

Take a Fresh Look at Your Association Chapter Member Dues



Chapters need to periodically evaluate the structure and amount of their association chapter dues. This is a critical exercise to help ensure that you're continuing to charge what you need to, to sustain your chapter for the long term, while considering what members are willing and able to pay (while assuming, of course, that you have a stable source of non-dues revenue in addition to your association chapter dues).



Has your board been talking about things like the stress your association chapter volunteers are under and the time and stress you could save by moving to a paid association management system (AMS) instead of continuing to cobble together the free systems you use? Will paying for a system allow you keep volunteers from burning out while providing more of what your members want, like a job board, members only content and targeted emails?

Many chapters don't take the time to regularly review their dues structure to see how an increase could actually help give members more of what they're looking for. Some haven't reviewed or made any adjustments since the beginning of COVID 19. To keep your association chapter solvent, and keep your members engaged, regular dues reviews are critical. Your association costs continue to go up and you don't want to limit the value you can provide, by not increasing costs as you need to.

Association chapter dues are a significant part of the money you need to:

- Have a healthy chapter
- Provide the tools your volunteers keep asking for
- Have your volunteers easily do more in less time.

Here are some things to keep in mind, as you figure out if you need to raise your dues, and if so, by how much.

Show the value of chapter membership

Your chapter is built on the assumption that members will pay the dues you ask. And that's true when members feel that in return for what those dues, they get the professional growth, networking opportunities, and access to valuable resources they expect. To make a stronger connection of the benefits you offer to your dues increase, it's important to continuously share the benefits of membership. By showcasing the tangible value of membership, you'll be able to more easily justify an increase in member dues.

Showing chapter value can be easy, when you ask your members to share how they've benefitted. Member stories can highlight your value, when members talk about things they've gotten from being a member in your chapter, like connections, education and growth. Maybe a speaker radically changed how a member did their job, or maybe another member met their future employer at a conference. Mine your members for those hidden gems – the reason your chapter exists.

Account for economic conditions and inflation

It is crucial to strike a balance between maintaining the financial health of your organization and ensuring that dues remain affordable for a diverse membership base. In the face of the economic uncertainties and inflation your members face, be mindful of the potential financial burdens some of your members may be experiencing.

One way to address changing economic conditions is to adopt a flexible dues structure that considers varying income levels in your membership. This can include options like tiered membership or sliding scale dues based on factors such as career stage, income, or geographic location. By offering flexibility, you can accommodate the financial constraints of members while still providing valuable benefits.



Communicate dues changes early and often

Whatever changes you make to your dues, communication is key to members being more accepting of it. Proactively engage with members and explain any upcoming dues adjustments. This transparency continues to build trust and fosters a sense of partnership and community between your chapter and your members.

In addition to sharing the information in your monthly meetings and in your print and online communications, consider smaller group meetings focused on the dues increase. Show you really want members to understand the reasons for the increase. Hold multiple sessions, in person and virtually, so people have a better chance of attending when and where it works for them. Create a short presentation to share at each session and then open the floor to questions. Summarizing those questions and uploading them in your members-only content hub is another effective way to keep members engaged while continuing to be transparent.

Evaluating association chapter member dues requires balancing demonstrating value, accommodating economic conditions, and addressing the evolving needs of your chapter and your members. By prioritizing transparency, flexibility, and a commitment to understanding member needs, you can more easily navigate the complexities that come with dues adjustments.

Ultimately, looking at member dues isn't just a financial decision; it is an opportunity to reinforce your commitment to members and ensure a sustainable and thriving future for you and your chapter. Look at your local dues as part of your ability to set up the chapter for success. Ultimately, members win when you increase dues, as planning gets easier, and you can provide all the things they've been asking for.

