

Metrics That Move The Needle

MEASURING MEMBER ENGAGEMENT
AND ASSESSING THE HEALTH OF
YOUR ORGANIZATION



Introduction



As a staff member, it's likely that you're wearing multiple hats, are strapped for time and are being asked to produce a number of metrics and reporting for your management. In the rush to meet deadlines and get everything done, it's important to remember to occasionally take a step back and consider whether the metrics you're producing, or being asked to produce, are truly beneficial in helping you understand your organization's performance:

- Membership metrics can help you assess the health of your organization.
- Engagement metrics can help you see where your engagement strategies and tactics are working and where there's still room for improvement.

Read on to learn which membership and engagement metrics you should be tracking and how to review them to spot patterns and correlations. What you learn from these metrics will help you identify wins, set benchmarks, and adjust your membership engagement plan.

Focus on the Most Useful Metrics

Your association management software (AMS) gives you access to all kinds of data, especially if your AMS is integrated with other systems.

But you have only a limited amount of staff time to manage all that data—and your colleagues and leadership have only a limited amount of time to focus on data. As such, focus your efforts on collecting the data and tracking the metrics that your organization needs. Typically, this will be the type of data that help people in your organization make decisions.

If someone requests a metric, find out how they plan to use the information. Some metrics, like retention rate and membership growth by segment, are useful in helping determine the overall health of your association. But don't bother tracking "nice to have" metrics—your time is better spent elsewhere.

Membership and engagement metrics must be aligned to strategic or departmental goals and the data should tell you if you're making progress toward those goals. For example, if one of your association's goals is to increase your reach into the millennial market, then you'll want to segment your membership data and metrics by age or career stage so you can assess not only whether that segment of your member base is increasing, but also if you're being successful in retaining those members.

Metrics Requirement: Data Integrity

Inaccurate and incomplete data leads to misleading metrics. To illustrate this, let's return to the millennials example. If the age field is blank in the majority of records for those young members, how can you determine an accurate retention rate for that segment? You may think the segment's retention rate is 90 percent



Clean and complete data is a must for trustworthy membership metrics. A data governance team is the first step toward data integrity.

when in fact the only records with the age field populated are members who participate on the young professionals committee. In reality, the retention rate could be much lower.

Create a Data Governance Team

This cross-functional team plans how your association collects, maintains, and uses data. They make sure you can compare apples to apples by developing rules, such as who's included in active member status, or when a lapsed member who renews is considered a new member or a renewing member.

Membership Health Metrics

Decide which membership metrics you'll track based on what staff and leaders need to know. What metrics will help your association spot problems and places for improvement? What metrics will help you identify areas to focus more resources?

Membership Growth

Many associations track these membership growth metrics:

- Total number of members by month/year
- Number of new members by month/year
- Year-over-year total membership decline or growth
- Year-over-year growth/decline in new member recruitment
- Growth/decline in membership by membership type and other segments
- Conversion rate from prospect (lead) to member
- Number of prospects in each stage of your pipeline

Retention

The retention metrics you could track include:

- Year-over-year retention rate
- Monthly and annual retention rate of first year members
- Monthly and annual retention rate of subsequent year members, for example, year 2, year 3, years 4-6, years 7-9
- Average membership tenure
- Changes in retention by membership type and other segments, for example, early career members, executive-level members, industry partner members
- Conversion rate from one membership type to another, for example, student or young professional to full member

Membership by Segments

Analyzing membership metrics by segments helps you understand where to focus your efforts.

Examples of membership segments include:

- Membership type
- Membership stage or tenure
- Career stage
- Job title/position or specialty
- Age
- Business size or type
- Chapter or geographic region

Revenue

Keep an eye on membership dues trends and the lifetime value of a member (LTV). The LTV is the average dollar value of a member over the time they stay a member. MGI explained how to come up with an LTV in their post on membership marketing calculations and formulas. A "guesstimate" is better than no number at all, but consider calculating LTVs by membership segments and bear in mind that an average LTV may be skewed because of outlier members - for example, large companies with deep pockets.

Chapter Metrics

Track the same type of membership metrics for each of your chapters so you can identify high performers and find out what factors influence their success. What are they doing that others aren't? Chapter metrics can also help you identify at-risk chapters that need additional coaching and resources.

Member Engagement Metrics

Focus your energy on areas where data can make a difference, for example, informing your marketing, onboarding, or retention strategies.



The list of engagement metrics you could track is long and includes digital data such as:

- Email opens and clicks
- Member portal logins and profile updates
- Website and blog page visits and downloads
- Member service contact via phone, email, and web form

Activity data:

- National and chapter event participation
- Online learning participation
- Online community contributions and participation
- Volunteer service: not only committee service, but also ad hoc or microvolunteering, such as writing or reviewing content, speaking or presenting, event assistance, reviewing session proposals, and grassroots political action
- Membership referral/recruiting

- Voting in association elections
- Social media interaction
- Use of other membership benefits/services

Transactional data:

- Product and service purchases
- Donations
- Sponsorships, advertising, exhibiting, and other revenue partner activities

Trade association data:

- Number of participating employees at company
- Engagement of primary contact

Some of the data you need for a 360 degree view of members may be stored in other systems, unless your AMS has a wide range of modules. To unlock your data's power, you need to eliminate data silos. An AMS with a strong open API will help you integrate your different systems.

Measure Engagement & Satisfaction

Association professionals don't always agree on the definition of engagement —which makes it difficult to provide standard engagement metrics.

Engagement means something different to every member. So-called “mailbox members” (or “inbox members”) are perfectly content reading the daily digest of your online community and your daily curated industry newsbrief. These resources are of tremendous value to them. But would they be considered “engaged?” They’re not at risk of dropping their membership because they’re getting what they need.

Engagement is not only about activities. Many members join because it affords them the opportunity to connect with other members. They renew because of their relationship with your association and fellow members. Their emotional experience as a member is a key factor in their decision to renew, but how do you measure that?

Association leadership consultant Rita Santelli wrote in an ASAE article on measuring member engagement: “The key is to measure whether members view the association as their partner and go-to resource for help with resolving challenges.” She suggests two engagement metrics:

- Measure the value of participation. Send out post-activity polls to find out how regularly members use benefits. (For example, “Will the information you learned today directly help you in your work life?”)



- Measure the emotional connection of the member to the association. How likely are they to turn to the association when a challenge arises? Find out how often they take advantage of member benefits (such as fellow members, your website and other resources) when seeking a solution.

When you collect and track this type of member engagement data, you can understand the true value of different membership benefits and activities. By noting trends in emotional satisfaction, you can see where you need to focus your efforts.

Develop a Member Engagement Plan

Don't overwhelm yourself with engagement metrics. Start small with metrics that can help you spot problems and answer questions.



What do you want to learn about the engagement of different membership segments? Where do you need to improve membership engagement? What new strategies and tactics can you try? How can you test those ideas?

By segmenting your data, you can better understand how different membership groups engage. Engagement metrics can help you gauge member interest in different topic areas. You can identify the most (and least) popular events, online learning programs, membership benefits, or products/services—either in aggregate or by membership segment. Engagement metrics can help you determine where to focus your limited resources as you develop next year's member engagement plan.

What do your association's decision-makers need to know about member engagement? What do other departments or teams need

to know? Give them information that will help them understand issues and make decisions.

For example, engagement metrics can help your association identify leadership prospects. You can spot under-the-radar members who aren't volunteer leaders but who are participating or contributing in other ways. Data can also lead you to membership prospects—those non-members who are engaging but haven't yet joined.

By segmenting data by membership journey stage, you can see how member engagement with the association changes throughout their tenure. You can find correlations between different types of activities and renewal rates. What activities are predictors of membership renewal? This type of information can help you develop not only a member engagement plan, but it can also help inform marketing and communication strategies and tactics too.

Analyze & Share Results

Once you've gathered your metrics, find out where you met goals and where you fell short.

Discuss possible causes and the changes you can make for next year. For example, if the retention rate of new members is less than desired, perhaps you need to improve your onboarding process. To see how your association's metrics compare to others, download MGI's Membership Marketing Benchmark Report.

Set goals for next year, but make sure your association can handle success. Some membership goals can get you in trouble. If the board requests a 15 percent increase in membership, do you have the bandwidth to onboard that many new members effectively? If not, next year's retention rate will plummet—as will your association's reputation with those disappointed members.

Sharing Results with Colleagues and Leadership.

Data is useless if not shared. Develop reports and dashboards for association staff and leaders that provide the information they need to inform decisions and strategies. Find out what questions they need answered. The answers they need will determine the type of data to share with them. Typically, the C-suite and board will want high-level information on membership trends and revenue. But this is also your chance to bring problems or emerging issues to their attention.

Colleagues who work with chapters will want to identify high-performing or at-risk chapters. They must be able to spot trends in certain

geographic areas or with specific types of chapters, for example, chapters who are holding on to their aging members, but aren't growing.

Your education and meetings colleagues may be interested in specific segments of the market, for example, a new growing specialty.

Find out if other departments and teams need to track the use of specific membership benefits or member participation in specific activities. Ask your marketing colleagues what type of data they need to help them better understand members and the effectiveness of their marketing initiatives.

It is also important to ask how your colleagues want to receive information. Some may prefer a different report format than the one you like. Use a report scheduler to email the reports they need at specific times each month.





CONCLUSION:

If you had unlimited time and gargantuan amounts of data, you could track all kinds of metrics, but time is your most valuable resource. As you prepare to analyze data and review performance, make sure that:

- You are only tracking useful metrics that help make decisions.
- You have decided which metrics you'll track based on what staff and leaders need to know.
- Your data governance team is keeping clean and complete data.

Once you've gathered your metrics, see if you met your goals and where you fell short. Share results with colleagues and leaders via reports and dashboards to ensure everyone is on the same page. Discuss possible causes, set new goals and adjust your strategy based on what the data is telling you.

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