



Getting Members to Volunteer as Chapter Leaders

By Tom Forsyth, CRM

In this era of decreasing membership due to tight budgets, many chapters find it challenging to replace outgoing board members. Engaging new members is the key to solving this problem. If you give them a purpose and show them a way to fulfill their goals through active ARMA involvement, you will *keep* them as members and can groom them for leadership!

New leaders, with their fresh perspectives and innovative ideas, will help rejuvenate the chapter. Engaging them will also allow those who have long served in leadership roles – sometimes in every position and multiple times – to finally retire or at least take a back seat on chapter operations.

So, how do we engage new members? And how do we keep them engaged and help them grow into chapter leaders?

Number one is for all board members – not just the membership director – to meet and get to know all new members. Go beyond introducing them at chapter meetings; set aside a time to talk with them to learn about their needs and interests.

- What are their hobbies? Do they like to write or are they interested in public relations?
- Why did they join ARMA? What are they expecting the main benefits of ARMA will be for them – professional development, career advancement, networking, or something else?
- Are they hoping to find a mentor for CRM exam preparation?

Having these conversations will reveal how the chapter can help them advance professionally and how they might best fit into the chapter in a meaningful way.

You might also consider asking new members to fill out a volunteer form to describe their interests, as we did when I served on our chapter board. Each board member received a copy and was asked to reach out to engage the new member in some area of the chapter.

First, get them involved in working on a chapter committee or helping with a chapter activity. Or, perhaps they can begin by writing articles for the newsletter or updating the events section of your chapter website. Working with more experienced chapter members and not taking on too much responsibility at the start will help new members become comfortable with being involved.

Second, be certain to recognize their service. Thank them personally and in front of their peers. Maybe reward them with something; nothing is too small if it is given in kindness and sincerity. Giving recognition is a surefire way to build both their confidence and satisfaction about their service.



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Next, encourage them to step out of their comfort zone. Quite often, members don't see their leadership potential. It may just take the thoughtfulness of a caring chapter leader to recognize their talents to help them see the positive role they can play for your chapter.

Finally, a logical progression is to ask these members to serve on the chapter board. Keep in mind the value of easing their transition into a new role on the board. You might have them start either as a general director or as a co-chair for a board role, serving alongside a more experienced member in a mentorship approach that has been used effectively by the Austin chapter and others.

Also, consider subsidizing their attendance at the Region Leadership Conference. Anyone who has attended an all-day board planning event certainly knows the value of board service in honing their skills as a leader!

Always be sure to focus on how serving on the board can help their personal development. One of the ways to emphasize this is to introduce them to the Leadership Academy courses, which are available online via the Chapter e-Handbook as a benefit to chapter board members.

Other points to emphasize in your conversations with potential chapter leaders – particularly with young professionals who are starting their careers in RIM – include:

- Gaining experience as a volunteer for chapter committees, activities, and the board of directors will help them immeasurably in advancing their careers.
- Serving as a chapter leader will increase their confidence and improve their communication skills.
- Working as part of a team to achieve positive outcomes and motivating others to achieve their full potential are invaluable leadership traits that are highly sought in today's workplaces and will help them become more valuable employees and community members.

Many of our chapter members who have stepped up to serve as chapter leaders have become CRMs, gained promotions to RIM management, and gone on to serve in regional and international leadership positions with ARMA and other professional organizations.

Let's stay focused on how good it has been for us to be ARMA chapter leaders as we work to renew the ranks of leaders who will be able to take our chapters successfully into the future!