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POWER OF A IS THE POWER TO PROBLEM SOLVE

A Collection of Insights from
SURGE Co-Creation



The Power Of A Is The Power To Problem Solve session is sponsored by Naylor Association Solutions.

Celebrating 50 years in the association community, Naylor builds strong associations by delivering solutions that engage members and generate non-dues revenue. We offer a comprehensive set of solutions, including communications strategy, print and digital communications, full service event management, advertising, sponsorships and exhibit sales, career centers, online learning, association management, and association management software (AMS). Our expertise and breadth of services help us see opportunities others miss, and our commitment to excellent customer service fuels our passion to help associations achieve more success.

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Thanks to our partners, who convene to further
the association profession!



INTRODUCTION

The following pages house the results of an industry-wide virtual collaboration.

SURGE Co-Creation assembled association professionals from across the globe to harness collective knowledge, through a virtual conference focused on transformative ideas and designed to maximize social learning.

Attendees could not only hear from speakers, but converse with them in real time and contribute their own thoughts. We have now assembled some of the best insights from these conversations into a body of knowledge for the benefit of the entire association community.

This eBook, one of the eleven-part SURGE series, delves into the session, *Power Of A Is The Power To Problem Solve*. It includes themes from the speakers' conversation, snapshots of ideas from guest speakers, contributions from attendees, links to further resources, and more.

Thank you to all who participated – and if you missed it, go to the **SURGE Co-Creation** [event page](#) to watch all the sessions for free, at your leisure!

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01

FEATURED SPEAKERS





Amanda Kaiser, MBA

*Member Engagement Consultant,
Kaiser Insights LLC*

From our experience, many associations that try to improve member engagement often experience mediocre success. Usually, the strategies are right, but the plans produce marginal results because they lack one key ingredient: the voice of the members. The voice of your members is not something you can get at with a member needs survey, at a conference, or even in a board meeting. So that's where Kaiser Insights LLC comes in. We specialize in the member research methods that successfully capture the voice of the members for our client organizations.

Kaiser Insights LLC is a qualitative member research firm owned by Amanda Kaiser. To date, Amanda has conducted over 373 in-depth member interviews for large and small, trade and professional associations. Through these conversations, she comes to understand members' goals, challenges, and worries then translates these insights into strategies that exponentially improve member engagement.

Channeling member insights, Amanda writes a weekly blog for association professionals at SmoothThePath.net.





Marjorie Anderson

Manager, Digital Communities, Project Management Institute

Marjorie Anderson is the Manager of Digital Communities at Project Management Institute and Founder of Community by Association, a digital resource for online community managers in the association space. Marjorie has worked to help evolve the community program at PMI and ensure that the online community not only serves members and meets their needs, but supports the ongoing success and growth of the Institute, as well. Since 2017, Marjorie has contributed to the development of the State of Community Management research, a long-standing research report by The Community Roundtable which provides a yearly outlook on the state of the profession and its influence within organizations. She has been featured on the Community Signal and Conversations with Community Managers podcasts, on Association Chat with Kiki L'Italien, and in Associations Now magazine.





Garth Jordan

Senior Vice President, The Healthcare Financial Management Association

Garth is the original bad boy of ops. Since co-founding RevCrew to help associations and non-profit organizations unlock their new revenue streams potential, Garth has taken the role of senior vice president of corporate strategy for the Healthcare Financial Management Association, and now works on special projects for RevCrew. Previously, he was the COO & CFO of the Denver-based MGMA (Medical Group Management Association) where he oversaw all IT, marketing, business development, membership, customer relations, and financial operations for this \$25 million national health care association. Prior to MGMA, Garth held a number of other association executive roles, and was VP/COO of Mercy Housing, a national nonprofit dedicated to helping provide affordable housing to the elderly and needy in more than 20 states.

He earned his MBA from the University of Colorado, Denver, and a Bachelor's from the University of Colorado, Boulder. While he's based in the company's Colorado office, Garth disdains Birkenstocks and tofu but loves hiking Fourteeners. And you should know, even though he has been forced to take ballet and piano lessons because he has two daughters, you should never, ever challenge him to a golf long-drive contest. You'll get yourself a serious whoopin'.





Randi Sumner, CAE

Senior Director, Strategy & Entrepreneurship at The Institute of Electrical and Electronics Engineers

Randi Sumner has over twenty years of experience shepherding associations towards success. She has worked for a wide range of non-profit organizations, ranging from those with almost no budget and staff to those with a \$400 million budget and over 1,000 employees. Sumner has led a wide variety of strategic programs at [IEEE](#) servicing over 430,000 members of both IEEE and it's more than 50 Technical Communities since 2007.

Throughout her over 20-year career, Sumner has successfully envisioned and initiated new, uncharted and profit-driven "bootstrap startup" projects within a wide variety of mission driven organizations. The impact of her role in several projects helped to transform business models as well as drive energy into stagnant organizations. Currently she holds the position of Senior Director, Strategy & Entrepreneurship for the IEEE, the world's largest technical professional society where she spearheaded the launch of [IEEE's Entrepreneurship initiative](#). This first-of-its-kind IEEE initiative inspires a global community for technology founders, engineers working in startups, as well as the vendors and funders helping to scale these businesses. Her efforts have brought the IEEE's global resources to technology entrepreneurs while inspiring new style events, virtual communities, and a video channel dedicated to startups.

Sumner brings to her leadership perspective, the knowledge and wisdom acquired as the Chief Staff Executive of the New Jersey Society of Association Executives, an organization that serviced Association Professionals in New Jersey before its 2010 merger into the [Mid-Atlantic Society of Association Executives](#). Prior to that, she served as Deputy Executive Director of the [New Jersey Apartment Association](#). During that tenure, the association doubled in both staff and budget. In addition to her executive skills, she has been a strategy consultant, career and presentation coach and a professional speaker.



002

GUEST SPEAKERS





Tommy Goodwin

Government Relations Manager, Project Management Institute

Tommy Goodwin is a federal and international government affairs leader who helps associations manage their external environment to influence public policy, enhance reputation, and find common ground with stakeholders. For nearly 20 years, he has led government relations, public affairs, and advocacy efforts for prominent associations and companies as they navigated the ever-changing domestic and global policymaking landscape. Based in Washington, DC, his passion is developing strategies that leverage each association's unique assets to shape public policies that solve problems and create opportunities for their members. When not working with policymakers, he loves playing Legos with his three-year-old son, his beloved Auburn Tigers (War Eagle!), and all things dark chocolate and salted caramel. You can reach him via email at tommy@tommygoodwin.com.





Heather Leventry

*Director of Education, NAIOP, Commercial
Real Estate Development Association*

It is easy to lose the attention of an audience. According to brain science expert John Medina, “we don’t pay attention to boring things.” Heather believes great learning experiences occur when we focus on the audience and not ourselves.

She is a self-acclaimed PowerPoint geek who believes that the medium and the message must be aligned.

Heather is responsible for the educational content contained in NAIOP’s growing online learning portfolio and the educational content presented at conferences. She enjoys public speaking and is a member of the Ashburn Toastmasters club.



03

HOW TO EMPOWER A COMMUNITY OF PROBLEM SOLVERS

By Marjorie Anderson

Despite our best efforts, it can be easy for associations to fall into a siloed way of working. We can get so wrapped up in only thinking about problems and challenges we face specific to the work we are tasked with doing that often times we do not see the downstream impacts until much later. This causes work conflicts, strategic misalignment, and in some cases, lost hours of work. This way of working creates a barrier to thinking and working in more creative ways, especially when it comes to understanding what our members are challenged with and what we can do to help solve some of those challenges. If associations want to get better at problem solving and innovating, we must get out of our own way and get better at identifying **what challenges** we are actually trying to solve for, allow people the opportunity to explore solutions to them, and provide them **the tools and support to move forward**.

KNOW THE JOB BEFORE FINDING A SOLUTION

Clayton Christensen developed the Jobs-To-Be-Done framework, which enables organizations to take an innovative approach to determining how to serve their customers by asking, “What is the customer hiring my product or service to do?” For associations, is the job simply to collect a string of certifications or to get a membership through a professional association? Or is there a deeper need that we’re missing because we’re not asking the right questions?

If we ask the right questions – different questions – aimed at solving problems for our members versus guessing what they want based on what has always worked, it helps find the right solutions for the right people. That also challenges associations to **understand who exactly it is they are meant to serve. The goal is not to find a one-size-fits-all solution for everyone who spends money with you, but to understand who your core customer is, what behaviors drive their engagement and then what job they need to get done** so that you can create the right products/services/experiences that are going to provide the most value.

It’s the approach that my association took to better understand who our primary customers are and what it is they need to be more successful at throughout their career journey and as they engage with us. We had to take the time to remember that the value we provide to them has nothing to do with what we think they need. We had to understand who was coming to us and why. We had to understand the market, and what was ahead of them and the challenges they were facing. Without that insight, we couldn’t

possibly continue to offer anything of deep value. The Jobs-To-Be-Done framework helped us start to **change our mindset around innovation** – both what it was and who we were innovating for.

EMPOWER THROUGH COMMUNITY

I believe that one of the major hurdles associations face when it comes to innovation is the hierarchical (and very siloed) nature of how work gets done. It seems to be ingrained in the way associations operate. When you have an idea or see an opportunity to solve an issue, you might spend an incredible amount of time figuring out who to ask for approval or who you need to get buy-in from to move forward. By the time you've checked all of the boxes, you find yourself in a situation where, in many cases, the opportunity to do something really impactful has passed.

If people don't feel empowered to bring ideas forward based off of the unique insights and data that they have, how can they effectively provide solutions for customers or the association?

In order to get out of that rut, I recommend that associations take **a close look at the transformative power of community** to help remove those barriers and encourage people to work differently. If you want staff to start thinking differently about challenges and to work differently to create solutions, then you have to equip them with the right tools and conditions to do so.

Identifying the real challenges and embracing a more community-centered mindset thus helps create better problem solvers and positive impacts to culture, enabling more innovative and collaborative ways of working.

FROM THE CHAT

“We have a Creative Team that vets ideas from all levels...it’s a time we get to think on areas that might otherwise be outside of our department.”

- Susan Noell -

“A lot of my colleagues find out much too late that they’re solving for the wrong problem.”

- Dennis Sadler -

“Are we problem solvers for our members? Are our members problem solvers for us? Both? Neither?”

- Chris Beaman -

“Members look to their association to anticipate the problems and challenges they will face. Reacting to needs and issues doesn’t cut it.”

- Dan Ratner -

04

TIME FOR A NEW ASSOCIATION VERB



By Garth Jordan

THREE VERBS

Over the last 20 years working in VP, COO, CFO and CSO roles for associations, it's become clear to me that our industry shares many common approaches to helping our members **lead, learn and connect.**

At a high level, associations often apply these three verbs on their web sites and in their various marketing campaigns. Many of us even use them in our mission statement. At our core, across our industry, there's not much deviation in these verbs.

Further, we've done a solid job of monetizing these verbs over time. We consistently added new products and services to the portfolio of what we sell to help people lead, learn and connect...to our credit, we've become quite good at it.

The simple table below shows a handful of examples of what we provide to members and business partners as part of our lead, learn and connect offerings.

Lead	Learn	Connect
Writing/Speaking opportunities	Magazines	Online communities
Volunteerism	Newsletters	Chapters
Grassroots advocacy	Books	Networking events
Thought leadership	Certifications	Business partner marketing
High-end research and analysis	Conferences, Meetings, Seminars	Directories
Mentorship programs	Online learning	Flipped exhibit halls and hosted buyer events

A FOURTH VERB

Listening with an empathetic ear, I've run multiple Design Thinking sessions with hundreds of members from the associations for which I've worked. Ultimately, I realized the qualitative input from those various memberships was telling me a consistent, compelling story that could drive our industry toward important change.

The feedback gave me an opportunity to create a unique insight from a meta-point-of-view. It's why people join associations, go to our meetings, attend our webinars, participate in our communities, buy our products, and more.

It took 3 steps to find the unique insight.

Step 1 - Collect and Summarize

Collating and reviewing the meta-feedback revealed a consistent theme, that **members want to be part of:**

1. Identifying meaningful challenges for their profession and industry, and
2. Creating impactful solutions with/via their community.

Step 2 - Empathetic Simplification

These two themes, boiled down to the essence of the core need being personally expressed, reveals that members want associations to help them **do two things at the same time:**

1. Create better solutions and
2. Become better problem solvers in the process.

Step 3 - Empathetic Simplification

Reduced to the truly unique insight, association members want our industry to become great at a new verb: SOLVE.

This process of finding a unique insight got me asking the question, "What if we purposefully designed member products, services and experiences around SOLVE, not just LEAD, LEARN and CONNECT? Can we take advantage of what we've accomplished over the years and expand our repertoire? I think YES!

- Committees
- Advocacy
- Thought Leadership
- Analysis
- Mentorship
- Research
- Magazines
- Newsletters
- Seminars
- Certifications
- Conferences
- Trade Shows
- Online Communities
- Networking
- Chapters
- Directories
- Partnerships

SOLVE: INSIGHT TO OPPORTUNITY

Our new **solve** core function could easily become a:

1. Completely new association model all together, or
2. A new “product or service” of the association world

What might either look like? Here’s a brief proposition of what **solve** might be - and a tiny bit about what it isn’t:

1. It’s not a passive membership. It’s more like an active apprenticeship and experience for problem identification and problem-solving within a profession and industry.
2. The experience is professionally-facilitated, highly inclusive, and community-focused. It includes solution-development conferences and executive meetings along the way for the most vexing challenges. But there’s also a solve-focused community platform that runs year-round for well-rounded engagement.
3. An association’s members identify the meaningful challenges of their profession and industry. The association builds community around each challenge to be solved.
4. It uses a clear methodology to impactfully problem-solve, like human-centered design, design thinking, scenario-based solving, etc.
5. It develops professionals via learning-by-doing (not by passive learning).
6. It creates better solutions, and creates better solvers.

And that’s the short version to what **solve** can become.

FROM THE CHAT

“Maybe the association should be seen as the place where solutions, best practices are shared (from other members, from industry gurus, from external sources or other industries or sectors.) The association is the universe where it happens.”

- Dan Ratner -

“The concept of prototyping was very interesting to me. I’ve spent my career in the nonprofit world, both the association community and the charitable world, and one of the sector’s biggest issues is how to bring people along and craft a shared vision of an opportunity or problem, and then a shared picture of what possible solutions would look like. Prototyping seems to me to be a way to put something in front of different stakeholders – staff, volunteers, members, investors – that helps them coalesce around an idea. Or not, but that’s useful too! Often we can go pretty far down the road on a project, assuming we all know what we’re talking about, only to find out when we get to execution time that we’re not really thinking the same thing at all. I want to use this kind of tool to help build the useful conversations up front.”

- Michelle Cash -

“We all spend too much time solving yesterday’s problems and not enough time thinking about the problems of the future.”

- Allen Lloyd -

05

TELLING THE ADVOCACY STORY: MOVING MEMBERS FROM “ME” TO “WE”

By Tommy Goodwin

For some association leaders and practitioners, advocacy remains a “black box.” While advocacy has always been one of the most powerful ways that associations engage their members, some associations struggle to link and communicate that work back to their members in a way that shows them that “My association is fighting for me!”

In a previous [article](#), I stressed that **advocacy is a deep, untapped driver of member value that we often overlook**. All associations advocate, but how many connect and communicate all their advocacy work back to member value and retention? Not many.

Why? For those association leaders and practitioners who do not understand the intricacies of advocacy, it can be difficult to effectively communicate that work externally. Additionally, since advocacy efforts are not always successful, there can be a fear factor about trumpeting that work too loudly in case it doesn’t achieve the desired outcomes.

But that type of thinking is preventing many associations from showcasing the great work that they are doing to advance their members’ interests. By flipping the script on advocacy communication, associations can reinforce the value they provide to their members each and every day. How?

COMMUNICATE... AND INTEGRATE!

[Survey](#) after [survey](#) shows that prospects and members care deeply about the work that associations are doing on their behalf. To them, it’s a core aspect of member value. That said, quite often member value and advocacy messaging and messages are totally distinct. That’s wrong. The key is to communicate about advocacy in a way **that shows how advocacy is a key piece to the member engagement and retention puzzle**.

We all know that one of the most critical long-term member journeys in the association world is getting a member to go from “me” to “we.” Often, new members join our associations to meet a specific need: a discount on a certification exam, a new project or service, etc. But eventually... or quickly... those rational benefits get tapped out.

So what else can get them to stay? The answer is the **demonstration of collective action, and a given member’s involvement in participating in that action**. It moves the needle

from “me” to “we” and begins to tap into those emotional components of the buying decision that increase stickiness and help plug the membership “leaky bucket.”

AVOID THESE PITFALLS!

When beginning to communicate about advocacy in an integrated way, **channel consistency and cadence is critical**. All messages touching on advocacy—from traditional calls to action to advocacy updates to membership renewals with advocacy angles—have to be coordinated in a way whereby they:

1. Simultaneously reinforce each other without contradicting each other.
2. Don't overwhelm the recipient.

Many associations struggle with advocate fatigue. That's when members are called upon too many times to take action on a particular policy issue. Since many policy issues take years to wrestle down, the key is not to overwhelm members with too many messages or too many requests. When layering in a focus on integrating advocacy and member value communications, even more care must be invested to ensure that this integration isn't communicated in a way that piles on even more. Rather, **it needs to leverage marketing best practices** around cadence, consistency, and preferences, so that members appreciate the message being delivered and the value being added.

Association advocacy—successfully executed and better communicated—can really **reinforce the relevance of the associations to their members and help drive engagement going forward.**

FROM THE CHAT

“We invest this time in an old problem then do everything we can to make it as good as it can be, when at the end of the day the problem went awry by the time we implement the solution.”

- Allen Lloyd -

“It’s important to PUSH for organization around needs that may not match governance structure. External and internal facing structures do not have to match.”

- Randi Sumner -

“The world is changing too fast to be complacent. Success today is failure tomorrow.”

- Candi Rawlins -

006

**GET MORE OUT OF
YOUR CONFERENCE
PLANNING SESSIONS**

By Heather Leventry

Do you start your conference planning sessions by asking a big group sitting at a U-shaped boardroom table, “So what kind of content would you like on the program this year?” Do you proceed to repeat that same question all day long? Then you likely already know that this approach doesn’t spark new ideas or help you find solutions to make your conference more engaging. And it gets kind of boring for the people in that meeting, and it gets kind of boring for you too. You know it and they know it.

Then how do you make a change to create **a more effective agenda** that enables you to **gain valuable insight** at your conference planning sessions?

The first item that should be on the agenda is, of course, **the introductions**. And I don’t mean the introductions that are just your name, rank and serial number. That would be as dull as it sounds. Don’t be shy to ask them to share a few more items. Ask about their passions!

What are they passionate about personally, and what are they passionate about for the conference being planned? Why do they go to this conference?

You also want to ask about their hobbies. Not only will you get to know them better and potentially find more common ground with the people surrounding you, but asking about their hobbies can help connect them with other people in the room too. Maybe they like fly fishing or skiing, or maybe they’re passionate about something you’ve never heard of. Whatever it is, it might strike conversations and engage others, and they’ll feel they’ve gotten more out of the day than typical surface conversations and the regular brain-drain of conference topic planning.

Once you have finished with introductions, there are three elements you should include in your agenda:

- 1. Ask about their goals.** What are their personal and professional goals for the next 12 to 36 months? What are the skills and knowledge they need to attain those goals? This will allow you to connect the dots back to the conference.
- 2. Try to relieve their pain.** What keeps them up at night? How can you help them figure these things out? This will help you market the conference, as you are making an emotional connection to the event and placing importance in helping solve for common and current nagging problems.

3. Know their learning goals. Of course, don't straight-out ask what they are. You want to ask them what types of content or topics needs to be at the conference. Then you want to find out what are the confusing or problem elements about it. You'll also want to know what's interesting about it, so that you can see both sides of the coin.

Maybe something needs to be in the conference because they have little knowledge on the topic, or maybe it needs to be in it simply because people find it quite fascinating. Either way, it is content you'll want to include.

07

FURTHER RESOURCES



During the live chat, speakers and attendees alike chipped in with their tips for further reading and resources about the power of associations. We've compiled them into a list here.

Human Centered Design

- [Human Centered Design Matters](#), Dave Thomsen for Wired Magazine
- Human-centered design field kits, design kits, facilitator's guides, courses [at IDEO](#)
- [Adobe XD](#) is a free user experience design tool
- Free "challenge identification and problem solving" resources at the [Stanford d.school](#)

Appreciative Inquiry

- [Appreciative Inquiry: A Positive Revolution in Change](#), David L. Cooperrider and Diana Whitney
- [The Power of Appreciative Inquiry: A Practical Guide to Positive Change](#), Diana Whitney and Amanda Trosten-Bloom

Jobs Theory

- [Competing Against Luck: The Story of Innovation and Customer Choice](#), Clayton Christensen, Karen Dillon, Taddy Hall, and David S. Duncan
- [Understanding the Job](#), YouTube

Research & Data Driven Decision Making

- [The Informed Association: A Practical Guide to Using Research for Results](#), Sarah Slater, MS, and Sharon Moss, PhD, CRA, CAE

Root Cause Analysis

- [The 5 Whys: The Ultimate Root Cause Analysis Tool](#), Kanbanize

Prototyping

- [Why You Should Start Prototyping Right Now](#), Pedro Andrade
- An [online course on prototyping](#) by IDEO [Fee]

Addressing Challenges

- [The Art of Innovation](#), Tom Kelley
- [Collective Genius: The Art and Practice of Leading Innovation](#), Linda Hill, Greg Brandeau, Emily Truelove, and Kent Lineback
- [Association Innovation Study](#), commissioned by NBAA and conducted by Amanda Kaiser

Change & Change Management

- [Leading Change](#), John Kotter
- [Pivot Point: Reshaping Your Business When It Matters Most](#), Sheri Jacobs, CAE
- [Switch: How to Change Things when Change is Hard](#), Chip and Dan Heath



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