

Association Value from A to Z:

26 Ways Associations Create Impact for Members

MICHIGAN SOCIETY OF ASSOCIATION EXECUTIVES (MSAE)



Associations create value in more ways than many people realize. Their work often extends well beyond meetings, membership, and governance to include education, advocacy, research, standards, networking, workforce development, and practical tools that help people and organizations succeed. The list below offers an A-to-Z look at the many ways associations may create value for members and for the professions, industries, and communities they serve.

Association value goes far beyond meetings, membership, and governance.

A

Advocacy and Public Policy

Associations help people and organizations speak with a stronger collective voice. They monitor proposed laws and regulations, explain what is happening, gather member input, and help decision-makers understand how issues affect a profession, industry, or community. Even when an association does not lobby, it may still educate members and public officials and help the industry/profession stay informed and engaged.

B

Benchmarking and Business Intelligence

Associations often collect and share data that helps members compare themselves to peers. This can include salary surveys, compensation reports, business trend data, member surveys, industry dashboards, and economic outlooks. These tools help members make smarter decisions by showing how others are performing and where change may be needed.

C

Chapters and Local Networks

Many associations create local or regional groups so members can connect closer to home. Chapters can make it easier for people to build relationships, attend events, volunteer, and discuss issues that matter in their own area. They can also help the association feel more personal and accessible.

D

Digital Libraries and Content Hubs

Associations often maintain online collections of useful resources. These may include recordings, articles, guides, templates, checklists, toolkits, and sample documents. A strong content library gives members practical help when they need it, not just when an event is scheduled.

E

Events, Exhibits, and Conferences

Events bring people together to learn, network, share ideas, and see what is new in the field. Conferences, trade shows, workshops, and special events often serve as major touchpoints for an association's community. They also create opportunities for vendors, sponsors, and partners to connect with members in meaningful ways.





F

Fellowships and Cohort Academies

Some associations offer structured learning experiences that go deeper than a single workshop or webinar. These may include leadership academies, fellows programs, bootcamps, or group learning cohorts. Such programs help participants build skills, relationships, and confidence over time.

G

Grants, Scholarships, and Giving

Associations sometimes provide financial support to help people learn, grow, or contribute to the industry/profession. This may include scholarships for students, grants for research, funding for leadership development, or donor-supported programs that expand access and opportunity. These efforts help associations invest in the future of the profession or industry.

H

Help Desks, Hotlines, and Advisory Services

Members often turn to associations for trusted help. Associations may provide legal tools, technical assistance, consulting, facilitation, resource referrals, or staff support on common questions. These services can save members time, reduce confusion, and help them solve problems more quickly.

Association value shows up in practical ways from advocacy and research to toolkits, workforce development, and year-round learning.

I

Industry Intelligence and Research

Associations gather knowledge that helps members understand what is changing in their environment. This can include research reports, white papers, trend summaries, case studies, and issue briefs. By organizing and interpreting information, associations help members make sense of complex developments.

J

Jobs and Career Centers

Career services are a common source of value, especially in professional societies. Job boards, resume banks, employer postings, career coaching, and internship listings help members find work, advance their careers, or hire qualified talent. These services benefit both individuals and employers.

K

Knowledge Communities and Peer Groups

People often join associations not only for information, but for connection. Peer groups, councils, roundtables, and online communities give members places to ask questions, compare experiences, and learn from one another. These spaces can be especially valuable because they combine expertise with trust and shared context.



Leadership Development and Mentoring

Associations help develop future leaders for their field and for the association itself. They may offer mentoring, volunteer pathways, leadership programs, speaking opportunities, and opportunities to serve on committees. These experiences build confidence, broaden perspective, and strengthen the pipeline of capable leaders.



Online Learning and On-Demand Education

Not all learning happens in a meeting room. Associations often provide online courses, certificate programs, recorded sessions, and self-paced learning that members can access on their own schedule. This makes education more flexible and more available throughout the year.



Media, Magazines, and Journals

Many associations publish magazines, journals, newsletters, podcasts, videos, and other media. These channels help share knowledge, spotlight trends, celebrate achievements, and keep members informed. They also shape the association's voice and identity within its field.



Public Awareness Campaigns

Associations sometimes work to improve public understanding of a profession, industry, or issue. They may run awareness campaigns, create public-facing resources, respond to misinformation, or highlight the value their members provide. This kind of work can strengthen reputation, trust, and visibility.



Norms, Ethics, and Codes of Conduct

Associations often help define what good practice looks like. Through codes of ethics, professional standards, and conduct expectations, they can promote trust, fairness, accountability, and responsible behavior. This helps strengthen both the industry/profession's reputation and the quality of work within it.



Quality Standards, Certification, and Accreditation

Some associations play a formal role in defining quality and competence. They may create standards, offer certifications, support accreditation, or recognize specialized skills. These programs help members demonstrate credibility and help the public or employers identify trusted professionals or organizations.

R

Research Funding and Resource Centers

Beyond sharing research, some associations help fund it. They may support studies, sponsor research projects, or maintain resource centers that gather important information in one place. This helps advance knowledge and can position the association as a trusted source of expertise.

S

Sponsorships and Strategic Partner Programs

Associations often work with sponsors, exhibitors, and partners that want to reach their audience. These relationships can help fund programs, events, and publications while also introducing members to useful products and services. When done well, partnerships support the mission without distracting from it.

U

Utilities, Toolkits, and Templates

One of the most practical things an association can do is save members time. Sample policies, calculators, checklists, templates, talking points, and implementation guides help members take action without having to start from scratch. These tools turn knowledge into something immediately useful.

T

Talent Pipeline and Workforce Development

Many associations help ensure the field has enough skilled people for the future. They may support students, apprenticeships, internships, job training, career pathways, and employer connections. This work is especially important in professions and industries facing shortages or rapid change.

V

Volunteer Leadership Pathways

Associations give members meaningful ways to contribute. Serving on committees, councils, chapters, task forces, and boards allows members to shape the organization's work while building their leadership skills. These opportunities deepen engagement and strengthen the association over time.



Associations create value in ways as diverse as the multitude of members they serve.



Webinars and Workshops

Shorter learning experiences remain an important part of association value. Webinars and workshops enable quick response to new issues, focused training, and outreach without travel costs. They are often one of the easiest ways for members to stay current.



eXpertise Networks and Referrals

Associations are often trusted connectors. They can help members find mentors, experts, service providers, speakers, peers, or business contacts. Sometimes this happens informally through relationships; other times it is built into a formal directory, referral service, or matching platform.



Year-Round Digital Channels

Associations increasingly stay connected through ongoing digital communication. Podcasts, email newsletters, online communities, video series, and resource hubs allow the association to stay visible and useful between conferences or major programs. This keeps the relationship with members active all year.



Zeroing In on Savings: Affinity Programs

Some associations help members save money or access useful services through endorsed vendors or group purchasing arrangements. These might include discounts on insurance, software, shipping, office supplies, travel, or financial services. While these benefits may seem simple, they can provide very tangible day-to-day value.

Taken together, these examples illustrate the broad range of ways associations can create value. No association is expected to provide every type of offering or service; the strongest associations are those that align their programs, products, and priorities with the needs of their members and the purpose they exist to advance. Viewed through that lens, association value is not about doing everything, but about doing the right things well.

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