

2025 Chapter Performance & Benchmarking Report

Our research confirms why chapters persist—and why they struggle.

re:members

 **MARINER**
MANAGEMENT & MARKETING





Table of Contents

- [Setting the Stage.....](#)3
- [Top Line Findings.....](#)5
- [Beyond Benchmarking – The Future of Community.....](#)8
- [The Arc of Community.....](#)9
- [Applying A Future-Focus.....](#)14
- [Lessons from the Field.....](#)18
- [What If: Recommendations.....](#)25
- [Benchmarking Insights: Detailed Look at What Associations are Currently Doing & Volunteers are Saying: 2025 Benchmarking Surveys.....](#)29
- [Headquarters Staff/Chapter Leader Comparison.....](#)31
- [Headquarters Staff Chapter Benchmarking: 2025 Survey Findings.....](#)36
- [Chapter Leadership Benchmarking: 2025 Survey Findings.....](#)55

Setting the Stage

Across a decade of benchmarking, one constant is clear: chapters remain far from universally high-performing, and ROI is still opaque thanks to fuzzy metrics and a dearth of shared data on individual engagement.

This year's study raises the alarm that we may be at a breaking point on volunteerism. While earlier reports noted succession challenges, 2025 shows leadership sustainability is a chronic vulnerability both in terms of numbers and readiness.

Perhaps because this trend hasn't budged, the latest study does point to shifts: a modest trend towards modernizing infrastructure around operations, more interest in—and action on—model diversification, as well as an appetite for dashboards and activity level data. These shifts are happening because, as a majority of study participants noted, there are compelling reasons to have components, especially those that are geographically based. If we pair that momentum with agile governance and leader training focused on belonging, components can shift from “running meetings” to building community around purpose, at scale.

The research goes beyond simply diagnosing problems to surface ideas and optimism. For example, associations are experimenting with lighter-weight [community models](#), [centralizing core systems](#) which reduces friction, and [shifting leadership focus](#) to governance rather than administration.

Among our [Research Advisory Council](#), a group of seasoned association executives, there is growing consensus that success depends on **reframing the conversation** around community building and **adopting a portfolio approach** which combines geographic and interest/affinity-based components supported by data and a renewed focus on belonging.

“I have felt for a long time as a staff member, our work is to facilitate the community, not to dictate it or own it. The structures we are frustrated with are dictating versus facilitating.”



Lindsay Currie, CAE
Council on Undergraduate Research

How to use this report:

Jump to the section that matters most to you or start at the top and discover as you go.

- ✓ **[Top-Line Findings](#)**
For a quick overview of what the research revealed, start here.
- ✓ **[Benchmarking Insights](#)**
Dive into the details of what's happening today across associations.
- ✓ **[Beyond Benchmarking: Future of Community](#)**
Explore how components might evolve tomorrow and what trends to watch. This section offers a discussion guide to keep the conversation going in new directions.
- ✓ **[Lessons from the Field](#)**
See real-world examples that bridge current practices and future possibilities.

The Research Process

While benchmarking current activity was a significant part of this exploration, the 2025 study went further to capture the conversations around components taking place in associations around the globe. Key elements included:

Research Advisory Council – A [group of association executives](#) who served as both a sounding board and a strategic lens for this project. They challenged us and the community to look beyond benchmarking, which is a rearview mirror, and seek to embrace fresh thinking to push forward.

External Research – An ongoing review of relevant studies within and outside the association world that explored past, current and future organizational structures as well as internal and external drivers affecting member engagement and the efficacy of those models. [See Beyond Benchmarking: Future of Community.](#)

Focus Groups & In-Depth Interviews – A series of facilitated group and individual conversations with association professionals regarding their perceptions and experience with local communities within their associations.

Benchmarking Surveys – A quantitative assessment of chapter practices and performance reported by association headquarters staff and chapter leaders. [See Benchmark Insights.](#)

Top Line Findings

Top line findings reveal a system under strain as chapters have the potential to deliver local value but underperform overall. Engagement is shallow, leadership sustainability is fragile, and success appears uneven, shaped by the two key factors of size and member personality. Geographic components remain important, but they should be part of a flexible portfolio designed around member needs, not just physical proximity.



Chapters deliver local value, but systems underperform

Association staff overwhelmingly agree their chapters deliver local connections (93%). Yet chapter leaders only rate their educational/technical program quality 3.8 on a 5-point scale and both groups give only 3.2/5.0 for overall performance. Additionally just 18% of CRPs suggest their current chapter structure is up to date.



Engagement is shallow and perhaps episodic

Staff indicated only a third of chapter members participated in chapter programs and less than 20% attend chapter events, while chapter leaders report similar numbers.



Leadership sustainability is at a breaking point

Volunteerism and succession challenges have evolved into a chronic disability. Associations are struggling with numbers as well as with leader readiness and skill gaps. Many boards recycle the same leaders and lack a bench, leading 77% of headquarters staff and 63% of chapter leaders to report insufficient qualified volunteers as the biggest challenge facing their chapters today.



Performance skews by size and social orientation

We identified two performance differentiators in this year's research:

Size Matters – Across the board, chapter leaders in larger chapters (by budget and member count) report higher scores in performance and participation, including volunteering.

Personality Matters – Chapters where association staff described their membership as mostly extroverts reported attendance and participation rates more than twice those where they believed their membership were mostly introverts.



We're still in a data desert

The vast majority of the benchmarking relies on self-reported information. Only 27% of the responding associations use "activity by member" to measure individual engagement and evaluate chapter performance, though 82% of staff wish they had it.

Despite the absence of this data, 40% of staff suggest "I would increase the support we provide chapters (such as training and resources)", but lacking system-wide, uniform data collection and reporting, these resource allocation decisions would continue to be made without an objective baseline and true measures of effectiveness.



Governance and structure need modernization

The Research Advisory Council unanimously pointed to outdated governance models and rigid volunteer ladders as holding associations back. There is a growing consensus from the advisory council, focus groups, and individual interviews that success will require agile governance, lighter-weight community models, and a portfolio approach to components designed to flex and evolve alongside the changing needs of the community.



Belonging and connection are the new imperatives

This insight on belonging isn't incidental; it emerged from our foresight work, which included an environmental scan to anticipate future member needs and organizational challenges in terms of community, components, and volunteerism. This is reinforced by the benchmarking surveys.



Geography still matters for advocacy and local networking.

Meeting members where they are shouldn't mean geography by default. *Lead with members.* Understand their motivations and interests and match with the right approach which sometimes is geography and sometimes not.

The Arc of Community

Ultimately, associations are about community. But here's the conundrum: community itself is being redefined while our traditional systems, particularly geographic components, are built for yesterday's association model. If members organize around purpose, identity, and shared values, and don't automatically equate community with physical proximity, what does that mean for chapters?

This section explores the shifts surfaced in our research and which shaped the recommendations from the Research Advisory Council.

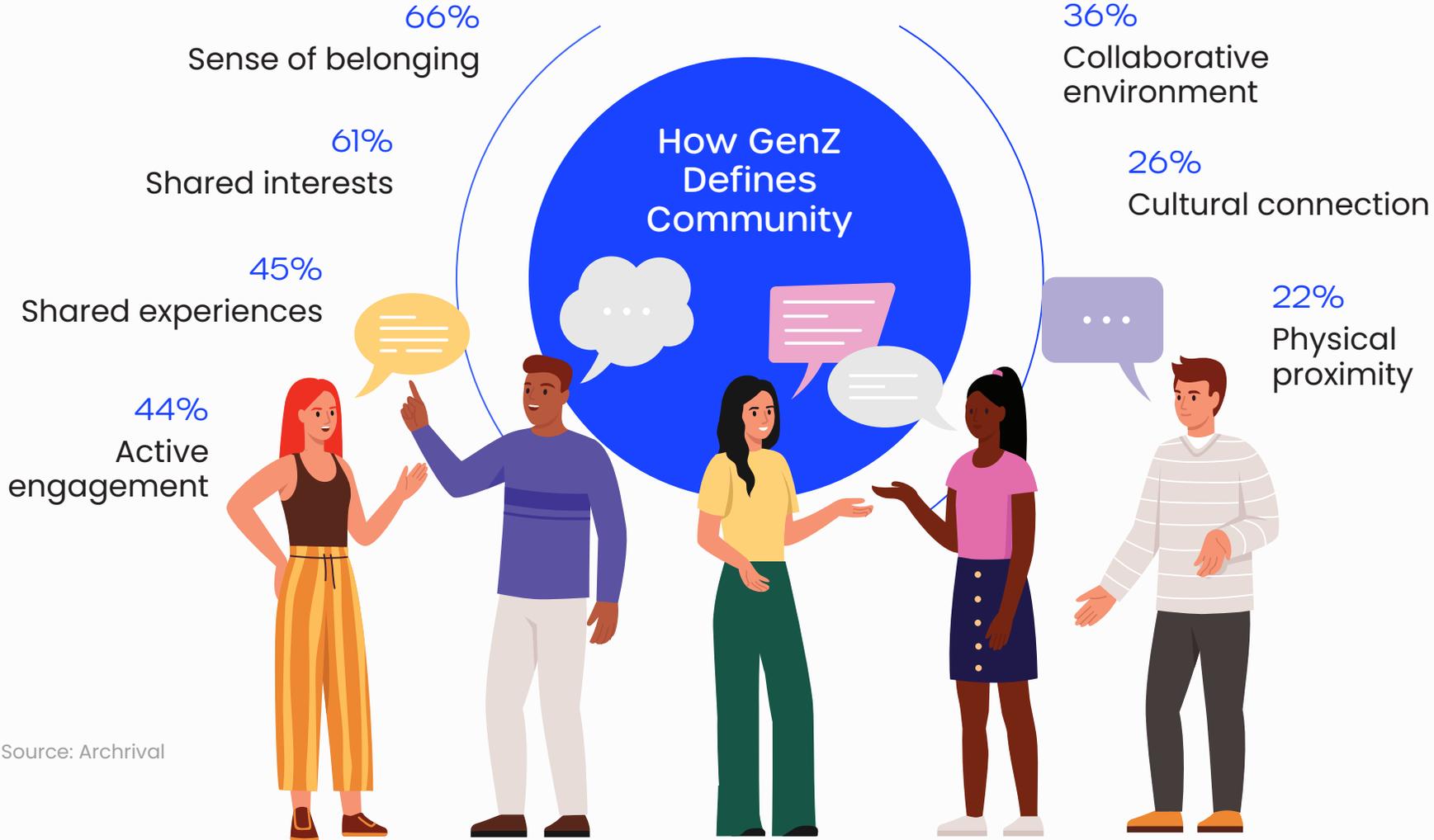
A New era of community has been born – and the rules of engagement have changed. Brands [associations] are not participants in communities, they're patrons.

(The State of Community, published by Tumblr and Archival)



What Gen Z Says Community Means

Gen Z places a premium on belonging (66% say it's important) and 85% say brands should create a sense of community (with 79% of Millennials concurring). Interestingly, physical proximity ranks last for Gen Z, which makes our own benchmarking data that only 35% of members participated in chapter programs last year more telling. [The State of Community](#) by Tumblr and Archrival offers additional insights which support ASAE's recent report on community.



Source: Archrival

From Place to Purpose

When we tap into a generational lens, we see a shift in what community means now. Drawing from Purdue Global Generations in the Workplan and several ASAE ForesightWorks drivers of change on next generation, workplace shifts, and volunteering, we see the community moving from structured, local and in-person to fluid, digital and values.

Community through a Generational Lens



Boomers/Silent:
Stability, committees,
face-to-face



Generation X:
Autonomy, task-based
participation



Millennials:
Purpose-driven,
inclusive, collaborative



Generation Z:
Fluid, digital-first,
global, values-based,
real-time action

Source: Compiled from [Purdue Global Generational Differences in the Workplace](#)

From Product to Strategy

The ASAE [Association Insights Center](#) (AIC) on community underscores a critical shift: community can no longer be treated as a program. It must be a core strategy tied to mission and value delivery. Association executives reported rising pressure to innovate engagement models as stakeholder preferences evolve, and members scrutinize ROI on both time and money. According to the AIC report, communities thrive when organized around shared purpose, identity, and value creation, provided they do so in new ways as traditional models are insufficient for today's expectations.

The Bigger Picture

Society itself is shifting in many ways. As Robert Putnam and Shaylyn Romney Garrett note in *Upswing*, American life has swung between "I" and "We." In other words, from individualism to communitarianism and back again over time. Associations grew up and flourished in the "We" era (1910-late 1960s) when we might say chapters were the wagon trains of professional life.

Today, we're living in an "I" era defined by individualism and self-focus. This shift likely reduces the appeal of convening when personal priorities often outweigh collective ones. Build in the convenience of digital and the habits born out of COVID and it begs us to rethink the current model.



...or take the US frontier, symbolized in countless westerns by the lone cowboy riding into the sunset, but also symbolized by a wagon train in which settlers sustain and protect one another."

(Upswing)

Collectively, this shows a clear pivot: **community is now shifting from place to purpose**. The data highlights that members, especially younger cohorts, organize around values, identities, and shared challenges more than geography. Physical meetups still matter, but as activation points for year-round digital communities. With this pivot in mind:

- ✓ Can we look to our chapters as the dimension through which we deliver IRL (in real life) activities that bring the digital value of our associations to life?
- ✓ Can we step away from the paradigm of “in-person” programming that typically offers traditional educational programs to a more imaginative model? One that can deliver a blend of experience and education through which members acquire knowledge while developing meaningful relationships as well as critical professional and life skills?

Community ≠ Engagement

Engagement is activity counted; *community* is connection/belonging that can persist even when activity pauses (e.g., “lurkers” still feeling part of the group). Build for **visibility + permeability** so people can find “their people” and flow in/out as life demands.

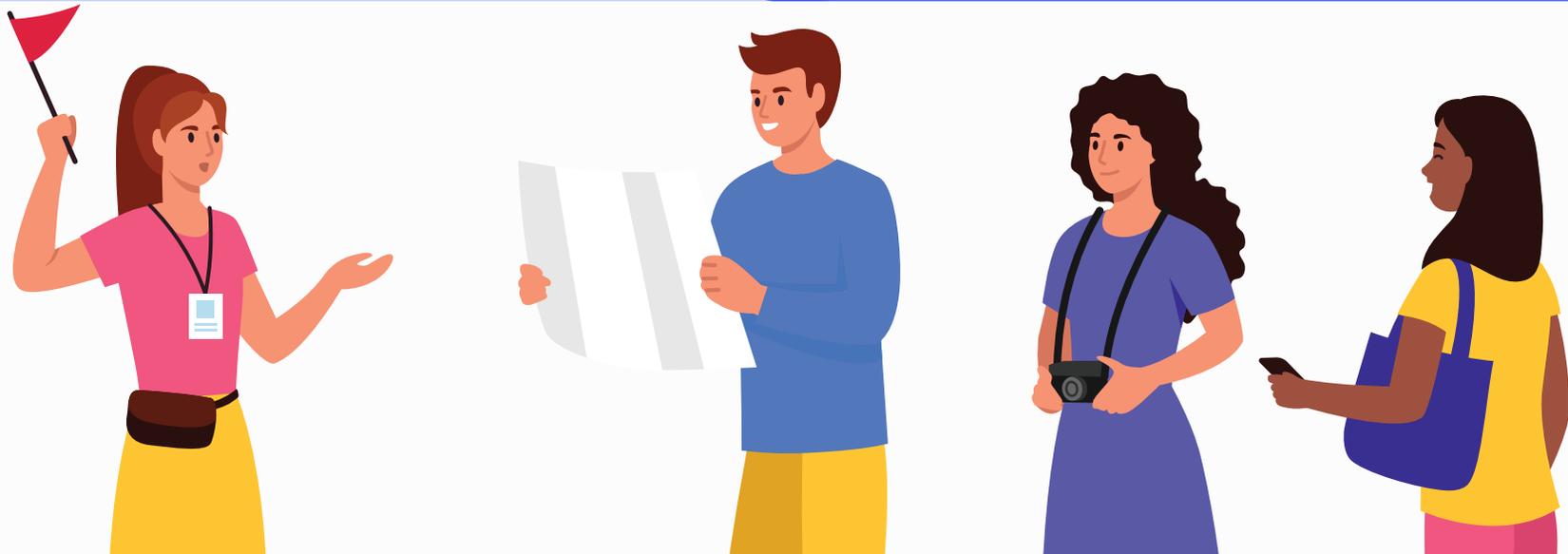


A community is a set of relationships and practices organized around shared purpose/values that create belonging and progress; it can be local or virtual, synchronous or asynchronous, and may ebb and flow over time.

Applying A Future-Focus

We also drew on external foresight work exploring community, member engagement, and volunteerism, reminding us that trends don't just tweak old models, they redefine them. **Community is not "where" it happens ... it's "why" it happens.** Geography is one of several places where the "why" can live.

The pattern is clear:



Signals to Watch:



Member Expectations

Time-value consciousness is rising. People are scrutinizing where they invest time, and they expect tangible ROI, flexibility, and alignment with their values.



Social Drivers

A growing sense of isolation and loneliness may drive a need to come together; however, evidence points to greater interest in this approach as small teams, buddy systems, cohorts.



Decentralized & Flattened Structures

There has been a shift over time as older generations who favor structured, in-person and local communities give way to younger generations who prioritize flexibility, digital connectivity and global. The next generation is not waiting for a career's worth of time to get on a board. This shift challenges the idea of the association or component as the central hub for professionals, thus potentially reducing associations' control and influence.



Volunteerism Evolution

We will see continued evolution in volunteerism toward episodic, short-cycle service and skill-based volunteering which will require changes in governance, replacing long ladders to ascend to leadership with "marketplaces" to match interest, time, skills to volunteer opportunities.



Geography Reimagined

It might make sense to redefine boundaries based on culture or operational areas (e.g., judicial circuits, cultural belts, health care service areas) rather than traditional state/city/municipal lines. Imagine geographic nodes in which law/licensure/market conditions demand them and regions where density is thin. Consider purpose/role/identity communities as a member's default home and geography as an add-on while keeping in mind that drive-time will always be an important factor for participation in in-person activities.



Quality & Value Matter More Than Geography

People will not come together just because they are co-located. We must deliver memorable experiences and content that meet participants' needs at that moment.



AI as a Game Changer for Components

Within 5 years, AI may shift from content helpers to agentic systems which provide components with autonomous assistants (think planning, nudging members, creating meaningful moments, flagging risk and compliance, and more), creating a more focused role for volunteers in facilitation and relationship work. And our association staff role will be reshaped as AI handles volunteer matching, potentially many volunteer roles, program design, and more. This role may also become the driver for component design, dynamically clustering members by interests, goals, and schedules, perhaps spinning up pop-up groups and sunseting groups as needs and activity change.



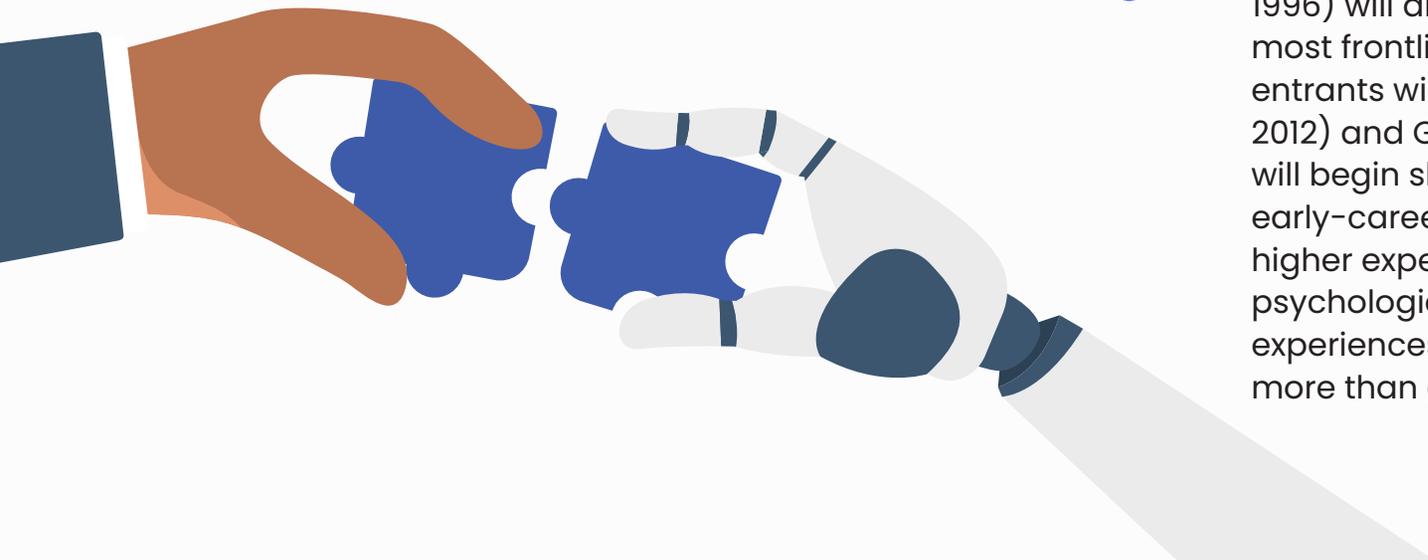
Shifting Roles for Local Components

The role of local components may be shifting from serving primarily as engagement channels for current members to becoming outreach engines that build relationships with broader communities, including those outside the core membership profile (e.g., students, emerging audiences, parallel professions and industries). The drive for local community may be less about being the local place to offer courses and networking, and more about being a resource, especially for career support and mentoring.



Generational Pivot Ahead

By the early 2030s, Millennials (born 1981-1996) will anchor mid-/senior leadership, most frontline volunteers and early board entrants will be older Gen Z (born ~1997-2012) and Gen Alpha (born ~2010-2024) will begin showing up in student and early-career cohorts. Practically, this means higher expectations for values alignment, psychological safety, and hybrid-by-default experiences built around identity/purpose more than geography.



Strategic Implications for Components

01

Portfolio Over Silo

Think beyond location to give members multiple pathways to belong. Success comes from a mix. Offer traditional geographic options where local presence matters (e.g., licensure/advocacy), informal HQ-supported geography-based communities as appropriate and non-geographic communities for interest/role/identity.

04

Centralized Infrastructure

Streamlining the finance, data and training functions enables volunteers to focus on connection and content.

02

Re-scoping Chapters

Shift from the “monthly meeting machine” to dynamic project or cohort hubs focused on achieving tangible outcomes. Hallmarks of this approach are mentoring circles, challenge sprints, or pop-ups that advance shared work.

05

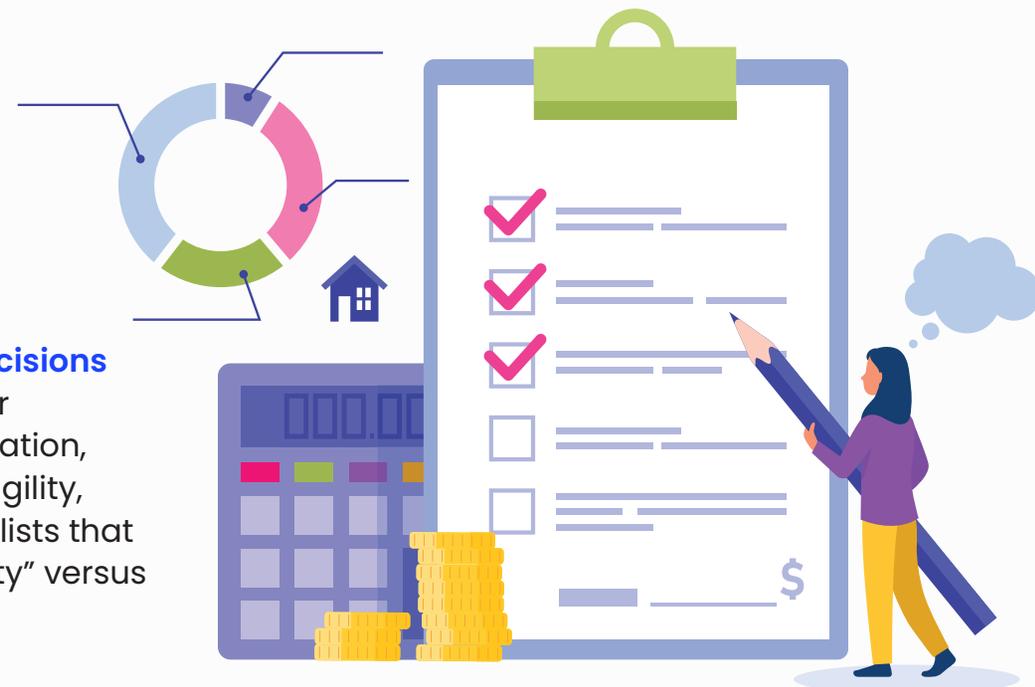
Data-driven Decisions

Embrace KPIs for belonging, activation, event pull and agility, replacing checklists that measure “activity” versus impact.

03

Leadership Redesign

Move from operations to community builders. Train leaders in facilitation, inclusive behaviors, and hybrid design. Shorten ladders and focus on skill-based, shorter roles.



Lessons from the Field





How can associations deliver a compelling value proposition to members through community while addressing the critical issues around volunteerism?

In this section, we spotlight four associations that tackled this issue. While the solutions vary, the common thread was this: each tackled a critical friction point—the tendency to expect volunteers to fill the role of professional association manager even though they stepped up to advance the mission, not to run the organization. A key goal of each solution is building a **positive, cooperative relationship with their volunteer leaders.**



In all four of the cases, the solution removed or reduced the administrative burden for volunteers while eliminating operational inefficiency and data inconsistency by introducing a shared management system.

From Chaos to Collaboration

LEARN MORE 

In-house management support system with regional councils

Association: [Fleet Management Association \(NAFA\)](#), a professional society

Call to Action: NAFA's chapter model was "sputtering at best." Volunteer engagement was low, membership was declining, chapters operated more like social clubs than mission-driven groups, and administrative overload left volunteers overwhelmed and unable to focus on meaningful work.

Solution: Create a model to align chapters to NAFA's mission and reduce volunteer burden. NAFA restructured 34 chapters into eight regional councils, each overseeing local networking groups (LNG) for grassroots connection and supported by an in-house association management team. LNGs plan and host their own events, with NAFA staff providing logistical and marketing support.

Results: Events more than doubled, membership grew 36%, and volunteer participation rebounded. LNGs are collaborating across regions, and overall momentum is strong.

"When we started looking at bringing people together, one of the first things that this task force mentioned is "we'd love to get out of the administrative work. We don't want to do this; this isn't what we do."



Bill Schankel, CAE
Chief Executive Officer at NAFA

Why it Works: Removing administrative burdens by having staff handle heavy lifts allows volunteers to focus on the mission. Plus, the solution was crafted with and by a member task force from different chapters and regions.

Collaboration Strategies for Affiliate Growth

LEARN MORE 

Shared management for independent affiliates

Association: [American Occupational Therapy Association \(AOTA\)](#), a professional association with independent, separately incorporated state associations and a contingent membership.

Call to Action: [AOTA](#) needed to strengthen a lagging relationship and build collaboration with its state affiliates to reduce volunteer and local staff burnout caused by operational drag. The AOTA Board of Directors called for a pilot to address the situation, a directive that required any proposed solution maintain state autonomy while advancing national goals and creating opportunities for collaboration.

Solution: Pilot an AMC-managed model where four states pool resources to outsource association management. The goal was to enable state association leaders to focus on leadership and advocacy rather than day-to-day management responsibilities. AOTA provided seed money; states retained autonomy. A design team of state leaders led the effort and, with support, conducted an AMC search which selected [Global Professional Services](#).

Allowing the states control over this process gave it credibility and the buy-in needed to be successful.

Results: Improved financial stability for participating associations, increased engagement across the four states, and reduced leader burnout. The bonus result is volunteers have been more creative and innovative, sharing their ideas across chapters and implementing them with confidence.

Why it Works: The volunteer's role is focused on creating value, collaboration is streamlined with AOTA, and operations are handled effectively.

“The key was to provide tools for the members to actually do the ambassadorial work and the engagement work, while staff contributed most significantly to the administrative, logistics, and systems work.”



Peggy McElgunn

CEO/Founder at Global Professional Services PC

From Risk to Resilience

LEARN MORE 

Centralized financial management platform to unify financials, data, and related administrative functions

Association: [Society for Marketing Professional Services \(SMPS\)](#), an association of marketing and business development professionals with integrated chapters.

Call to Action: [SMPS](#) faced a \$200K embezzlement incident which exposed vulnerabilities across 65 components with inconsistent financial practices. The crisis sparked a win-win transformation for SMPS and its chapter leaders.



Solution: Adopted [re:Members Chapter Performance](#) platform (formerly billhighway) to unify financial management, reduce risk and streamline volunteer administrative tasks. Their phased rollout included HQ covering some fees and a pilot-first approach to build trust and refine the product. They included training, townhalls and one-on-one support to ease adoption.

Results: Risk mitigated, operations streamlined, and volunteer experience elevated. Some 80% of chapters use the full solution, benefiting from an array of options including automated reconciliation and seamless volunteer transitions.

Why It Works: It combines security, efficiency, and volunteer support in a system that lifts administrative and financial management off volunteers' shoulders while preserving autonomy.

“My job is to make their volunteer experience the best it can be.”



Antonio Payne, CPA, CDE
Chief Finance and Operations Officer at SMPS

From Disarray to Design

LEARN MORE 

Chapter Leadership Council + branch hosts

Association: Warehouse Education and Research Council ([MHI-WERC](#)), a professional association for supply chain/logistics professionals

Call to Action: When COVID hit — and following WERC’s acquisition by MHI — the legacy chapter model went quiet. Volunteer capacity had dwindled over years, facilities weren’t opening for tours, and the lift to restart “the old way” would have required more staff time for less impact. The goal was to bring education and engagement opportunities closer to home without a heavy lift by volunteers and in turn streamline the planning operations.

“During COVID all of the chapters went to sleep and while the intent was to reopen, there was no volunteer energy. We knew that trying to rebuild the same way post COVID would put more staff resources in without different results...so we needed to do something different.”



JoAnna Leon
Director, Membership & Chapters at MHI

Solution: WERC transitioned from ten standalone regional chapters to a hub-and-spoke model that integrates national support with local engagement. This new structure is guided by a 12-member Chapter Leadership Council overseeing ten regions, which sets strategic targets and works closely with the national programming committee and staff. Volunteers in each state serve as Branch Hosts, organizing facility tours and networking events. These are light lift roles focused on convening, not administration. Planning and content development are centralized, with educational programming decisions now handled by WERC’s main education committee to ensure quality and brand alignment. National staff handle logistics, contracts, and payments, allowing volunteers to concentrate on building community and delivering meaningful programs without the burden of paperwork.

Results: Facility tours waitlisted, UK expansion underway, and volunteer pipeline rebuilding.

Why It Works: Centralizes complexity while keeping local connection strong.

Innovation in Progress: Experimenting with Models & Centralization

Associations are rethinking local engagement. Some are **centralizing operations** through corporate-owned chapters to stabilize consistency, while others are **piloting lighter-weight “community” models** where full chapters aren’t practical.

[Hospitality Sales and Marketing Association International \(HSMAI\)](#)

Blending **corporate-owned chapters** (15%) with **franchised chapters** (85%) across a global network. Insights from this hybrid approach are shaping a potential **“Chapter 3.0” model**.

[Wound, Ostomy and Continence Nurses Society \(WOCN\)](#)

Consolidated **33 regions and affiliates into 11 chapters**, adding **local networking communities** for hyper-local connection. Goals: streamline administration, reduce risk, and foster collaboration while minimizing HQ–chapter competition.

[National Golf Course Owners Association \(NGCOA\)](#)

Launching **grassroots ambassador groups** in states without formal chapters to bring owners and operators together informally.

[AIA Colorado, \(Colorado Chapter, American Institute of Architects\)](#)

Replaced four separate chapters with **one statewide organization**, preserving local voice through **regional advisory pods**. Volunteers lead programming and advocacy tailored to their area.

[National Association of the Remodeling Industry \(NARI\)](#)

Testing a **community model** in markets lacking chapters: no board, no separate entity—just a **nationally managed group** with a local steering committee of 2–3 members.

[Association for Advancing Physician and Provider Recruitment \(AAPPR\)](#)

Transitioned 50% of Affiliates from independent entities to an **internalized model** where AAPPR manages operations, finances, and compliance. **Volunteers maintain programming leadership with dedicated staff support**, while independent affiliates retain full autonomy with regular national communication.

What If: Recommendations

We posed to the Research Advisory Council "What if your association could do it differently..."



While acknowledging “chapters” remain valued for local connections, the Council urged a shift from **default geography to intentional design** which leverages data, flexibility and purpose-driven models.



Metrics Front and Center

Move beyond checklists and track KPIs that map to member experience. Consider belonging, engagement, governance agility (e.g., time to change, piloting), event pull (e.g., show rate, evaluations), and equity of access (e.g., career-stage mix, type of connections). An additional metric gaining attention is the *quality of interactions*. Though measurement methods are still evolving, it reflects a growing emphasis on depth, not just frequency, and belongs on the radar as expectations shift.



Training Reframe

Shift from “how to run a chapter” to “how to build belonging.” This could include welcoming and inclusion practices, facilitation and hybrid engagement skills, and new volunteering models.

“Strong components start when leaders are trained to guide communities, not just govern them.”



Tara Puckey, FASAE, CAE
Radio Television Digital News Association (RTDNA)



Build an ecosystem

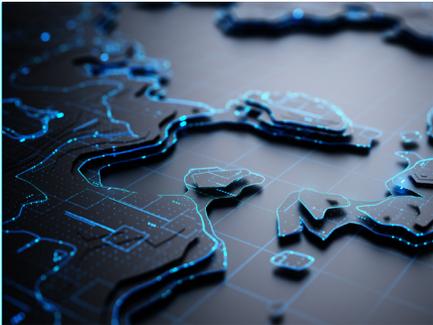
Think holistically about how members and stakeholders can find their place in your association. To guide this, they explored a decision dimensions framework to help assess strategic value, operational readiness, and member engagement potential.

Our discussions with the advisory council led to building a framework as a lens for evaluating existing components or designing new ones. The intent is to support associations in making informed choices about structure, purpose, and sustainability which are critical in an era where member expectations are shifting toward agility, meaningful engagement, and measurable impact. They offered two guides: a decision framework to assess current systems and a model to assess geographic viability.

Decision Dimensions Framework

- 1 Member Engagement Drivers**
 - + Do components deliver purposeful, high-quality interactions (not just frequency)?
 - + Are they organized around shared challenges or stressors, not just proximity?
 - + Are they addressing region-specific issues around advocacy, content and networking?
- 2 Strategic Purpose & Value Proposition**
 - + Is there a clear “why” for each component beyond generic networking?
 - + Does it complement or duplicate national offerings?
- 3 Resource & Volunteer Capacity**
 - + Can the component sustain leadership pipelines and program costs?
 - + Are volunteer roles designed and right sized for modern expectations?
- 4 Governance & Structural Flexibility**
 - + Can you pilot, merge, or sunset new models and existing units quickly under current bylaws?
 - + Is leadership selection addressing competencies needed?
 - + How can you balance local autonomy and alignment?
- 5 Technology & Generational Fit**
 - + Do leaders have the skills needed for digital community building and hybrid engagement?
 - + Are platforms accessible and secure for diverse cohorts?
- 6 Financial Sustainability**
 - + Can the component operate sustainably and generate measurable return on investment for the association?

Dimensions for Geographic Viability



Population and Proximity
(Density of members in a region)

Can you map member density by ZIP code to identify “natural” chapter territories or identify where members are forming local peer groups?



Social Orientation
(Value placed on in-person bonding)

In recent surveys, how often do members mention “networking” or “making friends”?

Are there cohorts (e.g., NextGen) who crave in-person camaraderie?



Purposeful Local Needs
(Regulatory, advocacy, or market drivers)

Are there state or municipal rules that require in-person advocacy or training?

Have local chapters led major initiatives national staff could not?



Resource Availability
(HQ dollars + local volunteer “muscle”)

Does HQ have budget flexibility and staff bandwidth to support chapter operations?

Are there committed local leaders with time and skills to run programs?

Is there access to technology (event platforms, CRM) for smooth execution?

Guiding Questions

Benchmarking Insights

Detailed Look at What Associations are Currently Doing & Volunteers are Saying: 2025 Benchmarking Surveys

As in 2022, we surveyed both association headquarters staff and chapter leaders. We received responses from staff at **250 associations headquarters** and **1,132 chapter leaders** from **25 association chapters**.

We begin by comparing responses in comparable areas, followed by full data sets from each survey. While the surveys covered similar ground, differences in questions exist. As these results represent samples of two larger populations, they should guide discussion rather dictate action.



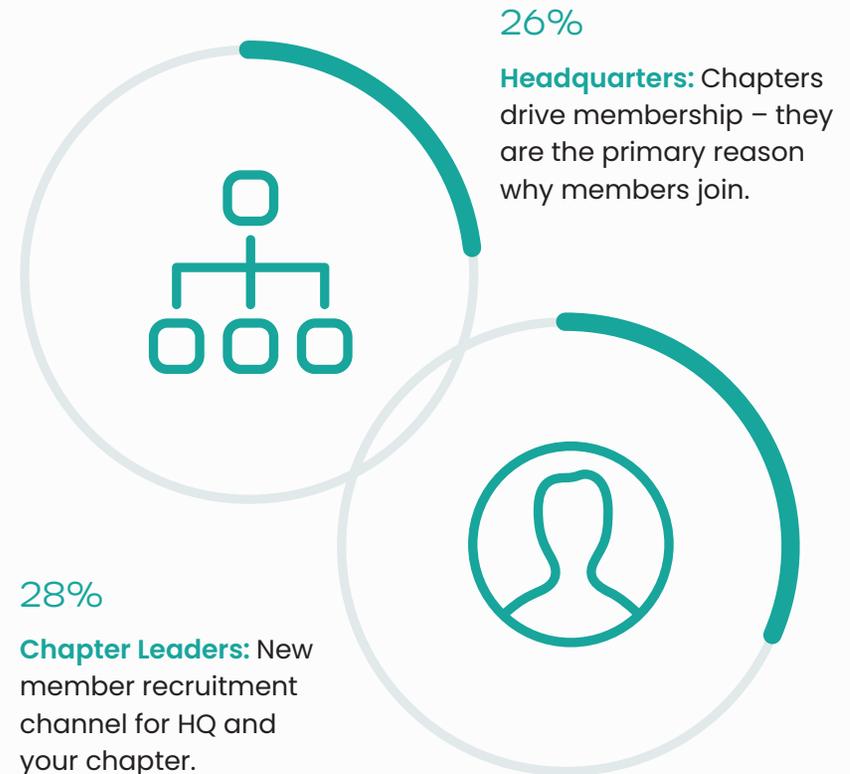
Headquarters Staff/Chapter Leader Comparison

Impact of Chapters

Despite differences in the individual elements in this impact assessment, headquarters staff (HQ) and chapter leaders (CL) reached similar aggregate ratings, 3.20 and 3.18, respectively.

Both also placed delivery of networking/educational programs at the top of their respective value chains, though neither group is especially impressed with their chapters as a membership recruitment channel.

Membership Recruitment



When asked, less than a third (32%) of chapter leaders indicated their chapter shares HQ membership recruitment materials and messages and 22% said they have a membership recruitment plan with goals.

Headquarters Staff

Providing members with local networking/ education initiatives	3.80
Are a primary reason that many members join/renew	3.47
Supporting our advocacy initiatives	3.34
Helping us develop new national and local/ regional leaders	3.28
Providing a source of local feedback by listening to/channeling member voices	3.26
Serving as a channel for recruiting new members	3.12
Helping us communicate more clearly with members/constituents	3.03
Deliver a majority of the total value that our members receive	2.93
Are a substantial cost center with little measurable return	2.55
Deliver consistent value across all areas/ regions covered by them	2.53

Aggregate Performance Score 3.20

Chapter Leaders

Ability to deliver high-quality educational/ technical programs	3.82
Ability to promote/support my professional and industry certifications in our area	3.45
Ability to provide sufficient networking for area professionals	3.44
Ability to attract/retain senior (seasoned or veteran) members	3.27
Ability to attract/retain new professional members	2.75
Ability to engage members in the Chapter	2.93
Finding and developing new volunteers within our Chapter	2.63

Aggregate Performance Score 3.18



Relationship

Headquarters and chapters report a fairly trusting relationship, and neither group feels chapters should be completely independent. At the same time, both recognize the sometimes-awkward competitor/collaborator relationship that defines most chapter systems.

Challenges to Chapter Performance

Headquarters staff and chapter leaders both identified the shortage of volunteers as the most critical impediment to chapter performance.

Operational Effectiveness

Chapter leaders offered a much more positive assessment of the effectiveness of their leadership and organizational structure.

	HQ	CL
We have a trusting relationship between chapters and HQ.	50%	77%
Chapters should function as independent affiliates of HQ.	35%	38%
Chapters sometimes function as competitors and sometimes as partners.	46%	79%
Difficulty getting new volunteer leaders.	77%	
Sufficient number of qualified volunteers.		63%
Our chapters are generally run by effective leaders.	44%	85%
Our current chapter structure is an up-to-date, effective organizational model.	18%	77%

HQ Support to Chapters

This chart compares the types of support provided by HQ to the importance of each type to chapter leaders. Notably, dues invoicing/collection (4.3 on a 5-point scale) sits at the top of the chapter leaders' list, while only half (49%) of the associations indicated providing these services.

	% of HQ which...	Importance to Chapter Leaders on 5-Point Scale
Provide training (Live, Archived, on-Demand)	80%	4.1
Provide resource portal (training guides, templates, etc.)	76%	4.2
Host chapter membership data in our AMS	73%	4.0
Communications/marketing support (e.g. email marketing, web hosting)	57%	4.0
Dues invoicing/collection	49%	4.3
Provide insurance access to chapters/officers	45%	3.6
Event registration processing	40%	3.8
Provide funding through grants, sponsorships, awards	36%	3.9
Tax filing/state registration, state sales tax	29%	4.0
Bookkeeping/accounting services	27%	3.7
Event planning	24%	3.6
Full-service management for select chapters	15%	3.6

Headquarters Staff Chapter Benchmarking: 2025 Survey Findings

Profile of Participating Associations

The survey attracted responses from 250 associations. In a new line of inquiry this year, we added questions regarding other components within the respondents' associations to better understand how, if at all, these component types interacted.

Geographic Chapters



- 2% No, but we did in the past
- 10% We have never had geographic chapters
- 88% Yes, currently

Special Interest or Practice Groups



- 5% No, but we did in the past
- 34% We have never had special interest or practice groups
- 60% Yes, currently

Component Structure

While 81% of organizations with special interest or practice groups reported those components are wholly owned subsidiaries, geographic chapters are less likely to be wholly owned (26%) with the largest share (38%) being separately incorporated.

Component Structure	 Geographic Chapters	 Special Interest or Practice Groups
Free-standing, independently incorporated affiliates of the central organization	36%	9%
Separately incorporated organizations chartered by the central organization	38%	10%
Wholly-owned subsidiaries of the central organization	26%	81%



Reason for Not Having Chapters

For those without chapters (10%), the most likely reason indicated is because the lack of demand for a chapter structure in the association (43%).



While the N of this group is small (25 respondents), consideration of variables such as the existence of informal or unaffiliated entities, or low membership density may offer areas for exploration when trying to determine reasons for low performance among some of your chapters.

Rating Potential Impact of Chapters

In rating their chapters' impact on the association, respondents gave an aggregate score of 3.2 on a 5-point scale, effectively a 64% or "D" rating. This result is similar to our previous surveys. As expected, the highest perceived impact (3.80) centered around providing members with local networking and education initiatives, while the lowest (2.53) centered around the delivery of consistent value.

Providing members with local networking/education initiatives	3.80
Are a primary reason that many members join/renew	3.47
Supporting our advocacy initiatives	3.34
Helping us develop new national and local/regional leaders	3.28
Providing a source of local feedback by listening to/channeling member voices	3.26
Serving as a channel for recruiting new members	3.12
Helping us communicate more clearly with members/constituents	3.03
Deliver a majority of the total value that our members receive	2.93
Are a substantial cost center with little measurable return	2.55
Deliver consistent value across all areas/regions covered by them	2.53
Aggregate Performance Score	3.20

In a related vein, respondents generally "somewhat" agreed their chapters had influence within the association.

3.38

Have significant representation in HQ's governance (e.g., Board of Directors/ Trustees or Exec Committee)

3.17

Have a substantial influence on HQ's decision-making

Data Used and Needed

Respondents indicated chapters mostly use membership data (80%) along with registration figures (66%) to measure member engagement; however only 27% use “activity by member” to do so. As has been noted in every previous chapter benchmarking study, the absence of consistent, uniform, individual member-level data frequently limits both headquarters staff and chapter leaders to anecdotal information in their assessments of performance and value.





Beliefs Predominantly Held Regarding Chapters

Respondents offered a range of sometimes conflicting responses. Nearly all (93%) agreed chapters deliver local connections and member engagement, and 70% believed they broaden reach enabling the association to “be everywhere.”

Yet only 18% see the current chapter structure as an up-to-date, effective model. Half believe there is a trusting relationship between chapters and HQ, and fewer than one-third felt their chapters were closely aligned or that they represent the primary reason members join.

Despite these seemingly fatal flaws, 52% felt their association should be investing more resources into its chapters. What is not clear from the responses is whether more resources will adequately address the weaknesses of the “outdated” model.

Relationship

We have a trusting relationship between chapters and HQ.	50%
Chapters should all be treated equally regardless of size.	45%
Our options to make changes to our chapter structure are limited by internal politics.	44%
We are concerned with risk management, if chapters do things that may get HQ into legal/financial “hot water.”	38%
Chapters should function as independent affiliates of HQ.	35%

Purpose

Chapters deliver local connections and member engagement.	93%
Chapters broaden our reach, allowing us to “be everywhere.”	70%
Chapters are closely aligned with HQ—we all “point in the same direction.”	32%
Chapters drive membership—they are the primary reason why members join.	26%
Chapters convey an illusion of democracy in their local operations.	17%
Other	6%

Operations

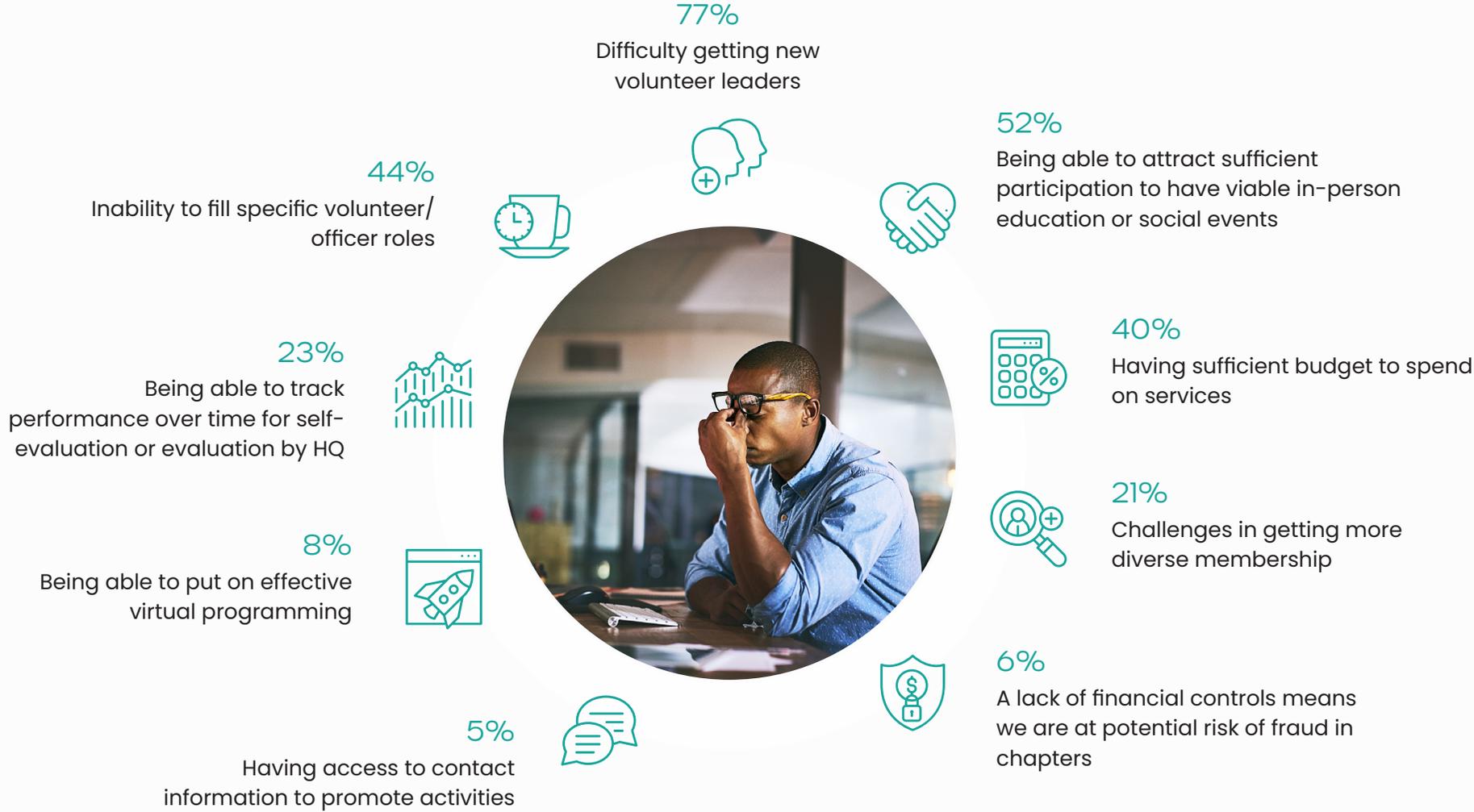
Our chapters are very diverse in terms of size, approach, and effectiveness.	90%
We should be investing more resources into our chapters.	52%
Chapters sometimes function as competitors and sometimes as partners.	46%
Our chapters are generally run by effective leaders.	44%
Our current chapter structure is an up-to date, effective organizational model.	18%

Value

Chapters are essential to our success.	68%
Chapters share our brand but offer a different value proposition to members.	56%
Chapters generally practice good quality control when it comes to delivering local programs and services.	41%

Biggest Chapter Challenges Preventing Delivery of Value

The shortage of volunteers, participants and money continues to limit chapter effectiveness.



When asked what one change would have the greatest impact on chapter performance, 40% would increase the support provided to chapters, while only 14% appear ready to explore fundamental change.



8% Other

Relationship Between Chapters & Special Interest/Practice Groups

When asked about the relationship between chapters and other components within the association, 55% reported minimal interaction. In contrast just 24% believed they worked together effectively to provide members with a diverse connections.

- 1% They tend to operate at odds with each other too frequently.
- 20% They complement each other reasonably well, although there are some areas where programming /interests conflict.
- 24% They complement each other very well to provide a wider range of connections for members.
- 55% There is not much relationship between them in our structure.



Services/Benefits Provided to Members by Chapters

These generally parallel results seen in previous years, with in-person education leading the pack.



89%

Chapter-developed professional development in-person programs



83%

Newsletters or other periodical publications



83%

Regularly scheduled meetings (monthly, quarterly or annual)



80%

Social events (golf, holiday parties, tours, galas)



76%

Social media presence for the chapter



74%

Standalone website for the chapter



73%

Chapter-developed professional development virtual programs



56%

Student programs/activities



55%

Community/public service or charitable programs



47%

Career services or mentoring programs



46%

Member directory



44%

HQ-supported professional development programs



41%

Trade shows/expo



37%

Certification program-related preparation/study programs

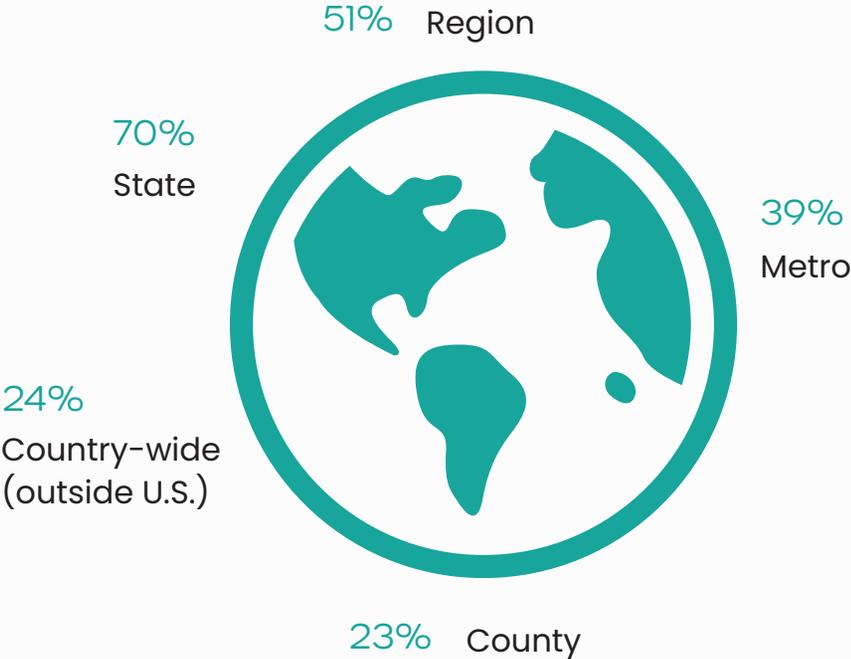


3%

Other

General Boundaries

As before, our respondent pool offered a variety of geographical boundaries among their chapters, with some having multiple types within the same association.



For the first time in this benchmarking series, we asked if there are significant geographic variations in the makeup or needs of chapter members: 58% said yes, 25% said no, and 17% were unsure.

Volunteer Structures Coordinating/Supporting Chapters

In this year’s study, we also attempted to better understand how associations structurally coordinate/support chapters at the national level. Almost half the respondents indicated HQ has national volunteers assigned to represent or support chapters, and another 39% said the central organization has a national committee or council of chapters. About one-third (36%) noted other aspects.

HQ has national volunteers assigned to represent or support chapters (e.g., Regional VPs or chapter ambassadors)	48%
HQ has a national committee or council of chapters (e.g., chapter presidents council)	39%
Other aspects	36%

Size of Network

We examined a number of data points regarding the size of the respondents' chapter system. The large difference between the mean (average) and the median (mid-point) clearly suggests the mean is skewed upward by the presence of several relatively large organizations. It is not surprising that based on the percentage of chapters with staff (69% for the mean vs 10% for the median), size matters. This difference is also reflected in the number of members and annual budget.



Chapter Structure

	Mean	Median	Difference	
Total chapters (if applicable)	179	49	-131	27%
How many chapters have part-time or full-time staff	124	5	-119	4%
% w/Staff	69%	10%	59%	15%
Number of chapters added, past 5 years	113.2	1.0	-112	1%
Number of chapters closed, past 5 years	5.5	2.0	-4	36%
How many chapters do you have outside the U.S.	32.2	1.0	-31	3%

Chapter Members

	Mean	Median	Difference	
Average members per chapter	816	200	-616	25%
Total members in your largest chapter	6,258	757	-5,501	12%
Total members in your smallest chapter	81	30	-51	37%
What percent of total chapter members participate in programs *	36%	30%	6%	83%

Chapter Finance

Average chapter dues level (excluding HQ dues)	231	30	-201	13%
Average HQ dues level (excluding chapter dues)	1,352	225	-1,127	17%
Average chapter annual operating budget	117,637	20,000	-97,637	17%

Chapter Attendance

What is the average attendance per in-person chapter event *	72	35	-37	49%
Average Attendance as % of Total Members	9%	18%	-9%	200%

* It is important to note that these figures represent estimated participation and number of attendees (regardless of their membership status). Our research and experience consistently confirm that this level of detail is rarely captured by the chapter or headquarters.

Psychology of the Network

This year’s study asked respondents to gauge whether memberships lean more towards extroversion or introversion. While the assessment was certainly seat-of-the-pants, the results follow a logical path that may help associations decide if chapters are the effective way to create a local presence. Across all key metrics including aggregate performance, total chapters, chapters with staff, number of members, participation, budget and attendance, the associations with “extroverted” memberships far outperformed those with “introverted” memberships.

	Generally extroverts	Generally introverts	Split	Unsure
# Respondents	39	28	69	25
Aggregate Performance Score	3.3	2.9	3.2	3.0
Chapter Structure	Mean			
Total chapters (if applicable):	511	65	87	58
How many chapters have PT or FT staff:	466	19	17	15
Chapter Members				
Average members per chapter	430	270	504	2,956
What percent of total chapter members participate in programs	50	22	36	21
Chapter Finances				
Average chapter annual operating budget	174,267	48,676	139,391	24,917
Chapter Attendance				
What is the average attendance per in-person chapter event	76	35	88	48

Chapter Membership/Dues System

The chapter membership/dues system reported this year is fairly typical of what we have seen in previous studies.

Membership Requirements

Chapter members are required to be central organization members	68%
Central organization members are required to be chapter members	19%
Separate, non-contingent membership	17%
Other	13%

Dues Structure

Unified dues which include both central organization and chapter membership	43%
Separate dues for central organization and chapters	40%
Dues vary by chapter	30%
Other	13%
Dues are same for all chapters	6%

Dues Collection

Central organization collects all dues	64%
Dues are collected separately	15%
Other	14%
Dues collection varies across system, such as offering chapters the option to collect dues	11%
Chapter collects all dues	7%

Percentage of Dues Rebated

By the central organization is rebated back to the chapters	36.9
By chapters rebated back to the central organization	6.3

Frequency of Dues Remit to Chapters

Monthly	43%	Annually	16%
Quarterly	15%	Never	11%
Other	9%	Biannually	7%

Chapter Support

Support for chapters has not changed dramatically from previous years; respondents reported an average of seven areas of support. Notably, associations that provided “career services or mentoring programs” or “full-service management for select chapters” or a “performance dashboard” gave their chapters the highest performance ratings in the survey (3.33, 3.31 and 3.42, respectively).

<p>80%</p> <p>Provide training</p> 	<p>76%</p> <p>Provide a resource portal</p>	<p>73%</p> <p>Host chapter membership data in our Association Management System</p>	<p>65%</p> <p>Active promotion of chapter events/ activities through HQ website or emails</p>	<p>55%</p> <p>Communications and/or marketing support for local efforts</p>
<p>53%</p> <p>Dues collection</p>	<p>50%</p> <p>Website hosting</p> 	<p>45%</p> <p>Dues invoicing</p>	<p>45%</p> <p>Provide insurance access to chapters/ officers</p>	<p>40%</p> <p>Event registration processing</p>
<p>36%</p> <p>Provide funding through grants, sponsorships, awards</p>	<p>29%</p> <p>Tax filing/state registration, state sales tax</p>	<p>27%</p> <p>Bookkeeping/ accounting services</p>	<p>24%</p> <p>Event planning</p> 	<p>22%</p> <p>Provide performance dashboard</p>
<p>15%</p> <p>Full-service management for select chapters</p>	<p>13%</p> <p>Other</p> 	<p>The associations that do not host chapter membership data reported that 48% of their chapters have their own AMS, and 52% maintain their membership data with spreadsheets or similar unstructured data. It is important to note the majority of systems are tracking membership data, not participation/engagement data at the chapter level.</p>		

Respondent's Organization Profile



Membership Structure

- 67% Primarily an individual member organization
- 22% Hybrid structure with both organizational and individual members
- 10% Primarily a trade association and organizational members
- 1% Non-member based organization (e.g., donor- or grant supported)

Geographic Scope

International/Global			48%
National	45%	Local	1%
State	7%	Regional	0%

Department/Division Primarily Responsible for Chapters

Membership Department	40%
Chapter/Affiliate/Component Relations Dept.	19%
Engagement (Member or Community)	10%
Membership & Chapters Dept.	7%
Executive Office/all	7%
Volunteer or Leadership	7%
Other	5%
Governance	3%
Operations	3%

Membership Count/Participation/Revenue/Support

	Mean	Median
Total individual members	52,357	12,306
Total organizational members	6,892	890
Total members	50,213	13,000
Percent of members who participate in association programs	37.4	30.0
Annual revenue per member, most recently completed fiscal year	\$40.0	\$8.6
Full-time equivalent (FTE) staff	98.0	25.0
FTE staff supporting chapters (including formally & informally)	4.1	2.0

Chapter Leadership Benchmarking: 2025 Survey Findings

Respondent Profile

Twenty-five associations participated in the chapter leader survey resulting in 1,132 responses, a 60% increase in participation from our 2022 project. As in 2022, responses were concentrated among a few associations with two accounting for 21% and 17% of responses while four others contributed 5%-10% each and the remaining 19 collectively accounted for one-third of total sample.

Years Served as...

a volunteer or staff for your Chapter



staff for your Chapter



Position in Chapter

Other Chapter Officer/Board Member	54%
Chapter President	32%
Other volunteer position	8%
Paid staff person	6%

Paid staff is rare, with only 13% of survey participants reporting having them.

Range of years served as volunteer or staff



Chapter Characteristics

Members

Mean	206
Median	100

Size range

1-50	28%
51-100	25%
101-249	25%
250+	21%

Geographic Scope

State	53%
Local/metro area	29%
Region	18%
Other	4%

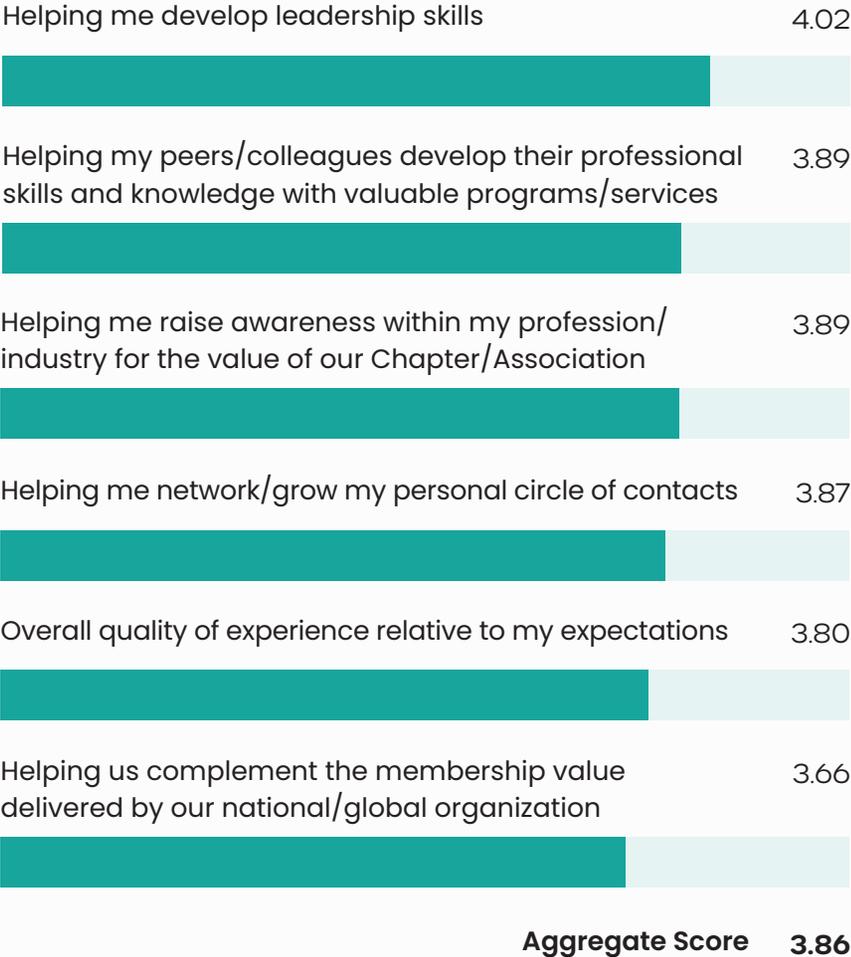


Annual Budget

\$1-\$50,000	75%
\$50,001-\$100,000	14%
\$100,001-\$250,000	6%
\$250,000-\$500,000	2%
\$500,001-\$1,000,000	1%
\$1,000,001+	2%

Satisfaction

Satisfaction with various aspects of their role as a chapter leader falls between “somewhat satisfied” and “very satisfied” with an aggregate score of 3.86 on a 5-point scale.



Leaders reported the greatest satisfaction (4.02) from personal benefit such as developing leadership skills, while the lowest (3.66) relates to complementing the value delivered by the national/global organization. Though this is only 10% lower, the pattern is telling: members value personal benefits like networking and skill development more than collective benefits for the association. They also feel more successful raising awareness than complementing the value proposition of the “mothership.”

Volunteers & Leadership

The overall levels of member engagement and board participation are generally similar to those seen in association surveys.

Current Chapter Board

All positions are filled and there are a number of qualified individuals waiting in the wings.	21%
Most positions are filled but we don't have many qualified individuals waiting in the wings.	23%
Most positions are filled; however, several volunteers have served multiple terms.	37%
We have open positions and difficulty finding willing volunteers.	18%
Not sure	1%

Engagement

	Mean	Median
Highly engaged (serving on a committee/board)	18%	10%
Somewhat/marginally engaged (attend a few meetings a year)	33%	25%
Residual: not engaged	49%	51%

Programs

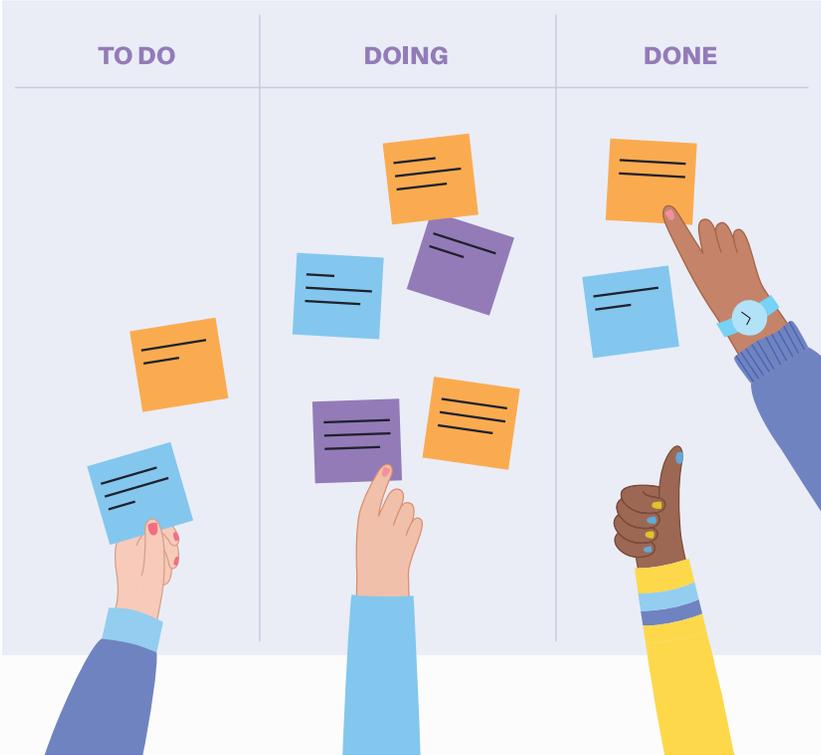
This data offers insight into the chapters’ reach but not member engagement. Participant figures are based on registrants, not members, and as chapters commonly include all stakeholders, we cannot assume member reach. Additionally, the counts reflect registrations not individuals.

Number of total programs per year reported

1-4	57%
5-9	26%
12+	17%

Mix of formats reported

All in-person	42%
Mix with mostly/all virtual (75+%)	26%
Mix with mostly in-person (75+%)	14%
Mixed	18%



In-Person vs. Virtual Programs & Participants



Programs & Participants

	In-Person		Virtual	
	Mean	Median	Mean	Median
On average, how many programs per year	5.3	4.0	5.6	3.0
How many participants per activity	52	30	33	20
Estimated total	276	120	187	60

Change in Number of In-Person and Virtual Programs over the last Three Years

	In-Person	Virtual
Increased	27%	27%
Stayed the Same	42%	29%
Decreased	25%	18%
Not applicable	6%	26%

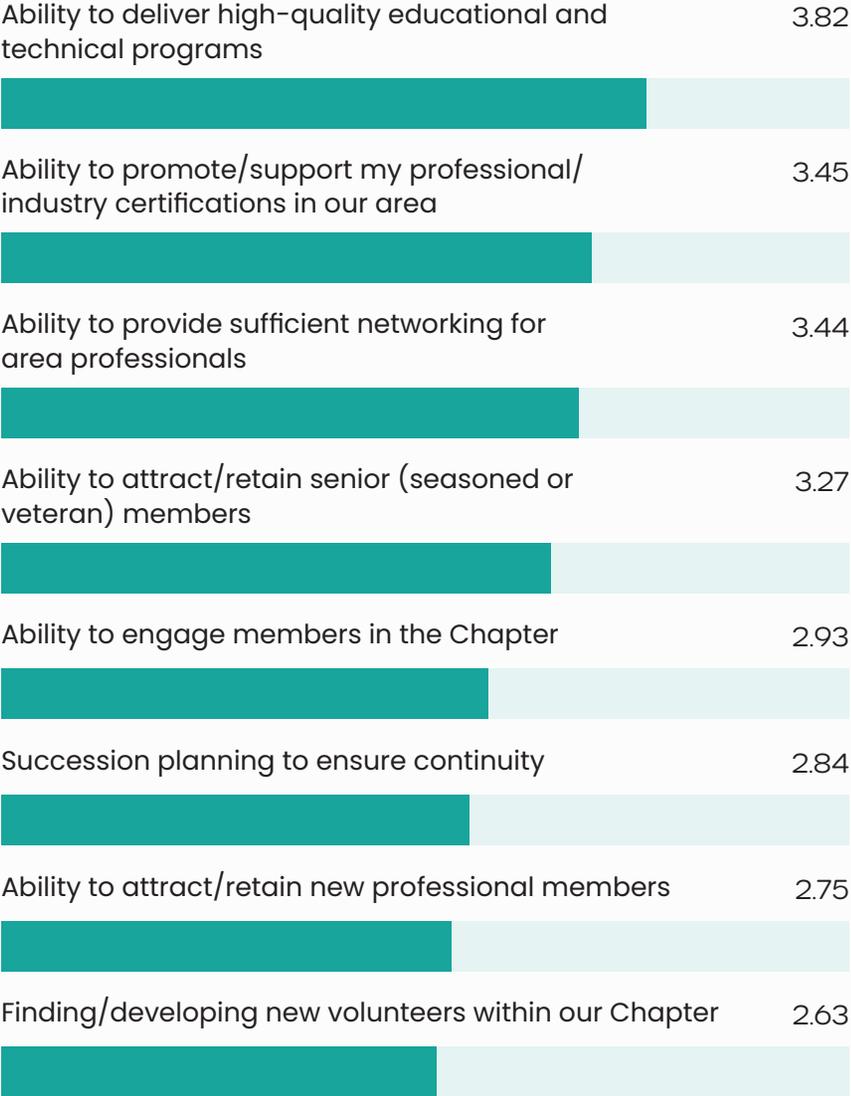
Size Matters

The chart below shows a clear and compelling relationship between size and chapter capacity/performance.

	Chapter Membership				Budget Range			Current Board				
	1-50	51-100	101-249	250+	\$1-\$50k	\$50-\$100k	> \$100k	Filled +	Most filled	Mult terms	Many unfilled	Not sure
Number of FTE Staff	1.1	0.6	0.8	1.9	0.7	0.7	2.5	2.3	1.4	0.9	0.9	
Aggregate Satisfaction with Volunteer Role	3.7	3.8	3.9	4.1	3.8	4.0	4.1	4.2	4.0	3.8	3.4	3.6
Aggregate Satisfaction with Chapter Performance	2.9	3.1	3.2	3.5	3.0	3.3	3.6	3.8	3.2	3.1	2.4	2.8
Sufficient Number of Qualified Volunteers	65%	70%	61%	53%	64%	62%	55%	29%	71%	69%	78%	44%
Participants per In-Person Activity	27	44	66	78	44	73	85	64	48	50	44	75
All Positions Filled w/Waitlist	12%	15%	24%	35%	16%	23%	45%	100%	0%	0%	0%	0%
We Share HQ's Messages re Issues/Prods/Services	46%	50%	53%	57%	49%	54%	58%	60%	47%	48%	53%	38%

Rating the Chapter

How Well My Chapter Delivers...



Challenges to Chapter Performance

- 63% Sufficient number of qualified volunteers
- 42% Small size of our membership
- 28% Size of territory (geography) covered
- 27% Adequate financial resources
- 15% Access to quality support (e.g., training, logistics, etc.)
- 14% Other
- 14% Limited knowledge in some functional management areas (e.g., event management, communications)
- 9% Relationship with HQ

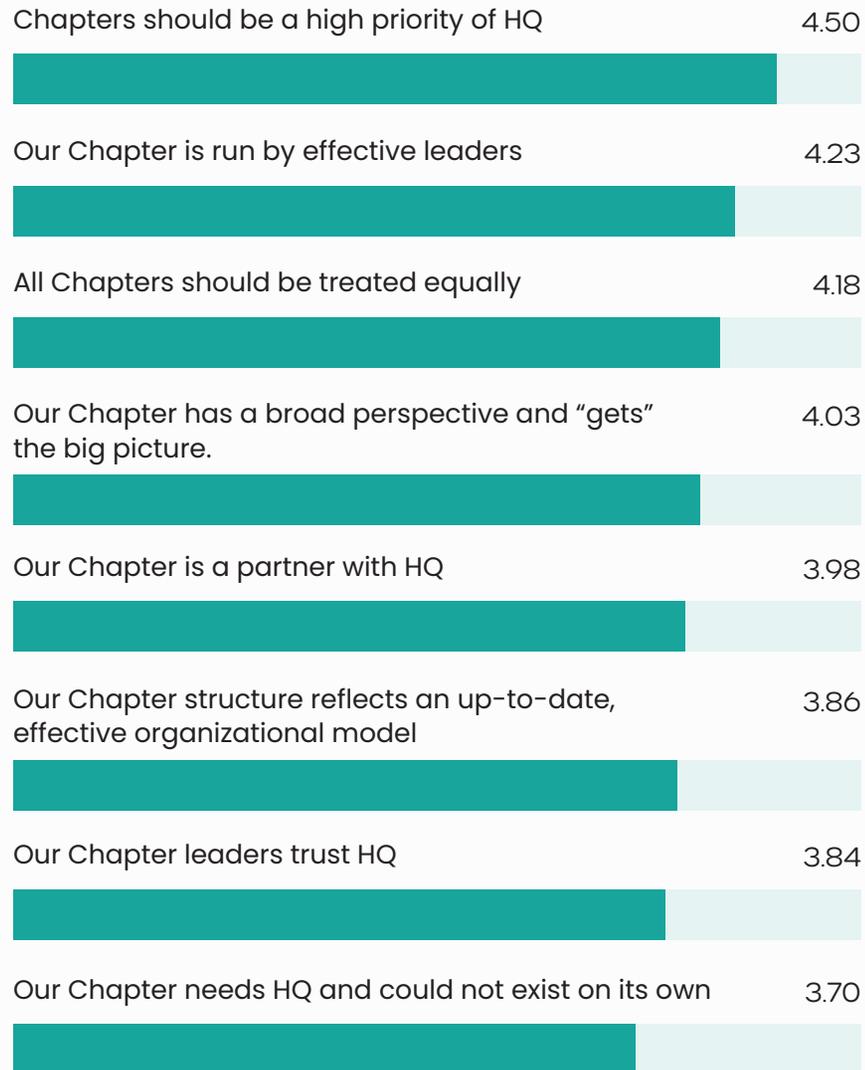


Value

Chapters reported a range of activities; however, the data reveals a notable gap between sharing HQ’s professional content and providing a new member recruitment channel.



Aspirations and Beliefs Regarding My Chapter



HQ Relationship & Support

While a plurality indicated a fairly good relationship with the national organization (49%), a considerable number gave the highest rating - a very strong, positive relationship (38%).

HQ Relationship

We have a very strong, positive relationship	38%
We have a fairly good relationship	49%
We have an uneasy relationship	7%
We have a very dysfunctional relationship	3%
Other	4%

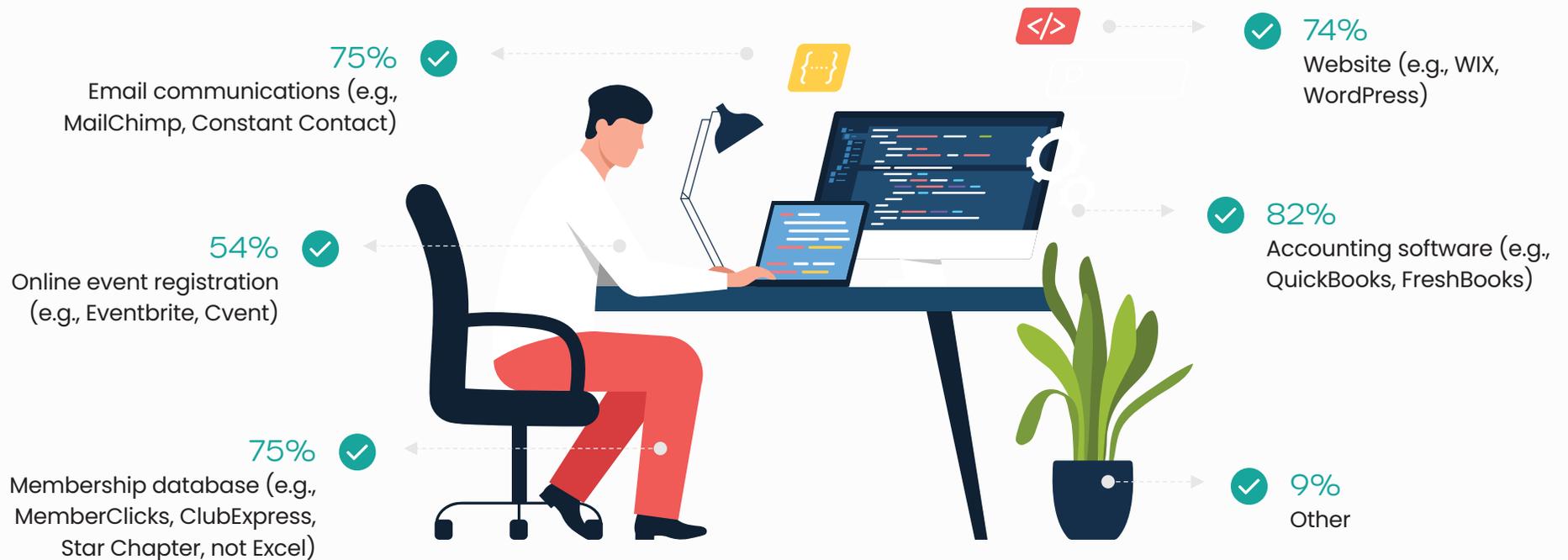
Member Recruitment Efforts

Have membership chair or committee	61%
Share HQ membership recruitment materials and messages	32%
Have a membership recruitment plan with goals	22%
Other	20%
None of the above	12%
We don't—this is HQ's responsibility	4%

Importance of HQ Resources

Dues invoicing/collection	4.25
Chapter leadership conference(s) or workshops	4.16
Website Portal with resources (training guides, templates, etc.)	4.16
Training Webinar(s) (live, archive, on-demand)	4.10
Chapter leadership training through learning management system (LMS)	4.00
Database management	3.98
Communications/marketing support (such as email marketing or web hosting)	3.98
Tax filing/state registration/sales tax collection	3.98
Funding through grants, sponsorships, awards	3.89
Discussion forum/online community	3.82
Virtual meeting software access/license (Zoom, Webex)	3.82
Event registration processing	3.75
Designated mentor(s)	3.72
Bookkeeping/accounting services	3.68
Provide access to insurance	3.61
Full-service management	3.59
Event planning	3.57

Software



Communications

	@ Email	Laptop E-newsletter	Envelope Direct Mail	Twitter Social media
Weekly	18%	3%	1%	26%
Monthly	44%	26%	5%	33%
Quarterly	19%	26%	5%	12%
Less Frequently	16%	16%	23%	17%
Not applicable	3%	29%	67%	13%

Research Advisory Council

We thank these association professionals who offered their experiences, insights and observations to the study. As “ad hoc” volunteers, these advisors demonstrated the importance of drawing “members” in to explore tough questions facing their profession.

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About the Research

This project was led by Mariner Management (Peggy Hoffman, FASAE, CAE and Peter Houstle) with survey and focus group support from Whorton Marketing & Research (Kevin Whorton) and futures research by Kristine Metter, CAE, Crystal Lake Partners. The process included two online surveys—one of association professionals (July 2025) and another of chapter leaders from 25 participating associations (August–September 2025). Additionally, two focus groups with association professionals were conducted in May and June 2025, complemented by individual interviews from January through May 2025. A Research Advisory Council provided guidance throughout the research. Re:Members provided funding support.

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Your Partners in Supporting Component Strategy



[Mariner Management](#) provides counsel, training and support to associations on components, chapters, member engagement and volunteerism. Check out our [CRP Solution Center](#) and [Resources](#) for ideas and more. Contact us with any questions or to explore ideas. Email us info@marinermanagement.com or call 301-725-2508.



[re:Members Chapter Performance](#) helps chapters thrive! Our technology tools streamline admin tasks and financial processes so chapter leaders and volunteers can stay focused on members and mission. Plus, headquarters gains real-time visibility into chapter health and engagement. These insights enable data-driven decisions that optimize performance, reduce risk, and increase ROI across the entire organization.

Looking to learn more about chapter management? Discover a growing library of practical guides, templates, on-demand webinars, and tools designed to help associations strengthen operations and engagement. Ready to see how re:Members Chapter Performance works? [Request a demo](#) to experience the platform in action.