

Starting A New Local Association Chapter



At the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, countless local association chapters, concerned about their ability to meet members' needs virtually, closed or merged with other chapters. Two years later, people want to interact in person on more of a local level. They want their local chapters to restart so they don't have to go far, or be online, to get the engagement they need. Many association chapters need help (re) building local chapters.



What You Need To Get Started

Starting a chapter can be difficult, but if you have a plan and are committed to making it happen, you'll get the community you're looking for. As you get started, here are some things we think are important to remember.

Don't do it alone. This is definitely not a one person, or even a one-chapter job. Find a group of people with the same desire to get a chapter started. Interestingly, you may find the help you need from another local association chapter in a field or industry like yours. Are there any local organizations that align with, but don't overlap, what you want to provide? See what guidance they can give you. Perhaps they can help with planning, membership, or even hold joint events once your association chapter starts.

Get support from a national organization. You may be starting an association chapter organization

that's part of a national organization. If you do, that parent organization will provide some of the materials and support you need to get your chapter started, like guidance on chapter structures and policies and procedures.

Choose the right chapter structure. What decisions do you need to make in advance of holding your first meeting? Here are some ideas.

- **Board makeup.** What association chapter officers do you need? Common roles include president, vice president, secretary, treasurer, and committee chairs like marketing, technology, and membership.
- **Dues.** Your goal isn't to make a profit, but you'll need money for organizing events, holding meetings, purchasing swag, etc. How much should you charge to bring in the right amount of money, knowing you'll be supplementing these dues with money from events, education, etc.?
- **By-laws.** If you'll be part of a national organization, review the national association by-laws and see what applies at the chapter level. They may already have chapter-level by-laws. If not, you'll find samples online and can also ask local organizations you've connected with to review theirs.
- **Record-keeping and accounting.** How are you going to track things like members' dues renewals, addresses, important dates, and expenses? At a minimum, you'll want a system to track the following. You may want to consider an AMS (association management software), where you can manage all of these things, while also managing your website, your email and your social media.
- **Your initial goals.** What do you want to accomplish in your first year? Develop your mission statement based on those short- and long-term goals for your new association chapter members and the chapter. These may be adjusted as you move forward, but they will give you a guiding light for all the important things you'll be doing. What do you want to be known for?

Once you get started

Once you have the wheels in motion, you'll need to put some activities in place to get people engaged and interested, both in joining and helping move your association chapter forward. It will be time to hold organizing and recruiting meetings, in person and virtually. Having meetings like this will let you discuss your mission and your goals; talk about any events you've scheduled; and recruit volunteers for specific activities.

Even with a plan and a committee, starting a new association chapter can be hard. Don't burn out your volunteers as you're getting everything off the ground. What are those items that need to happen sooner and what can wait till you begin to grow and add members who can help?

