



STATE OF ASSOCIATION MEMBER EXPERIENCE

SPRING 2021 REPORT



INTRO

Annual conferences have long-been the cornerstone of association member engagement. As planners prepare to welcome attendees back to in-person events in a post-pandemic world, it's the right time to reassess your approach to member engagement. Are in-person events still what your members want? How might they respond to more frequent virtual events?

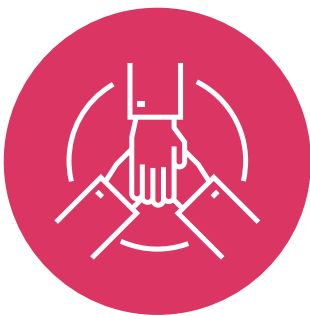
Forj, a leading virtual events and member experience platform for associations and professional community organizations, surveyed virtual event attendees from the United States and Canada, including members of professional associations, in spring of 2021.

The findings are collected in this paper to help professional associations understand what their members are expecting from their leadership in 2021 and beyond.

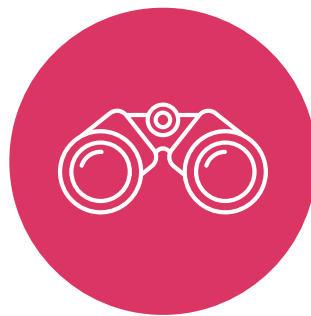
ABOUT THE SURVEY

Forj, a leading virtual events and member experience platform for associations and professional community organizations, surveyed 3,772 virtual event attendees from the United States and Canada, including 1,779 who are members of professional associations, in April and May of 2021.

This report will provide you with actionable data and ideas to strengthen your member experience and event marketing strategies for the remainder of 2021 and beyond, including:



Association member engagement levels, which are better than association leaders expected them to be



Insights on where to invest resources to reach members and prospective members more effectively (e.g., member community platforms vs. social media)



Actionable intelligence on members' event priorities, satisfaction drivers and intention to participate in virtual, hybrid and in-person events this year

SHIFT TO A DIGITAL-FIRST MEMBER EXPERIENCE STRATEGY

Key Takeaways to improve member recruitment, engagement and retention

95-96% of both association members and non-members rely on virtual events/webinars, online platforms and social media for their industry knowledge and professional networking.

It's clear from this data that a digital-first member engagement strategy will be more effective for associations than the legacy focus on an annual conference as the primary member engagement tool.

To strengthen member engagement, create a more personalized digital user experience aligned with their interests and preferences.

To convert non-members who consume your content into members, develop targeted campaigns, a dedicated recruitment content strategy and sales funnels.

A strong and consistent social media strategy can improve member recruitment and member engagement as it is already a preferred channel for networking with peers and obtaining industry knowledge.

WHERE TO REACH CURRENT AND NEW MEMBERS

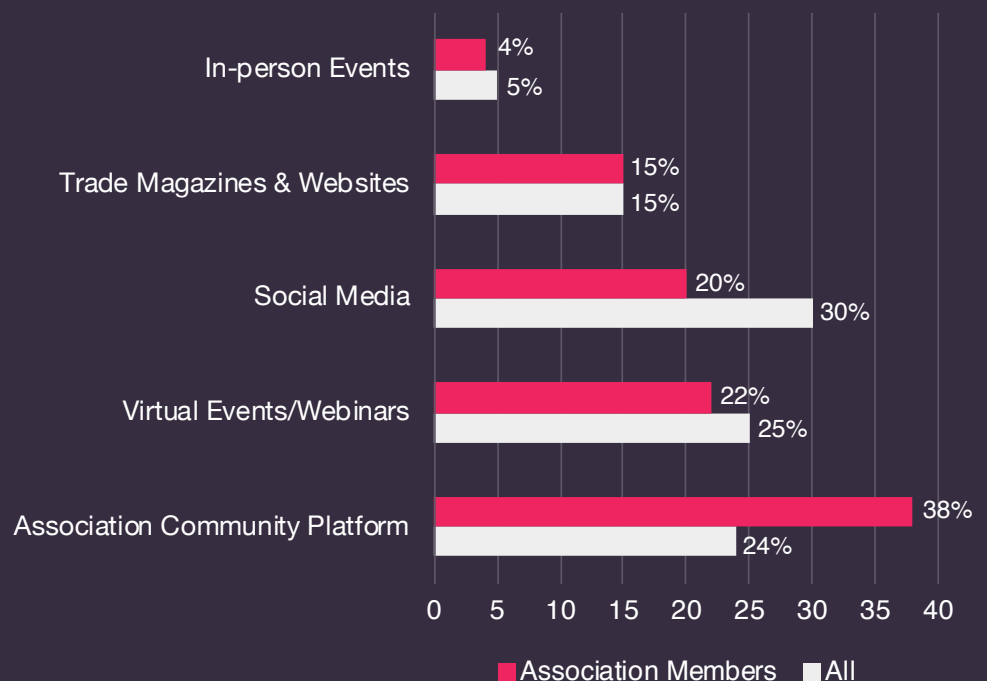
Industry association community platforms are the primary information source for association members (38%), but they are also a go-to resource for non-members (24%) seeking knowledge.

Social media is a dominant resource for both members (20%) and non-members (30%).

Trade media are only viewed as a primary resource by 15% of members and non-members.

Only 4-5% of respondents said they rely on an annual conference or other in-person events for learning and networking.

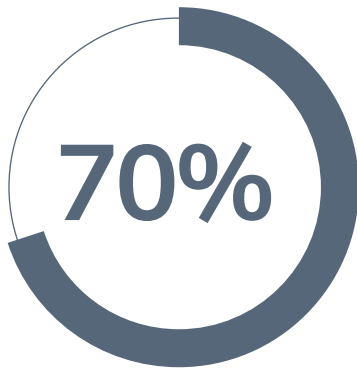
SOURCES FOR INDUSTRY KNOWLEDGE, TRAINING & NETWORKING



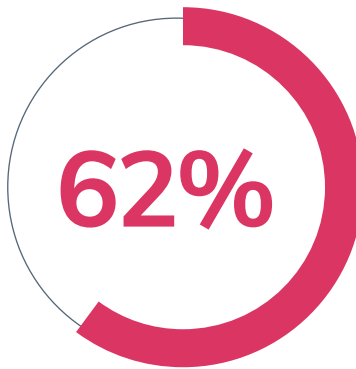
ASSOCIATION MEMBERS READY FOR 2021 EVENTS

- 72% of all survey respondents said they will return to physical events in 2021, as will 70% of association members.
- 62% of association members and 66% of all survey respondents will attend even more virtual events/webinars this year than last.
- 80-81% of both groups said they are, or may be, open to hybrid events this year.

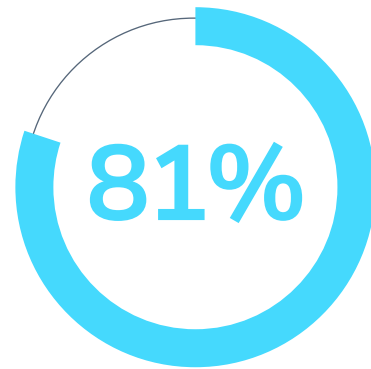
**Virtual events are here
to stay, even when in-
person events return**



Will Return to Physical
Events in 2021



Will Attend Even More
Virtual Events in 2021



Open to Hybrid
Events in 2021

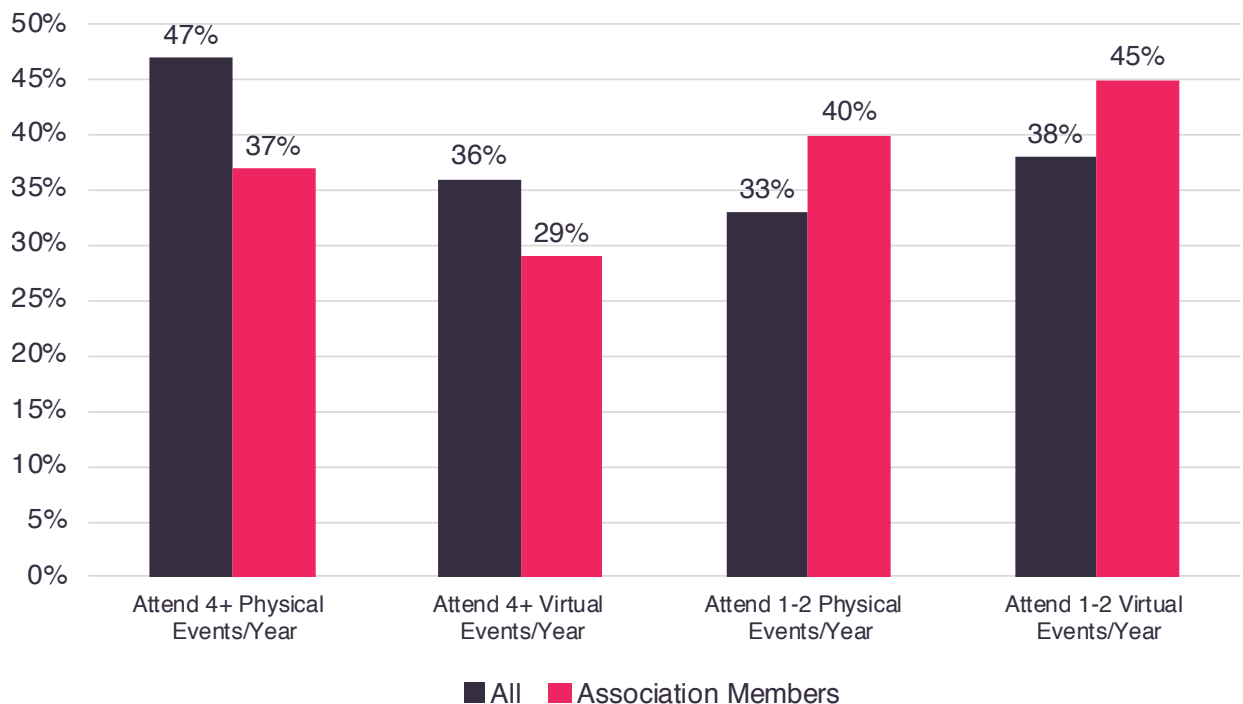


ASSOCIATION MEMBERS ATTEND FEWER EVENTS THAN THEIR PEERS

Holding more frequent events is key to improved ROI

- Association members are much less likely to attend 4 or more physical or virtual events per year than their peers.
- Many associations only offer a few events per year, as their annual conference consumes most of staff resources.
- More frequent events should increase member engagement and ROI

FREQUENCY OF EVENT PARTICIPATION



MOST IMPORTANT ASPECTS OF EVENTS

Survey respondents were asked to rank in order of importance various aspects of both physical and virtual events. The priorities were consistent across both types of events and for both association members and their peers.

Interestingly, these priorities changed when we asked them later in the survey about their satisfaction with recent events they participated in, and about their concerns regarding attending in-person events in 2021. We view this initial priority list as the reasons why they initially choose to attend or not attend events. Read on to learn more specifics about attendee priorities

1

Cost to participate

2

Size of the audience attending

3

Safety and privacy

4

Interesting topics

5

Sponsors I respect

6

High quality speakers

7

Relevant education opportunities

8

Strong networking opportunities

9

High quality technology platform

10

Interesting activities to keep me engaged



SATISFACTION WITH VIRTUAL EVENTS

Quality of content drives high satisfaction for virtual events

- Association members gave virtual event hosts high marks for providing interesting topics, interesting activities to keep them engaged and high-quality speakers.
- They were less enthusiastic about the audience size and cost to participate.
- Improving access to content and networking before and after the event should be a focus for future virtual events.

1. Interesting topics
2. Safety and privacy
3. Interesting activities to keep me engaged
4. High quality speakers
5. High quality technology platform
6. Relevant education opportunities
7. Strong networking opportunities
8. Sponsors I respect
9. Access to networking and content before and after event
10. Size of the audience attending
11. Cost to participate

SATISFACTION WITH IN-PERSON EVENTS

Quality of speakers is a big differentiator in physical event satisfaction

- Association members gave in-person event hosts high marks for providing interesting topics, as well as relevant education opportunities and networking.
- They were less enthusiastic about the audience size and cost to participate.
- Quality of speakers ranked considerably lower for in-person events than for virtual events, likely due to the ease of virtual participation for top speakers whose schedules often make it difficult to travel to events.

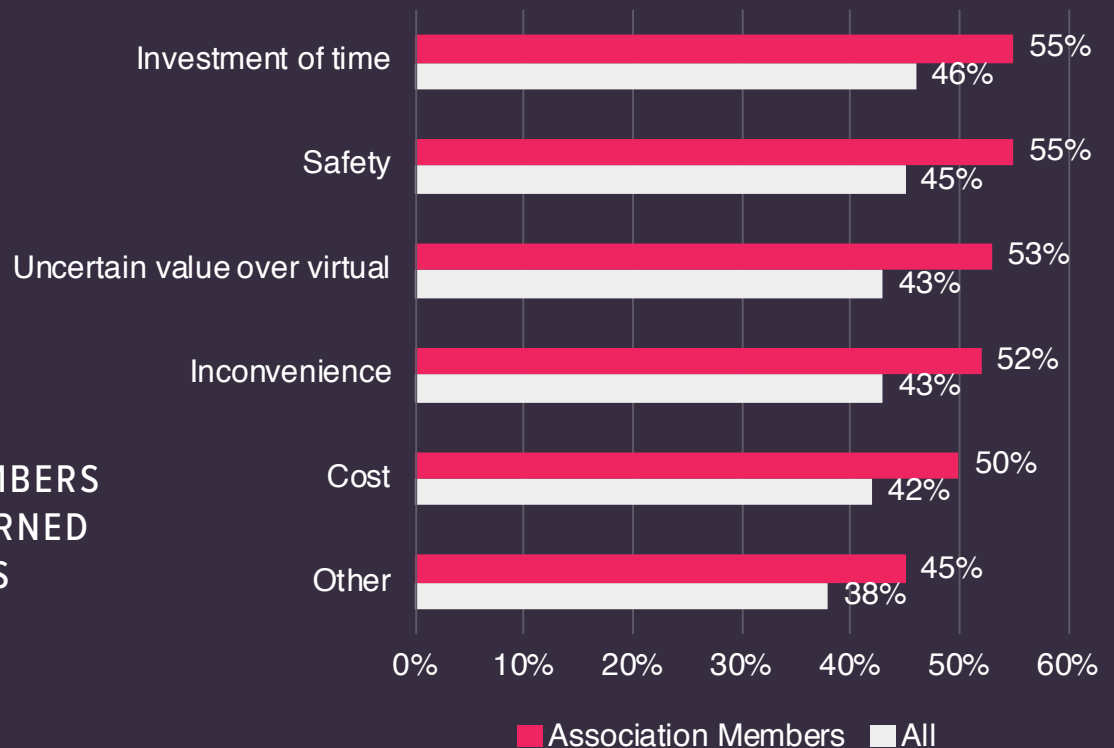
1. Interesting topics
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5. Interesting activities to keep me engaged
6. High quality technology platform
7. Sponsors I respect
8. Access to networking and content before and after event
9. Size of the audience attending
10. High quality speakers
11. Cost to participate

CONCERNS ON RETURN TO IN-PERSON EVENTS

- Association members are very or somewhat concerned about almost every aspect of physical events – much more concerned than their peers.
- Safety, time investment and uncertainty of the value of physical events over virtual events are the top concerns of association members. Now that

most association members have experienced at least one virtual event during the pandemic, it is likely that this is driving the uncertainty about the value of attending physical events. We recommend validating member interest in attending physical vs. virtual events to determine where to invest resources.

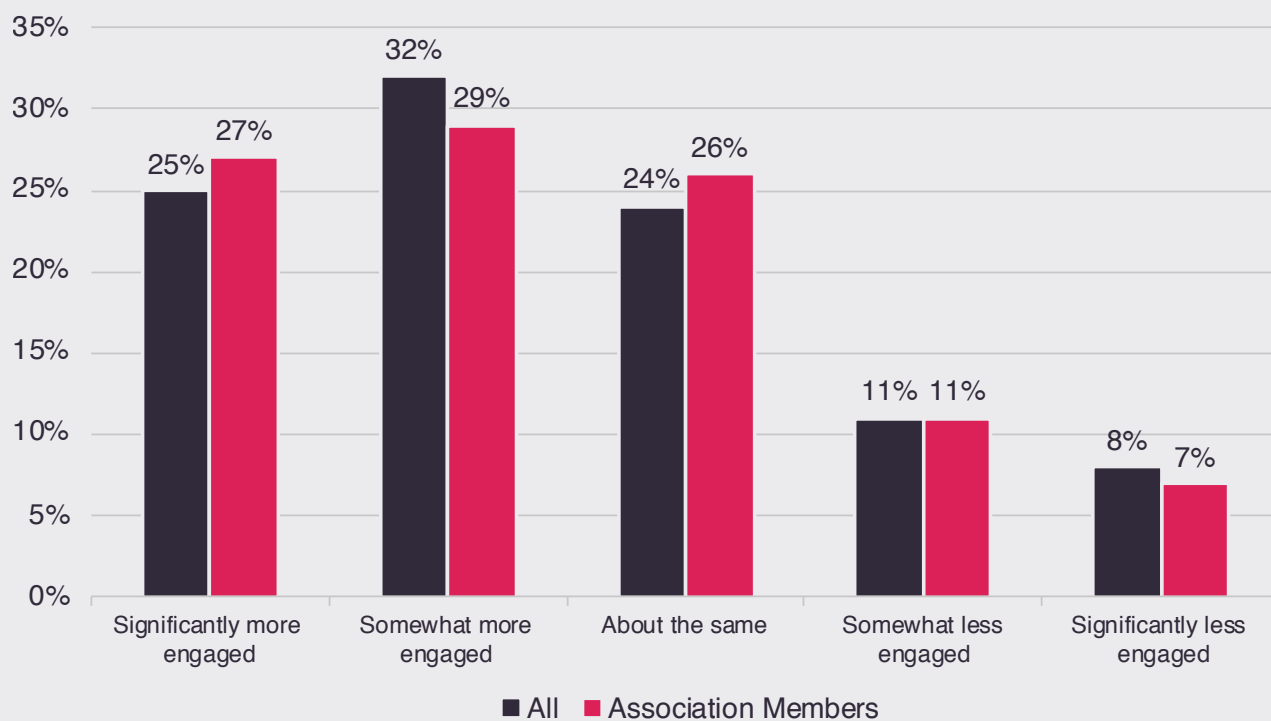
ASSOCIATION MEMBERS FAR MORE CONCERNED THAN THEIR PEERS



MEMBER ENGAGEMENT AFTER PANDEMIC YEAR

74% of association members report impact on engagement due to COVID

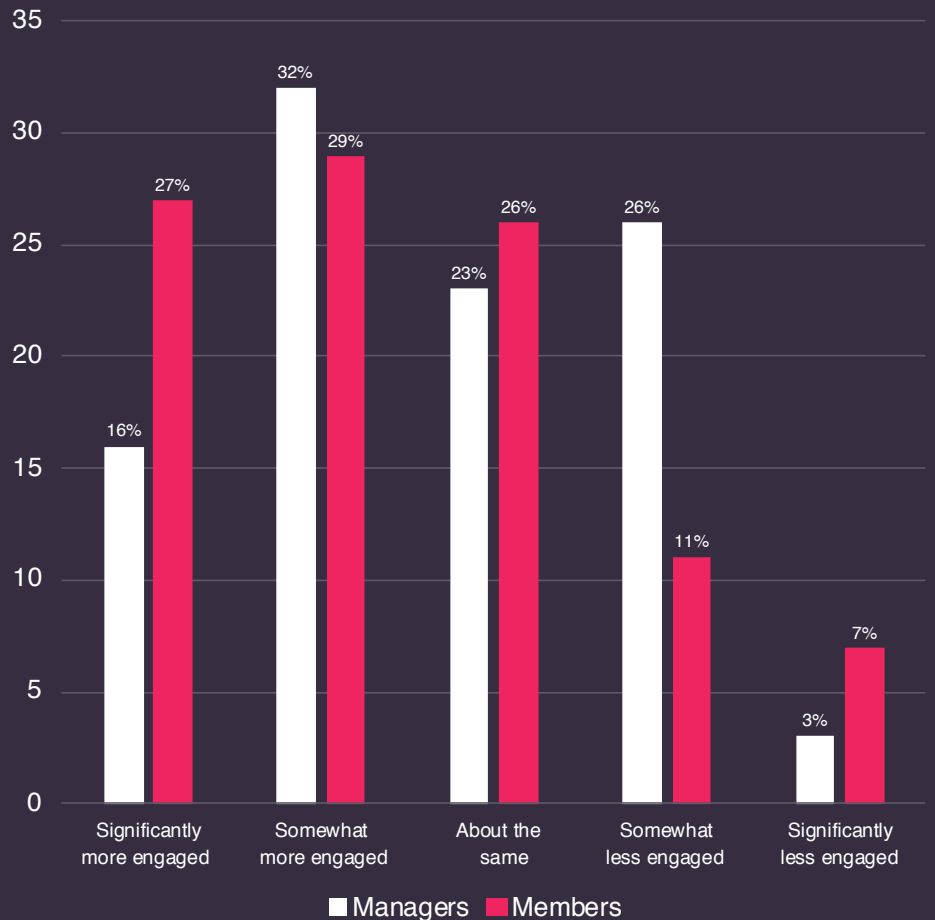
- 56% of association members are somewhat or significantly more engaged with their association than before COVID-19, similar to the engagement levels of their non-association peers with other types of groups.
- 18-19% of both groups are less engaged than before the pandemic. This segment is the most likely not to renew their membership.



ASSOCIATION LEADERS EXPECTED ENGAGEMENT TO BE WORSE THAN ATTENDEES ARE INDICATING

- When we surveyed 200 association managers in February and March of 2021, 48% said they had seen slight or significant improvements in their community engagement over the past year and 29% said they had seen a drop in engagement.
- Our more positive feedback from association members may indicate a rebound in engagement, or that members are much more engaged than their associations are aware. Regardless, this is a more optimistic result that reduces the threat of membership losses for associations.
- Many association managers indicated they had lost members and enthusiasm due to COVID-19 and that relationships are not as strong via virtual/remote communication. We see reason for optimism that a stronger focus on a digital-first member experience and more frequent quality events – both virtual and physical – can improve both member retention and recruiting.

MEMBER ENGAGEMENT



CONCLUSION

Association members still crave opportunities to learn, grow as professionals and network with one another. However, they're open to those experiences being delivered in a variety of ways.

As associations consider the future of member experience, it's clear that now is the time to shift in a new direction.

The pandemic accelerated digital transformation in all aspects of our work and our lives, and your members want more on-demand access to content and collaboration than ever before. Evaluate how well your technology is meeting your members' expectations and enabling your internal processes. Map the moments that matter, and reimagine your approach to attracting and retaining your members.

CONTACT US FOR A COMPLIMENTARY CONSULTATION TODAY.

ABOUT FORJ

Forj is a leading Virtual Events and Member Experience platform for industry associations and professional membership groups. Our platform, data intelligence, and client success team enable our clients to engage and grow their communities.

We fuse our member experience focus with leading-edge technology expertise to fuel more personalized, enriched experiences. And we connect communities for the common good. Every voice is heard, everyone learns, bonds are strengthened, and long-lasting relationships are forged. It's where empathy and belonging meet good business sense.

www.forj.ai

