

How to build a successful ambassador program for your small association

Engage and equip volunteers to extend your organization's reach



Introduction

We hear a lot about influencers these days. They're people in an industry that have the ability to inspire and persuade a target audience to make a purchase or take some other form of action.

But, do you think about engaging influencers for your association?

For associations, influencers take the form of ambassadors. They're a type of volunteer who aligns with your organization's values and brand voice and has the potential to help you do everything from recruiting new members and improving member retention to advocating for your industry. Building a strong ambassador program can help you extend your association's reach well beyond what your small staff could do alone.

Whether you're interested in starting an ambassador program, or your existing ambassador program needs a boost, this guide offers insights into these key areas to help you engage and motivate more ambassadors for your organization:

- Defining your ambassador program
- Recruiting ambassadors
- Training and engaging ambassadors to help them succeed
- Retaining ambassadors
- Getting your ambassador program started (or taking it to the next level)

Developing a great ambassador program is completely achievable – even for associations with small staffs.

**So, are you ready to learn how?
Let's get going.**



1 Defining your ambassador program

Before you begin recruiting ambassadors, it's important to define your program and what you want ambassadors to do. This starts with a clear description of each ambassador position that:

- Identifies the skills and attributes needed (to help focus recruitment efforts and attract the right people)
- Set expectations for the position

Here are some of the details a solid ambassador position description should include:

- **Title**
- **Brief description of position**
- **Objectives**
 - Purpose of the position
 - Expected impact of the position on the organization
- **Benefits**
 - Value to the ambassador
 - Value to the organization
- **Responsibilities**
 - Specific duties and obligations
 - Definition of success
- **Qualifications**
 - Skills needed
 - Required previous roles (if applicable)
 - Membership level required
- **Training and supervision**
 - Onboarding/training
 - Handbooks or guidelines
 - Who the ambassador will work with at your organization
- **Time commitment**
 - Overall length of service period
 - What days/times work can be completed
- **Who to contact/how to apply**



TIP: While ambassadors are typically volunteers, you can give them extra incentive and thanks for their work by providing them with perks, such as discounts on their membership dues or event registrations.

Successful ambassador programs have various types of engagement opportunities. This allows members to choose the opportunities that address their schedules and interests.

Here are some types of ambassador opportunities to consider including as part of your program:

Social/community

This ambassador can help you start conversations and keep them going, promote programs or research, and answer questions – on your social media accounts or in your online member community.

Membership

This ambassador can help you by connecting with prospective or new members to help them get to know your association and the benefits of being a member.

Career mentor

This ambassador can serve as a guide to younger members and those early in their careers to help them better understand your association's industry or profession and how your organization can help members advance their careers.

Advocate for the industry

This ambassador can help you stay on top of significant industry topics and advocate for legislative issues that impact your organization's industry or profession. Advocacy rated in the top three most important benefits of members who responded to a survey from the 2021 Association Trends Study by Community Brands.

Determine which ambassador opportunities will best support your organization, and then develop position descriptions for each one.

TIP: If you're launching an ambassador program for the first time, consider starting with only two or three positions. These can even be people from your board of directors or committee chairs. Get them started, ask for their feedback, and refine your program before recruiting more ambassadors.



2 Recruiting ambassadors

Once you have your program defined, it's time to create a recruitment strategy. This plan should address your prospective ambassadors' needs and include ways to target them with the right message and the right offerings at the right time.

Some ideas your ambassador recruitment strategy should include:

Audience

Who will you target? Think about which members likely have the time, skills, and traits required for the position.

Benefits

What will volunteering do for the ambassador, such as helping your industry/profession, learning a skill, having fun, and meeting people.

Features

These details – such as when, where, doing what, and with whom – should already be defined in your ambassador position descriptions.

Message

Your writing and visual elements should be clear, simple, compelling, and attractive.

Communication channels

Remember that different audiences may require different communication channels and strategies. Think about how and when to use your website, blog articles, social media, targeted email campaigns, information sessions, video, and personal asks to get the right message to the right people.



TIP: With YourMembership AMS, you can recruit ambassadors via your website, emails, and online community, and track who has volunteered for what opportunities through easy-to-use reports.

3 Training and engaging ambassadors

To help your ambassadors succeed, it's important to have a plan in place for orientation, training, and support. These resources help to ensure ambassadors:

Perform their duties well

and stay within the boundaries of their position

Feel clear and confident

while performing their role so they are more inclined to continue volunteering

Have a positive experience

and tell others, thus serving as an extension of your recruiting efforts

Consider the following ideas as you build your ambassador program:

Orientation


Make sure new ambassadors understand your association's mission and how it is organized. The more they understand about how your organization and your ambassador program work, the more they will be able to contribute.

Training

Remember that while your ambassadors might have influence over your industry, potential members, and members, they might not have a lot of experience in the specific ambassador role they're taking on. They might need training on items such as interpersonal communications, public speaking, social media, or office technology.

Support

Guiding and supporting volunteers is critically important. Think about it: You don't want them to feel lost or frustrated and resign from their ambassador role. Instead, meet with them regularly to ask about any concerns they might have, provide guidance, and offer the tools they need to be successful.



TIP: With YourMembership AMS, you can make first-time ambassadors feel more welcome by automatically pairing them with a veteran ambassador through your online community.

4 Retaining ambassadors

Keeping ambassadors engaged and motivated long-term requires meeting their needs and expectations in multiple ways. Here are some tips for keeping ambassadors around for years to come:

Listen to them. Regularly ask ambassadors for their feedback so you know you are meeting their expectations. Incorporate their input into your program as much as possible, and let them know when you've made changes based on their feedback so they know you are taking their thoughts seriously.

TIP: You can survey ambassadors and track volunteer hours using YourMembership AMS.



Provide feedback. In turn, provide feedback to ambassadors through an evaluation (via phone, video chat, or in person). Let them know how their activities fit into your association's bigger picture and offer them an assessment of their role and performance. Based on the evaluation, you might ask them to continue in the same role or invite them to try another role that might better correspond with their needs and skills.

Thank them. Don't assume your ambassadors know you appreciate them. As with other volunteers, you must actually say the words "thank you". It may take a few extra minutes but take the time to let your ambassadors know you truly value their work. In your thanks, mention their specific contributions and the impact they've had on the organization.

You can thank them privately through a handwritten note or phone call. You can also publicly thank them through a headline in your member newsletter, for example. These accolades not only recognize the ambassador, but also can encourage others to join in.

TIP: Using YourMembership AMS, you can give a shout out of thanks to individuals or groups through your online community.



5 Getting your program started (or taking it up a notch)

You might be just starting your ambassador program. Or, maybe it's time to revisit and rethink your existing program to make sure it's working as well as possible. Either way, here's an exercise that can help – even if you're short on time.

First, ask yourself these questions:

- What are your goals for engaging ambassadors? What are their goals for volunteering?
- Do you have descriptions for each ambassador role? If not, why?
- How do you identify new prospective ambassadors?
- Do you provide training for your ambassadors? If not, what could you do to onboard them and help them succeed?
- How do you thank ambassadors for their work?
- Do you provide feedback or an evaluation for your ambassadors?

Next, write down one thing you can do this week to improve your ambassador program or move your new program forward. Put it on your calendar. Once that's done, repeat. And repeat.

Soon, you'll find that you're well on your way to developing a successful ambassador program.



Get the right technology foundation for your ambassador program (and more!)

Even with a small staff, you can develop a successful ambassador program. Using YourMembership, you can implement the techniques in this guide.

YourMembership offers affordable, easy-to-use, all-in-one membership software for small to mid-sized organizations. It includes association management software (AMS) combined with an online community platform to help you manage member and volunteer activities while providing members with an easy, everyday way to connect, share, and learn.

Find out more about why YourMembership AMS is the ideal solution for small and growing associations.



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