FIRST STEP RESOURCE · SECTION 2

Association *in Balance*

Member Engagement Audit

Where to look first when members go quiet

Renewal and engagement are not the same thing. This audit helps you tell the difference, and shows you the one place to start when members are present on paper but missing in practice.

For boards, executive directors, and volunteer leaders · **One honest look. One clear first step.**

THE DISTINCTION THAT CHANGES EVERYTHING

Renewing is not the same as engaged

A member who renews every year but never shows up is not an engaged member. They are a dues payment with a name attached. That distinction matters more than most associations realize, because passive renewers are the first to leave when something better comes along, or when they finally notice they are not getting anything from their membership.

The genius moment in this audit

Most associations measure retention. Almost none measure participation. Retention tells you who stayed. Participation tells you who is actually getting value. The gap between those two numbers is your real engagement problem, and it is almost always larger than the board expects.

A renewing member looks like this
Pays dues on time, every year
Opens maybe one or two emails a year
Has not attended an event in two or three years
Would struggle to name one thing membership gave them recently
Will quietly not renew the year something disrupts their routine

An engaged member looks like this
Attends events, even virtual ones
Opens emails and occasionally clicks through
Serves on a committee, volunteers, or responds to surveys
Refers colleagues or mentions the association unprompted
Renews without needing a reminder campaign

YOUR FIRST STEP

Run the participation audit before anything else

Before you redesign your programming, launch a re-engagement campaign, or blame the economy for low turnout, do this one thing: find out how many of your renewing members have done anything in the last twelve months.

1

Pull your participation data for the last 12 months

Go into your AMS or database and flag every member who has done at least one of the following in the past year: attended an event, opened more than two emails, served on a committee, responded to a survey, or made any purchase beyond dues. That is your engaged group. Everyone else is passive.

2

Calculate your real engagement rate

Divide your engaged members by your total renewing members. Write that percentage down. Most associations expect to see 60 to 70 percent. Most actually see 30 to 40 percent. Either way, now you know your real number instead of guessing.

3

Look at who is in the passive group

Are they newer members, longer-tenured ones, a specific membership category, a certain geography? Passive members are not all the same, and the pattern almost always points to something specific you can actually fix.

What to do with what you find

You are not trying to re-engage everyone at once. You are looking for the pattern that explains the passivity. That pattern is your first step. Everything else comes after.

- [ ] If newer members are passive, your onboarding is not delivering early value
- [ ] If longer-tenured members are passive, your programming has stopped growing with them
- [ ] If a specific category is passive, your value proposition does not speak to what they actually need
- [ ] If passivity is spread evenly, your communication frequency or relevance is the issue

WRITE IT DOWN

Your engagement snapshot

Fill this in before your next board meeting. These three numbers tell you more about member health than your retention rate ever will.

Total renewing members

Members who participated in at least one way in the last 12 months

Your real engagement rate (participated divided by total)

The pattern you see in your passive group

Newer members? Longer tenured? A specific category? Geography?

The one thing you will do first based on what you found

Not a campaign. Not a rebrand. One specific, actionable thing.

Know your number. Not sure what to do with it?

Member engagement is one of six dimensions that determine whether an association stays in balance. If your passive rate surprised you, or you are not sure what the pattern is pointing to, let's talk it through.

Schedule a Complimentary Ecosystem Check-Up

Jeanne Eury · je@associationinbalance.com · (919) 624-8237



Association *in Balance*

je@associationinbalance.com · associationinbalance.com