

Member Communication Experience

Fellows' Perspective: 50 Years of Construction Management and Project Delivery Development

Part 6 – The Growth of CMAA Chapters

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In our [Fellows Perspective series](#), we have examined the evolution of project delivery methods and the development of CMAA over the past five decades, including the establishment of 10 chapters. This edition further explores how these chapters implemented their initial programs to provide value to their members and facilitate the growth of their respective organizations.

CMAA Chapter Programs: Building Membership Through Events

In the early days, CMAA Chapters learned that the best way to build a strong community was to bring diverse members of the construction management community together. Programs became the heart of that effort – ways to share ideas, meet owners, and connect across the growing profession. What started as simple gatherings soon turned into signature events that defined each chapter's identity and helped CMAA grow nationwide.

WHAT WERE SOME OF THE PROGRAMS THE CHAPTERS PROVIDED?

Chapters quickly discovered a simple truth: nothing drew a crowd like hearing directly from owners. Whether it was the Central Artery in New England, highway expansions in Texas,

or large capital programs in New York, members wanted to see the big projects and meet the decision makers behind them. The National Capital brought together owners to talk about their biggest projects and exchange insights from their experiences. Chicago's early experiments with technical training reminded leaders that content mattered, and that drew attendees who came for practical insights and networking with their fellow peers, not lectures. Across the country, chapters refined their approach: steakhouse dinners in Metro NY/NJ, behind-the-scenes tours in the Mid-Atlantic, and lively owner forums in the South Atlantic all blended substance with connection.

As chapters matured, they layered in new traditions – scholarship dinners in Northern California, student chapters in Texas, professional development courses in San Antonio and Southern California. These efforts not only funded the future but also elevated CMAA from a social network to a recognized voice of industry leadership. The pattern was clear: when programming combined owners, projects, and people, chapters thrived. When they stayed adaptable – trying new formats, securing the right speakers, and making room for the next generation, their gatherings became more than meetings; they became the foundation for CMAA's growth and credibility nationwide as evidenced by our thriving membership and record-breaking attendance at our annual fall conferences.

WHICH PROGRAMS HAD THE MOST ATTENDEES, AND WHICH ONES HAD THE LEAST?

In chapter after chapter, one truth emerged early on: when the owners came, the members followed. National Capital leveraged its proximity to government agencies and major property owners, arranging exclusive site tours of sports venues. Joe McAtee and Michael Griffin in the Mid-Atlantic saw attendance soar whenever public sector owners took the stage, while Henry Gomez in the South Atlantic recalled the enduring success of the Owners' Roundtable. Stacey Chapman remembered how a single program — How to Win Work with the State of Georgia — drew one of the region's largest crowds, thanks to the presence of a prominent state leader. In Northern California, Agnes Weber pointed to the scholarship dinners as the highlight of the year, while Robert Flory remembered the breakthrough moment in San Francisco when more than a dozen public owners set up booths for face-to-face networking. In San Antonio, the South-Central Owners Forum brought over 400 participants together under the leadership of local champions, while in Southern California, the arrival of a dedicated Program Director made "Owners Night" one of the chapter's signature traditions.



Signature events — awards galas, scholarship dinners, and charity fundraisers — soon became traditions that gave each chapter its identity, bringing together industry leaders in settings that mixed recognition with fellowship. The Southern California Chapter launched the first Annual Awards Gala in 1993, an event that has continually driven fundraising and set the stage for decades of strategic growth. Today the Gala generates over \$100,000 annually in scholarships for deserving

students. Similar events developed across the country and allowed for network opportunities to thrive, especially when paired with programs that provided practical insights into upcoming work or agency priorities. Yet not every effort succeeded. Highly technical or narrow educational programs often struggled to find an audience, and even the best ideas could falter when faced with bad weather, traffic, or competing events. Still, across the regions, the common lesson held steady: chapters flourished when they combined access to owners, meaningful recognition, and a sense of community that made every gathering more than just another meeting.

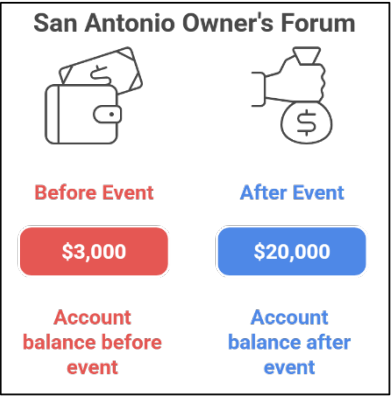
WHICH PROGRAMS WERE MOST BENEFICIAL TO MEMBERSHIP?

Whether it was a commissioner in New York speaking candidly about challenges in the field, public-sector directors in New England sharing lessons from their projects, or the City of San Antonio opening its convention hall for a landmark Owners' Forum, owner participation gave programs both credibility and magnetism. When owners spoke, contractors, designers, students, and construction managers filled the room.

Chapters also tackled the issues of the day that shaped the industry — labor shortages, claims, sustainability, inclusion, even organized crime. Pairing these headline topics with opportunities for real connection turned events into community milestones. Northern California's networking receptions, South Atlantic's focused panel discussions, and Southern California's Emerging Leaders Program mixers not only broadened perspectives but also built lasting relationships across the AEC world.


At the same time, chapters wove in a strong thread of professional development. Workshops on CCM certification, ethics training, legal seminars, and technical updates of CMAA Guidelines authored by construction management professionals ensured that programs supported every stage of a professional journey — from students to seasoned executives. Partnerships with other professional associations and universities often made these efforts possible, multiplying reach and resources.

The financial risks were real. San Antonio once borrowed \$10,000 to host its Owner’s Forum, entering the event with just \$3,000 in the bank. Yet when more than 400 people turned out, the chapter not only repaid its loan but finished with \$20,000 in the account – gaining both financial footing and momentum for years to come! Across the country, chapters found that when programs delivered real value, increased sponsorships and memberships followed which allowed their chapter to grow much quicker.



Over time, programming evolved with the profession itself. What began as simple networking in Southern California grew into capital program updates, sustainability series, legal seminars, and DEIB-focused conversations. Emerging Leaders’ programs took root, ensuring that the next generation was not just included but actively shaping the future.

FINAL THOUGHTS

CMAA Chapters proved that strong, adaptable programming is key to lasting growth and community. Their efforts defined a heritage of programs that were more than meetings – they were platforms for knowledge, community, and progress. Each chapter, in its own way, discovered that by elevating owner perspectives, tackling timely challenges, and nurturing new voices, CMAA could build not just events, but an enduring professional culture. 



About the Article

The CMAA College of Fellows Perspective Series, written by the Fellows Communications Committee, will share posts on the development of various project delivery systems over the years and how CMAA emerged and developed in response to changes in construction delivery. The Fellows hope this exploration of the past offers an understanding of the present and may even provide insights into what comes next.

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