

Membership Engagement for Small Staff Associations

Your membership and programming committees have come up with an amazing lineup of the best events. They're crowd pleasers, a good mix of educational and social, and in convenient places and times. And people are showing up! But will they show up again? One word ensures they will: **engagement.**

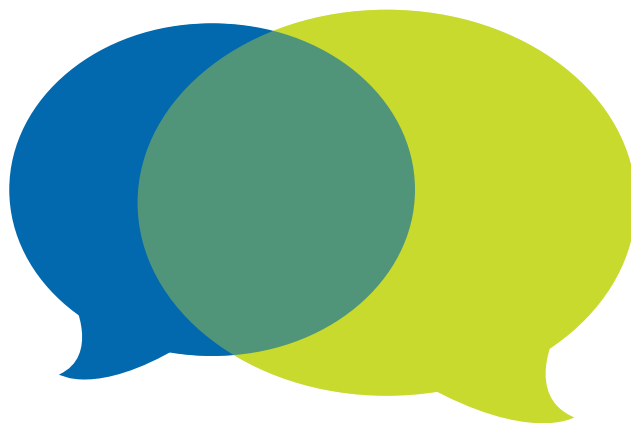
There are all kinds of ways to engage your members. Let's break them down and find the ones you're best at as an association leader and the ones your members will respond to most.



Face to Face

One-on-one

Direct, two-person engagement can be either a dream come true or a worst nightmare. Some people are really great at engaging others through one-on-one conversation, but there is always the potential for the situation to be uncomfortable and awkward. Keep some typical small talk questions in the back of your mind when it comes to your members. Besides the typical who you are and what do you do, ask them what they specifically want to get out of the association. What brought them to join? What do they think of the events and programming so far? Not only is that feedback valuable to you, it shows you care about that individual member's position and participation.





Small Groups

In smaller groups, say 5-10 people, engagement depends largely on how the group interacts. It could be your job to spur conversation, or maybe the conversation is so stimulated that it's your job to keep the conversation on topic or away from dangerous, potentially inflammatory topics. Highlight similarities and opportunities to grow when they present themselves. Point out and praise good ideas, and ask others to participate. And be sure to look for that member who seems to be on the fringes of the conversation and ask him or her to participate.

Meetings

Running meetings to optimize engagement is an art form in itself. It depends on the purpose of the meeting and the group that is gathering, but there are things you can do to pump up engagement. Make sure that there is a lot of participation, for example, by asking for feedback often. Let people take turns leading the meetings or parts of the meeting. Ask for help setting the agenda so as many people as possible feel as if they have a say in the direction of the meeting. And don't forget the follow-ups!

Big Groups

When you have a large group gathering, smaller groups and one-on-one pairings are bound to spin off. Engagement tends to happen on its own in large groups, but you can go around and make sure nobody falls through the cracks. Start conversations with the wallflowers and make some introductions. Then work the room yourself!

Huge Groups

If you're leading a lecture and there's a huge group in attendance, it's even tougher to encourage engagement. After all, if they're polite and doing what they're supposed to do they're sitting quiet and listening to you! But even a huge group has an opportunity for engagement. Schedule a few minutes before or during the lecture to encourage the attendees to swap cards and shake hands. It'll set a positive tone to your lecture and the listeners will undoubtedly walk away feeling like it was a valuable use of their time to attend.



Online

Social Media

Social media engagement is all about where your members already are. If you find that you can reach many of them on Twitter, go there! Encourage tweeting during meetings for increased sharing with the tweeters' friends and followers. If your members are on Facebook, start a group! Share pictures and post a conversation starter or event reminder every once in awhile. For more information on how to engage on social media, [download our free social media guide!](#)

E-Mail

E-mail can use be used for so much more than newsletters. While newsletters are a great tool to communicate the cool happenings of your association, they don't necessarily inspire a lot of back-and-forth. When using E-mail as a tool for engagement, keep the recipient list smaller. Get in touch with a few people, maybe even just one, or a committee and start a conversation or suggest a meeting in person. E-mail isn't the best place for a conversation, but it's a great tool to set up some other engagement. Also, it's an easy way to solidify relationships that were established in person that may be forgotten as soon as everyone goes home or back to work. Follow up with the engaging people you met with a quick E-mail and say hello!

On Your AMS

Your AMS is a great place to encourage engagement within the social community. Similar to Facebook, upload pictures, message members, and share comments. Build circles for committees to share or just between members who have certain things in common! For more ideas on how best to use your AMS for membership engagement, call your AMS provider for details.



Other Ways of Engagement

Phone Calls

Picking up the phone is almost an antiquated way of communicating these days, but because it's rare it makes the interaction seem more thoughtful or personal. Usual phone etiquette rules apply, of course, and be prepared to leave a message; nobody picks up for a number they don't recognize. Plus you have to be OK with the person you're contacting being able to call back because there's a good chance they will, and possibly a lot. But still, a phone call can be a nice, personalized gesture that could make a huge difference in engagement.


Handwritten Notes

Handwritten notes are also going the way of the dinosaur. People are paying less and less attention to the mail as they exchange personal e-mails and pay all their bills online. What mail people do still get in their mailboxes is often catalogs, ads, or junk mail. A nice, handwritten note would be shocking and refreshing to the recipient. It'll definitely make an impression!

Gifts

Gifts can be a tad over the top, but if you have a notable guest at an event or an invited speaker a gift is kind and customary, although not always necessary. Still, a nice, useful promotional item as a giveaway to attendees can help to keep your association in their mind and hopefully invite them to return and remind them of the great and engaging time they had with your association!





Anyone can fill up an auditorium. The real trick to getting people to come back is for them to have real connections. Possibly with you, but it would be even better if they engaged and collaborated with each other! That way friendships form, partnerships are established, and the attendees turn into members who actually care about the direction in which the association is going.

To learn more about engaging members with an AMS, [click here](#) to visit MemberClicks.com!