



Survey Results from Membership Metrics and Goals Surveys Data Collected July - August 2020

About the data set

As part of the Handbook effort, Membership Puzzle Project research team set out to benchmark the metrics and goals of member-driven newsrooms around the world.

To create items for the Membership Benchmarks survey, the research team collated the membership metrics we have seen member-driven newsrooms use to track their audience loyalty and membership revenue. To create items for the Membership Goals and Successes survey, we crafted questions that would encourage newsrooms to share their goals and definitions of membership success, and the indicators used to measure them.

We sent the surveys to 46 newsrooms. These newsrooms represent a diverse array of geographies, sizes, coverage types, and business models. To boost the response rate for this first round of data collection, we sent surveys to the member-driven newsrooms featured in case studies in the Handbook, the member-driven newsrooms MPP has worked in the past, and the member-driven newsrooms the research team has worked with in other projects. Newsrooms completed the surveys throughout July and August 2020.

In total, MPP received 34 responses for the Benchmarking Survey and 40 responses to the Defining Membership Goals and Successes Survey. Some of the survey questions were optional, so some newsrooms skipped over certain questions. Below, you'll see we've included the exact number of respondents for each survey question.

This data set contains a wide array of news organizations by type, location, maturity and mission. For example, included in this set are:

- **Coverage type:** The majority of newsrooms in this set (62%) provide some kind of national news, almost half (47.5%) provide local news, and about a third (32.5%) provide regional news. Less common in this set were newsrooms that provided state-wide coverage (27%), global coverage (25%), or topical and single-issue coverage (25%).
- **Staff Size:** The vast majority of newsrooms in this set (32) employed between 0 - 50 full-time employees as of the date of survey completion. 5 newsrooms reported full-time staffs of 51 - 100 FTE, and only 3 reported between 100 - 150 FTE. When MPP asked, of those full time employees, about what percentage of the staff touches membership in some way -- the average percentage was 41% and median 25%, with an upper range of 100% and minimum range of 1%.
- **Location:** The majority of newsrooms in this set (21 newsrooms) are North American-based newsrooms, followed by European-based newsrooms (11 newsrooms),



South American-based newsrooms (4 newsrooms), Asian-based newsrooms (2 newsrooms), and African-based newsrooms (2 newsrooms).

- **Age of newsroom and membership program:** The maturity of the newsrooms in this set varied: 2009 was the most cited year of newsroom founding (with 8 newsrooms), followed by 2018 (4 newsrooms) and 2014 (another 4 newsrooms). Interestingly, close to third of these newsrooms (13 newsrooms) launched membership programs in 2019 -- the most common membership launch year in our set, followed by 2018 (with 8 newsrooms).
- **Corporate structure:** Roughly half of survey respondents (21 newsrooms) are nonprofits, roughly a third (14 newsrooms) are commercial corporations (C or S corp), and roughly a fifth (5 newsrooms) are b-corps.

Therefore, MPP does not believe this set is a representative composite of any particular size or coverage type of newsroom, nor does MPP believe that this set contains enough examples of any business model to be able to definitively compare trends in the data. *Rather, MPP sees this data as a robust snapshot of the range of membership efforts and successes across newsrooms.*

How many individuals contributed between \$1 - \$5,000 to your organization in the last 365 days?

Respondents: 34

Average: 10,223

Median: 2,668

Max: 79,928

Min: 35

How many individuals contributed between \$1 - \$5,000 to your organization in the first year after the launch of your membership program?

Respondents: 31

Average: 3,688

Median: 1,000

Max: 36,000

Min: 0

Over the last 365 days, what is the average amount of a member/donor donation? (for all contributions between \$1 - \$5,000)

Respondents: 25

Average: \$69

Median: \$56

Max: 231

Min: 4



Over the last 365 days, what is your organization's average monthly revenue from contributors (all members or donors who gave between \$1 - \$5,000)?

Respondents: 33

Average: \$59,141

Median: \$15,000

Max: \$423,000

Min: \$750.00

How much revenue did your membership or small-dollar donor program bring in during FY 2019? (In USD\$)

Respondents: 29

Average: \$650,195

Median: \$240,201

Max: 4,400,000

Min: 2,100

How much revenue did your membership or small-dollar program bring in during FY 2020, to date? (In USD\$)

Respondents: 30

Average: \$509,112

Median: \$136,781

Max: \$4,541,190

Min: \$0

What percentage of your newsroom's total revenue pie for FY 2019 was composed of membership?

Respondents: 31

Average: 29%

Median: 19%

Max: 95%

Min: 1%

What percentage of your newsroom's total revenue pie from FY 2020 (to date) is composed of membership or small-dollar revenue?

Respondents: 30

Average: 33%

Median: 25%

Max: 98%

Min: 0%



Over the last 365 days, what is the rolling annual retention of your contributors (members or donors)? (how to calculate: Members active a year ago and still active today / members active a year ago)

Respondents: 17

Average: 69%

Median: 72%

Max: 94%

Min: 34%

Audience Data Snapshot

What is the email list size for your primary email list?

Respondents: 32

Average: 38,126

Median: 22,137

Max: 200,000

Min: 555

What is your primary email list's open rate?

Respondents: 30

Average: 31%

Median: 31%

Max: 65%

Min: 10%

In the last 365 days, how many unique users visit your website monthly, on average?

Respondents: 33

Average: 1,616,804

Median: 476,000

Max: 20,000,000

Min: 20,000

Defining Membership Goals and Success

How do you define and classify members? (check all that apply)

Respondents: 38

1. We classify all financial contributors as "members": 52.63%
2. We distinguish between our "donors" and "members": 42.11%



3. We distinguish between our “subscribers” and “members”: 34.21%
4. We classify all financial contributors as “donors”: 7.89%

Do you have a monetary threshold for membership?

Respondents: 38

1. We classify all financial contributors as “members”: 63.16%
2. We define “members” as those who give monetary support to us in a certain dollar threshold: 36.84%

What is the mission or purpose of your membership program? Please select all that apply.

Respondents: 38

1. Build community: 97.37%
2. Increase revenue: 94.74%
3. Increase engagement with audiences: 86.84%
4. Tie between
 - a. Increase loyalty of readership: 63.16%
 - b. To support our journalism with story ideas or sources from community: 63.16%

Which metrics do you or your newsroom track in order to assess the success of your membership program? (Please select all that apply)

Respondents: 38

1. Total number of active members: 92.11%
2. Revenue earned from members (all donations between \$1 - \$5,000): 92.11%
3. Number of new members acquired per month: 84.21%
4. Email newsletter list size (e.g. the total unique contacts on your newsletter list): 78.95%
5. Email newsletter open rate: 76.32%
6. Monthly web traffic (average monthly uniques): 73.68%
7. Number of new members acquired in the last 365 days: 71.05%
8. Annual retention of members: 71.05%
9. Monthly or annual churn of members : 68.42%
10. Average monthly contribution of members: 55.26%
11. Conversion rate, or the percentage of members acquired via email list: 55.26%
12. Email newsletter click rate: 52.63%
13. Number of event attendees per event / year: 47.37%
14. Percentage or number of members on email newsletter list: 42.11%
15. Number of emails acquired via website: 34.21%
16. Average one-time gift from members: 26.32%
17. Number of events hosted for members: 26.32%
18. Members acquired via event in the last year: 23.68%



- 19. Other (please specify): 23.68%
- 20. Upgrade rates of members, or the percentage change of an individual's financial contribution over time: 21.05%

Which markers, or qualitative indicators, do you notice or track when assessing the success of your membership program? (Please select all that apply)

Respondents: 38

- 1. The encouraging and nice emails and letters you get from your members, or the angry and upset notes you get when someone asks to unsubscribe: 97.37%
- 2. Are competitors doing what you're doing (copying memberful routines): 47.37%
- 3. Are members carrying out calls to actions: 42.11%
- 4. Diversity of your member events: 39.47%
- 5. The number of members who have recruited or referred new members: 36.84%
- 6. Average response time for member question: 21.05%
- 7. Diversity of staff that handles membership: 18.42%
- 8. Staff turnover for folks who handle membership: 10.53%

Other

What tools and software comprise your tech stack? Select all that apply.

Respondents: 38

- 1. Email Service Provider: 100.00%
- 2. Content Management System: 92.11%
- 3. Audience Analytics Tools: 84.21%
- 4. Point of Sale/Payment Processor: 81.58%
- 5. Social Media Management: 76.32%
- 6. Customer Relationship Management Software: 76.32%
- 7. Community Listening and Engagement Tools: 52.63%
- 8. Registration/Paywall Platform : 42.11%