



***The Decision to Join:
How Individuals Determine Value
and Why They Choose to Belong***

Executive Summary

Consider this: If you and everyone in your organization comprehended, at a deep level, the influence of demographic, attitudinal, and other factors on an individual's choice to affiliate—or not—you could:

- Improve your association's value proposition.
- Create and execute a more effective strategy.
- Target member and prospect segments, and tailor your offerings, in ways that most appeal to them.

The Decision to Join is intelligence to help you achieve exactly those things. Eighteen co-sponsoring associations opened their member and prospect rolls to survey and analysis, resulting in 16,944 responses. The enormous data pool—a diverse population of people who are, were, or could be but never chose to become members of an association—afforded researchers an unprecedented opportunity to probe a variety of factors that underlie an individual's decision to join *any* association. Hence, the strategic implications are relevant to you.

Perhaps the most telling research finding is this: The individual decision to join does not hinge on a cost-benefit calculation, which conventional wisdom argues. Rather, the choice of affiliating or not reflects an appreciation that goes beyond self-oriented assessment to include an assessment of value generated for a community of interests. Individuals get value and for no additional cost generate value for those who share a common bond. In effect, this realization expands the spectrum of benefits, and everyone offering the decision to join must understand this balance of personal and “good of the order” benefits that fundamentally influence affiliation and participation. The research uncovers several other key insights with significant strategic importance:

- The notion that elected leaders are the unwavering voice of the members may warrant a closer look. Perception of value rises with involvement level to the point where those who govern the association are no longer in sync with the perceptions of the majority who are not involved—an important realization. It's likely useful for leaders to know where they are out of sync with members and by how much.
- Overcoming the disconnection between association leaders' assessment of priorities and performance is a key piece of engaging the young, who are oft-dubbed “difficult to recruit.” Young people rate association offerings such as career information and employment opportunities as important but rank as low associations' performance in servicing those needs. Leaders, the most involved members, rate those same offerings as low in importance and believe performance is on par with importance.

- Viewing needs through the lens of career development is more useful than are generational stereotypes. Consistent with the conclusion of other researchers, the idea that the unique attributes of younger generations spell doom for the future of associations is called into question, with one caveat: The young are dissatisfied with associations' effectiveness in meeting their most important needs. Associations will need to strengthen the services they offer this segment if they intend to offset alternative means of networking and accessing information sources.
- The extent to which ad hoc volunteers are recognized by associations as a distinct segment or cultivated to become more involved warrants serious attention. Enthusiasm takes off with ad hoc involvement in activities such as writing, presenting, and reviewing content when compared to the perception of value by the uninvolved.
- Associations will be wise to consider gender segments in the context of environmental setting, in which differences emerge. For example, women in female-dominant settings have a significantly greater sense of value from their associations than women in more integrated settings. Men, on the other hand, report greater association value when working in integrated rather than male-dominant settings.
- Academics are among the strongest association supporters; they are the least apt to drop their membership, the most apt to volunteer, and far more likely to be promoters of the association. Plus, they're in a unique position to influence entry-level people.
- Employer support of dues, or lack thereof, has enormous implications. First, contrary to conventional wisdom, individuals whose dues are paid by their employers value their membership as much as those people who pay their own way. Second, while employers paying member dues brightens an association's day, the trend is otherwise. Associations may well need to invest in adjusting and communicating their value proposition in ways that resonate with employers.
- Non-United States respondents express more interest in networking and ad hoc volunteering than do their counterparts residing in the United States—raising interesting considerations not only around how easy associations make it for "international" members to participate but also how associations will resolve disconnects between non-United States needs and those of domestic members as membership populations take on a more global flavor.

The Decision to Join segments the data pool by the following factors (each is a chapter), all of which, the research shows, have a bearing on individual motivation to affiliate, or not:

- Generations
- Gender
- Affiliation and involvement
- Employer type and level of support
- World view, or international orientation

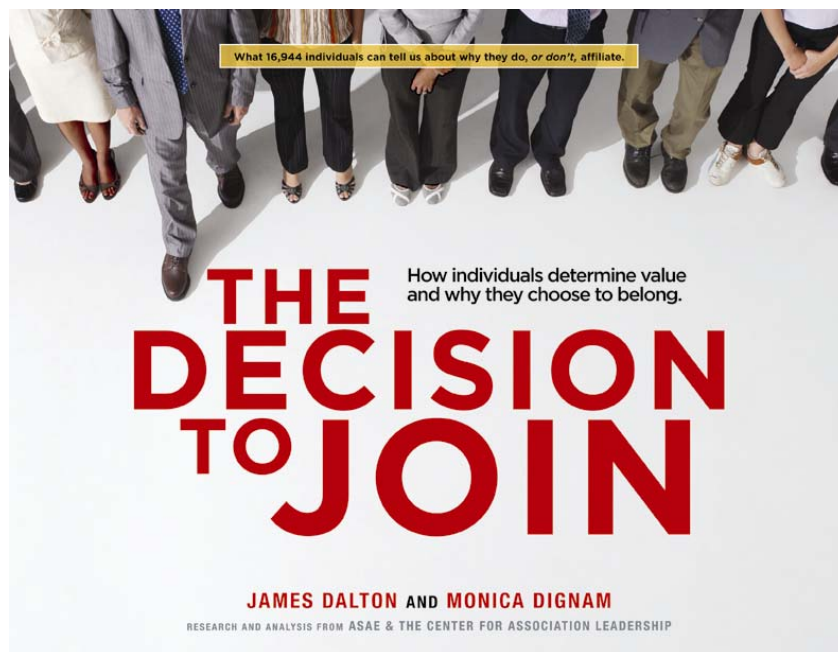
The insights and implications of ***The Decision to Join*** research are relevant to *any* association. In addition to their relationship—or lack thereof—with one or more of the co-sponsoring organizations, the 16,944 individuals who responded to the survey identified more than 5,000 other associations to which they belong. The enormous data pool,

diverse individual membership organizations to which they belong, and statistical confidence and reliability allowed for meaningful generalization across associations. ASAE & The Center for Association Leadership thanks those individuals and the co-sponsoring associations:

- American Chemical Society
- American College of Healthcare Executives
- American Geophysical Union
- American Health Information Management Association
- American Society for Quality
- American Society of Civil Engineers
- American Society of Mechanical Engineers
- The College of American Pathologists
- Credit Union Executives Society
- Emergency Nurses Association
- IEEE
- Institute of Food Technologists
- National Association of Secondary School Principals
- National Athletic Trainers Association
- National Court Reporters Association
- National Society of Accountants
- Project Management Institute
- School Nutrition Association

In addition to the valuable information contained in the narrative and almost 100 data tables, the book includes an appendix that provides step-by-step instructions for conducting the research study on behalf of your own association's members and non-members.

Look for your copy of ***The Decision to Join*** on our online bookstore at www.asaecenter.org/bookstore and at the Annual Meeting & Expo in Chicago August 11-14, 2007.



THE DECISION TO JOIN Benchmarking Opportunities

The Decision to Join—the book—provides valuable insights into why individuals choose to join...or not join... *any* association. But the strategic importance of understanding why some individuals join or don't join *your* association can only be addressed by implementing the study among your constituents. If your organization implements the study itself, you will be able to benchmark your results against those found in all of the associations that have participated. We have developed a suite of resources to help you do this. You can

- Implement the study in-house using the step-by-step instructions we provide as an appendix in the book along with templates available on our website at www.asaecenter.org/decisiontojoin; or
- Provide the materials available at our Web site to the vendor of your choice to implement the study for you; or
- Use our turnkey service to do the study on your behalf. If you use this service, the price of the book and template download will be credited to the fee.

As an incentive for organizations that do the study, either in house or using an outside consultant, to provide their results to ASAE & The Center's database, we will provide ad hoc telephone consultation free of charge. If SPSS is used for analysis, we will also provide our file structure parameters and the syntax files necessary to create new variables and generate cross-tab tables.

This complementary consultation service will only be available to organizations that provide information in the appropriate format and allow their data to be added to our **DECISION TO JOIN** database.

Additional analysis can also be provided on a fee-for-service basis. Fee-for-service options include

- Basic analysis on your data, with your tables returned in an Excel file benchmarked against the original database
- Creation of new variables for generation, world location, member status (more finely tuned than member and nonmember), gender-dominant profession or field, and volunteer level
- Statistical tests of significance by any of the key demographics
- Written narrative reports of findings

If you choose the turnkey service for **THE DECISION TO JOIN**, we will conduct the study on behalf of your organization for a flat fee of \$15,000 through 2008. This service includes the following:

- Two statistically valid surveys among (1) your organization's members and (2) its non-members
- Electronic survey deployment (mail is also available with direct costs additional)
- Two custom questions in each survey in addition to the benchmark question included in the templates
- Custom statistical report benchmarking results for your organization against other organizations in the study
- A database of responses for your organization

Please contact ASAE & The Center's Industry & Market Research Department at 202-626-2744 or evaluations@asaecenter.org to discuss the option that's right for you.