

# Associations, Generation Y, and Millennials:

What You Need to Know About Your Next Generation Members

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*Not just a perspective to consider, but a voice to hear.*



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### And special thanks to:



**Reno Tahoe USA**, an ASAE Strategic Partner. Reno Tahoe USA, and its partners, hosted the NextGen Association Summit and supports the community through a variety of initiatives during the year. Partners Make the Difference and ASAE appreciates the ongoing support and commitment of Reno Tahoe USA.

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# Introduction and Overview

In September of 2013, ASAE convened a special thought leader retreat to discuss contemporary association issues as seen through the Generation Y and Millennial lenses—Next Gen '13. Twenty-six young association professionals from across the United States were chosen to participate, including representatives nominated by the Association Forum of Chicagoland, CalSAE, and the Texas Society of Association Executives. Hosted by Reno Tahoe USA, what followed was an intensive two-day experience that began by applying a sociological lens to critical future trends poised to impact associations, discussing the current association model as seen by Generation Y and Millennials, confronting critical questions regarding younger members, and ending with the participants spending time reflecting on their personal membership experiences and where they would like to take their careers.

All discussion blocks and group exercises were designed to stimulate visions for the future, practice developing innovative solutions for today's associations, and closely examine the idea that association membership is not of strong interest to members of younger generations. We encourage associations to discuss and consider implementing some of our findings in order to ensure they are creating the best experience possible for younger members. Along the way, we had a candid exchange regarding some of the most common myths and misconceptions about younger professionals (as well as associations themselves), in addition to common barriers to engagement.

When looking at the faces of these dedicated, passionate young association professionals and listening to the compelling stories they had to tell about how associations have changed their lives, you cannot be left with anything but optimism for the future. It is clear they personally identify with the power of associations. Some critics posit that participants only hold these positive opinions of the value of associations to younger professionals because studies have shown perceived value shifts along the same axis as involvement. To those critics, we offer our thanks for proving the point.

**We are brought to the question—if the issue isn't really about the desire to join, then what is the key to recruiting and retaining younger members?** Over two days, we heard a lot about association programs that aren't applicable to a younger demographic as well as several barriers to involvement and engagement. Participants wondered aloud about association systems that seem to have become so rigid that the rank and file member has largely been removed from the value creation process. The oft-repeated refrain that younger members won't join unless they are "cleverly marketed and catered to" may very well be just another symptom of the "member is a customer" rigor mortis that has settled over our industry.

The participants recognized the fact that as long as there are jobs to be had, careers to be created, and perceived threats to an industry or profession to be confronted (either economic or political) in a free, democratic society, humans will continue to organize. Associations are the visible, organizational manifestation of groups of individuals who wish to exert collective influence over their environment, and these conditions will always exist. However, there is an acknowledgement that some associations aren't adapting quickly enough and are at risk of diminishment and increased competition from the outside.

The participants were adamant that ASAE NextGen not be just a "feel-good" retreat. As a group, they developed a list of key outcomes they wanted to see happen post-retreat which included items such as this e-book, toolkits for associations that include interactive discussion mechanisms, and PowerPoint shells for members of the group to use to take the message of NextGen back to their respective associations, SAEs, and interested parties. The participants also developed a list of personal commitments they intend to embrace in order to see the NextGen experience live on in the future and grow.

What follows is a narrative summary of the event for you to use to help spark discussions in your associations about how to make membership attractive and of value to your upcoming member base.

# An Eye to the Future

## Summary

Most discussions about how younger generations perceive association membership typically begin with the association itself, its current activities, or list of benefits and how to make those activities appealing to a younger demographic. This approach is a marketing discussion masquerading as a value discussion and it is destined to produce sub-standard or potentially misguided results. Simply putting current offerings on social media and assuming that's what it takes to attract Generation Y is not enough.

A more generative approach includes taking a deep look at issues affecting younger generations on a daily basis and devising solutions to assist with those challenges. Perhaps your current offerings were developed to solve issues for older members, not necessarily your prospect pool. *Creating contagious membership enthusiasm using “viral value” demands a focus from the outside in. Attempting to solve association problems without taking a hard look at how culture, science, education, and technology are remaking our society will not get you any closer to breaking the code to attract and engage younger members.*

Contrary to popular opinion, none of the participants in the retreat took the view that their younger peers and colleagues are not joiners. However, they were adamant that associations must stop thinking of their younger members as a marketing problem and begin thinking of them as a constituency that needs real-world solutions for their unique and complex challenges. For example, social media is not the solution to every problem and, even worse, poor use of social media can actually be a deterrent. Discussions about the future of association membership cannot begin within the association itself—they must begin in the larger social zeitgeist. Fully embracing members of all ages and experiences is key but does not encompass the growing need to dedicate the most strategic resources on rapidly prototyping solutions for the future members of the association.

During this part of the summit, participants turned their lenses outward and conducted several exercises designed

to bring a “future in flux” into clearer view. As a group, recommendations were developed for associations to consider when positioning themselves to operate in these new environments. *The formula for attracting younger members isn't difficult—just add what you know to how things are changing and then solve for Y.*

## Activities

We conducted two exercises to stimulate our thinking into what big trends are coming our way and what associations can do to capitalize on them and create real value for younger members.

### Trendhunters Top 20 Trends for 2013

First, participants watched a video produced by Trendhunter TV on the Top 20 Trends in 2013 and then used a custom designed worksheet to brainstorm different ways associations might be able to incorporate these trends in common association activities. The group generated over 200 ideas in the course of 30 minutes. Each participant shared their favorite ideas with the group as a whole. The worksheet we used and the entire list of Trendhunters ideas can be found in Appendices A and B.

### Scenario Planning

Second, participants discussed four major trends in the societal atmosphere that are having an impact on members at every level but with particular focus on the younger demographic. These four trends were chosen for their particular impacts on four major areas of association operations: Professional Development, Governance, Programs and Services, and Member Engagement.

Prior to the retreat, participants were asked to watch four TEDTalks. Once onsite, they were divided into groups, and each group was given one of the following scenarios to discuss. *It is important to note the scenario details are not “far flung” future projections of potential futures, they reflect current or imminent conditions affecting all members—younger members in particular.*

Each group was charged with developing a list of recommendations for associations to consider

implementing. The participants purposefully drafted their recommendations with an eye to the creation of outcomes they felt would resonate with younger members. Each scenario sheet can be found in Appendix C for you to replicate and use to spark discussion within your own association.

### *Massive Changes in the Professional Development Arena*

TEDTalk – Daphne Koller: What we're learning from online education

#### **Scenario Details**

- Our post-secondary system is suffering from what is becoming increasingly recognized as an unsustainable business model. Student debt levels have already passed the \$1 trillion mark and federal and state grants and subsidies are continuing to be cut. Scarcity is increasing both domestically and globally. Serious questions about the usefulness of the traditional education track are being raised. 72% of education providers believe they are preparing students adequately for the workforce while fewer than half of students and employers agree.
- A study released in December 2012 from McKinsey & Company says that globally, there are 75,000,000 youth who are unemployed or underemployed. By 2020, and there will be 85,000,000 positions that can't be filled because we can't find people with the skills to take them.
- Virtual learning companies like Coursera, Udacity, and EdX will continue to make significant inroads into virtual learning settings. The day is not far off when members begin to question why they can take a physics course from MIT for free but have to pay us \$120 for a 90-minute workshop and a hotel chicken lunch.
- Coursera, Udacity, and EdX are beginning to formalize how students gain actual course credit for completion. In August of 2013, the Georgia Institute of Technology announced they will begin to offer a master's degree in computer science online through Udacity. This master's degree will cost \$6,000 rather than the on-campus cost of \$45,000.
- Individualized instruction utilizing self-paced programs with both teacher and technological support is

beginning to impact the traditional idea of "grades." Already, efforts to quantify student achievement in the K-12 system are underway and the idea of using "certification" instead of "grade level" as the measure of educational attainment is gaining traction. This would build flexibility into the system and allow students to proceed with technology assisted learning as fast as they want to/are able to.

- The number of homeschooled students has increased from 850,000 in 1999 to 2.4 million in 2011. The trend continues to climb upward. In the next few years we may see as much as 5% of K-12 students being homeschooled. These students need carefully crafted pathways to access the types of career assistance associations can provide to their members.
- Coursera has a vision of open access to the highest quality education becoming a fundamental human right. If they succeed, can associations make the case that they can lock education up behind member-only walls anymore?

#### **NextGen '13 Recommendations**

1. Create a task force within your association to take a serious look at the MOOC movement (massive open online courses) and begin to evaluate technology platforms you may be able to use to migrate your content.
2. Conduct an analysis of all skills and specialized knowledge an employee in your industry or profession needs to succeed at their jobs. Catalog whether there are already high-quality open resources you can point members to. Figure out what kind of specialized content you already have that can fill in the gaps.
3. Be brutally honest when evaluating your current educational offerings. Many courses are taught by volunteers who may not have the educator skill needed to deliver the highest quality content. Utilize online training such as MOOCs to conduct facilitator training so volunteers without skills become skilled and valuable contributors.
4. Ensure your educational offerings are current.
5. Begin to think of your professional development programs on a global scale. What translation services do you need to accommodate global learners?

6. Collaborate for the greater good of the industries and professions you represent. This will require building trust among former competitors, universities, related associations, and corporations.
7. Fulfill education needs of front-line implementers who wouldn't generally be able to go to training as well as others.
8. Develop MOOC related study groups and gatherings or facilitate other in-person connections.
9. Reach the future workforce—develop relationships with community colleges programmed to reach students at the high school level and help them determine their career path.
10. Display content in creative ways.
11. Produce research.
12. Work with colleges, universities, and tech schools to identify job needs or skills gaps in the local community and develop career programming to set degree and certification pathway opportunities upon completion of each. This could also lead to an advanced certification, post-graduate work, and development of training for industries made possible and provided by the associations in that space.
13. Provide virtual training for jobs with projected shortfall of workers rather than playing catch-up.
14. Develop an integrated learning program that ties functional areas together—see how skills and departments tie together.
15. Create programs with a global perspective—pay attention to culture/ translation to help speakers understand their audiences.
16. For webinars, provide pre- and post- webinar live interaction with the speaker. Turn the tweets from educational programs into stories to send members with what they missed.
17. Identify the skill sets of high school juniors and seniors in various majors and how they match with skills needed in the profession served by the association—show them the road map of how they fit. Create a virtual career fair for associations only or a game (choose your own adventure online).
18. Identify experts on various topics and code in database to engage and leverage them. Add an “areas of expertise” check box in database.
19. Engage students as the volunteer workforce for events and provide them with free networking and education time.

## *Massive Changes in Transparency and Governance*

TEDTalk – Clay Shirky: How the internet will (one day) transform government

### **Scenario Details**

- Democratic systems, which associations operate as, become even more transparent than ever.
- Members are more and more interested in not only having access to and reading bylaws, policies and procedures, and legislative and regulatory items the association is working on—but also in weighing in on them and helping create them.
- Individuals are beginning to yearn for better ways to argue within their profession or industry over trends, new technological advancements, and changes in their operating environments.
- Members have critical information to share about advancements in their industry and profession and they want to share this information faster than via “journal publications” and “conferences.”
- New mediums have led to an explosion of information availability but it is getting even faster and denser. Members are continuously surrounded by white noise and are confused over what constitutes “the best, most reliable” sources.
- Wearable technologies like Google glasses, smart watches, etc., give us new opportunities to lay our association over our members actual visual or auditory field on a daily, even hourly, basis.
- More often than not, the industries and professions our associations serve are suffering with wicked problems, which are defined as social and cultural problems that are difficult to solve because of incomplete, contradictory, and changing requirements.
- Members are beginning to have more satisfactory experiences in systems that provide tools that support the notion of “cooperation without coordination.”

### **NextGen '13 Recommendations**

1. Begin to share videos and materials about the changing nature of governance and problem solving techniques to your boards and volunteers.
2. Have a discussion with your boards and volunteers about what democratic processes mean in the

association context and how transparency is a good move but won't be enough in the future. Members will not only want full access to materials, they will want a way to comment and hold a two-way conversation over what they see.

3. Begin to explore how to position your association to directly engage with stakeholders in your industries and professions on all issues in which ideas about open source might be applicable (bylaws, policies, legislation under consideration, content development, news, problem solving).
4. Create a task force to look at big, intractable, problems your association has yet to solve. Decide if you can use open source techniques to solve them. Become acquainted with the balance between crowdsourcing that leads to actionable information or crowdsourcing that leads to "groupthink."
5. Appoint a key volunteer leader or staff member to investigate programs such as Github (a code sharing community) and learn how they work. Investigate other platforms that might be of use.
6. View the association holistically—not at the granular year-to-year level. Move toward understanding what your leaders and volunteers are trying to accomplish and why—not just documenting success. Document historical efforts for posterity's sake.
7. Look at the association as a two-way street. Identify pathways for collaboration and dialogue.
8. Review your agility—go back to bylaws and Articles of Incorporation to see where your hands are tied. Better leverage past chairs in creative ways to keep dialogue ongoing.
9. Look at communication—are you being disruptive? If so, is it in a good way?
10. Use a crowd contributing open environment such as Google Drive, which are editable by large groups. "Suggestion box" with transparency—show the ideas and how you're listening and making changes.
11. Brainstorm—being transparent without influencing competition. Create effective hierarchy. Be proactive about looking to the future members and leaders.

## *Massive Changes in Consumption of Programs and Services*

TEDTalk – Rachel Botsman: The currency of the new economy is trust

## Scenario Details

- Economic systems become less about the production of new goods and more about the sharing and reuse of already existing goods. Idling resources are horizontally shared from association to association as well as vertically from member to member.
- Members are less interested in "swag and stuff" programs and services and are becoming more interested in experiences.
- Members move from appreciating to expecting the "exceptional." Room blocks for conferences are no longer viable because people want to stay in cooler, more unique places through services like Airbnb.
- Members are engaging in "collaborative, relationship, and values based" business behaviors, not just transactions. This changes our own conversation from "what's in it for me" back to where we started which was "what's in it for us."
- Members need some way to compete against an "Angie's List" and to create and maintain professional reputation dashboards on the internet. The "sticker in the window" is not cutting it anymore.
- Associations begin to create systems to rate/calibrate such behaviors as trustworthiness, reliability, and performance.
- As lines between "personal" and "professional" continue to blur, we begin to create ways for a member's participation in association leadership, education, etc., to translate into overall knowledge and trustworthiness in their careers.
- Average number of careers for an individual is now a total of six. Members want to combine their internet behavior, their career knowledge, and their volunteer leadership reputations so their entire reputation holistically follows them from purchase to purchase, job to job, and association to association.

## NextGen '13 Recommendations

1. Begin to share videos, books, and materials about this evolution—social media 2.0.
2. Create a page on your website that lists all kinds of collaborative consumption services you feel your members might like to learn about.
3. Create a task force to look at the idea of reputation capital. Decide how to help your members learn about and begin to craft their own online identities

- in terms of building trust in their behaviors and skills and abilities they use on the job.
4. Create a task force to look at the concept of “idling resources.” Are there swaps your members could be making that would reduce their costs and make them more competitive in the marketplace? Is there some way you can help them set those systems up? How about between associations too? Got a booth idling all year?
  5. Partner with groups such as Vizify to graphically show members’ careers to external audience.
  6. Industries come together to share resources/content that others are proficient in to create universal/one-stop shop.
  7. Sharing of staff resources to help other associations. Maybe you can help with marketing, meetings, etc. that another organization cannot support.
  8. Create cafeteria type membership levels and type/benefits that the more you pay, the more you have available.
  9. Certain measures of engagement lead to perks like free registrations to events, free publications, discounts, etc.

### *Massive Changes in Membership Engagement Processes*

TEDTalk – Jane McGonigal: Gaming can make a better world

#### **Scenario Details**

- We become flooded with a new generation of members who are “super-empowered, hopeful individuals.”
- Members want to experience a sense of urgent optimism, a tight social fabric, blissful productivity, and epic meaning.
- Members expect their membership experiences to be more personalized and fun.
- Each member expects to not only be inspired by your association’s mission, but expects to play an ACTIVE role in getting there. However, they want to play the role they most identify with and can customize and create around—not the role you assign to them.
- New member orientation becomes a collaborative process, not an informational one. Members benefit from missions, tasks, and rewards as they move further and further into the association social system.

- Associations begin developing large scale game scenarios and asking members to solve urgent problems within their professions and industries together in a fun, non-threatening, and scenario-based environment.
- Members want to do important tasks that are matched to their experience level. But they also want to work at the upper limits of their skills so they can reach breakthrough levels of performance.
- Members desire rewards, immediate feedback, and recognition.
- Associations begin to identify the gamer/programmer population in their memberships and capitalize on their talents.

#### **NextGen '13 Recommendations**

1. Begin to share videos and materials about the real-world, practical implications of gaming and gaming techniques.
2. Create a task force to look at the idea of gamification and explore where these techniques can be embedded into your association programs, starting with the member experience and working outwards from there.
3. Think of ways to make your association experience more fun and more engaging. Get beyond the badge!
4. Consider the fact that games are actually hard work and gamers LOVE to work hard. The idea of the “service” model of member as “customer” won’t work forever. Gamers want to be active players and want to do things that are fun and that contribute to the epic story your association is creating.
5. Stop telling members the best ways to engage; listen to them as they tell you the best way they can engage.
6. Gamification should be reflective of core purpose, value, proposition, and geared toward a specific audience.
7. Open-source your strategic plan to encourage engagement of all constitutes to identify interests, and to get a clear view of what success looks like for the profession.
8. Offer peer-to-peer promotions to connect suppliers and vendors and create buzz.

# The Association **Model**

## Summary

After going wide into the sociological zeitgeist, we used the second discussion block to begin to narrow our focus. We didn't feel we could have a robust conversation about the creation of viral value without taking a look at the association model itself. What we heard from the younger members in attendance at this summit is that the association model has definite value, but there are changes we need to make to the system to make it optimally appealing.

It is of note, however, that the vast preponderance of suggested changes to the association model are targeted at the intersection between wider societal needs and the association members, not the model itself. *Associations that embrace positioning themselves as a contextualized part of the wider society will have a better chance of attracting and maintaining the interest of younger members.*

## Activity

The main exercise in this content block included small group discussions, report outs, and then a larger group discussion. Each attendee was asked to provide an essay as part of the application process to be selected to attend the NextGen summit. Question blocks were derived from themes that surfaced from within those responses.

Each small group took on a different critical question and was asked to capture their responses and ideas on flip charts. Attendees were asked to couch their responses in terms of "what if..." questions to encourage them to push their own boundaries around the topics. The following includes the questions and a summary of the generated thoughts that were captured.

### **Question 1.A – How can associations become more responsive to societal shifts?**

The answers to this question revolved around three major themes—increasing diversity, shifts in the world of employment, and issues related to globalization.

Younger members seem to have serious concerns with the pace at which diversity and inclusion issues are being addressed at the association level. Large shifts in the employment landscape are leaving younger members adrift and unsure of how to navigate two opposing forces: the lack of employment opportunities in certain fields and the skills gap that is preventing them from moving into available employment slots currently going unfulfilled. In addition, the world is flat and younger members know it. Associations that obsessively focus only on the United States market are moving further out of touch with the perspective of many Generation Y and Millennial members.

Participants discussed the need to address diversity and inclusion issues head-on to ensure an association's inclusion agenda reflects the reality outside of the current association membership. Changing nominating committees to ensure diversity is better represented is crucial. Many associations have made cosmetic changes that give lip service to their diversity goals but, in practice, are not embracing changing demographics. Too often nominating committee members rely on their own personal networks to recruit association leaders and don't consciously recognize the lack of diversity in their own social circles.

Some suggestions regarding employment and workforce development dovetailed with ideas around globalization. Participants believe associations need to become better at reflecting real-time changes in the workforce environment their members function in and need to regularly consult members for real world data that can be used to intelligently direct workforce development strategies.

Also, certification programs need to be updated to make them more meaningful to younger members. For example, with the explosion of MOOCs and alternative educational pathways, some established certification program prerequisites may need to be reevaluated. It may be that job experience and demonstrated knowledge should become the ultimate determination

of eligibility, not just the issuance of a degree from a traditional institution.

In addition, the number of careers individuals are expected to engage in has risen to a total of six and, as life spans continue to increase, may rise even higher. Associations should be encouraged to look at the possibility that certification programs may need to evolve to become reciprocal or perhaps develop institutional rules that allow certain aspects of certification programs, once earned, to be “transferred” and accepted for credit in others.

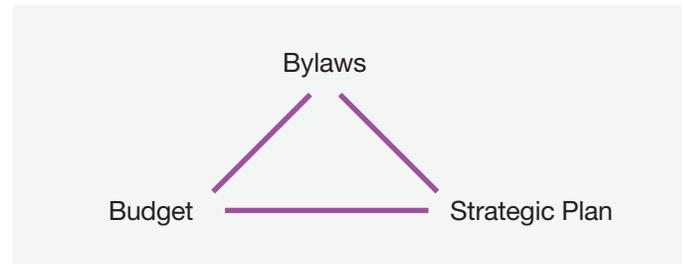
Associations that want to appeal to younger members also need to have a more global focus. Not simply an issue of diversity and inclusion, associations are missing some opportunities to globalize our brands. Not only do we need to develop a better real-time system to understand workforce shifts in the United States, we need to do the same thing on the global stage. Workforce development affects an employment system that has grown beyond the nation-state into a larger world-wide employment system.

Last but not least, attendees discussed their concerns that associations are sometimes portrayed as not working for the betterment of society in general or in giving back to their communities, but rather in protecting their members at all costs. Some established association professionals are unapologetic about this fact and consider it their highest responsibility. Younger members in particular are questioning this dogma and wondering if, in fact, there aren't other responsibilities for associations to assume if they want to continue as driving forces for change in the 21st century.

### Question 1.B – How can associations become more nimble and adaptable?

There was a general agreement within the group that associations are not known for their nimbleness or adaptability. Part of the inertia can be ascribed to the body of law that dictates some characteristics of association management that includes certain governance structures and fiduciary duties. However, more often than not, the paralysis in associations has more to do with power struggles and turf battles that lead to the complicated governance structures. Regardless of the reasons why some association systems have become rigid and inflexible, this is a

condition that must be remedied, and quickly. Newer generations of members are emerging into a world that is increasingly seen as a complex system that needs constant adaptation in order to survive. Attempting to engage newer members in the job of value creation will mean providing new tools for members to use individually or in groups to craft needed changes much faster and more easily than in the past. *There is nothing more disillusioning than whacking enthusiastic members who have good ideas upside the head with what our attendees called the tripod of stagnation—bylaws, budget, and strategic plan.*



Associations that want to attract a new generation of members need to look at governance structures, bylaws, and policies as launching pads for change rather than handcuffs. Other tools we can offer members include redefining how we allow for and account for “failure.” By changing our definitions of “failure” to accommodate experimentation, we create a safe space for innovation and growth. We should also consider devising metrics for agility that associations can measure themselves by in order to encourage them to see agility as a hallmark of a well-functioning, contemporary association.

Other strategies to encourage adaptability include not stretching our strategic planning processes and budgeting to their absolute limits—100% utilization. By filling our plates with as many strategic initiatives as we think we can handle (and usually adding one or two more) and then allocating every dime to expenditures or reserves, there is no “play” in the system if it comes under strain. There is little ability to react in real-time to opportunities that present themselves if all activity and money is already accounted for. It isn't enough to set aside some money in the budget for an “innovation fund.” That is obviously a good start, but you should consider opening up access to those funds to a wider audience within your association, not just the appointed bodies.

When discussing building systems that are more nimble, we shouldn't lose sight of our information-gathering apparatuses. Actively monitoring our environment and working through various scenarios can help us make better decisions faster. Too often we depend on the "annual member survey" to be the ultimate benchmark of our success. It isn't that surveys aren't good, it's just we need to build two-way mechanisms that build conversations between all stakeholders in our industries and professions—members, nonmembers, and other interested parties. This will allow for more actionable intelligence to continuously flow through the system and can bring forth trends the association needs to position itself to confront or capitalize on.

### **Question 1.C – How can associations become more involved in the personal and professional lives of their stakeholders?**

There is more to life than association programs. Younger members are interested in being embraced as whole people. The line continues to blur between the personal and the professional. *Associations have always been about networking and establishing relationships, but attracting younger members will involve a more intentional approach in which our stakeholders feel that we genuinely welcome them as fully actualized, authentic human beings.*

For example, associations need to create means of sharing member achievements that result in personal congratulatory responses from staff, volunteer leaders, and other members. Sometimes this "need for recognition" is somehow dismissed as a negative trait or accompanied with the old "everybody gets a trophy" chestnut. The reality is more nuanced. Members who are quickly acknowledged for their contributions to your association tend to stay "on the move," actively working to make their mark on your association. Waiting for the "annual banquet" to recognize your members won't cut it in a just-in-time membership world.

This also means creating unique opportunities to connect outside of the traditional association environment and having a little more fun. Consider unorthodox event venues like house meetings, baseball games, etc. These types of interactions allow members to create their own space for engagement and flourish without subjugating

them to heavy constraints. Incorporate a sense of fun into association collateral used at events or in other venues is a way to impart a sense of the "unusual."

Both in-person and virtual engagement is important, and both have their place. Those associations that are afraid that online platforms are killing the association model are missing the point. Online interactions are simply one facet of an overall communications strategy. The idea that younger members never want to hang out together in person is just not true.

### **Question 1.D – How can associations leverage relationships between themselves to benefit larger segments of society?**

This was yet another segment where themes associated with globalization appeared. Rigid governance systems were seen as an impediment to thinking of associations working together in concert to benefit society as a whole. Most of the themes that surfaced from this discussion had to do with breaking down barriers and having more inclusive discussions with all industry stakeholders, not just members.

*Protectionism worked as a membership strategy in the last century; newer members are more interested in collaboration and in open exploration of the links between systems.* Ideas generated in response to the question included removing or de-emphasizing competition by creating open forums for industry discussions, creating more access to member information, lifting bans on non-member participation, and breaking down hierarchies and barriers to new ideas within associations for both staff and volunteers.

Individual associations have an opportunity to open up their strategic discussions beyond their members and allow the industries or professions they represent to weigh in. Not only could a crowd-sourced strategy development process surface new ideas, it could inspire engagement on the part of nonmembers as well who feel they had some say in or a level of buy-in to the association's direction. You will also be able to capitalize on input that your more insulated members might not see or choose to acknowledge.

Last but not least, seasoned leaders from all related associations could join in regular conversations about cooperation and coordination. These summits could include younger members to build bridges between different segments of the industry and profession and increase the likelihood that economies of scale or complementary activities could be developed and pursued to the benefit of all.

## **Question 1.E – How can associations learn to accept and adjust to the “new economic normal?”**

This group began their exploration of the new normal by asking what would happen if we don't accept it? There are a number of associations who appear to be searching for their “glory days.” It actually may be an advantage to associations to not have a path back to their former glory and force them to consider a new future instead.

Those associations that are unable to admit there is a new normal and devise strategies to cope with it are at risk of being unable to evolve and change with the times. Those that continue to look backward are

becoming more remote and disconnected from the very membership demographic they claim to want more than ever— younger members. Some associations are even magnifying their blind spots in their desperate refusal to see that certain “truths” they hold onto so tightly don't matter nearly as much as they used to.

NextGen '13 participants had a very positive view of how they can help associations that are still struggling with denial regarding the new normal. The following six factors were listed as key strategies for associations who need to embrace the new normal and begin moving forward again. It is the forward movement that will attract younger members, not stories about your heyday. Younger members want to help associations do the following:

- Conduct 360-degree evaluations of the association as a whole
- Inspire a vision of what the future holds
- Proactively disrupt rather than reacting to disruptions
- Understand, acknowledge, and work around uncontrollable factors
- Operate with an acceptable amount of risk
- Admit failure and be more honest

# The **Membership** Experience

## Summary

This content block was designed to explore questions around the membership experience and how the young professionals in the room would respond to key concerns frequently mentioned in our association community. We asked about opportunities for younger members, barriers to engagement, myths, and the advantages and disadvantages of the “young professional” label.

## Activity

Each discussion group tackled the individual questions and then shared in a larger group discussion. All content generated was captured on flip charts and participants were given a chance after the discussion to go place marks by the points that resonated with them the most. What follows is a discussion on the major points agreed upon by the group.

### **Question 2.A – What are the biggest opportunities for young members?**

None of the most popular responses to this question will surprise seasoned association professionals. *Younger members are just as concerned with learning and networking as older members are. However, they are coming at these two activities from a decidedly different perspective than older generations did.* Their concerns are rooted in the major disruptions in the post-secondary and workforce development systems added to the severity and duration of the economic crisis of 2007-2008.

Two of the top four responses to this question were similar. Associations still provide individuals with professional volunteer opportunities, the chance to broaden members’ skill sets within their chosen industries and professions, and the ability to continue their “post-formal” education. However, simply signing up for association membership, being co-opted into committee assignments, and attending quarterly luncheons is no longer sufficient in a rapidly changing world. “Proximity” and “osmosis” are outdated strategies in a “Total Noise” world.

Associations need to do a far better job identifying and defining exactly what skill sets are required to be successful in their industry or profession. Once those skill sets are defined, professional development programs need to be aggressively rebuilt to provide specific activities to EVERY member so they can demonstrably achieve that skill set and advance to the next level. Younger members need more help on an individual basis, and technology platforms are evolving to the point where this expectation is no longer as unreasonable.

The third top response had to do with establishing relationships early. Many associations have already made the move to adopt mentoring programs as a way to help younger members establish relationships in the community. Although this is admirable and many participants in those programs see them as valuable, mentoring won’t solve every connection need. Although the internet does afford many more opportunities for members to self-organize, there is still a deep desire to connect with “movers and shakers.” The key is connecting directly with individuals in a one-on-one environment. Throwing younger members into a reception and expecting those connections to automatically manifest is an outdated strategy. Expertise is still of high value and associations should be facilitating connections that turn into conversations. The idea that Generation Y and younger cannot or will not engage in face-to-face interaction is part of the popular mythology that has grown up around this demographic. Yes, they are heavily immersed in technology, but they are still humans with just as many needs for sharing and connection as any other generation.

The fourth major opportunity younger members crave is the ability to drive the industry or profession they have chosen to be a part of. It isn’t enough to be a part of the community by offering passive dues support—they want to play an active and visible role in determining the future of their chosen occupation. *Associations are notoriously slow to grasp major shifts in their operating environments in large part because their notions of leadership are outdated and based on seniority rather*

*than on knowledge and demonstrated understanding of evolutionary changes taking place in the workplace.*

Younger members are increasingly immersed in a constant flow of information, and, as a result, are highly attuned to subtle shifts in conversation which lead to innovative leaps forward in the workplace. Associations rarely capture those leaps when they happen and are stuck playing catch up as they react to rather than dictate important shifts in their members' workplace environment. By allowing younger members to have a say in the future direction of the association, associations can begin to capitalize on these shifts as they happen rather than later.

### **Question 2.B – What are the biggest barriers for younger members?**

Clearly, associations are still a valuable platform, and with some work, they have the ability to provide younger members with the opportunities they are seeking. However, younger members also need help removing several barriers that can severely hamper their ability to engage with your association.

The largest barriers for younger members are interrelated, and both are critical in terms of association engagement: costs and time. Lack of support from current managers looms large in creating barriers for younger members with fewer employers paying or subsidizing dues and/or refusing to allow employees to take time off for association activities that conflict with the work week. Serious questions are being raised by business schools and members of the media regarding our employment landscape as it relates to the younger generations.

Employers over the past 30 years have created a perfect storm—providing lower pay, fewer benefits, fewer hours, and slashed professional development budgets, and then denigrating entry level workers who often job jump in an attempt to find more stable employment by calling them “shiftless” and “disloyal.”

As a result, employers are often unwilling to dedicate resources into developing employees they see as “temporary anyway.” Because associations have not done a good job of defining skill sets or providing clear paths to skill acquisition and then formal recognition at

each stage of development, younger members have little to show their employers in terms of how their association membership is benefitting the employer's bottom lines. Many younger members are simply not allowed to take time off during the day to attend association events or networking opportunities. *Associations absolutely must do a better job of not only communicating the value of membership to the individual, but to their employers as well and must provide members with tools to use to translate knowledge gained and other tangential benefits of membership into the workplace.*

However, the time/cost challenge doesn't end there. Even if a younger member does have supervisor support and is given time off to participate in association activities, many times that time is not compensated requiring younger members to use limited sick time, vacation time, or paid time off in order to avoid taking a hit in their paycheck they can't afford. This leaves younger members weighing the risk of using paid time for association activities when it may leave them unable to cope with an unexpected illness later on in the year or unable to take a needed and well deserved vacation.

In essence, due to the interrelation of time and costs, dues are actually much higher than they seem because of the hidden costs of participation in terms of time needed to take full advantage of the membership experience and the loss of compensation for said time. If you add dues and the hidden costs of time to additional fees to attend events or purchase publications, you can easily see how your association can quickly out-price your younger members and lock them out of the system.

Student membership categories were one strategy employed by associations in the past to help mitigate this situation. However, those categories are usually only applicable to those students who can prove they are enrolled in an accredited program with a traditional institution. This leaves potential members who are hungry for your education locked out of attaining a student membership as traditional education is becoming increasingly out of reach for the middle and lower classes in the United States. Even with a student membership, you are left with the problem of what to do with these members once they leave school and officially enter the profession. Associations often report low conversion rates from

student to regular membership and seem confused by it. The answer seems simple— younger members are often struggling with an average of \$25,000 in debt from school (and more for post-grad education), higher costs of living, fewer employment opportunities, and lower salaries in this still struggling economy. Hitting them with a significant dues increase at this vulnerable stage in their career could, by default, lock them out again.

Even if all of these barriers in terms of employer support, costs, and time are met (and we should certainly try to do so), the next significant barrier is the clash between traditional vs. non-traditional learning styles. Associations typically leave much of their educational programming in the hands of more experienced volunteers. Although peer-to-peer instruction is unquestionably valuable, many volunteer instructors do not have cutting-edge delivery skills either in terms of content design or familiarity with technological advancements in education. Where most associations have come to acknowledge “sage on the stage” as an outmoded form of information transmission, they are often at the mercy of older members who still heavily rely on that mode of instruction because it was the predominant style of learning those volunteers experienced growing up. Younger members who are used to electronic textbooks, blended learning environments, and study group approaches are sometimes put off by education that looks dated and not particularly conducive to their preferred learning styles.

The fourth major barrier that needs to be dealt with is the orientation process. Many associations still operate with an outmoded belief system that once the member pays their dues, gets the membership packet in the mail, and receives the first “welcome” phone call from staff or an ambassador volunteer, the association’s responsibilities are complete and then it is up to the member to take the initiative to get what they can out of their membership experience. This could not be further from the truth. All new members, but younger members in particular, need to learn about the association system itself, how it works, how the various activities complement and reinforce one another, and, most importantly, where they fit and what they can personally do to see the association achieve its mission.

The group did acknowledge that sometimes they do create their own barriers. There was a recognition that

young professionals may need to put more energy into the fine arts of compromise. Better leadership training on those specific issues may be warranted. Sometimes other young professionals do behave in a less than ideal manner and that backslash can lead to harmful generalizations being applied to everyone. However, instead of just complaining, the group felt it had a responsibility to be proactive, invite more young professionals into discussions, and be a positive influence.

### **Question 2.C – What are the biggest myths about younger members?**

It is certainly refreshing to get a bunch of people in a room and point blank ask them to identify the biggest myths about their generation. Although there is little doubt that shared sociological experiences are a big part of shaping the temperament and attitude of each successive generation, leaving the discussion at that point can lead to stereotyping and generalizations that might make for good media copy but paint individuals with an overly broad brush.

With a group of young professionals at our disposal, we wanted to see what they believe the biggest myths are about themselves and their peers. Lots of myths were mentioned, but the two that got the most attention were built around the concept of entitlement and the idea that all young employees or members want immediate advancements, more responsibilities, and commensurate salary levels.

Among the myths the group listed, there were also a number of participants who agreed that the oft-repeated refrain that Generation Y and their younger counterparts are “job-hoppers” with no loyalty or appreciation of where the organizations have been is a destructive narrative. Their response is they have to move quickly from position to position in order to move forward in their careers; promotion from within is becoming more difficult as economic conditions have forced many Boomers to postpone retirement plans. (This is a dynamic that also affects Generation X as well.)

The idea they have no respect for where the organization has been might have a kernel of truth to it, but some gentle pushback is offered that things are evolving

so rapidly in the social space that there is no time to appreciate the past when the future demands our full attention. *Generation Y seems to struggle with striking a balance between creating innovative disruptions that conditions require (and that managers seem to be asking for) versus giving due respect to the system.*

### **Question 2.D – What are the advantages and disadvantages of using the label “young professional?”**

We wanted to explore the term “young professional” with a group of young professionals to see if they actually like the term or if there are biases inherent in it that might actually be doing them a disservice. What we heard was a nuanced discussion of both advantages and disadvantages of using the term, and associations that are creating groups should be aware of the following consequences of using that label.

One advantage of using the term “young professionals” is that the label seems to infer these groups have a willingness to engage with everyone. It can also indicate fresh thinking and energy. In certain associations, young professionals qualify for breaks on dues and event rates or other special perks.

The participants engaged in a vigorous debate regarding the difference between what is “young” vs. what is “new” or “emergent.” Does “young” only apply to age, or does the term apply to thinking? Can one be “young in thought,” and is that more important than chronological age? There was agreement that the term is a loaded one. There were participants who were proud to be known as young professionals and felt there was a great deal of value in networking with peers their own age, but they do have some frustration that this is where their interactions within the association system seem to stop.

Although it was clear there are some advantages to using the term, the participants also identified some disadvantages as well. The biggest negative with using the term “young professionals” is it conveys a lack of experience which may or may not be the case. *One of the most poignant observations is that “young professionals” are seen by associations as a perspective to consider but not a voice to be heard.* Another clear disadvantage of the term is it creates a sense of the individual not being

a “full professional,” but someone who needs to be groomed and is “waiting in the wings.”

Some of the participants wondered if allowing themselves to be classified as “young professionals” was handicapping their ability to move within the association system. At what point does a “young professional” transition to an “old professional?” Of course, that was said in jest, but it did bring up a serious question, which is, “How and when if we allow ourselves to be branded as ‘young professionals’ do we transition out of that group, and what do we transition into?”

An interesting feature of the discussion was one item that was simultaneously seen as an advantage and a disadvantage. The group agreed that awards and recognition given specifically to “young professionals” are of value and have potential to be a career accelerator. At the same time, concerns were expressed about the ability of younger members to have the time and money to do the things required to earn recognition from an association. This can potentially leave a lot of younger members unable to compete for recognition which can create the perception that there is an uneven playing field and leave a distinctly negative impression regarding their membership experience.

One of the conclusions the group did come to is integration of young professionals groups (or any special interest group in an association system) needs to be done on both a horizontal and vertical axis. The more horizontal interactions between members who share certain demographic characteristics can provide a safe space to identify with one another, discuss mutual challenges, and share perspectives. However, associations need to also provide plenty of vertical integration so groups have opportunities to freely mix with all other groups. Diversity and inclusion efforts need to be stepped up with all dimensions of diversity being honored and welcomed by the system.

# Practical Advice on Generation Y from Generation Y

As part of the final exercises prepared for the retreat, participants spent several hours thinking and reflecting on their experience and considering their thoughts for the association community. We asked them to respond to the following question, “What one thing can associations do to help their younger members?”

## Culture

- Build and support a culture within your association that has a deep competency with diversity and inclusion issues of which age and/or career stage is just one facet.
- Create a status quo at all levels in your association, “fail fast, learn faster.”
- Create more equitable systems with level playing fields.
- Create a culture more tolerant of disruption and see the opportunities inherent in it.
- Build a culture that embraces “freemium” models offering basic education at no cost and allow individuals who wish to progress to invest in “upgraded” professional development opportunities.

## Contribution

- Get Generation Y and Millennials involved in meaningful ways within your association. Don’t ask for their opinions and then ignore the contributions they have to make.
- Purposefully open doors for younger members to walk through.
- Provide the tools and resources your younger members need to develop their strategic thinking skills and become leaders within your association.
- Don’t tell younger members to challenge the system and then shut them down when they try.

## Career

- Develop meaningful career pathways that show them where to start, what to consider, and what steps to take. Include vivid descriptions of the ultimate destinations on each path.
- Get beyond job descriptions. Identify the actual skills needed in order to advance in a chosen profession

and either recommend or provide experiences for younger members to seek out, discover, and conquer in order to gain those specific skills.

- Provide resources and experiences that keep younger members excited about their chosen careers.
- Encourage students from middle school through post-secondary to see associations as a source for high quality, affordable, career-focused education.

## Community

- Do your part to assert the importance of younger members in your association ecosystem and reinforce, by extension, their value to employers as well.
- Listen, absorb, reflect, respond, and help younger members succeed in order to ensure the vitality and sustainability of your association’s membership pipeline.
- Move past “happy hours” as the only bonding opportunity. Consider cooking competitions, healthy activities like fun runs, book clubs, etc.
- Develop mentorship programs that work.

## Coaching

- Generation Y desires direct feedback that is actionable, well-supported, and comes with concrete examples of how to engage with or improve their volunteer experience.
- Take action to show younger members you actually care not only about their careers but for them as individuals as well.
- Set well-defined, transparent expectations for members.
- Virtual interactions are nice additional communication tools but cannot replace the value of face time.
- Teach younger members how to establish a personal brand.
- Show younger members how to use professional networking sites like LinkedIn appropriately for career development.



## Conclusion

It is an exciting time for associations as well as association professionals. *With access to more diverse perspectives, information, and community-building resources than ever before, associations should be celebrating their opportunities, not musing about their potential demise.*

Generation Y and Millennials are just two more cohorts in a long line of generations that have moved through association management and leadership. Each generation has an outlook and a temperament, but they also have needs that contain certain recognizable constants. Younger members are just as interested in career and professional development, networking, and advancement as any other generation was and is. However, they have different ways of getting those needs met as well as economic pressures that are preventing many of them from engaging with associations.

Associations find themselves at a crossroads in terms of how to attract even younger generations into the association system. Associations no longer have the

luxury of waiting for potential members to find their way through an increasingly fragmented and uncertain employment landscape and come to association membership “when they are ready for it.” *Associations have an opportunity to hack the societal system and become a partner with students as they are exploring their career options rather than passively wait to inherit them once they have selected one.*

Generation Y is poised to become a valued and important constituency within each and every association. It is up to the association to amplify opportunities, remove barriers, and work to change cultures which have become rigid and closed to full membership engagement of ALL members, not just Generation Y. Failure to do so won't mean associations become extinct. However, it may mean YOUR association is sufficiently diminished to be challenged or risks being replaced by a competitor. You still have time to get all hands on deck and much to gain by giving younger members the opportunity to help steer the ship.



# Appendix A

**Jeremy Gustche**  
Trendhunter



**Video:** Trendhunters  
Top 20 2013 Trends

How can we tell a fad from a trend? Sometimes that is hard to do. Fads are more related to fashion and pop culture, where trends are connected to large changes in public perception of what is possible.

	FAD	TREND
<p><b>Vending 3.0</b> Smart vending machines that use facial recognition, social media and even swaps with others.</p> <p>What if...</p>		
<p><b>Upgraded Ordinary</b> Ketchup caulking guns? Spices in alchemical bottles? What can we spice up?</p> <p>What if...</p>		
<p><b>Dystopic Fascination</b> Movies like the Hunger Games, the current “zombie” fascination in the zeitgeist.</p> <p>What if...</p>		
<p><b>Millennial Madness</b> What do we do about these millennials?</p> <p>What if...</p>		
<p><b>Modular Retail</b> Can your association set up a “pop up shop” to increase awareness?</p> <p>What if...</p>		
<p><b>Imposed Interaction</b> Members need to connect, maybe we can help them get closer</p> <p>What if...</p>		
<p><b>Shoptimization</b> Mobile phones offer deals, treats or information about competitors automatically</p> <p>What if...</p>		
<p><b>Sustain-chitecture</b> Sustainable architecture is revolutionizing how people live and work.</p> <p>What if...</p>		
<p><b>Deliberate Vintage</b> Members are yearning for the past. Can we help them with retro design?</p> <p>What if...</p>		



	FAD	TREND
<p><b>Immersive Branding</b> It's not about a logo anymore...it's about an experience. What if...</p>		
<p><b>Wearable Multitasking</b> Beyond phones to uber-mobile...how do you help members adjust? What if...</p>		
<p><b>Subscription World</b> What can members subscribe to other than publications? What if...</p>		
<p><b>Physical Virtual</b> Can members virtually "try on" membership? What if...</p>		
<p><b>Benefit Brands</b> Using profit to further social causes. Can we partner with benefit corporations? What if...</p>		
<p><b>Nostalgic Escape</b> Can we use images from childhood to add whimsy to our marketing? What if...</p>		
<p><b>Crossover Cuisine</b> We are embracing internationalism...how can we help our members be more multi-cultural? What if...</p>		
<p><b>Fashionizing</b> Giving an extra-special touch to the everyday item What if...</p>		
<p><b>Shoppertainment</b> How can we make our member experiences more memorable? What if...</p>		
<p><b>Indust-retail</b> Make it cool, make it underground What if...</p>		
<p><b>Manufactured Addiction</b> Can our members go from supporters to addicts? What if...</p>		

# Appendix B

## NextGen Trendhunter What Ifs...

### Vending 3.0

**What if...** Members who bought specific products from associations had an easy way to share their experiences with that product with one another?

**What if...** We could connect our members who have similar issues or concerns?

**What if...** When networking in a large group, we could input a name or select a picture and ping the location of that person in the room (similar to existing near-field tech that already exists)?

**What if...** We freecycled things like office supplies or intern experiences, etc., for associations?

**What if...** We made all association products on-demand? Members should have access to it all the minute they sign up.

**What if...** We set up a site where members can acquire materials (peer-to-peer)?

**What if...** We use a vending 3.0 strategy at a committee meeting as some type of networking/ice breaker event? Maybe members can swap best practices among each other.

**What if...** We track members and their lives beyond the scope of being a member?

**What if...** Associations could “Amazon” their offerings and opportunities? Every member could feel like an individual—not just from what they chose to do with the association but by how the association communicated with them.

**What if...** Vending technology was applied to combat obesity and nutrient deficiencies? What if food associations worked more with technology associations?

**What if...** We hosted an electronic idea swap at ASAE meetings?

**What if...** We used facial recognition at trade shows and recommended booths for individuals? What if we could vend books, technology, etc.?

**What if...** We created an a la carte membership “vending machine” for large associations? Members could select benefits, create their own packages, and receive a member card?

**What if...** We offered an equipment exchange program at conventions and regional meetings? This could benefit members who are looking to upgrade their offices or recent graduates who are looking for discounted equipment. This could also build community.

### Upgraded Ordinary

**What if...** Our benchmarking surveys were repackaged and made more visionary and intellectually exciting?

**What if...** We used a “Hello! The conversation begins here” sign instead of “registration” at conferences? Scrap the counters for a more inviting welcome (hotels and department stores are finally embracing this). Who needs another tote bag? Hand members a welcoming beverage or snack pack instead. We change our language: instead of liaison reports, shift the focus to purple cow moments, aspirations... reports have become a learning experience.

**What if...** We made “imaginary packaging” for products that don’t have a tangible, physical presence?

**What if...** We updated the brand/ logo that the association has had for 20+ years?

**What if...** We changed the way our membership cards look? Instead of laminated paper, maybe a type of product that they use daily, like an app?

**What if...** We allowed members to borrow books instead of buying them? We could create on-demand customized books based on the content they want that addresses their current needs. Think of iTunes movie rentals offered at a lower price point and available to the user for only 24 hours after starting.

**What if...** We started selling recorded meeting material pre-loaded on an iPod? Move away from tote bags etc. at conferences and toward cool items people may actually use. Mail it to them so they actually keep it.

## Dystopic Fascination

**What if...** We imagined the field in which we work without our association? Or, the world without associations in general?

**What if...** Associations “jazzed up” their mundane emails with ones written like a dystopic novel? Would more people read it?

**What if...** Zombie themed conference.

**What if...** We created competition among our members/groups? What if we weren’t afraid of competition?

**What if...** We created a game in which a board of directors is overrun by zombies and players have to devise a plan to save the association using only the skills from the CAE domains?

**What if...** We employed role-playing with dystopian obstacle courses? Members can create their own adventures by writing a script to envision the long-term outcomes of strategic planning.

**What if...** We stopped showing only the positive and profitable success stories? What if we painted a more realistic picture of where a profession is changing, how it will remain the same, and why these can be good things?

## Millennial Madness

**What if...** Associations were leading in technology rather than following? Can millennials help?

**What if...** We stopped fixating on [millennials] and just let things happen organically? Curious individuals could monitor their conversations on social media and empower them to be ambassadors for the organization?

**What if...** Our association utilized apps that made the millennials first work experiences easier?

**What if...** We stop generalizing about millennials and opened up new avenues for leadership? What if we opened up room on the board for volunteers under a certain age or with less than 3 years of membership?

**What if...** We tailored membership benefits for millennials?

**What if...** We put our millennials in charge of social media? We could involve them in strategic planning processes so they could have ownership of the plan.

**What if...** We attempted to have millennials unplug from technology for a time period and have them go back to the days of toy machines and typewriters?

**What if...** We dropped the labels altogether? What if we paid less attention to the number of years of [work] experience?

**What if...** What if we stopped trying to create new products and services for millennials and treated them as equals and adults?

**What if...** We created an accountability system within our organizations that requires or encourages millennials, in particular, to review their supervisors?

**What if...** Associations stopped trying to create programs for millennials and instead created platforms for leadership/structure/vision/creation by millennials?

**What if...** We stopped classifying members based on age and started looking at education or years in the industry?

**What if...** We encouraged millennial madness in a way that would capitalize upon relationship building and service? Millennials could scourer member profiles and review websites and online forums to establish an authentic rapport?

## Modular Retail

**What if...** We did a road show of learning sessions across multiple regions at a society or large group office?

**What if...** Organizations raised awareness and promoted local advocacy by bus? CAMFT drove a mobile mental health bus to raise awareness for their field.

**What if...** Organizations prompted or organized role-playing pop-ups that members could use to practice their advocacy talking points?

**What if...** We hosted a virtual tradeshow?

**What if...** We developed a networking lounge on the industry’s advocacy-based resources for particular issues and convened experts on that issue to provide guidance?

**What if...** Organizations and retail behemoths co-branded pop-up shops in the form of cargo containers?

**What if...** We provided day-in-the-life-of opportunities for career changes? These wouldn’t have to focus on getting a job as much as getting information.

**What if...** Associations had strategically-placed pop-up bookstands at their conferences with books related to nearby session topics? (Instead of the typical one large bookstore)

**What if...** Associations had “food trucks?” How could this be different from a booth?

**What if...** Associations embraced the need for “local” created platforms of small, in-person value offerings with actual benefit to geographic chapters and then focus on trending communities for implementation.

**What if...** We ditched the idea of having organized meetings and let members host pop-up educational sessions in and around topics that were most interesting to them at that time and place?

**What if...** Instead of always exhibiting in a traditional 8x8 booth, we had “pop-up shops” in unexpected locales?

### **Imposed Interaction**

**What if...** Members had video chats with association staff or B.O.D. member?

**What if...** We facilitated virtual hangouts with customized invites based on business size, geography, etc.?

**What if...** We assigned a “buddy” for members? They are somehow required to interact throughout the year(s) and can facilitate peer-to-peer mentoring.

**What if...** We sent out a list of hot topics prior to a meeting and scheduled meet-ups?

**What if...** We made people uncomfortable by assigning seats at meetings and conferences?

**What if...** An association incorporated collaboration as a strategic goal? What if an association required all conference proposals to demonstrate a collaboration component—for example, of other governance groups?

**What if...** We created regular conversation hubs? Consider organized group travel to and from conferences, or even inviting members who telecommute to visit your offices.

**What if...** We required new members to join a new member video chat with those in their area?

**What if...** We required members to contribute to an online discussion relevant to their experience/expertise?

**What if...** We assigned groups of members to stations/posts at the ASAE Annual Meeting? (We require board members to interact with members.)

**What if...** the ASAE membership list was cross-referenced with LinkedIn, Twitter, and other social platforms to customize a list for each member or who they know/should meet?

**What if...** Members got to “vote” on what our next product would be?

**What if...** We hosted an open work meeting where members come together and work on specific topics on issues with no facilitation? This could help recreate that open office environment.

**What if...** We eliminated the annual meeting and used those funds to invest in platforms that allowed even more members to connect virtually?

### **Shoptimization**

**What if...** Associations offered daily deals on products and services via an app, mobile website, email etc.? Products and services could be tailored to the individual and relevant to the association.

**What if...** Associations offered special deals or discounts to members who are followers on social media?

**What if...** ASAE utilized push notifications via their conference app to promote discounts on books, other education, and time-sensitive deal? What if ASAE offered this opportunity to sponsors for additional giveaways throughout the show?

**What if...** We helped our members find deals on services they need?

**What if...** We used our data to geo-locate members, gauge proximity to meetings and other member services, distributed polls for feedback, and rewarded members with loyalty programs?

**What if...** Organizations changed their welcome message? “Welcome to the meeting! Grab a Starbucks! Wine on us!”

**What if...** Associations created apps that send daily alerts of new trends, relevant industry/association news, and engagement points?

**What if...** We sold our associations in bite-sized chunks, not just wordy brochures.

**What if...** We customized product offerings based on years in the industry, motivation for joining, etc.?

### **Sustain-chitecture**

**What if...** We collaborated and targeted the greater hospitality industry so our contracts aren't the only ones with sustainability language?

**What if...** Associations could lower their cost through sustainability?

**What if...** We gave X amount of dollars to each staff person and let them design/build their own office space? What would that look like?

**What if...** Our association offered a grant to assist members in going green?

### **Deliberate Vintage**

**What if...** We looked at the average age of our association's members and marketed events or products with that in mind?

**What if...** We harnessed our most tenured members to celebrate the past?

**What if...** We leveraged 'vintage' in our marketing and programming to appeal to members' desire for the past?

**What if...** We explored paradigm shifts from the past and where our industry is going next?

**What if...** We told stories of traditions [to younger generations] using only visuals from the past?

**What if...** In some cases, it's not actually worth looking back?

**What if...** We showed the history of the science in a 'pop-up shop'?

### **Immersive Branding**

**What if...** we had a LEED flagship house to showcase what life is like for those actually living inside of it using our products? Think about that kid who sleeps in the department store window or Big Brother (reality TV) and have them share their experiences via TV confessionals, blogs, etc.

**What if...** We involved our members in brand or logo development?

**What if...** We provided our services where people wouldn't normally expect them in order to expand our reach? Consider how Courtyard by Marriott offers workstations at airports to build awareness that their hotels are where you work while on the road.

**What if...** We gave our members meaningful experiences every time they touched us?

**What if...** We acted as concierges for potential and new members? They 'check-in' with a host, and they're escorted to a pod where a current member is ready to discuss benefits.

**What if...** Just for a while, we focused only on fun? We could have a conference session by the pool or host a property-wide scavenger hunt.

**What if...** We truly put ourselves in the shoes of our attendees at our conferences? And this is not just about thinking, "Where do we need directional signage?"

**What if...** We got our members to talk about their experiences and share them?

**What if...** Association staff lived for their respective brands? A brand manager should be on staff at (more important than products or services) every organization.

**What if...** We focused on the brand and moved away from "the best kept secret in..." approach? What if we strengthened the secret keepers? What if the branding is recognized as amazing because it is exclusive/unique?

### **Wearable Multi-tasking**

**What if...** Members could access all of our products and services from various devices, simultaneously?

**What if...** We featured best practices for how members use the technology?

**What if...** We provided an industry or office-specific Fit Bit device or service to help staff monitor health? What if, while we do work, we perpetually focus on life improvement?

### **Subscription World**

**What if...** Everything we did was subscription-based? Let members pay only for what is most valuable to them. (Do what cable TV will not!)

**What if...** Members could subscribe to industry data metrics/information?

**What if...** We designed new vehicles for pushing content, products, and services, since members will not read our blog?



**What if...** Similar to ASAEs Circle Club membership, we allowed our colleges to select a type of membership which would include a number of programs per year?

**What if...** We produced news shows online?

**What if...** We regularly compiled kits or frequently hosted book clubs around certain topics?

**What if...** Offered a service to link up to the database of dental offices and provide customized advice and insight on how to manage the practice effectively?

**What if...** We made all content compatible for an on-demand subscription?

**What if...** We offered a range of subscriptions that were flexible enough to meet the needs of our diverse member, and not just one-size-fits-all?

**What if...** We posted a daily blog or video to assist with solving common problems?

**What if...** Members subscribed to a single monthly benefit? (Selecting and receiving one new benefit each month)

**What if...** Associations created subscriptions outside of their regular publications? (Think complementary industries)

**What if...** Associations offered a concierge service/ number that members could call? Members could subscribe to this exclusive VIP service.



# Professional Development Arena

## **Scenario #1: The external environment we find ourselves in consists of:**

- Our post-secondary system is suffering from what is becoming increasingly recognized as an unsustainable business model. Student debt levels have already passed the \$1 trillion mark and federal and state grants and subsidies are continuing to be cut. Scarcity is increasing both domestically and globally. Serious questions about the usefulness of the traditional education track are being raised. 72% of education providers believe they are preparing students adequately for the workforce, while fewer than half of students and employers agree.
  - New studies from McKinsey & Company say that globally, we currently have 75,000,000 youth who are unemployed or underemployed. By 2020, we will have 85,000,000 positions that we can't fill because we can't find people with the skills to take them.
  - Coursera, Udacity, and EdX will continue to make significant inroads into virtual learning settings. The day is not far off when members begin to question why they can take a physics course from MIT for free, but have to pay us \$120 for a 90 minute workshop and a lunch.
  - Coursera, Udacity, and EdX are beginning to formalize how students gain actual course credit for completion. In August of 2013 the Georgia Institute of Technology announced they will begin to offer a master's degree in computer science online through Udacity. This master's degree will cost \$6,000 rather than the on-campus cost of \$45,000.
  - Individualized instruction utilizing self-paced programs with both teacher and technological support is beginning to impact the traditional idea of "grades." Already, efforts to quantify student achievement in the K-12 system are underway and the idea of using "certification" instead of "grade level" as the measure of educational attainment is gaining traction. This would build flexibility into the system and allow students to proceed with technology assisted learning as fast as they want to/ are able to.
- The number of homeschooled students has increased from 850,000 in 1999 to 2.4 million in 2011. The trend continues to climb upward. In the next few years we may see as much as 5% of K-12 students being homeschooled. These kids need carefully crafted pathways to access the types of career assistance associations can provide to their members.
  - Coursera has a vision of open access to the highest quality education becoming seen as a fundamental human right. If they succeed, can associations make the case that they can lock education up behind members' only walls anymore?



## Takeaway Page

1. Create a task force within your association to take a serious look at the MOOC movement (massive open online courses) and to begin to evaluate technology platforms that you may be able to use to migrate your content.
2. Conduct an analysis of all skills and specialized knowledge an employee in your industry or profession needs to succeed at their jobs. Catalog whether there are already high-quality open resources you can point members to. Figure out what specialized content you have that can fill in the gaps.
3. Be brutally honest when evaluating your current educational offerings. Many courses are taught by volunteers who may not have the educator skill needed to deliver the highest quality content.
4. Begin to think of your professional development programs on a global scale. What translation services would you need to acquire to accommodate global learners?
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### MORE RESOURCES ON THE REVOLUTION UNDERWAY IN EDUCATION



**Title:** DIYU – Edupunks, Edupreneurs and the Coming Transformation of Higher Education  
**Author:** Anya Kamenetz  
**Blog:** diyubook.com  
TEDTalk



**Title:** The Edupunks' Guide to a DIY Credential  
**Author:** Anya Kamenetz  
**Website:** edupunksguide.org



**Title:** A New Culture of Learning – Cultivating the Imagination for a World of Constant Change  
**Authors:** Douglas Thomas and John Seely Brown  
**Website:** newcultureoflearning.com  
TEDTalk



**Title:** Unlocking the Gates – How and Why Leading Universities are Opening Up Access to Their Courses  
**Author:** Taylor Walsh



**Title:** Rethinking Education in the Age of Technology – The Digital Revolution and Schooling in America  
**Authors:** Allan Collins and Richard Halvorson

# Transparency and Governance Arena

## **Scenario #2: The external environment we find ourselves in consists of:**

- Democratic systems, which associations operate as, become even more transparent than ever.
  - Members are more and more interested in not only having access to and reading bylaws, policies and procedures, and legislative and regulatory items the association is working on - but in weighing in on them and helping create them.
  - Individuals are beginning to yearn for better ways of arguing within their profession or industry over trends, new technological advancements and changes in their operating environments.
  - Members have critical information to share about advancements in their industry and profession and they want to share faster than “journal publications” and “conferences.”
  - New mediums have led to an explosion of information availability but it is getting even faster and denser. Members are continuously surrounded by white noise and are confused over what constitutes “the best, most reliable” sources.
  - Wearable technologies like Google glasses, Smartwatches, etc., give us new opportunities to lay our association over our members actual visual or auditory field on a daily, even hourly basis.
- More often than not, the industries and professions our associations serve are suffering with wicked problems which are defined as social and cultural problems that are difficult to solve because of incomplete, contradictory, and changing requirements.
  - Members are beginning to have more satisfactory experiences in systems that provide tools that support the notion of “cooperation without coordination.”

## **Discuss the association community response to this environment.**



## Takeaway Page

1. Begin to share videos and materials about the changing nature of governance and problem solving techniques to your boards and volunteers.
2. Have a discussion with your boards and volunteers about what democratic processes mean in the association context and how transparency is a good move, but won't be enough in the future. Begin to decide how to position your association to directly engage with stakeholders in your industries and professions on all issues in which ideas about open source might be applicable (bylaws, policies, legislation under consideration, content development, news, problem solving).
3. Create a task force to look at big, intractable, wicked problems that your association has yet to solve. Decide if you can use open source techniques to solve them. Become acquainted with the balance between crowdsourcing that leads to actionable information or crowdsourcing that leads to "groupthink."
4. Appoint a key volunteer leader or staff member to investigate github and learn how it works. Investigate other platforms that might be of use.
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### MORE RESOURCES ON THE IDEA OF GOVERNANCE, CITIZEN ENGAGEMENT AND DEMOCRACY



**Title:** Here Comes Everybody: The Power of Organizing Without Organizations  
**Author:** Clay Shirky  
**TEDTalk by Clay Shirky: Institutions vs Collaboration**  
[http://www.ted.com/talks/clay\\_shirky\\_on\\_institutions\\_versus\\_collaboration.html](http://www.ted.com/talks/clay_shirky_on_institutions_versus_collaboration.html)



**Title:** Democracy in America  
**Author:** Alexis de Tocqueville



**Title:** Healing the Heart of Democracy: The Courage to Create a Politics Worthy of the Human Spirit  
**Authors:** Parker J. Palmer  
**Website:** [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Bq1kPcoo\\_Go](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Bq1kPcoo_Go)



**TEDTalk by Rory Stewart:**  
[http://www.ted.com/talks/rory\\_stewart\\_how\\_to\\_rebuild\\_democracy.html](http://www.ted.com/talks/rory_stewart_how_to_rebuild_democracy.html)  
*"Democracy is not simply a question of structures, it is a state of mind. It is an activity."* Rory Stewart



# Collaborative Consumption Arena

## **Scenario #3: The external environment we find ourselves in consists of:**

- Economic systems become less about the production of new goods and more about the sharing and reuse of already existing goods. Idling resources are horizontally shared from association to association as well as vertically from member to member.
- Members are less interested in “swag and stuff” programs and services and become more interested in experiences.
- Members move from appreciating to expecting the “exceptional.” Room blocks for conferences are no longer viable because people want to stay in cooler, more unique places through services like AirBnb.
- Members are engaging in “collaborative, relationship and values based” business behaviors, not just transactions. This changes our own conversation from “what’s in it for me” back to where we started which was “what’s in it for us.”
- Members need some way to compete against an “Angie’s List” and to create and maintain professional reputation dashboards on the Internet. The “sticker in the window” is not cutting it anymore.
- Associations begin to create systems to rate/calibrate such behaviors as trustworthiness, reliability and performance.

- As lines between “personal” and “professional” continue to blur we begin to create ways for a member’s participation in an association leadership, education, etc., to translate into overall knowledge and trustworthiness in their careers.
- Average number of careers for an individual is now a total of 6. Members want to combine their internet behavior, their career knowledge and their volunteer leadership reputations so their entire reputation holistically follows them from purchase to purchase, job to job as well as association to association.

## **Discuss the association community response to this environment.**



## Takeaway Page

1. Begin to share videos, books and materials about this evolution – social media 2.0.
2. Create a page on your website that lists all kinds of collaborative consumption services that you feel your members might like to learn about.
3. Create a task force to look at the idea of reputation capital. Decide how to help your members learn about and begin to craft their own online identities in terms of building trust in their behaviors and skills and abilities they use on the job.
4. Create a task force to look at the concept of “idling resources.” Are there swaps your members could be making that would reduce their costs and make them more competitive in the marketplace? Is there some way you can help them set those systems up? How about between associations too? Got a booth idling all year?

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### MORE RESOURCES ON COLLABORATIVE CONSUMPTION AND REPUTATION CAPITAL



**Title:** What's Mine is Yours: The Rise of Collaborative Consumption  
**Author:** Rachel Botsman, Roo Rogers  
**TEDTalk from Rachel Botsman:** The Case for Collaborative Consumption  
[http://www.ted.com/talks/rachel\\_botsman\\_the\\_case\\_for\\_collaborative\\_consumption.html](http://www.ted.com/talks/rachel_botsman_the_case_for_collaborative_consumption.html)



**Title:** The Mesh – Why the Future of Business is Sharing  
**Author:** Lisa Gansky  
**TEDTalk from Lisa Gansky:** The Future of Business is the Mesh  
[http://www.ted.com/talks/lisa\\_gansky\\_the\\_future\\_of\\_business\\_is\\_the\\_mesh.html](http://www.ted.com/talks/lisa_gansky_the_future_of_business_is_the_mesh.html)



**Title:** Reputation Capital – Building and Maintaining Trust in the 21st Century  
**Authors:** Joachim Klewes, Robert Wreschnick



**Title:** The New Capitalist Manifesto  
**Author:** Umair Haque  
**TEDTalk from Robin Brush:** Excuse Me, May I Rent Your Car?  
[http://www.ted.com/talks/robin\\_chase\\_excuse\\_me\\_may\\_i\\_rent\\_your\\_car.html](http://www.ted.com/talks/robin_chase_excuse_me_may_i_rent_your_car.html)

**TEDTalk from Alex Steffan:** The Shareable Future of Cities  
[http://www.ted.com/talks/alex\\_steffen.html](http://www.ted.com/talks/alex_steffen.html)



# Membership Engagement Arena

## **Scenario #4: The external environment we find ourselves in consists of:**

- We become flooded with a new generation of members who are “super-empowered, hopeful, individuals.”
- Members want to experience a sense of urgent optimism, a tight social fabric, blissful productivity and epic meaning.
- Members expect their membership experiences to be more personalized and more fun.
- Each member expects to not only be inspired by your association’s mission, but expects to play an ACTIVE role in getting there. However, they want to play the role they most identify with and can customize and create around, not the role you assign to them.
- New member orientation becomes a collaborative process, not an informational one. Members benefit from missions, tasks and rewards as they move farther and farther into the association social system.

- Associations begin developing large scale game scenarios and asking members to solve urgent problems within their professions and industries together in a fun, non-threatening and scenario based environment.
- Members want to do important tasks that are matched to their experience level. But they also want to work at the upper limits of their skills so they can reach breakthrough levels of performance.
- Members desire rewards, immediate feedback and recognition.
- Associations begin to identify.

## **Discuss the association community response to this environment.**



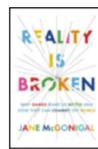
## Takeaway Page

1. Begin to share videos and materials about the real-world, practical implications of gaming and gaming techniques.
2. Create a task force to look at the idea of Gamification and to explore where these techniques can be embedded into your association programs – starting with the member experience and working outwards from there.
3. Think of ways to make your association experience more fun and more engaging. Get beyond the badge!
4. Consider the fact that games are actually hard work and gamers LOVE to work hard. The idea of the “service” model of member as “customer” won’t work forever. Gamers want to be active players and want to do things that are fun and that contribute to the epic story your association is creating.

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### MORE RESOURCES ON THE IDEA OF GOOD GAMES AND GAMIFICATION



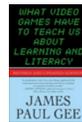
**Title:** Reality is Broken – Why Games Make Us Better and How They Can Change the World

**Author:** Jane McGonigal



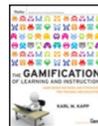
**Title:** Fun, Inc. – Why Gaming Will Dominate the Twenty-First Century

**Author:** Tom Chatfield



**Title:** What Video Games Have to Teach us About Learning and Literacy

**Author:** James Paul Gee



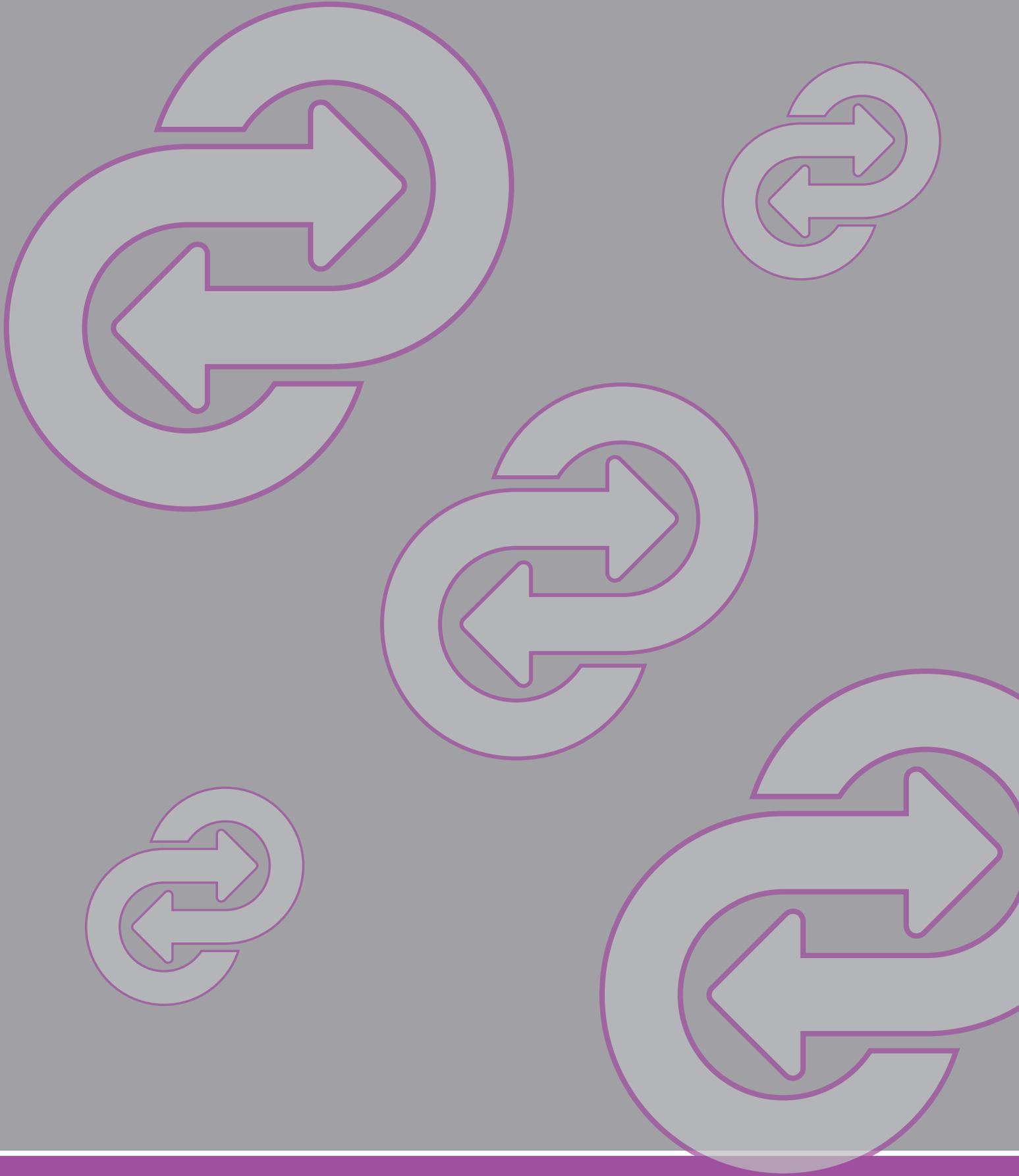
**Title:** The Gamification of Learning and Instruction – Game Based Strategies for Learning and Instruction

**Author:** Karl Kapp

**TEDTalk from Jane McGonigal:** The Game That Can Give You an Extra 10 Years of Life  
[http://www.ted.com/talks/lang/en/jane\\_mcgonigal\\_the\\_game\\_that\\_can\\_give\\_you\\_10\\_extra\\_years\\_of\\_life.html](http://www.ted.com/talks/lang/en/jane_mcgonigal_the_game_that_can_give_you_10_extra_years_of_life.html)

**TEDxTalk from Brenda Brathwaite:** Games for Understanding  
[http://www.ted.com/talks/lang/en/brenda\\_brathwaite\\_gaming\\_for\\_understanding.html](http://www.ted.com/talks/lang/en/brenda_brathwaite_gaming_for_understanding.html)

**TEDTalk from Seth Priebatsch:** The Game Layer on Top of The World  
[http://www.ted.com/talks/lang/en/seth\\_priebatsch\\_the\\_game\\_layer\\_on\\_top\\_of\\_the\\_world.html](http://www.ted.com/talks/lang/en/seth_priebatsch_the_game_layer_on_top_of_the_world.html)



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