

2021

MEMBERSHIP MARKETING BENCHMARKING REPORT

13TH EDITION

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INTRODUCTION

For the thirteenth consecutive year, MGI has conducted its annual Membership Marketing Benchmarking Survey. Our report highlights the strategies and tactics membership organizations find most useful for recruitment, engagement, renewal, and reinstatement of members.

Each year, we review the questions from the previous survey to ensure that the content we provide is relevant and on trend. As always, we evaluate the usefulness and success of questions and determine which will be removed, what questions will be added, and which will be retained for further analysis. This year, as associations faced unprecedented global events, we added questions pertinent to the effects of the pandemic. We also included an open-ended question asking about the impact of the pandemic and how associations responded.

Methodology

The 2021 Membership Marketing Benchmarking Survey was conducted online. It was launched on January 4, 2021, and remained open until February 4, 2021.

Email invitations were sent to 34,503 association professionals. A total of 678 individuals fully completed and 155 partially completed the survey, totaling 833 participants.











From these 833 responses, we drew the 747 unique associations that have formed the basis for this report.

Report Layout

The data in this report are segmented by type of association: Individual Membership Organization (IMO), Trade Association (Trade), or association with a combination of both individual and organizational types of membership (Combination). A total column is included in all charts and tables to show data relevant to all associations.

This report includes Participant Comments Highlights, which provide verbatim insights and recommendations shared by participants in the survey.

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Association Statistics	Member Recruitment (Acquisition)	Member Engagement	Member Renewal and Reinstatement (Retention)	Effects of Pandemic	Challenges and Innovation	Dues and Membership Structure	Marketing Tools	Association Demographics	Words of Wisdom

About Marketing General Incorporated

Marketing General Incorporated is the nation's largest marketing agency working exclusively with membership associations. For more than 40 years, MGI has helped hundreds of associations and relationship-based organizations increase their membership, improve retention, enhance member engagement, grow revenue, and gain new insights through market research and analysis. Additional information can be found at MarketingGeneral.com or by contacting us at 703.739.1000.

The MGI Membership Marketing Benchmarking Report Team



Tony Rossell
Senior Vice President

Tony Rossell serves as Senior Vice President of MGI. For over three decades, he has consulted with hundreds of associations to help them achieve their membership growth goals and mission through better strategy, research, and marketing.

A frequent writer and speaker, Tony recently published a book, *Membership Recruitment: How to Grow Recurring Revenue, Reach New Markets, and Advance Your Mission*, that offers a practical guide to help membership professionals. He is the past chair of the ASAE Membership Council. In his work at MGI, Tony launched the annual *Membership Marketing Benchmarking Report* and developed the membership framework he calls the "Membership Lifecycle."

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Adina W. Wasserman, PhD
Research Director

Working in research for over 20 years, Adina brings a wide range of expertise in both qualitative and quantitative methodologies. Her work with associations provides insights in a multitude of areas including determining value proposition and member needs, evaluating membership models and pricing, and uncovering perceptions and preferences. She has conducted research on a global scale, and is adept at translating research findings into actionable insights. Adina oversees the operations of the Research Department, providing data and insight to more than 50 different associations. She has overseen the annual *Membership Marketing Benchmarking Report* since its inception.

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Elisa Joseph Anders, DCMF
Senior Account Director

A results-driven marketing and strategy expert, Elisa has a strong track record of creating and building member, customer, and donor bases. Elisa brings her clients over 30 years of marketing, management, and consulting experience in the nonprofit and for-profit sectors. During her eight years with MGI, she has helped clients with memberships ranging from 2,000 to over 240,000 build successful, high-performance marketing programs to drive dues and non-dues revenue growth. Elisa serves on ASAE's Membership Professionals Advisory Council and speaks internationally about membership marketing best practices.

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Jana Darling, DCMF
Managing Director, Account Services

Results-oriented and data-driven, Jana is a high-impact strategist who brings a proven record of success in guiding the member journey across a diverse portfolio of clients. Specializing in the strategic management and execution of integrated marketing campaigns for over 15 years, Jana has built a track record of success on both sides of the association/agency partnership. Focused on collaboration and relationship building, Jana has developed marketing programs for her clients that have generated over 100,000 new members and millions of dollars in dues and non-dues revenue.

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“Hope for the future
It’s coming soon enough
How much can we achieve?
Hope for the future
It will belong to us.”

Paul McCartney – “Hope For The Future”

It has been a challenging year for association membership.

Not since the Great Recession over a decade ago have more associations reported that their membership has declined compared to those showing an increase. However, despite the challenges, there remain points of light that provide hope for the future of a forceful rebound for membership programs.



Current Challenges



Here are the sobering statistics from this past year. A total of 47% of associations are reporting declines in their total membership.

Of those who say membership has declined, the median percentage drop in counts is 9%. Member renewal rates are also impacted. 45% of associations report declines in member renewals, almost double from the previous year's total of 24%.

On top of membership challenges, 80% of associations say that their annual in-person meeting was canceled or postponed in 2020.



80%
ANNUAL IN-PERSON
MEETING WAS CANCELED

These outcomes have had repercussions on the budget and staff of associations. Two in ten associations report that their association experienced employee layoffs and salary or hour reductions. And 12% say that they furloughed employees. The following comment is consistent with what we heard from many respondents on the repercussions of the pandemic: "The effects were financially devastating. Nearly all revenue-generating activities were canceled. Major cost reductions were enacted as well as a reduction in force (RIF)."



Future Hope

Despite the trials of 2020, this year's data offers some promise of a turnaround for future results.

First, it is necessary to gain perspective by stepping back and looking at long-term trends whenever a downturn occurs. While the events of 2020 shook many membership programs, the overall long-term membership trend for associations remains positive. Nearly half of associations (45%) indicate that their membership still shows an increase over the past five years. And for associations reporting gains over this timeframe, the median growth rate remains a respectable 13%.

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The word repeatedly heard in our research on how associations responded to the pandemic and recession was “innovation.”

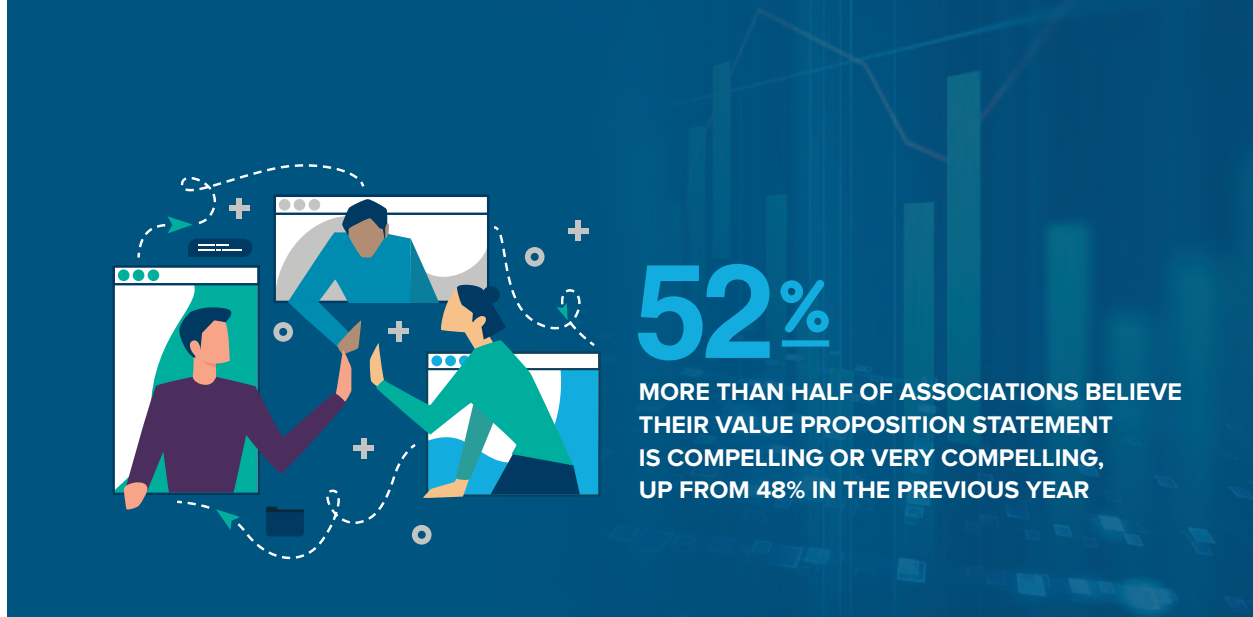
We see comments like: “COVID unleashed innovation and speed in adapting to a virtual environment” from survey respondents. And the data supports that associations adapted to this crisis.

For example, associations rapidly moved into offering virtual interaction with members. Even as lockdowns canceled in-person events, a remarkable 85% of associations noted that they increased virtual professional development opportunities for members. Beyond virtual meetings, 78% say that they developed new products and services to assist members and member companies during the pandemic. Finally, 68% used this time to reevaluate and streamline their internal processes.

NEW OPPORTUNITIES ASSOCIATIONS EXPLORED DURING PANDEMIC/RECESSION	
	Total (n = 655)
+ Increase virtual professional development opportunities for members	85%
+ Develop new products and services to assist members and member companies	78%
+ Reevaluate and streamline internal processes	68%

Many groups that adapted quickly saw a very positive level of membership engagement. One respondent shared, “The pandemic has had a positive impact on our association, with increased membership and engagement with our online member services. We have been able to add resources to deliver more online content in response to the pandemic.”

The increased focus on innovation was substantial. This year, 29% of association executives say that their organization is very or extremely innovative, up from 20% in the previous year. Over the years, we have seen a correlation between associations with an innovative culture and membership growth. This correlation has remained true this year. The segment of organizations reporting increases in their membership over the past year is also significantly more likely to consider their association to be very or extremely innovative. These associations say that they support innovation by focusing on communication and collaboration (62%), providing encouragement to innovative employees (52%), and driving innovation from the top down (45%). The increased focus on innovation bodes well for future membership growth.



Another positive sign for a membership rebound relates to the delivery of increased value to members.

Consistently in our research, associations with overall increases in new members and total membership are significantly more likely to report their association's value proposition is very compelling or compelling. This correlation remained the case this year, with those offering value seeing better membership outcomes.

Finally, past data from the *Membership Marketing Benchmarking Report* provides a reason for hope in the future. The report has tracked membership trends now for over a dozen years. So it is helpful to look back at the outcomes from previous economic disruptions. The Great Recession in 2008 and 2009 also negatively impacted association membership counts. However, the results from our research following the Great Recession show that membership made a remarkable recovery in subsequent years. In the years after that economic downturn, the proportion of associations reporting increased membership rose rapidly from a low of 36% in the 2010 report to nearly 50% and higher in the following years.

This historic membership rebound can be because professionals and companies that have experienced difficult times realize their need for the value an association can provide. After tough times there is a heightened awareness for a supportive community and network, access to career services, critical information to stay on top of rapid change, certification to demonstrate job skills, and the power of collective advocacy. These needs are traditionally the motivation for why people join and turn to their association.



How much growth will associations see in membership in the coming year?

Much will depend on how associations invest in membership marketing efforts, innovate, and provide tangible value to meet member needs. However, based on how associations have met the adversities of the past year and the needs in the marketplace, we believe that **2021 will be a banner year to reestablish growth and vitality for membership programs.**



SECTION 1

Association Statistics

HOW HAS YOUR MEMBERSHIP CHANGED
IN THE PAST ONE-YEAR PERIOD?

MEMBERSHIP CHANGE IN PAST YEAR (TREND)				
	Increased	Decreased	Remained the same	Not sure
2021	26%	47%	26%	1%
2020	42%	27%	30%	2%
2019	45%	26%	28%	1%
2018	48%	25%	26%	2%
2017	46%	25%	28%	1%
2016	49%	22%	27%	1%
2015	46%	24%	28%	2%
2014	53%	27%	16%	4%
2013	52%	31%	16%	1%
2012	52%	29%	16%	3%
2011	49%	34%	16%	2%
2010	36%	48%	14%	3%
2009	45%	35%	16%	5%

■ With the events of the pandemic and resulting recession, nearly half of associations are reporting declines in membership. Due to the circumstances of 2020, it is no surprise that the percentage of associations recording declines in membership has not been seen for over a decade. The last substantial membership decline was in 2010 (48%) and was a delayed result of the Great Recession.

■ This is the first time since starting this annual survey in 2009 that only one-quarter of associations are reporting increases in membership (26%). The previous low was also in 2010, when 36% of associations reported increases in membership.



MEMBERSHIP CHANGE IN PAST YEAR				
	Total (n = 745)	Individual (n = 332)	Trade (n = 200)	Combination (n = 213)
⊕ Increased	26%	29%	25%	22%
⊖ Decreased	47%	48%	42%	50%
⊞ Remained the same	26%	22%	33%	27%
❓ Not sure	1%	1%	1%	1%

- Regardless of membership type, the majority of associations are reporting declines in membership over the past year (47%), with 50% of combination associations and 48% of IMO's showing declines.
- Associations with overall renewal rates below 80% and new member renewal rates below 80% are significantly more likely to report declines over the past year. Furthermore, associations reporting declines over the

past five years, declines in new member renewals, and declines in overall renewals are significantly more likely to also report declines in their one-year membership numbers.

- However, associations reporting increases in new members, increases in their overall renewal rates, and increases in membership over the past five years are significantly more likely to report increases in overall membership over the past year.

PERCENTAGE INCREASE IN MEMBERSHIP OVER PAST YEAR				
	Total (n = 145)	Individual (n = 75)	Trade (n = 37)	Combination (n = 33)
⊕ Mean % Increased*	10%	8%	15%	10%
⊕ Median % Increased	6%	5%	5%	7%
⊕ Increased 1% to 5%	48%	53%	51%	33%
⊕ Increased 6% to 10%	33%	29%	37%	36%
⊕ Increased 11% to 50%	17%	17%	8%	27%
⊕ Increased more than 50%	1%	0%	3%	3%

*Means are influenced by high and low numbers in the data set.

- For the associations that report membership increases over the past year, the median increase is 6%. About half of these associations report an increase of up to 5% (48%). More than half of IMO's and trade associations report increases of up to 5% compared to

33% of combination associations. Combination associations are more likely to report increases of over 10% compared to IMO's and trade associations (30% vs. 17% for IMO's and 11% for trade associations).



PERCENTAGE DECREASE IN MEMBERSHIP OVER PAST YEAR				
	Total (n = 264)	Individual (n = 122)	Trade (n = 66)	Combination (n = 76)
÷ Mean % Decreased*	13%	15%	12%	12%
ⓘ Median % Decreased	9%	10%	9%	9%
– Decreased 1% to 5%	35%	34%	35%	36%
– Decreased 6% to 10%	28%	30%	30%	24%
– Decreased 11% to 50%	35%	33%	33%	40%
– Decreased more than 50%	2%	3%	2%	1%

*Means are influenced by high and low numbers in the data set.

- For associations that report decreases, the median percentage of decline is 9%. About one-third of associations report declines of up to 5% (35%). More than one-third of associations report declines of over 10% (37%). Combination associations are most likely to report membership declines of over 10% (41%).
- Of declining membership associations, those reporting member renewals of 80% or higher are significantly more likely to report declines in membership this year of up to 5% (48%), while those reporting membership renewals below 80% are significantly more likely to report declines of over 10% (52%).
- Additionally, declining associations with operating budgets under \$5 million are significantly more likely to report membership decreases over 10%, while those with operating budgets of \$5 million or more are significantly more likely to report declines of 5% or less. Similarly, smaller IMOs (5,000 members or less) are also significantly more likely to indicate declines over 10%, while those with more than 5,000 members are significantly more likely to have experienced member declines of 5% or less.

Associations reporting higher membership renewals tend to report smaller declines in membership overall. Similarly, smaller associations—in both size and budget—experienced greater declines in membership.



OVER THE PAST FIVE YEARS, HOW HAS THE TOTAL PERCENTAGE OF YOUR MEMBERSHIP CHANGED?

CHANGE IN MEMBERSHIP OVER PAST FIVE YEARS (TREND)				
	Increased	Decreased	Remained the same	Not sure
2021	45%	32%	20%	3%
2020	46%	28%	20%	6%
2019	50%	31%	14%	4%
2018	53%	29%	14%	4%
2017	50%	30%	15%	5%
2016	51%	31%	14%	5%
2015	49%	31%	16%	4%
2014	54%	33%	10%	5%
2013	54%	36%	7%	2%
2012	52%	34%	9%	5%
2011	51%	38%	9%	4%
2010	57%	30%	8%	5%
2009	60%	27%	8%	5%

■ While the events of 2020 have certainly adversely impacted the membership growth of associations in the short term, we do not yet know of possible long-term effects. Nearly half of associations (45%) indicate that their membership has increased over the past five

years, on par with findings from last year's benchmarking report (46% in 2020). However, there is a slight increase in the number of associations reporting five-year declines (32% vs. 28% in 2020).



CHANGE IN MEMBERSHIP OVER PAST FIVE YEARS				
	Total (n = 578)	Individual (n = 265)	Trade (n = 157)	Combination (n = 156)
+ Increased	45%	44%	50%	44%
- Decreased	32%	34%	28%	32%
= Remained the same	20%	19%	20%	22%
? Not sure	3%	3%	3%	3%

- 45% of associations report increases in membership over the past five years, with 50% of trade associations reporting membership growth. One-third of associations report a membership decline over the past five years (32%).
- Associations reporting increases in membership over the past year, increases in new members, increases in overall renewals, and renewal rates over 80% are significantly more likely to also report increases over the past five years.

Similarly, those reporting declines in the same areas, and with renewals below 80%, are significantly more likely to also report declines over the past five years.

- Associations with new member renewals above 80% are significantly more likely to indicate increases over the past five years, while those with new member renewals under 60% are significantly more likely to report declines in their five-year membership numbers.

PERCENTAGE INCREASE IN MEMBERSHIP OVER PAST FIVE YEARS				
	Total (n = 246)	Individual (n = 107)	Trade (n = 72)	Combination (n = 67)
÷ Mean % Increased*	21%	20%	21%	21%
↑ Median % Increased	13%	13%	11%	15%
+ Increased 1% to 5%	20%	26%	15%	15%
+ Increased 6% to 10%	26%	22%	35%	25%
+ Increased 11% to 50%	48%	46%	46%	52%
+ Increased more than 50%	6%	7%	4%	8%

*Means are influenced by high and low numbers in the data set.

- For associations reporting increases over the past five years, the median growth is 13%, mirroring findings from 2020. The median growth rate for trade associations over the past five years is 11% compared to 13% for IMOs and 15% for combination associations.

- Of associations reporting membership increases for the past five years, more than half report growth rates of over 10% (54%), with 60% of combination associations reporting membership growth at this level.



PERCENTAGE DECREASE IN MEMBERSHIP OVER PAST FIVE YEARS				
	Total (n = 239)	Individual (n = 115)	Trade (n = 57)	Combination (n = 67)
÷ Mean % Decreased*	14%	13%	13%	15%
1 Median % Decreased	10%	9%	10%	9%
– Decreased 1% to 5%	29%	31%	21%	31%
– Decreased 6% to 10%	28%	24%	33%	31%
– Decreased 11% to 50%	41%	41%	44%	37%
– Decreased more than 50%	3%	4%	2%	2%

*Means are influenced by high and low numbers in the data set.

- The median decrease in membership over the past five years is 10%, roughly the same across all association types and on par with results from 2020 (9%). Of the associations reporting membership decreases over the past five years,

29% of associations report declines of up to 5% and 28% report declines of 6% to 10%. However, the largest percentage of associations reporting losses in membership over the past five years report declines of over 10% (44%).



IN THE PAST ONE YEAR, HOW HAS YOUR NEW MEMBER ACQUISITION CHANGED?

CHANGE IN NEW MEMBER ACQUISITION OVER PAST YEAR				
	Total (n = 725)	Individual (n = 318)	Trade (n = 198)	Combination (n = 209)
+ Increased	29%	30%	32%	25%
– Decreased	37%	39%	32%	39%
= Remained the same	28%	24%	33%	30%
? Not sure	6%	7%	3%	6%

- Similar to findings of overall membership, many associations are reporting marked losses in new membership acquisitions through the year (37%, up from 12% in 2020). Some associations have indicated an upswing in new members (29%), but fewer than in 2020 (45%). Additionally, 28% report no change in new member acquisition (down from 34% in 2020).
- IMOs and combination associations are most likely to report declines in new members, while trade associations are equally likely to report increases, declines, and no change in new members.

- Associations reporting increases in their one-year and five-year membership numbers, as well as increases in overall renewal rate and a renewal rate over 80%, are significantly more likely to report increases in new member acquisition. Similarly, those reporting declines in the same areas, and with renewal rates below 80%, are significantly more likely to report declines in new members.
- Additionally, associations with new member renewals below 80% and IMOs with more than 1,000 members are significantly more likely to report declines in new member acquisitions.



PERCENTAGE INCREASE IN NEW MEMBER ACQUISITION OVER PAST YEAR				
	Total (n = 194)	Individual (n = 84)	Trade (n = 60)	Combination (n = 50)
÷ Mean % Increased*	15%	17%	15%	11%
⏸ Median % Increased	9%	9%	7%	8%
+ Increased 1% to 5%	40%	41%	43%	36%
+ Increased 6% to 10%	23%	20%	20%	30%
+ Increased 11% to 50%	35%	36%	33%	34%
+ Increased more than 50%	3%	4%	3%	0%

*Means are influenced by high and low numbers in the data set.

- For associations reporting increases in new member acquisitions over the past year, the median increase is 9%, up from 5% in 2020. 40% of associations report increases of up to 5%, down from 49% in 2020.

- Associations reporting increases in membership over the past year are significantly more likely to report increases in new members of 11% to 50%, while those reporting overall declines in membership over the past year are significantly more likely to report smaller increases in new members (up to 5%).

PERCENTAGE DECREASE IN NEW MEMBER ACQUISITION OVER PAST YEAR				
	Total (n = 243)	Individual (n = 112)	Trade (n = 60)	Combination (n = 71)
÷ Mean % Decreased*	21%	22%	21%	20%
⏸ Median % Decreased	20%	19%	29%	16%
- Decreased 1% to 5%	21%	23%	8%	27%
- Decreased 6% to 10%	14%	14%	12%	14%
- Decreased 11% to 50%	58%	56%	70%	64%
- Decreased more than 50%	8%	6%	10%	10%

*Means are influenced by high and low numbers in the data set.

- For associations that report declines in new members in 2020, the median decline is 20%. Trade associations had a median decline of 29% and combination associations a decline of

16%. Two-thirds of associations (66%) indicate an overall decrease in new members of over 10%. 80% of trade associations report declines in new members of over 10%.



WHAT IS YOUR OVERALL MEMBERSHIP RENEWAL RATE?

OVERALL MEMBERSHIP RENEWAL RATE				
	Total (n = 577)	Individual (n = 231)	Trade (n = 177)	Combination (n = 169)
÷ Mean	81%	76%	88%	80%
⏴ Median	84%	80%	89%	81%
⏴ Less than 80%	32%	43%	11%	38%
➤ 80% or more	68%	57%	89%	62%

- The median membership renewal rate is 84%, identical to results from 2020. Trade associations have the highest member renewal rate (89%). However, 57% of IMOs report member renewal rates over 80% (same as in 2020) compared to 62% of combination associations (down from 67% in 2020) and 89% of trade associations (down from 92% in 2020).
- Associations reporting increases in their one-year membership and their five-year membership numbers, as well as increases in

new member acquisitions, are significantly more likely to have overall renewal rates at or above 80%. Furthermore, associations with more than 1,000 members are significantly more likely to report renewal rates under 80%.

- Similarly, associations reporting declines in their one-year and five-year membership counts, declines in new member acquisitions, and declines in renewals are significantly more likely to report renewal rates under 80%.



WHAT IS YOUR RENEWAL RATE FOR FIRST-YEAR MEMBERS?

RENEWAL RATE FOR FIRST-YEAR MEMBERS				
	Total (n = 389)	Individual (n = 148)	Trade (n = 125)	Combination (n = 116)
÷ Mean	69%	60%	79%	68%
⏴ Median	72%	60%	86%	73%
⏴ Less than 60%	32%	49%	13%	31%
⦿ 60% - 79%	28%	28%	23%	32%
➤ 80% or higher	40%	23%	64%	37%

- For new members, the median renewal rate among associations is 72%, down slightly from 74% in 2020. For IMOs, the median new member renewal rate is lowest, dropping to 60% from 69% in 2020. Combination associations report higher median new member renewals (73%, up from 68% in 2020), and trade associations report new member renewals of 86%, on par with 2020 (87%).
- Almost half of IMOs (49%), however, report new member renewals of less than 60%, while two-

thirds of trade associations (64%) report that 80% or more of their new members renew.

- Associations with overall membership renewals of 80% or more are significantly more likely to also report new member renewals at or above 80%. Conversely, those reporting declines in new members and overall membership renewals are significantly more likely to also report new member renewals below 60%.



IN THE PAST ONE YEAR, HOW HAS YOUR MEMBER RENEWAL RATE CHANGED?

CHANGE IN MEMBER RENEWAL RATE OVER PAST YEAR				
	Total (n = 719)	Individual (n = 318)	Trade (n = 195)	Combination (n = 206)
+ Increased	15%	14%	18%	12%
- Decreased	45%	44%	40%	51%
= Remained the same	34%	32%	37%	32%
? Not sure	7%	10%	5%	5%

- Member renewal rates have also declined over the past year. 45% of associations report declines in member renewals; almost double that of 2020 (24%). Over the past year, only 15% of associations report increases in member renewals, down from 20% in 2020, and 34% report no change, down from 48% in 2020.
- Combination associations are most likely to report declines (51%) and least likely to report increases in renewals (12%). Trade associations are more likely than IMOs or combination associations to report relatively no change in their renewal rates (37%).
- Associations with member renewals above 80%, and those reporting increases in membership over the past year, the past five years, and increases in new member acquisition, are significantly more likely to report increases in their overall renewal rates. Conversely, those reporting declines in the same areas, with renewal rates under 80% and new member renewals under 80%, are significantly more likely to indicate declines in overall renewal numbers.

PERCENTAGE INCREASE IN MEMBER RENEWAL RATE OVER PAST YEAR				
	Total (n = 95)	Individual (n = 41)	Trade (n = 33)	Combination (n = 21)
÷ Mean % Increased*	9%	8%	8%	11%
Median % Increased	3%	2%	4%	4%
+ Increased 1% to 5%	67%	68%	72%	57%
+ Increased 6% to 10%	18%	17%	18%	19%
+ Increased 11% to 50%	11%	10%	6%	19%
+ Increased more than 50%	4%	5%	3%	5%

*Means are influenced by high or low numbers in the data set.

- Of the associations reporting increases in overall renewal rates, the median increase is 3%, identical to 2020. Two-thirds of these associations (67%) report increases of up to 5%, with 72% of trade associations and 57% of combination associations reporting this level of growth.



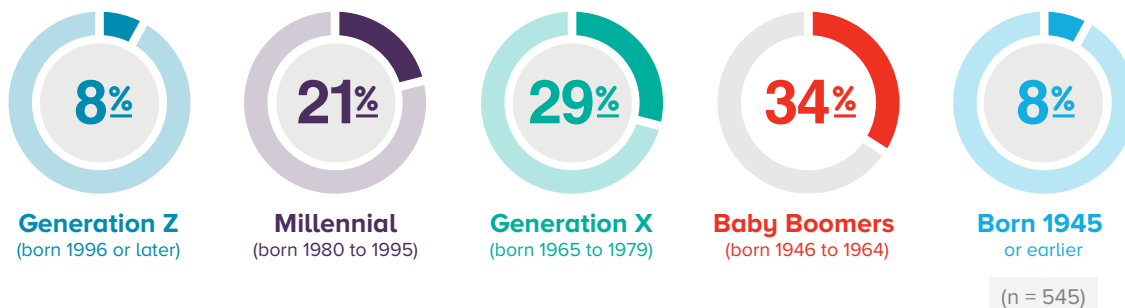
PERCENTAGE DECREASE IN MEMBER RENEWAL RATE OVER PAST YEAR				
	Total (n = 299)	Individual (n = 126)	Trade (n = 75)	Combination (n = 98)
⊕ Mean % Decreased*	10%	10%	11%	9%
① Median % Decreased	5%	5%	6%	6%
➔ Decreased 1% to 5%	51%	55%	49%	46%
➔ Decreased 6% to 10%	24%	20%	24%	30%
➔ Decreased 11% to 50%	23%	22%	25%	22%
➔ Decreased more than 50%	2%	3%	1%	2%

*Means are influenced by high or low numbers in the data set.

- Of the associations reporting declines in membership renewal rates, about half (51%) report losses of up to 5%. Compared to

findings from 2020, a greater percentage of associations report declines of over 10% this year (49% vs. 36% in 2020).

PLEASE INDICATE WHAT PERCENTAGE OF YOUR MEMBERSHIP BELONGS TO EACH OF THE FOLLOWING GENERATION GROUPS.



- Almost identical to findings from the previous two years, IMOs indicate Baby Boomers make up the largest single group within their current membership (34%). Generation X (29%) and Millennials (21%) make up the bulk of the IMO membership, together.

- Associations reporting increases in their one-year and five-year membership levels tend to have more Millennials and Generation X members, whereas those reporting declines in the same areas, plus declines in overall renewals, have a higher proportion of Baby Boomer members.



SECTION 2

Member Recruitment



WHICH RECRUITMENT MARKETING CHANNELS GET YOUR ORGANIZATION THE MOST NEW MEMBERS?

You may select up to three answer choices.

CHANNELS THAT GET MOST NEW MEMBERS					
		Total (n = 648)	Individual (n = 270)	Trade (n = 182)	Combination (n = 196)
TOP 1	Word-of-mouth recommendations	57%	54%	63%	56%
TOP 2	Email	50%	53%	43%	52%
TOP 3	Association-sponsored events/meetings	40%	36%	40%	46%
Personal sales calls		19%	5%	42%	16%
Member-get-a-member/ member referrals		18%	18%	17%	19%
Organic social media		17%	20%	10%	20%
Chapters		14%	16%	6%	17%
Direct mail		13%	16%	12%	11%
Promotion or exhibiting at conferences/trade shows		12%	10%	14%	12%
Paid online digital marketing		11%	19%	3%	8%
Content marketing lead generation		11%	10%	13%	11%
Telemarketing		2%	2%	2%	4%
Advertising in publications		2%	2%	2%	2%
Texting		1%	1%	1%	1%
Radio or TV		< 1%	0%	1%	1%
Other		9%	13%	6%	7%



- Similar to past research, word-of-mouth recommendations and email remain the most effective channels for new member acquisition (57% and 50%, respectively). However, the percentage of associations choosing word-of-mouth has dropped precipitously this year (57% vs. 67% in 2020) and the percentage of associations choosing email has continued to decline (50% vs. 52% in 2020 and 62% in 2019).
- Association-sponsored events/meetings maintains its position as the third most effective method for recruiting new members, but also shows declines compared to the previous research (40% vs. 46% in 2020). Fewer associations report that direct mail is a productive channel for sourcing new members than in the previous research (13% vs. 18% in 2020).
- Across association types, word-of-mouth marketing and email remain the top vehicles for member acquisition. However, trade associations are more likely to consider personal sales calls to be more effective than association-sponsored events.
- Associations with renewal rates at or above 80% are significantly more likely to consider word-of-mouth marketing, personal sales calls, and member referrals as effective vehicles for new member acquisition, whereas associations with renewal rates under 80% tend to significantly favor using email, chapters, and paid online digital advertising for new member recruitment.
- Associations reporting declines in overall membership in the past year, the past five years, and in new members significantly more often cite chapters as an effective vehicle for new member recruitment. Similarly, associations with drop-offs in their five-year membership numbers, new members over the past year, and overall renewal rates are significantly more apt to consider email as an effective mechanism for new member recruitment.
- There are significant differences based on association size and the channels considered most effective in acquiring new members. Associations with up to 5,000 members tend to significantly favor word-of-mouth recommendations, association-sponsored events, personal sales calls, and member referral programs.
- Associations with larger budgets (over \$5 million) are significantly more likely to cite email, chapters, direct mail, and paid online digital advertising as highly effective channels for new member acquisition.

Effective recruitment channels vary based on the size and budget of associations. Small associations tend to favor a more personal approach to recruitment. Associations with larger budgets can afford more external channels to increase member acquisitions.



HOW EFFECTIVE ARE THE FOLLOWING OFFERS FOR RECRUITING NEW MEMBERS?

EFFECTIVENESS OF OFFERS FOR RECRUITING NEW MEMBERS (VERY EFFECTIVE/EFFECTIVE)					
		Total	Individual	Trade	Combination
TOP 1	Conference or convention discount	54%	57%	45%	58%
TOP 2	Dues discount for first year	45%	48%	38%	48%
TOP 3	Monthly or quarterly installment dues	39%	40%	43%	34%
	Additional months free (e.g., 15 months for price of 12)	36%	39%	39%	30%
	Multiple-year dues discount	34%	36%	31%	34%
	Product discount, coupons, or voucher	31%	34%	31%	28%
	Free trial	32%	39%	28%	28%
	Member-referral incentives (given to members)	19%	23%	12%	19%
	Free gifts or premiums	19%	25%	8%	18%
	Money back guarantee	19%	24%	12%	21%
	Drawing or contests	14%	16%	7%	15%

■ For recruiting new members, the top offers remain the same as in 2020, with conference/convention discounts and dues discounts for the first year of membership considered the most effective (54% and 45%, respectively). However, the percentage of associations citing these offers as highly effective has declined slightly since last year (conference discounts 54%, down from 59% in 2020, and first-year dues discounts 45%, down from 49% in 2020). Monthly or quarterly installments on dues remains the third most effective offer, but has also fallen off in terms of perceived effectiveness from last year (39%, down from 46% in 2020). The only offer that has gained some traction over the past year is the free trial,

but even that offer demonstrates only a minor increase (32%, up from 30% in 2020).

- Similar to previous research, trade associations are more likely to consider additional free months more effective than first-year dues discounts (39%, an increase from 31% in 2020).
- Associations that saw increases in new members over the past year more often consider first-year discounts, monthly or quarterly dues installments, additional free months, free trial membership, and member referral incentives to be effective methods for recruiting new members compared to associations that witnessed declines in new members.



WHAT DO YOU BELIEVE ARE THE TOP REASONS MEMBERS JOIN YOUR ORGANIZATION?

You may select up to three responses.

TOP REASONS MEMBERS JOIN ORGANIZATION					
		Total (n = 640)	Individual (n = 270)	Trade (n = 181)	Combination (n = 189)
TOP 1	Networking with others in the field	63%	55%	69%	69%
TOP 2	Continuing education/ professional certification	37%	46%	19%	41%
TOP 3	Accessing specialized and/or current information	32%	27%	39%	32%
Learning best practices in their profession		30%	27%	35%	30%
Attending conferences/trade shows		23%	19%	26%	27%
Supporting the mission of the association		22%	24%	21%	22%
Supporting advocacy		27%	20%	44%	21%
Advancing their career		15%	24%	4%	13%
Obtaining discounts on product or meeting purchases		18%	19%	14%	19%
Receiving recognition or prestige by belonging to the association		12%	13%	11%	13%
Membership is compulsory		3%	5%	2%	1%
Other		7%	11%	8%	6%

- Across all association types, association executives believe that members most often join in order to network with others in the field (63% vs. 61% in 2020). This is especially true among trade associations (69%, same as in 2020) and combination associations (69%, up from 62% in 2020). IMO and combination association executives also believe that members join for continuing education/professional certification opportunities (46% and 41%, respectively). However, trade

association executives are more likely to believe that members join to support the advocacy done on behalf of the profession or industry (44%, up from 33% in 2020).

- According to association executives, accessing specialized and/or current information is also a strong membership driver, although it tends to be a more valued aspect of membership among trade and combination associations than for IMO associations.

Please see explanations on following page



- Association executives reporting member renewals above 80% are significantly more likely to indicate members join to access specialized and/or current information and to support the advocacy on behalf of the profession or industry.
 - Associations reporting increases in new members over the past year are significantly more inclined to believe members join to learn best practices in their profession and to support the association's advocacy work.
 - Conversely, associations reporting declines in one-year membership, as well as declines in new members, are significantly more apt to believe members join to network with others in the field and/or to attend conferences and trade shows.
- IMO's with up to 1,000 members and those with operating budgets less than \$20 million are significantly more likely to indicate that members join to network with others in their profession. Associations with more than 1,000 members are significantly more inclined to indicate that members join for the continuing education and/or to maintain their professional certification/credentials or to advance their career. Associations with fewer than 20,000 members indicate that learning best practices in their profession is a significantly more likely reason for joining the association.
 - Associations with operating budgets over \$1 million are significantly more apt to report that membership drivers include discounts on products or meetings and the ability to advance their career.



HOW COMPELLING IS YOUR ASSOCIATION'S VALUE PROPOSITION TO MEMBERS?



(n = 641)

- More than half of associations believe their value proposition to be compelling or very compelling (52%, up from 48% in 2020 and 49% in 2019). 40% of associations consider their value proposition to be somewhat compelling. Two-thirds of trade association executives (67%) indicate their association's value proposition is very compelling or compelling, compared to 47% of IMO or combination association executives.
- Associations with renewal rates at or above 80%, and those with increases in new members and overall membership in the past year and past five years, are significantly more likely to report their association's value proposition is very compelling or compelling.



Challenges and Opportunities Recruiting Members

Sadly, but not unexpectedly, a key finding of this year's Membership Marketing Benchmarking Survey is that many associations have taken a significant hit to membership in the past year. There are many reasons for this; primary among them is the economic impact from the pandemic and recession, and lower demand from the marketplace in many professions and industries. In addition, many associations faced cutbacks in membership budgets and staff shortages resulting from layoffs, furloughs, and reduction in hours. These impacts caused challenges in running membership marketing programs.



Despite these adverse conditions and impacts, about one in four associations saw overall membership growth last year (26%).

To understand why these associations were successful in growing membership, we turn to the key to driving membership growth: effective membership recruitment. Only 29% of associations saw an increase in new member acquisition last year—a dramatic decline from 45% the prior year. Associations that increased new member input were far more likely to see membership growth (63%, compared to 7%.)

CHANGE IN NEW MEMBER ACQUISITION OVER PAST YEAR	
	Total (n = 725)
+ Increased	29%
- Decreased	37%
= Remained the same	28%
? Not sure	6%

Continued on following page



WHAT DIFFERENTIATES THE 29% OF ASSOCIATIONS THAT SAW AN INCREASE IN NEW MEMBER ACQUISITION DURING 2020 FROM THEIR PEERS?

Here are **factors contributing to effective membership recruitment** and what we can learn from the *Membership Marketing Benchmarking Report* about what happened in these areas over the past year.

■ **Providing a compelling value proposition** is critical to success in membership recruitment. In this survey, associations reporting increases in their new member and overall membership in the past year are significantly more likely to say their association's value proposition is very compelling or compelling. This report also shows evidence of associations' ability to understand and rapidly address members' and prospects' changing needs during the past year. Associations report that they have focused on innovation, which could lead to a stronger value proposition. The percentage of association executives who consider their organization very or extremely innovative has more than doubled since last year (29%, up from 13% in 2020). This dramatic change correlates with increases in new members during the past year.

■ **Offering compelling reasons to join** is key to inspiring prospects. The data shows once again that the top reason association leaders think members join is to network with others in the field (63%), followed by continuing education (46%), accessing specialized information (32%), and learning best practices in their profession (30%). Advocacy has also seen an uptick this year as a membership driver (27% overall, 44% for trade

associations). Some associations ramped up their efforts and expanded their offerings in these areas, bolstering their value proposition during the pandemic. This focus might contribute to membership recruitment—associations reporting increases in new members over the past year are more likely to believe members join to learn best practices in their profession and support the association's advocacy work.

■ **Finding a mix of effective channels** for membership recruitment is also vital to an association's membership growth. This past year, associations reported decreases in the productivity of historically productive channels: word-of-mouth recommendations, email, and association-sponsored meetings. Direct mail has declined, too, in its use and perceived productivity as a membership recruitment channel. In the face of these declines, associations can benefit by testing to find what channel mix works for their market at this time. As one association leader shared, "Multi-channel, surround-sound offers (direct mail, email, paid ads)...they work together to increase overall response rate." Another leader advised, "Use a multitude of channels. There are no silver bullet 'one channel' strategies for membership."

Nearly one in four associations either saw a drop in their membership recruitment budget or had not budgeted for membership recruitment during the pandemic. While it may seem difficult to defend budgets in the face of economic downturns, there are strong justifications for preserving and even **increasing membership recruitment budgets** during these very times. Indeed, in this year's survey, associations reporting increases in their one-year membership numbers and in their new members over the past year are significantly more likely to have increased their membership recruitment budget.



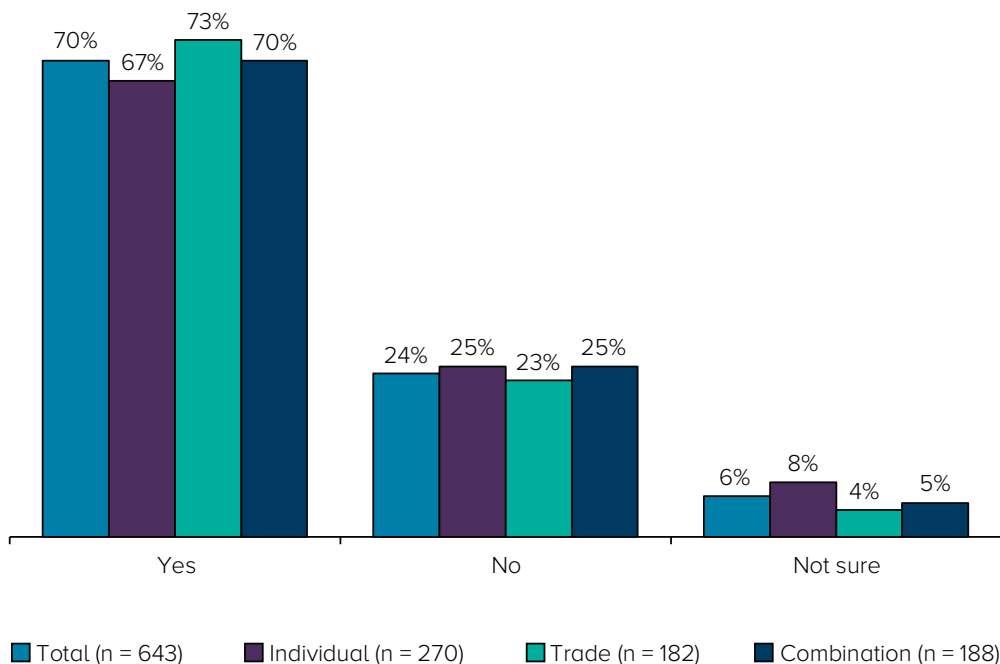
SECTION 3

Member Engagement



DO YOU HAVE A TACTICAL PLAN TO INCREASE ENGAGEMENT?

ASSOCIATION HAS A TACTICAL ENGAGEMENT PLAN



- The majority of associations (70%) acknowledge they have a tactical plan to increase engagement among members. This is up slightly from last year (67% in 2020). Similar to previous years, trade associations are slightly more likely to have an engagement plan compared to IMOs or combination associations.
- Associations reporting increases in their one-year and five-year membership numbers, as

well as increases in new members and overall renewals, more often indicate having a tactical plan to increase engagement among members.

- As the operating budget of an association increases, the likelihood that a tactical engagement plan is in place also increases. As such, associations with the largest budgets (over \$5 million) are significantly more likely to have a tactical engagement plan.



WHICH OF THE FOLLOWING COMMUNICATION METHODS DO YOU USE TO HELP ONBOARD OR ENGAGE NEW MEMBERS IN THE ASSOCIATION? Check all that apply.

COMMUNICATION METHODS TO ONBOARD NEW MEMBERS					
		Total (n = 636)	Individual (n = 267)	Trade (n = 182)	Combination (n = 187)
TOP 1	Welcome email(s)	77%	79%	75%	77%
TOP 2	Opportunity to create a membership profile	51%	53%	45%	56%
TOP 3	Invitation to follow/like association's social media (public or private) page(s)	45%	46%	39%	51%
New-member engagement email series		44%	46%	39%	51%
Invitation to join the online community		41%	47%	33%	41%
Membership card or certificate		41%	49%	28%	42%
Emailed welcome kit		38%	32%	43%	42%
Mailed welcome kit		33%	37%	31%	29%
Welcome phone call		31%	22%	46%	31%
Invitation to volunteer		28%	28%	23%	35%
New-member webinars		20%	14%	24%	26%
In-person new-member reception or orientation		20%	16%	25%	21%
Invitation to chapter meeting		18%	24%	9%	18%
New-member survey		15%	20%	8%	13%
New-member gift (e.g., gift card, calendar, or notepad)		11%	14%	7%	10%
Other		5%	4%	7%	5%
No special communication		2%	2%	2%	1%

- Welcome emails are the most common method for onboarding or engaging new members (77%, down from 80% in 2020), followed by opportunities to create a member profile (51%, up from 48% in 2020) and invitations to follow the association's social media pages (45%, up from 32% in 2020).
- IMOs are more likely to send a membership card or certificate (49%), while trade associations rely on welcome phone calls to engage and onboard new members (46%).

Combination associations are equally likely to send a new member email series as they are to promote their social media sites (51% each).

- Welcome phone calls are used significantly more often by associations with renewal rates of more than 80% and increases in new members and in overall membership in the past year.
- Welcome emails and new member email series are used significantly more by associations with larger operating budgets (over \$1 million).



DO YOU HAVE A STRATEGIC ORGANIC SOCIAL MEDIA PLAN IN PLACE?

(n = 640)



YES

58%



NO

28%



NOT SURE

14%

■ More than half of associations report having a strategic organic social media plan in place (58%), with IMOs more likely to have such a plan (61%) compared to trade and combination associations (54% and 57%, respectively).

■ IMOs with fewer than 1,000 members are least likely to have an organic social media strategy in place, while associations with operating budgets over \$1 million are significantly more likely to report they have organic social media strategies.



WHICH SOCIAL MEDIA DOES YOUR ORGANIZATION OFFICIALLY USE? Check all that apply.

SOCIAL MEDIA USED					
		Total (n = 638)	Individual (n = 268)	Trade (n = 182)	Combination (n = 188)
TOP 1	Facebook	90%	93%	83%	93%
TOP 2	Twitter	82%	82%	80%	82%
TOP 3	LinkedIn (Public)	79%	75%	81%	83%
	Instagram	59%	65%	48%	60%
	YouTube	57%	58%	52%	61%
	LinkedIn (Association Members Only)	24%	22%	29%	22%
	Association Blog	24%	23%	25%	24%
	Private Association Social Network	18%	23%	12%	18%
	Association Listserv	11%	10%	11%	11%
	Pinterest	7%	10%	3%	5%
	Flickr	6%	5%	4%	9%
	TikTok	1%	2%	0%	1%
	None—We don't use social media	1%	1%	1%	1%
	Other	4%	5%	6%	3%

Please see explanations on following page



- The most commonly used social media platforms, across all association types, are Facebook (90%), Twitter (82%), and LinkedIn Public (79%). Trade associations are more inclined to use LinkedIn members-only groups (29%) than IMOs or combination associations (22% each) and less likely to use a private association social network (12% vs. 23% for IMOs and 18% for combination associations).
- Trade associations are also significantly less likely to use Instagram compared to IMOs and combination associations. Associations reporting increases in renewals are significantly more likely to incorporate Instagram into their social media program.
- Size plays a role in the use of social media as well. IMOs with over 1,000 members are

significantly more apt to use Twitter and LinkedIn (Association Members Only) as social media platforms. Those with over 5,000 members are significantly more likely to also include YouTube and a private association social network. Finally, IMOs with over 20,000 members are significantly more likely to also incorporate Instagram and Pinterest.

- Not surprisingly, associations with higher operating budgets also incorporate more social media platforms. Those with over \$1 million in their budget are more likely to include Twitter, LinkedIn (Public), YouTube, and an association blog. Associations with \$5 million or more in their budget also incorporate Facebook, Instagram, and a private association social network significantly more often.



HOW OFTEN DOES YOUR ASSOCIATION POST TO YOUR SOCIAL MEDIA ACCOUNTS?



- On average, 41% of associations post one to three times per week, while one-quarter post four to six times a week (27%) or seven or more times per week (25%). Trade associations are most likely to post only one to three times a week (48%). Compared to the other types of associations, IMOs post more often to their social media accounts.

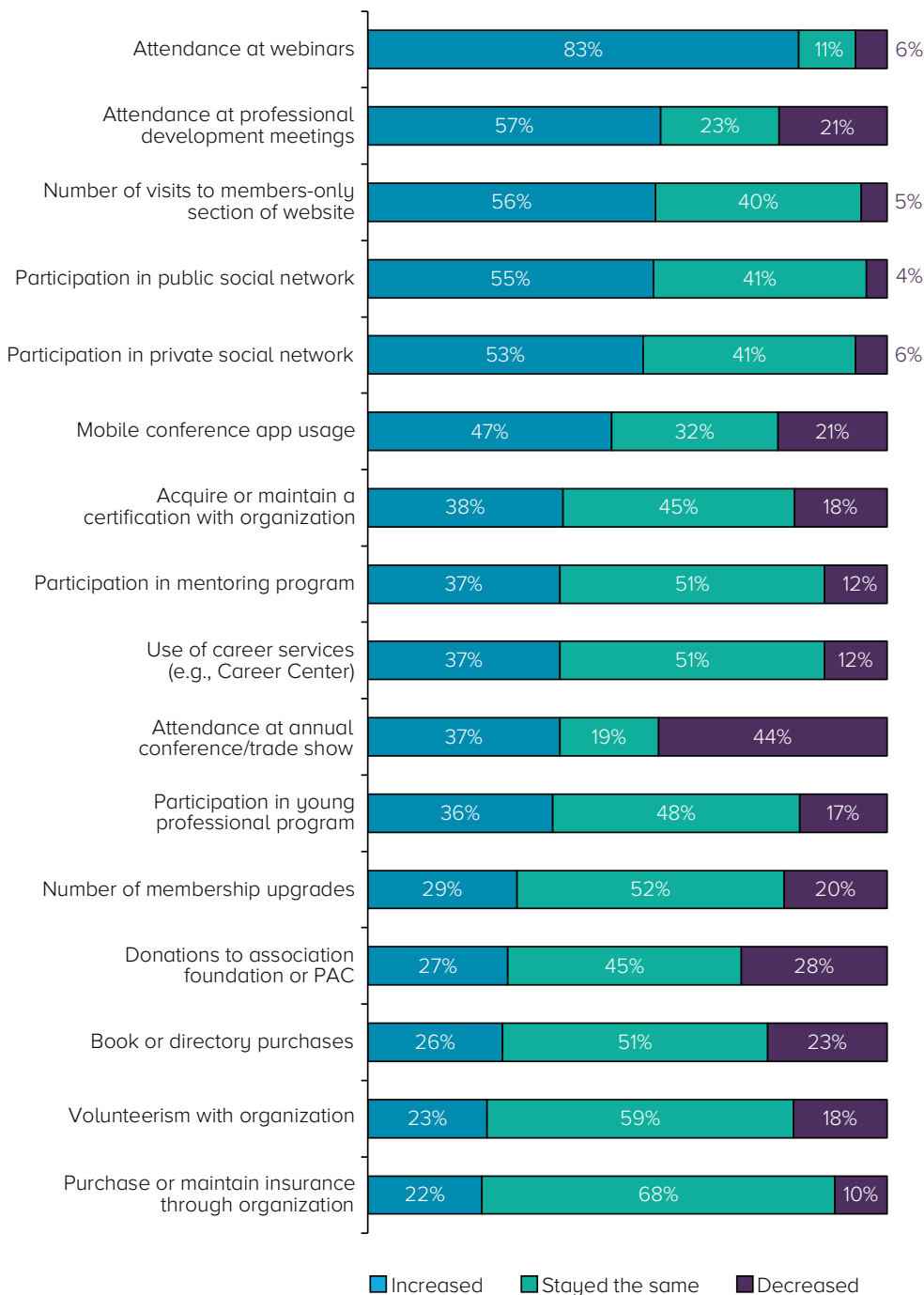
- IMOs with up to 5,000 members and those with operating budgets under \$5 million are significantly more likely to only post to their social media accounts one to three times per week, while those with more than 5,000 members and operating budgets over \$5 million are significantly more inclined to post seven or more times per week.



IN THE PAST FISCAL YEAR, HOW HAS MEMBER ENGAGEMENT AND PARTICIPATION CHANGED WITHIN EACH OF THE FOLLOWING AREAS?

Please indicate N/A if a particular item is not offered or not relevant to your association.

CHANGES IN MEMBER ENGAGEMENTS (TOTAL)



Please see explanations on following page



IN THE PAST FISCAL YEAR, HOW HAS MEMBER ENGAGEMENT AND PARTICIPATION CHANGED WITHIN EACH OF THE FOLLOWING AREAS?

Please indicate N/A if a particular item is not offered or not relevant to your association.

Continued from previous page

- During the pandemic, associations report that several areas of member engagement saw dramatic increases: attendance at webinars (83%, up from 53% in 2020), attendance at professional development meetings (57%, up from 44% in 2020), and the number of visits to the members-only section of the association's website (56%, up from 44% in 2020).
- Other areas where associations report engagement increases over the past year include the use of career services (37%, up from 33% in 2020) and book or directory purchases (26%, up from 23% in 2020).
- All other areas of engagement saw greater declines over the past year, with 44% of associations reporting declines in attendance at annual conference/trade shows, compared to only 13% reporting a decrease in 2020. Corresponding to the drop in attendance, there was a sharp decline in the use of a mobile conference app (21%, compared to only a 2% decline in 2020).
- However, some areas—even those with increases in engagement—also show substantial declines in engagement. For example, attendance at professional development meetings dropped for 21% of associations, compared to declines of only 8% in 2020. This emphasizes the fact that fewer associations are reporting no change in engagement from the previous year.
- Similarly, associations report declines in young professional programs (17%, compared to only 9% in declines in 2020), the number of professionals acquiring or maintaining a certification (18% vs. 12% in declines in 2020), the number of membership upgrades (20%, compared to only 6% in declines in 2020), volunteerism (18%, compared to only 6% in declines in 2020), and donations to an association foundation or PAC (28%, compared to 11% in declines in 2020).

Associations that were able to offer or increase the availability of remote and online engagement tools saw increases in engagement during the pandemic.



HOW DOES YOUR ASSOCIATION CONDUCT MEMBER RESEARCH? Check all that apply.

HOW ASSOCIATION CONDUCTS MEMBER RESEARCH				
	Total (n = 633)	Individual (n = 266)	Trade (n = 181)	Combination (n = 186)
✓ Online surveys	88%	90%	85%	89%
⇄ One-on-one interviews (online, in-person, or over the phone)	34%	28%	41%	36%
💬 Social media polling or posted comments	23%	24%	17%	28%
👤 In-person focus groups	20%	25%	14%	19%
@ Online focus groups	18%	21%	13%	20%
📞 Phone-based surveys	12%	11%	17%	9%
✉ Mail-based surveys	8%	7%	11%	8%
* Other	6%	5%	7%	6%
✗ My association does not conduct member research	6%	5%	6%	6%

- A strong majority of associations use online surveys to conduct member research (88%). After that, one-on-one interviews (34%) and social media polling and/or review of posted comments (23%) are top methods for member research.
- IMOs, however, are equally likely to use in-person focus groups (25%) as they are to analyze social media posts (24%). Trade associations are more inclined to employ phone-based surveys than IMOs or combination associations. IMOs and

combination associations are more likely to utilize online focus groups and social media polling than trade associations.

- As the size of the association increases for both IMOs and trade associations, the likelihood of using online surveys also increases. Similarly, as the operating budget of an association increases, so does the use of online surveys, with the largest associations being the most likely to use online surveys to conduct member research.



Associations Step Up to Support Members

One data point that jumps out from the 2021 *Membership Marketing Benchmarking Report* is the outstanding response of associations to support members during the pandemic and subsequent recession. Members turned to their professional and trade associations for assistance at record levels. **And the data shows that associations responded heroically.**

One remarkable statistic testifies to this heightened relationship. Seven in ten associations (71%) reported that the level of member engagement increased this year. As one association executive shared, “Our members were greatly impacted by the pandemic with an increase in the demand for their services and facing special challenges. The association responded [and]...Member engagement soared.”

This year’s report highlights the products and services driving increased member participation. When asked how they had seen engagement change over the previous year, associations reported tremendous growth in three areas.



- **83% said they had higher participation in their webinars** compared to 53% the previous year.
- Those seeing increased attendance at **professional development meetings rose to 57%**, up from 44%.
- Those reporting an uptick in visits to the **members-only section of their website grew to 56%**, up from 44%.

Not surprisingly, member engagement moved to the virtual world. In contrast, attendance at conferences and trade shows, volunteer participation, and book purchases saw steep declines.

A very practical example of helping members through the economic challenges was offering assistance in finding jobs. **37%** reported an increase in the members’ use of their career services.





Part of the success for increased member engagement came from associations' ability to understand and rapidly address member needs.

An impressive 78% of associations reported that they developed new products and services to assist members and member companies over the past year. As one respondent noted, "We had to quickly adapt and create, repurpose and push out content and product offerings extremely quickly. We had to become more nimble and responsive. We offered free content and courses (no membership required) to help our audience face the COVID crisis—mission over revenue."



78%

**OF ASSOCIATIONS DEVELOPED NEW
PRODUCTS AND SERVICES TO ASSIST
MEMBERS AND MEMBER COMPANIES**

(n = 655)

This increased level of support and new product offerings bodes well for future membership growth. In the cases where engagement does not take place, members leave. According to this year's data, the number one reason why members lapse is "lack of engagement with the organization."

The good news is that the majority of associations (70%) report that they currently have a tactical plan in place to increase engagement. We see a correlation between increased membership and overall renewal rates among associations executing engagement programs. The more services a member uses, the more likely they are to continue with the organization. As one survey respondent shared, "Based on analysis, we know that if someone completes at least 10 actions...they are way more likely to remain a member."

Because many associations worked hard to serve members and prospective members in the past year, they have established a foundation of goodwill. As the saying goes, "a friend in need is a friend indeed." The impact of this support will form the basis for membership growth in the year to come.

SECTION 4

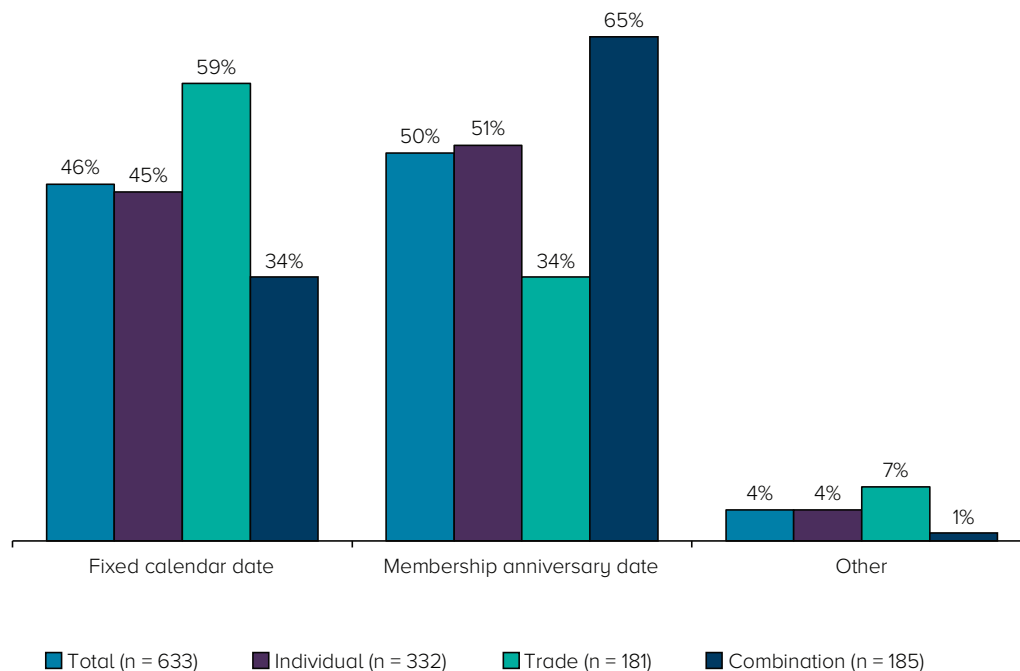


Member Renewal and Reinstatement



IS MEMBERSHIP RENEWAL BASED ON A FIXED CALENDAR DATE FOR ALL MEMBERS OR AN ANNIVERSARY DATE FROM THE START OF THE MEMBERSHIP?

DATE ON WHICH MEMBERSHIP IS BASED



■ 46% of associations use a fixed calendar date for membership renewals (up from 44% in 2020), while half tie membership renewal to the anniversary date (50%, down from 53%). Trade associations are most likely to use the fixed calendar date (59%, up from 53% in 2020), while combination associations more often use the membership anniversary date for renewals (65%, down from 68% in 2020).

■ Associations with overall renewal rates at or above 80%, new member renewals at or above 80%, and increases in new members are significantly more likely to employ a fixed calendar date for membership renewals.

■ The smallest IMOs (up to 1,000 members) are significantly more likely to utilize fixed calendar date renewals for the association.



AFTER A MEMBERSHIP EXPIRES, HOW LONG IS YOUR ASSOCIATION'S GRACE PERIOD FOR ACCESSING MEMBER BENEFITS?

LENGTH OF GRACE PERIOD				
	Total (n = 632)	Individual (n = 265)	Trade (n = 181)	Combination (n = 186)
🕒 1 month	18%	21%	11%	21%
🕒 2 to 3 months	49%	45%	51%	53%
🕒 4 to 6 months	11%	11%	18%	7%
🕒 7 to 12 months	3%	1%	6%	2%
➤ More than a year	3%	3%	3%	1%
✕ We don't offer a grace period	16%	19%	12%	16%

- About half of associations allow for a two- to three-month grace period after a membership expires (49%, up from 46% in 2020). Only 16% of associations now report that they do not offer a grace period, down from 21% in 2020.
- Trade and combination associations are more likely to offer a two- to three-month grace period, but trade associations are more likely to extend the grace period out to four- to six-months.
- When we look at all associations, those with overall renewal rates of 80% or higher are more apt to offer a two- to three-month grace period, while those with renewal rates under 80% are significantly more inclined to offer no grace period after the membership expires.
- Associations with new member renewals above 60% are significantly more likely to allow a two- to three-month grace period.
- As the size of an IMO increases, however, the likelihood that they do not offer any grace period also increases, with about one-quarter of the largest IMOs (over 20,000 members) indicating they do not offer any grace extensions.



CONSIDER YOUR ANNUAL MEMBERSHIP RENEWAL SERIES AND THE VEHICLES USED TO REACH MEMBERS. PLEASE INDICATE HOW MANY TIMES EACH MEMBER RECEIVES CONTACT FROM YOUR ASSOCIATION USING EACH OF THE FOLLOWING CONTACT VEHICLES.

Select the number of times each vehicle is used in your renewal series.

MEDIAN NUMBER TIMES EACH VEHICLE USED FOR MEMBER RENEWAL PER MEMBER				
	Total	Individual	Trade	Combination
@ Email	5	5	4	4
\$ Paid digital ads	3	3	1	2
💬 Text	2	2	3	2
✉ Mail	2	2	2	2
📞 Phone/telemarketing	1	1	2	1
📰 Magazine cover wraps	1	1	1	1

■ Email is the most often used vehicle within a member renewal series, with associations employing email a median number of five times per member (up from four in 2020). Paid digital ads are used a median number of three times per member (mirroring findings from 2020). Echoing last year, direct mail is employed a median of two times per member within a renewal series. Text messaging has increased from a median of one to a median of two contacts per member from 2020.

- Email and paid digital ads are more often used by IMOs than by trade and combination associations. Trade associations are more likely to employ text messaging and telemarketing for renewals compared to IMOs and combination associations.
- Associations reporting increases in new member renewals are significantly more likely to utilize telemarketing within their renewal series. Those with renewal rates below 80% for new members are significantly more inclined to use email than those with 80% or more new members renewing.



WHEN DO YOU START THE RENEWAL EFFORT?

START RENEWAL EFFORT				
	Total (n = 628)	Individual (n = 265)	Trade (n = 179)	Combination (n = 184)
🕒 Immediately after welcoming	9%	8%	13%	6%
🕒 Prior to 6 months before expiration	4%	3%	6%	3%
🕒 At 6 months prior to expiration	4%	3%	6%	3%
🕒 5 months prior to expiration	1%	1%	2%	1%
🕒 4 months prior to expiration	9%	9%	9%	8%
🕒 3 months prior to expiration	39%	39%	32%	45%
🕒 2 months prior to expiration	18%	19%	17%	17%
🕒 1 month prior to expiration	10%	10%	11%	9%
🕒 The month of expiration	4%	4%	3%	5%
🕒 Not sure	3%	3%	4%	1%

■ Three months prior to expiration is the most common starting point for beginning the renewal effort (39%). However, about one-third of associations begin the process closer to the point of expiration (32%).

■ The largest IMO's (over 20,000 members) are significantly more likely to start their renewal process at four months before expiration.

The smallest IMO's (up to 5,000 members) and associations with operating budgets of up to \$1 million are significantly more likely than their larger counterparts to start the renewal process only one to two months out from the member expiration date.



WHEN DO YOU END RENEWAL EFFORTS (STOP RENEWAL CONTACTS TO THE MEMBER)?

END RENEWAL EFFORTS				
	Total (n = 625)	Individual (n = 264)	Trade (n = 178)	Combination (n = 183)
🕒 At the month of expiration	2%	2%	3%	1%
🕒 1 month after expiration	10%	10%	7%	12%
🕒 2 months after expiration	11%	11%	9%	12%
🕒 3 months after expiration	24%	19%	28%	27%
🕒 4 months after expiration	6%	5%	7%	7%
🕒 5 months after expiration	3%	2%	3%	6%
🕒 6 months after expiration	12%	14%	14%	8%
🕒 More than 6 months after expiration	9%	10%	7%	8%
🕒 We don't stop contact	22%	25%	19%	20%
🕒 Not sure	3%	3%	4%	2%

■ One-quarter of associations finish their renewal efforts three months after the expiration date (24%), with trade and combination associations most likely to use this end point (28% and 27%, respectively). However, IMO's are most likely to report that they do not stop contacting expired members (25%).

■ Associations with the smallest operating budgets are most likely to end their renewal efforts three months after expiration. As the operating budget increases, so does the probability that renewals will extend more than six months after member expiration.

Associations with larger budgets tend to extend their renewal efforts, contacting expired members for at least six months, and often indefinitely.



WHICH OF THE FOLLOWING MARKETING CHANNELS GENERATES THE MOST MEMBERSHIP RENEWALS?

You may select up to THREE choices.

TOP MARKETING CHANNELS FOR RENEWALS (TREND)			
	Email marketing	Direct mail	Staff phone calls
2021	83%	41%	42%
2020	80%	49%	45%
2019	81%	52%	42%
2018	78%	51%	37%
2017	79%	50%	39%
2016	77%	58%	37%
2015	75%	58%	37%
2014	72%	56%	40%
2013	90%	79%	53%
2012	88%	81%	53%
2011	88%	82%	52%
2010	88%	85%	49%
2009	83%	91%	56%

- Email marketing (83%, up from 80% in 2020), phone calls (42%, down from 45%), and direct mail (41%, down from 49%) remain the most effective marketing channels for renewals.



TOP MARKETING CHANNELS FOR RENEWALS				
	Total (n = 621)	Individual (n = 262)	Trade (n = 177)	Combination (n = 182)
@ Email marketing	83%	88%	76%	82%
📞 Phone calls (staff, board, or chapter)	42%	26%	68%	40%
✉ Direct mail	41%	44%	32%	45%
👤 Member or employer contacts	23%	15%	34%	22%
👍 Social media	8%	11%	6%	6%
📞 Telemarketing	6%	5%	2%	9%
💰 Paid digital ads	4%	7%	0%	2%
💬 Texting	4%	5%	1%	4%
📰 Magazine cover wraps	1%	2%	1%	1%
★ Other	6%	8%	4%	6%

- For IMOs and combination associations, direct mail is more effective than phone calls made by staff, board, or chapter. For trade associations, phone calls are significantly more effective. Additionally, trade associations indicate that member or employer contacts are a more effective marketing channel than direct mail.
- Associations with overall renewal rates of 80% or higher and new member renewals of 80% or higher are significantly more likely to rate phone calls and/or member or employer contacts as highly effective marketing channels for renewals.

- Smaller IMOs (up to 5,000 members) are significantly more likely to rate phone calls as a highly effective renewal channel, while associations with over 20,000 members are significantly more inclined to consider direct mail one of their best marketing channel for renewals.
- Associations with the largest operating budgets (over \$5 million) are significantly more likely to rate email marketing and direct mail as effective marketing channels for gaining the most renewed memberships.



DO YOU OFFER ANY OF THE FOLLOWING RENEWAL OPTIONS?

Check all that apply.

RENEWAL OPTIONS OFFERED				
	Total (n = 617)	Individual (n = 256)	Trade (n = 177)	Combination (n = 184)
Accommodations for member hardship	51%	48%	49%	58%
Installment renewal payments (monthly, quarterly)	35%	31%	44%	32%
Automatic annual credit card renewal	31%	40%	16%	30%
Multi-year renewals	22%	27%	12%	25%
Lifetime membership	19%	27%	6%	19%
Renewal bill-me	18%	15%	21%	19%
Automatic annual Electronic Funds Transfer (EFT) renewals	16%	11%	20%	17%
Early-renewal discounts	14%	14%	14%	14%
Gifts or premiums for renewal	6%	10%	1%	7%
None	15%	12%	18%	17%

- For renewal options, half of associations offer accommodations for member hardship (51%), with combination associations more likely than their counterparts to provide this option (58%). More than three in ten associations offer an installment payment option (35%, up from 25% in 2020), with trade associations more likely to offer this option (44%, up from 32% in 2020). Automatic annual credit card renewals are offered by 31% of associations (up from 27% in 2020), and are significantly more likely to be offered by IMO and combination associations (IMOs: 40%, up from 34% in 2020; combination: 30%, up from 26% in 2020). Instead of the automatic credit card renewal, trade associations are more likely to offer a renewal bill-me option (21%, up from 17% in 2020) or automatic annual electronic funds transfer (EFT) renewals (20%, up from 18% in 2020).

- Associations with renewal rates above 80%, increases in their overall membership numbers the past year, and increases in their overall renewals are significantly more likely to offer the option to pay renewal fees in monthly or quarterly installments.
- Associations with new member renewal rates below 80% are significantly more likely to offer automatic annual credit card renewal, multi-year renewals, and/or lifetime memberships.
- Small IMOs (up to 5,000 members) and those with operating budgets of less than \$5 million are significantly more likely to offer a renewal bill-me option. Larger associations (over 5,000 members) and over \$5 million in operating budget are significantly more prone to offer an automatic annual credit card renewal option.



WHAT DO YOU BELIEVE ARE THE TOP REASONS MEMBERS DO NOT RENEW THEIR MEMBERSHIP IN YOUR ORGANIZATION?

You may select up to THREE choices.

TOP REASONS FOR NOT RENEWING MEMBERSHIP					
		Total (n = 626)	Individual (n = 265)	Trade (n = 177)	Combination (n = 184)
TOP 1	Lack of engagement with the orgaization	50%	49%	60%	43%
TOP 2	Lack of value	39%	39%	37%	41%
TOP 3	Employer won't pay or stopped paying dues	33%	36%	18%	45%
Left the field, industry, or profession		31%	34%	26%	32%
Forgot to renew		29%	37%	17%	29%
Could not justify membership costs with any significant ROI		28%	22%	37%	31%
Company closed or merged		24%	5%	54%	21%
Too expensive		23%	23%	25%	21%
Retirement		18%	25%	7%	19%
Student memberships do not convert to full memberships		8%	10%	0%	11%
Unemployment		6%	8%	1%	8%
Disagree with advocacy position of the association		3%	3%	5%	1%
Other		9%	8%	12%	7%
Not sure		1%	1%	2%	0%

■ Association executives report that members are most likely not to renew because of lack of engagement with the association (50%, up from 43% in 2020), lack of value (39%, up from 25% in 2020), or because their employer will not pay or stopped paying dues (33%, up from 25% in 2020).

■ Lack of engagement is the top reason cited for IMO and trade associations, but combination associations are most likely to report that members do not renew due to a lack of financial support from their employer (45%). Trade associations are highly inclined to mention that members do not renew because of company



closures or mergers within the industry (54%, up from 45% in 2020). 37% of IMO executives indicate that members forget to renew (up from 33% in 2020).

- Associations reporting declines in membership over the past year and declines in their overall renewal rates indicate significantly more often that members leave because their employers do not support the membership financially. Furthermore, associations with declines over the last five years are significantly more likely to report members leave due to a perceived lack of value.

- Associations reporting increases in their five-year membership numbers and increases in new members overall report that members do not renew because they left the field or the industry.

- The largest IMOs (over 20,000 members) and associations with budgets over \$5 million are significantly more likely to indicate that members do not renew because dues are too expensive.



WHAT CHANNELS GENERATE THE MOST REINSTATED LAPSED MEMBERS? Please select up to THREE answer choices.



- Email and phone calls remain the most effective channels for reinstating lapsed members (78%, up from 76% in 2020 and 50%, up from 37% in 2020, respectively). Direct mail is also a top channel for reinstatement, taking a slight dip from previous research (28%, down from 30% in 2020).
- IMOs and combination associations are most likely to rate email as the most effective channel, while trade associations tend to rank phone calls as the top reinstatement tool. Both trade and combination associations are significantly more likely to consider phone calls an effective reinstatement tool compared to IMOs.

- Associations reporting renewals of 80% or higher and those reporting new member renewals of 80% or higher are significantly more likely to consider staff phone calls an effective tool for reinstating lapsed members.
- Large IMOs (over 5,000 members) and those with operating budgets over \$5 million rate emails and telemarketing calls as effective reinstatement tools at a significantly higher rate than those with fewer members or smaller operating budgets.



HOW HAS THE BUDGET CHANGED FROM LAST YEAR FOR EACH STAGE OF THE MEMBERSHIP LIFECYCLE?

BUDGET CHANGE FOR EACH STAGE OF MEMBERSHIP LIFECYCLE TOTAL				
	Increased	Stayed the Same	Decreased	Not Budgeted
\$ Awareness	14%	53%	11%	22%
\$ Recruitment	23%	53%	14%	10%
\$ Engagement	24%	51%	12%	13%
\$ Renewal	17%	63%	10%	10%
\$ Reinstatement	10%	62%	10%	18%

- Similar to findings from 2020, most associations did not alter their budget with regard to the Membership Lifecycle. Renewal and reinstatement are the two areas where budgets are most likely to have remained unchanged.
- However, those with budget changes saw a larger percentage of decreases compared to 2020 when all stages of the Lifecycle saw a less than 4% decrease.
- Associations reporting increases in their one-

year membership numbers and in their new members over the past year are significantly more likely to have increased their budgets for awareness, recruitment, engagement, and renewals compared to associations reporting declines in the same areas.

- Additionally, IMOs with over 1,000 members are significantly more likely to have increased their budgets for recruitment and renewals compared to the smallest IMOs (under 1,000 members).



Associations Are Resilient

“Membership retention and recruitment numbers dropping due to COVID and organizations not having the funds to afford membership right now.” That’s what has been keeping one association executive up at night, and we would be hard-pressed to believe they are the only one.

Given the unprecedented challenges of 2020, it should come as little surprise that 45% of associations report a membership renewal decline in the *Membership Marketing Benchmarking Report*—nearly double that of the previous year. But one thing we learned from this past year is that most associations are resilient and in tune with the needs of their membership base. One shining example is that half of associations



offered hardship accommodations for their members when it came time to renew. In addition, many associations extended their grace period to help members. In 2020, 23% of associations reported that they did not offer a membership grace period. That number dropped to only 16% this year. In fact, across all grace period categories, associations on average have extended the grace period that they offer.



Additionally, more than three in ten associations offered installment payment options and automatic annual credit card renewal. In a year when many industries saw a major shift from an office to a home-based workspace, many mailed renewal notices may have gone unopened in office mailboxes. Associations that offered installment dues payments and automatic credit card renewals were more likely to see increases in their renewals than those associations that did not.



Despite the best efforts and hard work of association staff and volunteers, including renewal series with a median of five emails, three paid digital ads, a text, a direct mail notice, and a phone call per member, there will always be members who do not renew.

In 2021, association executives cite lack of engagement (50%), lack of value (39%), and employers no longer paying dues (33%) as the top reasons for members not renewing. A dip in renewals over the past year should not come as a surprise, but it should spur action. Reinstating lapsed members in the year ahead should become a membership marketing priority.

Email, phone calls, and direct mail remain the most effective marketing channels for renewals and reinstatements.

As one respondent put it, “nothing renews members as effectively as picking up the phone.” Associations with 80% or higher overall renewal rates are significantly more likely to rate phone calls as highly effective. In a year of social distancing and isolation, the value of a phone call and its personal touch was one of the most important things respondents learned in membership marketing this year: *“It’s all about the relationships. Phone calls or personal emails go a long way over the course of a year.”*

Time will tell if the good will in working with members to help them maintain their memberships will pay off, but one thing we know is that an engaged and valued member is a loyal, renewing member. Now is not the time to give up on renewal and reinstatement efforts, but instead continue to communicate the value and benefits of membership, especially since many members were forced to allow their memberships to expire in the past year due to job losses and budget cuts. With hope on the horizon for a better year ahead, lapsed members may now be in a better position to reinstate their membership, but will not do so unless asked. In fact, many associations maintain contact well after a member departs, with 22% of associations reporting they do not stop contacting lapsed members.



SECTION 5

Effects of Pandemic



TO WHAT EXTENT HAVE YOU SEEN A CHANGE IN THE VOLUME OF ACTIVITY FROM YOUR MEMBERS AS THE PANDEMIC AND RECESSION HAVE EVOLVED?

CHANGE IN ACTIVITY AS PANDEMIC/RECESSION HAS EVOLVED				
	Total (n = 655)	Individual (n = 274)	Trade (n = 185)	Combination (n = 196)
↑ I have seen a significant increase in engagement from members	32%	27%	37%	33%
↗ I have seen a slight increase in engagement from members	39%	42%	36%	36%
→ There has been no change in engagement from members	8%	8%	9%	7%
↘ I have seen a slight decrease in engagement from members	14%	15%	10%	16%
↓ I have seen a significant decrease in engagement from members	8%	8%	8%	7%

- More than seven in ten associations (71%) report some level of increased engagement as the pandemic and recession evolved over the course of 2020. Only 22% of associations indicate that they have witnessed a drop-off in member engagement.
- Trade associations are significantly more likely to report a significant uptick in engagement among members, while IMOs are more likely to report modest increases in member engagement (42%).
- Associations reporting increases in their one-year and five-year membership, as well as increases in both new member acquisitions

and overall renewals, are significantly more likely to also report that they have experienced increases in their member engagement during the pandemic and resulting recession.

- Similarly, associations experiencing declines in their one-year and five-year membership counts, drops in their new members, and fall-offs in overall renewals are significantly more likely to report a similar decline in member engagement.
- Additionally, as the operating budget of an association increases, the level of member engagement during the pandemic and recession also increases.



WHAT NEW OPPORTUNITIES MIGHT YOUR ASSOCIATION EXPLORE DURING THE CURRENT PANDEMIC/RECESSION?

Check all that apply.

NEW OPPORTUNITIES ASSOCIATION EXPLORED DURING PANDEMIC/RECESSION					
		Total (n = 655)	Individual (n = 273)	Trade (n = 186)	Combination (n = 196)
TOP 1	Increase virtual professional development opportunities for members	85%	84%	80%	91%
TOP 2	Develop new products and services to assist members and member companies	78%	74%	82%	80%
TOP 3	Reevaluate and streamline internal processes	68%	66%	69%	69%
	Conduct market research/ data analytics	43%	42%	39%	49%
	Increase virtual professional development opportunities for employees	35%	35%	34%	37%
	Take market share from competing associations	11%	10%	13%	12%
	Other	7%	5%	5%	11%
	None of these	1%	2%	1%	1%
	Don't know/unsure	1%	1%	1%	2%

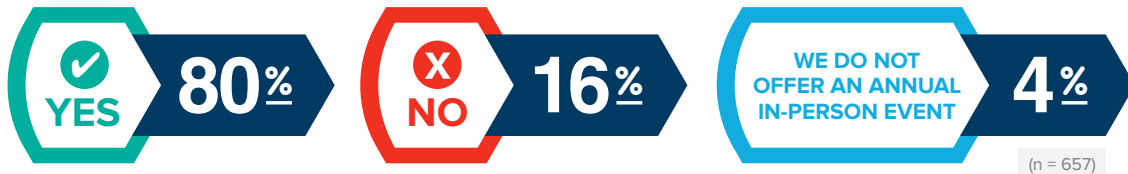
- Across all membership types, associations are more inclined to explore additional options such as increasing virtual professional development opportunities for members (85%), developing new products and services to assist members and member companies during the pandemic (78%), and reevaluating and streamlining internal processes (68%).
- Associations with renewal rates at or above 80% were significantly more likely to reevaluate and streamline internal processes and increase

virtual professional development for employees compared to those with lower renewal rates.

- IMOs with 20,000 or more members were significantly more likely to reevaluate and streamline internal processes compared to associations with fewer members. Additionally, IMOs with over 1,000 members and those with operating budgets over \$1 million are significantly more inclined to have conducted market research and data analytics during 2020.



WAS YOUR ASSOCIATION'S ANNUAL IN-PERSON EVENT CANCELED OR POSTPONED IN 2020?



■ 80% of associations report that their in-person annual meeting was canceled or postponed in 2020. Trade associations were slightly less likely to have canceled or postponed their event than IMOs or combination associations.

■ As an association's operating budget increased, the likelihood of canceling or postponing the in-person event also increased, with 89% of associations with operating budgets of \$20 million or more canceling or postponing their event.



DID YOU OR WILL YOUR ASSOCIATION OFFER A VIRTUAL CONFERENCE IN PLACE OF THE IN-PERSON EVENT?

ASSOCIATION OFFERED A VIRTUAL CONFERENCE IN PLACE OF IN-PERSON EVENT				
	Total (n = 524)	Individual (n = 227)	Trade (n = 140)	Combination (n = 157)
✓ Yes	80%	83%	75%	80%
✗ No	20%	17%	25%	20%

■ 80% of associations that canceled or postponed their in-person event did offer a virtual conference instead. Again, trade associations were less likely to offer this opportunity compared to IMOs and combination associations.

■ Larger IMOs (over 5,000 members) and associations with operating budgets over \$5 million are significantly more likely to have offered a virtual conference compared to their smaller association counterparts.



DID YOU CHARGE A REGISTRATION FEE FOR THE VIRTUAL EVENT?

ASSOCIATION CHARGED REGISTRATION FEE FOR VIRTUAL CONFERENCE				
	Total (n = 418)	Individual (n = 187)	Trade (n = 105)	Combination (n = 126)
✓ Yes	69%	74%	55%	73%
✗ No	31%	26%	45%	27%

- Overall, 69% of associations offering a virtual annual event in place of the in-person event still charged a registration fee, with trade associations being less likely to charge a fee compared to IMO and combination associations.
- Associations with renewal rates above 80% are significantly less likely to have charged a registration fee for the virtual event (67% vs. 76%). Similarly, associations with higher new member renewal rates were less likely to charge for the virtual event than those with lower new member renewal rates.



IF RESTRICTIONS ON PUBLIC GATHERINGS CHANGE WITHIN THE NEXT YEAR AND YOU ARE ABLE TO REINSTATE YOUR ANNUAL IN-PERSON EVENT, DO YOU PLAN TO ALSO OFFER A VIRTUAL EXPERIENCE?

PLAN TO OFFER A VIRTUAL EXPERIENCE IF IN-PERSON EVENTS ARE REINSTATED				
	Total (n = 652)	Individual (n = 273)	Trade (n = 184)	Combination (n = 195)
✓ Yes	59%	62%	55%	60%
✗ No	11%	10%	14%	10%
? Not Sure	30%	29%	31%	31%

- 59% of associations indicate that even if restrictions on public gatherings are lifted, they will still offer a virtual option for the in-person annual event. However, 30% of associations are uncertain as to the plans for a virtual experience in 2021. IMO and combination associations are most likely to offer a virtual experience even if in-person events resume (62% and 60%, respectively), while just over half of trade associations (55%) indicate they will provide a remote experience.
- Larger IMOs (over 5,000 members) and those with operating budgets over \$5 million are significantly more likely to offer a virtual conference in conjunction with their in-person event.



WHICH, IF ANY, OF THE FOLLOWING HAS YOUR ASSOCIATION EXPERIENCED SINCE THE BEGINNING OF THE PANDEMIC (MARCH 2020)? Check all that apply.

ASSOCIATION EXPERIENCED THE FOLLOWING SINCE THE PANDEMIC STARTED				
	Total (n = 652)	Individual (n = 272)	Trade (n = 185)	Combination (n = 195)
▼ Layoffs, with no intention to bring back affected employees	21%	22%	22%	20%
▼ Salary/hour reductions for employees	19%	18%	17%	21%
▼ Reduction of employer-provided benefits	16%	19%	17%	11%
▼ Furloughs, with an intention to bring back affected employees	12%	14%	9%	11%
* Other	9%	10%	10%	8%
x None of the above	54%	54%	52%	55%

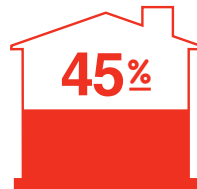
- More than half of associations (54%), while weathering a reduction in membership over the past year, were able to avoid employee layoffs, furloughs, or reductions in salary or hours. About two in ten associations report that their association experienced employee layoffs and/or salary or hour reductions. IMO's and trade associations are most likely to report layoffs, while combination associations most often employed salary/hours reductions.
- The associations that reported declines in membership over the past year, the past five

years, and declines in new members and overall renewals were significantly more likely to indicate that cost-saving measures such as layoffs, reduction of salary/hours, and reduction of benefits were implemented compared to associations that showed member increases over the past year.

- Additionally, associations with more members (over 5,000) and larger operating budgets (over \$5 million) were significantly more likely to have experienced layoffs and reduction of employer-based benefits.



WHAT IS YOUR ASSOCIATION'S CURRENT OFFICE SITUATION?



**Everyone is
working remotely**



**Most employees
are working
remotely, though
some choose to
work from the office**



**Most employees
are back in the
office, though
some choose to
work from home**



**Everyone is
back in the office**

(n = 655)

■ Across all membership types, most employees are still working remotely, with 45% of associations reporting that all employees are working remotely and 36% indicating that most employees are working remotely. About two in ten associations indicate that most or all employees are back in the office.

■ Larger IMOs (over 5,000 members), larger trade associations (over 500 members), and those with larger operating budgets (over \$1 million) are significantly more likely to report that most employees are still working from home, while smaller associations (up to 100 trade association members and up to \$1 million budget) are significantly more likely to report all employees are still home-based.

IMOs are slightly more likely to report that the majority of employees are still working in a remote capacity (86%), compared to trade and combination associations (75% and 79%, respectively).



SECTION 6

Challenges and Innovation



WHAT ARE YOUR ORGANIZATION'S BIGGEST INTERNAL CHALLENGES TO GROWING MEMBERSHIP?

Please select up to THREE responses.

BIGGEST INTERNAL CHALLENGES TO GROWING MEMBERSHIP					
		Total (n = 622)	Individual (n = 265)	Trade (n = 174)	Combination (n = 183)
TOP 1	Difficulty in communicating value or benefits	38%	36%	40%	40%
TOP 2	Insufficient staff	32%	30%	35%	33%
TOP 3	Difficulty identifying/contacting prospects	26%	23%	31%	25%
Difficulty attracting and/or maintaining younger members		24%	33%	10%	22%
Lack of a strategy or plan		21%	19%	22%	21%
Membership too diverse, difficulty meeting needs of different segments		20%	19%	21%	21%
Insufficient budget		19%	20%	20%	18%
Inadequate association management database		17%	16%	18%	18%
Lack of marketing expertise		11%	9%	12%	11%
Difficulty in converting student memberships to regular memberships		10%	14%	0%	12%
Inadequate research to understand market		8%	9%	8%	8%
Technology changes		7%	9%	4%	7%
Unwise board actions		4%	6%	3%	2%
Staff retirements		2%	2%	3%	2%
Other		8%	7%	9%	8%



- Echoing findings from both 2019 and 2020, the two biggest internal challenges to growing membership are difficulty in communicating value or benefits (38%, up from 36% in 2020) and insufficient staff (32%, up from 31% in 2020). About one-quarter of associations struggle to identify/contact prospects (26%, up from 22% in 2020) and attract and/or maintain younger members (24%, up from 17% in 2020).
- IMOs are more likely to struggle with attracting and maintaining younger members than they are in identifying or contacting prospective members.
- Furthermore, associations indicating drops in one-year membership, five-year membership, and new members are often challenged by attracting and maintaining younger members compared to associations reporting increases in the same areas.
- For associations with new member renewals under 80%, weak product or service offerings, and difficulty converting student memberships to regular memberships are significantly greater challenges compared to those with higher new member renewal rates.
- The smallest IMOs (under 1,000 members) struggle significantly more with insufficient staff, while those with more members are significantly more taxed with attracting and maintaining younger members and converting student members to regular memberships.
- Finally, associations with operating budgets under \$5 million are significantly more challenged by their budgetary constraints, while those with larger budgets struggle more with a diverse membership whose needs they have difficulty meeting.

Associations reporting declines in their one-year membership and in their overall renewals are significantly more likely to struggle with growing their membership due to lack of a strategy or plan for improvement.



WHAT ARE YOUR ORGANIZATION'S BIGGEST EXTERNAL CHALLENGES TO GROWING MEMBERSHIP?

Please select no more than three responses.

BIGGEST EXTERNAL CHALLENGES TO GROWING MEMBERSHIP					
		Total (n = 619)	Individual (n = 263)	Trade (n = 175)	Combination (n = 181)
TOP 1	Declining member/ employer budgets	43%	39%	39%	53%
TOP 2	Pandemic/global health issues	35%	38%	31%	35%
TOP 3	Economy/recession	34%	31%	38%	34%
	Competitive association(s) or sources of information	33%	39%	29%	29%
	Perception of the association and/or its culture (i.e., old boy's network, not specialized enough)	27%	31%	23%	23%
	Lack of brand awareness	26%	29%	19%	28%
	Company mergers/ industry shrinkage	20%	7%	39%	20%
	Changing demographics of industry/fewer young people in industry	20%	24%	14%	19%
	Market saturation	8%	9%	7%	8%
	Legal/liability actions	1%	2%	0%	0%
	Hacking/IT infrastructure	1%	2%	0%	1%
	Other	5%	7%	5%	3%



- As a result of the ongoing global issues, the top challenges that associations report facing now are different than in early 2020. The top challenges now include the declining member/ employer budgets (43%, up from 34% in 2020), the pandemic and global health issues (35%), and the economy/recession (34%). Competitive associations—formerly the top external challenge—has become the fourth overall largest outside challenge for associations (33%, down from 41%).
- Combination associations struggle most with declining member and employer budgets (53%, up from 41% in 2020) compared to IMOs and trade associations, while trade associations struggle more in the face of the economy and current recession (38%). As a result of shrinking budgets and economic recession, IMOs are most likely to face challenges with competitive associations and outside sources of information fighting for the same depleting membership pool (39%).
- Additionally, trade associations still struggle against industry shrinkage and company mergers (39%, up from 37%).
- Associations with renewal rates under 80%, declines in membership over the past year, declines in new members, and overall declines in renewals have struggled significantly with the pandemic and ensuing global health issues.
- Associations with renewals rates above 80% are significantly more likely to face challenges regarding company mergers and industry shrinkage, as well as the changing demographics of the industry.
- Associations with operating budgets under \$5 million are more apt to struggle significantly with a lack of brand awareness compared to their larger association counterparts.

Not surprisingly,
the global pandemic
and resulting recession
have jumped to
the top of the list of
external challenges
that associations
faced in the past year,
supplanting previous
top challenges
such as competition
in the market.



WHAT ARE THE MOST SIGNIFICANT DATA CHALLENGES YOUR ASSOCIATION FACES?

Please select up to THREE responses.

DATA CHALLENGES					
		Total (n = 592)	Individual (n = 247)	Trade (n = 170)	Combination (n = 175)
TOP 1	Lack of marketing results tracking and analysis reporting	37%	35%	36%	39%
TOP 2	Inadequate membership dashboards and reporting tools	34%	39%	31%	30%
TOP 3	Lack of skilled data professionals to manage and work with our organization’s data	33%	32%	35%	33%
Lack of ability to model and segment members and customers		32%	33%	27%	37%
Lack of demographic or firmographic data on members/customers		32%	34%	28%	33%
Poor data hygiene and accuracy		30%	30%	32%	29%
Decentralized data/lack of a centralized database for member, customer, and prospect data		21%	21%	24%	19%
Lack of ability to import/export new data points and/or data sources		11%	12%	9%	11%
Other		7%	6%	10%	7%

■ The findings in the current study mirror those from 2020. The top data challenges include a lack of marketing results to track and analyze reporting (37%, down from 39% in 2020), inadequate membership dashboards and reporting tools (34%, same as in 2020), and a lack of skilled data professionals to manage and work with the association's data (33%, down from 34% in 2020).

■ IMOs are the most likely to face challenges with member dashboards and reporting tools (39%), while trade and combination associations face greater challenges regarding the lack of marketing results to track and analyze (36% and 39%, respectively).



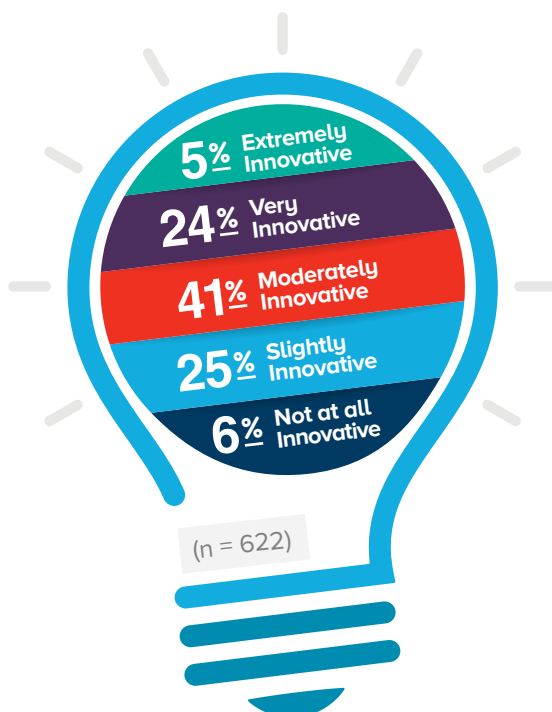
■ Combination associations are also more likely to struggle with an inability to model and segment members and customers (37%), making marketing efforts less targeted. Furthermore, about one-third of IMOs and combination associations report that a lack of demographic and firmographic data adds to their data challenges (34% and 33%, respectively), while trade associations struggle with poor data hygiene issues (32%).

■ Associations with operating budgets over \$1 million are significantly more likely to face challenges with poor data hygiene and accuracy compared to associations with smaller budgets. Additionally, those with the largest budgets (over \$20 million) are significantly more challenged by the lack of a centralized database for member, customer, and prospect data.



Innovation has many meanings. In the context of the association world, it most commonly means creating or improving a product or benefit that provides additional value to members and customers. This can be done for its own sake, or in order to solve members' currently unsolved problems. Given that interpretation:

HOW INNOVATIVE WOULD YOU CONSIDER YOUR ORGANIZATION?



■ 29% of association executives believe that their organization is very or extremely innovative, up from 20% in 2020 and 13% in 2019. However, association executives are most likely to believe that their association is moderately innovative (41%, down from 49% in 2020). Trade association executives are more likely to rate their association as very or extremely innovative (24%) compared to executives from IMOs or combination associations (19% each).

■ Association executives at organizations with overall renewal rates and new member renewal rates at or above 80%, and those reporting increases in their membership over the past year, increases in new members, and increases in overall renewals, are significantly more likely to consider their association to be very or extremely innovative.

**HOW DOES YOUR ASSOCIATION SUPPORT INNOVATION?**

Please select all that apply.

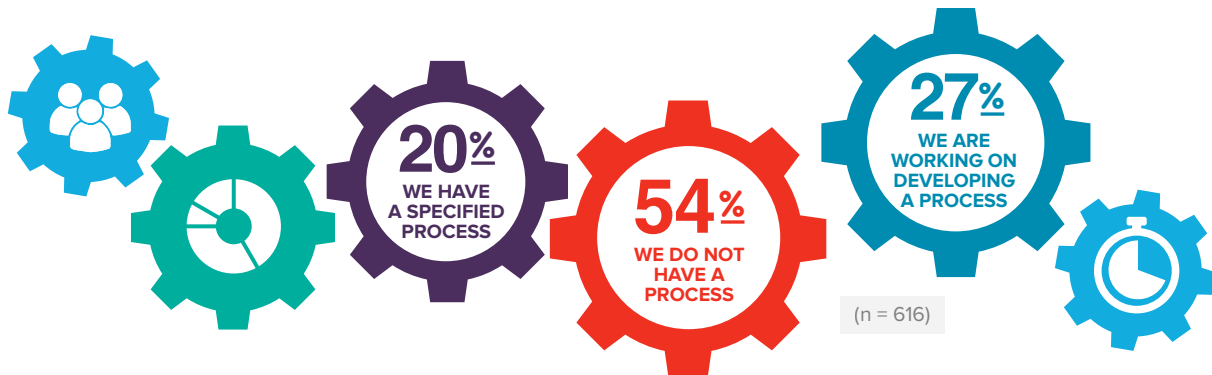
ORGANIZATIONAL SUPPORT FOR INNOVATION				
	Total (n = 607)	Individual (n = 258)	Trade (n = 172)	Combination (n = 177)
! Focusing on communication and collaboration	62%	60%	61%	65%
! Providing encouragement to innovative employees	52%	56%	44%	53%
! It is driven from the top down, (i.e., from the CEO and the board)	45%	45%	44%	46%
! Hiring the right people	40%	43%	37%	38%
! Forgiving mistakes	37%	39%	33%	39%
! Adding innovation goals to performance reviews	20%	22%	17%	19%
! Other	4%	4%	7%	2%
x My association does not support innovation	6%	8%	5%	4%

- Associations are most likely to support innovation by focusing on communication and collaboration (62%, up from 53% in 2020), providing encouragement to innovative employees (52%, up from 38% in 2020), and driving innovation from the top down (45%, up from 41% in 2020).
- IMOs and combination associations are more likely to support innovation through employee encouragement than are trade associations.

- Associations reporting increases in membership over the past year are significantly more likely than those reporting declines to provide encouragement to innovative employees and hire the right people. Associations with new member renewals at 80% or higher are significantly more likely to indicate their innovation support is driven from the top down.
- Furthermore, associations with operating budgets over \$1 million add innovation goals to performance reviews significantly more often than associations with lower operating budgets.



DOES YOUR ORGANIZATION CURRENTLY HAVE A PROCESS IN PLACE FOR INNOVATION AND NEW IDEAS?



- Similar to findings from 2020, 20% of association executives report that their association has a process in place to encourage innovation and new ideas. However, more than half do not (54%, same as in 2020).

- Associations with the largest operating budgets (\$20 million or more) are significantly more likely than those with smaller budgets to have a specified process in place to support innovation and new ideas.

Compared to associations reporting membership declines, associations reporting increases in membership over the past five years are more likely to have a specific process in place to support innovation (22% vs. 17%), or are working on developing a process for innovation and new ideas (28% vs. 25%).

SECTION 7



Dues and Membership Structure



ON AVERAGE, HOW MUCH ARE YOUR BASIC ANNUAL MEMBERSHIP DUES? Do not put a range.

ANNUAL MEMBERSHIP DUES STRUCTURE				
	Total (n = 612)	Individual (n = 262)	Trade (n = 173)	Combination (n = 177)
\$ We have a sliding scale	40%	23%	59%	45%
\$ Basic dues	61%	77%	41%	55%



BASIC ANNUAL MEMBERSHIP DUES				
	Total (n = 362)	Individual (n = 192)	Trade (n = 70)	Combination (n = 97)
\$ Under \$50	8%	10%	4%	4%
\$ \$50 to \$99	10%	12%	1%	10%
\$ \$100 to \$149	12%	12%	1%	21%
\$ \$150 to \$199	9%	13%	0%	9%
\$ \$200 to \$299	16%	16%	11%	20%
\$ \$300 to \$399	12%	12%	9%	12%
\$ \$400 to \$499	8%	9%	6%	8%
\$ \$500 to \$749	9%	7%	20%	7%
\$ \$750 to \$999	4%	3%	7%	4%
\$ \$1000 and over	12%	5%	40%	4%
÷ Mean	\$3,534	\$833	\$11,785	\$3,008
ⓘ Median	\$249	\$216	\$650	\$205

- About 40% of associations have a sliding scale for dues, up from 35% in 2020. This is more common among trade and combination associations (59% and 45%, respectively) compared to IMOs (23%).
- Dues rates have increased slightly over the past year. The median basic annual dues, for associations that have one, are \$249, up from a median of \$232 in 2020. IMOs have median

dues of \$216, up from \$200; trade associations have median dues of \$650, up from \$625; and combination associations have median dues of \$205, up from \$199.

- Associations with an increase in overall renewals and a renewal rate of 80% or higher are significantly more likely to have a sliding scale for dues.



WHAT PERCENTAGE OF YOUR OVERALL REVENUE IS DERIVED FROM MEMBERSHIP DUES?

If you are unsure, check not sure.

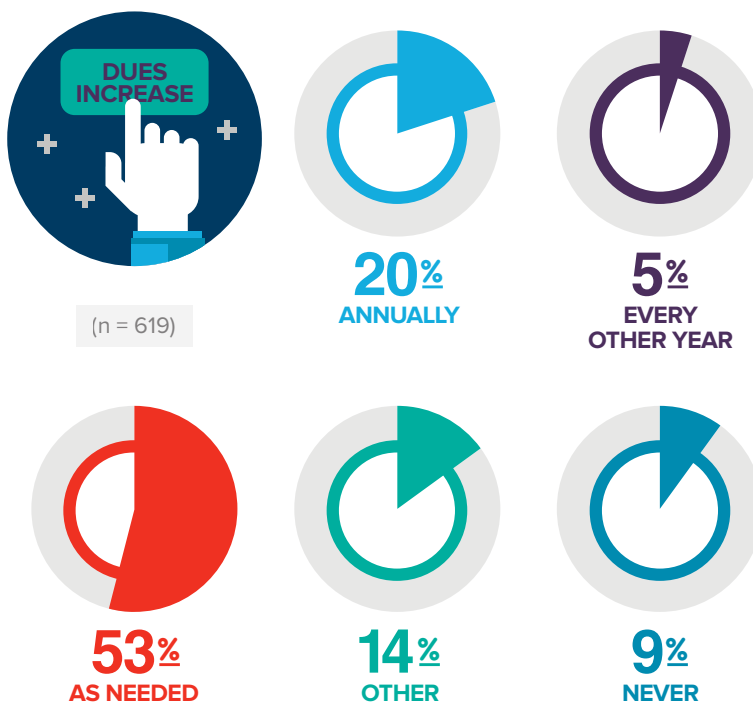
PERCENTAGE OF REVENUE FROM MEMBERSHIP DUES				
	Total (n = 570)	Individual (n = 240)	Trade (n = 159)	Combination (n = 171)
÷ Mean	43%	43%	46%	40%
▮ Median	40%	39%	43%	35%
% 0%	1%	1%	1%	0%
% 1% to 10%	10%	12%	6%	12%
% 11% to 20%	10%	11%	8%	11%
% 21% to 30%	17%	16%	16%	19%
% 31% to 40%	15%	13%	16%	18%
% 41% to 50%	14%	13%	16%	14%
% 51% to 60%	11%	10%	13%	12%
% 61% to 70%	7%	9%	8%	2%
% 71% to 80%	8%	8%	7%	9%
% 81% to 90%	4%	5%	3%	2%
% 91% to 100%	4%	4%	6%	3%

- Associations derive a median of 40% of revenue from membership dues, (up from 35% in 2020). Trade associations tend to obtain a larger percentage of revenue from membership dues compared to IMO or combination associations (median 43%, compared to medians of 39% and 35%, respectively).

- Associations with renewal rates of 80% or more, new member renewal rates above 60%, and those reporting increases in new members are significantly more likely to derive more of their revenue from membership dues.
- Furthermore, the smallest IMOs (up to 1,000 members) and those with operating budgets under \$20 million derive significantly more revenue from membership dues than their larger counterparts.



HOW OFTEN DOES YOUR ASSOCIATION RAISE MEMBERSHIP DUES?



■ Identical to results from 2020, 53% of associations raise dues as needed. 20% of associations schedule an annual dues increase, with trade and combination associations more likely to have annual raises compared to IMOs (22% each vs. 17% for IMOs). IMOs are most likely to raise dues as necessary (56%).

■ Associations reporting declines or no change in renewals over the past year are significantly more apt to raise dues on an annual schedule, while those reporting increases in renewals over the past year are significantly more likely to raise dues only as needed.

As the operating budget for an association increases, the likelihood that it will raise dues on an annual basis also increases.



HOW WOULD YOU DESCRIBE YOUR MEMBERSHIP DUES STRUCTURE?

MEMBERSHIP DUES STRUCTURE				
	Total (n = 617)	Individual (n = 264)	Trade (n = 174)	Combination (n = 179)
\$ Everyone pays the same membership dues	23%	31%	19%	16%
\$ The membership dues are based on certain attributes (i.e., qualifications, experience, company size, revenue, geography, etc.)	50%	40%	59%	57%
\$ The membership dues are based on a tiered structure of increasing benefits	12%	12%	6%	18%
\$ The membership dues are based on member-selected benefits (à la carte)	2%	1%	3%	1%
* Other	13%	16%	12%	8%

■ Half of associations (50%) indicate that their membership dues are based on certain attributes, such as company size or revenue. However, this is significantly more common among trade associations (59%, down from 70%) and combination associations (57%, up from 48%) than IMO's (40%). In fact, IMO's are significantly more likely than other membership organizations to have a membership dues structure where everyone pays the same amount (31%).

■ Associations reporting overall renewal rates of 80% or higher and new member renewal rates of 60% or higher are significantly more likely to employ a membership dues structure that is based on specific criteria, such as company size, revenue, qualifications, etc.

■ IMO's with fewer than 20,000 members are significantly more apt to report a membership dues structure based on certain attributes, such as company size, revenue, qualifications, etc.



WITHIN THE PAST FIVE YEARS, HAS YOUR ASSOCIATION ADOPTED OR CONSIDERED ADOPTING A NEW MEMBERSHIP MODEL?

ADOPTED NEW MEMBERSHIP MODEL IN PAST 5 YEARS				
	Total (n = 619)	Individual (n = 265)	Trade (n = 175)	Combination (n = 179)
✓ Yes, my association has adopted a new membership model	17%	16%	17%	20%
✓ Yes, my association has considered a new membership model	45%	43%	43%	49%
✗ My association has neither adopted nor considered adopting a new membership model	38%	41%	39%	32%

- Results show an uptick in the number of associations that have considered a new membership model within the past five years (45%, up from 40% in 2020).
- 17% of associations have adopted a new membership model within the past five years, on par with results from 2020.








- Associations experiencing increases in membership over the past year, the past five years, and in their new members tend to have adopted a new membership model within the past five years.

The percentage of associations that have not adopted nor considered a new membership model has declined across the board (38%, down from 42%), but more so for trade associations (39%, down from 47% in 2020).



WHAT TYPE OF NEW MEMBERSHIP MODEL(S)

HAS YOUR ASSOCIATION ADOPTED? Check all that apply.

NEW MEMBERSHIP MODELS ADOPTED				
	Total (n = 106)	Individual (n = 41)	Trade (n = 30)	Combination (n = 35)
 Tiered	43%	37%	53%	40%
 Added special interest (student, retired, etc.) to existing model	26%	34%	10%	31%
 Combination (adding individual or organizational membership)	23%	22%	10%	34%
 Group	9%	7%	3%	14%
 Electronic	9%	20%	3%	0%
 À la carte (pick your benefits)	7%	5%	7%	9%
 Other	21%	24%	30%	9%

■ Of the associations that have adopted a new membership model, the most common is a tiered membership structure (43%, down from 46% in 2020). The membership model showing growth, however, is one where a special interest group was added (e.g., students, retired members) to an existing model (26%, up from 21% in 2020).

■ Associations experiencing increases in membership over the past year, the past five years, and those showing growth in new members and overall renewal rates are more likely to have implemented a tiered membership structure.



SECTION 8

Marketing Tools



WHAT TYPES OF ANALYSIS DO YOU USE TO MEASURE THE EFFECTIVENESS OF YOUR MEMBERSHIP MARKETING CAMPAIGNS? Check all that apply.

TYPES OF ANALYSIS USED TO MEASURE EFFECTIVENESS OF MEMBERSHIP MARKETING CAMPAIGNS					
		Total (n = 602)	Individual (n = 258)	Trade (n = 169)	Combination (n = 175)
TOP 1	Google Analytics	52%	56%	41%	55%
TOP 2	Response rate analysis	48%	52%	40%	49%
TOP 3	Return on Investment (ROI)	31%	33%	28%	32%
Digital advertising performance analysis (via conversion tracking/metrics)		30%	36%	18%	31%
A/B split marketing tests		26%	33%	16%	26%
Source code, keycode, or promotion code capture and analysis		24%	31%	10%	27%
Cost of acquisition		16%	21%	10%	15%
Computer matchback to prospect database or campaign list		12%	17%	7%	10%
Data mining/modeling		12%	14%	8%	13%
Lifetime value analysis		10%	10%	11%	9%
Net return after servicing costs		7%	7%	5%	10%
Other		3%	2%	2%	4%
None		19%	16%	27%	14%



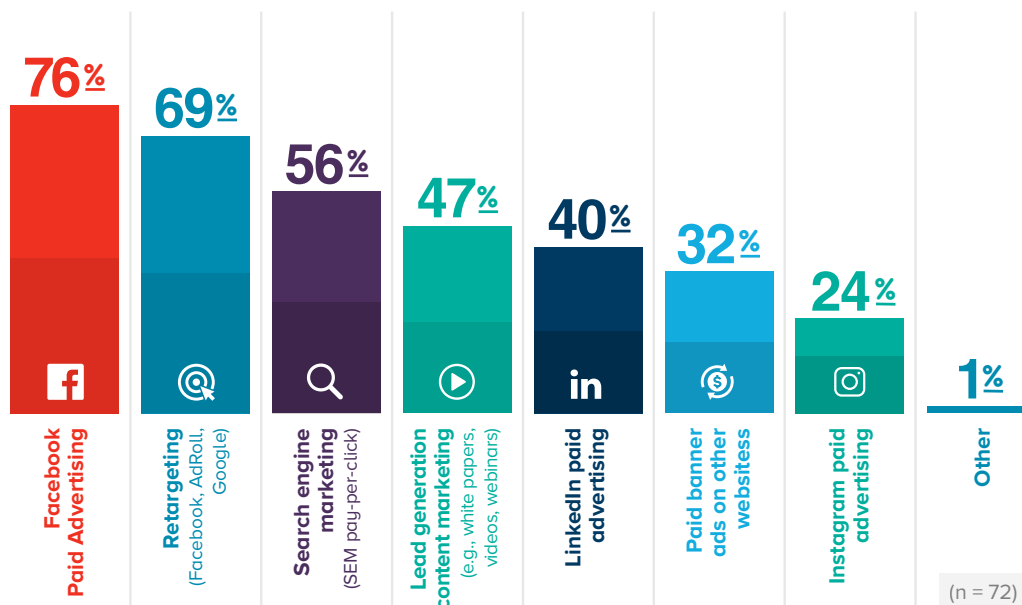
- Echoing findings from 2020, the most commonly used analysis for measuring the effectiveness of marketing campaigns are Google Analytics (52%, up from 50% in 2020) and response rate analysis (48%, same as in 2020). Measuring return on investment (31%, up from 27% in 2020) and digital advertising performance (30%, down from 32% in 2020) are also among the more common tools associations use to measure campaign effectiveness.
- IMOs and combination associations are significantly more likely to employ several methods of analysis compared to trade

associations, which are significantly more likely to report they do not measure the effectiveness of membership marketing campaigns.

- Similarly, the smallest IMOs (under 1,000 members) and those with the smallest operating budgets (under \$1 million) are significantly more likely to not use any analyses to measure marketing effectiveness. Conversely, the largest IMOs (over 20,000 members) and those with the largest operating budgets (over \$20 million) employ multiple analysis techniques to measure campaign effectiveness significantly more than their smaller counterparts.



WHICH OF THE FOLLOWING PAID DIGITAL MARKETING TOOLS, IF ANY, DO YOU USE? Check all that apply.



- As seen earlier in the report, 11% of associations use paid digital marketing for recruiting new members. This is especially true of IMOs, in which 19% consider paid online digital marketing to be highly effective, compared to 3% of trade associations and 8% of combination

associations. Of the associations that utilize paid digital marketing tools, the most commonly employed are Facebook paid advertising (76%), retargeting (Facebook, AdRoll, Google) (69%), and search engine marketing (SEM pay-per-click) (56%).



FOR WHAT MARKETING PROMOTIONS DO YOU USE PAID ONLINE DIGITAL ADVERTISING PLATFORMS? Check all that apply.

(n = 69)



Associations using paid digital marketing most often use it to promote membership (87%) and annual conference/trade shows (73%). About

half of associations employing paid digital marketing use it to promote professional development meetings and programs (51%).



ON AVERAGE, HOW MANY EMAILS DOES A MEMBER RECEIVE FROM YOUR ASSOCIATION IN ANY GIVEN WEEK?

EMAILS PER WEEK				
	Total (n = 600)	Individual (n = 258)	Trade (n = 168)	Combination (n = 174)
# 0	1%	1%	2%	1%
# 1	12%	13%	12%	12%
# 2	23%	19%	23%	28%
# 3	19%	19%	21%	16%
# 4	13%	15%	10%	14%
# 5	9%	10%	8%	10%
# 6	4%	4%	6%	3%
# 7	3%	4%	6%	3%
# 8	5%	5%	6%	3%
# 9	1%	0%	1%	1%
# 10 or more	10%	11%	10%	8%
÷ Mean	4	5	5	4
! Median	3	3	3	3

Members receive a median of three emails per week from their association, regardless of the type of association they belong to. This has not changed compared to 2020. Associations tend to send about two to three emails per week (42%).

Smaller IMOs (under 5,000 members), smaller trade organizations (up to 100 members), and those with operating budgets up to \$5 million are significantly more likely than their larger counterparts to send fewer emails per week.



WITH REGARD TO YOUR MEMBERSHIP MARKETING, WHAT SERVICES, IF ANY, DO YOU OUTSOURCE? Check all that apply.

OUTSOURCED SERVICES					
		Total (n = 598)	Individual (n = 257)	Trade (n = 169)	Combination (n = 172)
TOP 1	Graphic design	37%	32%	41%	38%
TOP 2	Website development	32%	31%	38%	29%
TOP 3	Direct mail printing and mailing	30%	31%	38%	29%
Market research		18%	22%	17%	13%
Paid digital advertising		15%	21%	11%	12%
Copywriting		13%	14%	12%	12%
Telemarketing		13%	18%	4%	13%
Search engine optimization		12%	12%	12%	13%
Brand development		10%	11%	11%	9%
Email marketing		8%	9%	9%	6%
List management/list acquisition		8%	11%	5%	6%
Organic social media management		6%	6%	6%	5%
Print ad placement		6%	9%	4%	2%
Data analytics		4%	5%	3%	2%
Database hygiene		3%	3%	2%	4%
Texting		3%	4%	1%	2%
Other		2%	2%	4%	2%
Nothing/no outsourcing		28%	26%	28%	30%

- Associations are most likely to outsource graphic design services (37%, same as in 2020), website development (32%, up from 30%), and direct mail printing and mailing services (30%, down from 37%).
- Trade associations are more likely to outsource direct mail compared to IMOs and combination associations (38%, up from 26% in 2020). Direct mail outsourcing has declined for IMOs (31%, down from 42% in 2020) and for combination associations (29%, down from 41% in 2020).
- Trade associations are also more likely to outsource website development (38%) compared to IMOs (31%) and combination associations (29%). However, for all types of associations, outsourcing of website development has increased over the past year: IMOs 31%, up from 28% in 2020; trade associations 38%, up from 36% in 2020; and combination associations 29%, up from 26% in 2020.
- Associations reporting increases in membership over the past year or past five years are significantly more likely to outsource website development and search engine optimization.
- The largest IMOs (over 5,000 members) outsource services such as direct mail printing and mailing, paid digital advertising, copywriting, and telemarketing significantly more than smaller IMOs. The largest trade organizations (over 500 members) are significantly more likely to outsource market research and direct mail printing and mailing.
- Associations with operating budgets over \$1 million outsource services like direct mail printing and mailing, market research, paid digital advertising, and telemarketing significantly more than associations with lower operating budgets.



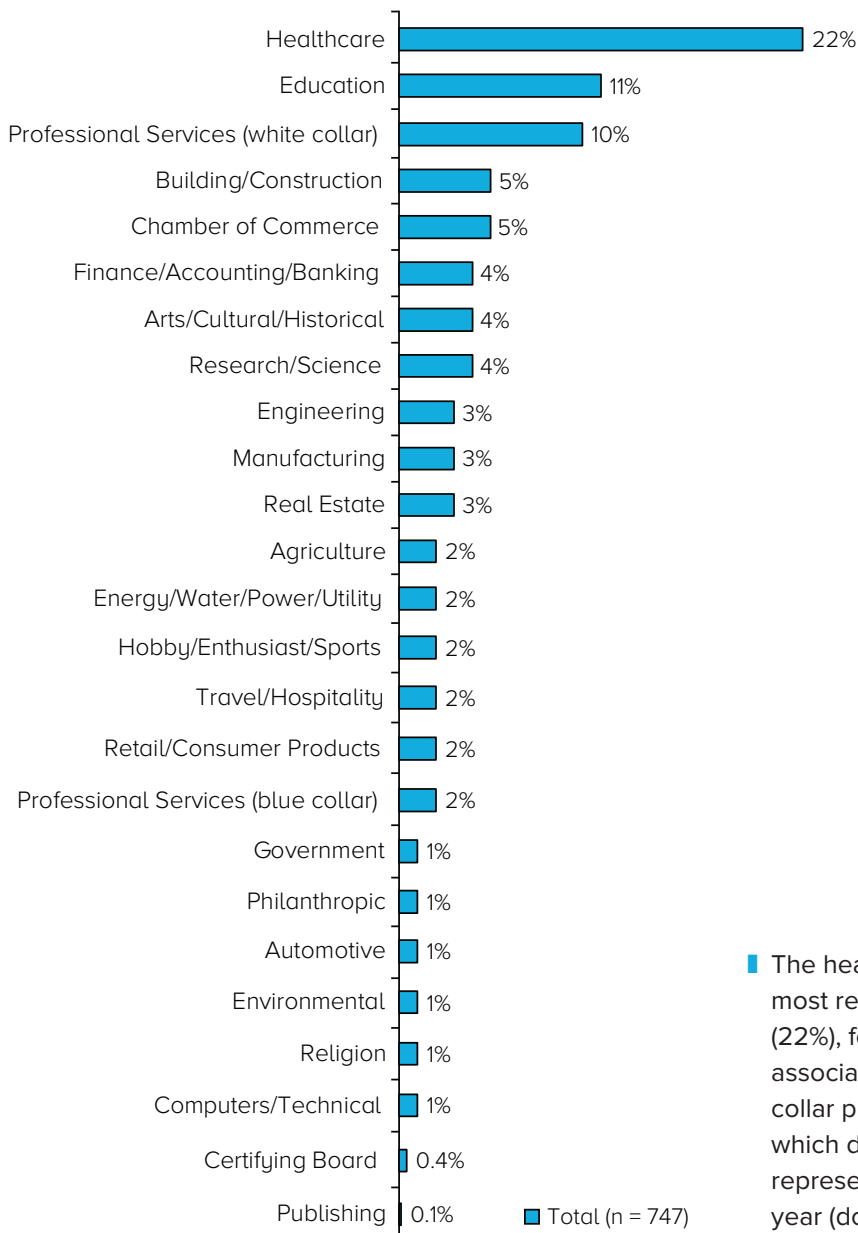
SECTION 9

Association Demographics



WHAT BEST DESCRIBES YOUR ASSOCIATION'S INDUSTRY?

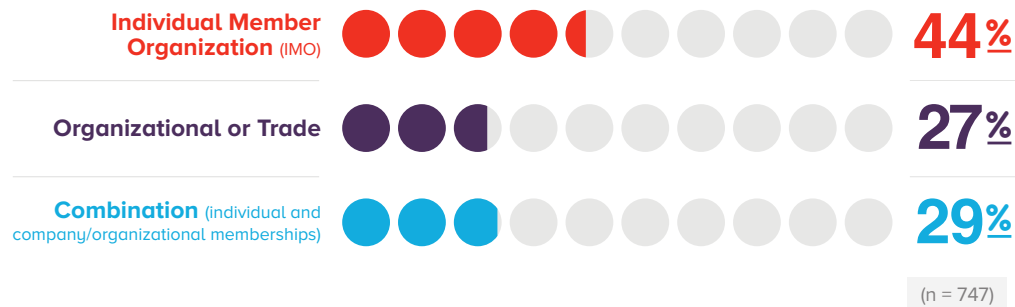
ASSOCIATION INDUSTRY



■ The healthcare industry is the most represented in the sample (22%), followed by education associations (11%), and white collar professional services (10%), which dropped considerably in representation from the previous year (down from 17% in 2020).



WHAT TYPE OF MEMBERSHIP OFFERING BEST DESCRIBES YOUR ORGANIZATION?



■ Results are similar to those from 2020: 44% of the participants represent Individual Member Organizations (45% in 2020), 27% represent organizational or trade associations (28%

in 2020), and 29% represent combination associations—those with individual and company/organizational memberships (27% in 2020).



HOW MANY PAID MEMBERS ARE IN YOUR ASSOCIATION?

NUMBER OF PAID INDIVIDUAL MEMBERS			
	Total (n = 537)	Individual (n = 329)	Combination (n = 208)
Median	4,172	6,010	1,567
# Up to 1,000	28%	19%	42%
# 1,001 - 5,000	26%	27%	26%
# 5,001 - 19,999	26%	29%	21%
# 20,000 or more	20%	26%	11%

■ The number of paid individual members within an IMO or combination association is similar to findings from 2020, with the highest percentage of associations reporting up to 1,000 individual members (28% vs. 29% in 2020). Similar to sample parameters from 2020, one-quarter of associations report having either 1,001 to 5,000 members or 5,001 to 19,999 members (26% each, compared to 24% and 27% in 2020).

■ IMOs are relatively equally split in the number of paid members. More than one-quarter of associations have either 1,001 to 5,000 members (27%), between 5,001 and 19,999 paid members (29%), or 20,000 or more members (26%). Combination associations are most likely to have up to 1,000 individual paid members (42%).



NUMBER OF PAID COMPANY/GROUP MEMBERS			
	Total (n = 409)	Trade (n = 199)	Combination (n = 210)
Median	422	496	330
# Up to 100	17%	8%	25%
# 101 - 499	36%	39%	34%
# 500+	47%	53%	41%

- Compared to results from 2020, there is an uptick in the number of trade and combination associations reporting 101-499 company/group memberships (36%, up from 32% in 2020) and a slight drop in those reporting 500 or more members (47%, down from 50% in 2020).
- More than half of trade associations have 500 company members or more (53%). 41% of combination associations have more than 500 company/group members.



WHAT IS YOUR ORGANIZATION'S ANNUAL OPERATING BUDGET?

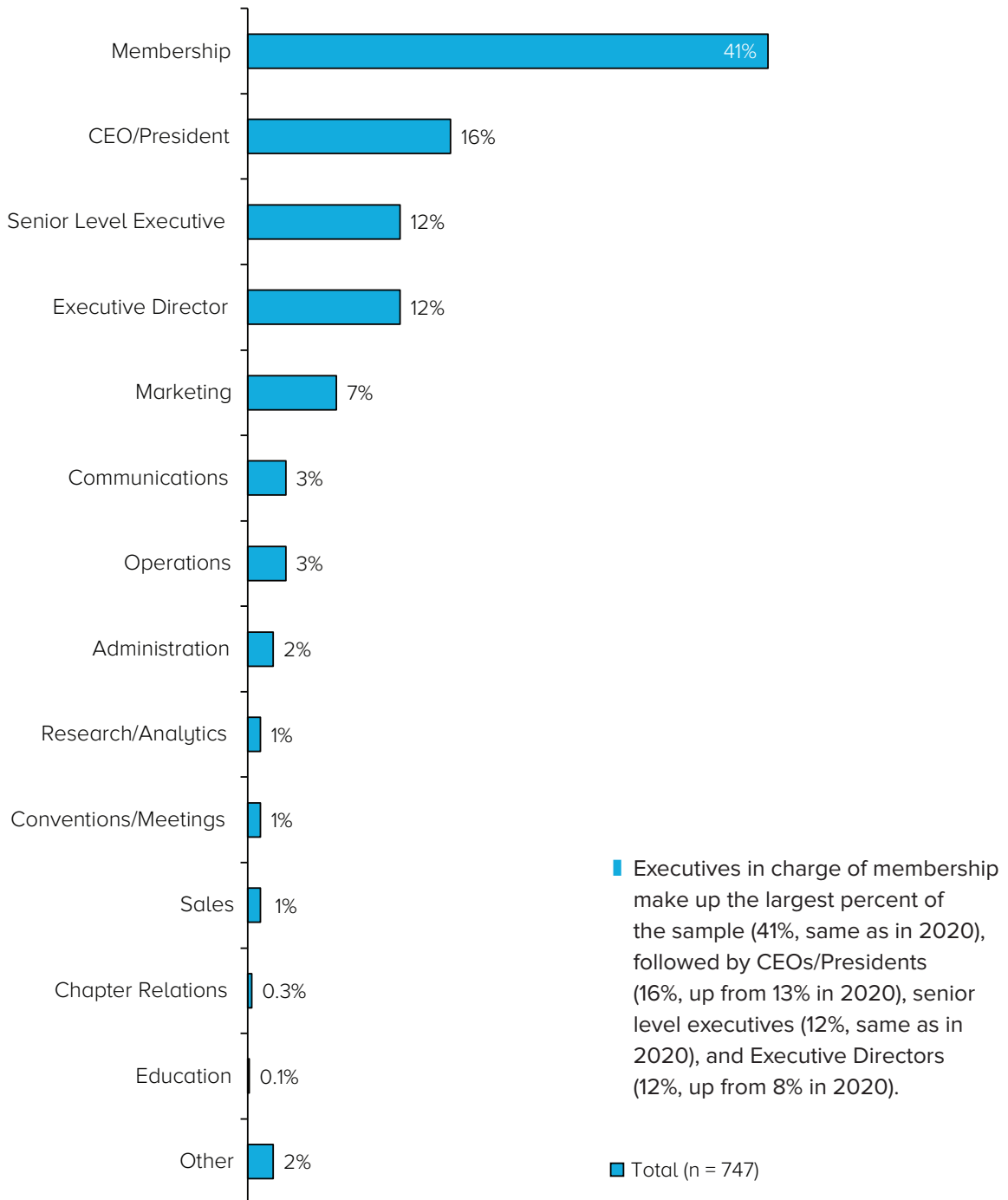
ANNUAL OPERATING BUDGET				
	Total (n = 747)	Individual (n = 332)	Trade (n = 202)	Combination (n = 213)
Median (in millions)	\$2.19	\$2.58	\$1.90	\$1.99
# Up to \$1 million	25%	23%	24%	30%
# \$1 million to \$4.9 million	36%	32%	45%	33%
# \$5 million to \$9.9 million	15%	15%	13%	15%
# \$10 million to \$19.9 million	13%	15%	9%	12%
# \$20 million to \$50 million	7%	8%	6%	7%
# More than \$50 million	4%	6%	3%	3%

- The median operating budget is \$2,190,000, with IMOs having a higher median annual budget and trade and combination associations having a lower median annual budget.
- About one-third of associations, regardless of type, report an annual budget between \$1 million and \$4.9 million (down from 38% in 2020). Trade associations are most likely to report their budget falls within this range (45%, up from 42% in 2020) compared to IMOs (32%, down from 35% in 2020) or combination associations (33%, down from 40% in 2020).



WHAT BEST DESCRIBES YOUR PRIMARY JOB FUNCTION?

PRIMARY JOB FUNCTION





SECTION 10

Words of Wisdom



DESCRIBE AN ACQUISITION OR RECRUITMENT STRATEGY

that your association has employed that has been very successful and/or from which you learned something valuable.

- Inbound marketing beats cold calling. Get busy creating drip campaigns and stop the random cold calling. Once a prospect is warm, they are easy to call. (Trade)
- Promote group membership to current members with 3 or 4 individual memberships in the association. (IMO)
- Outbound phone campaigns were very effective for retention, especially early in the COVID pandemic. (IMO)
- We recently bundled our on-demand webinars with membership and created a new membership level which has proven to be very popular. (IMO)
- We are finding advocacy messaging provides the initial spark for membership followed by access to our convention/educational event. (Trade)
- This year we offered virtual educational webinars free for paid members. We offered access to all webinars if non-members paid a registration fee to access the webinar series that included a 1-year membership. The registration fee was equal to the average cost of membership for 1 year. We've seen great success with non-members signing up to access premium content relevant to the industry. (Combination)
- Offer a new member discount to non-members shortly after they attend our annual conference. (Combination)
- Demonstrating value through infographics highlighting sheer quantity of support helps to get potential members across the line, along with testimonial quotes from other members. (Trade)
- Mass media marketing and awareness campaigns integrated with digital ads, retargeting, thought leadership and campaign landing pages. (IMO)
- We are offering a free introductory membership which allows prospective members to test-drive our association for six months; it has been a great acquisition tool during the pandemic when resources are limited but connection is important. (IMO)
- Phone calls to prospects who have engaged with us in some way (e.g., attended an event or signed up as a website guest). Many of these prospects are at the precipice of joining and the phone call gets them over the line. (IMO)
- Multi-channel, surround-sound offers (direct mail, email, paid ads); no single channel has a high attribution number; they work together to increase overall response rate year-to-year. (IMO)
- We sent mailers to newly licensed contractors to tell them about our association so they would know about us when they were still new to the industry and likely at a space in their career where they would most need our programs/assistance/benefits. (Combination)
- Provided members with scripts and templates to use when recruiting. (IMO)
- Deep discount and flash sales work well in the beginning but without good engagement immediately after, you will lose 50% of those new members. Engaging them from the start is key. (IMO)
- Group Membership. Offering a lower price for several individuals in a group has increased membership and retention rate. (IMO)
- Bundling of membership with all products and services. (IMO)



DESCRIBE AN ENGAGEMENT OR RETENTION STRATEGY

that your association has employed that has been very successful and/or from which you learned something valuable.

- We often send “wow” gifts to members after we hear about an event in their lives, whether it be a new baby, retirement, purchase of a new business, etc. (Combination)
- Credit card autopay—with clear and transparent communications and opt-out information—has been hugely successful. Almost no one opts out. (IMO)
- We implemented an onboarding strategy 2 years ago of sending new members a schedule of info about the association on a regular basis over their first 12 months. We’ve seen our renewals grow 1-2% this past year. (Trade)
- My belief is that it is critical to think strategically and to allow time each week to ‘dream’—new ideas are raised, additional options are discussed and strong engagement by staff is a great outcome. (Combination)
- We added FlexPay, our new partial payment option, that allows members to renew with monthly, quarterly or semi-annual payments. So far, we’ve had over 200 members who have renewed using this option. We’ve also made FlexPay available to those who are joining as first-time members. (Combination)
- Offering a discount on multi-year memberships (18% off a 2-year and 25% off a 3-year). (IMO)
- Outbound call service to members with whom we have not had contact with for 90 days. With the right questioning, gain good market intel and update CRM. (Trade)
- Amazon gift cards work very well for new and reinstating members. (Combination)
- We have implemented a year-long system of touchpoints for 1st-year members. (IMO)
- Based on analysis, we know that if someone completes at least 10 actions (reg for event, listen to webinar, get CE) they are way more likely to remain a member. We created an email campaign to drive those actions by inviting them to watch X webinar, or download X journal article. (Combination)
- We have assigned a dollar value to some of our legislative successes to show how membership costs are easily covered by the cost savings resulting from our advocacy. (Trade)
- Opened up our members’ online community to non-members to increase engagement and allow non-members to network with our membership base. (IMO)
- Our online community has been an amazing tool for us. Members never had a place to discuss issues or get advice prior to launching it in 2018. (Combination)

Using member demographics to develop special interest groups that individual members can identify, engage, and gain value individually and for their company. This helps members engage at a level they are comfortable. (Trade)



WITH REGARD TO YOUR ASSOCIATION, WHAT KEEPS YOU UP AT NIGHT?

- How to keep members engaged when you have LinkedIn and other great resources to help you advance your career. (Combination)
- I am concerned about burnout on my team. We are a small staff and we continue to do more and more each year. (Combination)
- How to successfully create an innovative culture that focuses on the development of unique and solution-oriented products and services delivered through channels of interest to the membership. (Trade)
- Membership retention and recruitment numbers dropping due to COVID and organizations not having the funds to afford membership right now. (IMO)
- Lack of a data strategy and trying to convince leadership we need one. (Trade)
- Whether we will be here and staffed at our current level in a year if we don't have our in-person conference this July. Not sure we can sustain with 2 virtual conferences as it just doesn't generate the revenue we need. (Trade)
- Too many new initiatives in addition to existing programs, and not enough competent staff. (Combination)
- How do we provide better value and service to stop the membership bleeding and attract new members to join. That on top of worries about what's new and looming regulatory pressure will stifle growth in our industry. (Combination)
- We move too slowly to adapt to the changing world of our members, professionally and demographically. We're old and male, and while there's some noble movement in the areas of diversity and inclusion, it's not moving nearly fast enough to be relevant. (IMO)
- We're experiencing fast market growth and undertaking multiple initiatives—difficult to keep up with a small team. (Trade)
- The divisions within our group, which have gotten worse this past year due to the political unrest. (IMO)
- Educating new board members on strategic goals and how they align with marketing strategies. (IMO)
- The huge group of baby boomers that will be leaving the profession soon and the lack of young professionals to backfill. (IMO)
- How to get the board of directors to buy into creating programs/services that are valued and sunset those that are no longer working. (IMO)
- Lack of membership strategy and willingness to take risks to evolve membership model to reach younger generations. (IMO)
- Retention. My association experienced astronomical growth in 2020, and our challenge in 2021 will be to retain those new members. (IMO)
- Overall direction of the organization. Lack of definitive, consistent focus and purpose over years has led to treading water. (IMO)
- The pending implementation of our new Member Model. We will be converting from a standard category model to a 3-tiered model this year. (IMO)
- Lack of data analytics, lack of evidence-based decisions, lack of drive to benchmark and learn from other associations. (IMO)
- Not being able to effectively communicate the value of the association to nonmembers. (Trade)
- Growing membership, ensuring members have a dynamic customer experience, and identifying ways to bring in more young members 1-5 years in the profession. (IMO)



IN YOUR OWN WORDS, WHAT ARE THE MOST IMPORTANT OR SUCCESSFUL LESSONS

you have learned in the area of membership marketing?

- Keep trying new ideas to attract and retain members—and make sure those messages are always evolving. Consumer expectations are high and you need to make sure your messages don't get stale. (Combination)
- Innovate. Innovate. Innovate. Flexibility. Be open to new opportunities. Test—always. (IMO)
- Diversify...don't have all revenue coming from any one industry event. (Trade)
- Be genuine in your offering and practice servant leadership. Members do not want to be monetized, they want to be co-collaborators. (Trade)
- Keep contacting new member prospects and lapsed members. Employees change, management changes, and you never stop contacting them with the benefits the association provides to the industry. (Trade)
- Keep trying; just because something you tried a few years ago didn't work, it doesn't mean it won't work now. (Trade)
- You need to use multiple channels. (Combination)
- Don't just survey for the sake of it. Ensure the outcome of any surveys can directly relate to the feedback and member benefits. (Combination)
- That if you send too many emails you become background noise and are ignored. (IMO)
- Members need to see real tangible value from their membership or they will not continue membership. (Trade)
- Do not hesitate to discount to recruit new members. (Trade)
- As with most things in life, it's about building meaningful relationships that are mutually beneficial. Growth occurs when the association is providing value and members are valuable contributors to the community. (Trade)
- Keep trying new and creative ideas. Work with professionals who know the business. (IMO)
- We have to continue to use digital marketing, especially on social media channels. (IMO)
- Invest in all areas of the marketing funnel (awareness, interest, consideration, purchase). (IMO)
- One of the most important lessons learned is that most people do not read. They focus on bullets or bold lettering only. A paragraph of text will be read by 1% of the audience. (IMO)
- Membership marketing is a mixture of both art and science. Understanding the issues for the sector and effectively communicating how your association is part of the answer they are seeking is tremendous ongoing work. Testing packages, offers, subject lines is absolutely critical to long-term success. (IMO)
- (1.) You have to be market and data-driven in all that you do—from creating valuable products & benefits for members to how you market them. "Build it and they will come" only works in the movies. (2.) Marketing is all about great storytelling—you need to know your audience and adjust your voice and your plot just a bit accordingly; start with something that grabs their attention and end with something that leaves them thinking. (Combination)
- Recruitment and retention are ongoing activities that should be embedded in every goal identified by the strategic plan. (Combination)
- I believe people still like the personal phone calls and talking with a membership person. (IMO)
- Most non-renewals are from a lack of making time to renew. Make it as easy as possible and communicate frequently. (Trade)
- Strategic importance of data acquisition, management, and automated dashboard reporting. (IMO)

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- Test 100 things per year, 5-10 will work...and those ideas that work add up to significant impact on performance. (IMO)
- It takes a lot of touches before you get your message heard. (Trade)
- Outsource for expertise that you don't have internally; develop strong value statements. (Trade)
- Use a multitude of channels. There are no silver bullet "one channel" strategies for membership. (IMO)



WHAT IMPACT HAS THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC HAD ON YOUR ASSOCIATION and how has your association responded?

- We are draining our reserves. Funds coming in are a fraction of what they were before but member and community need is great. We are flexible. (Combination)
- Retention wasn't hit as badly as expected but new member acquisition and reinstated members decreased quite a bit. I believe many were trying to wait on an investment until we had more certainty. We pivoted many of our programs to become virtual and provided pandemic resources to help professionals navigate supply chains during this unprecedented time. (Combination)
- Changed to an all-virtual meeting format. Working remotely, and even though we were supposed to move to a new office location, we are now considering staying remote all the time. (Trade)
- Still assessing. Early on, it looked like Armageddon; however, as it wore (or, has worn) on, we've been finding that more of our members are in better shape than originally feared. (Trade)
- COVID-19 has had a tremendous impact on us. At the start, we were sending out COVID updates every day (including weekends). We still send out several COVID-related updates each week and are on-call 24/7 to support our members as needed (crisis communication, staffing shortages, PPE availability, and now vaccine distribution plans). (Trade)
- We have grown, adding new members every week. We have put on additional staff to support the growth and now we are expanding in 2021. (Trade)
- It's a lost year (and maybe two). We pivoted to digital quickly and have maintained a robust calendar of events, with modest success. But, we haven't figured out a way to monetize those events and we're burning reserves. The impact on our financial health may extend well beyond the pandemic as it takes years of careful financial stewardship to build reserves and we're spending it now. (IMO)
- Working from home has now become the preferred method. We have worked from home since 19 March 2020 and the office was officially closed 1 November when the lease ran out. We adapted quickly by embracing Zoom and other delivery methods for public education and meetings. (IMO)
- At first, it united us. As time went on, it divided us due to a variety of strong, opposing opinions about how to respond to the pandemic. (IMO)
- The effects were financially devastating. Nearly all revenue-generating activities were canceled. Major cost reductions were enacted as well as a RIF. (Trade)



- The pandemic has had a positive impact on our association, with increased membership and engagement with our online member services. We have been able to add resources to deliver more online content in response to the pandemic. (IMO)
- It is tearing us apart; we've pivoted to offering a lot of virtual content, but by doing so we've lost focus on member value and have gutted our value proposition to leave little reason to renew dues. (IMO)
- Our members tend to renew when they attend meetings. They prefer in-person over virtual meetings. Without in-person meetings we've lost members until live meetings return. (Combination)
- Significant (11%) reduction in membership—but not as much as during 2008 or 2001 because of the miracle that is Zoom, and the fact that many of our members experienced a fiscally fabulous year. (IMO)
- We had to sell our tradeshow to ensure financial stability and continue serving the mission. We now need to develop a strategic plan to chart a new course. (Combination)
- COVID unleashed innovation and speed in adapting to a virtual environment for annual meetings and technical/business meetings. (Combination)
- Our revenue is down about 25%, but we did not have to tap into reserves due to staff frugality and innovation in the virtual space. (IMO)
- We have lost 70% of our revenue—devastating—layoffs, furloughs, etc., yet members expect a continuation of services for the dues they pay. (IMO)
- It has required us to be more innovative and agile, something we were always cautious about, but with COVID-19 found that we can do it, and do it well. (IMO)

Marketing General Incorporated has published the *Membership Marketing Benchmarking Report* annually since 2009. Every year, our research and creative teams put together this in-depth study of the strategies and tactics that membership organizations from the US and from around the world use to recruit new members, engage and renew those members, and reinstate lapsed members. We want to thank Bill Schaffner, Kimberly Humphries, Nicole Clark, and Stella Niblett for their support on this project.

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