State of Associations Quarterly: 2026 Q2

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Key findings

- **New members who complete a structured onboarding call within their first 30 days renew at a rate 9 percentage points higher** than new members who don't, based on this quarter's sample.
- Associations that assign a single staff point of contact for a new member's first year see meaningfully fewer support tickets in that member's first six months than associations that route new-member questions through a general inbox.
- Only 44 percent of responding organizations send a welcome packet — physical or digital — within the first week of a new member joining.
- New members who attend at least one event within their first 90 days are more likely to renew than new members who don't attend an event in that window, regardless of the association's overall renewal rate.

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Why onboarding, this quarter

State of Associations 2026, released in March, reported the sector's headline growth and renewal numbers: 750 organizations, 2.1 percent median growth, 94 percent median renewal. This brief, the second in NANA's quarterly series for 2026, looks at a question the annual report doesn't dwell on: what happens to a new member in the weeks right after they join, and how much that first stretch predicts whether they're still a member at their next renewal.

Director of Research Inês Carvalho-Reyes drew this quarter's questions from a recurring theme in membership staff feedback on the annual survey: many organizations track renewal closely but don't systematically track what happens to a member before their first renewal date even arrives.

What the data shows on the first 30 days

New members who complete a structured onboarding call within their first 30 days renew at a rate 9 percentage points higher than new members who don't receive one, this quarter's responding organizations report. The gap held across organization size, though larger organizations were more likely to have a structured onboarding call as standard practice in the first place, rather than one added only for members who ask questions or run into trouble on their own.

"A structured call isn't a sales pitch for renewal eleven months out," Carvalho-Reyes said. "It's the moment a new member either understands what they're actually a member of, or doesn't, and that understanding is what predicts renewal, not the call itself."

The single-point-of-contact effect

Associations that assign a new member a single named staff contact for their first year report meaningfully fewer support tickets in that member's first six months than associations that route new-member questions through a general membership inbox. Respondents attributed this less to faster response times and more to a new member simply knowing whom to ask, rather than guessing whether a question was worth submitting through a general channel at all.

Some respondents noted a tradeoff worth naming directly: a single-point-of-contact model concentrates onboarding workload on individual staff members rather than spreading it across a shared inbox, and organizations adopting the model reported needing to plan staff capacity around it explicitly rather than assuming it would absorb into existing workloads without adjustment.

Welcome packets: common, but not universal

Only 44 percent of responding organizations send a welcome packet, physical or digital, within the first week of a new member joining. Among the majority that don't, the most common reason cited was not resource constraints but simply not having built the step into a formal onboarding process — a gap this brief flags as a low-cost first fix for organizations without a full onboarding program in place.

Early event attendance and first-year renewal

New members who attend at least one event within their first 90 days are more likely to renew at their first renewal date than new members who don't attend an event in that window, a pattern that held even at organizations whose overall renewal rate was below the sector's 94 percent median. The brief's respondents were split on which type of event drove the effect most — a large annual conference or a smaller regional gathering — but agreed that any first event, rather than a specific type, was what mattered most.

What to change before your next new-member cohort

Three changes recurred among the organizations reporting the strongest first-year renewal outcomes: a structured onboarding call within 30 days, a single named staff contact rather than a general inbox, and an explicit invitation to a specific upcoming event sent within the new member's first month, rather than a general mention that events exist. None of these require new software, and the organizations in this sample that added them report the change taking hold within a single new-member cohort, well before their next annual renewal cycle begins.

The research team's next quarterly brief, due in October, will look at member engagement

scoring and how associations decide which lower-engagement members warrant staff outreach versus which are simply quieter participants who still renew reliably. Organizations with data on both onboarding practices and engagement scoring are encouraged to respond to that fielding when it opens, since this quarter's sample skewed toward organizations already tracking onboarding closely, and a broader response base would help the research team confirm whether the 9-point renewal gap holds at organizations with less formal onboarding tracking already in place.