

# Retaining Local Chapter Value After A Merger



Association chapter mergers have been happening with greater frequency since the height of the COVID-19 pandemic. Chapter membership is down and chapters are finding it difficult to get and keep – members while also trying to find the association chapter volunteers and the resources they need to keep moving forward successfully.



## The Benefits of Merged Association Chapters

Yes, members may need to travel a little further than they did previously to engage with their new association chapter. But when a merger is done correctly, the new merged association chapter provides members with more opportunities, not less, and it makes that extra distance worth it.

Merging association chapters allows organizations to:

- Better share services, opportunities and resources and deliver them more efficiently and effectively.
- Bring together more like-minded people.
- Provide resources the individual chapters may not have been able to offer previously.
- Deliver economies of scale and benefits to existing members.

## Ensuring the Success of an Association Chapter Merger

We've talked before about the technical side of successful association chapter mergers. Those steps include activities like choosing a new association chapter name, securing a URL and getting



association chapter sponsors. Taking these steps put a merged chapter on the right path to success, but they aren't necessarily enough to guarantee that success.

A merged association chapter may be organized and well run, but if it isn't providing the benefits and services that members and member guests received from their membership in their unmerged chapters, it won't be truly successful. The board of a merged association chapter needs to be aware of what the individual chapters provided that attracted members to join and stay. And they need to incorporate what they learn into the new merged association chapter structure.

Retaining the unique selling points of each local chapter is key to a merged chapter's long-term success. Here are several ways the board of a merged association chapter can ensure they know exactly what those are.

### **Retaining Local Chapter Value in an Association Chapter Merger**

Only once the merged association chapter board has this information can they be sure they're ready to set up the merged chapter in a way that will benefit members of each of the unmerged chapters and effectively attract new members.

**Survey members from both chapters.** To be sure the new board captures members' expectations of the new chapter, it's important not to guess. Ask members of the individual chapters what they got out of membership in their individual chapters. Was it the variety of events or speakers? The mentorship program? At the same time, it's important to know if there was anything the chapter offered that doesn't need to be carried to the new chapter. (Knowing that also means you could need fewer volunteers!).

**Interview prior board members.** Talk to members who were board members in the unmerged chapters –they may or may not be on the new board. These conversations can help clarify the benefits provided by each of the individual chapters that members would like to see continue, or not, in the new chapter.

**Audit previous programming.** Along with considering the services and programs to carry to the merged association chapter, it's important to understand how these programs were delivered in the individual chapter – What did events look like? Where were they held? Who managed them? Maybe one association chapter president always delivered a State of the Chapter update at the beginning of monthly meetings, and members of that chapter want to see that continue. Be clear on the



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programming of the individual chapters in the few years before the merger and review it against what members want to see continue, to be sure the new association chapter delivers the same value.

### **Don't Rush to Judgment**

Instead of moving quickly to provide what you think members and member guests would want from a merged association chapter, first identify what made each individual chapter valuable in the eyes of the members. Be intentional about creating a new chapter by making sure you know what you need to do to keep the legacy of the individual chapters going.

Take these steps and you'll better ensure that the value, including all the tiny details that members have come to expect from the individual chapters, doesn't get lost in the merger. Taking this time will help you better engage members of the new merged association chapter and give members the sense that this new chapter will be just as much "home" to them as the old one was. Maybe even more.

