

Should You Waive Your Association Chapter's 2021-2022 Membership Dues?



We're in the last quarter of a very unsettled year. How are your members holding up? Are you seeing them at your events, in person and virtually? Are you meeting their needs and providing the value they've come to expect from your chapter?



Did you:

- Improve your association chapter website with members-only content or update your web design? Did you make information easier to find, with blogs, forums, job boards, etc.?
- Experiment with virtual and hybrid programming options like education, networking, monthly meetings and special events?

Or did you cancel everything and wait for things to get better? If you waited for things to improve so you could start meeting in person, how did your association chapter members respond? If membership stayed with you while you canceled everything or continued to do what you'd been doing pre-pandemic, it's time to say thank you in a big way and give them something in return for their patience.

Consider waiving current members' 2021-2022 dues (in addition to making some long overdue programming changes). COVID-19 created a financial hardship for many, and a membership



extension could be extremely helpful to some of your members, while also being seen as a very compassionate gesture.

However, before you jump to free membership, it's important to be sure a membership waiver is the right decision for your association chapter.

How do you know waiving membership fees is right for your chapter?

Gut instinct is useful, but decisions are stronger when they're backed with data, especially for a decision like this that will affect your chapter financially. Collect some additional data through a member survey and be sure you understand the financial impact of free membership on your association chapter in the short-term and long-term.

If you've not held much programming in the past year, does that mean that in addition to lost event revenue from members, you've also not collected revenue from your association chapter sponsors? For some chapters, even if they've lost substantial revenue, they have enough reserves to survive another year of decreased revenue.

Keeping association chapter members takes more than free membership

Waiving fees is a start, but it might not be enough to keep your members. Some may still leave if you don't provide those things of value that they joined for. There's still time to make changes, like updating your website to make it easier for members to find what they need during these trying times or adding interesting virtual programming with a speaker from outside your area.

Consider asking for something in return

How can your association chapter benefit from a one-year membership fee waiver, in addition to keeping members? If you're going to provide a year of free membership, look for ways to get association chapter members involved and engaged and helping with chapter programming. Consider asking them to volunteer by writing a blog post, coordinating an event, overseeing your mentoring program, etc.

If you've provided value to your members during the pandemic and adjusted your programming to meet their needs, you've earned the right to keep charging membership dues. However, if you've



done nothing, there's still time to make some changes to keep your members around. A one-year membership waiver for 2021-2022 might be what you need, but don't make that the only thing you do; consider additional ways to add value, so you don't find yourself continuing to lose members in 2022 and beyond.

