

Help Members Create Their Own Engagement Plan

By Erin Sandage

An engaged member is a loyal member, but according to Community Brands (s3.amazonaws.com/cbwpcdn/membership/infographic/CB17_MemberLoyalty.pdf), only 55 percent of members feel connected to their member organization. The more members are engaged, the more likely they will become super members, e.g., those members who are loyal and will spread the word about your organization. To ensure engagement, be proactive and help your members create an engagement plan.

The member development department for the Greater Boston Chamber of Commerce (Boston, MA) offers each of its members the opportunity to craft a personalized engagement strategy that maximizes membership.

“We highlight programs the member is already taking advantage of, as well as areas where they could participate more,” says Director of Membership Development Erica Smith. “The engagement plan is usually a jumping-off point for a longer conversation between our team and the members about what their goals for their memberships are and what we can provide.”

A typical plan lists chamber offerings available to the member according to their membership tier, with highlighted areas of past participation as well as contact information should the member wish to participate in something, explains Smith. The data used is pulled from the chamber’s database, which tracks each program and event a member attends. With this information, member services staff can see what programs might be a good fit based on the member’s industry and goals and also look for a drop in participation.

“We want to make sure that our members are maximizing their membership, so if we notice a member has not come to an event or program in a long time, our team will reach out,” adds Smith. “We consider it our job to ensure every member feels they are getting the most from their relationship with the chamber.”

Plans are proactively designed for those members who have not participated, but members also reach out directly to the chamber. Last year, the team coordinated about 55 engagement meetings, not including the engagement plans that are designed for each new member as part of their on-boarding.

“The root causes can often be similar — the member’s goals may have changed or the individual who was most involved with the chamber has moved on,” says Smith. “The plan is used as a road map for re-engaging the member in our offerings.”

Sources: Erica Smith, Director, Membership Development, and Abbe Ramanan, Membership Services, Greater Boston Chamber of Commerce, Boston, MA. Phone (617) 557-7350. E-mail: esmith@bostonchamber.com. Website: www.bostonchamber.com

Three Key Engagement Drivers That Matter to Members

A member may join an organization for a variety of reasons but it is their engagement that keeps them there.

Courtney Ramsey of Courtney Ramsey Speaks (Dallas, TX) says she uses this formula to break down member engagement: social connection + professional development + member contribution = association engagement. “People will stay with an organization because they’ve bought into its mission or purpose but also because they’ve made friends, they’re learning something new, and if they are truly active within the association,” she says.

1. **Social connection.** According to Community Brands, only 55 percent of members actually feel connected to their associations. “So, how can we help nurture friendships and deepen connection within the association? It’s all about creating a sense of tribe,” Ramsey explains. She suggests creating events and programs that support social connections for each level of member — new, three to five years and more than five years with your organization. For example, match new members with a touch person at orientation who can talk to your new members about what to expect and how to get involved. The touch person can be staff or, better yet, a member you’d love to spotlight. “One-on-one check-ins by phone or in person also really help,” she adds. And for veteran members, consider planning an invitation-only event like a happy hour just for them. “A lot of times the issues veteran members have differ from those who are just beginning.”
2. **Professional development.** Members look to associations to stay up-to-date in their industry, and personalized development usually wins over generalized development, says Ramsey. “Personalize it for each level of member you have and include a variety of options so people have some choices.” For example, millennials and Generation X members like webinars and online classes. Other professional development options include half-day workshops and learning labs, podcasts, adding an educational component to monthly meetings and national conferences. “Keep in mind that for veterans, professional content doesn’t always go deep enough. They might want to hear how to stay relevant and how to reinvent yourself, as opposed to best practices when you’re new to the industry.”
3. **Member contribution.** Get your members involved in the first two methods, social connection and professional development, before you ask them to contribute, says Ramsey. “You have to ask your members to help you out with these things as an association leader. Very few people are going to walk up to you and say, ‘I really want to lead an orientation for new members.’ But if they’re asked, a lot of times people will absolutely help out.” Ask a veteran member to be the touch person for a new member. If you’re looking to launch an association podcast, find a member you want to recognize who also has that skill. Then ask him or her to contribute! Using your members’ expertise for content also helps keep the price tag low, and it’s a great way to keep them engaged.

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