



How Associations
Can Leverage
Travel Benefits
to Grow
Membership
and Drive
Revenue

*Enhance Membership
Value Without Sacrificing
Financial Viability*





1,828,187

That is how many associations were recognized throughout the U.S. in 2021 alone.¹

Over the past decade, associations have surpassed various business models to become one of the most common membership-based organizations in the country. More than 81,000 new professional societies, trade groups, and business leagues were included in the latest Internal Revenue Service (IRS) Data Book,² yet they perpetuate the same question as the associations that came before them.

How can associations enhance membership value but still ensure financial viability?

Despite years of unconstrained growth, many of today's associations still struggle to balance the obligation to drive value for current and potential members with the need to secure reliable revenue streams. To help deliver on their shared mission and contribute to members' goals, associations must enhance the desirability and profitability of their membership program.





Enter a travel benefits rewards program with strategic and operational partnerships.

A travel benefits rewards program, also referred to as an association travel club, is a recruitment and retention initiative to provide members with branded travel perks. A travel club enables members to browse and book exclusive deals and travel experiences through a membership organization's website, similar to what they could expect from an online travel agency (OTA).

Associations with a travel club create an additional touchpoint for member-association interaction that enhances membership engagement and elevates the membership experience. Equal parts practical and profitable, a travel-based loyalty program offers professional and trade associations a separate channel to ramp up revenue, retention, and recruitment significantly.

Explore how associations can leverage travel benefits to solve decades-long challenges.



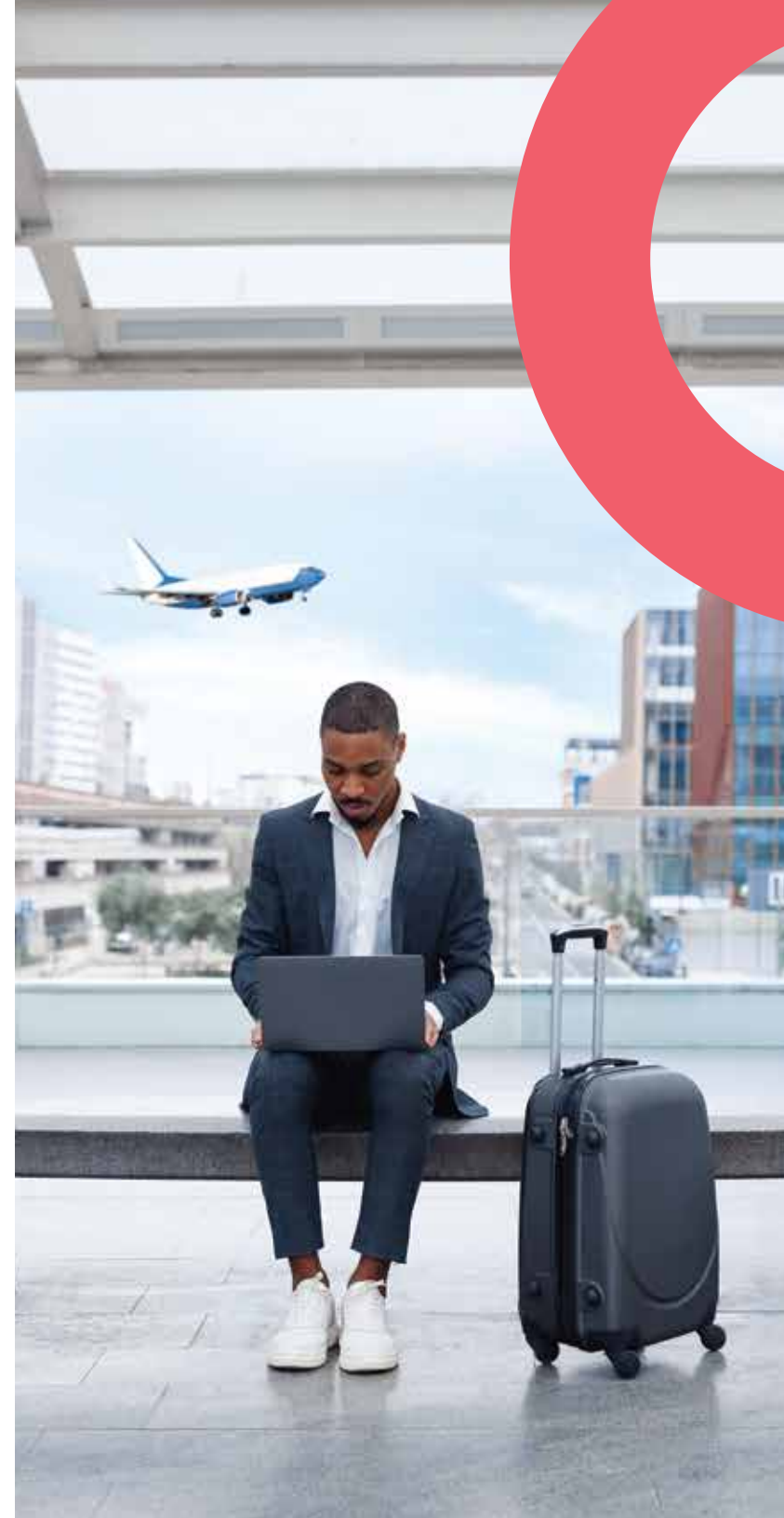


Advantages of Rewards and Loyalty Programs

Membership organizations like trade associations are no strangers to rewards programs. Many associations offer members various perks beyond networking and professional development opportunities, such as promotional codes for partner services or vouchers for airport lounge access. A dedicated travel rewards loyalty program takes these perks to an entirely new level for a broader business strategy that favors an association and its members.

How a Travel Club Benefits Associations

A travel club incurs several benefits for an association, the primary being a higher value proposition for current and potential members. Put simply, Americans prefer to travel, regardless of occupation or industry. Nearly 60% of Americans have taken at least a week's vacation to a destination away from home,³ and 80% plan to travel more in the coming months than they have in the past year.⁴





Advantages of Rewards and Loyalty Programs

Adding full travel benefits, as opposed to one-off perks, drives a higher perceived value for association membership, and higher engagement comes with higher value. If an association's travel club can effectively meet its members' travel needs, it can also encourage members to continue to engage with that association instead of shopping elsewhere for travel.

This additional touchpoint for member-association interaction enhances a member's relationship with the organization, which can translate to sustained dues-paying and higher retention rates over time. The higher perceived value of travel benefits is a cornerstone for membership recruitment initiatives that can attract new audiences to a professional association.





Why Members Prefer a Travel Loyalty Program

At a time when the average consumer belongs to more than 16 loyalty programs at once,⁵ it is not a question of whether members would prefer loyalty rewards but rather what kind of perks would best incentivize them. A survey conducted in early 2022 of 2,150 U.S. consumers who are loyalty program members indicates that travel benefits are the perk that continues to reign supreme.⁶

Nearly half of loyalty program members capitalize on travel benefits to subsidize travel costs or access exclusive opportunities.⁷ Travel benefits for professional and trade associations captivate members with reward options that take them further than ever before. 69% of loyalty program members are already planning a trip this year, and 24% have already booked one.⁸

A travel club enables association members to seamlessly navigate between their association's resources and below-market pricing on members-only travel options. Where travel could apply to personal trips with family or friends, it can also be a bonus incentive to attend conferences, workshops, and other industry-related events that ultimately drive association activity.





Travel Clubs at Work in Adjacent Industries

With more than 90% of organizations employing some type of customer loyalty program, it is not difficult to see travel clubs at work across adjacent industries.⁹ Look at American Express Travel Cards, especially the Business Platinum Card, to witness travel perks. One of the most popular options for business travelers, the Business Platinum Card offers cardholders:¹⁰

- Up to \$100 credit toward the Global Entry or TSA PreCheck application fee.
- Access to The International Airline Program and Cruise Privileges Program.
- Access to The Global Lounge Collection in more than 1,400 airports.
- Access to The Hotel Collection and Fine Hotels + Resorts program.
- Eligibility for Gold status at Marriott and Hilton hotels.
- Access to Car Rental Privileges (Avis, Hertz, National).





Types of Travel Benefits for Associations

When membership activity dwindles (and budgeting for retention and recruitment decreases in tandem), associations can leverage travel benefits to drive engagement and revenue. Several types of benefits are included in a standard association travel club, from rewards like free flights and seat upgrades to perks like exclusive vacation packages and below-market pricing on cruises.

1. Travel Discounts
2. Travel Insurance
3. Access to Exclusive Experiences
4. Points-Based Rewards
5. Co-Branded Credit Cards





Travel Discounts

Among professional and trade associations, travel discounts are the most popular loyalty rewards, partly due to strategic partnerships between associations and travel providers. Travel discounts provide association members with promotional codes, complimentary vouchers, and other types of reduced pricing on travel.

Travel Insurance

Generally, travel insurance covers financial losses (and sometimes compensation) due to trip cancellations, baggage delays, and rental car issues. With consumer intent to purchase travel insurance leaping from 19% in 2019 to 43% in 2022,¹¹ and more than one-third of consumers accessing membership-based insurance perks,¹² travel insurance is a hot commodity for associations.

Access to Exclusive Experiences

Access to exclusive experiences through a membership association often materializes as access to an airport lounge. However, a robust travel loyalty program can reward members with more than just a complimentary drink before take-off. With strategic partnerships, associations can offer exclusive perks like an add-on stay at a luxury villa or first dibs on an upcoming concert series.





Points-Based Rewards

In a points-based system, members must take certain actions to earn points that can be applied to redeem travel rewards or reduce travel costs. Points-based association systems require members to donate, participate in surveys, or recommend a friend to earn points. A points-based system is usually organized into tiers that offer members higher value rewards at higher tiers to encourage member participation.

Co-Branded Credit Cards

Co-branded credit cards are a partnership between a company (like an airline) and a financial institution, such as the Delta SkyMiles® Platinum American Express Card, in which cardholders can earn company rewards each time they use the card. At a time when 50% of consumers find earning rewards on purchases to be extremely important,¹³ co-branded credit cards drive a higher value for association memberships.



How to Implement Travel Benefits in a Membership Program

A highly effective association travel club will go beyond traditional offerings, like a stint in the airport lounge, with exclusive and flexible travel benefits its members cannot find elsewhere. Think big: like the ability to package a cruise of their choice with an add-on excursion package or the power to search and secure the best airfare prices directly through an association's website.

However, before you can craft a travel-focused loyalty program for a professional or trade association, it is crucial to consider the ultimate needs of your target market, identify relevant travel perks, and select opportunistic partners for optimal rewards. Consider the essential steps for implementing successful travel benefits to elevate your membership association.





Identifying the Travel Needs of Your Target Market

Travel has a universal target market. Every age group, from Baby Boomers and Generation X to Millennials and Generation Z, has leveraged travel rewards to upgrade or save on a trip. Where Millennials are more likely to use a loyalty status to upgrade or access other perks while traveling, Gen Z travelers are likely to use theirs to book an exclusive members-only activity.¹⁴

However, while travel benefits may have an all-inclusive audience, your association probably does not. More likely, your professional or trade association centers around a particular industry, niche, or society that attracts a certain target market. Therefore, the foundation of your travel benefits membership program must align with your target market and their individual travel needs.

To identify the travel needs of your target market, assess the various member personas your association has created. Consider multiple demographics — including age, average household size, and spending habits — to reveal the travel preferences of your members. It may also be helpful to issue a travel-focused survey to members to gain first-hand insight into their current needs.





Select Travel Benefits and Strategic Partners

With a better understanding of your target market, you can begin to determine relevant travel benefits and strategic and operational partnerships to fuel your travel club. Starting with the results of your market research, designate high-value travel perks. Choosing the right travel benefits is crucial, attracting new members and motivating existing ones.

To help guide your selection of various travel benefits for your association, consider which partnerships could make your travel club possible. For instance, if your target market frequently travels to popular cities for conferences, you may want to partner with local hotel groups or restaurant chains to create high-value, highly relevant travel benefits for your association.

As you contemplate travel benefits, remember that associations have something most for-profit companies and service providers do not: they are closed user groups (CUGs). Because associations have limited members at any given time, travel providers can offer private rates at a significant discount. Due to this, cruise lines, airlines, and hotel groups have become prime strategic partners.

However, where travel providers can offer below-market rates, they are more stringent with their partner organizations — meaning local associations may struggle to barter a profitable partnership. In these cases, it may be more strategic to partner with a travel loyalty company that offers a white-label travel inventory and technology solution to integrate with your existing website.



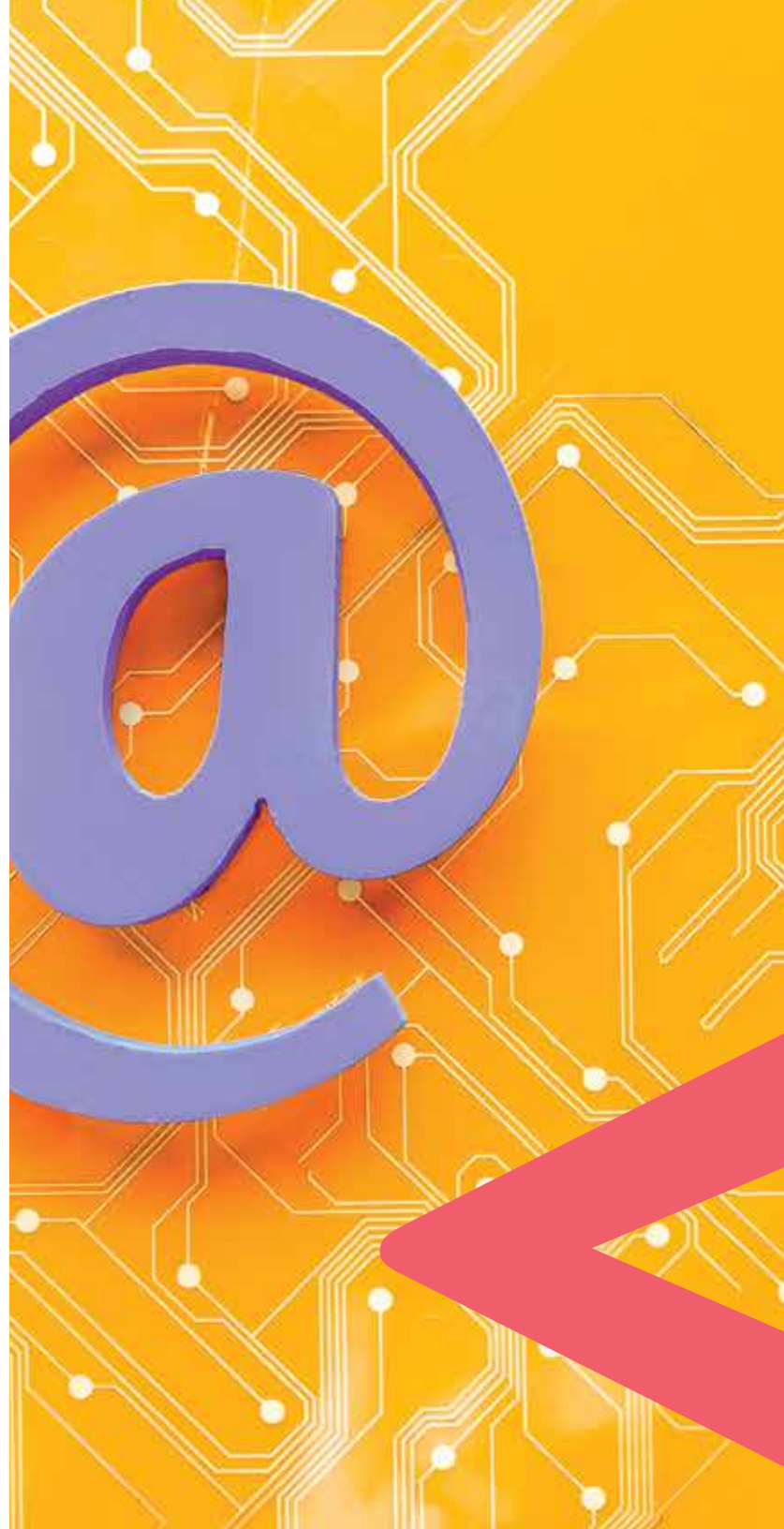
Communicate Travel Benefits to Members

Once you lay the groundwork for your association's loyalty program, it is time to communicate its value to members. Historically, barriers to member communication posed an issue when trying to sell new and current members on a rewards program. Fortunately, the rise of an omnichannel communication network has enabled associations to engage with members more effectively.

An omnichannel communication network for an association may encompass:

- **Websites**, such as your primary association site
- **Applications**, such as a members-only association app
- **Social media networks**, such as Facebook and LinkedIn
- **Email marketing**, such as periodic members-only newsletters
- **Offline channels**, such as printed brochures at association events

It is vital to spread the word about your travel benefits to reap the increase in revenue, recruitment, and retention levels. If current members are not aware of your benefits, they will not use them, nor will they share them with acquaintances in your target market. Adequate promotion will also ensure that news of your travel benefits reaches potential members to entice them to join.



Manage and Monitor the Loyalty Program

While a travel-focused rewards program is a worthwhile selling point for an association, simply operating a program is not enough to drive a noticeable shift in membership rates. A recent McKinsey study revealed that two-thirds of loyalty programs fail to deliver on consumer expectations,¹⁵ which has led consumers to use less than half of their memberships actively.¹⁶

Implement benchmarks for desired program performance instead of creating a loyalty program and trusting it will generate revenue and drive membership rates. Track and measure the success of the program over time. Monitor various elements like program participation rates, the types and frequency of rewards redeemed, and results of satisfaction surveys to gauge program success.

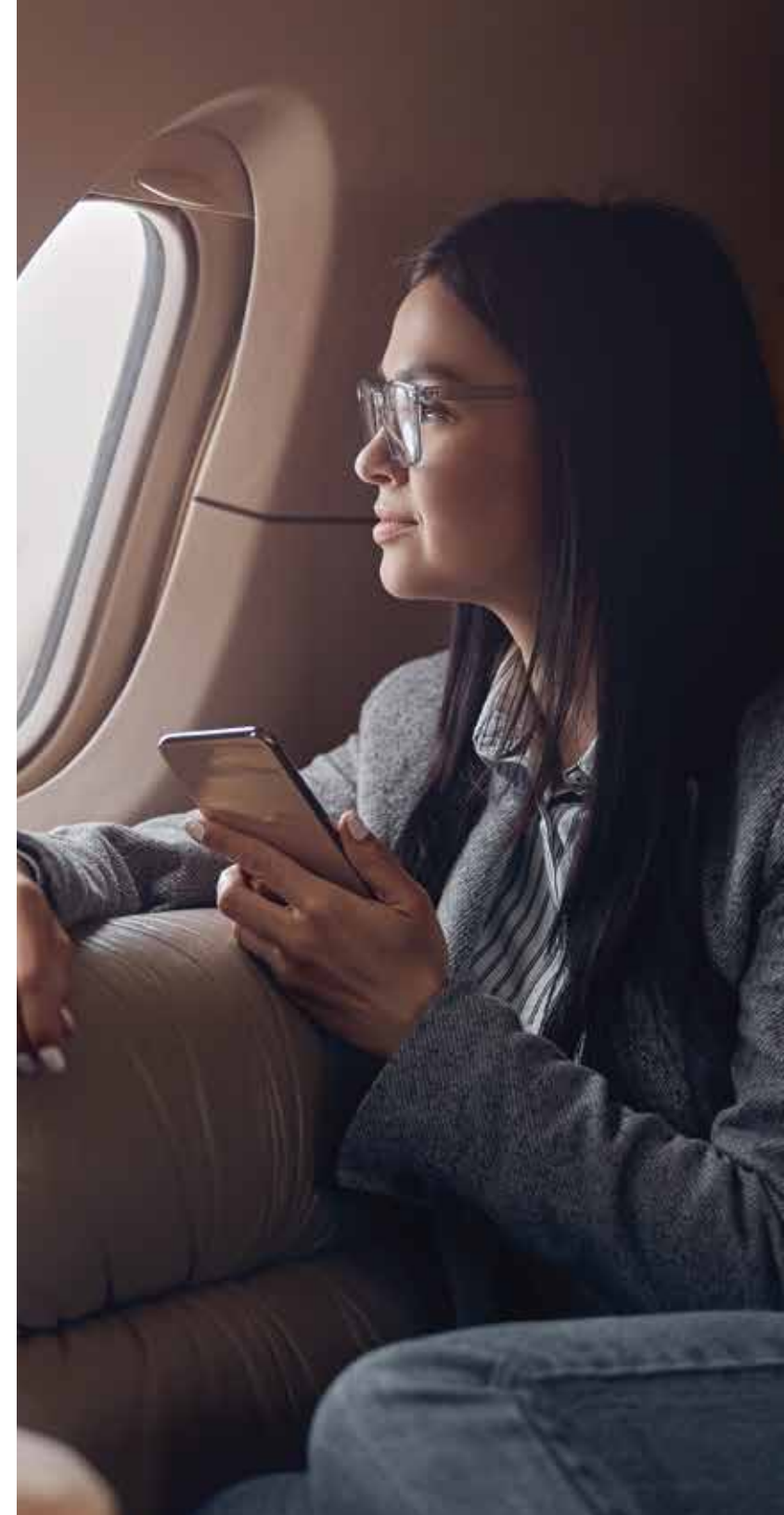




Reinforce Loyalty and Incentivize New Memberships

To make an association more desirable to members and profitable to association leaders, continuously reinforcing loyalty and incentivizing new memberships through your travel benefits is critical. Your travel rewards options can surprise and delight members only if you cater to their needs. So, be sure to evaluate the success of the program constantly.

Based on the data collected while tracking relevant metrics and collecting member feedback, periodically adjust your association's rewards program as needed. Adjustments may involve tweaking specific travel benefits or shifting eligibility criteria, such as the number of points necessary for an upgrade. By continuously refining the program for your members' tastes, you can ensure it remains of high value to your association.





Case Study: Noted Success of a Travel Rewards Program

With hundreds of travel rewards programs available today, the success of travel benefits is hard to ignore. Most recently, a major international airline encountered the challenge of steep business downturns in the face of the pandemic.¹⁷ It decided it required a business strategy that was more stable and predictable, so it expanded its frequent flyer program to a broader rewards system.

In this case study, the key success factor was implementing a points-based system that members could use in different categories, such as travel, financial services, and hospitality. The loyalty program rewarded nearly 12 million members with loyalty points. As a result, the airline's loyalty points became the third-most circulated 'currency' in the company's home country — and the loyalty program now drives nearly a quarter of the airline's total operating profits.¹⁸

Another major success factor in this case study was the ability to keep frequent flyers logged in to the airline's primary membership database as they continued to move throughout the rewards program. Like a white-label travel inventory and technology solution that can integrate with your current website, this approach helps streamline and elevate the membership experience.





Drive Desirability and Profitability with Travel Benefits

For American associations, travel benefits remain among the most reliable and relevant loyalty perks. A robust travel rewards loyalty program helps professional and trade associations dramatically enhance membership value and encourage long-term member engagement that can increase revenue and drive retention and recruitment.

Whether you want to make your association more appealing to industry leaders or provide members with enhanced perks, travel benefits can help keep membership activity strong. Give your members reasons to stay engaged with your association with a turn-key, white-label rewards platform that can easily integrate with your existing membership benefits or association website.

Elevate your association with arrivia, the most comprehensive travel rewards provider with unrivaled travel incentives for members and unparalleled ease of use for associations. As the number of functional associations grows, end long-standing revenue and recruitment challenges once and for all with arrivia.

[Visit our website to connect with a representative and request a demo.](#)





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