

Get more from your association's program budget

Association executives often are concerned — and with good reason — that they're not offering enough programs to keep members active and engaged. But developing new programs requires time, effort and money. Here's how to get the biggest bang for your buck.

Do	Don't
Poll your audience. Gather information about issues your membership is facing. Note gaps between your current program offerings and members' wants and needs. Seek new input through focus groups, surveys and informal conversations.	Develop programs for the wrong reasons. Don't try to spin member feedback to match what you think your organization needs. Listen carefully, and then create programs that respond to your membership's actual needs.
Target specific outcomes. Identify the intended outcomes of proposed programs and attach measurable goals to them. Goals should be strategic, realistic and timely.	Lose focus. Consider only those program ideas that will directly contribute to your association's mission, vision and overall goals.
Think like an advertising executive. For a new program to be successful, people need to know about it. Tag yours with an attention-grabbing name, create a targeted marketing, advertising and PR plan, and assign someone to implement it.	Add programs just to enhance your image. Fluffy program offerings won't make a positive, measurable impact on your membership — or reflect well on your organization. Commit to providing only meaningful and useful programs.
Protect your creation. If your new program is unique, protect it with appropriate trademarks, copyrights, service marks and patents.	Go it alone. Whenever possible, share expenses and resources by partnering with other organizations. Alliances can lend depth, breadth and impact to programs.
Keep your promises. Deliver new programs on time and on target for the greatest impact on your membership.	Overspend. Come up with a reasonable budget, get it approved by your board, and stick to it. Make adjustments only when absolutely necessary.
Start small. Launch new programs slowly and thoughtfully, and then build on initial success.	Worry about perfection. Take chances and try new strategies; the best ideas often are those most different from what you've done in the past.