



# 2025 ASSOCIATION TRENDS: WHAT SMART LEADERS ARE DOING DIFFERENTLY

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Association leaders face no shortage of challenges in 2025. Revenue models are under strain, traditional engagement tactics aren't landing like they used to, and the next generation of members expects more than just a newsletter and a handshake. But within this complexity lies opportunity—real, actionable opportunity. At Sequence Consulting, we've combed through the most authoritative research to bring you the clearest picture of what's changing, what's working, and where the smart bets are. This white paper is your roadmap to what's next.

While **63%** of associations anticipate membership growth and **74%** expect increased engagement in 2025<sup>[5]</sup>, these topline numbers may obscure deeper risks. Retention is stagnating, younger members remain under-engaged, and value is often poorly articulated. Strategic optimism must be matched by operational follow-through.

## INTRODUCTION: THE INFLECTION POINT

We're at a pivotal moment. The data says it. The market says it. Most of all, your members are saying it.

Expectations are rising, but so is the potential for a breakthrough. Associations that focus on relevance, connection, and strategic alignment will outperform. Those that cling to old models will stall—or fade. This isn't just about keeping up. It's about leading with clarity and confidence. This report is your briefing for the year ahead.

## MEMBERSHIP TRENDS: THE EVOLVING CORE

Membership is the lifeblood of any association. But in 2025, membership looks different:

- **Retention is softening.** Growth may be steady, but loyalty isn't guaranteed. According to GrowthZone, retention rates are flat or declining for many associations, with **41%** reporting flat retention and **14%** seeing net decreases in 2024<sup>[1]</sup>. Meanwhile, MGI reports that **63%** expect dues revenue to rise, suggesting a possible disconnect between revenue expectations and membership realities<sup>[5]</sup>.
- **Younger professionals are under-engaged.** Nearly half of associations do not customize communications for early career members, per Naylor's 2024 Benchmarking Report<sup>[2]</sup>.
- **Personalization is the missing link.** Only one-third of associations consistently use segmented communications, despite **88%** acknowledging its importance<sup>[3]</sup>.

**If your membership strategy hasn't changed in the last three years, it's time to revisit it.**



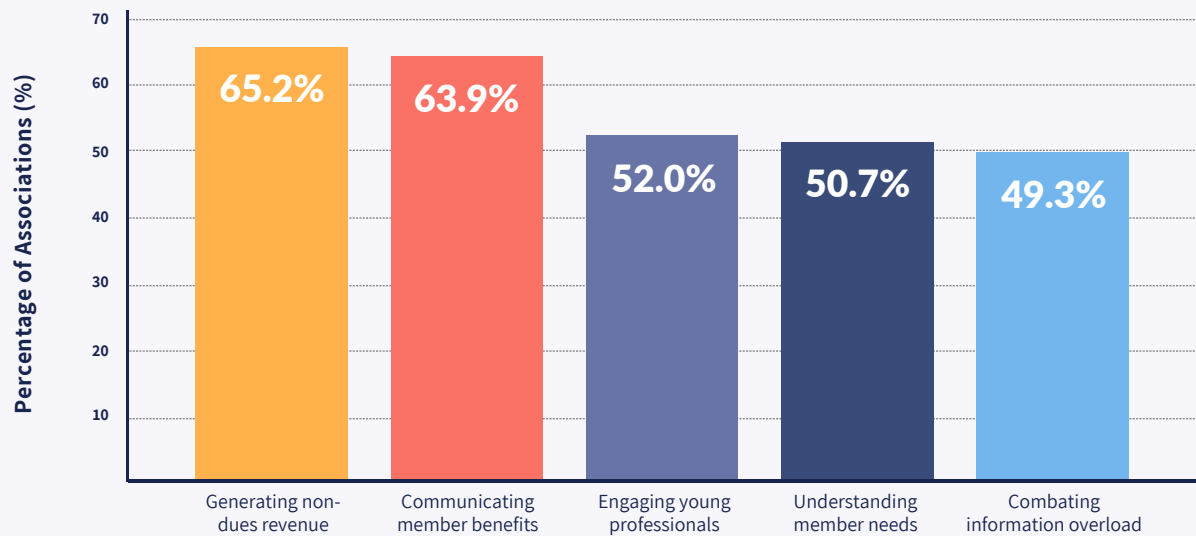
## REVENUE PRESSURE AND INNOVATION FATIGUE

Let's call it what it is: non-dues revenue is keeping association executives up at night.

- **65%** of associations cite non-dues revenue as their top challenge in 2024, up from **58%** in 2023[2][4].
- Top barriers include limited resources (**52%**), low member engagement (**51%**), and staff bandwidth constraints (**32%**)[2].
- While **63%** of associations expect non-dues revenue to increase in 2025[5], few are prepared with the systems and strategies required to support that growth.

**You don't need a bigger team—you need a smarter model.**

TOP 5 CHALLENGES FOR ASSOCIATIONS IN 2025



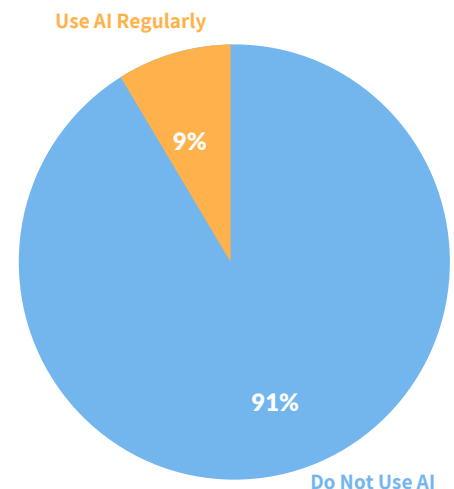
## DIGITAL DISCONNECTS AND MISSED OPPORTUNITIES

Associations know digital is critical. But most aren't seeing returns on their digital tools. Here's why:

- **Community platforms are underused.** Only **25%** of members actively engage with these tools, according to GrowthZone 2025[1].
- **AI is a buzzword, not a tool.** Just **6%** of associations report using AI regularly to engage members, while **64%** do not use it at all[2]. Yet MGI finds that **19%** of associations plan to implement AI, and **41%** are currently exploring its use[5].
- **Surveys aren't systematic.** Only **33%** of associations conduct member surveys annually, and **40%** have no regular feedback strategy[2].

**The digital gap isn't about technology—it's about intentionality.**

AI ADOPTING AMONG ASSOCIATIONS (2024)



## ◆ STRATEGIC GAPS HOLDING ASSOCIATIONS BACK

Here's the hard truth: insight without execution is just noise.

- **Communications are fragmented.** Just **29.7%** of associations say their engagement tools are mostly or fully integrated[2].
- **Strategic priorities get stuck in planning.** For example, implementing a comprehensive data strategy ranks as a top aspiration, yet fewer than 1 in 4 associations say they've made meaningful progress in this area[2].
- **Capacity is misaligned.** While **67%** of staff work in hybrid environments, marketing and data strategy remain the most under-resourced departments[2].

**Execution is where vision becomes value. And that's where many associations fall short.**

## ◆ STRATEGIC IMPERATIVES FOR 2025

Let's not just name the problems. Let's solve them. Here are the six moves we believe every association should make this year:

1. **Rebuild the Member Journey.** Every step, from first touch to long-term loyalty, should be intentional—and measurable.
2. **Make Value Visible.** Don't bury your benefits in fine print. Use stories, testimonials, and outcomes to make the value of membership undeniable.
3. **Segment and Personalize.** Speak to real people, not lists. Start with career stage and engagement behavior.
4. **Rethink Revenue Models.** Monetize attention, not access. Think subscription bundles, digital sponsorships, and knowledge products.
5. **Elevate Feedback and Insight.** Establish regular feedback loops and make member insight a daily input, not an annual task.
6. **Align Strategy, Staff, and Systems.** Build a planning cycle that connects your vision to your calendar and your budget.





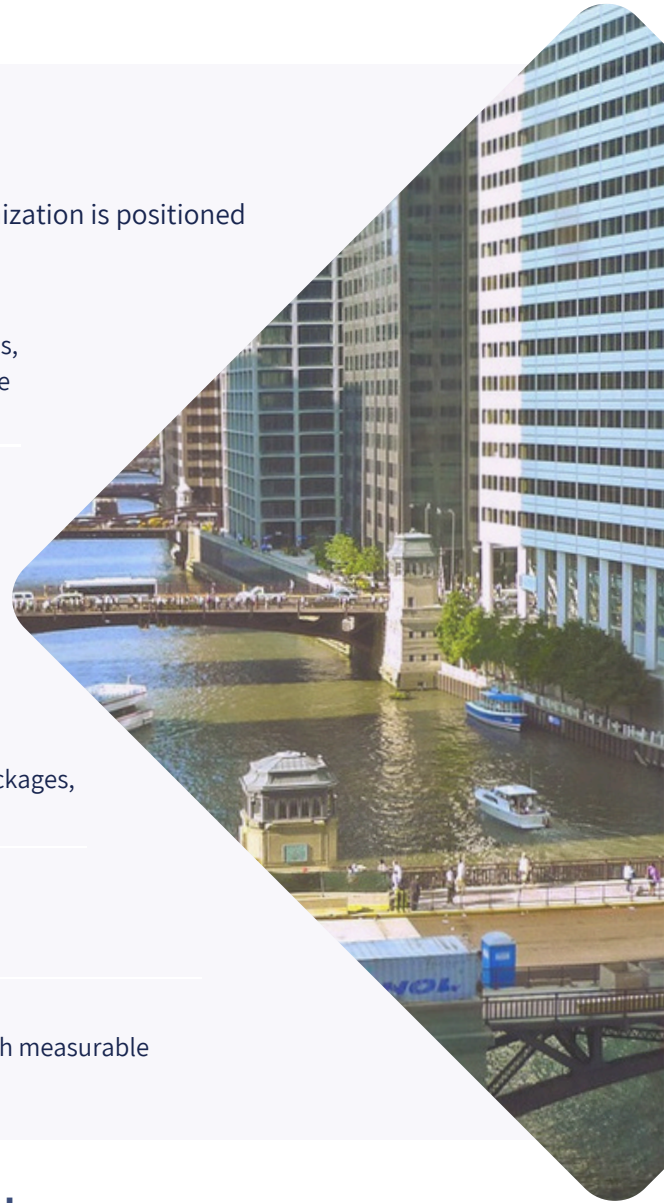
## 2025 OUTLOOK AT A GLANCE

- **63%** of associations expect membership growth
- **74%** expect higher engagement
- **63%** expect non-dues revenue to increase
- **37%** will raise dues in 2025 (mostly by 3–5%)
- **41%** are exploring AI, and **19%** plan to implement it
- **28%** plan to invest in market research or needs assessments

## 2025 STRATEGIC READINESS AUDIT

Use this as a lens, not a list. These indicators signal whether your organization is positioned to lead—or lag—in the year ahead:

- ☐ **Member Strategy is Behaviorally Tuned**  
Your engagement strategy adapts to the real-world behaviors, motivations, and interests of members—meeting them where they are, not where a title says they should be.
- ☐ **Communication is Orchestrated, Not Fragmented**  
Messaging flows across teams and channels with clarity, cohesion, and purpose—replacing silos with symphony.
- ☐ **Insights Drive Action in Real Time**  
You leverage behavioral data and feedback loops not just to learn, but to continuously optimize how you connect, deliver, and retain.
- ☐ **Revenue Models Reflect Today's Market**  
You've evolved past traditional monetization and now offer value-rich packages, scalable digital assets, and partner-ready platforms.
- ☐ **Voice of the Member Shapes Decisions**  
Feedback isn't an annual ritual—it's a living signal embedded in planning, programming, and performance metrics.
- ☐ **Your Digital Platforms Are Outcomes-Driven**  
Community and content tools aren't just present—they're productive, with measurable impact on engagement and value delivery.



## CONCLUSION: FROM INSIGHT TO EXECUTION

2025 won't reward hesitation. The challenges facing associations—shifting member expectations, volatile revenue models, and rising demands for relevance—are real and growing. But so are the opportunities.

The associations that will thrive in the years ahead are those willing to rethink what they offer, how they engage, and how they define value. That work takes clarity, commitment, and a strategy built for execution.

If that's where you're headed, we're here to help you get there—with the insight, experience, and strategic focus to make it happen.



## ◆ ABOUT SEQUENCE CONSULTING

### The Growth Strategy Firm for Associations

Sequence Consulting helps mission-driven associations grow smarter and faster. We specialize in transforming member value, revenue models, and strategic clarity.

With decades of experience exclusively serving associations, we understand the complexity of your mission and your membership. Our clients include many of the most respected organizations in the country. Twelve of the top twenty associations are Sequence clients.

We partner with growth-minded executives to help them engage members, diversify revenue, and clarify the path forward. Whether you're rethinking your value proposition or reinventing your business model, we help you translate strategy into meaningful results – measured in growth, engagement, and relevance.



## ◆ LET'S TALK

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### Sources:

- [1] GrowthZone 2025 Association Survey Report
- [2] Naylor 2024 Association Benchmarking Report
- [3] Association Laboratory "Looking Forward 2025" Executive Summary
- [4] Naylor 2023 Association Benchmarking Report
- [5] MGI 2025 Association Outlook Report

