

Research Report: **Engagement is Profoundly Human.**

Book 2 – Middle Engagement

Based on the results of the 2024 Member Engagement Labs

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Hello, and welcome back!

What do I mean by ‘welcome back’? Oh, maybe you missed the first book of this three-part series based on the research results from the 478 participants of the [Member Engagement Labs](#) hosted between January – March 2024. If you’d like to return to the first book, you’ll learn all about engaging prospective and new members, the hardest-to-engage member segments. You can find that book right here.

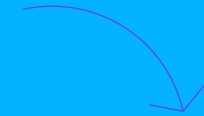
READ BOOK 1

Go ahead and read it, or skim it and come back. We’ll be waiting!

 [Que friendly waiting music.](#)

Okay, now, hello, and welcome back!

Here is a super quick big-picture recap.

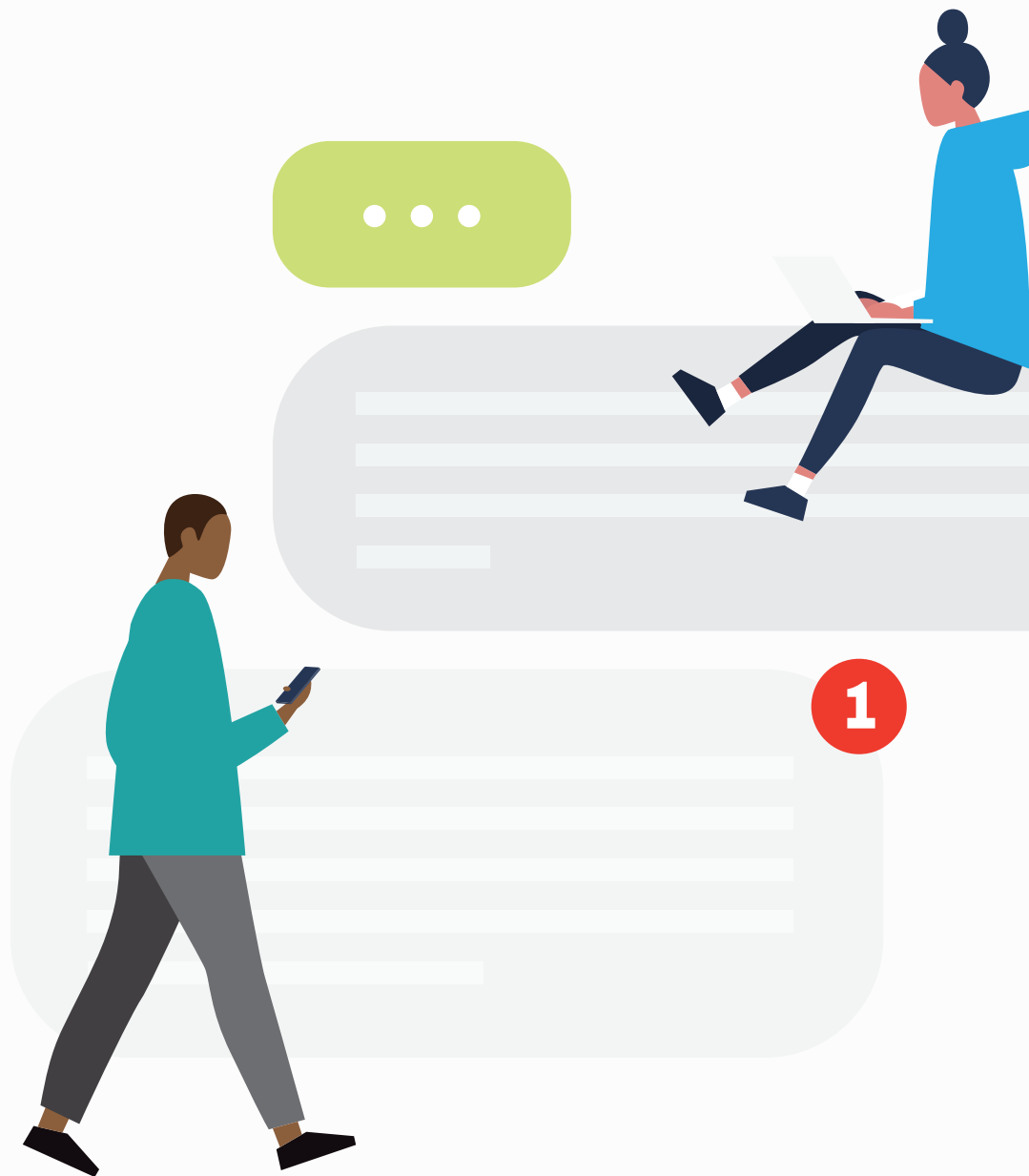


As it becomes harder to engage members, we need a new way to engage them, which is why the great team at re:Members and I have authored three...er, let’s call them mini-books based on the thoughtful co-created ideas from 478 of your association colleagues collected during the Labs. We had so many participants that every topic got a research-like volume of responses.

Get ready to talk about the human side of engagement! It is time to learn all about how to engage those middle members.

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Engaging Middle Members

Middle members (not new *new* or new, or long-time members) tend to be the most engaged.

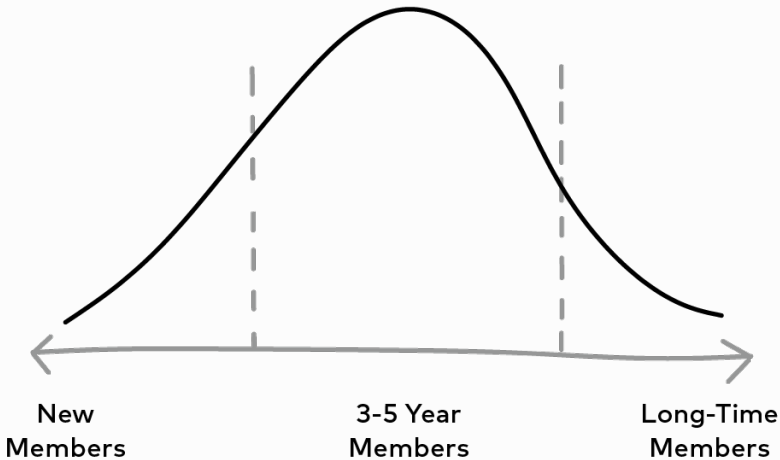
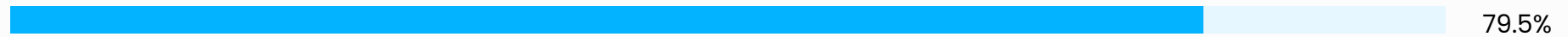


Illustration from [Elevating Engagement](#), page 143.

However, not everything these middle members encounter is engaging. We asked the Lab participants how engaging they thought the most common association benefits are for members.

What benefits do you think members find MOST engaging?

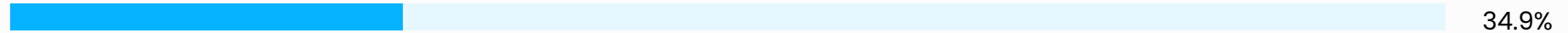
In-Person Events



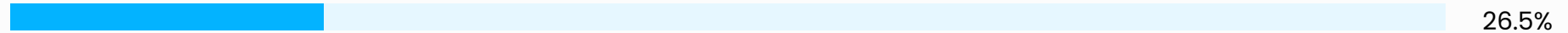
Networking Events



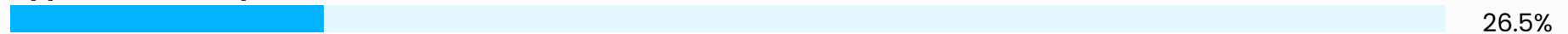
Content (articles, publications, whitepapers, videos, etc.)



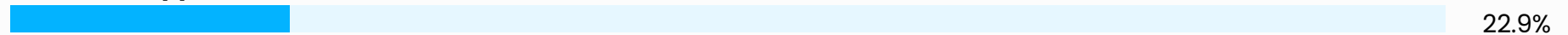
Online Community



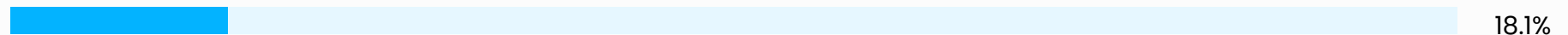
Opportunities to Speak/Write/Be Interviewed



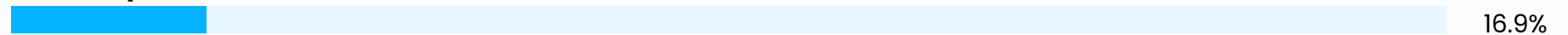
Volunteer Opportunities



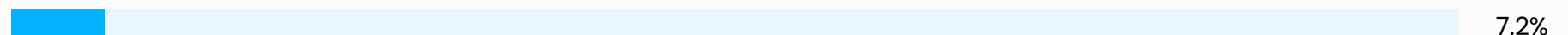
Online Events



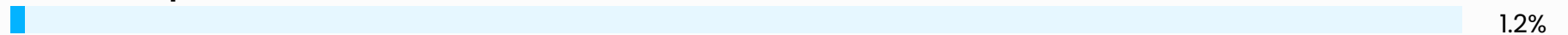
Advocacy



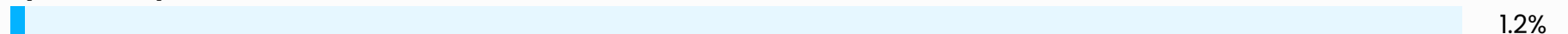
Exhibits



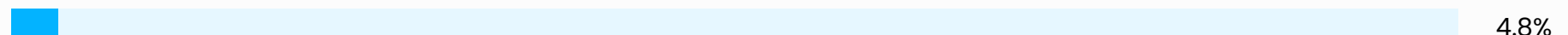
Research Reports



Sponsorships



Other



Yep! I know that these results are not from members themselves, but association leaders know their members and can see the usage of many benefits, so this is directionally correct. Take a look at the bottom of the chart.

Two big money makers exhibits and sponsorships are not all that engaging for members—Yikes! And the big driver of data and content—research reports aren't either.

Redesigning Research Reports

Research is super valuable, and the results can be a game changer for your members—except these reports can't change games if members don't read them. So, the participants of the Labs dove into how to make this valuable benefit more engaging.



Here are some of the highlights that your colleagues came up with:

- ✓ Make it scannable.
- ✓ Highlight impact factors.
- ✓ Reference a surprising finding.
- ✓ Embedded videos in the report, or infographics. (You will see this in action at the end of this eBook!)
- ✓ Explain “the why” and how the results relate to the reader.
- ✓ Shorter vs 120 pages of stuff. Or even a one-pager! You can even take it one step further and link them to a platform like [Dynamic Benchmarking](#) where they can filter the data to get results that are applicable to their situation.)
- ✓ Include recommendations and outcomes —also milestones to achieve along the way (the best practice might be too big, too difficult, or too expensive for many members to focus on immediately).

Helping Sponsors & Exhibitors Be More Engaging

What about sponsors and exhibitors (notice they landed on the bottom of the chart)? We rely on them for some serious \$\$, and want them to get a ton of value for their sponsorships (or exhibitorship—is that a word? It is now!). It's worrisome that most sponsor and exhibitor initiatives might not engage members.

One member organization does something super special for sponsors and exhibitors. The first day of each event is just for them. There's education and time for connection just like any other day at the conference, except it is a special sponsor/exhibitor-only day. During that day, they settle in, create relationships, and experience the conference culture. On the second day, when the attendees arrive, sponsors and exhibitors are ready to welcome them and help the conference hosts pass on the special and unique vibe.

Again, your colleagues have your back with ideas you can build on:



Less sales, more engaging.



Try a sponsor/exhibitor reception.



Walk them to key audience members to meet/shake hands.



They need to be a part of what they are sponsoring and humanize the sponsor so it is not just about the company.



Pre-conference programming that is just for sponsors (and maybe exhibitors, too.)



What about a sponsored webinar or a meet-and-greet cocktail hour with appointments at registration for the event?



Directly address their needs. Ask about their strategy. Based on their plan, you can offer three easy options.

Boosting Engagement in Your Online Community

Online communities ranked #4 in the most engaging benefit lineup, and it's true that when there's participation and energy in an online community, it becomes the go-to place to ask questions and share ideas in real time.

However, many associations have difficulty getting their community off the ground. One participant said, "We have a private social network on our site that is only accessible to members. We're struggling with getting people to engage with other members. Other staff members and I have posted to this network, but we haven't received much response from our members. *Is there something we can do there to get more engagement?*"



Colleagues jumped in with their experiences:



We are an AMC, and we have one association with fantastic engagement in their online communities - but it took years and years and years to build. Our other groups that have been doing it for five years or less are really struggling - particularly healthcare professional and academic associations, I think, because they just don't have time!



We have an "expert panel" that has the responsibility to contribute to forum conversations.



Do you have a member app? I'm curious if members had their discussion forums on their phones if there would be more engagement.



We like to keep the actual conversation peer-focused, so I don't participate in the threads, but I've noticed the digest email gets really good open rates, and announcements are included, so I have a content calendar for announcements that I share.



Find some members who will serve as ambassadors. Collect seed questions from members and post on their behalf.



Shortcut for Increasing Benefit Engagement

Got a benefit that you believe is not all that engaging, but provides a lot of value? Ask your staff, your volunteer leaders, or yourself these questions and see if they spark some interesting ideas:

- 01** How do we want people to feel when interacting with [the valuable benefit]?
- 02** How might we redesign or add to [the valuable benefit] to help people feel [the positive emotion(s) you selected]?

How do these two questions work to increase engagement? You've already got a valuable benefit, so adding more value likely won't move the needle on engagement. You've got to add something else. Something that gets people's attention, that sparks their imagination, that makes them feel an emotion—and that



something is **experiences**. Making something more experiential engages our hearts, not just our minds.

After all those interviews with members, I've determined that the formula for engagement is good value + positive experiences. Value and experiences always go hand in hand, and with every benefit, you also deliver a host of experiences, like first impressions (which we talked about in [book one](#)). When unattended to, these experiences might be ho-hum, meh, or even poor.

The good news is we can change the experiential part of a valuable benefit and make it much more engaging.

Let's do a hypothetical thought experiment with online events.

Online events can be SUPER valuable because you can **reach more people** who will never be able to come to your in-person events. You might get a whole **new set of speakers**, and you can **try out niche topics** with fewer resources.

But with everyone talking about Zoom Fatigue, it's easy for these events to be, well, a yawn. We have to work harder to engage online attendees because it is easy for them to multi-task.

Think about your interactions with webinars. What do you do when someone says, "People are still filing in, so we're going to give it another minute"?

Or, when someone is on minute 5 still giving their introduction? I find that a great time to catch up on the latest Wordle. We sometimes tune presenters out. So, let's try out the short-cut-for-increasing-benefit-engagement process.



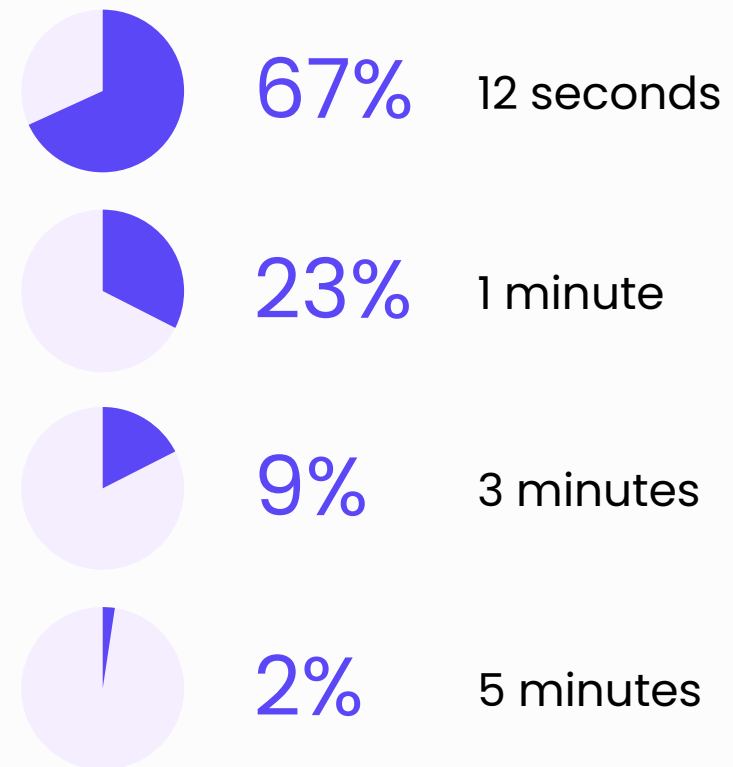
First, **ask how do we want people to feel when they attend our next online event?** Follow-up questions or variations include:

- How do we want attendees to feel before heading to a breakout group?
- How do we want attendees to feel as the online meeting is concluding?
- One of my favorites is—how do we want attendees to feel in the first minute after they log on to the online event?



That first minute or even the first few seconds of exposure to a benefit, event, or product sets the tone for your member’s subsequent interactions with that benefit, event, or product.

We asked the Lab participants, “How much time do we have before someone’s attention wanders?”



(57 respondents)



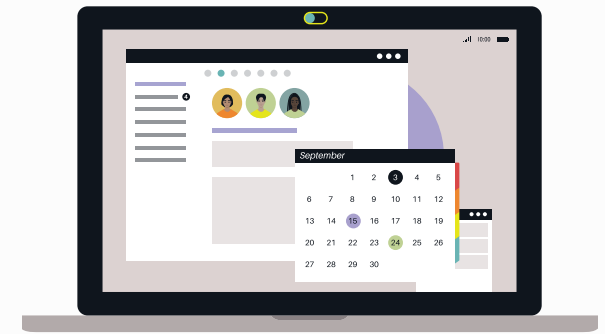
67% of the participants said approximately three sentences, about 12 seconds, give or take a couple of seconds.

The participants are right! Research shows that lasting first impressions are recorded in our brains somewhere between a few tenths of a second to 7 seconds. That's FAST!

So reverse engineer that first few seconds to first-minute experience can make any benefit, event, or product more engaging. Back to our example, how do you want your attendees to feel when they attend your next online event? Hmmmm... how about welcomed, happy, curious, *[insert your emotions here.]*

Hypothetically, let's say that the topic of your next online event appeals to young professionals, and you want them to feel welcomed.

Okay, it's time for question number two! Second, **ask how might we redesign our next online meeting to help people feel welcome?** Oh! I'm so glad you asked because here are some hypothetical (well, not so hypothetical, tried and true) ideas for you to adapt:



Admit attendees from the waiting room three minutes early to welcome the early birds.

Have you got a small group? Prompt some light chit-chat while verbally welcoming each attendee. If you have a large group, get them working on answering a question or doing an activity to help them feel like a part of the group.

Nominate a chat ambassador (or two) who will look for new names.

Your chat ambassador can welcome those people specifically in the chat or, for huge groups, welcome everyone to the event. Chat ambassadors are great for raising energy in the chat, which can lead to attendee engagement. They can celebrate great chat comments, ask for more details about a chatter's idea, and repost unanswered attendee questions. (I learned this from our friends at [Matchbox Digital Initiaves.](#))

Welcome registrants before the event even gets started.

People wonder what the event will be like, how to prepare, and if they will be on camera. I'm a big believer in onboarding your event participants. Send them an email or a video that welcomes them, sets the tone, and helps them prepare for a successful event (even if it's only one hour).

Here's an example of one of our onboarding emails straight out of the Labs:

Subject Line: **Are You Ready for The Member Engagement Labs?**



Hey there!

The countdown is on!!! Soon, we will open our virtual doors and meet up live for our first Member Engagement Lab (MEL). Honestly, I'm feeling a lot like I expect Kermit feels every time he introduces a guest on The Muppet Show. YAAAaaaaAAayyyyy!!!! (My flippers are waving all over the place.)

Here's what you need to know:

- [Jump into the MEL space](#) early and poke around, especially in the 'Start Here' section.
- A few minutes before 1 pm Eastern on 1/25, login, scroll down, look for the January 25 headline, and click the "Join the Session" tile. Click the link to our event's Zoom Meeting room.
- Do I need to be camera-ready? We'd love to see you. The more people on camera, the more energy for us all. Also, there is no pressure. Sometimes kids, cats, jammies happen—we get it!
- There's still a tiny bit of time to get your [work buddies, colleagues, and friends to join MEL](#), too, because this is a more, the merrier situation.

Got questions or just want to say 'Hi'? Hit reply, or reach out to Amanda, Sarah, or Lauren.

We can't wait to see you in the Labs!

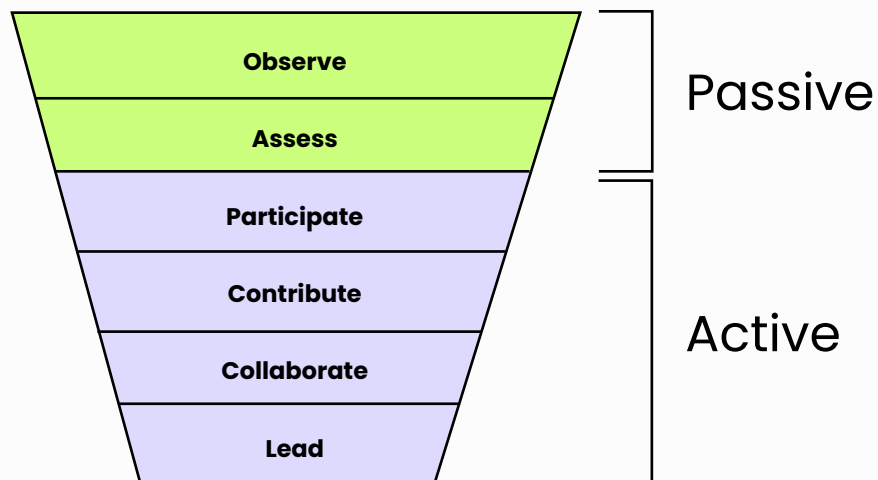
Lauren, Sarah, and Amanda

P.S. See you Thursday, January 25th at 1 Eastern/noon Central/ 11 Mountain/10 Pacific.

Help Members Participate

We [discussed how to help your new members](#) become aware of your value. Maybe a better way to say this is that we want to make sure they get the solutions to the problems they are grappling with right now. However, only offering solutions is not quite enough to keep them on the path of engagement.

Here's an illustration from page 12 of [Elevating Engagement](#) that shows the six stages of engagement, through your members' engagement journey.



The first two stages, Observe and Assess, are very **passive** – people watch and analyze. They are trying to figure out if your association is for them. Could they feel like they belong someday?

The following four stages are **active**. There's a massive mindset shift between the passive and active stages.

Participation is the first active stage, and it's vital to break the ice and get people to participate so they can continue their engagement journey.

What is participation?

I define it as all the little active things like:

- ✓ Asking a question
- ✓ Commenting on a post or article
- ✓ Interacting in the chat during a webinar
- ✓ Shouting out an answer during a presentation
- ✓ Talking to a stranger in the registration line or at a reception

The participants said **on average, groups with 10-15 people and above make participation a little scarier.** Ah ha!



Most keynotes have more than 10-15 people, and many sessions have more attendees than this, as do webinars.



Hundreds or thousands of people may be in your online community or reading the comments in your articles.



Thousands to hundreds of thousands have access to posts on social media.



No wonder why members cricket-up! Priming members to participate can get them participating before they even consider becoming a cricket.

One way to prime members to participate is the Progressive Participation Method, which I explain in this clip:

Progressive Participa

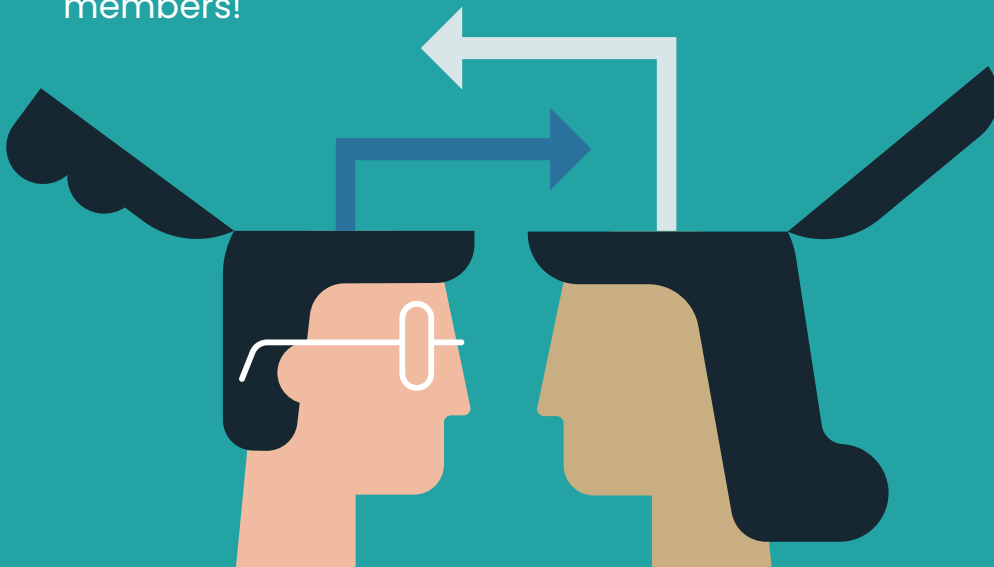
1. Invite participation immediately.
2. Create opportunities that everyone can do.
3. Make the first steps easy, interesting a
4. Save more substantive Q&A for later.

play the video

Conclusion

Okay, so your core members have stayed engaged and are now entering the long-time member stage of their journey, and something shifts. Some long-time members decide it's time to give back, and they dive in more wholeheartedly. But others fade away. Noooooo!!!!

Need some tools to re-engage your long-time members? Yep! Many associations do because engagement can dwindle for this critical group. Stay tuned for the third and last book of this series focused on. You guessed it. Long-time members!



More Resources

Watch

[Register to watch the Lab replays](#) and download the debrief reports.

Read

Three popular articles inspired by the labs:

- [What to do When Your Most Valuable Benefits are Boring](#)
- [What Do You Do About Latecomers?](#)
- [What Are Reverse Ground Rules?](#)

About the Respondents

The intrepid experimenters in the Member Engagement Labs set out to discover how to engage our stakeholders in many new ways because engaging people is getting waaayyy more difficult. 478 association professionals like you collaborated to solve some BIG engagement problems. They come from all sizes of associations.

68%

Professional Associations



Associations by region



38% Globally



35% Nationally



18% State



7% Regional



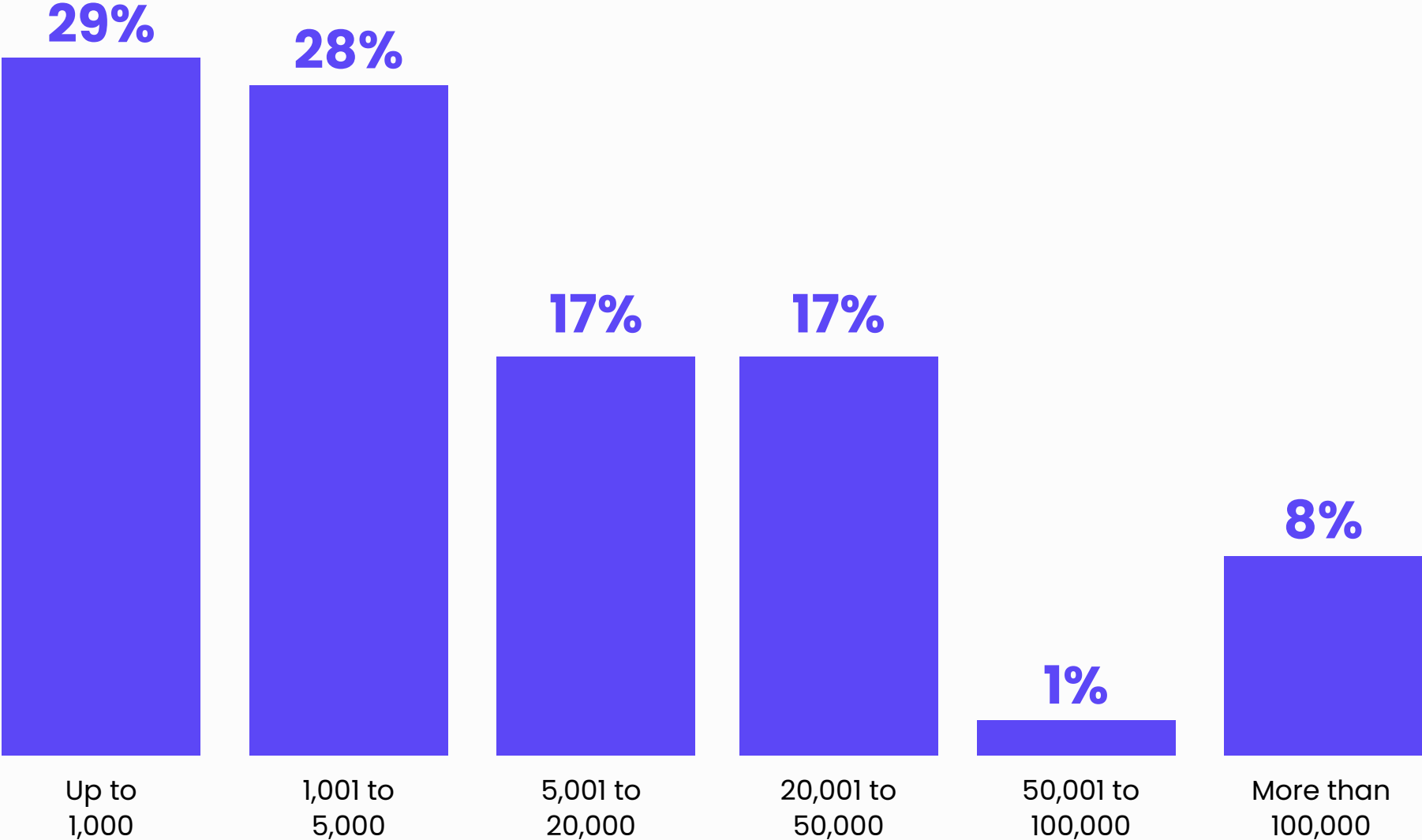
3% Locally

32%

Trade Associations

Associations by size of membership

(72 respondents)



Associations by staffing size

(81 respondents)

10%

Very Small (0-1.5 staff)



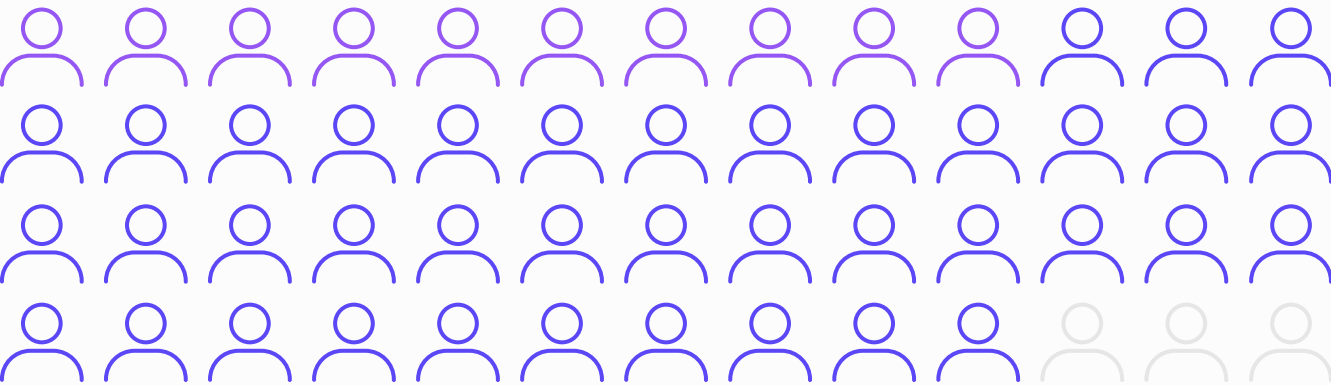
27%

Small (2-9 staff)



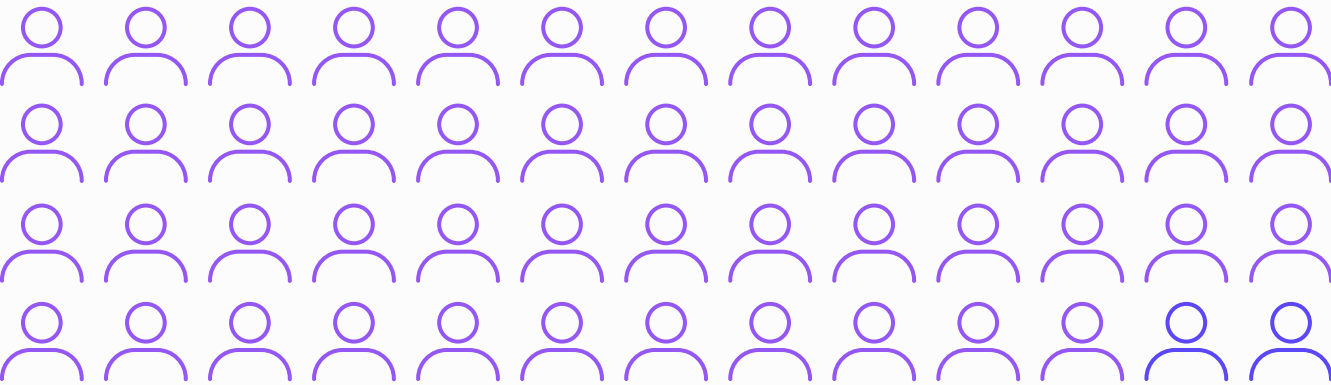
33%

Medium (10-49 staff)



30%

Large (50+ staff)



About the Collaborators



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Member Engagement Strategist, Lab Facilitator, and Author of this eBook



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