

# Member Engagement and Loyalty Study

A close look at what members want from their professional associations and what makes them stick around



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Edge Research

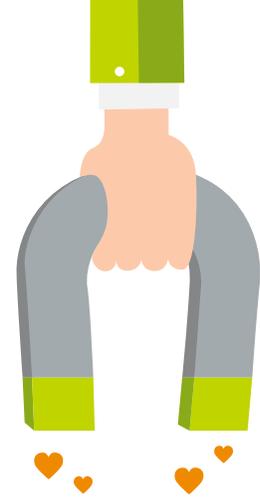


# A deep dive into what's behind member sentiments and behaviors



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# Overview: Why care about this study?

Members turn to their professional membership organizations for many reasons. Professional development, training, certification, industry information, advocacy, networking – the list goes on.

That's why Community Brands has conducted studies over the past few years to shed light on important topics, including what benefits matter most to members, what makes members loyal to their organizations, and how member needs and preferences vary based on generation and loyalty segments. The studies include:

- Member Education and Career Development Report: Examining the intersection between professional development and career advancement (2018)<sup>1</sup>
- Digital Member Study: Examining the gaps between member expectations and association technology (2017)<sup>2</sup>
- Member Professional Development Study: Aligning education strategy with what matters most to members (2017)<sup>3</sup>
- Member Loyalty Study: A deep dive into member retention and preferences (2017)<sup>4</sup>
- Member Engagement Study: Aligning organization strategy with what matters most to members (2016)<sup>5</sup>

The findings have consistently shown that member priorities, behaviors, and preferences are different based on generation and loyalty level. Understanding these varied needs and preferences is vital to an organization's success.

## Digging deeper into member engagement and loyalty

Taking a step further, Community Brands conducted this latest study to see how member engagement and loyalty have changed over time. And we've taken a closer look at what's behind member sentiments and behaviors based on career stage and other factors. This study focuses on key questions, including:

- **What benefits do members value most and which ones have the biggest impact on renewal?**
- **How do members engage with their organization, and how does engagement correlate with loyalty?**
- **How do member priorities and loyalty change throughout the member career journey?**
- **What can organizations do to align their strategy with member values, behaviors, and preferences?**

Parallel surveys were conducted with more than 1,100 members of professional membership organizations and 400-plus professionals who work at those organizations (referred to in this report as **"Members"** and **"Pros,"** respectively). This study examines attitudes, values, and behaviors from both perspectives.

**NOTE:** Due to rounding, not all percentage totals in this report equal 100 percent.

Here is a  
**detailed look  
at the findings.**

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.communitybrands.com/resource-library/whitepapers/member-education-and-career-development-report/>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.communitybrands.com/resource-library/whitepapers/community-brands-digital-member-study/>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.communitybrands.com/resource-library/whitepapers/member-professional-development-study/>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.communitybrands.com/resource-library/whitepapers/cb-member-loyalty-study/>

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.communitybrands.com/resource-library/whitepapers/member-engagement-study/>

# Key findings

- 1 Professional membership organizations must continuously prove their value.**

Members who responded to the survey gave their organization stronger performance scores across the board than in years past. Those early in their careers are more likely to feel connected to their organization and be satisfied with membership. However, this does not mean organizations can rest on their laurels. This group is also less likely to commit to renewing and less likely to promote their association to their peers. To keep these members around long term, organizations must regularly prove their worth.
- 2 Members join organizations for different reasons than why they stay.**

Networking, socializing, and job opportunities top the list of reasons members join. Job opportunities continue to be critically important to those members who are early in their career, while those who are mid-career find professional trainings most valuable. Over time, these benefits become less important, while other benefits – including code of ethics, timely industry information, and representing members' interests – become more valuable.
- 3 Organizations have work to do around some benefits that are most valuable to members.**

Members are satisfied with many of the benefits they consider most valuable: industry information, code of ethics, trainings, raising awareness, and advocacy. However, there are some areas that members value most where organizations have opportunities to improve: job opportunities, feedback loops, and representing member interests.
- 4 Organizations underemphasize the importance of job opportunities.**

Job opportunities are one of the most important benefits to Members from when they join through the early career stage, and are also a priority for segments who are less loyal to their organization. Pros, on the other hand, do not rank job opportunities at the same level of importance, nor do they say they offer a great member experience in this area. This disconnect suggests more time, attention, and marketing focus should be placed on how professional membership organizations help Members get the right job and advance their career.
- 5 Continuing education is not just for meetings and conferences anymore.**

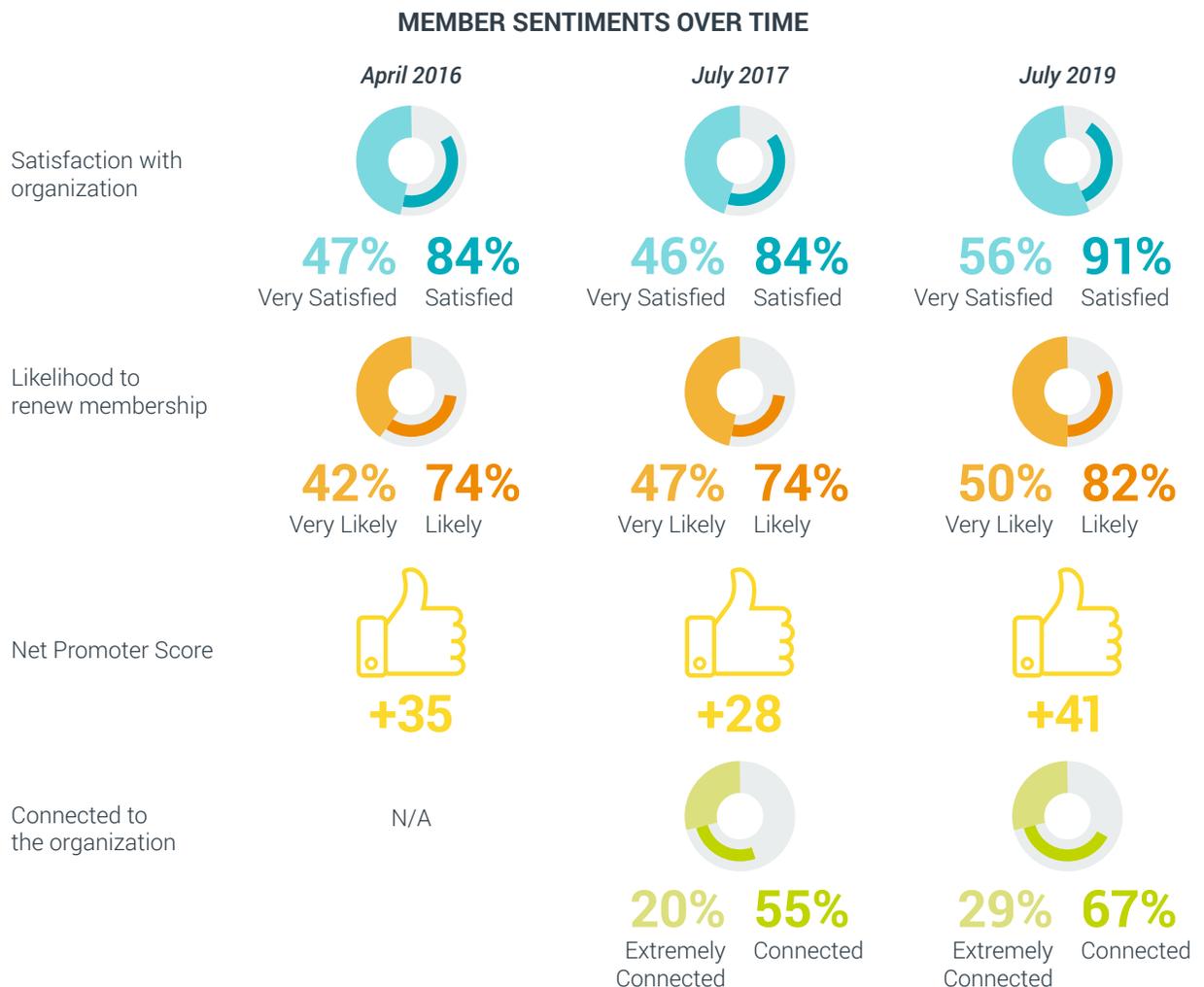
Meetings and conferences, which traditionally have focused on training and continuing education, are one area where Pros are very focused – they believe this is one of the most important and strongest benefits they offer Members. Yet, Members rate meetings and conferences as lower importance than Pros. Other studies from Community Brands shed light on this disconnect. Findings show that professional behaviors and preferences are evolving. They suggest that Members learn through multiple modes versus relying only on the annual conference for their continuing education. It may be time for organizations to emphasize additional learning opportunities, as well as other high-value member benefits, such as providing industry information and offering job opportunities.



# Section 1: Member sentiments

As in previous studies, Members were asked to think about the one professional membership organization most important to them, and then evaluate it on several key brand indicators.

Those surveyed give strong ratings around four loyalty metrics, all of which have risen to some degree since 2017. The weakest score has been connection to the organization, but that, too, has gone up.

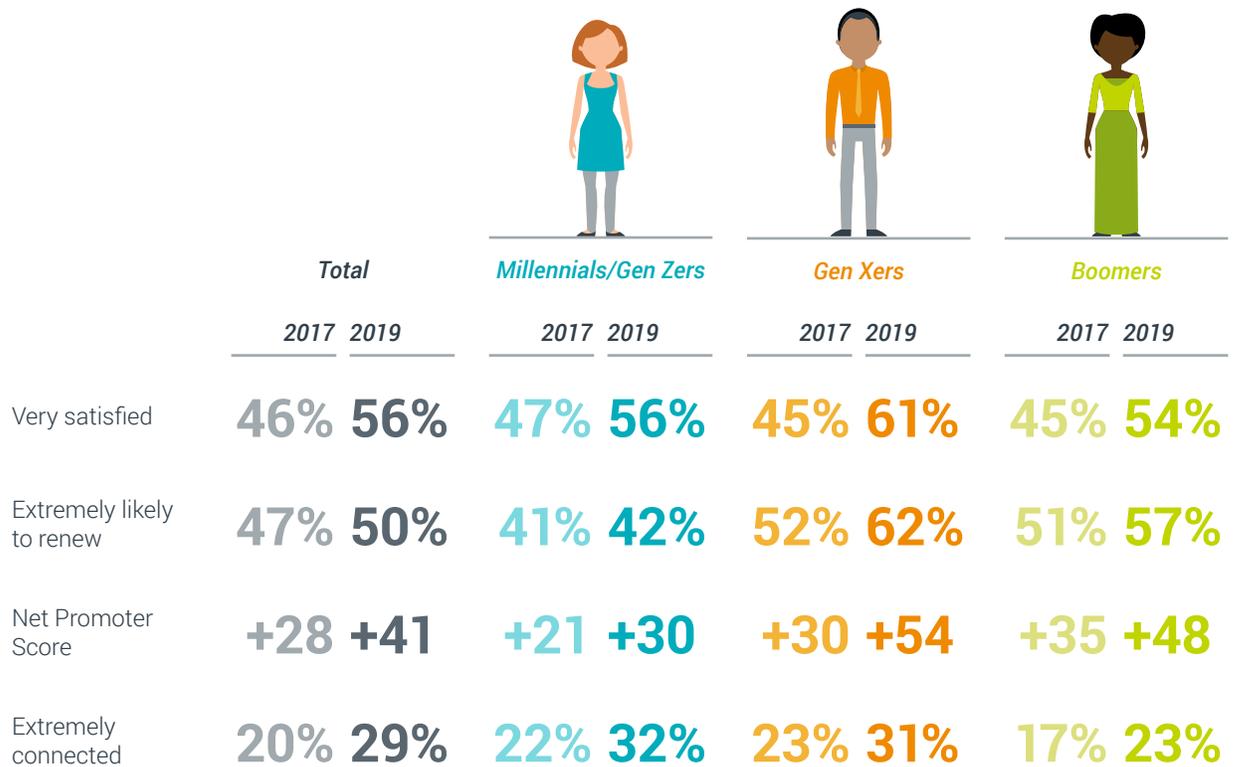


**Figure 1.** Questions asked: Overall, how satisfied are you with your membership in this professional membership organization? | How likely are you to renew your membership in this professional membership organization after your current membership expires? | How likely are you to recommend this professional membership organization? Use a 10-point scale where 10 means you are extremely likely to recommend and 0 means you are not likely to recommend the organization. | On a scale of 1 to 5, where 5 means extremely connected and 1 means not connected at all, how connected do you feel to this professional membership organization and the work that it does?

A breakdown of this data by generation shows positive shifts in satisfaction and Net Promoter Score across generations. Renewal intent shows a statistically significant increase for Gen X and only small directional shifts for other generations.

All generations except Boomers significantly increased feeling connected to their organization.

**MEMBER SENTIMENT CHANGES OVER TIME BY GENERATION**

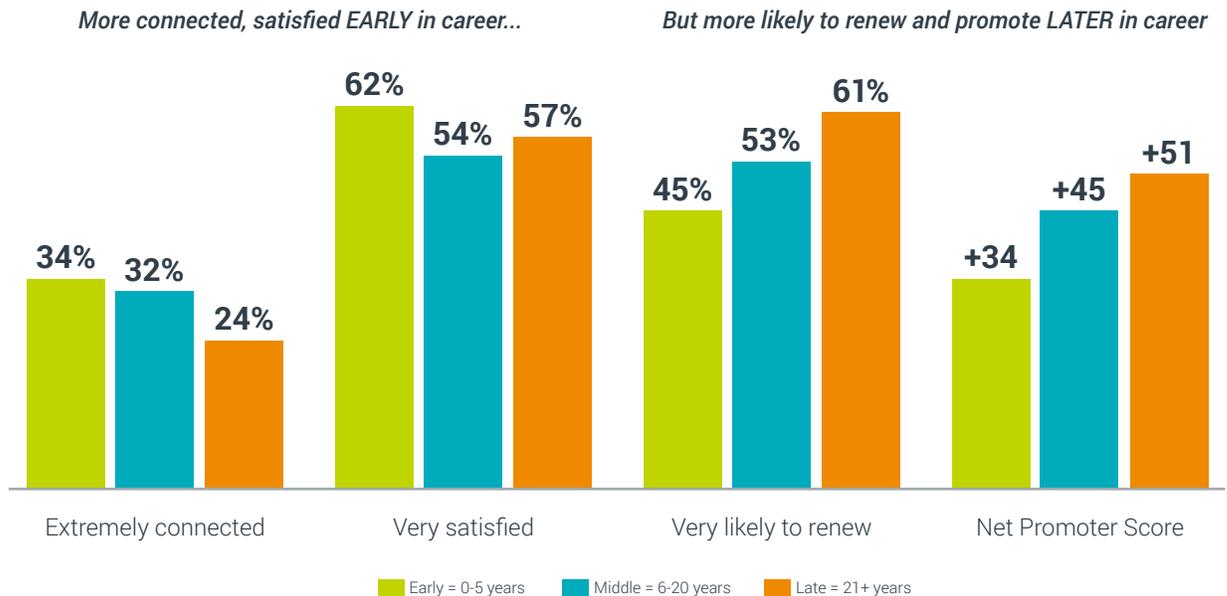


**Figure 2.** Questions asked: Overall, how satisfied are you with your membership in this professional membership organization? | How likely are you to renew your membership in this professional membership organization after your current membership expires? | How likely are you to recommend this professional membership organization? Use a 10-point scale where 10 means you are extremely likely to recommend and 0 means you are not likely to recommend the organization. | On a scale of 1 to 5, where 5 means extremely connected and 1 means not connected at all, how connected do you feel to this professional membership organization and the work that it does?

This year's survey included a new question about career stage. It turns out that those later in their career feel less connected and less satisfied with their organization, yet most groups can count on them to stick around. They are the most likely to say they will renew their membership. On the other hand, those early in their career are more likely to feel connected and be satisfied with their organization, but are less likely to commit to renewing their membership. The data suggests that organizations need to prove their value year-over-year to help ensure retention among this younger group.

Those who are mid-career are middle-of-the-road. They tend to feel more connected with their organization than those late in their career, but also are less likely to feel satisfied, renew their membership, or promote their organization to their peers than those late in their career.

### MEMBER SENTIMENT BY CAREER STAGE



**Figure 3.** Questions asked: Overall, how satisfied are you with your membership in this professional membership organization? | How likely are you to recommend this professional membership organization? Use a 10-point scale where 10 means you are extremely likely to recommend and 0 means you are not likely to recommend the organization. | On a scale of 1 to 5, where 5 means extremely connected and 1 means not connected at all, how connected do you feel to this professional membership organization and the work that it does? | How likely are you to renew your membership in this professional membership organization after your current membership expires?

## When do they join?

The largest number of Members join a professional organization early in their career – within five years of employment. About one-third join before employment. Few join later in their career. This data suggests that recruitment activities should be focused not only on students and recent graduates, but also those in their first few years of employment.

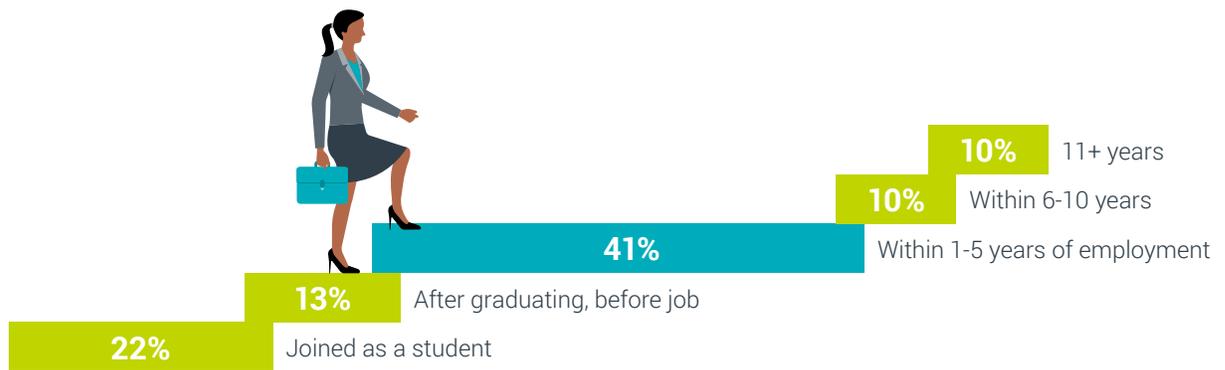


Figure 4. When did you first become a member of a professional membership organization?

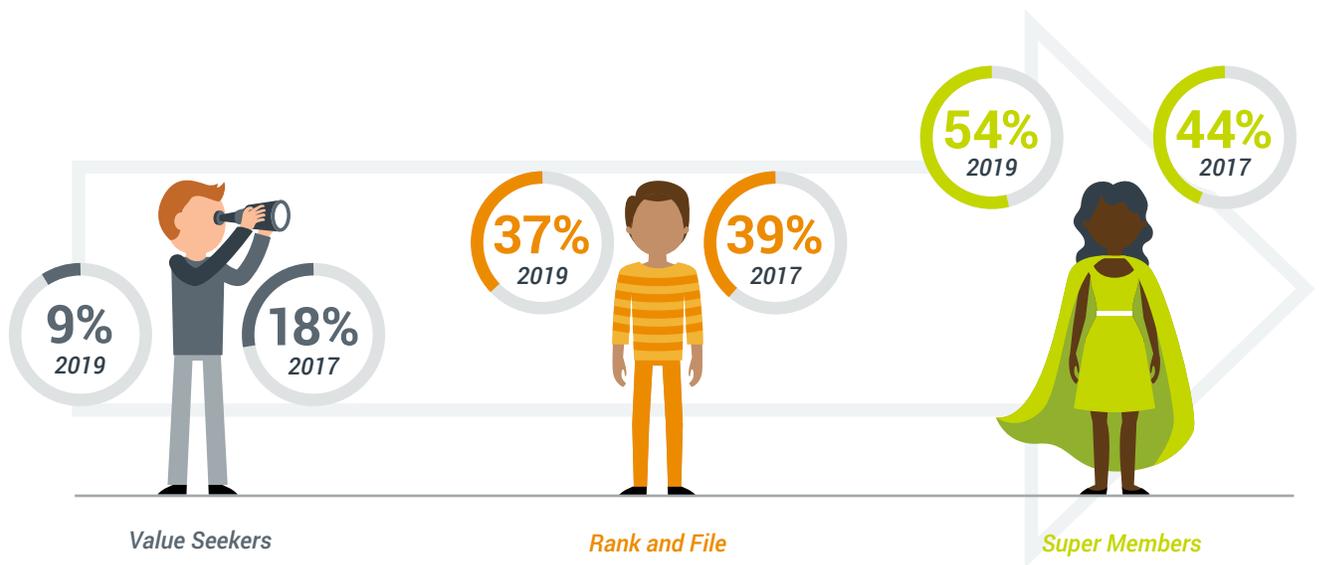
# Section 2: Member loyalty



This study looks at member loyalty data by three segments: high (“Super Members”), medium (“Rank and File”), and low (“Value Seekers”), using the performance indicators outlined previously (satisfaction, connection, renewal intent, and Net Promoter Score).

From 2017 to 2019, the number of Super Members increased by 10 points, while low commitment Members decreased by nine points. This suggests positive movement in member loyalty in general.

## MEMBER LOYALTY SPECTRUM MOVEMENT



**Figure 5.** Methodology: Used factor and k-means cluster analysis to segment members into exclusive groups based on how committed they are to the one professional membership organization that is most important to them. Inputs included: satisfaction, connection, renewal intent, Net Promoter Score.

Here's a closer look at some characteristics of each loyalty segment:

### PROFILE OF MEMBER LOYALTY SEGMENTS

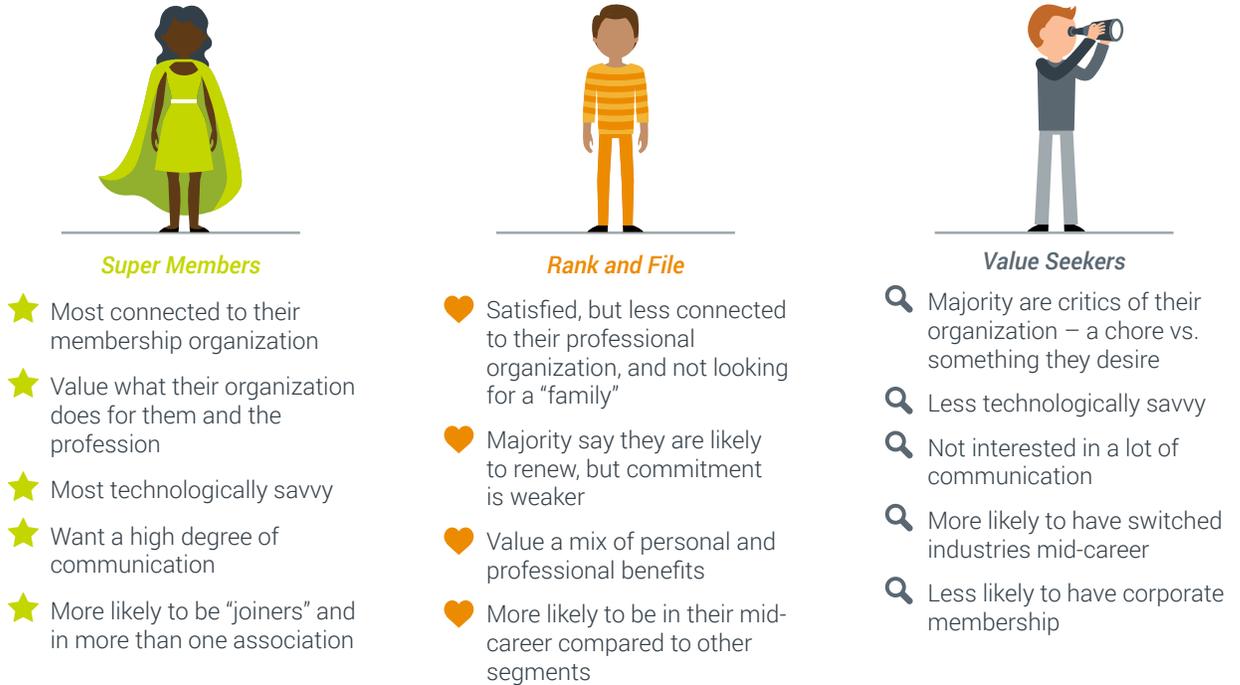


Figure 6. Analysis of multiple questions and data points.

As one might expect, when looking at how long members typically stay with an organization, Super Members average the longest time at almost 12 years. Value Seekers average the shortest at nine-and-a-half years.

### AVERAGE TENURE OF LOYALTY SEGMENTS

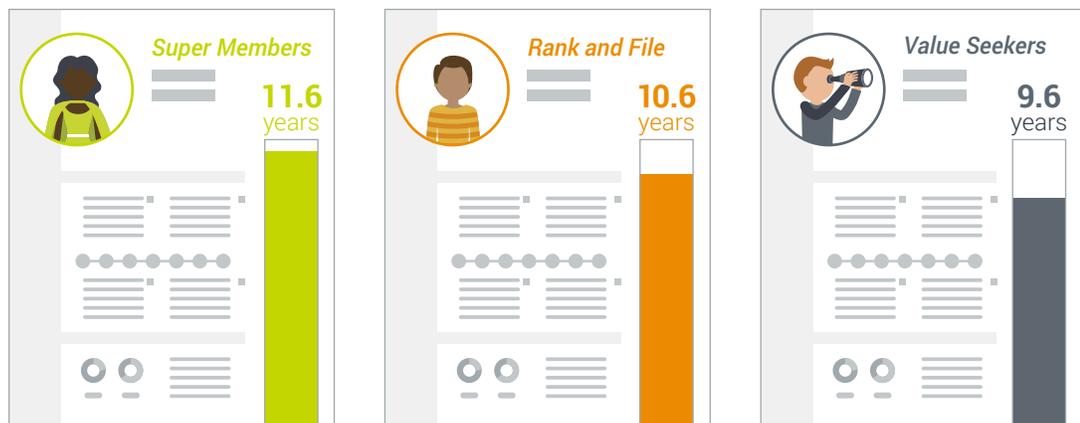


Figure 7. Please think about the ONE professional membership organization that is most important to you. How long have you been a member of this professional membership organization? Please enter the number of years. If less than one year, enter '0'.

When looking at the correlation between member loyalty and member involvement with their organization, the most common involvement across segments is attending an annual meeting, followed by certification and continuing education.

Even though Super Members are more likely to have participated in most of the activities tested, less than half say they have participated in any one engagement opportunity tested.

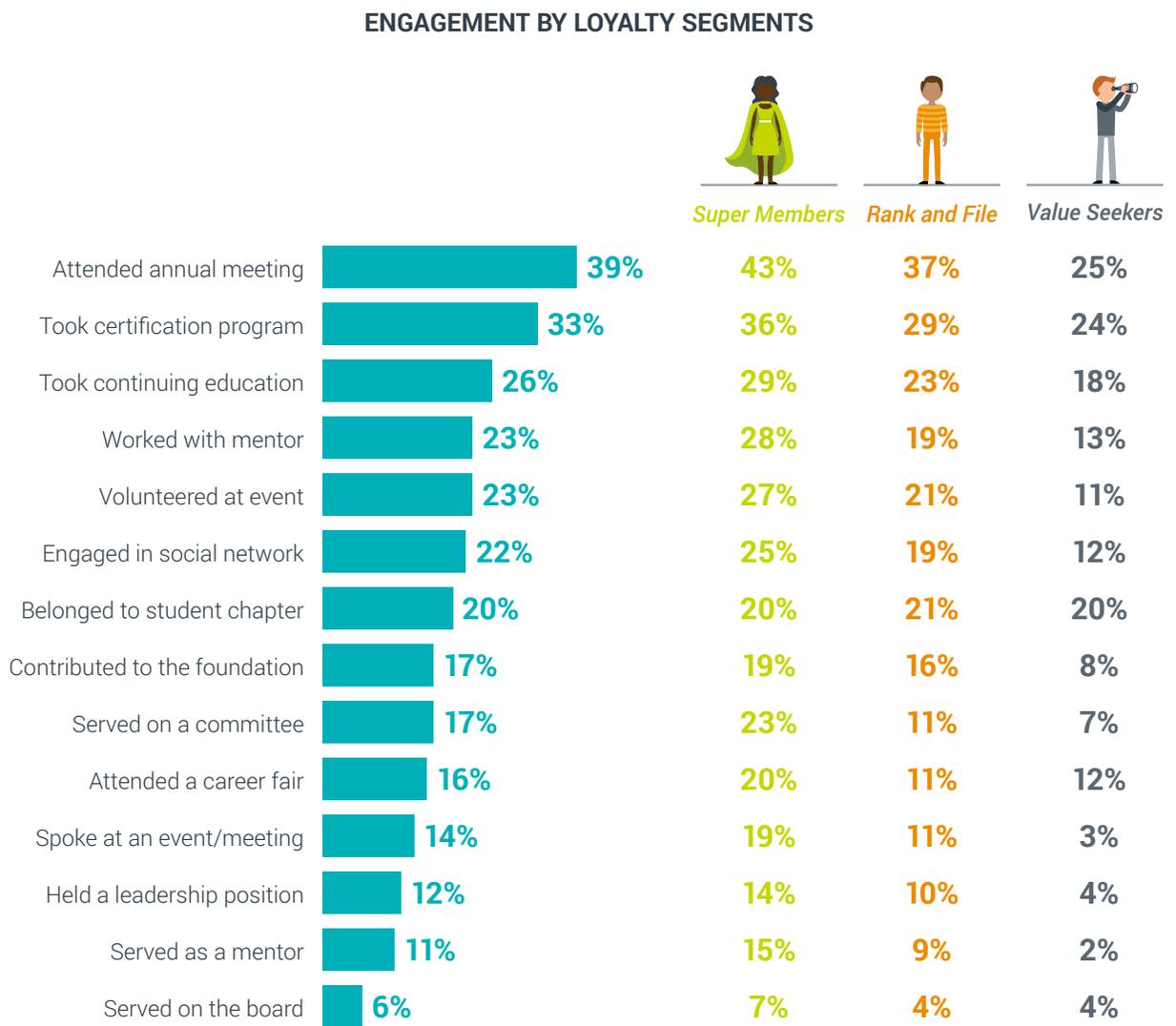
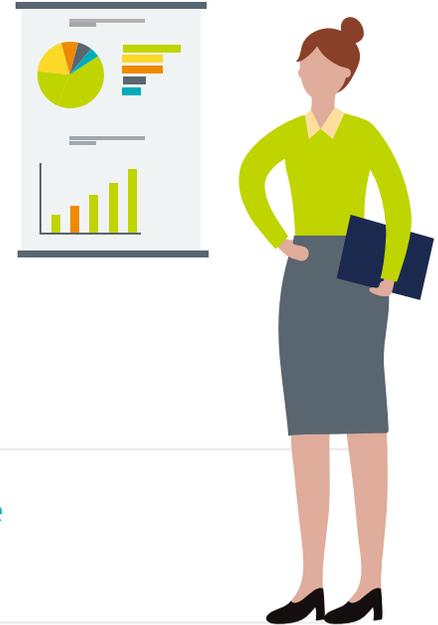


Figure 8. In which of the following ways have you been involved with your professional membership organization(s)? Please select all that apply.

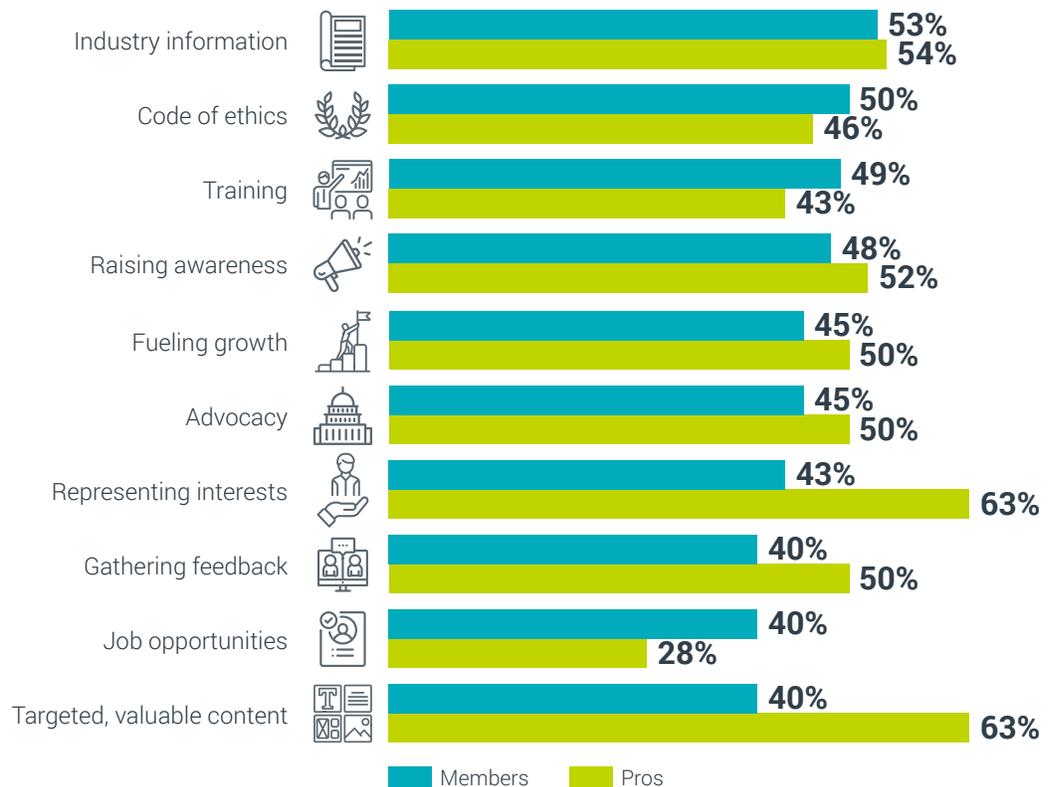
# Section 3: What matters most to members?



As in 2017, Members say industry information and code of ethics are top on their list of important benefits once they become members.

Training (such as presentation skills, media, leadership) and raising awareness about the profession have grown in importance. Job opportunities has risen to one of the top 10 benefits since 2017. Interestingly, Pros underestimate the importance of job opportunities as a valuable member benefit.

**TOP 10 MOST IMPORTANT BENEFITS  
(MEMBER AND PRO VIEWPOINTS)**



**Figure 9.** Questions asked: Below is a list of benefits that being a member of a professional membership organization might provide. For each, please indicate how important that benefit is to you. | Below is a list of benefits that a professional membership/trade organization might provide to its members. For each, please indicate how important you feel that benefit is to your organization's members.



## A spotlight on job opportunities

The 2019 survey data highlights a trend seen across multiple Community Brands studies: Job opportunities are important for acquisition, as well as retention, among those early in their careers. They are also a way to increase value with harder to reach audiences (see Rank and File and Value Seeker segments in Figures 13 and 14).

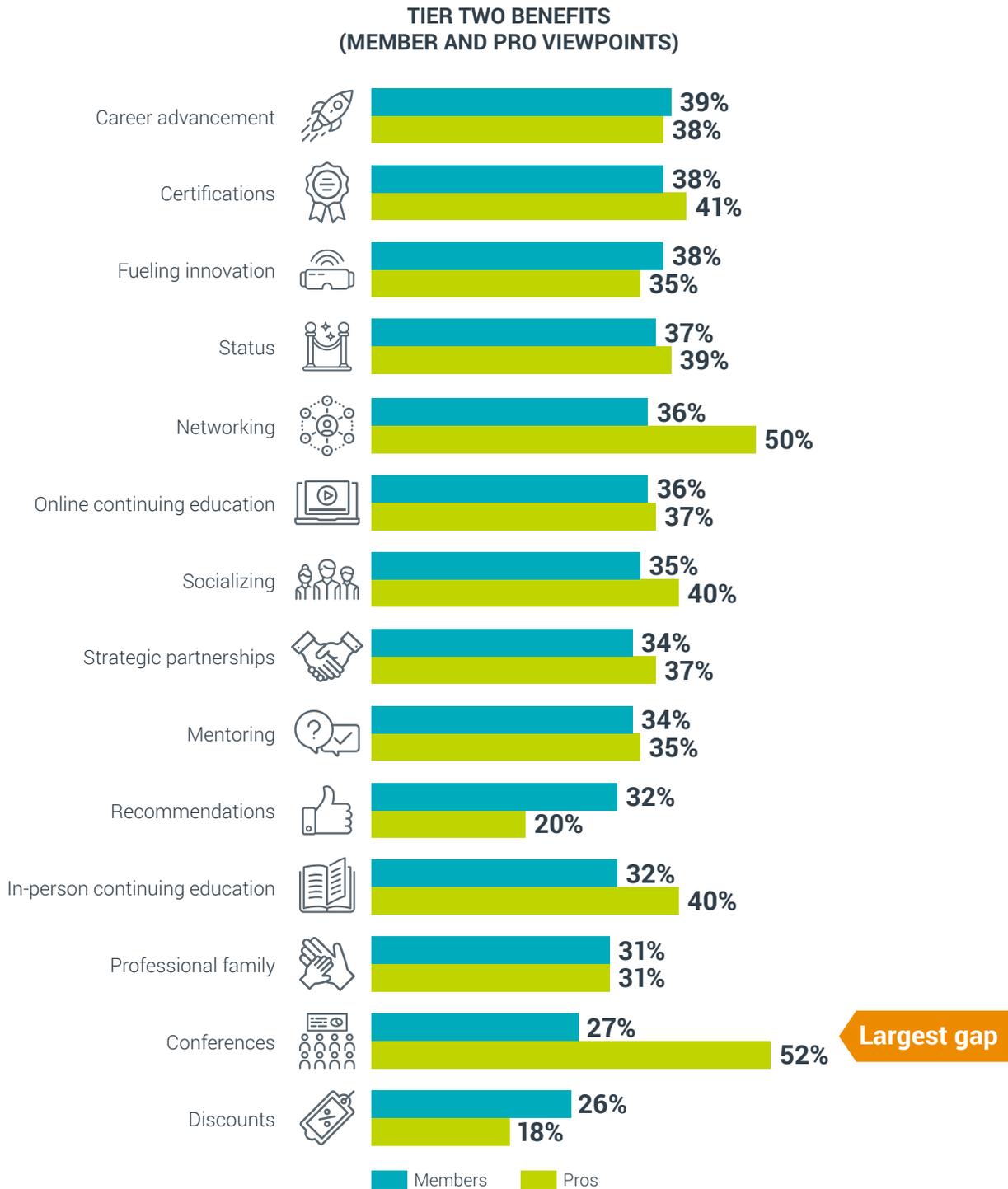
But a closer look at the data suggests organizations are missing the mark on this opportunity. Pros do not see job opportunities as important as Members do, and only 12 percent say their organization is doing very well delivering job opportunities. Members say their organization is doing a better job than Pros say they are, but still only 27 percent of Members say they're doing very well.

### JOB OPPORTUNITIES (MEMBER AND PRO VIEWPOINTS)



**Figure 10.** Questions asked: (Members only:) Below is a list of benefits that being a member of a professional membership organization might provide. For each, please indicate how important that benefit is to you. | How well is your primary professional membership organization doing in each of the following areas? If your organization does not offer the benefit below, select "NA." | (Pros only:) Below is a list of benefits that a professional membership/trade organization might provide to its members. For each, please indicate how important you feel that benefit is to your organization's members. | How well is your professional membership/trade organization doing in each of the following areas? If your organization does not offer the benefit below, select "NA."

Secondary benefits that Members find most valuable include many “tangible” benefits, such as certifications and recommendations. Meetings and conferences emerge as one area where Pros are very focused, but Members rank it as a lower priority.



**Figure 11.** Questions asked: (Members only:) Below is a list of benefits that being a member of a professional membership organization might provide. For each, please indicate how important that benefit is to you. | (Pros only:) Below is a list of benefits that a professional membership/trade organization might provide to its members. For each, please indicate how important you feel that benefit is to your organization’s members.



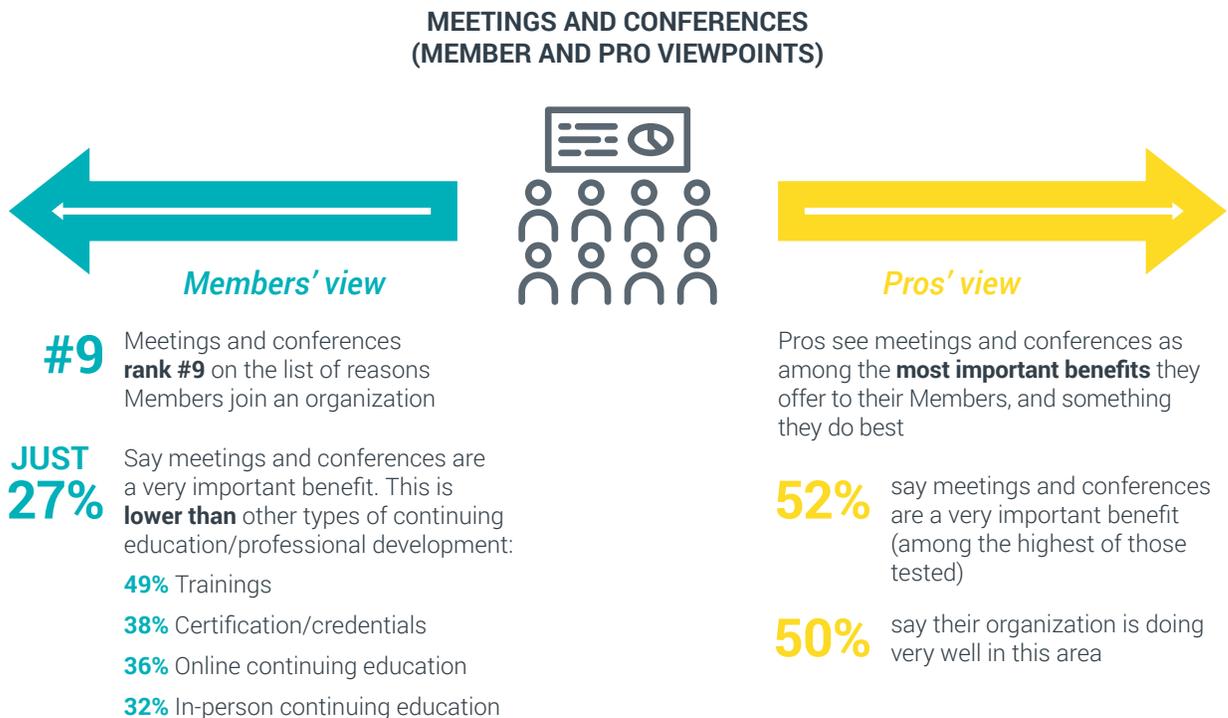
## A spotlight on meetings and conferences

At first glance, it might seem as if meetings and conferences lack importance with Members. But remember, attending the annual conference was top on the list of ways members have been involved with their organization (see Figure 8). So, what's going on here?

Findings from Community Brands 2018 Member Education and Career Development Report shed light on this topic and the evolving preferences and behaviors around continuing education in general. Members no longer look to annual conferences as the primary or only source of training and continuing education. They now learn anytime, anywhere, and in a variety of ways (five on average) – in-person, digital, time-intensive, condensed, and micro-focused.

Member preferences around learning also vary by generation, and not always in ways that align with common assumptions based on age and career stage. For example, Gen Xers' and Boomers' use of short videos as an educational tool has increased. And Millennials are as interested in face-to-face professional development as older generations; but they also have some interest in emerging learning formats, such as just-in-time learning and gamification.

Taken together, data from this study and previous studies suggests it may be time for organizations to shift the focus of their annual conference to emphasize additional learning opportunities, as well as other high-value member benefits, such as providing industry information and offering job opportunities.



**Figure 12.** Questions asked: (Members only:) In which of the following ways have you been involved with your professional membership organization/s? Please select all that apply. | Below is a list of benefits that being a member of a professional membership organization might provide. For each, please indicate how important that benefit is to you. | What benefit(s) originally motivated you to become a member of the professional membership organization you are involved with? Select all that apply. | How well is your primary professional membership organization doing in each of the following areas? If your organization does not offer the benefit below, select "NA." (Pros only): Below is a list of benefits that a professional membership/trade organization might provide to its members. For each, please indicate how important you feel that benefit is to your organization's members. | How well is your professional membership/trade organization doing in each of the following areas? If your organization does not offer the benefit below, select "NA."

Looking at Member benefit priorities and loyalty segments, the data shows Super Members give benefits to the profession higher priority than other segments. Rank and File find a mix of personal and professional benefits as most important. Value Seekers are most interested in how their organization impacts their own job or career opportunities.

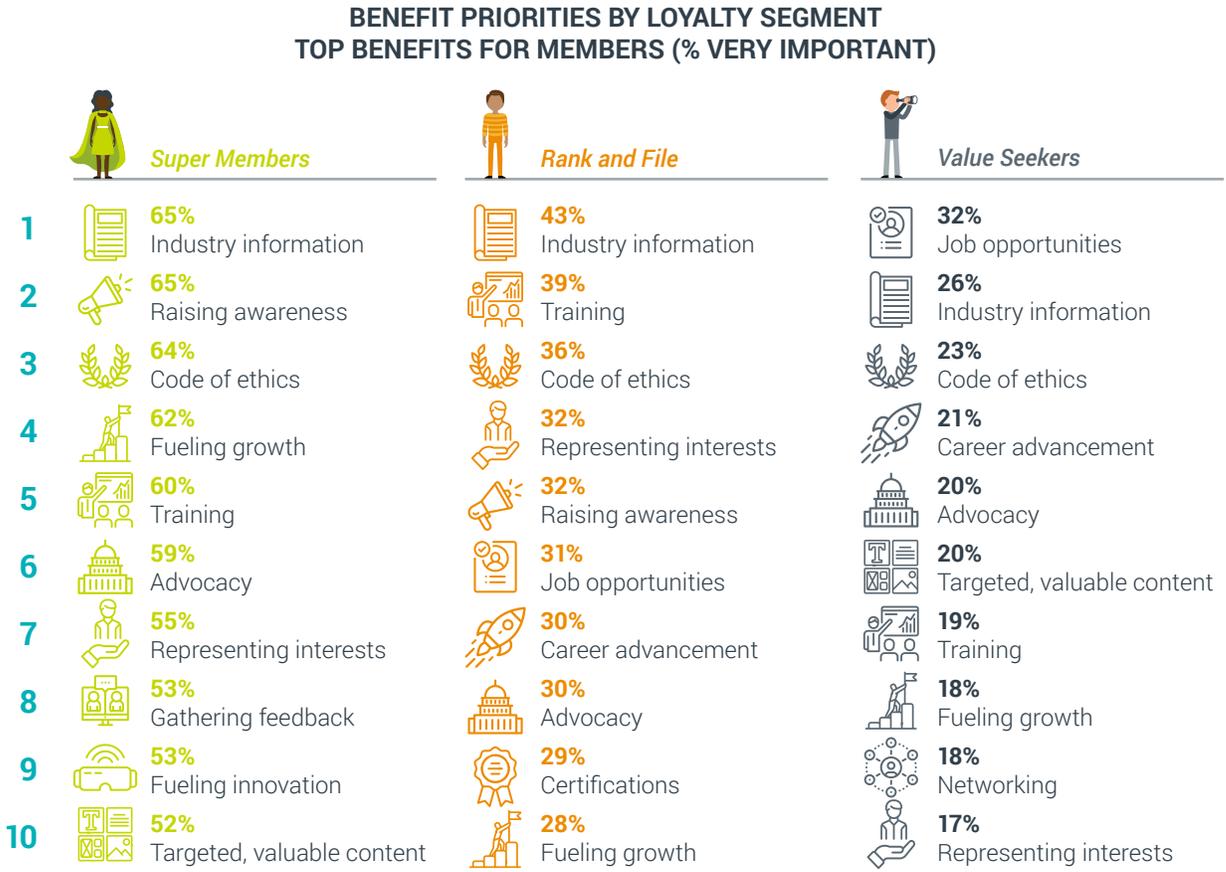


Figure 13. Above is a list of benefits that being a member of a professional membership organization might provide. For each, please indicate how important that benefit is to you.

When we asked respondents what other benefits are important to them, their open-ended feedback highlights additional areas of value and sheds light on the three loyalty personas.

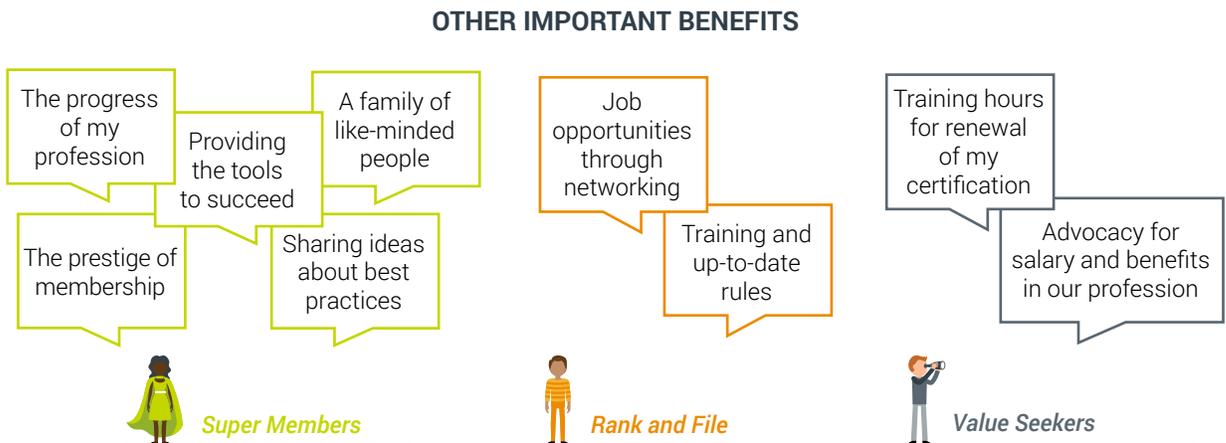


Figure 14. What other benefits are important to you?

Looking at Member benefit priorities by career stage provides insights into members from a different perspective. Members who are early in their career are more interested in advancement benefits, including training and raising awareness. Those later in their career are more likely to value code of ethics and advocacy over training. All three segments list industry information as a top three priority.

This data suggests organizations would have greater success using messages for member acquisition and retention efforts that support what members want most in each stage of their career.

### BENEFIT PRIORITIES BY CAREER STAGE

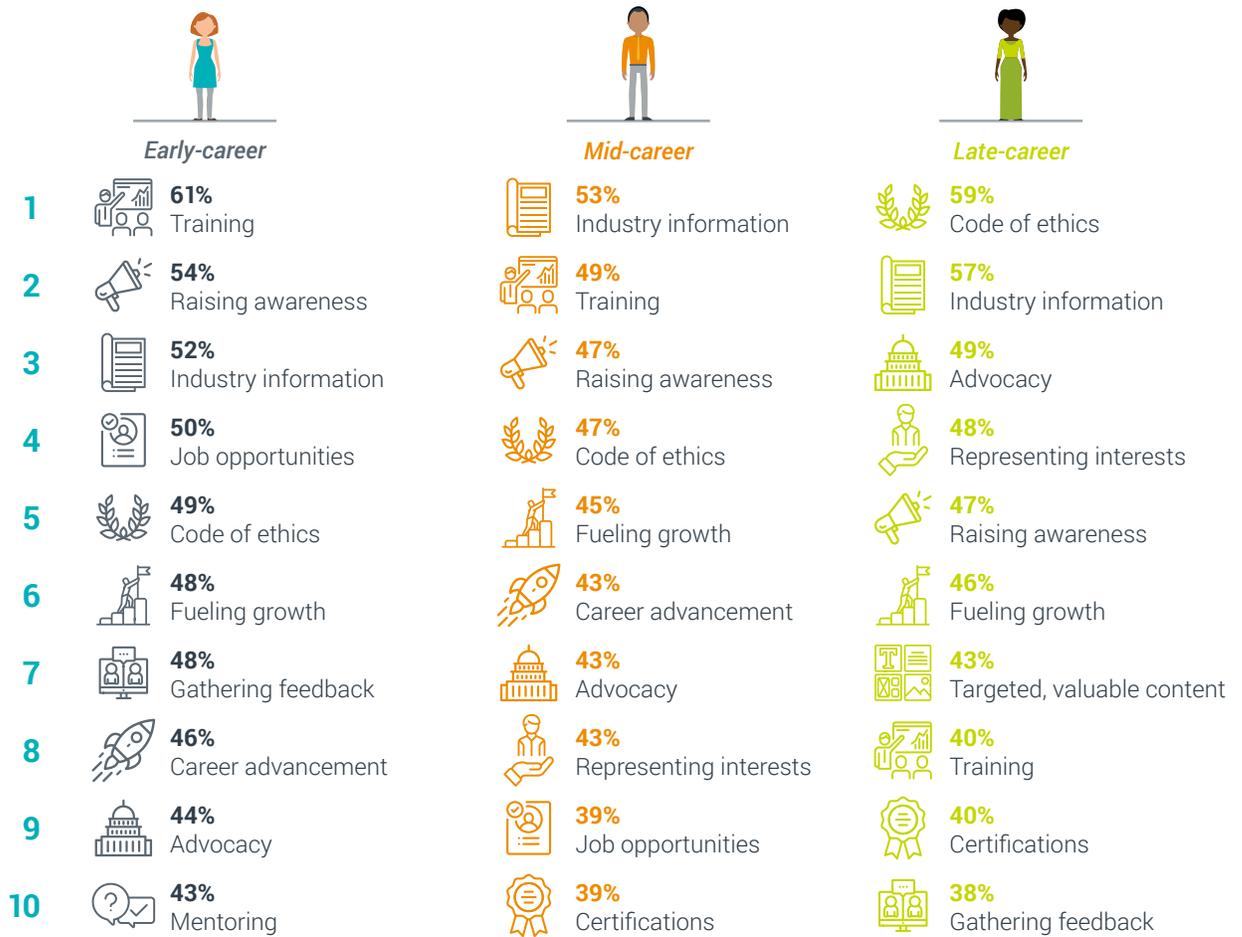


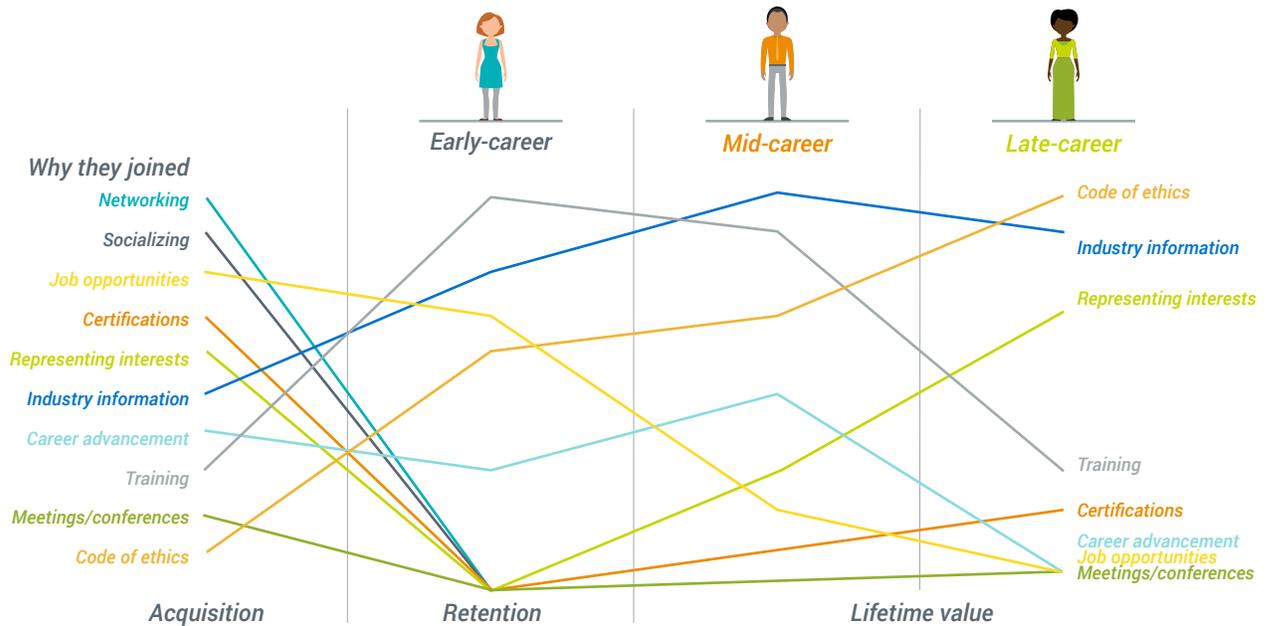
Figure 15. Above is a list of benefits that being a member of a professional membership organization might provide. For each, please indicate how important that benefit is to you.

Looking at multiple data points together, it's possible to see how the importance of various member benefits changes throughout the member journey – both through the member lifecycle and career stage.

For example, Members tend to initially join their organization for networking, socializing, job opportunities, and certifications, but networking and socializing quickly become less important. Over time, code of ethics, industry information, representing interests, and training grow in importance.

These changes over time in what members value most suggest an opportunity for organizations in their acquisition and retention efforts: to provide more targeted content and services to help members as they move through the member journey.

**CHANGES TO THE IMPORTANCE OF BENEFITS THROUGHOUT THE MEMBER JOURNEY**



**Figure 16.** Questions asked: What benefit(s) originally motivated you to become a member of the professional membership organization you are involved with? Select all that apply. | Below is a list of benefits that being a member of a professional membership organization might provide. For each, please indicate how important that benefit is to you.

A driver (regression) analysis helps to understand what benefits impact retention. The analysis looks at how satisfaction with certain benefits (how well Members say their organization is doing in certain areas) impacts renewal intent (how likely Members are to renew).

There are several benefits that have the biggest impact on retention, as outlined in Figure 17.

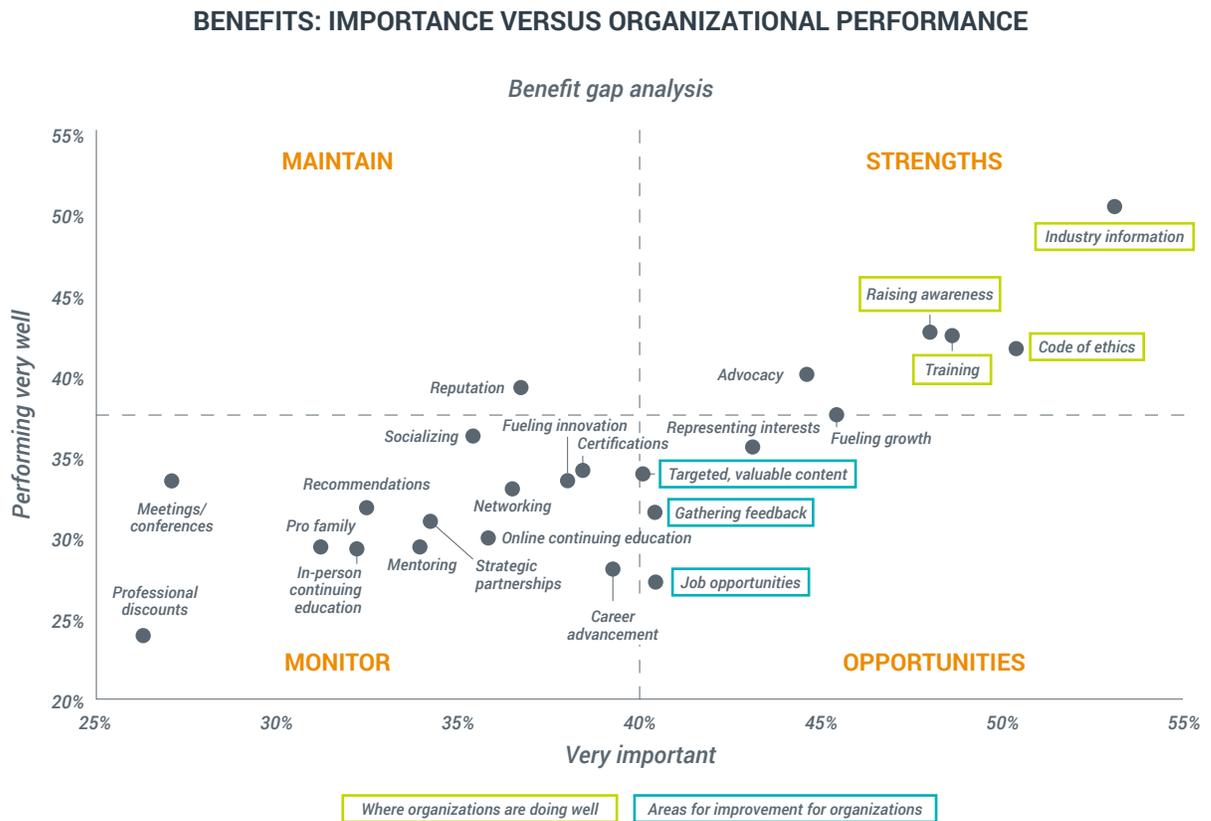
### KEY BENEFITS THAT DRIVE RENEWAL AND RETENTION



**Figure 17.** Questions asked: How likely are you to renew your membership in this professional membership organization after your current membership expires? | How well is your primary professional membership organization doing in each of the following areas? If your organization does not offer the benefit below, select "NA."

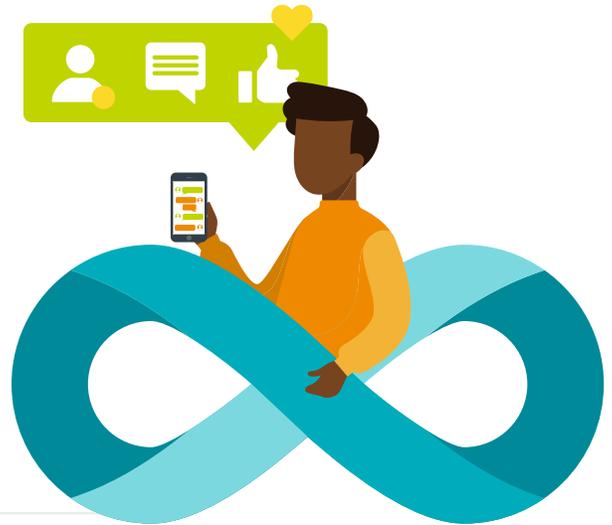
Pulling multiple data points together also provides a gap analysis around member benefits – where are organizations strong, where are they weak, what benefits do they need to maintain, and what are some areas that are less important.

The analysis shows organizations are doing well in several areas that are important to members, including sharing industry information, providing a code of ethics, offering training, and raising awareness. The same analysis shows organizations have more work to do around key areas, including offering job opportunities, gathering feedback, and providing targeted and valuable content.



**Figure 18.** Questions asked: (Members only.) Below is a list of benefits that being a member of a professional membership organization might provide. For each, please indicate how important that benefit is to you. | How well is your primary professional membership organization doing in each of the following areas? If your organization does not offer the benefit below, select "NA."

# Section 4: Where do you go from here?



Study findings continue to show member priorities, behaviors, and preferences are different and change over time based on multiple factors, including generation, career stage, and loyalty level.

Understanding these needs and preferences is critically important for an organization's ongoing success.

Here are five tips on how to use data from this study. Implementing these at your organization will help you align your strategy with what matters most to members.

1

## **Continually evaluate your organizational strategy to provide value throughout the member lifecycle and career journey.**

This study's findings show the benefits members value when they join change throughout their membership and career lifetime. Those early in their careers are more likely to feel connected to their organization and be satisfied with membership. However, this group is also less likely to commit to renewing and to promote their association to their peers. To keep members around for the long haul be sure to continually evaluate your organizational strategy to ensure you're providing value throughout the member journey. Consider what your members are doing and what they may be looking for from your organization in each phase of their career. For additional tips and insights, read the paper, "[\*\*Supporting the Lifetime Member Journey.\*\*](#)"

2

## **Revisit the benefits you provide your members.**

This study shows that while members are satisfied with many of the benefits they consider most valuable, there are some areas members value most where organizations need improvement. Use the data from this study as a starting point, then survey your members to make sure you know exactly which benefits are most important to them (a bonus, as asking for feedback is an area for improvement for organizations). As you evaluate your organizational strategy to ensure it provides value throughout the member journey, be sure to incorporate changes to benefits based on the feedback you receive.

3

**Give your job board a boost.**

Job opportunities are an important benefit to members, yet organizations have work to do in this area. With the right technology and some proven techniques, your online career center can be a great source of engagement (and even added revenue) for your organization. For tips on how to grow your career center, read the paper, **“101 Ways to Grow Your Career Center.”**

4

**Review your learning and professional education program.**

While annual conferences top the list of ways members have been involved with their organization, members don't look to a one-time per year event as the only source of training and continuing education. Be sure to address your members' preferences for learning in a variety of ways. Audit your professional education program to understand what learning formats may be beneficial to add. For more insights in this area, read the paper, **“Innovation in Continuing Education.”**

5

**Focus on member engagement.**

This study suggests there is room for organizations to get members more involved. Even among Super Members, who are more likely to have participated in most of the activities tested, less than half say they've participated in any engagement opportunity. Ask your members to participate by volunteering at an event, work with or serve as a mentor, or even hold a leadership position. The more involved they are, the more likely they will be to stick around for years to come.

## Survey Methodology

Commissioned by Community Brands, Edge Research conducted an online survey of 1,143 U.S. members who self-reported they are 18 years old or older and a member of a professional membership organization. Survey respondents were recruited through an online non-probability sample, meaning findings are not projectable to the larger population of members. The term "Members" refers specifically to those who were surveyed. Quotas were set so the survey is representative of key demographics. A parallel online survey was conducted among 405 professionals who work in these organizations. Survey respondents were recruited using both an online non-probability sample and Community Brands lists. The terms "Professionals" or "Pros" refers specifically to those who were surveyed. The surveys were in the field during July of 2019.

## About Community Brands

Community Brands is the leading provider of cloud-based software and payment solutions for associations, nonprofits, K-12 schools, and faith-based groups. Specifically for associations, Community Brands offers solutions for membership management, learning management, career centers, and event and camp management. Industry-leading products include YourMembership, Nimble AMS, NetForum, Aptify, Crowd Wisdom, Freestone, YM Careers, GiveSmart, MIP Fund Accounting, and Expo Logic. Through innovation and technology, the company empowers more than 100,000 clients and partners of all sizes to create greater member engagement, grow revenue, and improve staff efficiency. To learn more, visit [www.communitybrands.com](http://www.communitybrands.com) or follow us on [Twitter](#) or [LinkedIn](#).



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