

## **2017 Association Sector Trends**

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I met recently with the six other AMCES CAEs to identify key association sector trends. While there are many, here are four that we feel should be given attention.

### **1. There is Greater Attention on Succession Planning**

If you, your key staff or key volunteers are suddenly unable to continue within the organization, who will step into these roles? Organizations are paying more attention to risk management and are thinking more strategically about succession planning. This includes understanding that millennials should be celebrated rather than “managed” and identifying high performers earlier in their careers and providing them with opportunities to develop through experiential learning. Another critical element is having an attractive organizational culture that encourages innovation, collaboration and openness.

#### Questions for Association Leaders

- Do you have a succession plan for yourself, staff and volunteers?
- How do you identify and develop future talent?
- Do people want to work for your organization? If not, what needs to change?

### **2. The Relationship Between Technology and Membership Engagement is Expanding**

As of 2015, 53 percent of mobile phone users accessed online content through their devices and this is expected to increase to 63 per cent by 2017 ([www.statista.com](http://www.statista.com)). It is clear that this trend will have an impact on membership retention and recruitment. Members expect their associations to keep up with technology, and a mobile-first website design is a must so that content can be found quickly and in a format that is useful. If members can't get what they need from your organization, there are many other options available to them.

Associations are also looking to attract members and retain current members. One way of doing this is to expand the options for how members can engage, and technology plays a key role in this. Virtual memberships are for those for whom face-to-face interaction with other members is not possible or not of interest at this time. Typically, virtual memberships include engagement via webinars, online resources and tools. The needs of members can change over time and if virtual members have had a positive experience they may turn into higher-level members at some point in the future.

### Questions for Association Leaders

- Is your association willing to invest in staff and technology to support virtual memberships?
- What is the possibility of turning virtual members into higher-level participation members at some point in the future?

### **3. Increased Governance Focus on Sustainability**

The Canada Not-for-Profit Act is clear about a board's fiduciary and other responsibilities. As a result leaders have to think beyond the current and next budget. They see the value in engaging in scenario planning and strategic thinking to get a better handle on sustainability. This longer-term approach will help associations to better foresee and prepare for potential risks and opportunities.

### Questions for Association Leaders

- What is my role in helping the Board feel more comfortable exploring uncharted territory?
- How can Board meetings be changed to facilitate these important discussions?

### **4. The Quality of Professional Certification Programs Increasing**

Certification is a stamp of quality and provides assurance that an individual is competent to perform a job or task. Obtaining a certification is a requirement for many professions and, even when it is not mandatory, can give a job-seeker a competitive advantage. Certification is also one of the last avenues for "mandatory membership" in a professional association. The demand is growing for certification. Affordability, quality, reputation and convenience of access are critical factors for success.

### Questions for Association Leaders

- Is the quality of our certification program consistent with better practices? If not, what improvements do we need to make?
- How do we ensure that our certified members are engaged in the association and aren't just paying for the letters?