

An abstract painting featuring a large, vibrant heart shape in the center. The heart is rendered with thick, expressive brushstrokes in shades of yellow, orange, and red. The background is composed of swirling, layered brushstrokes in various colors, including light blue, teal, and dark blue, creating a sense of movement and depth. The overall style is reminiscent of Impressionism or Expressionism.

The Corner Office

The *Heart* of
Your Association:
Building a Strong
Culture in 2025

JEAN JERNIGAN, CAE; CMP; IOM | President, Auburn Hills Chamber of Commerce



Let's be real: building a strong organizational culture is no small feat, especially if you're working within the tight budgets of a small association. Yet, as we navigate 2025, it's clearer than ever that culture is at the core of long-term success. Employees today are reevaluating what work means to them—seeking purpose, connection, and rewards that go beyond the paycheck. So, what does that mean for workplace culture?

For starters, it's about creating an environment where people feel valued, supported, and inspired to bring their best selves to work every day. Whether you are part of a large association or a scrappy, small team, this is essential. Culture drives everything: employee engagement, member satisfaction, and even your financial health.

It's no secret that many associations face financial constraints. But here's the good news: building a positive culture doesn't have to break the bank. Simple, cost-effective initiatives can go a long way. Think about offering flexible work hours, remote options, or even creating a culture of recognition.

Employees who understand how their work contributes to something bigger than themselves are naturally more motivated and innovative.

Sometimes, the smallest gestures make the biggest difference—a handwritten thank-you note, a genuine “great job” during a meeting, or treating someone to coffee. These actions show people they’re appreciated, and that sense of belonging can’t be overstated.

One thing associations have going for them is their mission. Employees who understand how their work contributes to something bigger than themselves are naturally more motivated and innovative. As leaders, it’s on us to connect those dots for our teams.

Highlight individual contributions regularly. Share success stories. Celebrate milestones that tie back to the mission. When people see how their roles align with the organization’s purpose, it’s a game-changer.

If there’s one non-negotiable when it comes to culture, it’s communication. Open, transparent communication is the foundation of trust. Without it, everything else falls apart.

Make it a habit to hold regular team check-ins, involve employees in decision-making, and encourage feedback. And don’t just listen—act on what you hear.

You don’t need a massive budget to build a culture that thrives. What you need is intention. Focus on strategic, meaningful actions that show employees they matter. And remember, culture isn’t just about perks or policies; it’s about how people feel when they show up each day.

When you prioritize engagement, align efforts with your values, and consistently communicate with your team, you’ll create a culture that not only attracts talent but keeps it. And in doing so, you’ll strengthen the connections between your employees, your members, and the mission you all share.

In 2025, workplace culture isn’t just a “nice-to-have.” It’s the heartbeat of your association—and the key to lasting success.

Interested in learning more about how Jean approaches culture-building? Email jjernigan@auburnhillschamber.com.



Meet Jean

JEAN JERNIGAN, CAE; CMP; IOM, is the President of the Auburn Hills Chamber of Commerce and current Chair of MSAE. She’s been involved with MSAE since 1996, having earned credentials in association management and event planning. Jean and her husband, Bradley, have been married for 30 years, have an adult son and an adorable pug, Betti.