

2026 Association Benchmarking Report Reveals Associations Are Getting More Intentional About Data, AI, and Revenue

New data shows heavy AI use nearly tripling, revenue streams diversifying, and staffing pressure easing

ALPHARETTA, GA. – August 3, 2026 – [Naylor Association Solutions](#) and [Association Adviser](#) are excited to announce the release of the [2026 Association Benchmarking Report](#), offering a clear snapshot of how association leaders are planning, measuring, and growing in the year ahead. This year's findings show associations moving from reacting to designing, using data more deliberately, adopting AI at scale, and diversifying revenue beyond traditional sponsorship models. At the same time, they continue to work through familiar pressures around non-dues revenue, member communication, and the capacity to turn data into confident decisions.

Now in its 15th year, the annual study finds that generating non-dues revenue remains the top challenge for the fourth consecutive year, though the share citing it fell from 61% to 51.9%. Rising quickly behind it is a new concern: leveraging data to make strategic decisions moved into the top three challenges for the first time, signaling that the harder problem is no longer reaching members but making sense of the engagement data they generate.

Based on 665 survey responses from senior association professionals across North America, the report provides in-depth analysis of trends in strategic planning, member engagement, communications, events, technology, staffing, and non-dues revenue.

Christine Shaw, CEO and President of Naylor, announced, "This year's findings show associations becoming more deliberate and data-informed — exploring new technologies and rethinking how they engage members and grow revenue. The landscape continues to evolve, but one thing remains constant: strong associations help industries grow and thrive."

Key findings from this year's report include:

- **Heavy AI use nearly tripled**, with associations using AI-powered communication tools frequently or daily rising from 12.5% in 2025 to 33.5% in 2026
- **Top challenges:** generating non-dues revenue (51.9%), communicating member benefits (49.5%), and leveraging data for strategic decisions (47.7%)
- **Revenue mix diversified**, with job posting sales nearly tripling from 3.6% to 10% of non-dues revenue while sponsorship's share slipped from 29.7% to 25.3%
- **Staffing pressure eased sharply**, as reported understaffing fell from 51.3% to 35.1% and "just right" staffing rose to 52.2%, though data and strategy remains the most understaffed area at 38.5%
- **High-frequency video engagement jumped nearly eightfold**, from 3.2% to 24.5% of associations communicating 11 or more times per month
- **Email remains the most valued engagement tool** at 83.4%, followed by association websites (80.6%), newsletters (80.2%), and webinars (79.1%)

- **Fastest-rising tools** include online buyers' guides (+24 points), SMS messaging (+22.5), AI tools (+17.5), and association apps (+17.1)
- **Outsourcing expanded across nearly every function**, led by association management, which more than doubled from 9.9% to 22.7%
- **Fully in-person work more than doubled** from 10.4% to 25.5%, while hybrid remained the dominant model at 52%
- **Naylor's composite Best Practices Score rose from 42.8 to 48**, pointing to a sector growing more data-informed and operationally mature

To download the full 2026 Association Benchmarking Report, [click here](#).

About Naylor Association Solutions

Naylor Association Solutions is a strategic growth partner for associations. We help professional and trade organizations modernize member engagement, diversify revenue, and make smarter decisions through integrated communications, marketing, events, career solutions, association management software, full-service association management, and data driven insights. With deep association expertise and a relentless focus on outcomes, Naylor helps associations stay resilient and positioned for long-term growth. Founded in 1969, Naylor partners with more than 1,600 associations across 80+ industries. Our headquarters are in Alpharetta, Ga. with additional offices in Gainesville, Fla.; Schaumburg, Ill.; and Winnipeg, Manitoba. For more information, visit www.naylor.com.

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