

<https://associationsnow.com/2019/12/daily-buzz-dont-ask-members-what-they-want-ask-this-instead/>

## DAILY BUZZ: DON'T ASK MEMBERS WHAT THEY WANT. ASK THIS INSTEAD.

For real innovation, associations need to foresee members' biggest goals and problems. Also: how "low-impact" meeting menus contribute to a greener world.

What do your members want? You could ask them, sure—but real innovation comes from solving problems members don't realize exist yet.

"We didn't all know we wanted to be able to carry thousands of songs around in our pockets until [Apple] showed us the iPod," Elizabeth Weaver Engel, CEO of Spark Consulting, said [in an interview with Association Success](#). "Before that, we all thought that our Walkman and our Discman was awesome and the end-all, be-all of audio technology."

When associations ask what members want, it puts the onus on members to solve problems, Engel argues. Instead, asking questions such as, "What are your most important goals in your profession or industry that you're having trouble achieving? And/or what are the problems you're having on a day-to-day process that you can't seem to solve?" creates an opportunity for associations to provide more value.

"It's incumbent on the association to look at that information and say, OK, how do we solve these problems? How do we help them achieve these goals?" Engel said. "Stage one is figuring out what's really going on with people. Stage two is looking at, OK, are we actually helping them achieve those goals and solve those problems?"

### MEETING MENUS' ENVIRONMENTAL PAYOFF

A new report compares the environmental footprint of 19 common catering options. The numbers may surprise you.

**With attendees pushing for greener meetings**, event planners need to get savvy about sustainable conference choices. One area to consider: menus.

According to the "[Catering to the Climate](#)" survey from the Center for Biological Diversity, replacing conventional menu options with "low-impact" alternatives at events with 500 attendees can spare as much as five acres of habitat from animal agriculture, reduce greenhouse gas emissions equivalent to driving a car for 22,000 miles, and prevent massive amounts of manure pollution and water use.