



What Members Want

“A feeling of membership infrastructure is needed so that people can extend trust beyond the people in their physical communities.” — Robbie Kellman Baxter

To understand how we can best serve our members, we need to understand why people join associations in the first place.

Yes, we know that associations provide education, advocacy and networking, but what actual psychological need does joining fulfill? For that, we turn to Abraham Maslow and his mid-century work to understand the self-actualization of self.

Maslow was born in 1908 in Brooklyn and studied psychology at the University of Wisconsin and the New York School of Social Research before later working as faculty at Brooklyn College and, later, Brandeis University, according to [Britannica](#).

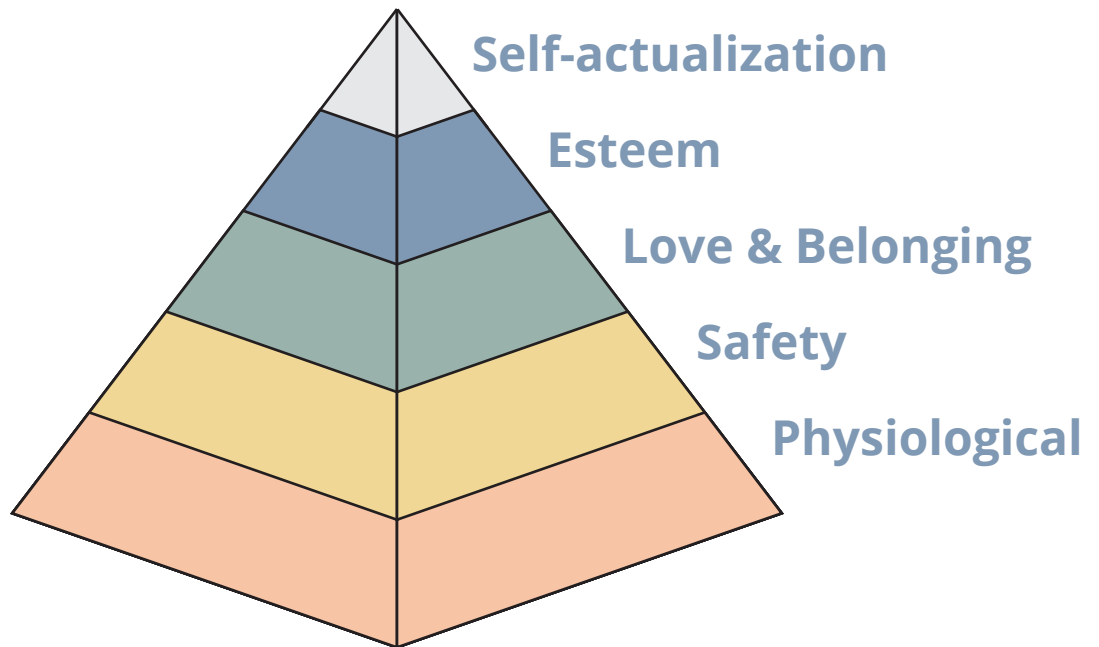
In publishing “Motivation and Personality” in 1954 and “Toward a Psychology of Being” in 1962, Maslow argued that humans have a series of needs that must be met, one before the other, to allow the conscious self to focus on achieving the next highest level.

Often outlined and visualized as a pyramid (see below), Maslow’s “hierarchy of needs” refers to five separate categories. They include, from the base of the pyramid to the top:

- **Physiological:** The basic needs we have for survivability, like air, clothing, water, food and health
- **Safety:** Those things we need in order to feel secure, like shelter, financial resources, personal security, stability, employment and physical property
- **Love and belonging:** The relationships by which we measure ourselves, love, intimacy, family and friends.
- **Esteem:** A sense of self, social status, esteem and respect.
- **Self-actualization:** The need to develop the self, deep creativity and honesty.



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So, where do associations fit in? If we take another look at that list of the things that associations fulfill — education, advocacy and networking — then we're quick to understand that that associations fulfill the spaces on the pyramid in the top three sections:

- Love and belonging: Associations provide networking, opportunities to connect with other individuals and a way to feel like you're part of something bigger than yourself
- Esteem: Membership can convey a sense of importance, prestige and exclusivity
- Self-actualization: An association can help produce action and advocacy for the greater good in an area that your members are interested in furthering

Questions to consider:

- Does your organization already do these things for your audience?
- How is that message being relayed to your members?
- Are there ways you can repackage the story around your membership to appeal more distinctly to the needs that we have as human beings?
- What new ways can you engage with your members to establish how your organization helps them fulfill these needs?