

Is Taking A Summer Chapter Break Right For Your Chapter?



Most association chapters take the summer off, breaking from June through the end of August. This means no meetings or events, and little if any planning. Some chapters also avoid any contact – through email, social media, their website, etc. – with their membership or potential members during that time.



For many chapters, the summer skip is something they've just always done. The feeling that since members are on vacation in the summer, it's more difficult to engage and accomplish things as they do during the chapter year. Instead, they shut down completely and take three months off.

Is that long break truly good for chapters?

A summer break with no events or board meetings can be both positive and negative. Board and committee members get some well-deserved downtime; they've been so busy since September running the chapter, they deserve it. But that time away can also lead to decreased member engagement. And it also has the potential to lead to burnout of your board members once things start back in the fall and they're overwhelmed again.

Here we discuss the good and the bad of taking the summer off. We also offer a middle ground for those chapters that may want to use the summer to have some fun while also accomplishing a few things they've been putting off.

4 pros of taking the summer off

1. **Reduced workload.** Summer breaks provide a much-needed break from the demands of the chapter year. With time off from things like managing membership and developing new and exciting ways to engage members and member guests, volunteers can return recharged and ready to take on the next year.
2. **Time for reflection.** A break means your board and volunteers aren't spending their time planning and executing events, finishing one event and immediately starting the next. Without events overshadowing everything else they do, the board can think about the previous chapter year and set goals for the coming year, with ample time to plan future events and/or initiatives.
3. **Opportunity for professional development.** Some chapters may use their time off for board and committee member trainings, in topics like finance, project management, board management, website development, etc. In addition to helping these volunteers do a better job in the roles they're in, this can help some volunteers realize there may be other roles that are a better fit.
4. **Time for a personal life.** Your board members may be feeling a little burned out by all they've had to accomplish during the chapter year. Summer break lets them spend time on what they really want, whether being with family, pursuing hobbies, and doing things they've put off, like doctor's appointments.

All these activities, or lack of, contribute to board members' well-being and bring them into the next chapter year positive, relaxed and ready to take on what comes their way.

3 cons of that summer chapter shut down

1. **Decreased engagement and morale.** A long break can make it harder to re-engage your board and committee members, and your entire membership, when the chapter year starts restarts.
2. **Increased workload during the program year.** When you stop work on activities for a time, your volunteers could come back to an increased workload. Plus, you might find that some could be spending their time off stressing about what they'll come back to.



3. **Financial challenges.** With no events over the summer, your chapter is bringing in little to no money. You could restart in the fall worried about how you'll pay for all the activities and services you want to offer your membership.

Turning a full summer break into something useful

There is another option. Holding a few events and activities over the summer can keep the momentum going, members engaged, money coming in and your board prepared for the full return in September.

Knowing that people will be on vacation, and fewer people will be available, schedule a low-key networking event, like a group outing to a baseball game or a happy hour at a local pub, that doesn't take a lot of planning, or many people, to carry out. Be sure to send out messaging in advance of the summer shutdown, so people have time to get it on their calendars.

Stay connected with members by keeping your social media and your website up to date and the conversation going, instead of holding monthly chapter meetings. There are probably multiple topics members have brought up during the year. Drop some conversation starters into your members-only forum and moderate an engaging conversation that people can jump into as they have time.

Summer is also a good time for your board to get some of the work done they keep putting off. Consider a short summer retreat. In a few days, they could knock out some of the big tasks on the board's To Do List, like developing board job descriptions, reviewing the chapter bylaws and doing some planning and goal setting for the upcoming year.

If you stick with your default summer break year after year, you may not be doing what's best for your chapter and your members. Take some time to figure out what makes the most sense for your chapter. Do you need to take the summer off? Keep going full speed as you have been for years? Or does the best path forward for your chapter summer lie somewhere in between?

