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Your Most Important Measurement: Impact



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Associations tend to pay more attention to how much their resources are used than to the impact those resources have on their community. Instead, focus on impact to better assess—and improve—your value proposition.

What will the world look like in three years? While the future is uncertain, every professional needs to be prepared, regardless of career stage or industry. And while many associations promote their education, information, networking opportunities, and advocacy as elements of their value proposition, what may be more important to future members is the ability to improve outcomes in their work.

Consider these questions:

- Are you having the same impact on your members as you did when your annual meeting, journal, or industry standards were first created?
- Does participating in your educational programs or accessing your content have the desired impact?
- Have members' roles, responsibilities, or work environments shifted in recent years due to regulatory changes, technological advances, or consumer demands?
- Does your organization review, assess, and gather feedback on the impact of its offerings, or do you primarily measure importance and satisfaction?

Many industries are facing significant changes, and associations are caught in the upheaval. The programs, products, and services created 10, 20, or 30 years ago may no longer solve members' problems if the problems themselves are changing.

To address challenges and leverage opportunities in a changing landscape, associations must be nimble and member-centric. They must be willing to test new ideas and allow for failures. Innovation and relevancy happen when organizations believe it is riskier to stay the course than to make changes to programs and products that have a successful track record.

Association leaders should ask themselves, "What impact do we want to have on our members or the community we serve?" An association's mission statement acts as an overarching guide, but association leaders should go through the exercise of articulating the specific impact they hope to achieve through provision of programs, products, and services. By articulating the desired impact (or impacts), an association will be in a better position to evaluate its achievement toward its mission and assess where it should increase (and sometimes decrease) its investment.



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The first step is to go beyond just measuring the use of your offerings to evaluating the impact on the community you serve. For example:

- Are members who attend your annual meeting more likely to say they have improved decision-making skills?
- Do members who earn your association's certification find they are more influential in their workplace?
- Are certified members more likely to advance their careers within their chosen field?
- Do employers value the knowledge, information, and education you provide?

What's Your Impact?

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- **The Key Award**, recognizing exceptional leadership by an association CEO.
- **The Professional Performance Award**, honoring invaluable contributions by senior association executives who are not CEOs.
- **The Academy of Leaders Award**, recognizing exemplary support of the association community by an industry partner or consultant. The author, Sheri Jacobs, FASAE, CAE, is the recipient of the 2017 Academy of Leaders Award.

Applications for this year's awards are being accepted until May 21, 2019. [Apply now](#).

Even relying on self-reporting from members, answering questions like these will help your association evaluate its mission achievement and will offer guidance on how to adjust to improve performance.

To begin the process of evaluating the impact of your offerings and to remain relevant for years to come, it's important to prioritize and incorporate the following activities:

Track changes in behaviors. Preferences may tell you more about desires than behaviors. Asking members how they wish to access information and education will not provide you with the data needed to track how behaviors have changed within your community. Instead, ask about the types of specific

resources they regularly access and how often they consult your organization's resources in specific situations.

Re-examine existing solutions. Is your association providing solutions but not delivering them at the point of need? Even if your solutions are superior in quality, members may turn to other sources if their resources are more accessible and affordable and can be delivered exactly when needed.

Innovate. Is your association too afraid of failure to try new ideas? Too often, associations operate as if accountability precludes innovation. Associations should be transparent and should evaluate their efforts honestly, but there should also be room to experiment with new ideas, learn from mistakes, and adapt rather than give up on an idea just because it didn't work in its first iteration.

These recommendations do not suggest abandoning the core strengths organizations bring to the table. Rather, if they wish to have an impact on members and achieve their mission, it is time for associations to understand and respond to the market forces driving the decisions to join and engage.

Tags:

 **CEOS/EXECUTIVE MANAGEMENT**

 **INNOVATION**

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