

# Top Ten Tips For Small Staff Association Member Retention

A new member joins your association. At first, he or she is active, participating, reaching out and attending events. But after awhile, you quit seeing the member at meetings and events. Dues keep coming in, but sooner or later, you lose those too.

It's normal for members to come and go in the timeline of an association. There are many factors that contribute to a member disengaging and eventually leaving an association, so identifying strategies to keep them ahead of time will save you the headache of trying to win them back later.

Read on for our top 10 tips for retaining your members.





**Here are ten tips for holding on to members:**

**1. Have a solid mission statement**

The main thing that's going to attract and keep members is a solid, grounded mission statement. Your mission statement needs to be something that both your members and leadership can get behind and take pride in. Continual adherence to a strong mission statement will create camaraderie and pride in the association, and when your members look at their balance sheets and see your association's events and dues, they'll be less likely to cut that expense if they feel like they're a part of something that helps them and helps others.

**2. Emphasize value**

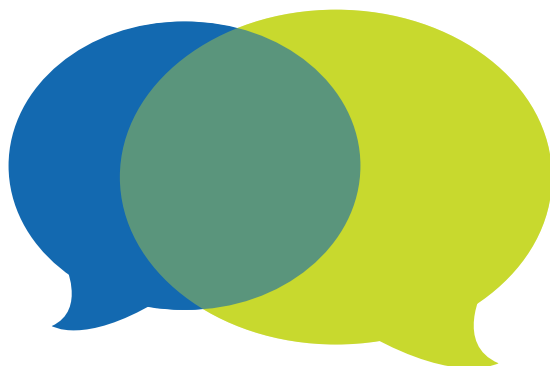
Sometimes you have to remind your members of the value of your association if they haven't been able to experience the benefits lately. When you have well-attended meetings, bring up big wins the association has had lately or places where you've really made a difference as a group. A newsletter is another great place to put this information.

### 3. Keep programming fresh

External reasons are one thing, but a lot of members drop off because events get boring or because they joined and never did anything with the association, so it wasn't worth the expense of dues. If you focus mainly on information, try having a few events that are all about networking. Mix up venues and themes, but be careful that your members don't get confused or lost.

### 4. Have a good system in place for interaction

When members develop relationships with each other, they're more likely to stick around and take part in events together. Not only does that strengthen the association, but it also widens possibilities for collaboration. Can you say sub-committee? Make it so members have an easy way to connect with each other. Your AMS could be just the platform you need as an easy place to keep members' contact information in a limited, for members-eyes-only, safe area. Most AMS solutions offer a secure social community available only to members and protected by a login. It's a great place for members to interact and collaborate.



## 5. Focus on the social aspect

As we just mentioned, interaction is really important and relationships are going to be what keep your members coming back for more. Encourage teamwork and be sure to mix business with pleasure. For example, when a committee has been burning the midnight oil putting together a big event or panel, why not suggest the next meeting be at someone's home and have a little BBQ?



## 6. Revel in great communication

When you, your board, or other key, active members have open lines of communication with members, jump on that! Make a separate list of active people to contact directly when you have time. That personal touch can make a big difference. Many sororities and fraternities have “pledge parents” who nurture excited new members into active sisters and brothers. Could your association somehow harness the energy that comes with new membership into something longer lasting? All it usually takes is a little personal contact!



## **7. Encourage everyone to take a turn**

It's easy to lean on the volunteers who are dependable and always deliver great results, but branch out. Invite members who may not be as closely involved in activities if they would be interested in helping out or attending a committee meeting. Keep in mind that they may not have time for additional volunteering so approach them with a friendly tone, and they may have a personality where they are perfectly content keeping their membership somewhat distant. But just the simple act of asking can stimulate conversation and open up a door, even if the answer is no.

## **8. Personalize as much as you can**

Personalizing your events to your association's members is a no-brainer, but what about appealing to even smaller groups within your association? For example, if you happen to see a lot of recent grads, early-career workshops could be helpful and energize a demographic likely to forego association membership due to budget concerns. Also keep in mind the other concerns of your members outside of the business or hobby in question. For example, are there enough women or minority members to form a smaller subcommittee? What about mentor/mentee seekers? How about members studying for a particular certification? These are all great opportunities to mold your association's offerings to meet the specific needs of your members.

## 9. Be patient

It takes awhile to build a following, and sometimes it takes a few false starts before you find a combination of programs and offerings that really work for you. It may be tough, but keep fighting the good fight. Associations thrive under diligent leadership and that's what you're offering. It may be a juggling act to keep your board onboard when plans start to fail, but sooner or later you'll figure it out!

## 10. Flexibility is key

If you ask 100 different members what they want from your association, when they like their events and what kind of events they like to attend, you'll get 100 different answers. While it's impossible to make everyone happy, it is your job to make sure your members know they're heard. You may have to challenge some of your association's traditions or "that's how we do things" policies. Keep an open mind, be flexible, and you'll find out what works best for you and your members.



The most important theme throughout all of these tips, if you didn't catch it, is talking to your members and finding out what they think. Assess your situation now, ask for what they would like to improve or change, and see if they have ideas. Surveys can be useful, but I guarantee you'll get the best responses out of conversation. Don't get overwhelmed! You don't have to make all of these changes and improvements all at once.

For step one, reach out to one member. Just one. Start a dialogue, and go from there. Good luck!

