



# Starkweather Association Services

Thinking Ahead. Preventing Failures. Protecting Revenue.

## Using Incentives to Turn Participation into Loyalty

For many associations, member engagement can start to feel transactional. If your members only show up once or twice a year, no amount of renewal reminders will fix retention.

A stronger approach is to create reasons for members to participate consistently. When associations offer a thoughtful mix of incentives, such as discounts, recognition, and milestone-based experiences, engagement becomes more personal, more rewarding, and more likely to last.

Done well; incentives help transform membership from a one-time purchase into an ongoing partnership.



### Why member incentives matter

People are more likely to stay involved when they can clearly see the value of showing up. Associations with active engagement strategies see up to **20–30% higher retention rates**.

That value does not always need to be large or expensive. Often, it is the combination of practical rewards and emotional connection that makes the biggest difference. A member who receives a discounted event registration, gets recognized for contributing to the community, or receives a thoughtful anniversary message is being reminded that their participation matters.

That kind of reinforcement helps associations:

- increase repeat event attendance and forum activity



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- strengthen members' sense of belonging
- encourage repeat engagement
- improve renewal rates by reinforcing ongoing value throughout the year

In other words, incentives are not just perks. They are a strategy for building habits, relationships, and loyalty. In working with associations using YourMembership, we consistently see that small, well-timed incentives outperform large, one-time perks.

[Want a quick visual example? Watch our latest OneMinuteYM video to see how your team can use promo codes, featured members, and milestone messages to support member engagement strategy.](#)

## What We Recommend Setting Up in YM

### 1. Offer discounts that make value feel immediate

Discounts are one of the simplest and most effective member incentives because they provide immediate, concrete value.

When members can access special pricing for events, programs, or store products, they see a clear return on their membership. This works especially well when associations use promo codes to create members-only offers tied to specific campaigns, seasonal pushes, or registration deadlines.

A discount can help answer an important question every member asks whether they say it out loud or not: "What do I get for staying involved?"

Examples include:

- reduced pricing for conferences or webinars
- members-only discounts in the online store
- early-bird promo codes for active participants
- special offers tied to renewal, onboarding, or milestone moments

For associations using YourMembership, this can be a practical way to connect engagement activity with visible value, without adding unnecessary complexity for staff. [Get guidance on setting this up in YM.](#)

A practical first step is to choose one upcoming event or product and test a members-only discount. Small changes like this can be enough to make member value more visible without creating a heavy lift for staff.

### 2. Use recognition to encourage the behavior you want more of



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Recognition is powerful because it costs little but means a great deal.


Members want to feel seen and appreciated. Featuring a “Member of the Month,” spotlighting volunteers, or highlighting members who contribute to forums or attend events regularly can create a sense of pride and momentum within the community.

Recognition also signals what your organization values. When members see that participation is noticed, they are more likely to contribute moving forward.

You might recognize members for:

- commenting or posting in forums
- attending events consistently
- volunteering their time
- mentoring peers
- contributing ideas or resources to the community

In YourMembership, featured member tools can help bring that recognition to the front end of the member experience, making appreciation visible rather than implied. [See how Starkweather helps teams move faster in YM.](#)

|   |  |
|---|--|
| <p><b>Featured Members</b></p> <p>Sari Bope</p>  | <p><b>Payment Information</b></p> <p>Total Amount: \$0.00</p> <p>Promo Code: <input type="text" value="FREEREGISTRATION"/> <input type="button" value="Apply"/> Promo Code Applied</p> |
|---|--|

For teams with limited time, recognition can be one of the easiest engagement strategies to start with. It does not require a major system overhaul, just a consistent plan and a simple process for deciding what participation to celebrate.

### 3. Celebrate milestones to build emotional connection

Not every incentive has to be transactional.

Birthday messages, membership anniversary notes, and small milestone rewards help members feel personally connected to your association. These moments create a different kind of value, one rooted in appreciation and belonging.



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That emotional connection matters. Members are more likely to remain loyal to organizations that acknowledge them as people, not just records in a database.

Simple milestone strategies include:

- sending birthday greetings
- recognizing membership anniversaries based on registration date
- pairing milestone messages with a small discount or gift card
- welcoming members into “year 1,” “year 5,” or other key tenure moments

These touches can be automated or standardized over time, which makes them especially appealing for lean teams trying to improve engagement without creating manual work at every step. [Get help making YM support your goals.](#)

This is often where association leaders see the value of having a reliable setup behind the scenes. When member data is clean and processes are manageable, it becomes much easier to deliver these moments consistently.

## **The bigger goal: move from transactions to relationships**

The goal of incentives isn't to give more — it's to make participation matter more.

It is about creating a member experience that feels responsive, rewarding, and intentional. Discounts provide immediate value. Recognition reinforces contribution. Milestone celebrations strengthen emotional connection.

Together, these elements help move the relationship beyond dues and transactions. They make membership feel active, personal, and worth renewing.

For Executive Directors and membership leaders, this matters because engagement and retention are closely connected. Members who participate more often are more likely to see the value of staying. And when your systems support that experience reliably, your staff can spend less time chasing manual processes and more time supporting your organization's goals. Even a modest increase in retention can significantly impact non-dues revenue, event participation, and long-term member lifetime value



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Hi [First Name],

🎉 **\*\*Happy Birthday!\*\*** 🎉

*From all of us at **\*\*Starkweather Association Services\*\***, we hope your day is filled with celebration, appreciation, and maybe even a little time to relax (you've earned it!).*

*As a valued member, you're a big part of what makes our community strong. We're grateful to have you with us and look forward to supporting your continued success in the year ahead.*

*Here's to another year of growth, connection, and achievement.*

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*Warm wishes,  
The Starkweather Association Services Team*

## **Keep the strategy manageable for staff**

This is where many teams get stuck.

The ideas are good, but the challenge is finding the time to set them up correctly in YourMembership, train staff, and make sure the experience works smoothly for members.

That is often the real barrier, not a lack of capability.

Your staff is smart and capable. They just may not have hours to research setup details, test workflows, and troubleshoot configurations while also keeping daily operations moving.

Sometimes the most helpful next step is not a major overhaul. Explore how the right guidance can help your team move forward with confidence, save staff time, and ensure your engagement strategies are fully aligned with your YM system: [Talk through your YM setup with our team.](#)

## **Start small and build from there**

A good member incentive strategy does not need to start big.

Start with one or two incentives that are easy to explain and easy to maintain. For example:

- a members-only promo code for an upcoming event
- a monthly recognition feature for engaged members
- a birthday or anniversary message campaign

Then build from there.

The goal is not to launch everything at once. The goal is to create a reliable member experience that encourages participation and supports retention over time.



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If your team is working on how to set these ideas up in YM, a little support can go a long way. The right help can make it easier to move faster, avoid trial and error, and give staff more confidence in the process.

## **A steady next step**

Your team does not need to figure everything out alone.

If you want a practical way to make YourMembership support your engagement goals, Starkweather's support plans are designed to provide hands-on guidance, quick response times, and personalized help so staff can keep moving without losing time to research and rework.

*Your staff can do this. We help them do it faster!*