

# Crystal Ball:

See what the future holds  
for associations in 2022



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# It's time to polish off the crystal ball

Oh, the crystal ball. It's a magical tool used to get a glimpse into the future that should, in theory, enable us to make future-forward decisions a little more confidently.

But last year, our crystal balls felt more like a Magic 8-Ball — a toy you shake out of frustration when the only answer you seem to get regarding your future is “please try again” or “don't count on it.”

While 2021 taught us that trying to predict the future can be impossible, it also taught us that looking forward to the future with optimism and preparing for it with a clear vision makes a foggy future appear brighter.



# 2022 will be filled with hard work and great reward

[When our team was just starting talk about what lay ahead for associations in 2021](#), we approached it with hope. It looks like that mentality is starting to pay off, even with some very real setbacks like the Delta variant and labor shortages.

Some of the latest data shows 2022 is already shaping up to be a year of opportunity, and even growth!

We hope that looking ahead to the 2022 trends will allow association leaders to gather the right team, implement the right strategies, and select the right tools to make 2022 a year of progress and growth.

Charitable giving is expected to increase 4.1% this year and 5.7% in 2022, [according to projections from the Lilly Family School of Philanthropy](#) at IUPUI in Indianapolis, Ind.

Nonprofits in the United States alone account for [5-10 percent of the country's economy and about 10 percent of U.S. employment](#).

# The trends that will make 2022 magical for associations and their members:

**GROWING YOUR ORGANIZATION**

Non-Dues Fees



**EVENTS IN THE TIME OF COVID (AND BEYOND)**

In-person and Virtual Components



**LONG-DISTANCE CONNECTIONS BECOME GENUINE BONDS**

Online Communities



**MEMBERS OWN THEIR MEMBERSHIP**

Member Empowerment



**RESPONSIVE AND AGILE ASSOCIATIONS**

Resiliency to Agility

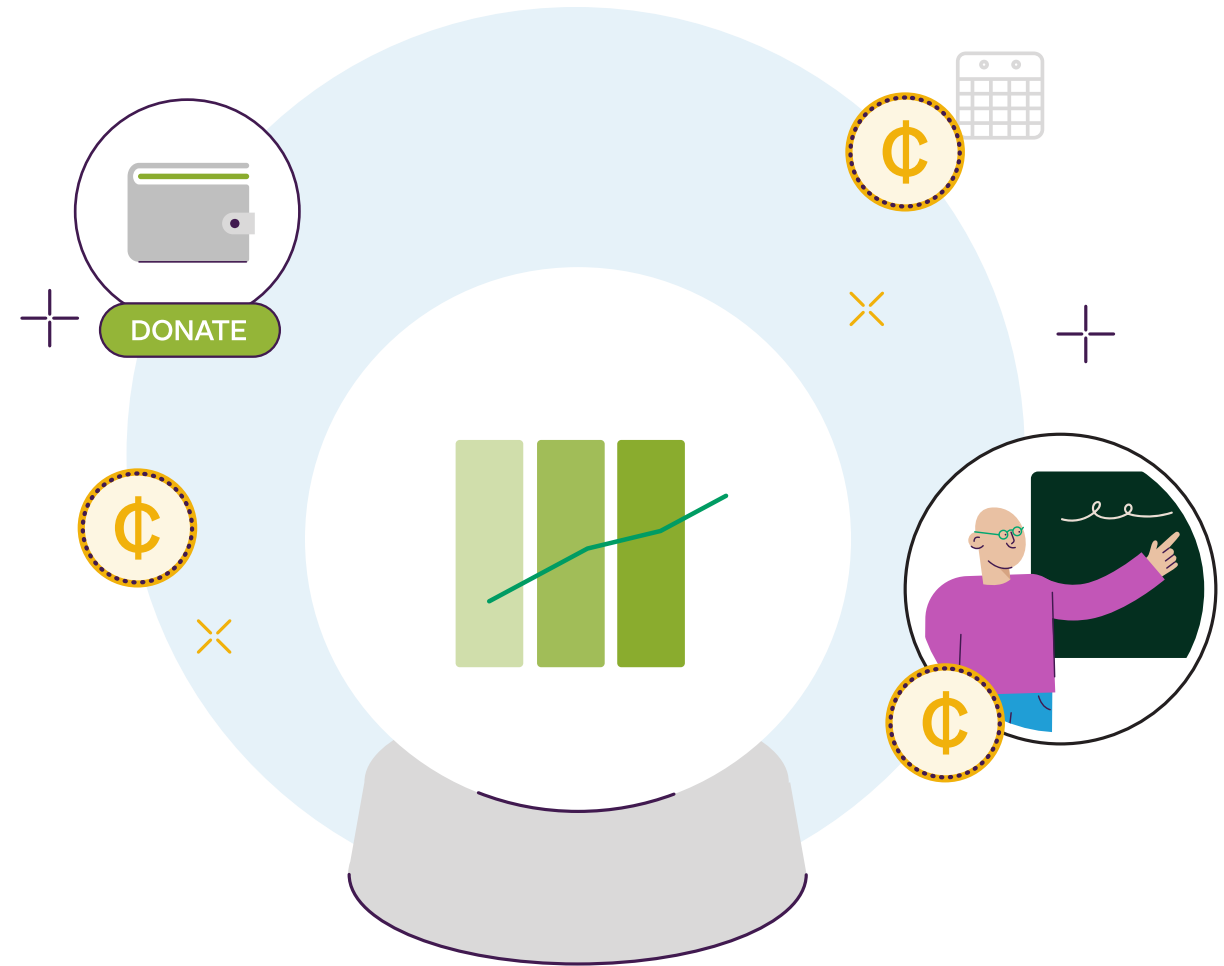


## GROWING YOUR ORGANIZATION

### Trend #1: The shift towards non-dues fees

The pandemic had an interesting effect on the revenue associations generate from dues and non-dues fees. You had people who paused memberships to be mindful of spending after layoffs and reduced work hours. Then, you had some members who saved money as their commutes disappeared and they couldn't spend income on entertainment and food since theaters, restaurants, and travel ceased for a while.

And at the intersection of these groups are your members who decided to continue their membership — but the value they normally would receive from their membership was at risk as events, fundraisers, and other member benefits either paused or were significantly changed (looking at you, virtual events).

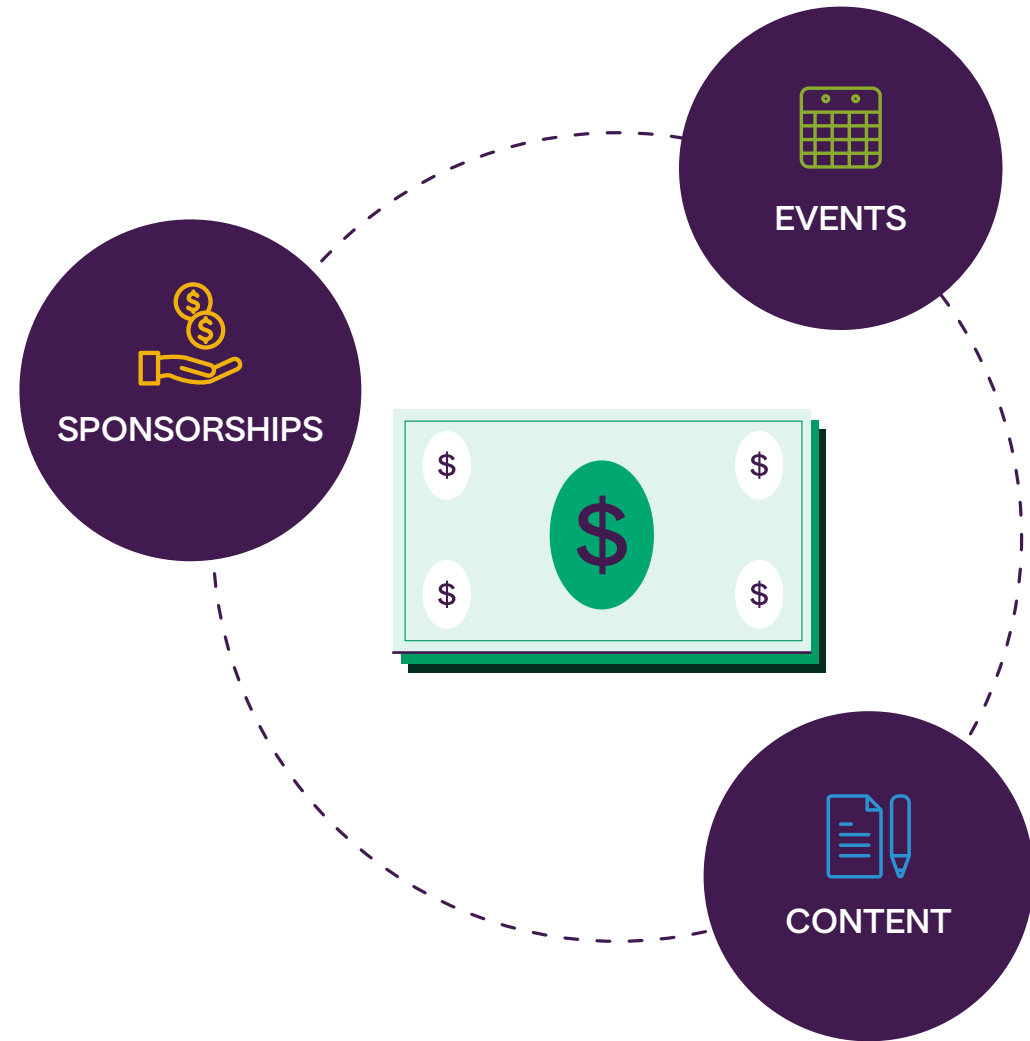


## GROWING YOUR ORGANIZATION

This unique challenge of growing revenue in 2021 forced many association leaders to take on an entrepreneurial spirit, which has led to a rise in non-dues fees.

So, what's the magic formula for growing non-dues fees? According to Sean Soth, founder of Professionals for Association Revenue, [it's a combination of getting revenue from sponsorship, events, and content.](#)

This willingness to look at strategies like content and sponsorships in a different light will also affect dues structures in 2022. [Even though non-dues fees may be the stars of the coming year, the pandemic has shown that it pays to reevaluate dues structures,](#) introduce relevant tiers, and make the process to choose and pay for membership easier than ever before.



## What does the future of non-dues fees look like in 2022?



**Digital sponsorship will continue to grow** as associations make the most of email campaigns, newsletters, and virtual events.



**Webinars and learning opportunities will expand to offer more value to members and attract non-members.** Instead of one webinar, associations are planning multi-day workshops or bootcamps, and certification courses will become more robust.



**The addition of a job board will prove mutually beneficial to members who are looking for good, trusted talent and for associations who can plan to grow revenue** by charging fees for featured job listings across their channels. New opportunities for your members and your organization!

Want to dive deeper? [Check out this case study](#) showing how one association grew revenue after a canceled event.





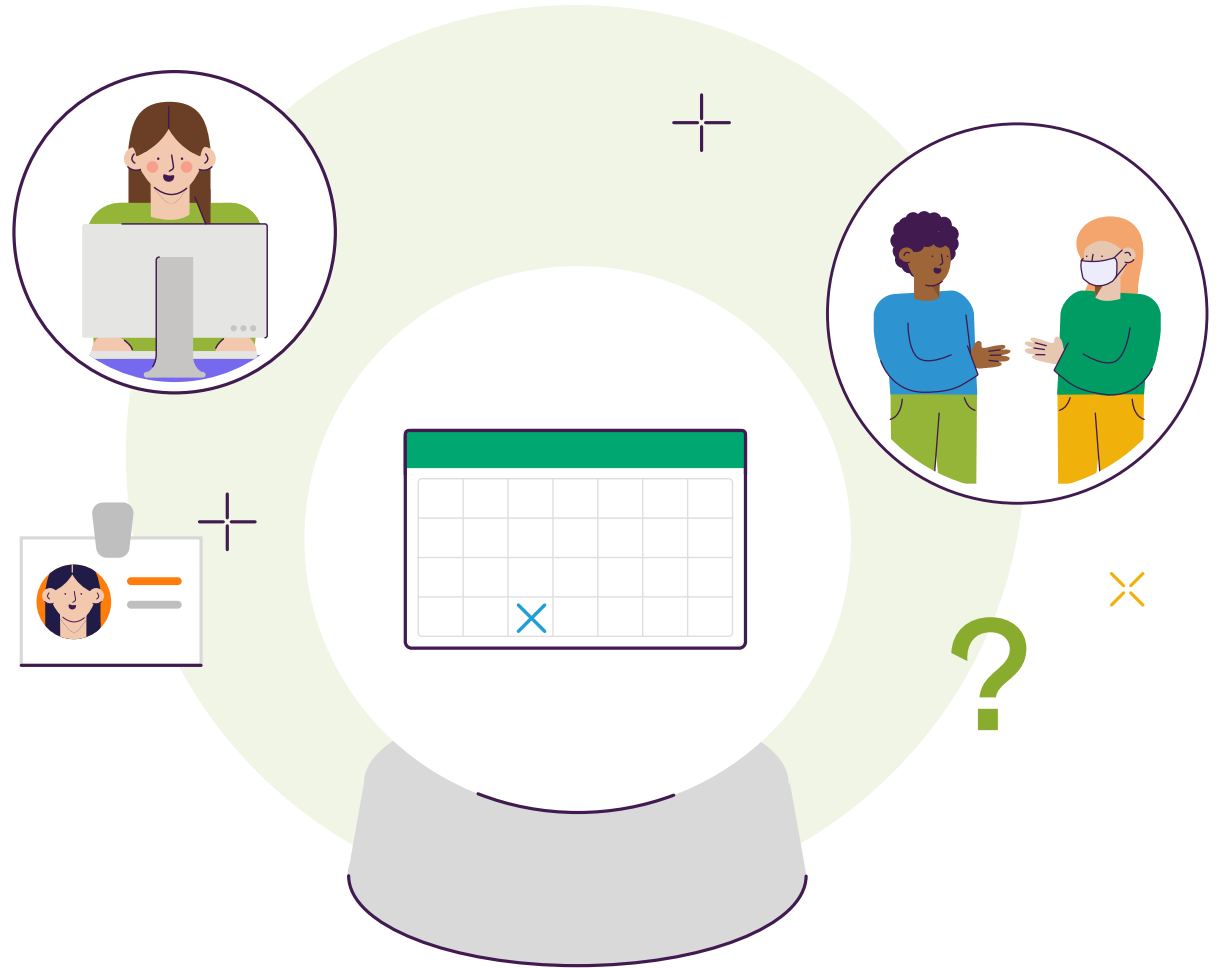
## EVENTS IN THE TIME OF COVID (AND BEYOND)

### Trend #2: In-person events are back... but still may need a virtual component

When we rang in 2021, we had a lot of reasons to start planning for more in-person events in what we thought was going to be a post-pandemic world. And then the Delta variant arrived, and we all rolled up our sleeves and became best friends with Zoom for another year.

But despite the Delta variant making an unwelcome appearance, [we started seeing that in-person events are, indeed, wanted by members and associations alike.](#)

When planning an event, many organizers' first thoughts are to start implementing robust safety protocols and procedures. And while that's certainly important work, it can be easy to forget what the very first step should be in planning an event in the time of COVID: check in with your members and other partners who you want to attend the event.



## EVENTS IN THE TIME OF COVID (AND BEYOND)

### Include members in planning a safe event

Taking a quick survey of your attendees and partners' comfort levels with meeting in-person, thoughts about vaccine requirements, etc. should be the first step in planning for an event. Even if you don't find a consensus or the survey results show a bit of tension between member expectations and your association's core beliefs, it's good to know how to frame the conversation and can lead to options for events that you hadn't considered.

When it comes to planning for a safe event, it's important to get the most updated information from reliable sources, look to local safety guidelines to help shape where and how your event is planned, and explore creative options for gathering people together.



“Your attendees are the key component to the event,” [explains Tara Reed, Chairman of the Clinton County, Ohio, Chamber of Commerce.](#) “If you have a good read on what they want to do, that can help jumpstart the planning process and help guide your core decisions.”



## EVENTS IN THE TIME OF COVID (AND BEYOND)

### ADDITIONAL IDEAS FOR PROVIDING A SAFE ENVIRONMENT FOR EVENTS

- Consider decreasing the size of in-person attendees to align with local safety guidelines while offering a virtual component.
- Book an outdoor event space. Of course, you'll want to make sure the weather cooperates, so it could mean planning for an in-person event in a warm climate.
- Take advantage of multiple offices or satellite campuses that can host smaller in-person events with the ability to connect virtually. The Personify Marketing team hosted our first off-site meeting using this approach, and it meant people could gather safely and according to their comfort levels.

Here are some trusted resources and ideas to consider as you implement the best safety policies for your in-person events:

#### Trusted COVID-19 resources for U.S. events

- [The Center for Disease Control and Prevention \(CDC\)](#)
- [The U.S. Food and Drug Administration \(FDA\)](#)
- [COVID ActNow](#) – A map of COVID risk assessment per state based on vaccination stats
- Department of Health sites for each state

#### Trusted COVID-19 resources for international events

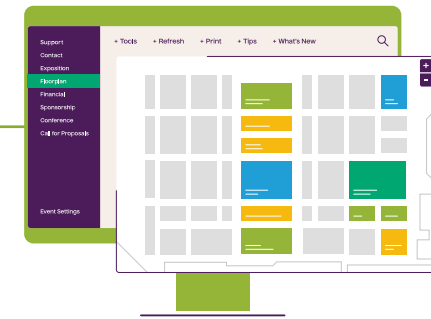
- [The World Health Organization \(WHO\)](#)
- [The CDC map of Risk Assessment Level for COVID-19](#)



## EVENTS IN THE TIME OF COVID (AND BEYOND)

### As you're planning your in-person or hybrid event ask yourself —

- 1** HOW MANY PEOPLE ATTEND THIS EVENT ON AVERAGE?
- 2** HOW MANY SPONSORS AND EXHIBITORS LOOK FORWARD TO PARTNERING WITH YOU FOR THIS EVENT?
- 3** WHAT TYPE OF MEMBERS DO YOU GENERALLY SEE AT THIS EVENT?  
(A lot of current members, a good mix of current and potential members, a lot of students, a lot of professionals?)
- 4** WHAT TYPE OF PROGRAMMING DO YOU USUALLY PLAN FOR THE EVENT?  
(Mostly breakout sessions, a concert to wrap up the event every year, a much-anticipated exhibitor hall, etc.)?
- 5** WHAT TYPE OF ROI DO YOU SEE FROM THIS EVENT ON AVERAGE?



Your answers to these questions will guide your 2022 planning. Ultimately, the events where you see the most attendees, a strong ROI, and usually plan for the most robust programming could be worth all the planning, staff, and investment of a hybrid event. But many events can safely be planned in-person with the right amount of planning and technology.



## EVENTS IN THE TIME OF COVID (AND BEYOND)

# What does the future of events look like in 2022?



**Micro, in-person events like educational workshops, smaller tradeshows, and roadshows will dominate 2022** since they can be planned with smaller cohorts in mind and offer more opportunities for revenue if you have multiple events throughout the year.

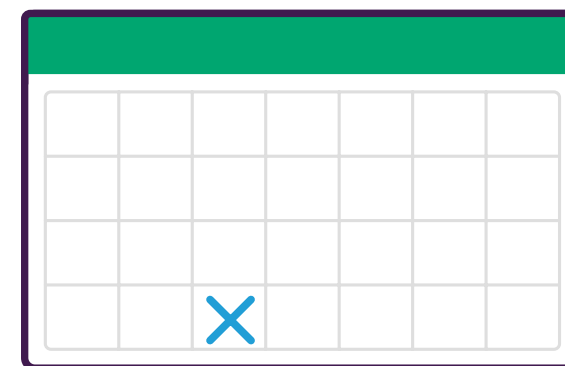


**Technology will help streamline health and safety protocols**, which is predicted to be the number one priority for event planners in 2022. There are event apps that allow attendees to upload vaccine cards and COVID test results and companies like [Curative](#) offer quick and safe on-site COVID testing.



**Look to national and local safety guidelines to help plan successful events.**  
And don't forget to ask your members and partners how they feel about in-person and hybrid events.

Want to dive deeper? [Watch and see how to maximize the new events normal with tech tools.](#)



## LONG-DISTANCE CONNECTIONS BECOME GENUINE BONDS

### Trend #3: The continued rise of online communities

We can't talk about the crystal ball's vision for 2022 without talking about the continued rise of online communities for associations.

The consumer world embraced member-only, online communities a while ago, especially brands in the beauty and food industries. Buyers loved the idea of connecting with fellow buyers to read about their experiences and find reliable product reviews. Video became helpful for things like makeup tutorials or cooking sessions. And one of the biggest reasons consumers were joining online communities by the dozens was for exclusive or early access to deals and events.

Associations approached online communities by turning to social media, and specifically, Facebook groups. This was great because starting a Facebook group was easy, almost everyone had one, and it seemed like it wouldn't take a lot of support to ramp it up.



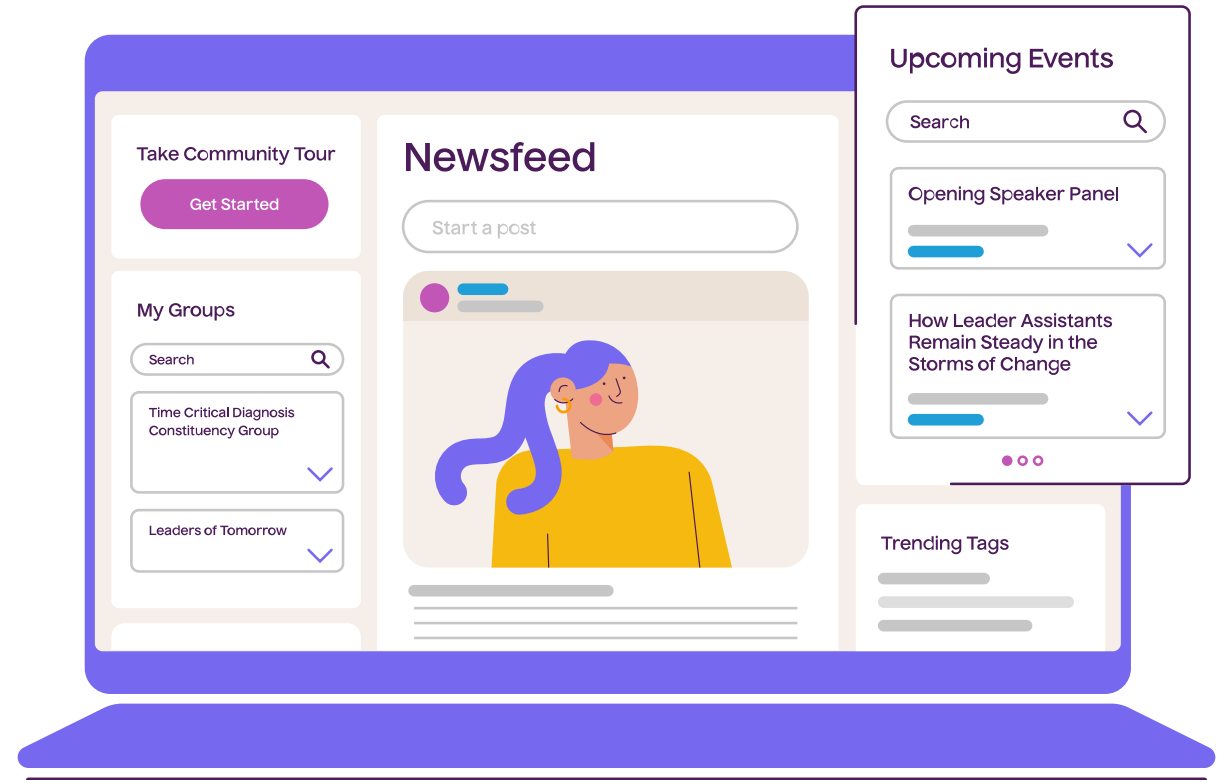
## LONG-DISTANCE CONNECTIONS BECOME GENUINE BONDS

# Online communities go beyond a “nice-to-have” in a remote world

Over the last couple of years, associations and nonprofits have considered alternatives to social media platforms as concerns about member privacy and data, and the difficulty in keeping posts and other content organized began taking its toll on staff and members.

Right before the pandemic hit, we saw a rise in associations building their own online communities. A few months into 2021, we saw online communities go from a “nice-to-have” to a “need-to-have” for associations who wanted to turn casual contact with new members into authentic connections.

From organized discussion forums to event calendars to member directories updated in real-time, online communities are proving to be THE place to be in 2022 for your members, your staff, and your partners to connect on their time and in their way.



## What does the future of online communities look like in 2022?



**New revenue opportunities in online communities like job boards with sponsored listings, online stores, and extended event spaces** will make communities a pivotal part of association's growth and add new value to members.



**Online communities will become the hub of member communication and connection.** Want to ensure all your members have the latest event dates and changes? Post it to the community calendar. Want to make your members' donations and engagement are celebrated? Post an impact report on the community main page.



**Ensure that members stay a part of the action even if they step away from your online community with instant alert emails** that notify them of any activity that's happening in the community. Any alerts should give members the option to opt-out of notifications and change the frequency.

Want to dive deeper? [Get the playbook](#) for growing your online community in its first 90 days.





## MEMBER ENGAGEMENT? TRY MEMBER EMPOWERMENT.

### Trend #4: Members take ownership of their membership

The idea of the educated consumer was an idea born out of a popular menswear ad, but not only has it echoed across the entire consumer world, it's become the rallying cry of organizations in the digital age.

With information searchable in seconds, and the ability to take significant action with one click (apply to a job, donate to a cause, etc.), customers are more than engaged — they're empowered.

Well, these same consumers are also members! Even though associations and nonprofits can have smaller teams and limited resources compared to the big corporations, association members are still the same educated people who don't need to be told why they should join your organization. Instead, Erin Sullivan, Director of Marketing at Personify explains that, **“members need to be given the tools to take ownership of their membership.”**



MEMBER ENGAGEMENT? TRY MEMBER EMPOWERMENT.

## What does the future of member empowerment look like in 2022?



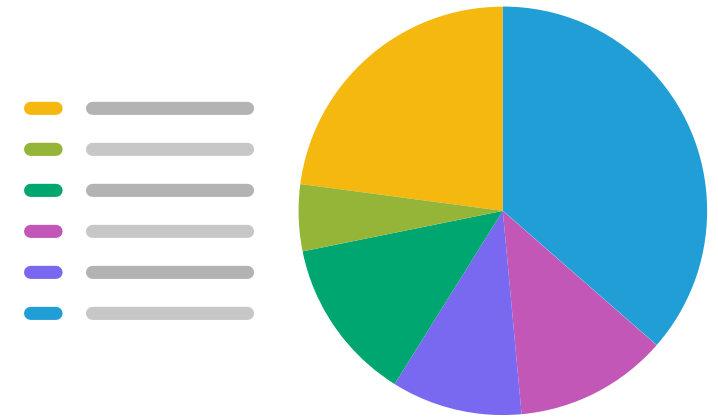
**Build a mentorship program** where volunteer members or even board members can meet one-on-one or in small groups to get consistent access to the association's greatest needs and opportunities.



**Make it easy for members to self-identify where they'd like to engage with the association.** Having a field on a registration form that asks new members' engagement and communication preferences should be standard. But make it a habit to ask the question in follow-up emails from events, in a yearly planning email, and a few months before their renewal anniversary.



Rather than waiting for your association's flagship event to get members excited about your association and empower them to participate in your mission, **campaigns are year-round now.** Whether you're sending out a regular newsletter with volunteer opportunities or sending targeted emails to members based on their engagement preferences, members are more likely to contribute to your association if you stay top-of-mind.



**“Now, more than ever, associations will need to focus on improving their level of customer service. In almost all industries, customers are demanding more, and receiving less, service than ever. Delighting customers with outstanding service will do more to sustain long-term success than almost any program or service the association offers.”**

- Wes Trochlil, president of Effective Database Management

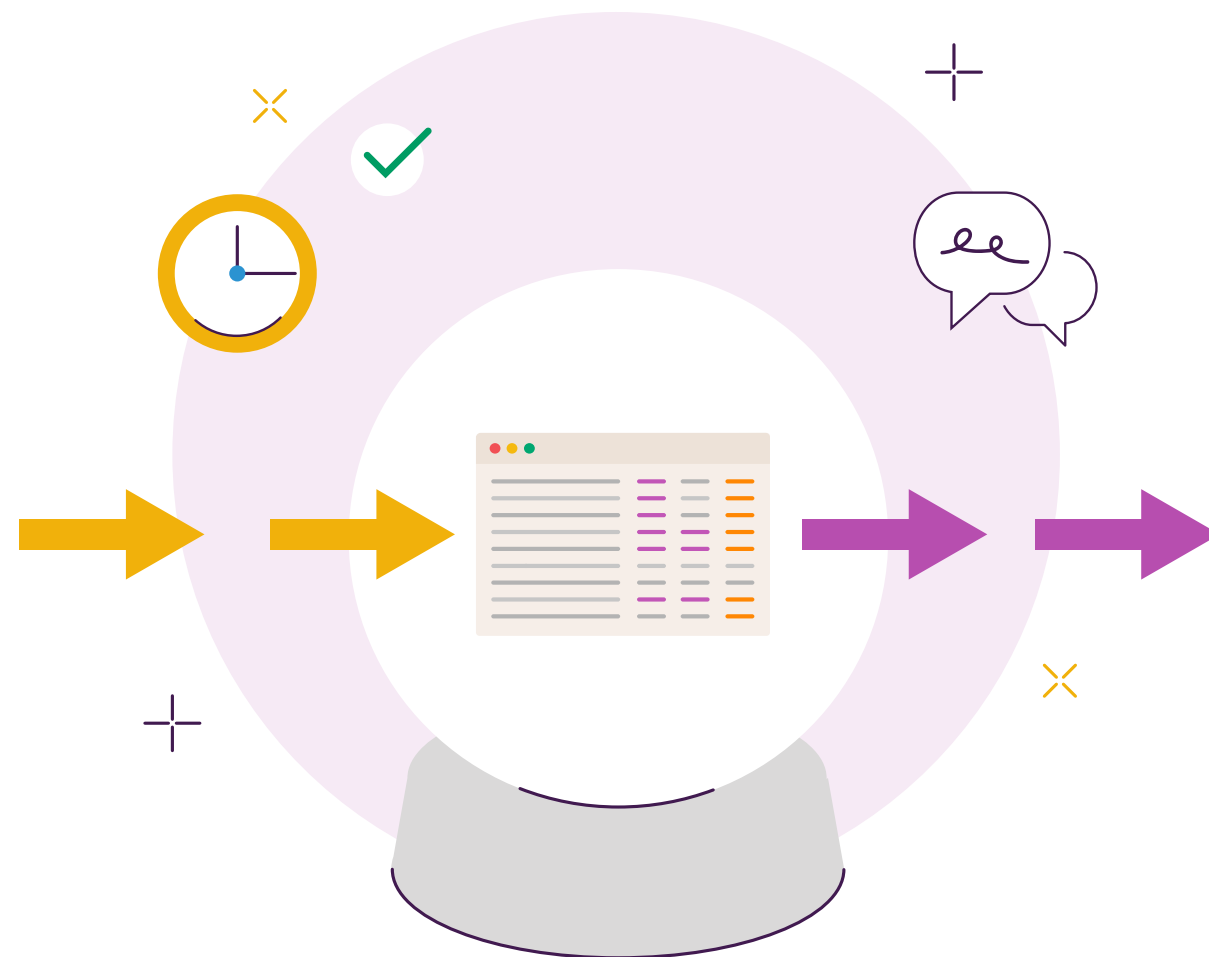


## RESPONSIVE AND AGILE ASSOCIATIONS

### Trend #5: Going from resiliency to agility

[Last year, we talked a lot about the idea of resilience planning.](#) At the time, we dove into the importance of unifying your team and members around one cause, starting to structure your organization to allow for quick and confident decision-making, and leveraging technology to support remote teams and efforts.

Now that we've had over a year to implement our resilience plans, 2022 will be a year of going beyond resilience and planning for long-term agility.



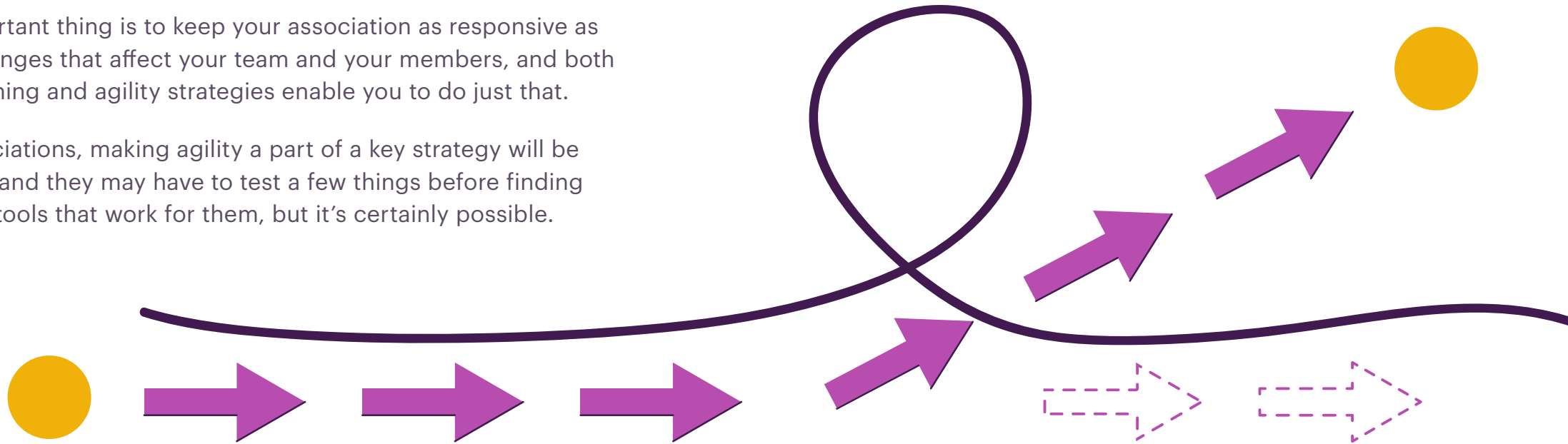
RESPONSIVE AND AGILE ASSOCIATIONS

## You can't always predict change, but you can plan for it

Of course, associations have different organizational goals and structures, and some organizations will still be solidifying their resilience plan. Others may find that they start doing a little bit of both — tightening up their resilience plans while started to put a few big strategies in play for ongoing agility. And both paths lead to success.

The most important thing is to keep your association as responsive as possible to changes that affect your team and your members, and both resilience planning and agility strategies enable you to do just that.

For some associations, making agility a part of a key strategy will be a little foreign, and they may have to test a few things before finding strategies and tools that work for them, but it's certainly possible.





## Here's what the evolution from resilience to agility could look like this year:

### THE 2021 RESILIENCE PLAN

Technology that allows for centralized communication for remote workers & members

Reactive recruitment of new staff members as the great recession started taking hold

"Special edition" communications to members that communicate change on a "need-to-know" basis

Seasonal recruiting periods for new board members and new member campaigns

Gathering your member data all in one place to make big decisions faster

### THE 2022 AGILITY APPROACH

Technology that empowers remote members and workers to connect in deeper ways

Focus on retention of staff whose knowledge and skills help ease the burden of change

Consistent transparency in member communications

Year-round board & member recruitment

Customized dashboards & reports to get insights into association's health in real-time

## What does an agile approach look like in 2022?



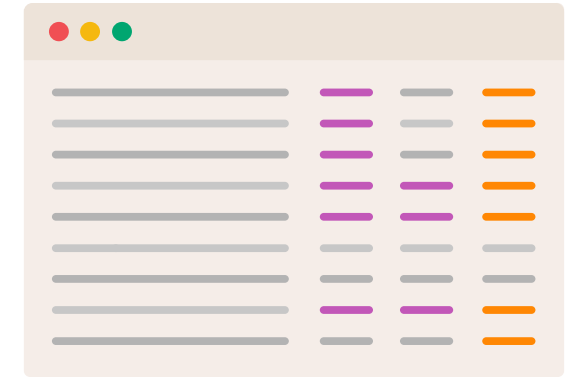
**Offer more flexibility and support to your team.** Staff turnover has always been a challenge for associations and nonprofits, and it's important in times of change to retain trusted team members. Consider offering flexible work schedules, a couple of paid mental health days, or a co-working space stipend.



If you have trusted technology partners that help you collect reliable data or communicate clearly with members, **see if there are additional tools or add-ons that will help you make more informed decisions and connect with members more consistently.** If you're not pleased with your tech partners, ask other association partners which tools they're using.



**Expect to see new staff roles or responsibilities like community managers or more communications roles emerge.** These new roles and duties are proving to be integral to associations so that member communication and connection occurs before and during times of change.



# Plan for a bright future in 2022 with the best partners at your side

If there's one lesson we learned in 2021 that we believe will have a lasting, positive impact, it's that change doesn't happen in a vacuum and that victory over adversity is ten times as sweet with the right people at your side.

The world of associations and nonprofits have been affected by the pandemic in a unique way as their organizations were called to serve their communities in ways never seen before, and they were stretched thin due to the same economic and health challenges as every other business.

But you've pressed on, and you have made all the difference to your communities. There's still a lot of work to be done in 2022, but there's also a lot of victories to be had. We hope that by getting ahead of the 2022 trends you can start planning for success with the best strategies, tools, and partners to help you reach your goals.

**LET'S TALK COMMUNITY**





# Grow a stronger community. Leave a lasting legacy.

Personify helps you manage and grow your community with integrated software solutions that strengthen the connection between your organization, your members, and your mission.

## WE'RE IN THE RELATIONSHIP-BUILDING BUSINESS.

Looking for a committed, understanding partner to help you grow? Let us mix, match, and mold our Community Experience solutions to meet your emerging needs and help you create better relationships with your community. We love to listen, and there's nothing we find more gratifying than deepening the connections that drive your success.

[REQUEST A DEMO](#)



**We build strong connections with our customers so they can build strong connections with their communities.**

**70K+ organization staff** use Personify solutions every day.

**25% of the U.S. population** interacts with Personify through associations, events, and nonprofits.

**20 years of industry leadership** make Personify the trusted choice for a technology partner.



