

A Look at What's Changing for Chapters



2022 Chapter Performance

& Benchmarking Report

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MANAGEMENT & MARKETING

While we all felt the rumblings in chapters before 2020, the past 22 months have been an exercise in jumping over deepening cracks in the system. We saw chapters go dormant, and others burst with activity and new faces. Disruption has opened a door for us to explore new options for chapters and chapter programs.



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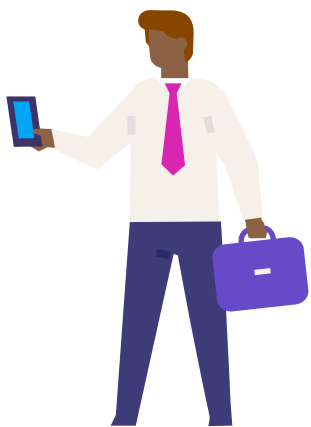
In response to this continuous change, Billhighway and Mariner expanded our traditional survey by adding focus groups, interviews, and two new surveys — all to explore key questions and topics, such as:

- 1 How are chapters navigating the new normal?
- 2 What's important to chapter leaders?
- 3 What's important to association CEOs?
- 4 Are associations changing how they manage and relate to their chapters?
- 5 What support and services should we give our chapters?
- 6 How should we evaluate our chapters?
- 7 Are chapters still relevant?
- 8 How aligned are we to the standard practices for chapter membership, programming, metrics, and requirements?

We gathered this data on chapter programs to serve as a resource for benchmarking, sharing innovations in chapter management, and starting conversations about the future of chapters.

This report incorporates data analysis from three surveys directed to CEOs, CRPs (or association staff overseeing chapter operations), and chapter leaders, along with findings from CEO roundtables and focus groups—all complemented by insights gained over several decades of managing and consulting with hundreds of associations.

Let's explore what we gathered and learned.



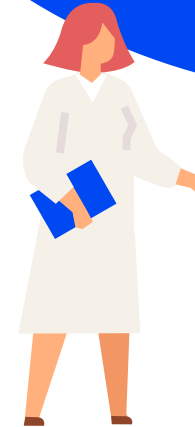
CEO



CRP



CEO Roundtables



Chapter Leader



CRP Focus Groups

SECTION 01

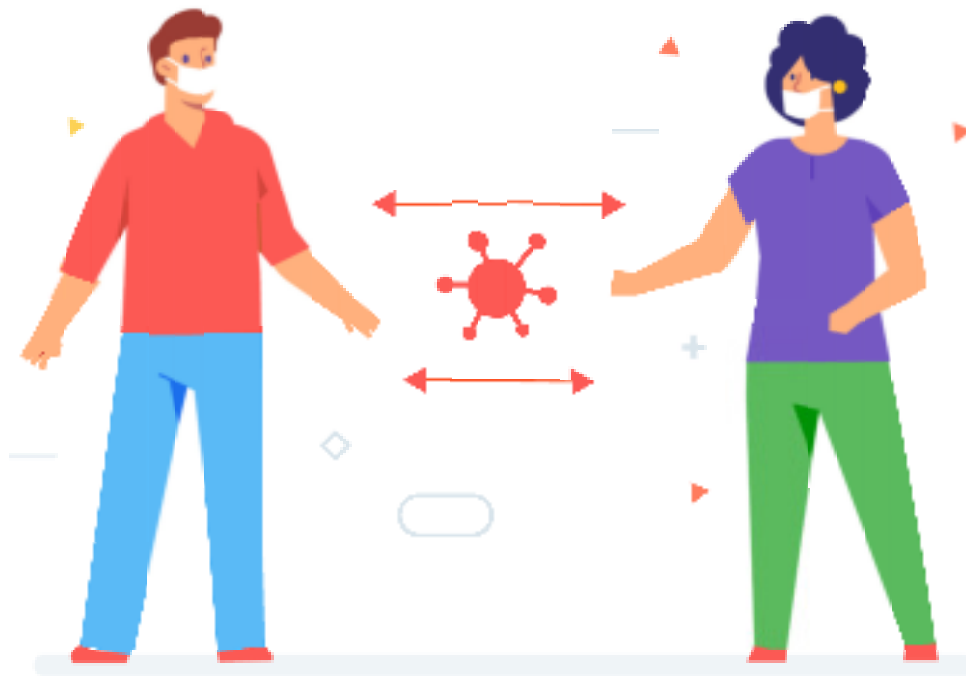
What the Chapter Benchmarking Data Tells Us

2022 Chapter Performance & Benchmarking Report



2020 Was a Wake-Up Call

While our quantitative surveys didn't look directly at the impact of the pandemic, discussions with CEOs, CRPs, and clients, as well as, findings from [*ASAE Foresight Works: A World Reshaped by COVID*](#) uncovered several common themes characterizing the chapter response to COVID-19.



20th century form limited 21st century function

An antiquated organizational structure limited chapters' ability to adapt to a virtual environment. While some pivoted successfully, many lacked the flexible and innovative mindset, resources, and/or technology to shift quickly to the virtual format.



Time zones, rather than geography, redefined operational boundaries

The shift to a virtual environment produced several interesting side effects. Many chapter members who had never participated in traditional in-person events showed up for virtual programs—suggesting an opportunity for responsive chapters to expand their value proposition beyond those members willing to get in a car. Yet, paradoxically, this shift also placed chapters in direct competition with programs delivered by the central organization (association headquarters/HQ) and other chapters.



Good leadership still matters

Chapters that adapted well to the pandemic benefited from good leadership—flexible, innovative, empathetic, business-savvy, problem-solving leaders. This fundamental attribute of effective organizations is especially important in an environment of uncertainty and radical change—and it applies regardless of technology.


Are Chapters Worth the Effort?

Associations find chapters struggle to make the grade.

This question continues to stump the association community. **Only 30% of CEOs offered an unqualified “absolutely” when asked if chapters are worth the effort and organizational resources devoted to them.**

The answers of the remaining 70% ranged from “probably” to “absolutely not” with an average score of 2.8 on a 5-point scale, a less than passing grade. CRPs gave an only slightly better score of 2.9.



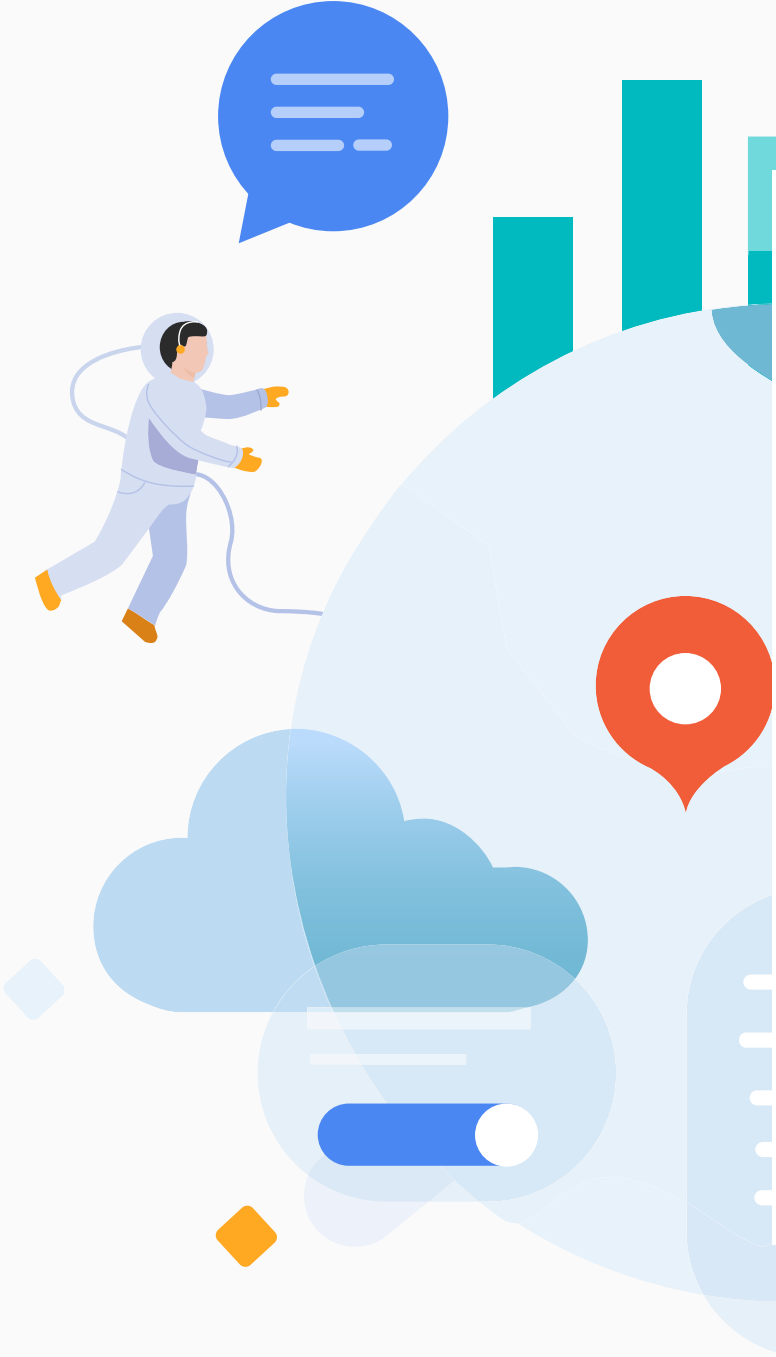


Associations lack valid chapter performance data.

Based on the CEO and CRP surveys, roundtables, and focus groups, the uncertainty likely derives from fuzzy metrics caused by the persistent lack of valid chapter performance data.

Only 22% of associations surveyed reported having direct access to a full range of chapter data while 39% reported no access at all.

Most associations rely on chapter-reported or anecdotal information which, on our close inspection, is usually incomplete and/or inaccurate in far too many cases.

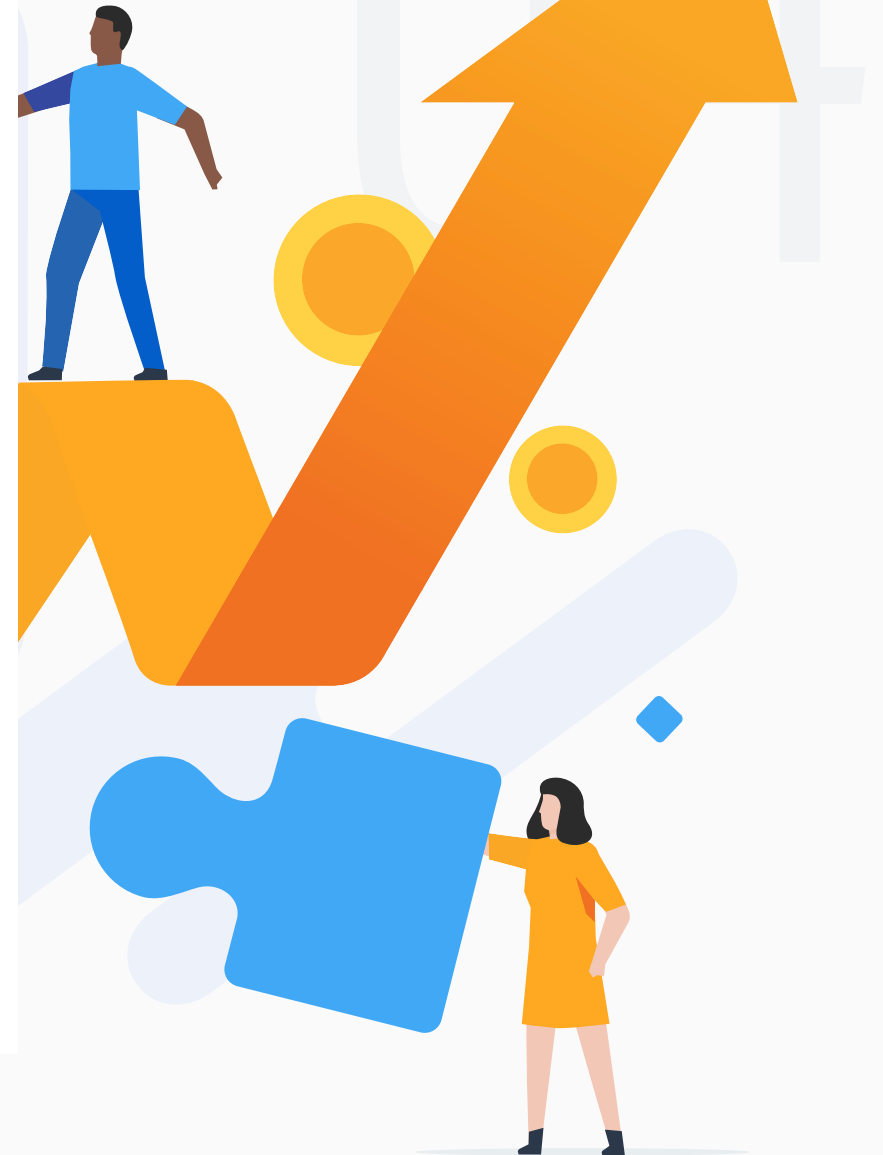


Associations need a local presence for networking, education, and advocacy.

In our qualitative research, CEOs and CRPs agreed their **associations need a local presence for networking, education, and advocacy**. Yet, without data, CEOs and CRPs struggle to confidently affirm the quality and value of chapter performance in these areas. Given the extensive range of programs and services offered by associations to support their chapters, it would seem associations need a more effective chapter data management system, one that provides a reliable measure of member value and engagement in chapter programs.

Association support does not produce better chapter performance.

We detected no obvious positive correlation between headquarters support and consequent chapter effectiveness—sadly, **more HQ support did not seem to produce better chapter performance.** This persistent ambiguity should be a red flag to associations when considering the allocation of scarce resources. If HQ provides the same support, such as leadership training, year after year, but chapter performance doesn't improve, it's time to evaluate and revamp the type of support provided. We're not arguing that chapters aren't worth the resources or effort, but associations must address the severe limitations of their current model of chapter performance assessment. Addressing this will permit associations to more effectively support chapters.



The Farm Team Paradox

Another stumbling block in answering the “are chapters worth the effort” question is the commonly stated challenge that **chapters represent a “third rail” that severely limits the association’s ability to implement major changes in the chapter system.**

In the survey and roundtables, a third or more of CEOs said chapters represent an important leadership development channel for their associations. As a result, **chapters may have, by proxy, a significant influence on the association board.**

Although this level of chapter representation doesn’t necessarily pose a problem, our extensive chapter volunteer management experience and research suggests that the uneven and often flawed leadership development practices seen in many chapters may be seriously hampering the “farm team” model. **Chapter leaders elevated to the association’s board of directors are often unable to remove their “chapter hat” and think strategically about the needs of the association.**

The Chapter Training Paradox

How we are training and preparing our chapter volunteers isn’t meeting the association’s needs at the chapter level or when they move to the national level. Over three-quarters of the CRPs surveyed said their association allocates substantial resources to chapter leader training via leadership conferences and webinars. The bulk of this training is designed to help volunteers learn how to manage the logistics of running a chapter (finance, communications, events, etc.), not the strategic needs of a membership organization hence the disconnect with chapter leaders as the farm team.

Volunteers have limited time to devote to developing chapter management skills, and when they finally (if ever) master them, it’s time for a new leadership team to assume office. Given chapter leaders’ limited time and inevitable turnover, **associations should allocate more resources to technology that shores up the operational functions of their chapters.** Volunteer leaders could then focus their limited time and energy on program design, member service, and strategic planning. A technology solution would also improve the quality, consistency, and accessibility of chapter performance data. Without this data, associations still don’t have a conclusive answer on the true ROI of chapters.

How to Use This Report

To assist in benchmarking, this report provides information on:



Chapter profile: the chapter/association relationship in terms of legal and membership structure, dues, tax filings, and more.



Association support: the services and support, such as training and resources, provided—from the perspective of CRPs and chapter leaders.



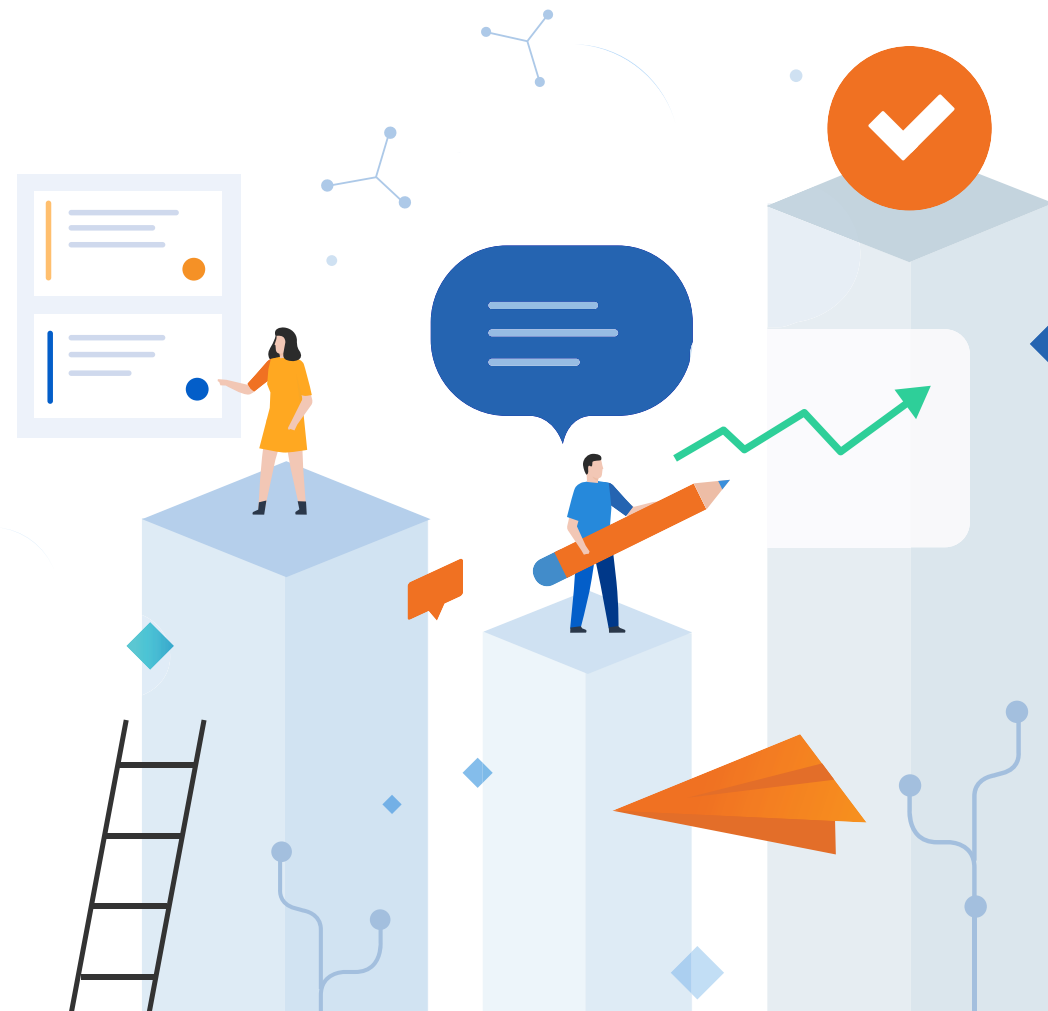
Performance assessment and metrics: the perceived effectiveness of chapters, from the perspective of CEOs, CRPs, and chapter leaders, and chapter performance metrics.



Chapter value: how associations view the value of chapters, based on their expected role, risks and concerns, effectiveness, and ROI.

While we designed this research project to help your association benchmark its chapter system against others, you'll derive a far greater value by using it as a catalyst for internal conversations about chapter effectiveness and an honest evaluation of the assumptions on which your chapter system operates.

Throughout this report, we suggest Conversation Starters to help you address common chapter orthodoxies and begin discussions about new directions.



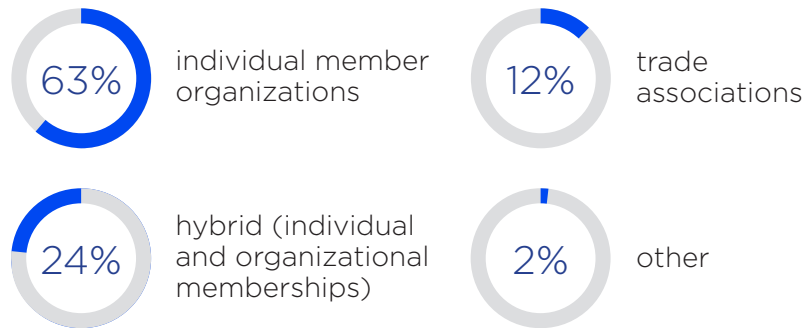
SECTION 02

The Chapter Profile



Organization Structure & Relationship

The respondent pool from 112 associations represents a diverse group of member organizations:



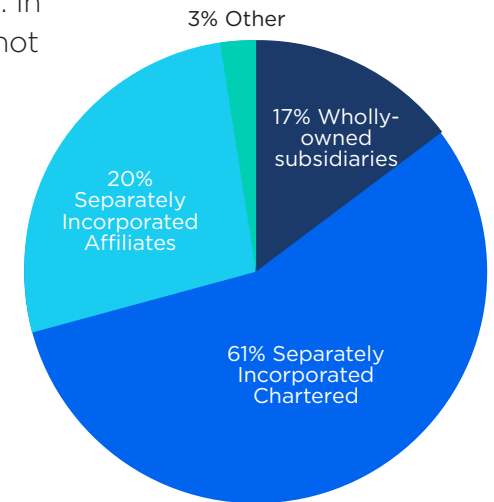
These organizations have an average of 74 chapters, each with an average of 308 members per chapter. The majority (68%) are state-based. Slightly less than half of the responding associations (47%) indicated they were global and have an average of 13 chapters outside the U.S.

The average number of individual members for respondent associations was approximately 42,000 (median = 15,000).

Majority of chapters cannot exist independently of Headquarters

For 78% of respondents, the central organization (HQ) has significant control over its chapters: 61% operate as separately incorporated chartered organizations and 17% are wholly-owned subsidiaries. In these cases, the chapters cannot exist independently of HQ. 20% reported an independent affiliate structure and 3% are “other.”

The “other” category, although small, reflects a blend of structures, in part to provide different approaches to chapters outside the U.S.



Key Definitions:

Chapters are **subsidiaries** of the central organization, i.e., they are a single corporation. Chapters are separate organizations **chartered** by the central organization, i.e., chapters cannot exist independently of the central organization. Chapters are separate organizations **affiliated** with the central organization, i.e., chapters can exist independently of the central organization.

Note: while we refer to “separately incorporated” to indicate chartered chapters, they may not all be legally incorporated; they are, however, legally independent from HQ.

Number of Chapters

Associations reported an average of 74 chapters, with an average of 308 members per chapter and medians of 51 and 196, respectively.



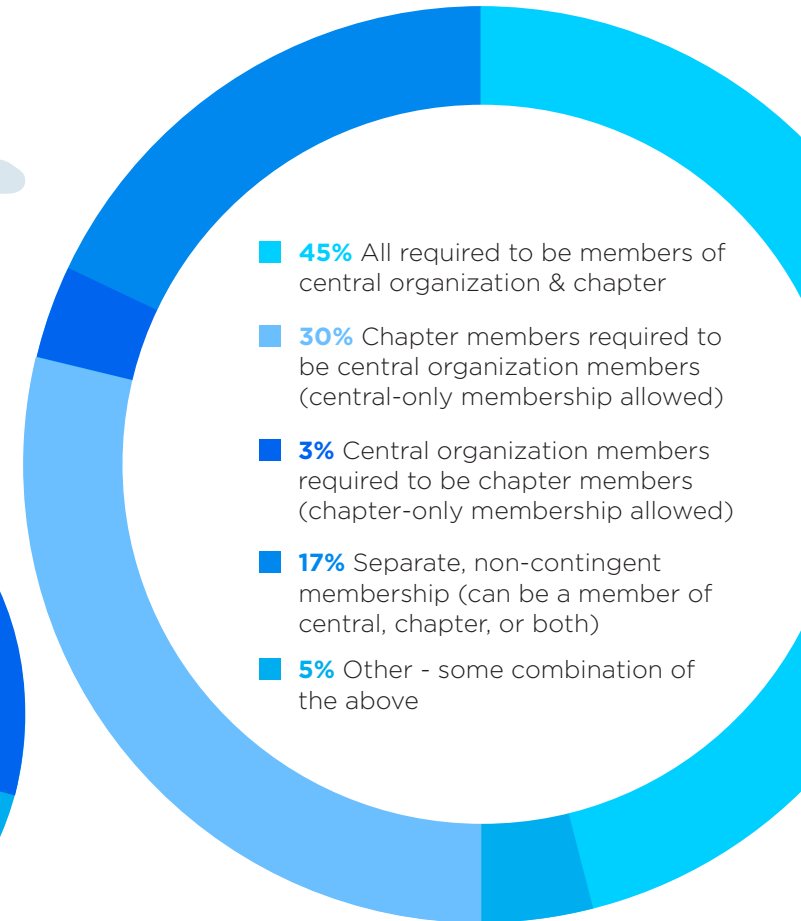
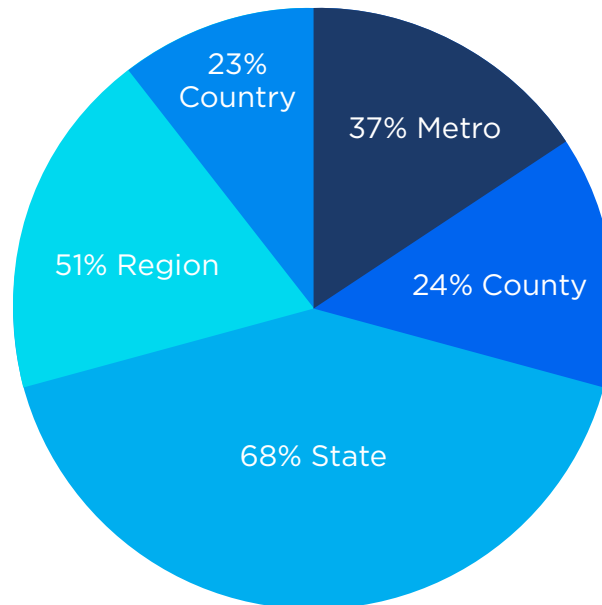
Membership & Dues Structure

Slightly less than half of the associations (45%) require chapter members to be members of the central organization (HQ) while about a third have a non-contingent membership, i.e., one can be a member of either or both.

Chapter Boundaries

Over a third of respondents (38%) reported a mix of boundary options. States were the most common boundary (68%).

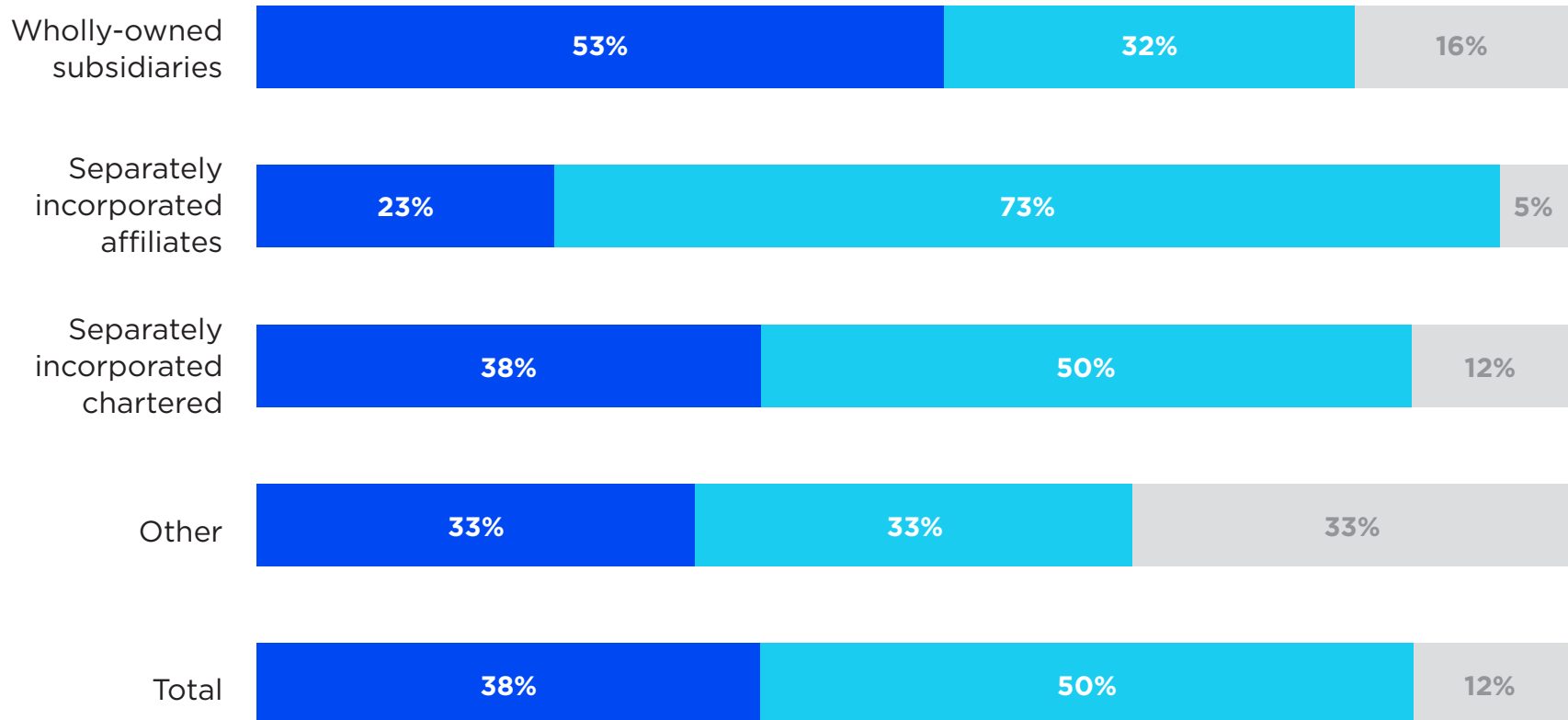
This chart represents more than 100% because some organizations have multiple hierarchical or geographical boundaries. For example, an organization may have state chapters and metro chapters within the state.



Relationship by How Dues are Charged

50% of associations charge separate dues, while 38% charge unified dues that include chapter dues. Unified dues could refer to a member making a single payment for both memberships to either HQ or their chapter. Dollars are then split, and each party receives its share. This scenario could also mean a single payment to HQ if there are no chapter dues. Separate dues are most prevalent in organizations with separately incorporated affiliates (73%).

■ Unified ■ Separate ■ Other



Dues Collection

In 14% of associations, no separate dues are charged. When separate dues exist, HQ collects dues for 63% of the respondents; 10% collect dues independently.

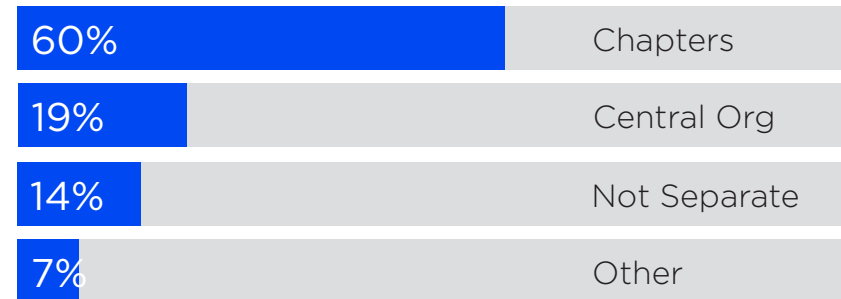
HQ unilaterally sets the dues only 19% of the time, suggesting a preference for giving chapters greater control in the dues decision-making process. The advantages when HQ collects dues include having access to a critical dataset that's essential to calculating recruitment and retention percentages.



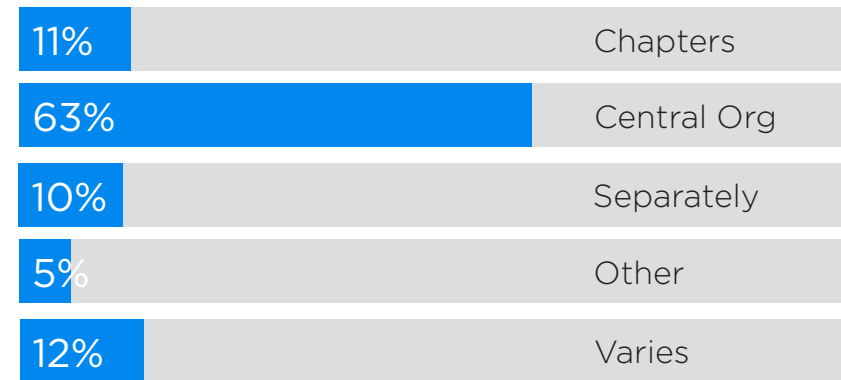
On average, when HQ collects the dues, it rebates 36% of the dues back to the chapter. Notably, when chapters collect the dues, they only rebate 7% of them back to HQ.

This discrepancy may reflect both a variation in the cost of processing dues—HQ could be more efficient and thus more generous—and/or a different perception of the value produced by HQ or chapters.

Dues Set by...



Dues Collected by...

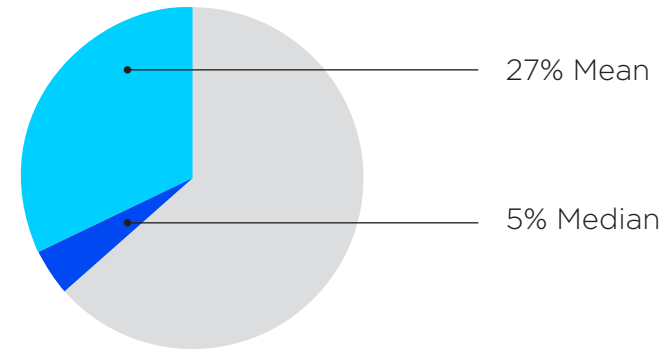


Financials & Staffing at Chapters

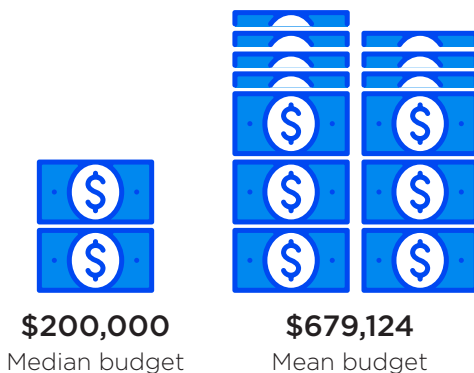
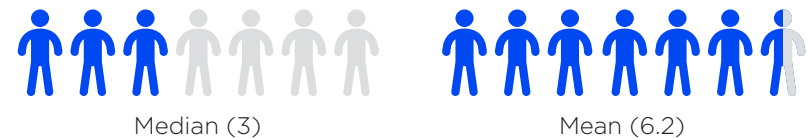
Chapter budgets tend to be limited: the median operating budget is \$50,000. Even an average operating budget of \$101,326 limits resources in terms of paid support, which undoubtedly accounts for why only 27% of chapters have paid staff.

The number of full time (FTE) staff employed by a chapter averages to about one employee. This may, however, understate the actual staffing for chapters since an unknown number may have part-time staffing not reported to or by the CRP respondents, for example, bookkeepers, event registrars, and webmasters. The overall message is that chapters are, in most cases, heavily dependent on volunteers.

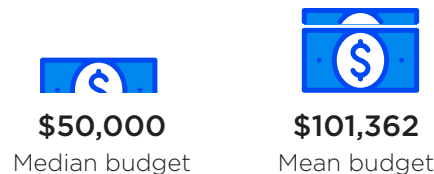
Percentage of chapters with paid staff



Largest number of paid staff in a chapter



Largest Annual Operating Budget Among All Chapters



Average Annual Operating Budget Among All Chapters

The associations participating in this survey reported a wide range of chapter structures, sizes, staffing, and resources.

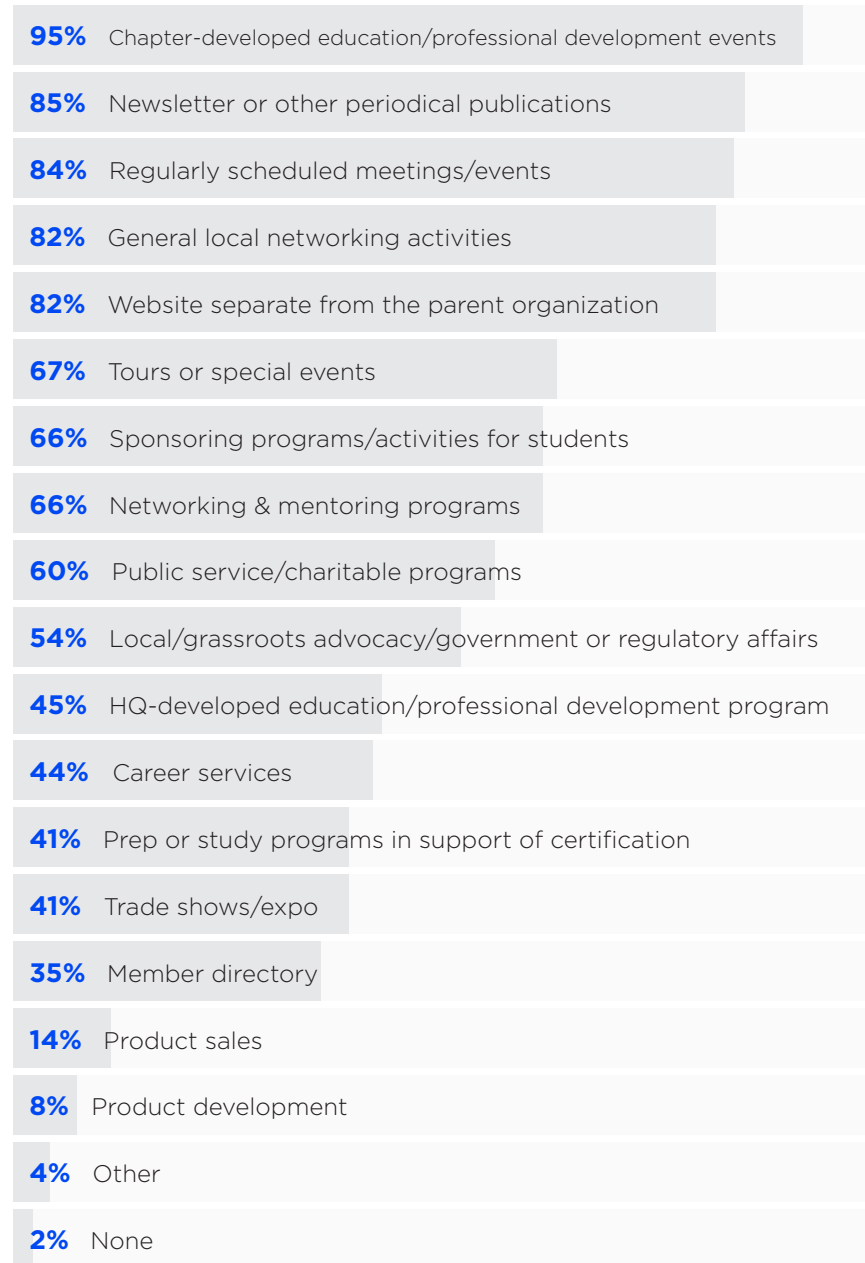
However, the findings tell us that chapter success or failure has nothing to do with those attributes. **Small chapters are just as likely to be successful as large chapters are likely to fail.**

What Chapters Provide

We asked CRP respondents about the programs and services their chapters provide to members: networking and education topped the list.

An unsurprising difference from the 2019 report is a **decrease in networking events**, likely a result of the pandemic (93% in 2019 vs. 82% now). We also saw a **decrease in the delivery of HQ-developed education** (61% in 2019 vs. 45%) and **certification study programs** (52% in 2019 vs. 41%).

The median number of chapter program types was ten, perhaps a stretch for some chapters. Far too often, chapters attempt to deliver too many programs and end up compromising the quality of all. Based on the Dashboard Indicators research, we strongly recommend sticking to two or three programs that they can do consistently well, focusing on activities that complement the offerings of HQ.



The pandemic wreaked havoc on chapter programming, which traditionally relies on in-person events.

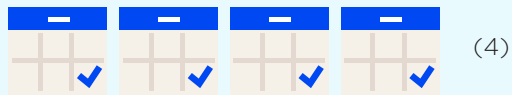
For the first time, we asked about the number of events produced by chapters and the average attendance per event. This will be an interesting number to watch as we return to an environment where in-person meetings can resume.

Number of meetings held per year per chapter

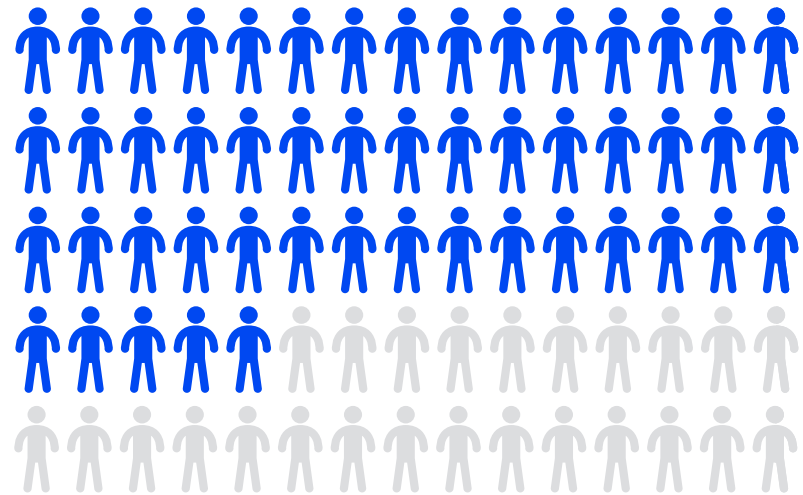
Average number of meetings



Median number of meetings



Attendance per chapter meeting



Median (50)



Mean (74.8)

Conversation Starters

- + If your chapters are volunteer-driven and have limited budgets and access to staffing, what administrative support can, or should you offer?
- + How can we discuss the chapter's capacity and the wisdom of focusing their efforts to help them make decisions where they have limited resources?
- + To help chapters best determine what services to offer, how can we help chapters to bring in the voice of the member? Do chapters tend to rely on the board or same key members in making programming decisions?
- + What do members want from their chapter vs. from national?
- + Has the type of value members receive from chapters during the pandemic differed from pre-pandemic? Is it different from what they receive from HQ?
- + How is the demand for virtual – programming and networking – evolving for your chapters?
- + How well are chapters providing virtual programs/ services? Has the shift to virtual affected – good or bad – the essence of chapter membership?
- + Should we talk to chapter leaders about each of our roles – national and local – in providing virtual programs, resources, and services?
- + Should there be a strategy around virtual programs to address potential coopetition, resource allocation, and possible geographic boundaries for virtual programs? Why/why not?
- + Should groups of chapters work together to develop programming? Would this help them share the burden, increase attendance, and provide better sponsorship bang for the buck?
- + Should we work with chapters as program partners?
- + Do national and chapters go after the same sponsors? How do our offerings differ? How could we partner to provide additional value to sponsors (and members) at an increased, bundled price?

SECTION 03

Association Support to Chapters

In this section, we explore the support provided to chapters by the central organization (HQ), including chapter management and leadership development support. We also share the perspectives of chapter leaders and CEOs on the importance and value of that support.







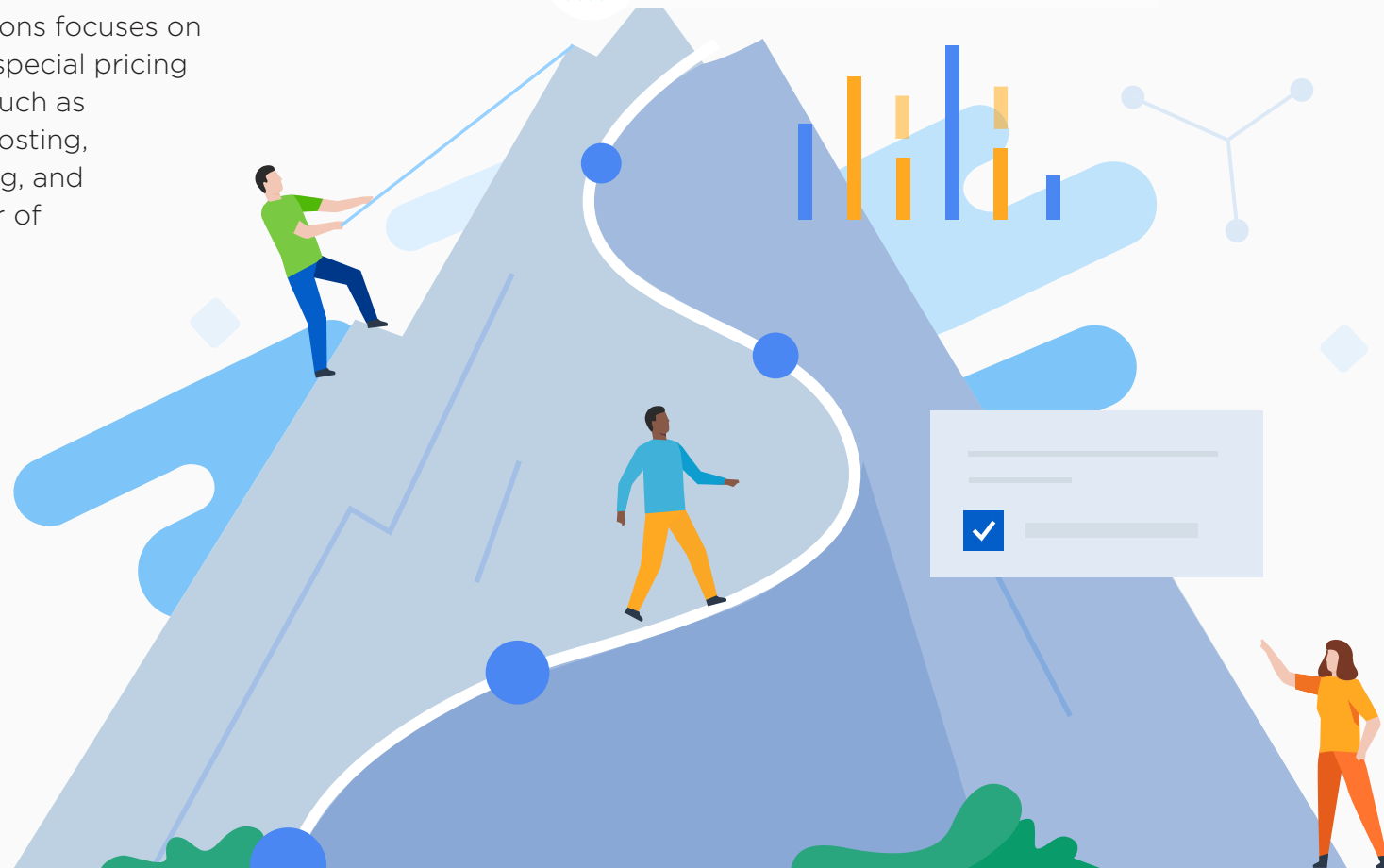
Functional Support Provided to Chapters

Few associations provide logistical event support (planning and registration), or financial or tax services—all areas that routinely challenge volunteer-led chapters. Even fewer offer full-service management.

The support of some associations focuses on providing group discounts or special pricing for chapters on key services, such as database platforms, website hosting, communications and marketing, and insurance. The median number of support items reported per association was six.

The four most common services or support provided to chapters were:

-  Database management
-  Dues collection
-  Start-up kits
-  Dues invoicing



Types of Support for Chapters



Support Details

We drilled down into some of the support areas to gain additional insight. Of the associations that offer some level of database management (70% reported doing so), the primary method is access to the central database (60% - see details below), although this finding may appear somewhat at odds with the low levels of direct access to data reported by associations. We learned from open-ended comments and feedback that access is limited, in many cases, to downloading or receiving member lists.

For those providing event registration, 29% provide access through HQ's registration system, and 23% handle event registration data and fee collection. 52% provide microsites or a dedicated page/community on HQ's website. For those offering communications support, only 17% handle e-communications, while 41% provide access to blast email or other digital communications tools. Nearly three-quarters of those providing insurance support do so through HQ's insurance policy.

These details do not reflect the actual use of these services by chapters. In our experience, actual usage is uneven at best, as many chapters opt for their own systems as a statement of independence and/or dissatisfaction with the HQ product.

Database Management

- 60%** Include chapter member/prospect data in the central database with direct access by chapter leaders
- 2%** Provide special pricing with a separate provider

Event Registration Processing

- 29%** Provide access to event registration through the central organization's registration system
 - 23%** Handle event registration data and fee collection for chapters
 - 5%** Handle only registration fee collection for chapters
 - 4%** Provide special pricing with a separate provider
-

Website Hosting

- 52%** Provide microsites or dedicated page/community on central organization's website
 - 4%** Offer special pricing with a separate provider
-

Access to Insurance

- 28%** Cover chapters through the central organization's insurance policies
 - 12%** Offer a discounted insurance policy for General Liability
 - 11%** Offer referrals for insurance products
 - 10%** Offer a discounted insurance policy for Directors/Officers
-

Communications & Marketing

- 46%** Provide passive communications support (chapter events/activities on central organization calendar)
- 41%** Provide access to blast email or other e-communications tools
- 39%** Actively promote chapter events and activities in central organization's communications
- 17%** Handle e-communications and marketing for chapters
- 4%** Offer special pricing with a separate provider

Developmental Support for Chapter Leaders

The three most popular chapter leader training resources are the same as in 2019:

1. Web portal containing a variety of materials accessible around the clock
2. Webinars
3. Chapter leadership conference

Associations are tapping their LMS slightly more for chapter training: 24% reported this as a training mode compared to 21% last time.



Conversation Starters

- + Are we providing sufficient technology support to our chapters so volunteer leaders can focus on strategy and membership value, and spend less time on administrative tasks?
- + What's impeding us from providing more technology and how can we overcome these barriers?
- + Are chapters adopting the technology we provide? What barriers are preventing adoption?
- + What kind of change management strategy do we need for introducing technology to chapters? How can we identify and nurture beta testers and early adopters (champions)?
- + Should we incentivize chapters to adopt technology?
- + Who is offered chapter leadership training (officers, board members, committee chairs, committee members, others)? Could there be value in opening the training to all?
- + Is training available online and convenient to access at any time? Do we have a way to track who's completed training programs?
- + Do chapter leaders experience information overload before and upon taking office? How can we change this by mixing up and/or extending training options over a longer time frame?
- + How can we use technology to make chapter peer networking to share success stories and help solve problems a reality?
- + How can we be present at the chapter leader's "moment of need"? Does our chapter portal and/or help desk put the desired information and resources at their fingertips at that moment of need?

SECTION 04

Chapter Performance Assessment & Metrics

We looked at the chapter performance question through the eyes of association staff and chapter leaders. Both groups cited the challenges of finding and engaging volunteers as a weakness that significantly affected chapter performance.

2022 Chapter Performance & Benchmarking Report



From the Association CRP Perspective

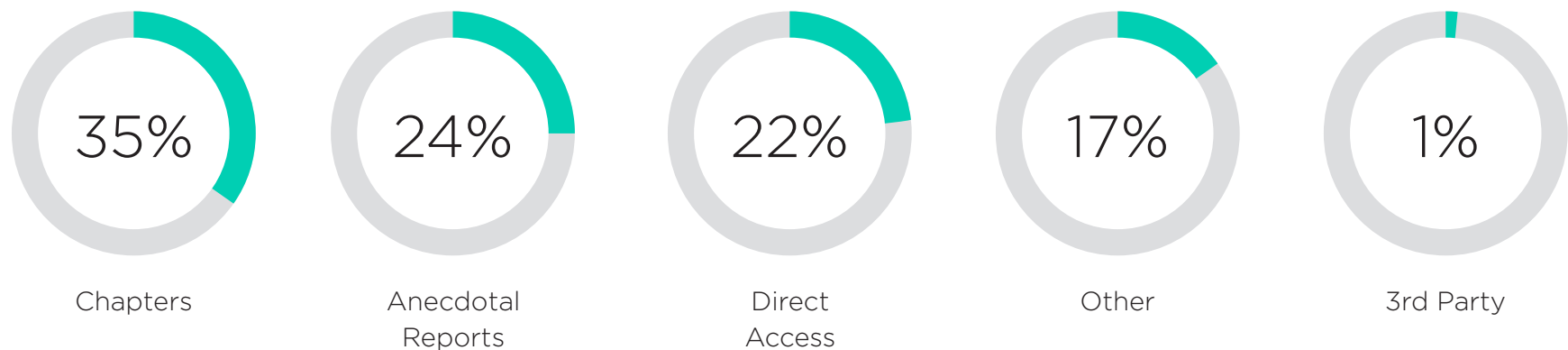
This year, we added several questions about performance metrics and methods. As noted in the report's opening, **associations lack reliable data regarding the performance of their chapters and must often rely on self-reported or anecdotal information.** This lack of data makes it difficult to objectively assess chapter performance and continues to challenge the rationale for an association's resource allocation decisions.

Chapter Data Sources

The survey looked at sources of data for a wide range of metrics, including financial health, membership recruitment and retention, program participation and satisfaction, volunteer leadership pipeline, and more.

The only areas where a greater number of associations reported having direct access to data than those that reported "none: don't use" were membership retention and recruitment. 44% of associations have direct access to retention data and 38% to recruitment data, most likely those that collect dues.

Overall Average of Data Sources



For more details, see [Sources of Data Detail](#) in the Appendix.

Perceived Chapter Effectiveness

When asked to rate the effectiveness of their chapters on a 5-point scale from “not at all” to “extremely effective,” **CRPs gave their chapters the highest grade on giving our brand a local presence (3.5)**, followed closely by **providing volunteer opportunities (3.3)**, **extending service to members who can’t attend national events (3.2)**, and **increasing overall member value (3.1)**.

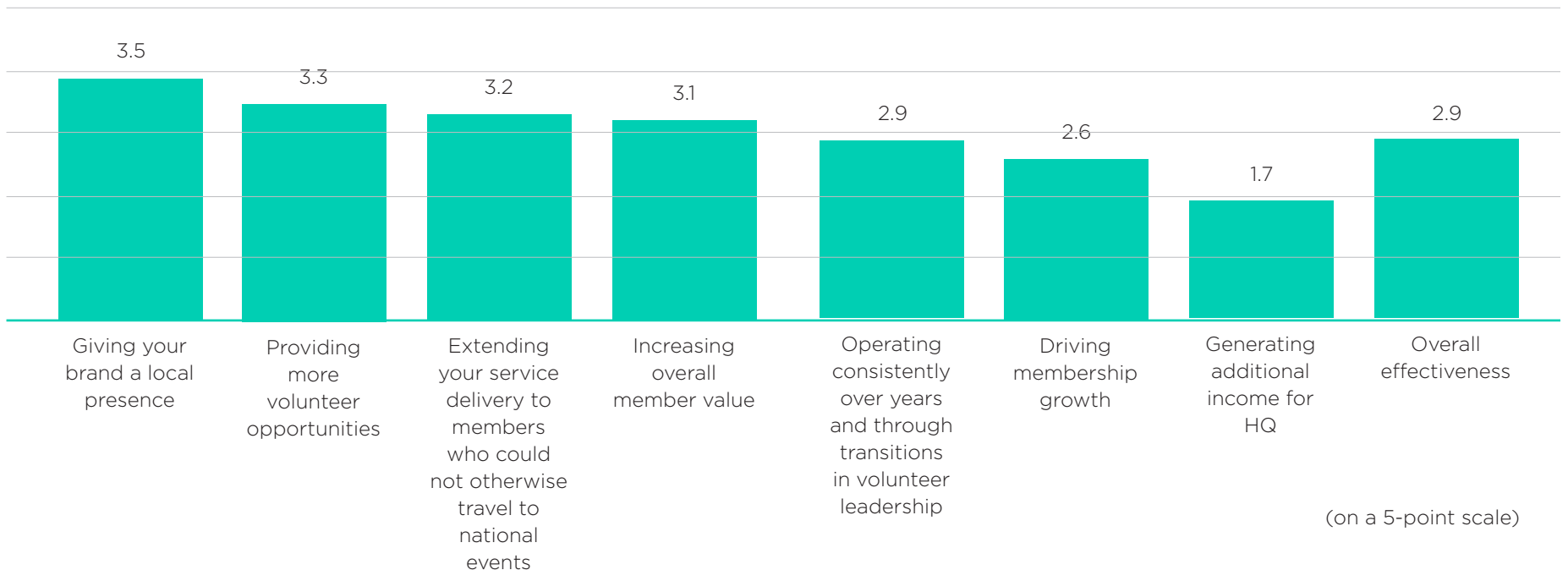
The average of all ‘grades’ was 2.9, which barely gives chapters a passing grade. As few associations see chapters as prime revenue generators, we can eliminate

that score and still only move chapters into the “C” range. Notably, *driving membership growth* also scored poorly (2.6).

We also found that **the number of support activities provided by HQ (database management, dues collection, etc.) appeared to have little impact on perceived chapter effectiveness.**

Score for Perceived Chapter Effectiveness Overall

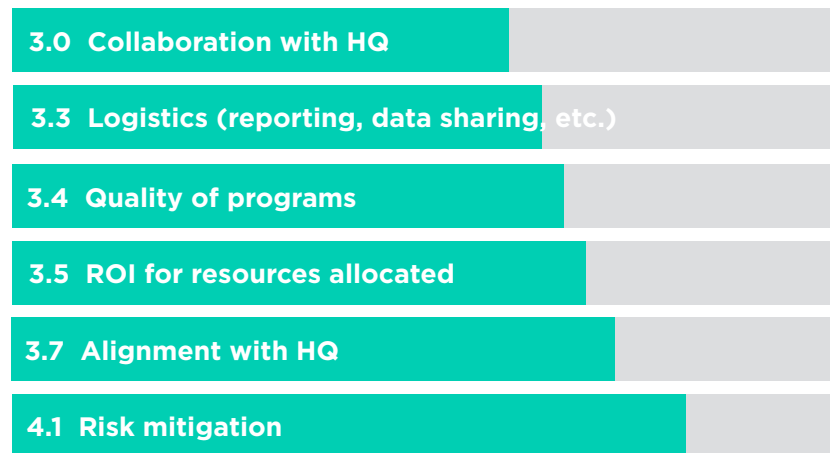
9+ Support Activities	★ ★ ★ ★ ★	2.9
5-8 Support Activities	★ ★ ★ ★ ★	3.0
0-5 Support Activities	★ ★ ★ ★ ★	2.8



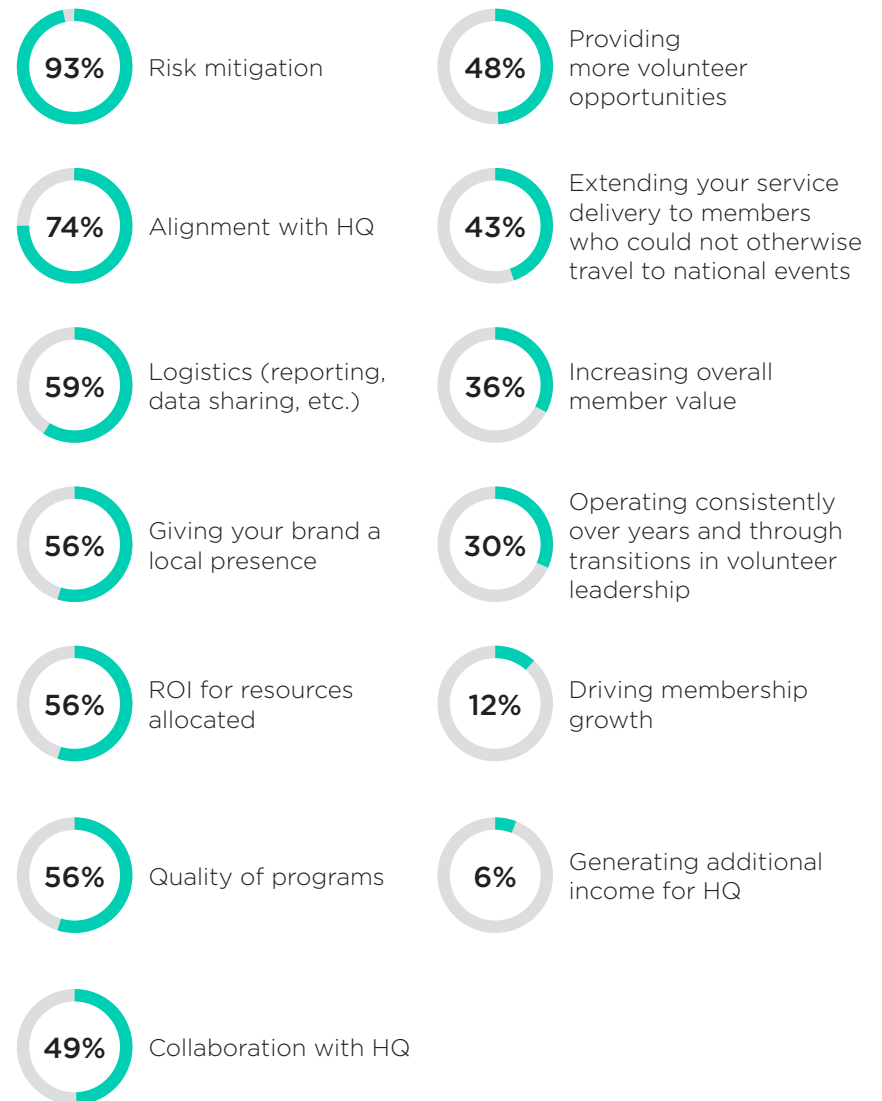
(on a 5-point scale)

When asked to score their chapters along several qualitative measures of performance, CRPs rated their chapters slightly higher across the board on all dimensions compared to 2019.

When we looked at the impact of developmental resources (web portals, training programs, etc.) on chapter performance and perceived effectiveness, we found that these **chapter leader resources delivered a very positive impact on association/chapter relationship elements**, such as risk mitigation and alignment, **but decreasing returns on critical performance metrics**, such as increasing member value. On the surface, everyone seems to get along well, but our chapters are not doing a good enough job serving the member.



Impact of Provision of Developmental Resources on Perceived Effectiveness and Performance



Low-performing chapters

When we asked CRPs about the most recurring problems in low-performing chapters, **leadership succession challenges** are at the top of the list, an issue that links directly to a lack of qualified volunteers. Lack of volunteers and the consequent volunteer burnout have been persistent themes in our CRP discussion groups, with clients, and in association discussion forums.



As we noted in the introduction, chapters that thrived in the last two years were overwhelmingly characterized by **strong leadership, which only happens when the association has a deep volunteer pool fed by a consistent and vibrant volunteer pipeline**. And conversely, poor leadership invariably results in limited programming and loss of members.

From the Chapter Leader Perspective

New this year, we invited chapter leaders to weigh in on their experiences and perceptions. All total, 710 chapter leaders from 471 chapters representing seven associations took part in this survey. (Note, 51% of the respondents came from one association. Compared to the others, this association had smaller chapters, experienced lower member engagement, and reported lower satisfaction among their chapter leaders.)



Over 90% of the respondents were volunteer leaders. Only one-quarter of the overall respondent pool said their chapter had paid staff—with a median of one FTE per chapter.



Respondents reported a median membership count of 343 and a mean of 95, roughly half classified as local/metro, another quarter as state, and the remainder as regional or some combination.



The average annual budget reported was \$107,000, although this number was decreased by the association noted above, for which the average was only \$32,000.





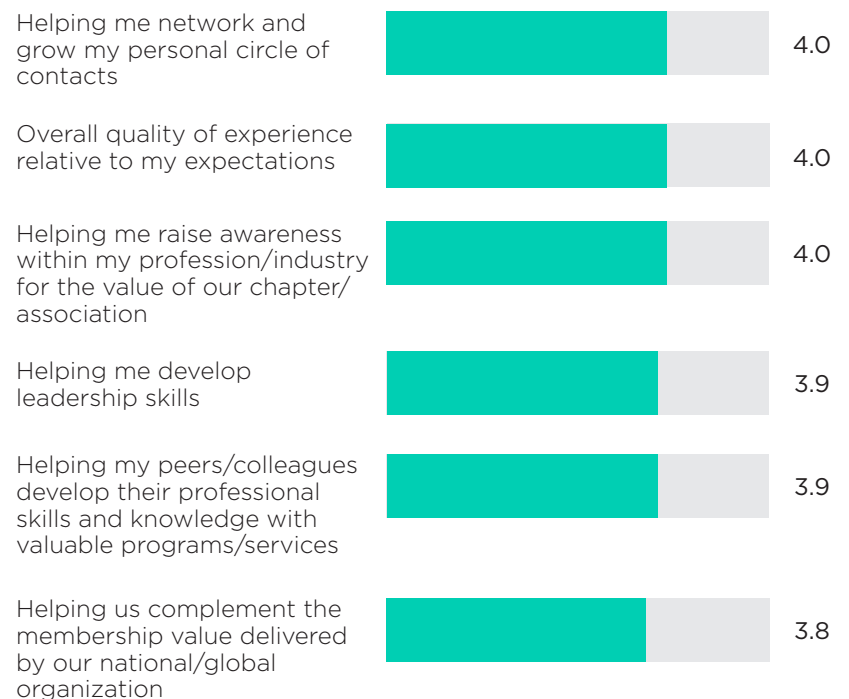
Member Engagement

As expected, respondents reported 10% of their chapter members as highly engaged (serving on a committee/board), 33% somewhat/marginally engaged (attend a few meetings per year), and 47% unengaged.

This distribution shows up consistently in our assessments of chapter systems and in discussions with association staff. Again, we see a significant **opportunity to deepen engagement among members by introducing more inclusive and accessible volunteering and participation options.**

Role Satisfaction

Chapter leaders rated **“networking” as the benefit which brings them the highest personal satisfaction in their role as chapter leaders.** They receive lower satisfaction from “complementing the membership value delivered by the national/global organization” and “helping peers/colleagues develop their professional skills.” Since both these leadership roles are tied to the chapter’s purpose—serving members—associations should explore ways to help chapter leaders find greater satisfaction in meeting member needs.

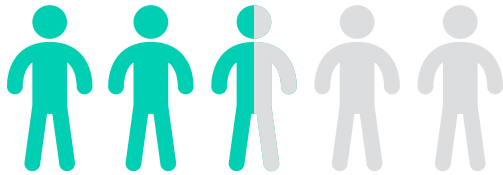


(on a 5-point scale)

Board Leadership

Also, as expected, only 21% of respondents reported all board seats filled with volunteers waiting in the wings. Over half consistently struggle to fill leadership seats, another reason to re-examine the volunteer system.

This challenge was reflected in respondents' **dissatisfaction with their ability to find and develop new volunteers** (2.7 on a 5-point scale) as well as the high percentage (65%) who considered the lack of qualified volunteers a significant issue.



In our experience, **chapters regularly attempt to fill roles that have no meaningful purpose or whose scope and/or required commitment far exceeds the capacity or interest of most volunteers**—again, reinforcing the call for more inclusive and accessible volunteer and participation options for members.

Recent research for the ASAE Foundation also suggests an **increase in volunteer intolerance of traditional roles and growing demand for more flexible and meaningful work**, a trend we expect will continue for the foreseeable future.

Chapter Programs

The responding chapters offer an average of seven programs per year. About half of those programs are educational, and the balance are social/networking or charitable, with a median member participation of 30 (mean = 45). Respondents reported a higher satisfaction with their chapter's ability to deliver high quality educational/technical programs (3.6 on a 5-point scale) and somewhat less satisfaction with its ability to provide sufficient networking for area professionals.



Communications

As you might expect, the majority of chapters in the survey pool communicate with their members through digital media, with over 50% sending emails/e-newsletters monthly. For those who use it, social media sees equal or more activity, although 28% reported using no social media at all. Very few chapters mail correspondence—35% don't do it at all.

Average communications each year



21 emails



18 social media posts



9 e-newsletters



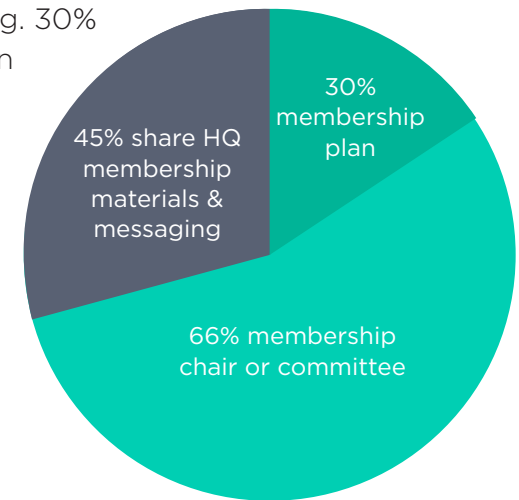
4 mailings

Challenges

When asked about serious issues, **the shortage of qualified volunteers remains the overwhelming limiting factor for chapter leaders** (65%). This parallels the low satisfaction with their chapters' ability to find and develop new volunteers. Notably, only 6% of the respondents suggested their relationship with HQ was a problem. Other issues cited, but of relatively low impact (<25%), included financial resources, functional management, technical support, and size of the territory served. Slightly more than a third cited the small size of their membership as an issue.

Membership Recruitment

Most chapters participate in some form of membership recruitment: 66% have a membership chair or committee and 45% share HQ membership materials and messaging. 30% have a membership plan with recruitment goals. Most appear to rely on personal outreach (e.g., member-to-member campaigns) and word-of-mouth for their recruitment efforts.



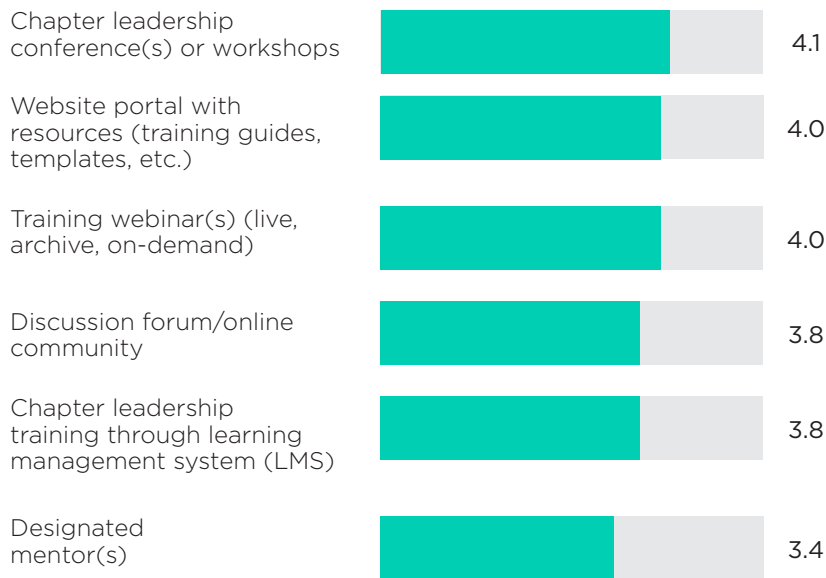
Relationship with HQ

Overall, the respondents reported a very strong (49%) or at least fairly good (43%) relationship with HQ. Only 1% suggested a dysfunctional relationship. When queried, few agreed their chapter “should be independent from HQ” (1.9 on a 5-point scale) or is a “competitor with HQ” (2.0). Conversely, there was far more agreement that their chapter “is a partner with HQ” (4.1) and that their leaders “trust HQ” (4.2). Most also agreed that their chapter is “run by effective leaders” (4.4) and “should be a high priority for HQ” (4.5).

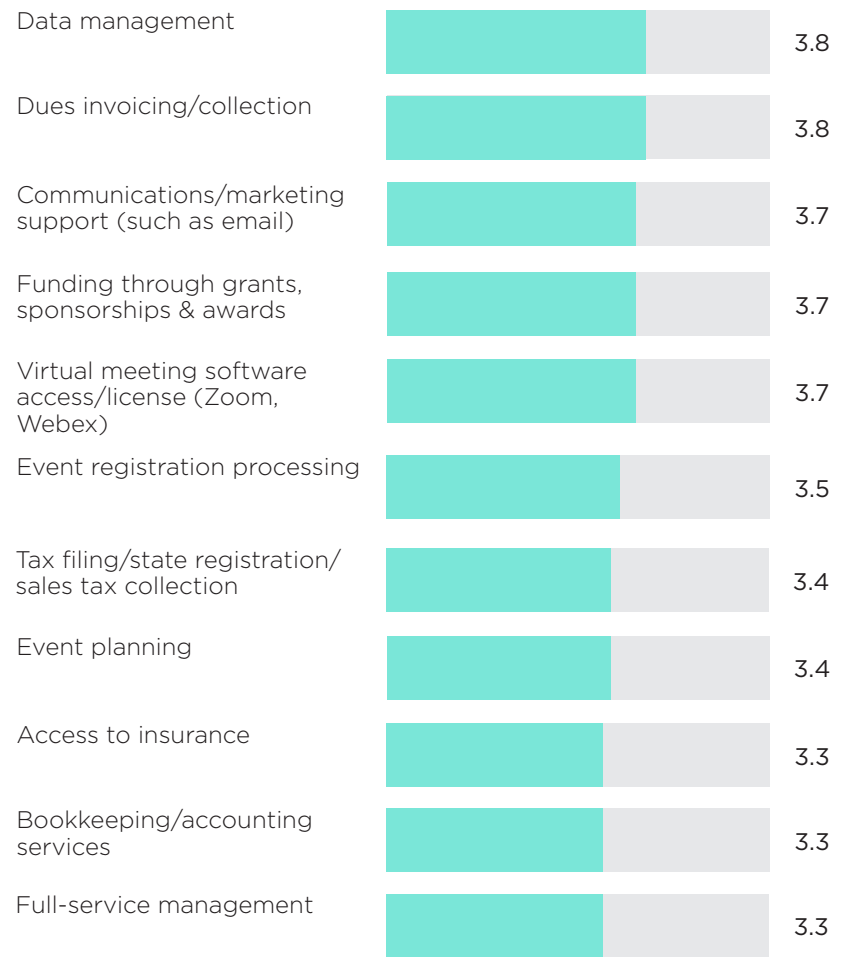
HQ Resources

When asked about the importance of resources provided by HQ, respondents rated developmental resources (overall average of 3.9 on a 5-point scale) slightly higher than functional resources (3.5)—see the charts below.

Importance of Developmental Resources



Importance of Functional Resources



Conversation Starters

- + Where does our vision for chapters and the chapters' vision align and not align? How does what you think chapter leaders should do match what chapter leaders think chapters should do?
- + Has the perceived effectiveness of chapters changed during the pandemic? Considering the continuing flux and uncertainty, how might chapter effectiveness change in the future?
- + What has to change to make chapters more effective overall?
- + As volunteering is viewed as a critical barrier for chapters, how can we help chapters eliminate barriers to volunteering? How can we supplement or support chapters in finding volunteers? Do we know why members are not interested in taking on chapter leadership roles?
- + How can we make the chapter leadership experience more enticing? Could we alleviate the administrative burden or lessen the time commitment required for chapter leadership?
- + Is the current chapter governance model still viable when interest in volunteering is waning? Do chapters really need a traditional board?
- + As chapter leaders indicated they get lower satisfaction from “complementing the membership value delivered by the national/global organization” and “helping peers/colleagues develop their professional skills,” how can we help chapter leaders find greater satisfaction in meeting member needs?
- + Since chapter leaders say leadership conferences and other development resources are most important, how can we enhance the training experience to meet the needs and interests of our volunteers?
- + In terms of operations, chapter leaders value database and communications support. How can we augment what we're offering now?
- + When do you close a chapter?

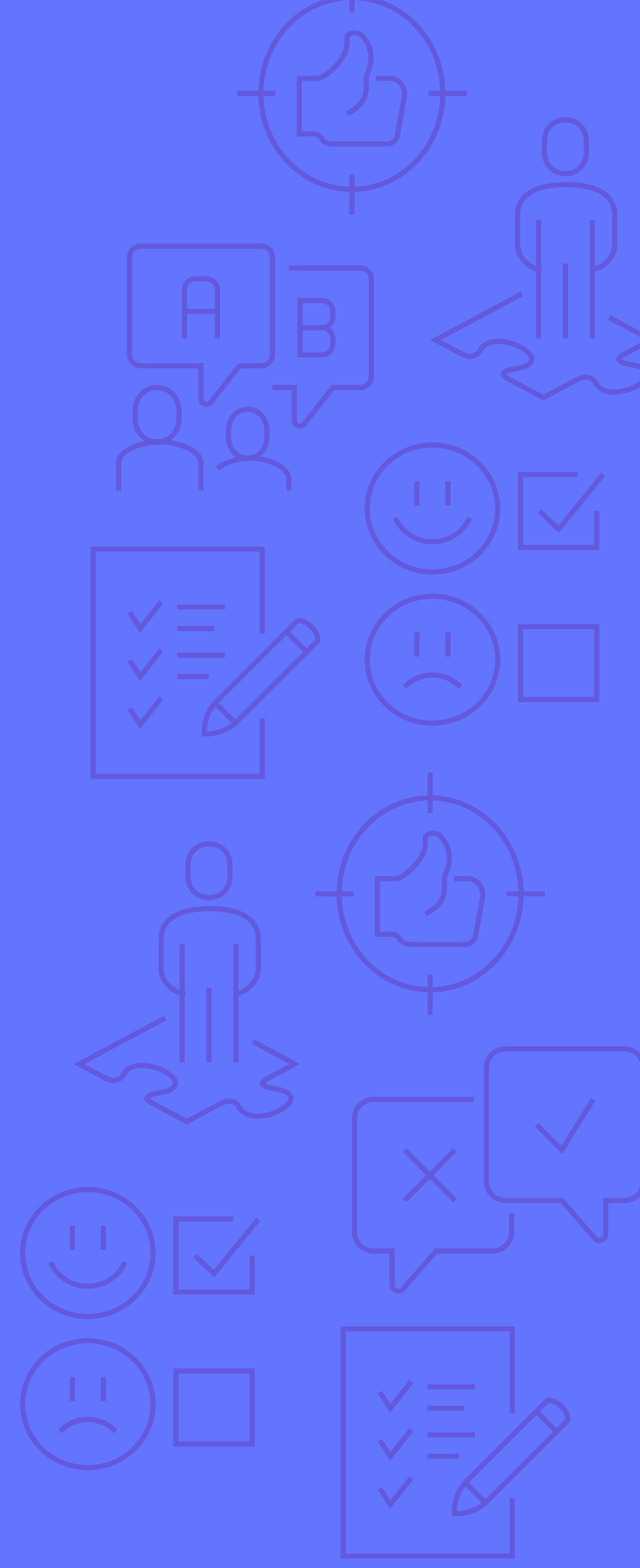
Conversation Starters



- + What type of chapter data do we have direct access to? How are we using that data? How is that benefiting our chapters?
- + What data do we need that we don't have access to? How can we collect or gain access to that data?
- + Are we measuring key association metrics for our chapters such as member engagement (event attendance, activity participation, volunteering), member satisfaction, NPS, market penetration, or progress on key initiatives such as diversity & inclusion? How would our association and chapters benefit from having this data?
- + How are we measuring a chapter's financial performance? How would our association and chapters benefit from having this data?
- + Association software exists that can help us collect and analyze chapter data, but what barriers will we have to overcome to provide this type of software to chapters? What return on investment (tangible and intangible) would we receive if we did?

SECTION 05

Chapter Value



Exploring the Value with CEOs and Chapter Leaders

Answering the chapter value question led us to conversations with CEOs, who, while not typically involved in the day-to-day management of chapters, influence the strategy and chapter leaders who drive the work at the local level. With both these groups, we explored their views on the chapter role (what chapters do), impact (what they accomplish), and value (is there a positive return on investment).

We also asked the CEOs about the board's perception of chapters as that perception has significant ramifications for ultimately addressing the changes to our chapter system necessary to address many of the issues identified in this report. In answering these questions, we examined several orthodoxies regarding chapters.



Role: What Chapters Do

Both CEOs and chapter leaders concurred on the important role of chapters as a local resource channel (CEOs – 3.4; fig 1) and the ability to deliver high-quality educational/technical programs (chapter leaders – 3.6; fig 4). *Note: Figures referenced in the text can be found at the end of this section.*

Interestingly, **only 25% of chapter leaders said their chapter offers a “leadership development channel through which members can develop and sharpen their leadership skills to participate on the national level”** (fig 6). **CEOs appear more likely to view chapters as a key path to leadership** (3.2; fig 1).

Chapter influence aside, the “farm team” leadership model causes us concern given the paradigm that dominates the thinking of many chapter leaders: **in-person activities are the most important channel for delivering value to members.**

However, per industry research and our association consulting and management experience, **only a minority of members see in-person events as the center of the association’s value proposition.** To succeed in the 21st century, we need a more diverse perspective on value if we hope to reach all members regardless of their location.

As one CEO remarked during a roundtable discussion, “One-third of our members love the chapters, one-third hate the chapters, and one-third ask, ‘What’s a chapter?’”

Impact: What Chapters Accomplish

On the perceived impact of chapters, we found relatively **high agreement among CEOs that their chapters are:**

“often too small to succeed but too large to fail” and low agreement that chapters **“deliver the bulk of our value to our members”** (fig 3).

This less than enthusiastic view is reaffirmed in the 2.8 score (on a 5-point scale) given by CEOs when asked if their chapters are worth the organizational effort and resources devoted to them (fig 2).



Value: What is the Return for the Effort

The CEOs’ skeptical view on value likely plagues CRPs trying to convince senior management to provide more funding to chapter support, especially given the continued struggle to produce reliable, objective chapter performance data. Despite this ambiguity, CEOs do not appear ready to throw in the towel.

The possibility of eliminating chapters generated a relatively low 1.7 (fig 2). CEOs appear willing to muddle along with their chapters without a serious commitment to go all in or walk away.

On the other hand, chapter leaders generally agreed their chapter is “run by effective leaders” (4.5 on a 5-point scale) and its “structure reflects an up-to-date, effective organizational model” (4.0) (fig 5). Although the chapter leader survey represented a smaller sampling of associations, their sentiment is not at all out of line with what we frequently hear in our fieldwork.

These responses suggest **different perspectives on value and a consequent impediment to change: the CEOs willingness to muddle along and the chapter leader’s belief that they’re doing a reasonably good job with an effective system.** All this, of course, further amplifies the need for better data, as both parties are relying almost entirely on anecdotal and, in many cases, self-serving performance assessments.

Chapter Impact on the Board

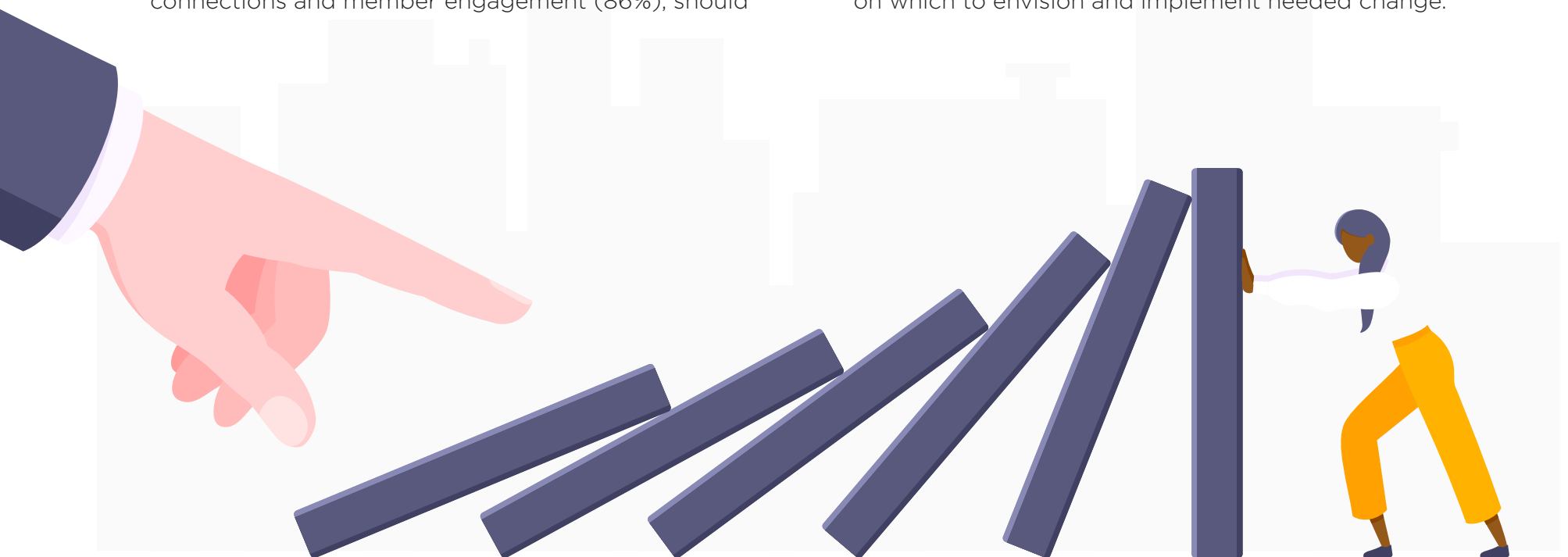
We found it interesting that CEOs were more likely to **agree that “chapters have significant representation on the board of directors”** (3.4) than they felt “chapters have an outsized influence on HQ’s decision-making” (2.5) (fig 3).

The other interesting note is the CEO’s perception that their board does not view chapters as a “third rail” that limits options for change (fig 7), a belief CEOs tend to hold.

Though we are in effect relying on hearsay, it may be no surprise CEOs would conclude that board members hold chapters in high esteem, believing chapters deliver local connections and member engagement (86%), should

be considered “essential to our success” (72%), and should be served by HQ (68%) as it is common among associations with chapters that many board members come up through the chapter leadership channel (fig 7).

These orthodoxies could be viewed as contrary to the notion that chapters do not have “outsized influence on HQ decision-making.” At the same time, **only 5% of CEOs agreed their board members believe that chapters “have a broad perspective and tend to get the big picture”** while, conversely, chapter leaders generally agreed their “chapter has a broad perspective and gets the big picture” (fig 5). Suffice to say, these conflicting views create an even more unstable and muddled ground on which to envision and implement needed change.





The promising message here is that CEOs and chapter leaders appear to see a valid purpose for a local presence - i.e., chapters. The challenge is that the current antiquated model for chapters and the inability of the association board to step back and look at the system strategically places associations in a quandary. **This disconnect in viewpoints ultimately leaves CRPs - along with their association CEOs and Boards - in a rather awkward position trying to reconcile the differences.**

Might the answer be: **get reliable data to make a more accurate, objective assessment of true purpose and value.**



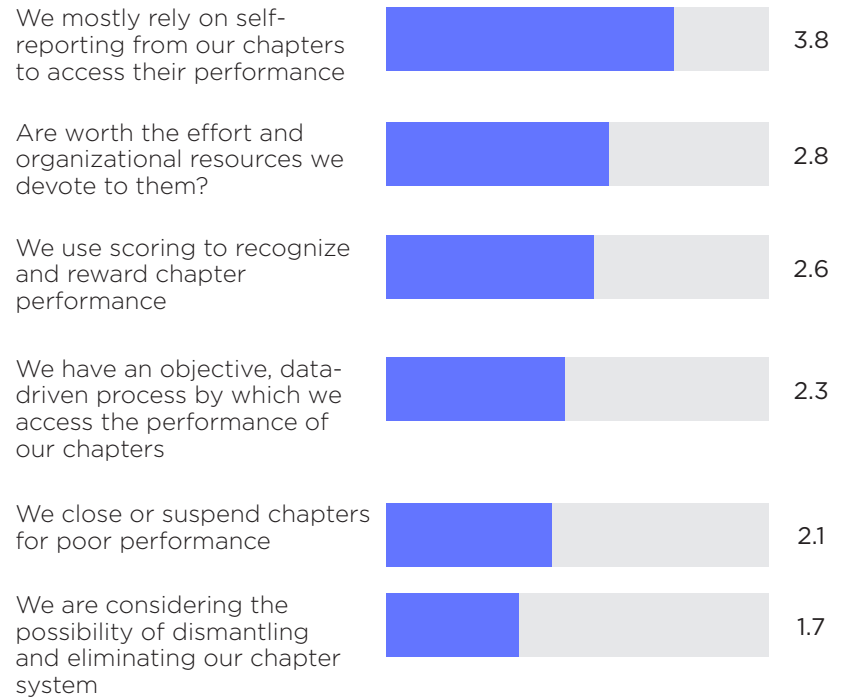
CEO/Chapter Leader Perspectives

The following charts reflect the divergent views of CEOs and chapter leaders regarding chapter purpose and value.

CEO Perceived Purpose of Chapters - Fig 1



CEO Assessment of Chapter Performance - Fig 2



(1= strongly disagree, 5 strongly agree)

CEO Perceived Impact of Chapters - Fig 3

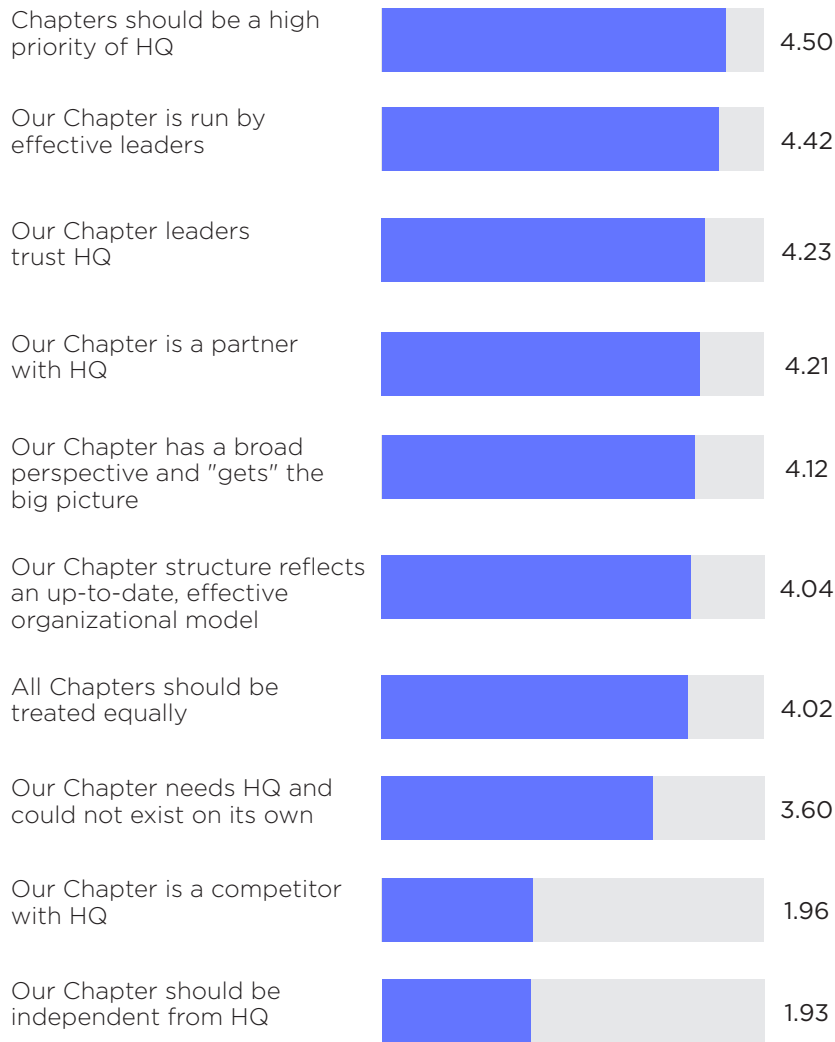


Chapter Leader Satisfaction with Chapter Performance - Fig 4



(1= strongly disagree, 5 strongly agree)

Chapter Leader Perception about Chapters - Fig 5

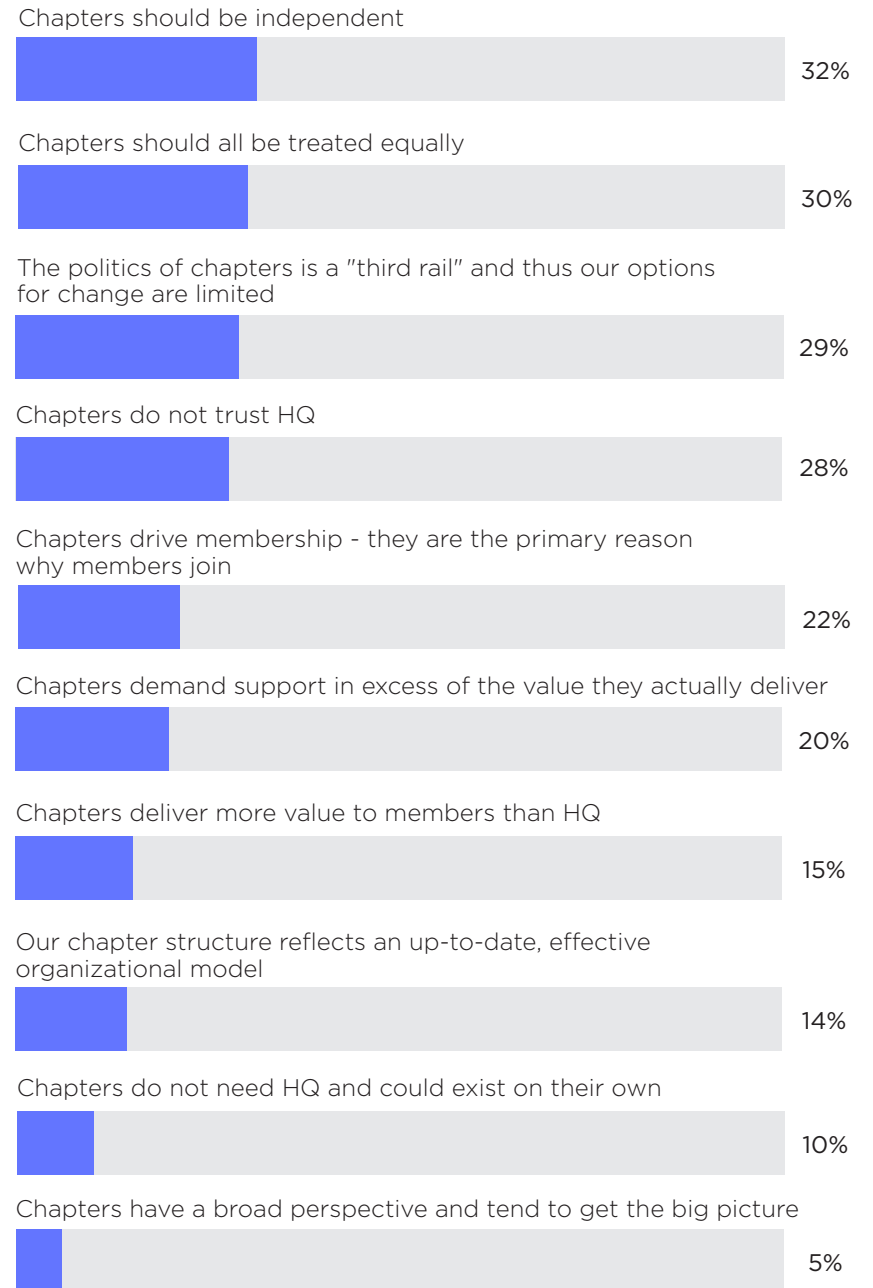
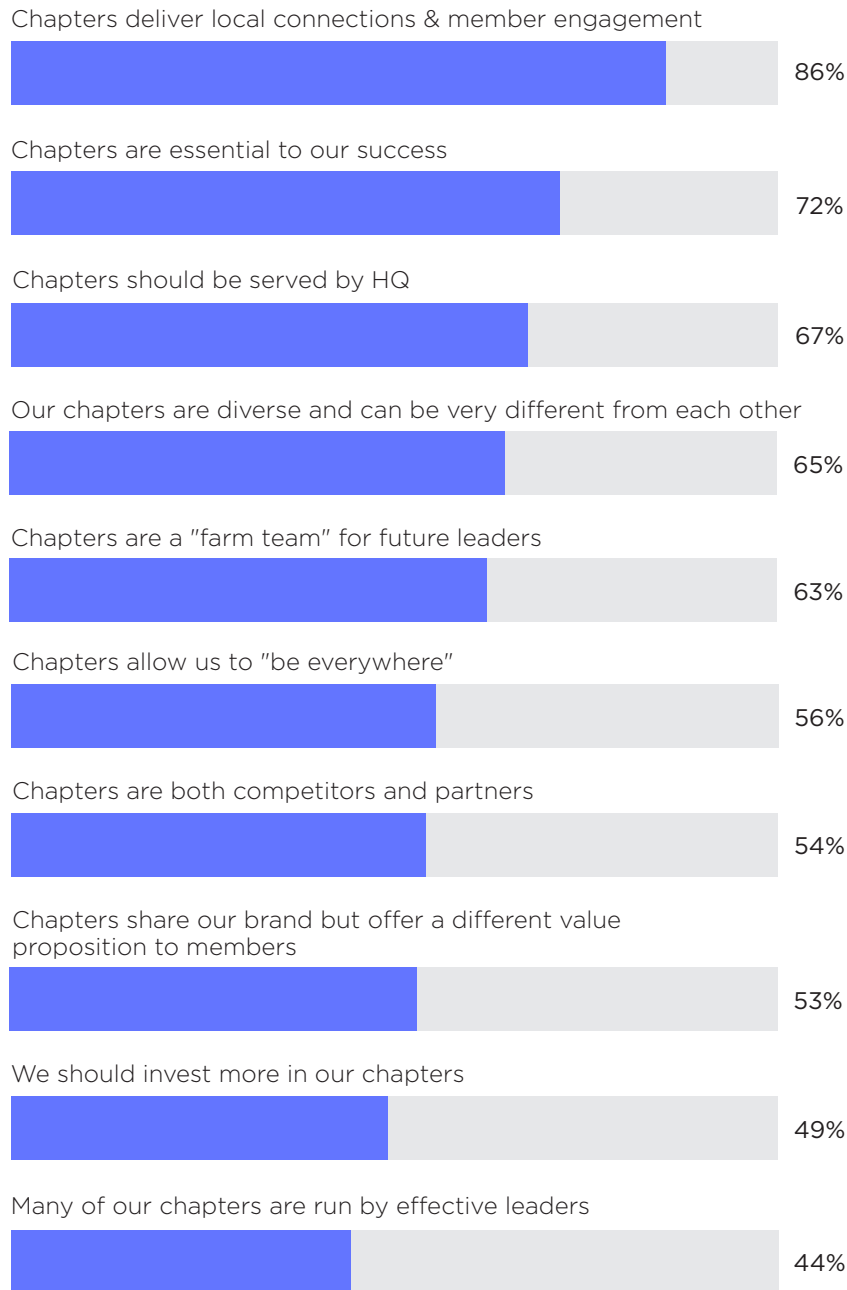


(1= strongly disagree, 5 strongly agree)

Chapter Leaders Perception of Chapter Value to Larger Community - Fig 6



CEO Perception of Board Beliefs about Chapters - Fig 7



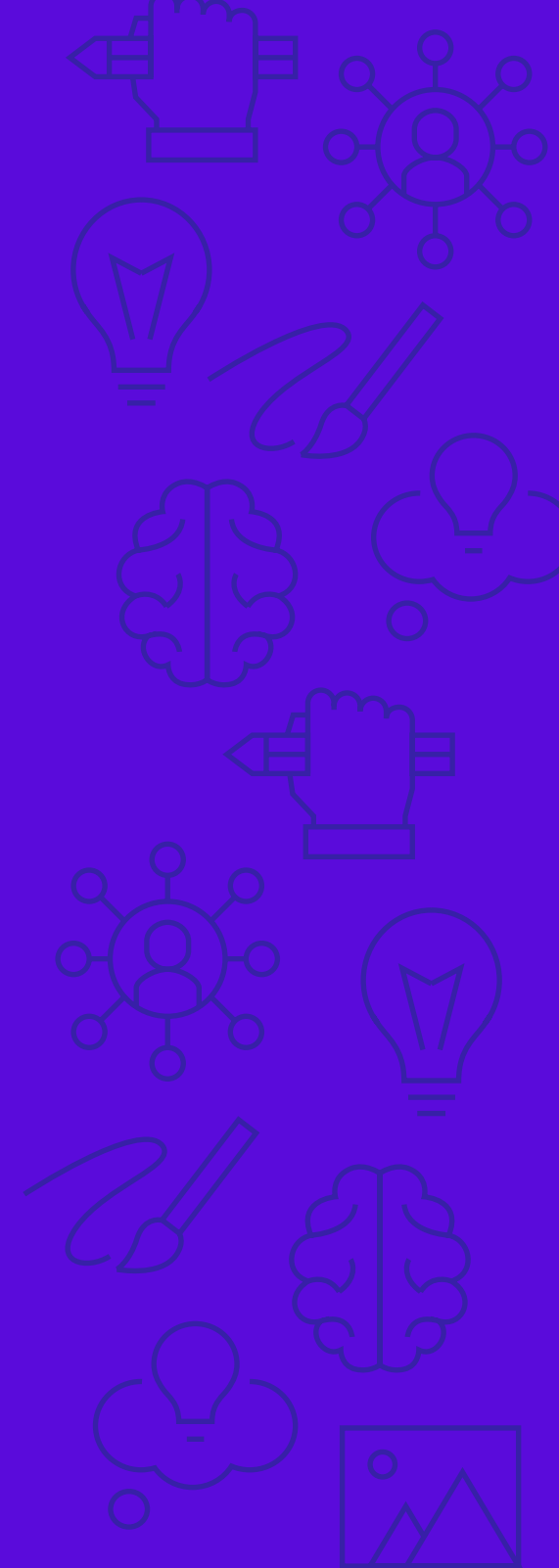
(1= strongly disagree, 5 strongly agree)

Conversation Starters

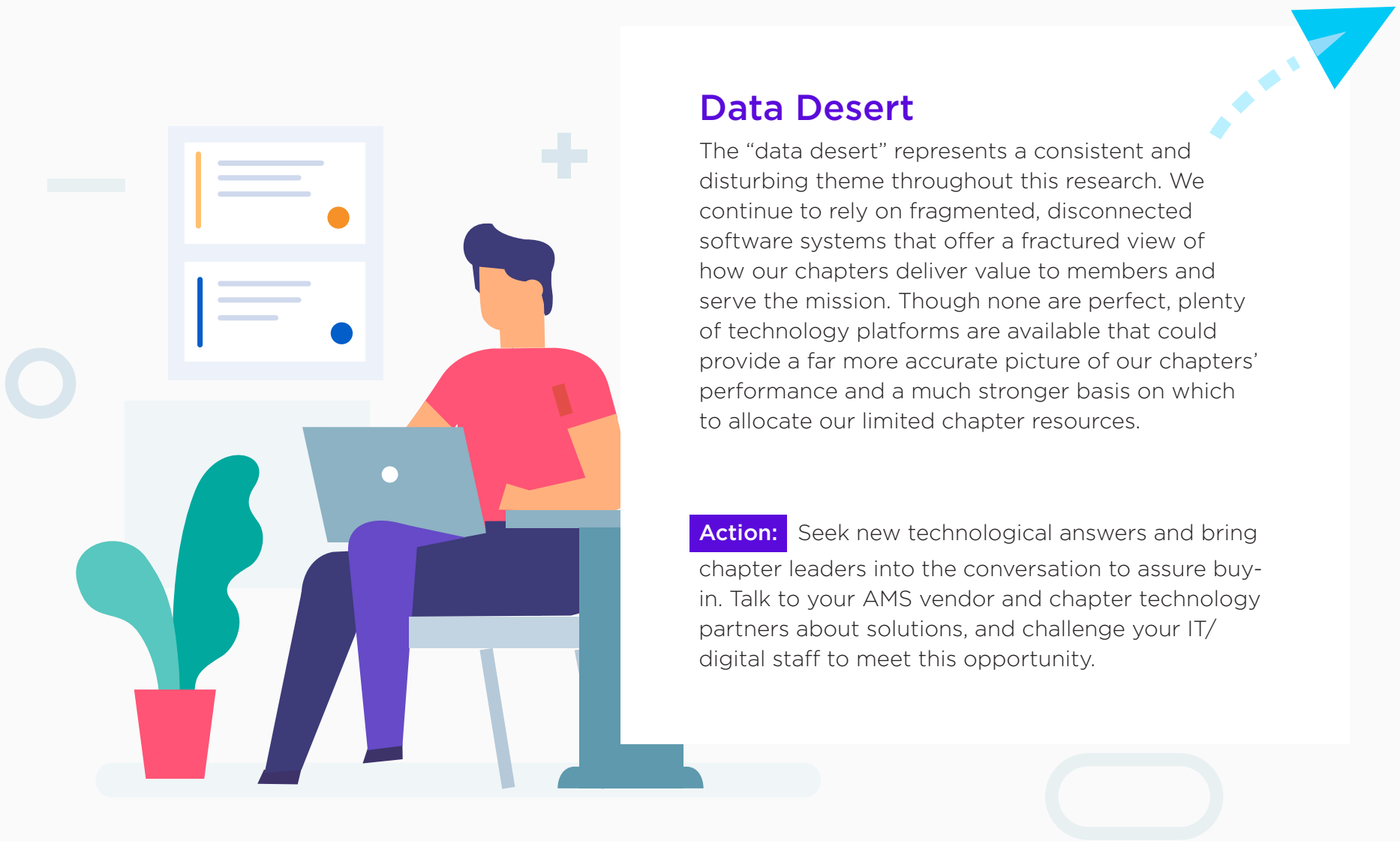
- + How can we share this data about CEO perceptions with your CEO and have a strategic conversation on where they see the chapter value?
 - + How does your CEO measure chapter effectiveness and value?
 - + If there is agreement that having a local resource channel is important, how do we create a shared definition for success as a local resource and set meaningful metrics to track? How would having this help you allocate resources?
 - + What is the ROI on your chapter management program?
 - + What changes do we need to make to our chapter leadership development program to attract volunteers and prepare them for both the operational and strategic responsibilities of their position?
- + How receptive is your C-suite and/or board to requests for additional chapter support? Do we have members who don't know what a chapter is or choose not to join the local chapter? If so, is there a persona or characteristics that make these members different than those interested in chapters? How do we use the information to support decision making?
 - + What changes do we need to make to our chapter leadership development program to attract volunteers and prepare them for both the operational and strategic responsibilities of their position?

SECTION 06

Preparing for the Future



Conundrums aside, chapters do have a place in many associations. They've been an oasis for members in many associations — providing PPE, securing legislative/regulatory wins, delivering critical news, and offering comfort. However, the path to a successful future lies in navigating these three deserts.



Data Desert

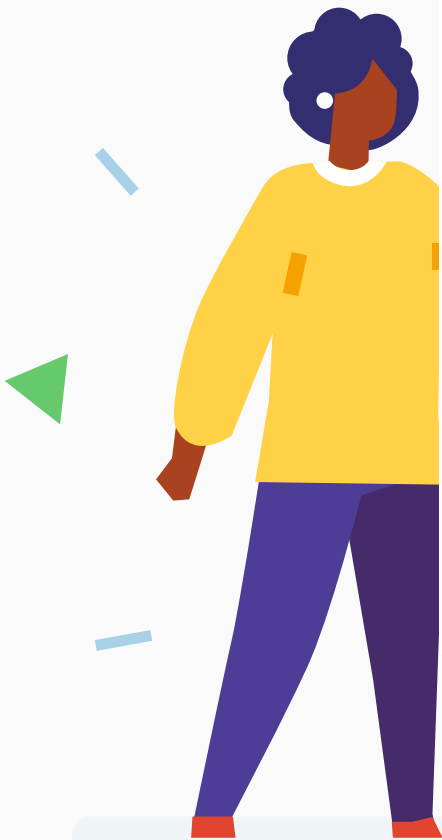
The “data desert” represents a consistent and disturbing theme throughout this research. We continue to rely on fragmented, disconnected software systems that offer a fractured view of how our chapters deliver value to members and serve the mission. Though none are perfect, plenty of technology platforms are available that could provide a far more accurate picture of our chapters’ performance and a much stronger basis on which to allocate our limited chapter resources.

Action: Seek new technological answers and bring chapter leaders into the conversation to assure buy-in. Talk to your AMS vendor and chapter technology partners about solutions, and challenge your IT/digital staff to meet this opportunity.

Volunteer Desert

One CEO observed, “The grass is always greener... where you water it!” Our volunteers represent a precious resource that we tend to waste by asking them to spend their extremely limited time dealing with administrative checklist functions rather than member service and the mission.

Action: We need to apply resources, especially technology that reduces or eliminates the need for volunteers to fulfill those administrative roles. We must build a volunteer development program that supports and places our volunteers in roles where they are most likely to succeed.



Strategic Desert

CEOs, CRPs, and chapter leaders spend far too much of their collective time in the tactical weeds. We must step back and view our chapters as one part of a vibrant ecosystem working collaboratively to serve the member and move the mission. We allow ourselves to be hamstrung by territorial squabbles that reinforce an “us vs. them” culture. Let’s throw off our HQ or chapter shoes and put on our member shoes so we can focus on why we’re here in the first place.

Action: To get beyond the chapter volunteer and staff blinders, talk with members about their experiences. Tap behavioral data to uncover how members are interacting with their chapters. Develop chapter member personas and walk through their experiences in a journey mapping exercise.

- ✔ Use the conversation starters in each section to have more intentional dialogue with colleagues, volunteers, and members that can lead to innovation and reinvigoration of your chapter network.
- ✔ Consider expanding these conversations across associations to share effective practices.
- ✔ Tap into the experience of external consultants who can help you get to the other side of these deserts and closer to an oasis.



Appendix: Data Sources

We asked CRPs "What metrics do you use to access your chapters, and what are your data sources for each of those metrics?"

Chapter Metrics	Not Used	Used	Sources of Data for Metrics Where Used				
			Chapters	Direct Access	3rd Party	Anecdotal Reports	Other
Membership retention	25%	75%	33%	44%	0%	22%	1%
Membership recruitment	23%	77%	37%	38%	0%	23%	2%
Event registrations/participation	33%	67%	39%	27%	3%	24%	7%
Member participation in CE	43%	57%	33%	24%	0%	23%	20%
General membership satisfaction	30%	70%	34%	21%	6%	38%	1%
Volunteer/chapter leader pipeline	28%	72%	48%	19%	0%	30%	3%
Event/activity evaluations	40%	60%	38%	18%	1%	27%	15%
Local member penetration	56%	44%	24%	18%	1%	18%	40%
Advocacy/grassroots engagement	48%	52%	35%	14%	2%	26%	23%
Financial health/viability	28%	72%	48%	10%	2%	26%	14%
Total fundraising volume	71%	29%	21%	5%	0%	12%	62%
Overall average	39%	61%	35%	22%	1%	24%	17%

Note: When we extend the math, only 13% (22% x 61%) of the participating associations indicated access to these metrics, the highest percent going to membership retention at 33% (44% x 75%).

How We Can Help

Let's use the insights from the 2022 Chapter Performance & Benchmarking Report to strengthen and grow our chapter programs. Both Billhighway and Mariner Management can help your association and chapters prepare for the future that lies ahead.

How Mariner Helps

We are all about optimizing your local presence, whether it's the traditional chapter or something else. We help you empower volunteers, improve the member experience, and answer tough questions about components.

Check out the Mariner [CRP Solution Center](#) and the [Volunteer Training Toolkit](#) for ideas. Visit us at www.MarinerManagement.com and check out our [blog](#)!

Let's Chat



Peggy Hoffman, FASAE, CAE
Mariner Management, President
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301-725-2508

How Billhighway Helps

Billhighway is a solution for associations with components that helps automate and simplify all your chapters' tasks, including banking, events, finances and accounting, microsites, engaging with members, and more. While chapters use Billhighway to lessen the administrative burden and serve members better, we provide you with vital data to measure chapter performance and member engagement. These insights help you increase your association's growth, retention, and total revenue.

We'd love to learn more about your chapter challenges and explore how the right chapter performance data could be in your grasp. Schedule a [knowledge share](#) or reach out to Mark Prevost.

Let's Chat



Mark Prevost
Billhighway, Director of Growth
mprevost@billhighway.com
(248) 925-4013



Chapter Webinars & Resources

Looking for component-based resources and inspiration? Get access to a wealth of resources (*articles, whitepapers, webinars, etc.*) created exclusively for associations with components, chapters, sections, states, and affiliates. Billhighway & Mariner Management host a live webinar every month. Our joint webinars and blog posts typically cover the following topics for CRPs:

- ✔ Member Engagement
- ✔ Auto-Renewals/Installments
- ✔ Joint Membership
- ✔ Chapter Restructuring
- ✔ National vs. Chapters
- ✔ Dues Processing
- ✔ Volunteerism
- ✔ Chapter Dashboards & ROI
- ✔ And more!

Attendees receive 1 CAE credit for attending a live webinar. If you missed one of our past sessions, [visit our webinars to watch now!](#)

About the Survey

Commissioned by Billhighway and Mariner, Whorton Marketing & Research conducted two online surveys: association staff (172) and CEOs (92) recruited through direct email using Billhighway/Mariner lists and social media in a non-probability sample—meaning, the findings are not projectable to the larger population of associations.

Whorton conducted an online survey of chapter leader volunteers invited by each of the seven participating associations (710). Mariner conducted the focus groups and CEO roundtables with Jeff De Cagna, FRSA, FASAE, of Foresight First LLC. The surveys were in the field October-December 2021, and the focus groups and CEO roundtables took place during 2021.

