# The Chapter
# of the Future

What if you could build your chapters from scratch? What would you keep? What would you toss out? What would your volunteers keep? And toss out?

*"The real voyage of discovery consists not in seeking new lands*
*but in seeing with new eyes."* – Marcel Proust

Join us in a voyage for a new model. Start here for some resources ...

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## Starting Facts

In associations, members naturally gravitate to groups within the association based on four elements first defined by research from the Forbes Group:

1. Discipline – ***What You Do***

2. Interest – ***What You Care About***

3. Issue – ***What Confronts You***

4. Location – ***Where You Are***

These groups are an association's components—or member communities. Our traditional special interest groups (SIGs), communities of practice (CoPs), specialty sections and a myriad of ad hoc self-forming groups evolve from the first three. Chapters (sometimes referred to sections or affiliates) are all about location. The purpose: maximize opportunity for and value of face-to-face interaction among members.

**Fact:** Volunteers provide the energy fueling component—SIG, CoP, chapter—activity.

**Fact:** Associations have committed significant resources to components. An ASAE & The Center survey on how associations are supporting and measuring components reported that nearly 80% offer some level of administrative support largely at no cost while nearly 50% have at least one full-time staff person devoted to components activities – in addition to a median budget of $55,000 direct dollars. (Full report here.)

**Fact:**  In a 2006 industry survey conducted by Whorton Marketing & Research and Mariner Management & Marketing, we found that more than 40% of survey respondents indicate, in essence, that the chapter's presence has a positive effect on their likely future renewal in the sense that, if chapters did not exist, they would be less likely to participate. (Full report here.)

## Fundamental Questions Each Association Needs to Answer

The disconnect comes when we are applying scarce resources—volunteer energy and time and association funds—and our components are not succeeding.

- What is the chapter offering that is unique to it?
- How do we measure performance – not activity, but true outcomes?
- What level of structure and support by the parent organization will ensure each chapter fulfills its purpose without under- or over-utilizing the volunteer pool available?
- What level of effort are volunteers willing to give?

## Volunteer Reply

Mariner's research with volunteers from dozens of organizations along with ASAE & The Center's groundbreaking research on the Decision To Volunteer tell us...

*What today's volunteers & members are asking for at the local level:*
- Fun

- Connections
- Making a difference
- Flexibility
- Balance

*What today's volunteers & members chafe at:*
- Re-inventing the wheel
- Meetings for the sake of meeting
- Paperwork (without connection to results)
- Standing committees
- Lengthy required time-commitments

Essentially, volunteers asked for less paperwork and less red tape. Most asked for easier systems and processes. All asked for clarity on responsibilities and solutions for nagging tasks, including database management, communications, and event planning. All demanded a chapter that was led—not managed. And a few brave volunteers asked for a vision—and an answer to why chapters are there.

*"We live in a Knowledge Worker Age but operate our organizations*
*in a controlling Industrial Age Model that absolutely suppresses*
*the release of the human potential."* – Stephen R. Covey

## The Balancing Act

The question is: How do we balance those two lists while addressing the concerns of liability, risk management, brand management, and customer service from the national perspective?  For two associations, American Society of Interior Designers (ASID) and  The American Association of Diabetes Educators (AADE), the breakthrough was when the organization realized that national and local associations share the same customer: the members. It wasn't about the organizations; it was about the members.

The fundamental question then is: What form will facilitate the core function of the chapter to meet the members' needs? Or, stated slightly differently: What level of structure and support should be imposed by the parent organization to ensure each chapter fulfills its purpose—meeting members' needs—without under- or over-utilizing the volunteer pool available?

Answer what will make the difference for members and how you will measure success to find the structure that will deliver. In many cases, the structure required isn't much more than a steering committee that gathers to plan and host a series of gatherings, keeps its eyes on the local community and its ear to the ground to discern issues and concerns, and serves as an ongoing communication channel.

Some local groups get or are large enough to warrant more structure. But even the largest needs to be nimble enough to associate on the fly. In the article "Preparing for the Open-Range Future" in Association Management, author Bruce Butterfield noted, "The problem lies in the practice of over-structuring in an increasingly unstructured world." He challenges us to reduce structure to allow members to associate when and how they need and want to do so.

## Traditional Model Weakness: Mismatch of Structure to Level of Activity

This chart shows that many of today's chapters produce activities of a size below the minimum threshold, but remain saddled with an administrative burden disproportionate to the level of activity appropriate or possible for the chapter.

The consequence: volunteers burn an excessive number of calories meeting irrelevant compliance standards rather than member-centric and size-appropriate performance standards. The result: volunteers don't step up, participation goes down.
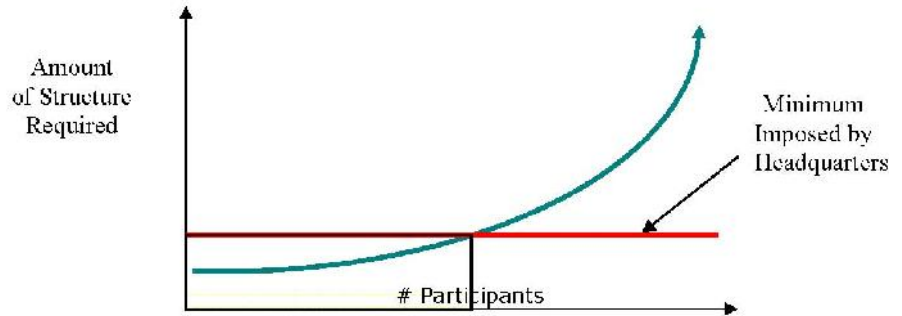


## Chapter of the Future
**Driven first by function, _then_ by form**

| CHAPTER OF TODAY | CHAPTER OF THE FUTURE |
|---|---|
| Chapter Charter | Principals of Affiliation |
| Board of Directors | NA * |
| Articles of Incorporation/By-Laws | NA * |
| Elections | NA * |
| Standing Committees | Task-Oriented Teams |
| Regular Meetings | Meet Only As Needed |
| Bank Account | HQ Funding Pool |
| 1-up Communications Systems (e.g. Web, Email) | Centralized Communications Systems |
| Limited Program Management Expertise (Event Planning, Marketing/Comm, Etc.) | Program Management Expertise Highly Supported or Provided Directly by HQ |
| Limited Member Needs Assessment | Needs Assessment Tools & Data Supplemented or Provided Directly by HQ |
| Awards Based on Activity Rather than Results | Awards Based on Results Rather than Activity |
| Knowledge Uncollected | Knowledge Harvested & Shared |

*Some chapters may eventually achieve a financial size that requires some traditional structure, such as a central governing body, incorporation, formal by-laws.*

## Jump-Starting the Next Phase

We have been seeing a migration to "alliances" or "chapter-lite" models in the past five or so years. The Association of Women in Communications and CPCU, the Chartered Property Casualty Underwriter association, were early adopters of committee-run, less structured chapter models. ASID made a cultural shift when it restructured its chapter program. They described the shift as "moving the focus from 'broken' chapters to members." The shift embraced the downsized boards, limited structure at the chapter level and instituted a new staff structure which went from a silo-ed chapter department to a decentralized chapter support. All-in-all it was based on fewer rules and functionality versus status. ASID has put self-determination in force at the local level.

AADE's new structure broke down further walls. They moved to a state coordinating body—a team led by co-leaders—with oversight for the state and informal networking groups at the local level. They shifted key operational tasks, including banking, financial management, event registration and communications, to the national office. Read the [Case Study](#).

If you're looking at fixing your broken chapters or simply finding a way to maximize your chapters, consider these questions:

- What do members want from the association?
- Where do they want to access those things?
- For those services they want at the local level, what are they willing to do to get them?

Ask these questions of staff:

- What are you offering to members?
- Where are they provided—locally, nationally?
- Where are they most effectively (and efficiently) provided (locally versus nationally)?
- What is a less restrictive structure needed to deliver those services locally?
- How do we measure success?
- Are we training, recognizing, and rewarding based on those measures of success?

By engaging staff and volunteers to work together to answer these questions, you can have success in creating a chapter that works. Join the conversation on the Chapter of Future—visit our blog to join the conversation or contact us to map out your own exploration.

## Additional Questions for Reflection

1. How have the changing demographics affected your association and its chapters in terms of engagement and volunteerism?
2. Where are your chapters producing measurable value?

3.  In what areas are your chapters struggling most?

4.  Where is the opportunity for associations in having chapters? As brand-extenders? As incubators for new products, new business lines, new strategies? As new avenues and types of member engagement? As new marketing strategies? As new governing strategies?

5.  How can your association assess the "business opportunity" in having chapters?

6.  If you could net the same results from forging collaborations or partnerships rather than chapters, which would you choose?

7.  Self-forming groups (e.g., LinkedIn, Google Groups, Meet-Up, giving circles), Chapter Lite (e.g., ASID), teams, local networking groups (e.g., book clubs, travel clubs, Chat, Chew, Chocolate), corporate model (e.g., Starbucks, franchises) abound … are these formats possibilities for your association?

8.  What do your members need to form communities? What are the make-or-break elements for their success?

9.  Looking at your mission and goals, is there a relevant role that chapters uniquely serve?

10. If you were to build a member community from scratch, what would the new model look like?

## Additional Resources

- Dreyer, Lindy and Maddie Grant, CAE. *Open Community.* (Omnipress, 2010)
- Fernandez, Kim, "Chapter/National Relations: Pulling Together or Pulling Apart," *ASSOCIATIONS NOW* (2008)
- Gazley, Beth and Monica Dignam. *The Decision To Volunteer.* (ASAE, 2008)
- Hoffman, Peggy, CAE, Blog Series on New Chapter Models at www.MarinerManagement.com:
    - "Throwing Out the Bath Water, Not the Baby"
    - " The New Competition for Association Chapters"
    - "Chapter Struggling? Here's a Thought"
    - "Lesson for Chapter Structure in Obama's Campaign"
    - "Chat, Chew, Chocolate—A Different Chapter Model"
    - "Four Lessons for Building a New Chapter Model"

## About Peggy Hoffman & Peter Houstle

Peggy and Peter are managing partners at Mariner Management & Marketing, an association management company specializing in component relations. As such, Mariner serves as the chapter office for four organizations. In additional to managing organizations, Peggy and Peter help national associations create stronger partnerships with their chapters and councils. They have spoken, facilitated or managed leadership conferences and strategic planning meetings for more than two dozen national organizations. One of their tools, the Dashboard Indicators for Chapter Success, has been used by many associations and local chapters to help plan for success, and is highlighted in ASAE's Component Relations Handbook and its online Principals of Component Relations. Peggy also helped design and facilitates ASAE Advanced Component Relations online course.  In addition, Peter and Peggy are co-founders and active in a chapter of the future in action: Association Networking Exchange. For more information, visit www.MarinerManagement.com.