

Dues & Membership

Fundraising for a guild often starts with multiple levels of membership and dues. Dues for each class of membership are a subject of great debate among many guilds. Dues need to be high enough to fund the activities of the organization, but not so high as to discourage membership.

Remember, the more brewers involved in your guild, the stronger the collective voice will be. In a state where most breweries are more or less the same size, a flat rate works and discourages isolating one or two larger brewers. But, in a state where businesses range from small brewpubs to large regional breweries, a sliding scale based on production is often used.

Likewise, associate, retail and enthusiast level dues should be set to encourage participation.

Common Membership Tiers

Core/Voting Members (Brewery)

The Brewers Association bylaws define this class as follows:

[a] Packaging Brewers shall be classified as those professional brewing members that sell 75 percent or more of their product outside of the brewery and are producing six million barrels or less annually.

[b] Taproom Brewers shall be classified as those professional brewing members that sell more than 25 percent of their beer on site, do not operate significant food services, and are producing six million barrels or less annually.

[c] Pub Brewers shall be classified as those professional brewing members that sell more than 25 percent of their beer on site, operate significant food services, and are producing six million barrels or less annually.

Associate/Allied Trade

Beer industry partners (businesses providing goods and services to the brewing industry, wholesalers, retailers, non-voting breweries) who sponsor the guild/guild events in return for exposure, networking, advertising, and increased business relations with breweries. Most generally used bylaws definition: *Tradespeople and suppliers doing business with the brewing industry or any individual, partnership or corporation in an allied industry or endeavor may be admitted as a non-voting Associate member. An Associate will pay minimum dues as set by the Board of Directors. An associate is eligible to be elected to the Board of Directors but may not serve as an officer of the Association.*

Guild benefits of allied trade members:

- A valuable supplier/vendor directory could be crafted with membership information and provided to brewery members as a benefit.



- Breweries could organize co-operative supply purchasing of ingredients, tanks, glass, etc. If a guild wishes to explore such arrangements, obtaining legal advice to avoid possible pitfalls is essential.
- Suppliers could be given the option to pay to present product demonstrations at guild meetings. These funds could be used to put on more professional meetings.

Additional allied trade benefits below. These could also possibly be keyed to the level of sponsorship (financial investment).

- Listing/link on guild website.
- Usage of guild logo for promoting local craft beer.
- Discounts on guild merchandise.
- Opportunity to advertise on guild website.
- Discounted conference registration.
- Complimentary festival tickets, and/or early entry.
- Participation in the process to identify retail accounts receiving complementary festival tickets, where permitted.
- Logo placement on festival programs.
- Brewery hospitality sponsor at guild events.

Enthusiast Members

This membership tier allows craft beer enthusiasts to stay more connected to the developments of the organization. This can also be an excellent source of foundational funds as brewery members can provide benefits to these members.

There are no voting rights for enthusiast members, and they are not eligible to be elected to the board of directors.

Perks for enthusiast members may include:

- T-shirt
- Newsletter
- Pint of beer (caution: some states don't permit this)
- Pint glass
- Early festival entry or VIP hour (it's not recommended to offer festival tickets)
- Discounts at breweries
- VIP tours and tastings
- Addition to a distribution list or forum
- On-line platform for promoting events similar to CraftBeer.com
- Notice of legislative alerts (similar to the [Support Your Local Brewery](#) program).
You can also use this enthusiast member list as a grassroots network for legislative



issues. They are your foot soldiers and will often contact their elected officials if needed.

Example guild enthusiast programs:

- [Illinois Craft Brewers Guild ImBIBE](#)
- [Michigan Brewers Guild Beer Nuts](#)
- [Montana Brewers Guild Brew Crew](#)
- [North Carolina Friends of NC Beer](#)

Other Categories

- Wholesaler/Distributor Partners
- Festival Sponsors
- Retailers
- Homebrew Clubs
- Breweries In-planning

Membership is the Foundation

As already noted, members are the heart and purpose of the organization, the reason the guild exists.

While maintaining current members is important, organizations cannot retain their way to growth. Guilds must strive to keep the members they have while also attracting new members. Association members will forever come and go, and there will always be non-joiners, but as members are the primary customer of the guild, member recruitment is the never-ending project for brewers guild leadership.

Ideas to keep and increase membership:

- Conduct a listening tour and survey. Identify member needs and offer the resources or solutions in the precise way they are needed. Survey, develop new resources, evaluate these resources for value, repeat.
- Increase interactions. The more personal and frequent interactions a prospective or current member receives, the more likely they are to feel served. Deepen their involvement by empowering engagement at the committee and board levels.
- Give the marketing of guild membership a fair shake. Track efforts by total response. Sunset programs that don't work and build those that do.
- Reevaluate your dues.



- The value of a dollar decreases every year, so freezing dues slowly but inexorably erodes the financial position of a guild.
 - It may be time to increase or decrease dues. Depending on structure and roll out, either could increase the bottom line, through additional dues, or additional joiners. A more complex structure change from flat rate to per barrel may offer a more level playing field for dues costs while increasing the total sum.
 - Capture new dues with new membership categories within or outside of the voting tier.
 - Consider monthly or quarterly auto-debit payment plans.
 - Ensure the smallest member businesses have an attainable (read: affordable) opportunity to be involved from the very start. They may grow and become more substantial contributors to the guild through non-dues means (like hosting fundraiser events or brewing beers for the guild's benefit).
 - Add an additional donation option to the various tiers of dues payments already included with the transaction, and then offer an opt-out option for the donation. Directly asking for donations has proven effective for guilds. If the transaction is packaged up neatly, people appreciate the opportunity of simplicity and often won't opt out.
- Recruit active members and the guild board as ambassadors to campaign for guild membership. Make it easy by offering talking points or an email to forward to prospective members (these non-members are, after all, their peers and colleagues within the industry).
 - Enhance the member experience through modernizing communication, service delivery, and program offerings. Offer automatic membership renewal. Make joining the guild, conferences or events frictionless transactions – people want self-service check out. If the guild does not take advantage of technology trends like frictionless transactions, it's going to be increasingly difficult to compete.
 - Improve and increase networking opportunities and offerings for professional development. Many guilds offer regional and monthly gatherings, annual conferences, educational seminars at guild meetings and mentor programs.
 - Promote members individually through recognition in publications or events.
 - Incentivize membership. Offer member discounts for conference registration, make fest booth participation exclusive to members, restrict online resources, member forum, email distribution list, and valuable content to members-only. Some guilds offer a discount to current members who recruit new members.



Generally, the larger the brewers guild, member base, and operating budget, the more time can be dedicated to non-dues revenue sources, and the lower the reliance on membership dues. There's always time and resources necessary for implementation of any program, and it is often more than expected – but the ROI can yield a higher than expected return.

Why Invest in the State Guild?

Why do breweries join their state's brewers guild? The motives behind investing in guild membership transcend just supporting the cause these days. With an increasingly challenging market for selling craft beer, brewers join their guilds to change laws, defend against legal and regulatory threats, network, gain professional experience, and increase business exposure – these motives have become increasingly more important. And all these reasons offer opportunities for non-dues revenue development.

Expanding the outreach of fundraising programs outside traditional sources (dues, conferences, festivals) has the potential to drive revenue far beyond the dues and beer donations small business owners can afford out of their own bottom line.