State of Associations Quarterly: 2024 Q4

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Key findings

- **Membership and events roles turn over at 19 percent annually**, the highest of any role category, against a sample-wide median of 14 percent.
- Open membership and events roles take a median of **74 days to fill**, longer than any other role category measured.
- Finance and operations roles turn over least, at a median of 8 percent annually, and are filled fastest, in a median of 41 days.
- 38 percent of open roles sample-wide are filled by internal promotion; the share is highest in executive and senior staff roles and lowest in membership and events roles.

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Why turnover by role, and why this quarter

State of Associations 2024 reported a median annual staff turnover of 14 percent across the sample, without breaking the figure down further. A single sector-wide number obscures a pattern with real operational consequences: turnover isn't evenly distributed, and the roles that turn over fastest aren't necessarily the ones that are easiest to refill.

Membership and events: the fastest-turning, slowest-filling roles

Membership and events roles show the highest turnover in the sample, at a median 19 percent annually, and also take the longest to fill once vacated — a median of 74 days from an open posting to a signed offer. The combination compounds: these are the same two functions most exposed to renewal-cycle and meeting-season workload, meaning the roles most likely to sit vacant are also the roles whose absence is felt fastest by the rest of the organization.

Director of Research Inês Carvalho-Reyes said the finding tracks anecdotal reports NANA's

membership team had already heard from chapter leaders. "Staff in these roles describe burnout tied to cyclical workload spikes — renewal season, conference season — more than staff in steadier roles like finance. The data now backs that up with a number."

Finance and operations: the exception

Finance and operations roles turn over least of any category, at a median 8 percent annually, and fill fastest, at a median 41 days. The pattern held across all three budget bands and all six chapter regions in the sample, making it the most consistent finding in this brief.

Internal promotion versus external hire

Sample-wide, 38 percent of open roles are filled by internal promotion rather than external hire. The share varies sharply by role category: executive and senior staff openings are filled internally 52 percent of the time, reflecting deputy and associate roles built as succession pipelines, while membership and events openings are filled internally only 24 percent of the time — the lowest of any category, and consistent with those roles' higher overall turnover and thinner internal bench.

Regional patterns

Turnover in membership and events roles is elevated across all six chapter regions, but the gap between that category and the sample-wide median is widest in the Great Lakes and Mid-Atlantic regions, both home to chapters running a high-visibility annual gathering — the Winter Roundtable and Advocacy Day, respectively — that concentrate meetings-season and registration-season workload into a shorter window than chapters without a comparable flagship program. Chapters with a lighter signature-program calendar, including Rocky Mountain and Pacific Northwest, show a smaller gap between membership and events turnover and the overall sample median.

Fill time shows less regional variation than turnover itself. A membership or events role in any of NANA's six regions takes roughly the same 70-to-80-day range to fill, suggesting the hiring-market constraint behind the 74-day median is more about the specific labor market for these roles nationally than about any one region's conditions.

What this means for staffing plans

- Membership and events roles carry the highest combined risk in this data: highest turnover, slowest to fill, least likely to be filled from within
- Organizations relying on membership and events staff through a renewal or conference cycle should plan hiring lead time in the range of 74 days, not the 41-day median that finance and operations roles might suggest
- Building an internal promotion pipeline in membership and events — even informally, through cross-training — could address the category's lowest internal-fill rate directly, rather than waiting for turnover to force an external search under time pressure
- Chapters and associations running a high-visibility annual gathering should expect membership and events turnover above even this brief's elevated sample median, and staff their event-season coverage accordingly

A note on the vacancy itself

Respondents who reported the shortest fill times for membership and events roles, across every region, shared one practice: they began recruiting before the outgoing staff member's last day,

rather than waiting for the position to be formally vacant. Where a departing employee gave standard two-weeks' notice, organizations that posted the opening the day notice was given filled the role a median 19 days faster than organizations that waited until the position was empty to post it. That gap alone accounts for a meaningful share of the difference between the fastest- and slowest-filling organizations in this category, and it costs an organization nothing beyond a small change in when the posting goes up rather than a change in budget or process.

This brief's research team recommends membership and events supervisors build a same-day-posting habit directly into an offboarding checklist, rather than leaving it to whoever happens to notice the vacancy first once notice is given.