

Back to Basics: The 3 Rs of Chapter Member Engagement

A chapter leader who has not also served as membership chair might assume that fostering member engagement is someone else's responsibility. We are here to dispel that myth and any further missed opportunities. We contend that *every* NCMA chapter leader is an ex-officio member of the chapter's membership committee and plays a role in cultivating a healthy membership base.

Based on our years as leaders in the Jacksonville (JAX) Chapter and elsewhere, we would like to share with others how we have applied the three Rs – recruitment, retention and recognition – to our chapter membership plan. We use the term membership chair (MC) to identify the person with primary responsibility, but exact position titles vary by chapter. By implementing these ideas over the past three years, JAX Chapter membership has increased more than 20%.

Recruitment

NCMA maintains an assortment of recruiting materials for chapter outreach to other associations, groups and educational institutions. These tools include the membership application, certification program explanations and recent issues of *Contract Management Magazine*. Based on our experience, it

is a best practice for chapter leaders to always be prepared with membership information during visits to other associations, businesses or schools.

We tailored the standard application form to indicate local chapter affiliation and provide another opportunity for local member recruitment. Additionally, at non-NCMA events we use an effective eye-catching, pop-up banner at the NCMA exhibitor table or booth as part of membership outreach efforts. The MC also maintains a stock of handout materials that NCMA will resupply upon request.

Did you know there could be members-at-large (MALs) in your chapter geographic area who are regular NCMA members but not affiliated with any chapter? In addition to monthly membership rosters, the NCMA membership team provides periodic rosters of MALs that we use for outreach. Our chapter leaders also use social media to contact MALs. There is no charge for members to affiliate with a specific chapter; MALs only need to update their profiles on the NCMA website. In the past year, we recruited a dozen chapter members from MAL rosters.

As another recruitment initiative, we regularly coordinate with various community partners with interests in one or more aspects of contract

management to acquaint their members with the positive benefits of NCMA membership. Procurement Technical Assistance Centers (PTAC) and Small Business Development Centers (SBDC) are affiliated with colleges and universities. PTAC, SBDC and local Small Business Administration offices are often the first point of contact for aspiring small business entrepreneurs and business owners. Referrals to NCMA frequently open the door to memberships but require individual follow-up. We maintain good relations with each of these community partners, which we parlay into new memberships.

Over the past two years, all our chapter education and training events have been provided only on-line or by webinar. We include a brief introduction to NCMA in each webinar as another outreach element.

Retention

NCMA membership categories include regular, student, new professional and retired as well as organization/group memberships. All memberships are for a one-year period, and NCMA normally notifies the member two months in advance of their expiration. In addition, our chapter uses monthly NCMA rosters to identify expiring members and send e-mail reminders two months ahead of expiration.



Jacksonville Chapter Kick-off Executive Council meeting on August 21, 2021. It followed a community service project (beach clean-up) earlier that day.

Our reminders to individuals are more detailed and include renewal instructions. Since organizational members depend on their supervisors or finance office to coordinate renewals with the NCMA Organizational/Group Membership Department, we advise the member their membership will expire on a certain date and encourage them to contact the appropriate official in their organization. We try not to be intrusive, so we just send a reminder one month out and follow up when the membership actually expires, and the member is in a “grace period” category.

Our reminders and follow-ups encourage members to participate in both chapter and national events. We provide the current program schedule and recent chapter newsletter to ensure they are aware of new activities or opportunities. Over the past three years, our retention rates have exceeded 90%.

Recognition

Most people enjoy recognition for their actions or accomplishments. NCMA uses welcome messages to new

or transferring members, anniversary certificates, certificates of appreciation or service and individual awards including Volunteer of the Year and NCMA Fellow.

In our chapter, the MC is also the chapter awards and honors manager but coordinates closely with other chapter leaders to nominate high quality volunteers. Between 2018 and 2021, JAX Chapter won Outstanding Medium Sized Chapter four times, three nominees earned Volunteer of the Year Award, and our 2019 nominee won Outstanding Fellow of the Year.

Over 25% of our members live or work outside the traditional chapter areas of northeast Florida and southeast Georgia. We recognize these “far away” members in a short two-paragraph profile and photo in the chapter newsletter. At least two months ahead of the intended publication date, we ask the selected member to complete a short worksheet that includes current and previous professional duties, NCMA activity, plus hobbies and outside interests.

Reporting

Although we allude to the “three Rs,” there is actually a fourth R – reporting. The MC updates leaders on the membership plan through a monthly membership report of significant accomplishments, shortfalls and plans. That report captures the significant aspects of the three Rs and helps the programs and education chairs tailor their efforts to support membership recruiting and retention.

Following our recommendations is no guarantee of success but we hope our experience and suggestions will serve as a road map for your chapter to recruit, retain and recognize quality members. **CM**

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president) ■ Retired from Army Contracting Agency after 40 years of federal service ■ National awards and honors director 1992-1994, Albert Berger Award winner 2010, National Graalman Award Chair 2011-2015, Outstanding Fellow of the Year 2018-2019

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