



# BEYOND THE TWO DAYS: Designing Events that Strengthen Association Membership

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Anh Nguyen, President, Spark Event Collective





With the 9th pick in  
the 2026 NFL Draft,

**THE KANSAS CITY  
CHIEFS SELECT...**

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# What if your association worked like the NFL?

The NFL doesn't have an off-season.

They have 12 months of intentional engagement touchpoints between Super Bowls.

**Your association can work the same way.**

NFL year-round engagement model  
Every month has a moment. No dead time between Super Bowls.



Takeaway: every month has a moment. Your association can do the same between annual events.

How much money do you invest in your "Super Bowl"?



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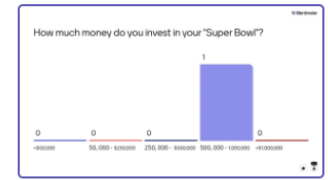
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CSAE: Beyond the Two ...



Select which slide to add



What's the first thing that happens after your biggest event ends?

survey

What's one thing you currently do before your event that both participants or speakers, not just attendees?

Where is the missed engagement opportunity in your event?

THE BIG QUESTION

# What happens to all that energy on Day 3?

**\$150K-\$3M+**

Typical conference cost

**\$500/day**

Per attendee cost (CAD)

**Then What?**

Post-event engagement ROI





LET'S FIND OUT

**What's the first thing that  
happens after your biggest  
event ends?**

Join at [menti.com](https://www.menti.com)

What's the first thing that happens after your biggest event ends?



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## THE MINDSET SHIFT

### Transactional Event Planning

✘ Sell tickets, fill seats

✘ Hit the budget target

✘ Deliver content

✘ Send a survey

✘ Wrap up & reporting

✘ Start planning next year



### Engagement-Led Event Design

✔ Build anticipation

✔ Deepen member connection

✔ Build year-round community

✔ Drive ongoing participation

✔ Create clear next steps

✔ Feed the membership journey

Same work. Different lens. Transformative results.

You're still doing marketing.  
You're still doing registration.  
You're still doing logistics.

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**But the purpose shifts.**



# Three phases. Endless opportunity.



## PRE-EVENT

Registration



**Spark conversation**

Marketing & promotion



**Build anticipation**

Logistics



**Build belonging**



## DURING EVENT

Communicate content



**Design for participation**

Networking



**Foster real connection**

Exchange knowledge



**Create engagement**



## POST-EVENT

Sell tickets for next year



**Extend value**

Distribute content



**Reinforce learning**

Sell memberships



**Build community**

PHASE 1

# Pre-Event Engagement

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Setting the stage before anyone walks through the door

# Registration is a conversation, not a transaction.



## Segment by role, interest & goals

Instead of member & non-member, can you unlock personalized communications & programming preferences.



## Invite input before Day 1

Let attendees vote on topics, submit questions, shape the agenda. The earlier people feel invested in shaping the experience, the more engaged they'll be when they walk through the door.



## Spark conversation, learn about your audience, not logistics

Storytelling over schedules.

## PRE-EVENT ENGAGEMENT

# Know your attendees before they arrive.

Use pre-event quizzes to understand how your attendees learn, connect, and engage and then design your event around them.

### EXAMPLE

StoryCraft Lab's Experience Profiles™ categorize attendees into six engagement types: Creator, Explorer, Thinker, Harmonizer, Adaptor, and Igniter. Attendees fill out the quiz, you can tailor sessions, networking, and content to how people actually engage.



Try it yourself

Scan to take the Experience Profiles™ quiz

The Experience Profiles™ help us understand our audience at a deeper level, moving beyond demographics and even psychographics. With this information, we can help you identify what engagement tactics will be meaningful and produce a desired action or result.



LEARN MORE HERE

# Programming choices that build belonging.



## Pre-event virtual touchpoints

Short video calls, online community spaces, or discussion boards that let attendees start connecting before they arrive.



## Storytelling over bios

Introduce speakers through stories and provocative ideas, not just titles and credentials.



## Create "sneak peek" moments

Share a controversial stat, pose a provocative question, or give attendees a small pre-event challenge.

## PRE-EVENT ENGAGEMENT

# Build FOMO and belonging at the same time.

Give attendees branded shareable graphics: "I'm attending," "I'm speaking", "I'm Pitbull" - that turn every registrant into a promoter. Builds social proof, excitement, and legitimacy.

### EXAMPLE

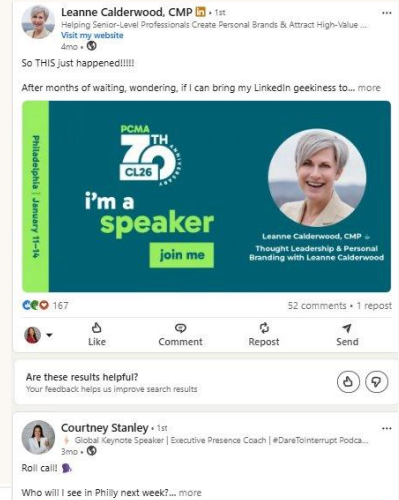
PCMA Convening Leaders 2026 used Snöball to generate personalized "I'm attending" and "I'm speaking" graphics that attendees shared across social media, creating a wave of organic buzz weeks before the event.



### Check out Snöball

Scan to visit [snoball.events](https://snoball.events)

- ✓ Social proof from real people
- ✓ FOMO that drives registrations
- ✓ Attendees invested before arrival



## PRE-EVENT ENGAGEMENT

# Kill the "I don't know anyone" feeling.

Host a virtual mixer before the event so attendees can meet each other, share what they're working on, and arrive on Day 1 already knowing faces in the room.

### WHY IT WORKS

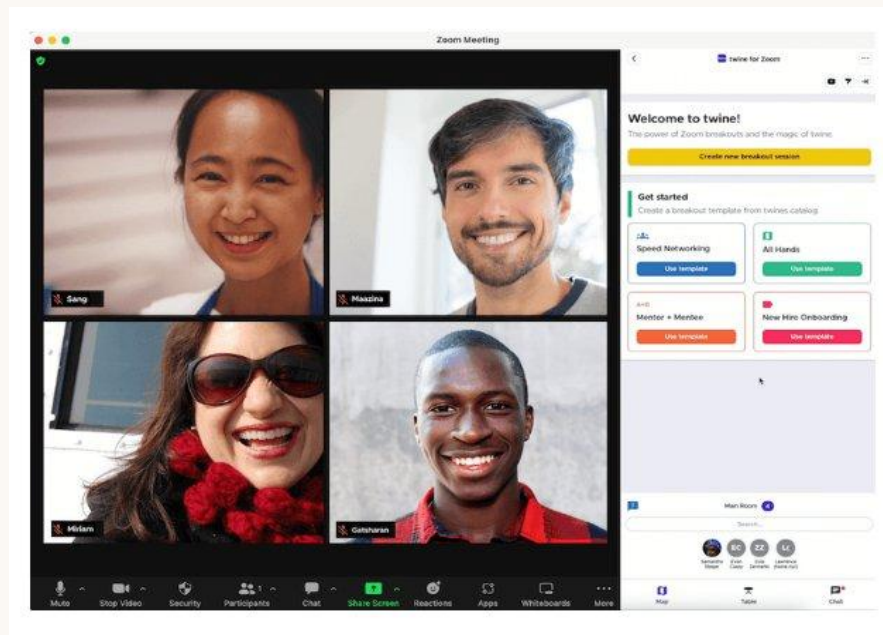
When people know someone at the event, they're more likely to attend, more likely to participate, and more likely to stay engaged after. A 30-minute virtual mixer can transform the on-site experience.



Check out twine

Scan to visit [twine.us](https://twine.us)

- ✓ Eliminates the "stranger" barrier
- ✓ Increases on-site participation
- ✓ Builds community before Day 1





DISCUSS & SHARE

**What's one thing you currently do  
before your event that genuinely  
builds engagement not just awareness?**

3 minutes | Share with the person next to you



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What's one thing you currently do before your event that builds anticipation or belonging, not just awareness?

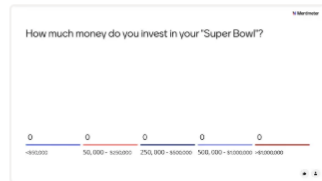


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0 of 1 responded



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What's the first thing that happens after your biggest event ends?

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Where is the missed engagement opportunity in your event?

# Three phases. Endless opportunity.



## PRE-EVENT

Registration



**Spark conversation**

Marketing & promotion



**Build anticipation**

Logistics



**Build belonging**



## DURING EVENT

Communicate content



**Design for participation**

Networking



**Foster real connection**

Exchange knowledge



**Build engagement**



## POST-EVENT

Sell tickets for next year



**Extend value**

Distribute content



**Reinforce learning**

Sell memberships



**Build community**

PHASE 2

# Intentional Event Design

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Designing experiences that foster connection and participation

# Events are overprogrammed. Attendees are checking out.

27%

of attendees return  
year after year

83%

of organizers think content  
is their key differentiator

41%

of attendees  
agree with them

~50%

participate in  
keynote sessions

<20%

cite CE credits  
as a top goal

70%

rank live events as #1  
learning source



“People don’t measure value by how much content they consume, but by what actually changes after they leave.”

— Ken Holsinger, SVP Strategy, Freeman

# Less content. More connection.

## Instead of...

 Packed agendas

 Passive lecture formats

 Generic networking breaks

 One-size-fits-all sessions



## Try...

 Peer learning by role

 "Ask the Board Anything"

 Facilitated introductions

 Topic-based roundtables

 Birds of a feather, small groups

**More content doesn't mean more engagement. It often means less.**

Shift the ratio: fewer formal sessions, more structured opportunities for people to learn from each other.

# Put leadership on the hot seat.

## The "Bear Pit" format

SUMA (Saskatchewan Urban Municipalities Association) put provincial cabinet members and board leaders on stage for 75 minutes of unfiltered Q&A from members.

✓ Packed room. Long lineups to ask questions.

✓ Real transparency. Real accountability.

✓ Members felt heard. Trust deepened.

This is what "Ask the Board Anything" looks like at scale.



# Networking that doesn't make you cringe.



## “Open bar” is not a networking strategy.

Most people default to talking to people they already know. Unstructured breaks feel like networking but produce nothing new.



## Design networking with intention.

Facilitated introductions, topic-based roundtables, speed-meeting formats, and shared-challenges discussions give people a reason and a structure to connect.



## Use smart networking technology.

Smart badges, matchmaking apps, and interest-based pairing tools connect people based on goals, not chance.

## INTENTIONAL EVENT DESIGN

# Give people a reason to talk to strangers.

JabberYak badges display each attendee's personal interests, not just their job title. When you can see that someone shares your love of theatre, Chiefs football, or being a gym rat, you have an instant conversation starter.

## HOW IT WORKS

1. Attendees select their top 7 interests during registration
2. Custom badges showcase personality, not just credentials
3. Matchmaking app connects people with shared passions



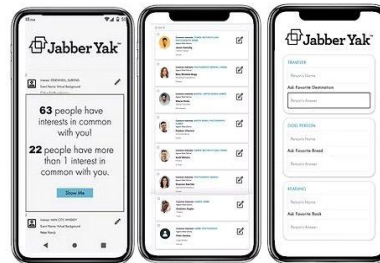
Check out JabberYak

Scan to visit [jabberyak.com](http://jabberyak.com)

✓ Interest-based connections ✓ Instant conversation starters

## Attendee Hub

- Integration with leading event registration systems.
- Enables attendees to select their top 7 interests from a curated list.
- Connects attendees based on common interests.
- Highlights each attendee's individual personality and interests.
- Enhances attendees connections by showcasing shared passions.



## Event Networking & Matchmaking

- Enhance attendee connections with JabberYak ConnectNOW, an innovative matchmaking app.
- Automatically matches attendees based on shared personal interests.
- Enables seamless messaging and gamifications.
- Encourages content sharing, forums, and collaborative engagement.
- Helps attendees discover local spots aligned with their



# Flip the sponsorship model.



## 1. Design the experience attendees want

Build the networking & engagement moments members ask for.



## 2. Package the activations

Offer branded activations that you source, build & execute



## 3. Build engagement

Sponsors get value. Members get better experiences.

# Activation Alley: sponsorship, flipped.

The Alberta Dental Association (ADA) replaced the traditional tradeshow with "Activation Alley", experiential moments attendees actually wanted - then we let sponsors brand them.

## ALBERTA DENTAL ASSOCIATION

Sled dogs, pretzel walls, candy bars, caesar bars, spin-to-win wheels, live maple stations, ice sculptures, photoboos, fondue, all designed for attendees first, then packaged as branded sponsorship activations.

### The shift

**Old:** Sponsors create activations, hope people show up

**New:** Design what attendees want, let sponsors brand it



#### MEET THE SLED DOGS

A once-in-a-lifetime après moment! This attraction draws crowds, photos, and excitement—your brand at the center of it all.

#### FRESH PRETZEL WALL

Nothing says après ski like a salty, warm pretzel. Guests will line up to grab one, making this a natural place to meet new clients.

#### LIVE MAPLE STATION

A sweet Canadian classic! This hands-on experience is the perfect moment for your brand to be associated with a uniquely memorable treat.

#### FONDUE STATION

Dipping, sharing, and gathering—this station invites connection while putting your brand at the center of a crowd-pleasing indulgence.

#### MULLED WINE STATION

Warm, spiced, and oh-so après ski. Your brand fuels the cozy vibes as guests sip and mingle.



#### BRANDED SCULPTURE & ICE LUGE

A dramatic showpiece carved from ice—your brand frozen into the spotlight while guests enjoy the interactive luge experience.

#### BRANDED VIGNETTE & PHOTOBOOTH

Après ski is all about memories. This vignette sets the stage for social-worthy photos with your brand woven into every shot.

#### FACEPAINT STATION

Playful designs bring out the festive side of après ski.

#### DJ

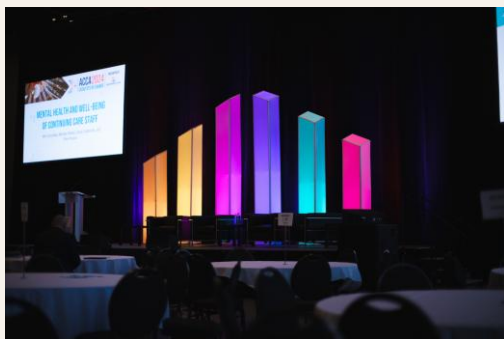
Keep the dance floor alive and the après energy high. Your brand is the reason the party doesn't stop.

# Make it worth talking about.



## Production quality

Invest in moments that look and feel premium. Staging, lighting, signage that signals "this matters."



## Social-worthy moments

Design experiences people photograph and share, this extends your reach and creating FOMO for non-attendees.



## Must-attend atmosphere

When people plan their calendar around your event, you've shifted from conference to community.



CASE STUDY

# Alberta Continuing Care Association

4 years of intentional growth

**150 → 420** Attendance almost tripled

**X5 Growth** Sponsorship revenue

**72%** Membership growth

## HOW THEY DID IT

- Revamped sponsorship
- Moved to Edmonton
- Invested in production
- Created a must-attend social event





DISCUSSION & SHARE

# Where is the missed engagement opportunity in your event?

Think about dead time, passive content, or missed moments where members could be experiencing connection or engagement.

**3 minutes | Small Groups**

# Where is the missed engagement opportunity in your event?



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**Build community**

PHASE 3

# Post-Event Follow-Up

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Where most associations leave the most value on the table

# Have the pathways ready before the event ends.



## Volunteer Opportunities

Visible during the event.  
Simple sign-ups.  
Low-barrier first steps.



## Next Events

Visible during the event.  
Pricing incentives.  
Deadlines to register.



## Board Pipeline

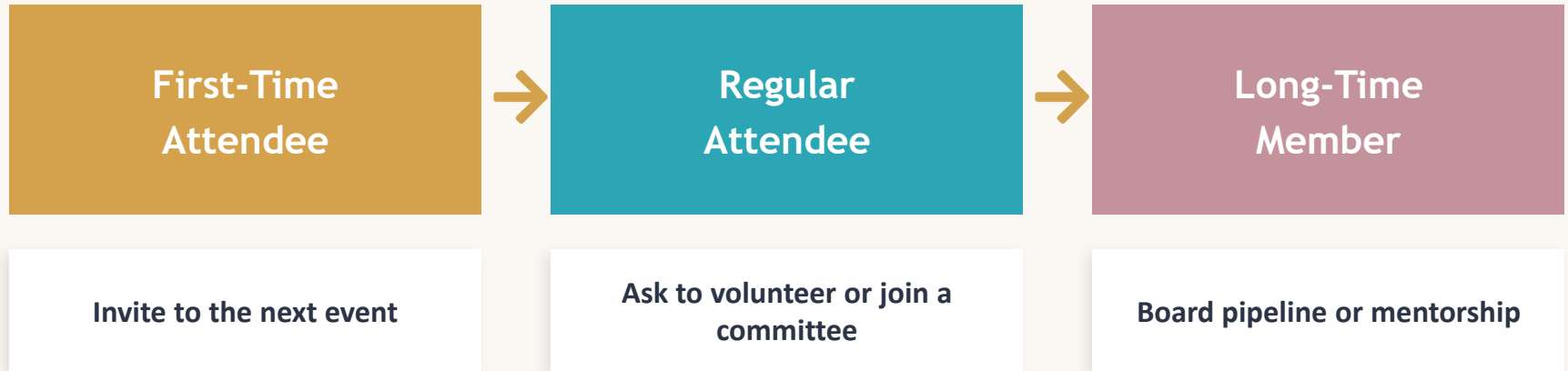
Visible during the event.  
Opportunity to meet the board.  
Perceived prestige.



## Community Groups

Leverage technology.  
Easy ways to sign up.  
Facilitated & valuable.

# Move members one step further.



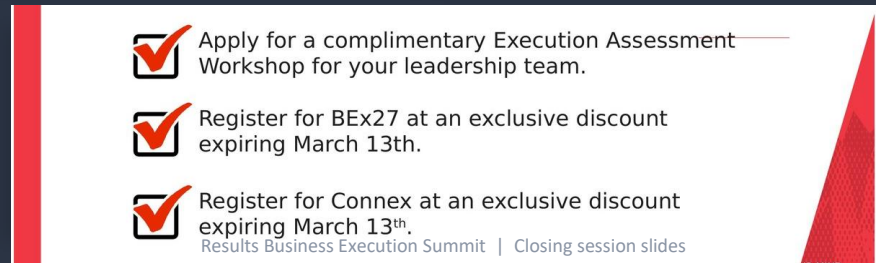
*Every attendee is at a different point. Post-event is your chance to move them one step further in their journey.*

# The next step is ready before the last session ends.

Results' Business Execution Summit doesn't wait until after the event to follow up. During the closing session, attendees see:

- ✓ Next year's event announced with presale pricing
- ✓ QR code to register on the spot
- ✓ Multiple purchase options (form, scan, bookstore)
- ✓ Upcoming Connex events with dates + pricing
- ✓ Free leadership workshop offer on the feedback form
- ✓ Presale deadline creates urgency (expires in 5 days)
- ✓ Follow-up call to confirm interest post-event

Momentum captured, not lost.





## REFLECTION

**What currently happens in the  
5 days after your biggest event?**

**Then tell us: where's your biggest post-event gap?**

Where's your biggest post-event gap?



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# Now. Go. Build. Yours.

The NFL showed us the model. Here's what it looks like for your association: 12 months of intentional touchpoints between annual conferences.

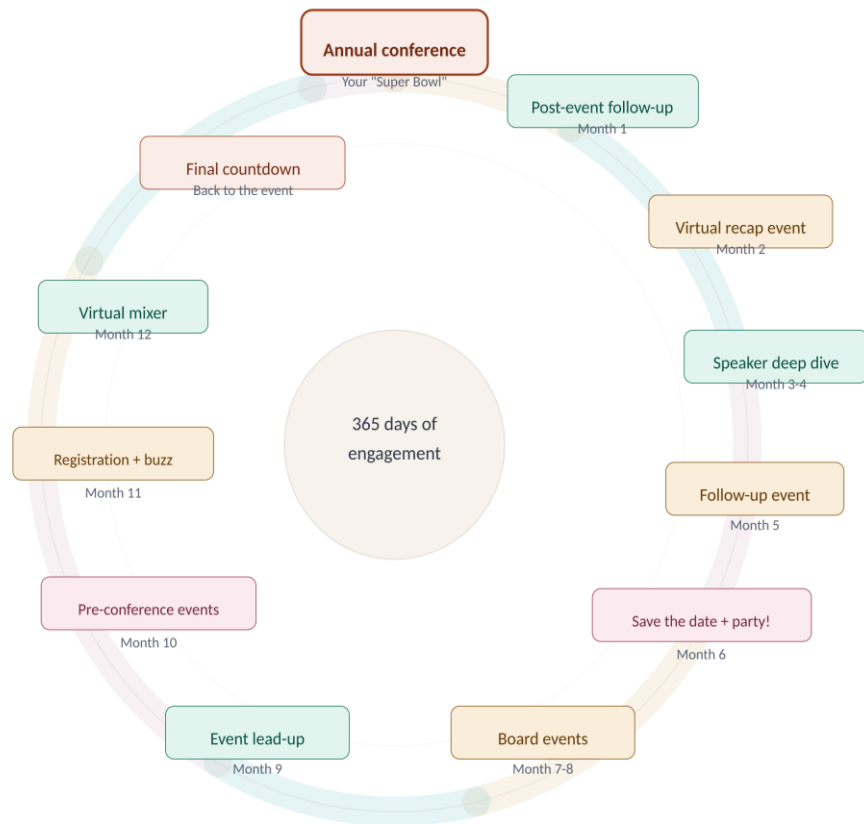
**No dead months. No silence. Just a continuous loop of member engagement that starts with your event.**

## Your action item:

Map your own 12-month engagement calendar. What's your "Combine"? Your "Draft night"? Your "schedule release party"? Fill every month with a reason to stay connected.



Your association's 365-day engagement model  
Design your year so there's never a gap between annual conferences.



Your members should never wonder "what's happening?" between annual events.



## THE TAKEAWAY

# You don't have to do everything.

Pick 1–2 changes per phase. 3-4 years to see the change.

Small, intentional shifts create compounding impact.



# Questions?

Let's keep the conversation going.



## Anh Nguyen, CMP

President, Spark Event Collective



Connect with me  
on LinkedIn



Join the  
WhatsApp chat

CSAE Western  
Summit

Remember:

Pick 1-2  
changes.  
Start  
small.  
Start  
now.