



MEMBERSHIP, GROWTH & DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION

CRM and Data Quality: Your Membership Database Is Quietly Decaying

Member records go out of date every year. A one-off cleanup fixes the symptom, not the process

Your membership database is decaying right now, quietly, regardless of how clean it looked the last time anyone actually checked. Contact and member records erode steadily without active maintenance, as people change jobs, move, update their preferred contact details, or simply drift away from engagement without formally leaving. Left unaddressed, this compounds into a serious governance problem, not just an administrative inconvenience.

Which rules apply to your association?

The law depends on how your association is set up. A **company limited by guarantee** follows the Corporations Act 2001 (Cth) and its constitution. An **incorporated association** follows its state or territory associations Act and its rules. A **registered charity** also follows the ACNC Act and the ACNC Governance Standards, and some Corporations Act rules are replaced for charities that are companies. Check your own governing documents, and get advice before decisions with legal consequences.

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The Compounding Problem Most Boards Never See Coming

Data decay does not happen once. It compounds continuously. Without regular maintenance, errors accumulate year after year, so an unmaintained database becomes steadily less reliable. For an association, this is not an abstract statistic. It is the accuracy of your register of members, which your governing legislation requires you to keep (the Corporations Act for a company limited by guarantee, your state or territory Act for an incorporated association), and, if your association is covered by the Privacy Act, part of your obligation under APP 10 to take reasonable steps to keep personal information accurate, up to date and complete. It is the accuracy of your voting roll, connecting directly to the e-voting and digital AGM discipline discussed earlier in this quarter, the reliability of your renewal targeting, and the basic question of whether a member communication about a governance decision actually reaches the people entitled to weigh in on it.

Why A One-Off Cleanup Never Actually Solves This

A thorough one-time data cleanup project produces a clean database only for a short time, since the cleanup addresses a symptom rather than the underlying process that keeps generating bad data. Data quality governance requires an ongoing system, not a periodic emergency project undertaken whenever the database becomes obviously unreliable. A quarterly review is a sensible starting point for most associations; adjust it to your data volume and risk, since waiting much longer turns routine maintenance into a full remediation exercise. If data quality is treated as everyone's responsibility, it quietly becomes no one's. A membership database without a clearly assigned owner and a standing review cadence does not stay clean by accident, no matter how capable the staff maintaining it happen to be.

The AI Connection This Series Has Already Flagged

This connects directly to the AI governance discussion earlier in this series. An association excited to deploy AI-powered member insights, personalised engagement, or predictive renewal modelling on top of a decayed membership database is not solving its data problem with better technology. It is automating the consequences of that problem at considerably greater speed and scale. AI systems tend to amplify whatever data quality already exists, good or bad, and a board evaluating any AI-enabled membership tool should ask about the underlying data quality first, not the AI capability itself.

- Assign a named owner for membership data quality, connecting to the delegation of authority discipline discussed earlier in this series, rather than leaving the responsibility diffused across whoever happens to touch the database.
- Build a standing quarterly review and verification cadence into the association's operating calendar, treating this as routine maintenance rather than an occasional emergency project.
- Validate data at the point of entry, standardised fields, format checks, and required verification steps, since preventing bad data from entering the system costs considerably less than correcting it after the fact.
- Confirm your membership data's accuracy specifically before relying on it for AGM voting rolls or any AI-enabled membership tool, treating both as high-stakes uses that data decay directly undermines.
- Review data governance practices whenever a CRM migration or system change is planned, since migrations are a common source of duplicate records and structural data problems that persist long after the migration itself is complete.

A membership database is not a static asset an association builds once and simply relies on indefinitely. It is a living system that decays without active governance, and the associations that treat data quality as an ongoing discipline rather than an occasional cleanup project are the ones whose membership decisions, from voting to renewal to AI-enabled engagement, actually rest on something trustworthy.

This is one of the practical governance topics built into our Association CEO course, alongside the papers, tools and frameworks that turn the principle into your board's actual practice. [Explore the course](#)

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BOARDROOM ACTION WORKSHEET

CRM and Data Quality: Your Membership Database Is Quietly Decaying

Turn the resource into evidence, a decision and an accountable next step. Keep the completed record in your association's approved board records system.

1 What is the issue or decision?

State the governance question in one clear sentence.

2 What evidence do we already have?

Record the facts, source documents and stakeholder evidence available now.

3 What evidence is still needed?

Identify the legal, regulatory, financial, member or operational information still required.

4 What is the agreed next action?

Capture the owner, timeframe and how the matter will return to the board.

Action owner	Review date	Board decision or resolution

General education, not legal, financial, tax, clinical or governance advice. Confirm specifics at the relevant primary source or with your own qualified adviser. Nexus Leadership is operated by Lipstick Consulting Pty Ltd · ABN 15 619 120 482.

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