

Working with Gen X and Gen Y Volunteers

10 Ideas for Getting Young Professionals Involved and Excited

Understanding Generational Differences

- Silent Generation
- Baby Boomers
- Generation X
- Generation Y

The Silent Generation

- Survived the trauma of the Depression and a major war.
- Characterized by a reverence for authority, a quest for stability and financial security and a strong civic-mindedness.

The Boomers

- Reeling from the chaos of the civil rights movement, assassinations of popular leaders and the Vietnam War.
- End up focusing more on achieving ideals through support of teams, harmony, self-fulfillment, and a strong commitment to the work (in contrast to the Silents' commitment to the company).

Gen X

- Saw a much higher rate of divorce among their parents, was also the first generation of latchkey kids and the first to witness the effects of downsizing as their parents were laid off.
- Ended up with a more self-reliant pose, challenging leadership structures (not just leaders) and advocating for a work-life balance.

Gen Y

- Generally defined as the generation between 18 and 25 years old, is conservatively estimated to be 60 million strong, making it almost as large as the massive Baby Boom generation.
- They are the hyper-glorification of pop culture.
- They want to help people and make the world a better place. So, one of their deepest desires is to resolve the contradiction between financial success and making the world a better place. To them, it shouldn't have to be an either/or. They're looking to create a more integrated lifestyle and a more integrative career.

Applying the Knowledge

- Understanding diversity is imperative, applying it is tricky. The primary danger is stereotyping.
- Don't guess what volunteers from different generations within your organization want – ask them!
- Build a culture that enhances change as each new generation is embraced.

The Biggest Hurdles for Associations

Show Me the Value

- Many Gen X and Gen Yers question why they should bother joining an association at all much less volunteer? I didn't need you in college why do I need you now?

Resistance to Change

- Aversion from current members as to the value of including students/young professionals? What do they have to offer or will they just get in the way? They question everything we do! They're lazy, uninterested, etc.

Fear

- Business owners not wanting to send younger staff to participate because they're scared of losing employees.

10 Ideas to get Gen X and Gen Y Volunteers Involved and Excited

1. Another Look at Student Membership

Reinvigorate or create a student membership

- Appoint a task force to take a look at your student membership and its value to students (Note: Networking is probably high on their list of needs – are you delivering?).
- Make sure students can be involved at all levels of the association – they are your future committee leaders and board members. Treat it as a training ground.
- Create a student working group that can offer ideas and a new perspective on current association programs as it relates to them.

2. Create a Young Professional Membership Category

- Create a Young Professionals Membership Category / Pricing. This will make it seem prestigious and special for them to join.
- For business owners/staff of members who are under 30 (or whatever age you choose).
- Make it affordable – remember they're just starting off on their career path.

3. Form a Young Professional Task Force

- Create a young professionals task force
- Let them develop programs/services specific to young business owners/staff. This allows you to deliver to them what THEY want rather than trying to guess.
- Young professionals can often be intimidated by long time industry members so this is an outlet for them to express ideas freely with other like-minded individuals.

4. Create Task Driven Initiatives

- Research shows that young professionals want dedicated tasks with a clear beginning and a clear end.
- Start initiatives within your organization that don't require becoming a committee member for life (e.g. golf outing task force or mentorship program creation task force, etc.).

5. Communication is Essential

- Managing "generational diversity" is only partly about knowledge, and it is mostly about communication.
- Often conversations about recruiting or retaining younger generations turns to the topic of technology (i.e. Web 2.0, facebook, etc.) and we overlook the message itself.
- Focus the message on what the association can do for them:
 - Help you advance your career
 - The Association as a change agent

6. Rethink Leadership Roles

- Challenges with the current structure: Top Heavy
- Many volunteer leaders don't know how to manage change (which is what we ask them to do when we want them to embrace a new member who thinks and acts differently).
- Many volunteer leaders still use command and control approaches—which don't work with today's volunteers who want to be part of the solution rather than a committee member for years.
- Many volunteer leaders support a culture based on martyrdom. The most worthy volunteers get Martyr of the Year awards. If they allow others to volunteer and have meaningful impact, the leader loses brownie points toward the big award. Why would they want to involve others?
- The future: Flat – responsibility to everyone
- A linear progression of leadership (one generation taking the reigns from the next) may be on the way out. Gen X (the smallest generation in history) doesn't have the numbers required to take over for the Baby Boomers. A new model of multigenerational leaders will develop in the near future. This will encounter resistance from current leaders so begin preparing them now.
- Younger generations want to know they can lead without 10 years of following. Create training opportunities for young professionals to prepare them for these roles quickly. The opportunity to lead is appealing to them. But don't throw them to the wolves!

7. Social Responsibility is Key

- Young professionals want to contribute to the greater good. Create opportunities for them to do so...and they will follow you.
- Consider a community service project or environmental initiative they can get behind.

8. Focus on Their Skills: Problem Solving

- The Learning Shift
- Gen X and Y learn through questioning and thinking critically. Therefore, they may question why you do things the way you do - not out of disrespect, but because that's the way they were taught to learn.
- Allow young professionals to help you solve the problems you're facing – they want to help! Create a task force around an issue and let them go.
- Issue them a challenge – they will rise to it.
- But, make sure the leadership of the association is ready to take their ideas seriously or you risk losing them.

9. Make it Fun!

- When Young Professionals come to your meetings, they don't want to be bored by talking heads. They want to be part of the learning experience. Younger members want to interact as they learn.
- Consider updating your meeting structure to be more of a forum rather than a point by point agenda to keep these generations engaged.
- Use interactive tools at your meetings – videoconferencing, etc.
- Create fun activities such as speed networking, outing to a baseball game, a happy hour, not just meetings.

10. Embrace Generational Change from the Top Down

- Encourage your Board to begin the discussion of embracing change brought about by intergenerational involvement. If the leadership doesn't embrace change, you will fight it every step of the way.

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