

State of The Chapter Meetings Matter—It's Time to Show Members Why



Does your membership have any idea of all that goes on behind the scenes to keep your chapter moving forward? We'd bet you keep most of that information at your board and committee levels. Maybe you mention some of it during monthly meetings but there's a good chance many details don't make it to members.



Don't assume your general membership isn't interested in learning what drives your decisions and actions. Most probably want to know where their money is going and hear why things are done a certain way. Or why they're not.

That's where a State-of-the-Chapter meeting, which your members may call an All Hands or Town Hall meeting at work, plays an important role. They're a chance to bring everyone together—board members, volunteers, long-term members, new faces, even those who may be thinking of leaving—to understand and discuss the current state of the chapter, where it's going and, most importantly, how everyone is part of its future.

These meetings are standard in many companies and non-profits because they work. When executed correctly, they can improve communication, strengthen engagement and help attendees feel connected to a larger purpose. Association chapters are no different. When members understand the why behind chapter decisions and priorities, they're far more likely to stay engaged and contribute.

What makes these meetings unique

Unlike regular meetings that focus on education, networking and specific initiatives, state-of-the-chapter meetings focus on things like high-level chapter direction and the priorities and reasons behind it. Everyone is encouraged to ask questions and participate, rather than just listen to an update.

Coming together to work toward a common outcome helps align members around your vision, reinforce what the chapter stands for and better support where it's headed. This meeting can also provide clarity about what's working well and what needs attention. And perhaps most importantly, it helps turn passive members into active participants by showing them where they fit and how they can get involved.

Looking for help with chapter financials, managing your member referral program or improving your monthly events? These meetings let you talk in more detail about all you could accomplish in those areas, if only you had more creative, experienced, etc. help.

The format & the content

Every chapter is different; there's no universal format. Some chapters hold theirs at the beginning of the calendar year, while others align their meeting with their new fiscal year or when they install a new board.

Like all meetings, these meetings go more smoothly with an agenda. Common topics delivered by board and committee members, and even general membership include a summary of recent accomplishments, new initiatives, introduction of new leaders, summary of chapter financials and a discussion of priorities for the coming year. Ask your board what they want to discuss and ask membership what they want to hear more about.

Whatever the agenda, they're a chance to reinforce your goals and show, with real chapter examples, how you're working toward the same outcomes. They're also a natural fit for taking about challenges. Members appreciate honesty and candor, especially when paired with the plan for overcoming challenges, even if that's asking for input creating that plan. Issues finding volunteers? Chapter bank account a little short? Let them see the reasons you're holding fewer events or providing less-than-desirable food at monthly meetings. Share the why and ask for their help turning things around.



Keep it approachable

The more approachable, the better. Keep updates clear and digestible, and as always, avoid jargon where possible. Include time for conversation and questions and consider breakout sessions with individual board members.

A little creativity can go a long way. How can you provide information that attendees might find boring in its “natural state”? A chapter finance update, for example, shouldn’t feel intimidating. Consider a lighter, more engaging delivery, like a skit or a song, to help your members absorb the information, and stay awake!

Benefits to members & chapter leaders

The success of state-of-the-chapter meetings depends heavily on getting people to attend. The more people who show up, the better your chances to align your mission and vision across your chapter and increase trust in your chapter leadership.

These meetings let all members hear the same information at the same time, directly from leadership, which means there is less room for confusion and interpretation. And they get another chance to see the board members as people, not just as talking heads, especially if they fumble over words in a song about numbers!

These meetings also provide a greater chance for members to reconnect with leadership, peers and the mission that brought them to the chapter in the first place. For members who may have become less active, this can re-engage them, in ways they wouldn’t get from attending a networking or regular monthly meeting.

These meetings can offer your board real-time input, get them build buy-in for initiatives and increase credibility and visibility. Instead of guessing how members will react to the scaling back of your gala because funds are tight, you hear direct feedback, and you have the chance to respond in the moment or take away what you hear and come back with a plan. You also get to hear a wider range of perspectives, instead of the “it was fine” message you may hear in those tired of filling out your surveys.



Removing barriers to attendance

Make it as easy as possible for people to be there; consider virtual or hybrid options. Communicate clearly ahead of time around what you'll be covering. And for chapters experiencing engagement fatigue, be sure to share how you'll be keeping the meeting focused and interactive and give them a hint about any fun surprises.

Some chapters improve attendance by offering small incentives, like a voucher for a future meeting or event or copy of a book written by someone members admire. Even a free chapter sweatshirt or mug may be enough to get people off the fence and to the event.

Set up your meeting for success

Successful state-of-the-chapter meetings have a clear purpose and agenda. They allow time for open discussion and questions. They provide honest updates, not just highlights. And they end with clear next steps, so members know what to expect and how to stay involved.

Most importantly, they are set up to feel like an invitation, not an obligation. Members are encouraged to attend, through extra emails, social media or personal calls to those who haven't been active lately. The message reinforced is that the board is listening, and each piece of feedback is valued.

When chapters make time for these more in-depth, detailed conversations, they create something that's hard to achieve through emails or monthly updates alone: shared understanding and engagement and a sense that the chapter is for everyone who is a member, not just the board.

