

December 2019
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Enhancing the Weakest Link

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Associations want to portray strength. If the national is composed of state chapters, or the state has local components, all of them should perform at a certain level to deliver consistent value to members.

An association with a network of components should have mechanisms to maintain standards of excellence. The focus may be on proper brand usage, strong advocacy, and sustainable membership growth.

“You’re are only as strong as the weakest link,” is a concept that applies to components. If a chapter is underperforming or finds itself with troubles, the reputation of the entire network suffers.

The Rising Tide

President John F. Kennedy is credited with the phrase, “a rising tide lifts all boats.” It is about improving economic policies to benefit all of America.

The same can be said about association components. By improving operations and performance, all chapters benefit and the national stays strong.

Programs for Continuous Improvement

Parent associations address chapter performance with programs and training. Ironically, it may be the weaker associations that choose not or cannot afford to attend. Their rationale: “We don’t need it,” and “We don’t have the time or money to participate.”

Whether the state organization has local chapters, or the national association has 50 components, there are ways to raise performance.

Annual Education – Provide a national program to train component staffs. In a collaborative forum, attendees can ask questions and share best practices. The focus is on operations, governance, strategy, finances, membership techniques and risk awareness. Without volunteer leaders being present, the executives are encouraged to ask their questions.

Accreditation – Some organizations have created a process to accredit the organization that meets prescribed standards. Examples include the US Chamber of

Commerce accreditation with a sample self-paced analysis available at <https://www.uschamber.com/members/chambers/accreditation/accreditation-self-analysis-local-chambers>.

At the state level, another example is the Louisiana Association of Chamber of Commerce Executives process. The program was created to promote adoption of generally accepted best practices.

Chambers and associations perform similarly, both designated nonprofit, 501c6 exempt organizations. The sample is beneficial to both sectors, located at [https://www.louisianachambers.org/fileadmin/user_upload/PDFs/LACCE/LACCE_Certified Chamber Program Application 2018.pdf](https://www.louisianachambers.org/fileadmin/user_upload/PDFs/LACCE/LACCE_Certified_Chamber_Program_Application_2018.pdf).

Core Standards – Some national associations, especially those that are federated, have created core standards. These are the minimum requirements to maintain the relationship.

For a chapter to exist, it must meet these benchmarks. The standards prescribe the necessary legal structure, use of the brand and logo, and what must be included in the strategic plan for alignment between chapter and parent.

The National Association of REALTORS®, requires local state, and territorial associations, as a condition of membership, to meet organizational alignment standards, described at <https://www.nar.realtor/ae/manage-your-association/core-standards-for-state-and-local-associations/core-standards-fifth-compliance-cycle>. The areas of focus include ethics, advocacy, consumer outreach, organizational support, technology and finances. Noncompliance can result in revocation of the charter.

“NAR’s core standards ensures that all the associations across the USA perform at the highest levels to serve REALTORS®,” said Steven Louchheim, executive director at the Tallahassee Board of REALTORS®.

The American Institute of Architects created a proprietary component playbook to support organizational excellence.

“AIA implemented a core service accreditation process to ensure members have access to, at the least, minimum levels of services at the local and state levels. The assessment considers both elemental needs, such as directors and officers insurance, bylaw compliance and financial management as well as availability of minimum hours of quality continuing education and other offerings,” explains Vicki Long, Hon. AIA EVP CEO at AIA Florida.



“Some local AIA chapters opted into mergers with neighboring chapters to get the critical mass necessary to adequately perform while some local chapters blossomed with the guidance the evaluation afforded. Accredited chapters participate in a profit share with the national organization to, in turn, provide even better member service and engagement.”

No association wants to be the weakest link. Through education, accreditation and core standards, component associations can demonstrate organizational excellence, serve members and align efforts to advance a unified mission and goals.

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Note: Bob Harris, CAE, provides free governance tips and templates at www.nonprofitcenter.com.