

# Strategy Sessions: Focus on What You've Been Through and What Lies Ahead



Many association chapters take the summer off from all activities, member- and board-related.

Summer is the perfect time to work through those chapter planning, development and implementation tasks you've been putting off. Hold a strategic planning session this summer and ask board members and committees to create plans and implement ideas to be better prepared for fall, and ready to handle another pandemic driven shutdown or unforeseen circumstance if one should happen, to avoid what many association chapters have experienced, scrambling to pull together ways to engage members virtually.



If you're wondering what to focus on, we've got some ideas.

1. An association chapter crisis response plan
2. Your chapter activity plan for the fall
3. Long-term chapter planning and implementation

## **Association Chapter Crisis Response Plan**

Many association chapters were unprepared for the shutdown that accompanied the COVID 19 pandemic. Months passed while they looked for ways to engage with their association chapter members when they couldn't be in front of them. Few association chapters can say they had a strong



plan and immediately knew how to pivot; more than a year later, some still have everything on hold while they wait for things to go back to “normal.”

Document what you did this past year, so you'll be better prepared for the future. If you shifted to operating in part or completely virtual, what worked well and what wouldn't you do again? Virtual meetings and networking events? Panel discussions? Speakers from outside your geographic area? Expansions to your association chapter website? Were you happy with the technology you used? Brainstorm those things that would work for your association chapter if something like this happened again. This advance planning will make easier to shift and continue to deliver association chapter member value during trying times.

### **Long-term Chapter Planning**

Are there things on your association chapter To Do list you've been putting off? Are there things that previous challenges brought to light as potential weaknesses of your organization? Summer is a great time to look at your:

**Digital presence:** Members got a lot of their value digitally during the global pandemic. Some will expect that to continue and you will want to be prepared if the need arises again in the future. Is it time to update your association chapter website? Should you add recordings from your recent meetings to your members-only forum? Do you need to add a members-only forum or job board? What does your association chapter social media plan look like?

It's time to figure out how to provide your association chapter members with a strong sense of community online. Doing this may require a plan and a board member who knows more about technology than just how to update the content on your chapter website.

**Sources of non-dues chapter revenue:** Your focus can't be solely on answering the “how do I grow my membership” question; in some cases, that's not where the majority of your chapter revenue can come from. It's about finding ways to tie your revenue to the value you provide. If it seems like you didn't provide much value to association chapter members or sponsors, how can you change that this year? Will expanding your digital presence allow you to ask for sponsors for sections of your website, like your job board? Could creating a new online education program allow you to expand your speaker pool and bring more people to your events, which in turn brings in more revenue?



**Changes to your board:** Are your board meetings productive, or frustrating? Holding more effective association chapter board meetings doesn't have to be a tough process; summer is a perfect time to figure out what needs to change and how to do it. It's also a good time to look at things like board continuity, membership structure, finances, and special programming. For some chapters, it could be a focus on getting back to board basics, to set you up for success in the fall.

The experiences of this last year taught us that to continue to deliver association chapter member value requires having plans in place long before something happens. The pandemic may have forced us to find quick fixes, but a long-term, forward thinking plan and execution of that plan really makes the most sense.

