State of Associations 2026

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Key findings

- **750 member organizations responded** to NANA's third annual benchmarking survey, up from 720 in 2025 and 690 in the 2024 inaugural edition.
- **Median membership growth held at 2.1 percent for a third consecutive year**, the longest run of stable growth NANA's research team has recorded since the survey began.
- **Median renewal climbed to 94 percent**, up from 93 percent in each of the two prior editions — the first year-over-year renewal gain in the survey's short history.
- **Median dues rose 3.8 percent**, the largest single-year dues increase recorded since the survey began, outpacing both prior years' increases and outpacing the 2.1 percent membership-growth figure in the same period.

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Why this is the third edition, not the first

State of Associations began in 2024 as a one-time attempt to give association staff a sector-wide number to compare their own membership figures against. Three years in, it has become the number NANA's own board and member organizations reference before any other, and Director of Research Inês Carvalho-Reyes now leads it as an annual fielding, alongside Chief Executive Officer Walter Abernathy and Treasurer Haruko Tanaka, who bring board-level context to how the results are read against NANA's own dues and reserve policy questions.

"The first year, we were mostly asking whether associations would tell us their numbers at all," Carvalho-Reyes said. "By the third year, the harder question is what to make of three years of the same growth rate in a row. Flat can mean stable. It can also mean an entire sector plateauing at once, and it's our job to tell members which one it is."

Methodology

NANA fielded the 2026 survey with Fieldstone Data Partners between November 2025 and January 2026, collecting responses from 750 member organizations — up from 720 in 2025 and 690 in the 2024 inaugural edition. Results are broken out by sector, staff size, NANA's six chapter regions, and organization budget size, consistent with the two prior editions so year-over-year comparisons hold across all three fieldings.

Respondents report membership counts, renewal rates, dues levels, staff counts, and a non-dues revenue estimate for their own most recently closed fiscal year. Fieldstone Data Partners validates response completeness and flags outliers for follow-up before results are finalized, the same review step used in both prior editions.

Membership growth: a third flat-but-stable year

Median membership growth held at 2.1 percent for the third consecutive year, matching both the 2024 and 2025 editions exactly. NANA's research team reads this as genuine sector stability rather than survey noise, since the figure has now held across three separate fielding periods and three different response samples of growing size.

Growth was not uniform across sectors: associations in health care and early-childhood education reported growth above the 2.1 percent median, while associations tied to sectors with declining member-organization counts of their own — several agricultural and maritime trade groups among them — reported flat or slightly negative growth. The median absorbs both ends of that range, and this report cautions against reading it as evidence that every association is growing at a similar, moderate pace.

Renewal: the first gain in three years

Median renewal reached 94 percent, up from 93 percent in both 2024 and 2025 — the first year-over-year gain the survey has recorded. NANA's research team is cautious about attributing the gain to any single cause, but notes that renewal gains appeared most concentrated among organizations that reported having adopted a formal, calendar-driven renewal process in the past two years, a pattern consistent with what NANA's own Member Renewal Benchmarks report found in May 2026.

The gain was broad rather than concentrated in one sector or region: a majority of responding organizations reported a renewal rate at or above their own prior year's figure, rather than the median gain being driven by a small number of organizations with an unusually large improvement.

Dues: the largest increase yet

Median dues rose 3.8 percent in 2026, the largest single-year increase recorded across all three editions, and notably larger than the 2.1 percent membership-growth figure in the same period. Organizations reporting a dues increase above the median were disproportionately concentrated among those citing rising event and insurance costs as a driver, rather than a shift in their underlying dues model — a distinction Treasurer Haruko Tanaka's ongoing Dues Model Study is tracking separately, as it moves into a phase where twelve member organizations pilot a revised

dues structure.

The gap between a 3.8 percent dues increase and a 2.1 percent membership-growth figure is not, on its own, a warning sign — most responding organizations' operating costs also rose faster than their membership counts — but this report flags it as a trend the research team plans to watch closely in the 2027 edition, particularly against this year's renewal gain.

Staffing and non-dues revenue

Staff counts across the sample grew modestly and roughly in line with membership growth, suggesting most organizations are not meaningfully changing their staff-to-member ratio year over year. Non-dues revenue — sponsorships, event registration, and paid education — continued to represent a larger share of total budget at larger organizations than at smaller ones, consistent with the two prior editions.

Smaller organizations, those with the fewest staff and the smallest budgets in the sample, reported the widest spread in non-dues revenue as a share of budget: some rely on it for a meaningful share of total revenue, while others report almost none, a pattern the research team attributes to differences in event and education programming capacity at organizations too small to run either at scale.

Regional patterns

Response volume grew across all six of NANA's chapter regions relative to 2025, with the largest increase in raw response count coming from the Mid-Atlantic and Southeast regions, NANA's two largest chapters by member-organization count. Growth and renewal figures did not vary meaningfully by region once sector and organization size were controlled for, reinforcing the research team's view that sector, not geography, is the stronger predictor of an individual association's trajectory.

The report notes one regional exception worth flagging without over-interpreting: Pacific Northwest respondents, NANA's smallest chapter region by member count, reported the widest range of renewal rates of any region, from among the sample's highest to among its lowest. The research team attributes the spread to the smaller sample size in that region rather than to any regional factor, and expects it to narrow as chapter membership there continues to grow.

How to use this report

NANA recommends member organizations compare their own figures against the budget-band and sector breakdowns in this report rather than the national median alone, since an organization's own relevant comparison group is rarely "all associations" but rather associations of similar size and sector. A board reviewing its executive director's report on membership performance should ask which comparison group the report is using before treating any gap from the national median as either a problem or a success.

This report is intended to be read alongside NANA's quarterly State of Associations briefs, which examine a single theme — renewal timing, member onboarding, and other topics — in more depth than the annual report's broader scope allows.

What the research team is watching for 2027

Carvalho-Reyes flagged two questions for the 2027 edition: whether the renewal gain holds for a second year or proves to be a one-year uptick, and whether the growing gap between dues increases (3.8 percent) and membership growth (2.1 percent) starts to affect renewal at

associations where the gap has persisted for multiple years in a row. The 2027 survey opens to responses in November 2026, and NANA plans to report preliminary Dues Model Study pilot results alongside it in mid-2027.

A note on organization size

This report breaks results into three budget bands — under $1 million, $1 million to $5 million, and over $5 million in annual operating budget — the same bands used in NANA's Staff Compensation Survey, so a reader working with both reports can compare growth, renewal, and staffing figures for the same size category without reconciling two different band definitions.

Smaller organizations, those under $1 million, reported both the widest range of outcomes and the smallest average response volume per sector, a combination that makes their median figures somewhat less stable year over year than the medians for larger budget bands. The research team weighs this when comparing a small organization's own figures against the smallest budget band's median, recommending a multi-year average of that band's own figures over any single year's number where a small organization has three years of survey history to draw on.

Three years of the same benchmarking partner

Fieldstone Data Partners has fielded all three editions of this survey, a continuity NANA's research team considers essential to the year-over-year comparisons this report relies on. A change in survey vendor, methodology, or question wording between editions would make comparisons across years considerably less reliable, since even small wording changes to a question about renewal or growth can shift how respondents interpret and answer it.

NANA plans to continue the relationship with Fieldstone Data Partners for the 2027 edition, and any methodology change under consideration — a revised question on non-dues revenue is the one currently being discussed — will be evaluated specifically for whether it would break comparability with the three editions reported here, before any change is adopted.

Why the research team publishes benchmarks rather than rankings

This report publishes medians and distributions rather than a ranked list of individual organizations, a deliberate choice consistent with all three editions. Publishing organization-level rankings would likely increase response rates in the short term among organizations confident of a strong ranking, while discouraging honest reporting from organizations further from the median — precisely the organizations whose data matters most to a report meant to help the whole sector, not only its strongest performers, understand where it stands.

Individual respondent data remains confidential to NANA's research team and Fieldstone Data Partners; only aggregated, anonymized figures appear in this report, consistent with the confidentiality terms every respondent agrees to before participating. Carvalho-Reyes has said this confidentiality commitment is itself part of why response volume has grown in each of the survey's three editions: an organization asked to report a flat or declining membership figure is more likely to respond honestly, in her experience, when it knows the figure will appear only inside an anonymized median rather than beside its own name. That trust, once established, is the asset the research team is most protective of in every fielding decision it makes.