

What's Your Plan When Your Association Chapter Admin Retires?



It's a random Tuesday afternoon. You check your association chapter Inbox and find an email from your chapter administrator. You open it and can't believe what you're reading. She's planning to retire, and she has a date. Unfortunately, she's only giving you a few weeks' notice.



Ok, so maybe this won't happen to your association chapter. Or maybe it just might. Since the COVID 19 pandemic, the number of association chapter administrators retiring early has increased significantly.

Having a single person responsible for overseeing major association chapter activities without a system of checks and balances can have disastrous outcomes – you could find yourself out of money and even worse, out of business. With a structure and a documented contingency plan to keep your association chapter administrator (or an executive director) from being your chapter's single point of failure (SPoF), you'll be on your way to keeping your chapter running effectively if your admin decides to leave with little notice.

Contingency planning for an unexpected chapter administrator vacancy



Your association chapter administrator isn't the CEO of your association chapter. Your association chapter board runs your chapter -- your executive director just makes sure it all happens smoothly.

Here are three things to include in your association chapter administrator contingency plan.

Board oversight. Your response to questions about processes and status, etc. can't be "our admin handles that. Let me get back to you." Problems can happen when an association chapter board doesn't know what their admin does or doesn't oversee some of those responsibilities. Designate association chapter board members to interact with them regularly. Have your --

- **President** manage overall board oversight for your admin.
- **Treasurer** work with your chapter admin to administer payments, monitor chapter budget, tax returns, etc.
- **Secretary** oversee your ED's work around general office duties, governance, website, dues collection, insurance.
- **Vice President** connect with your admin on things like meeting management, logistics, marketing and registration, exhibits, sponsorship, etc.

A contract. Your admin is a chapter staff member the board hired to do a job, and they should be managed. Have them sign a contract with your chapter that outlines your relationship and their specific role. Include things like compensation, job responsibilities, terms of service, ownership of materials, and remember to update it when their role changes.

Have a clear understanding of what the person does. Make sure you know all they do for you, and you have access to all the systems they use. Consider having association chapter board members shadow your ED to better understand what they do for your chapter. Once you gather that information, document it and keep it in a place your board can easily access. Review and update it as needed, as the admin's responsibilities change and evolve to meet the need of your evolving chapter.

Patrick Algyer, CVA, Encore Engagement Solutions LLC, has been an association chapter leader and a director for an international association. He now leads a full-service association management company (AMC). Patrick brings a unique perspective to creating association chapter contingency plans that involve chapter administrators, and he believes that documentation is extremely important in a chapter's relationship with their ED.



“My top recommendation for organizations,” Patrick says, “is documentation. If the pandemic has taught us anything, it is that we should be prepared for anything. Document everything. Processes, procedures, How Tos, whatever you think would be helpful for someone stepping into that role.”

Patrick also recommends the resources of the AMCI Institute (AMCI). An association for association management companies, “AMCI offers great resources for organizations looking for an AMC company. They have a free RFP request for hiring a replacement that is distributed to all AMCI members.”

Patrick’s other piece of advice for those associations that are chapters of national organizations: contact your parent organization to see what recommendations and guidance they might have for working with an executive director.

3 questions to ask about your chapter administrator:

Consider asking the following questions of your admin and the role he or she is in.

1. **What does this person know?** Are there things he or she knows, or has access to, or a task that he or she completes that no one else does? You may find out he or she completes critical tasks you weren’t aware of.
2. **What will happen if this person leaves, and no one is ready to step in?** What’s your level of risk?
3. **How difficult is it for someone to learn and take over this person’s tasks?** Would it require outside training? Or can their tasks be documented and followed?

Feeling a little overwhelmed by the idea of losing your ED? With some structure and a contingency plan, you’ll have a head start to keeping your chapter going if that happens. And you may not know, but StarChapter maintains a network of preferred vendors that can help your association chapter organization plan for those unforeseen events.

