The Evolution of the Chapter

> *"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

Chapters have been around as long as associations and in quite a few instances pre-date their respective national/international association. The need to have the face-to-face "in my neighborhood" connections remains strong. What's changed is the need for a mini-version of the national organization and all the infrastructure to accommodate that.

Pre-technology / pre-internet we needed small organizations to reach our members. Associations still think of chapters as organizations rather communities thus we create metrics around operations rather than value delivered. Meanwhile, our members want to make change by working on things they are passionate about. If associations launched projects rather than organizations, they could leverage the passion of the members to create value.

We can't have this conversation without also acknowledging the great shift in volunteering and its impact particularly on member components. The Decision To Volunteer (ASAE, 2008) showed us that nearly 60% of members prefer ad-hoc or micro volunteering and the lack of these types of volunteer opportunities and inflexibility in volunteering are the leading cause for low volunteering rates. Volunteers face a time-intensive job to dot all the I's and cross all the T's required for a traditional incorporated entity. They are still being asked to "run" an organization. Tomorrow's leaders look at the situation and simply refuse to participate.

Associations Respond

As associations grapple with low-performing chapters or inadequate resources, especially volunteers, for chapters, some have shifted structures, others shifted support and others limited scope of the chapters. On structure, we're seeing a move to informal groups or chapter lite as well as downsizing governance requirements. On support, we're seeing association assume responsibility for key areas such as banking and accounting, event planning and registration, data management, and communications. Alternately, they are offering access to turn-key solutions. Limiting the scope is about requiring less from chapters; chapters don't have to offer all products and services, just those of interest in their area.

Here are a few options from the association community and the for-profit sector.

Organic, Free-form Chapters

The Interaction Design Association (IxDA) is a member-supported organization dedicated to the practice of interaction design. Since its launch in 2003, IxDA has grown into a global network of more than 100,000 members and over 200 Local groups. In 50 countries around the globe, IxDA members self-organize on a regular basis to connect, learn and inspire.
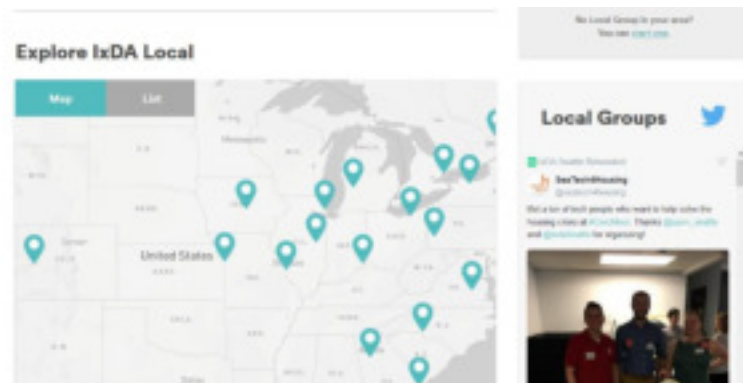
The common structure is an informal group with a volunteer leadership team. A local group can be as involved or as light as a leader wants it to be: Maybe it's a few folks getting together once every few months as a social networking gathering, working on ideas and brainstorming together, or a large group of folks getting together once a month to discuss a topic or attend a presentation. Leaders have the freedom to fit it to the needs of their area. The ultimate goal is "to get interaction designers learning and sharing with each other!" Less than 10% have bank accounts and even fewer are incorporated. IxDA global facilitates online tools for those groups interested – including registration, conference calling, code repositories, and more – making it easy to find, form, engage and lead. Groups use a variety of online platforms as home base: IxDA webpage, website, LinkedIn, Facebook, Ning or Meetup.com. A group of volunteer Regional Coordinators serve as contacts for the local group offering support, advice and connection to the global organization. View the Local Group Application for an example of how IxDA positions local groups.

Hub & Spokes Model

North Carolina Association of CPAs (NCACPA) chapters were evolved in 2016 to the MY Member Community which leverages the online community as the hub for virtual groups, Networking groups and meet-ups (check out their video). Their website describes the options in this way:

Are you looking to network with a group around a shared interest/practice area, or meet up with a group of peers on the fly? NCACPA can help you facilitate two types of gatherings:

- **Networking groups**—These are smaller groups that will get together regularly to meet around shared interests or ideas. NCACPA will provide you with tools and resources to help facilitate your networking group and make group communication easy.
- **Meet-ups**—These are more informal, organic gatherings based on shared interest, location, or people. You can arrange these through Connect or Volunteer Match, and NCACPA is here to help you get started!

Networking Group Model

The **American Physical Society** has a variety of autonomous units in which members can participate based on scientific specialty (divisions and topical groups), geographic (section), and demographic (forums). When the society identified an underserved group critical to its strategic plan, they opted to consider a different model and created the APS Local Links. Different than the autonomous units, these Local Links are an extension of the Society with the intent to develop mutually beneficial links between academia and industry by connecting industry professionals, early career physicists, students, and faculty in geographically centered areas.

The basic structure is an informal networking group with a small leadership team. The frequency of meeting is determined by the group with the target to meet frequently either face-to-face or virtually to share ideas, learn about current academic and industrial research, build relationships, network, and potentially encourage recruitment of students and postdocs into industries. Groups are encouraged to set-up a LinkedIn group (example).

> **Is there an ideal size?**
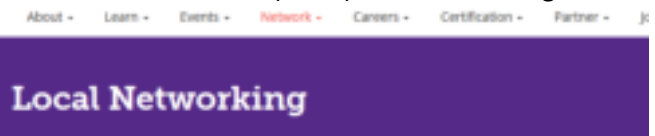> No. The measure of success is the energy of the group.
>
> **Are APS Local Link participants members of APS?**
> There is no requirement to join APS to participate; however, membership is encouraged! Plus APS has a discounted Early Career Membership which gives eligible participants tangible benefits and connections around the world.
>
> **Can APS Local Links hold formal events?**
> Generally speaking, Local Link events will be smaller, less formal events like social gatherings, lunch-n-learns, or networking with a speaker. It is not expected that Local Links will put on conferences or all day events. APS has a wide variety of formal events that members can attend so Local Links do not need to duplicate efforts. Visit our calendar for a current listing.

CXPA – Customer Experience Professionals Association's CXPA Networks are organized and led by volunteer members of the Customer Experience Professionals Association (CXPA) to serve to bring together customer experience professionals based on geographical location. Events are held on a semi-annual, quarterly or monthly basis with speakers, panels and/or networking. Attendance is free at most of these events and attendees are encouraged to connect, learn and share ideas and best practices. The CXPA provides white glove service to members that are willing to form a local team and CX professionals interested in joining the group are introduced through email. This program is viewed as a critical part of the association's mission to bring CX professionals together to learn and grow from one another.

SHRM-Atlanta augmented its more traditional chapters with Regional Development Communities (RDCs) - formerly known as Geographic Emphasis Meetings (GEMS) – which provide a more intimate setting for additional networking and learning as well as programming in convenient locations across metro-Atlanta. These communities are small (average 20-40 attendees), so formal leadership, and meet less frequently (about four times a year, typically during lunch or after work).

Franchise Club Model

Chat, Chew and Chocolate is an "inspirational friendship club for busy women" and is included here because it offers a look at a model of a licensed chapter is which the Hostess Director pays 1-time fee for which they get a manual, party in a box, phone and web support and training. And this Director can make money on the special events if they want to. Members don't pay dues, they pay an event registration. And, they aren't called upon to take a role like running the next event. The Director (think new name for president) has a clearly defined task, ample support and incentive. Members pay as they go so they equate the "dues" with a use fee; makes seeing the value of the dollar a little clearer. The chapter exists simply to create and nurture community - not to do long reports, hold elections, update bylaws, etc. etc. And the chapter is measured on its ability to create community aka bring women to an event not on how many points they get for completing tasks. At one point, the organization had 26 chapters – like Phoenix – and 15, 000 members. [Original blog post http://www.marinermanagement.com/resources/blog/2008-08-27/chat-chew-chocolate-different-chapter-model]

Combination Model

American Association of Diabetes Educators (AADE) replaced its traditional chapter program with a state-based program that features a state Coordinating Body (CB) with Local Networking Groups (LNG). The financial, database and web management is handled by AADE offices in Chicago. This streamlines the responsibilities and the workload of volunteers. The volunteer structure is based on an adhocracy model. An online community portal, called MY AADE NETWORK, is the hub.

They have a unified membership which means one membership fee includes national, state, local and virtual communities of practice are all included.

Similarly to AADE, the **Council of Residential Specialists** evolved their individual chapters into a model with regional networks that had local networking groups associated with the state or regional core group. Led by leadership teams with all administration handled by CRS, these groups focus on delivering education, networking and community outreach.

For-Profit Sector Embraces Chapter-Like Model

Thousands of organizations are recognizing that people want both virtual and face-to-face connections based on a shared passion or commitment. And they are responding by harnessing the power of social tools (many which are free Meetup.com) to facilitate this. Each becomes a story that further shows our members there is an easier, less expensive, less hassle, less time-consuming, fun way to get the face-to-face connection. And if you aren't offering the same, they will look outside or minimally just say "no thanks" to the burdening obligation of your chapter. Some will even say, hey I can use Meet-up.

WordPress launched the **WordPress Meetup** with a grandiose proclamation in January on the WordPress blog: "We hereby declare 2012 as the Year of the WordPress Meetup. You'll want to get in on this action." It is breaking the game wide-open. They define the WordPress Meetup simply as "people in a community getting together — meeting up — who share an interest in WordPress, whether they be bloggers, business users, developers, consultants, or any other category of person able to say, 'I use WordPress ….'"
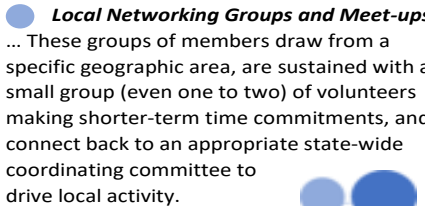
Look at little closer at the promise WordPress makes: "Running a popular group takes time and money … We don't want it to cost anything for someone to run a WordPress meetup, or to attend one — building local communities should be as free as WordPress itself." Notice how WordPress understands that people don't want extra work. And instead of approaching the question of "how do we connect people geographically" they didn't start with form: let's have chapters. They started with function: people want to learn from each other, share examples, get hands-on help, etc. [Original blog post http://www.marinermanagement.com/resources/blog/2012-03-17/new-competition-our-association-chapters]
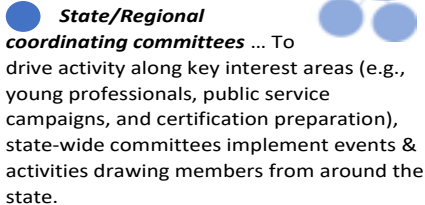
In 2012 **Match.com** rolled out **Stir events** to bring singles (specifically its "members") together offline. It was a push to take the cold, impersonal aspect of the membership to a warm, personal level (sounds like our chapters). 400K singles attended in 2-year period. In the summer of 2017, Match is offering singles more than 600 Match Events**,** found through a searchable Bucket List Event Series. The list offers everything from photography classes, paddle boarding, flying lessons, hiking excursions and day trips. You can use their app Bucket List to search opportunities. What if our associations matched members and activities and people based on a bucket list of professional goals? The quote from their promotional video captures why it's working: *"…love because it's an activity you can do as well as meeting people. Seems more natural to go into a batting cage or cooking class or a whiskey tasting …"*
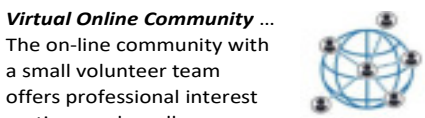

DRIVING MEMBER COMMUNITY

Activity occurs in three spaces: local, state or regional and virtual. This focuses on empowering members to drive activity and connections rather than "run" mini-associations.

● *Local Networking Groups and Meet-ups* … These groups of members draw from a specific geographic area, are sustained with a small group (even one to two) of volunteers making shorter-term time commitments, and connect back to an appropriate state-wide coordinating committee to drive local activity.

● *State/Regional coordinating committees* … To drive activity along key interest areas (e.g., young professionals, public service campaigns, and certification preparation), state-wide committees implement events & activities drawing members from around the state.

Virtual Online Community … The on-line community with a small volunteer team offers professional interest sections and smaller mastermind or member-formed communities which draw like- minded members from across the state into groups for peer-to- peer knowledge sharing and networking. We are enabling of-the-moment, ad-hoc communities or virtual meet-ups to form to address a topic that surfaces on the established forums or through calls to the office. These ad-hoc communities can be easily sunset as well.

The "glue" is the Association central office which provides the administrative support services, volunteer development and support, the online community and the membership product.
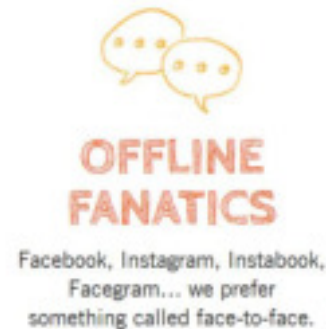
Twitter led to tweet-ups and some of these have spawned community. **NASA Social** provides a look at a national organization can engage people at a local level without the chapter trimmings. NASA Social started as @NASATweetup which gathered Twitter followers to in-person events like launches. Now it includes both special in-person events and social media credentials for individuals who share the news. This journey which began with the fans and their own @NASATweetup and wiki evolved to be a program of the central organization. In partnership, NASA Social and NASATweetUp provide a rich example for associations.

According to the stats from Wikipedia there have been at least 120 Tweetups since 2009 drawing engaging more than 7500 people.

This video clip offers some advice such as *"You as a community has to own it & so you have to take responsibility … and you have. It shouldn't be a NASA thing, it should be your experience and we come to your thing."* And a statement that the model will constantly evolve: *"I don't see tweet-ups as what we'll be doing in even 2 years. It'll be something else."*

Bisnow is a story about how an empire started on the premise of news and grew as it connected the newsmakers and the news readers in cool events. They opened their e-shop because "people within local business communities are as interested in their fellow industry players, partners and friends as they are in the industry itself." What they soon found out is that people like to read but really like to meet.

OFFLINE FANATICS

Facebook, Instagram, Instabook, Facegram… we prefer something called face-to-face.

Part of what makes them work is their mantra: Socially-Oriented, Hyper-Local, More Fun Than a Whoopie Cushion. What they teach us is that a successful formula is being available 24/7 and in the evening (afternoon, morning) nearby. In doing so, they have had a major impact on associations but drawing away members to their events and creating competing value as an often lower cost, more accessible and a larger community.

Bisnow also organizes approximately 250 annual events – monthly or quarterly in 29 US cities, London and Toronto – attracting approximately 70,000 attendees.]

THE FACTS

HUGE CROWDS | TOP LEVEL | LIVELY

Meetup.com, the platform of choice for Wordpress as noted above, is by all accounts the world's largest network of local groups. Easy may be the word to best describe this platform as it easy for anyone to

organize a local group or find one of the thousands already meeting to join. The take-away for associations include how they support leaders, approach pricing and create opportunities.

Members	Meetup Groups	Countries	Monthly Meetups	Monthly RSVPs	Meetups Happening Now
32.30 million	288,726	182	614,764	3.90 million	9,689

Supporting the leader comes through simple community guidelines, accessible, user-friendly portal and tools like how to step down as organizer. They are constantly evolving and most recently that had to do with pricing. They are now offering tiers in pricing and of course the options for organizers to decide to charge "dues".

The success can be seen in how it drives engagement by focusing on the individuals which also is what assures a group's sustainability. Take Eugene Coneglan's story which you can read in detail on the Meetup Blog. He joined Wellington, New Zealand's Adventure Wellington Meetup on July 4, 2011 and has since participated in more than 1000 of their 3,900 Meetups all centering on getting the body moving. Coneglan shares that the Meet-ups work because they provide an experience that you wouldn't have possibly been able to do on your own and in a way that helps develop new skills.

The result doesn't stop there as Coneglan demonstrates how this experience and enthusiasm within the group draws in leaders. In his short tenure, the Meetup's leadership team has swelled to 37 members and watching members turn into Meetup leaders, he says, is one of the most rewarding parts of his experience. "People grow as part of the group," he explains.

What can you take away from these examples? I think this is a wake-up call to us. How can we unburden our groups? How can we re-imagine our local "meet-ups"?

> *The problem lies in the practice of over-structuring in an increasingly unstructured world. We are challenged to reduce structure to allow members to associate **when and how they need and want to do so.***
>
> – Bruce Butterfield, Forbes Group