

The Associations West Story

Associations West (AW) was built from the ground up by local societies that believed their members would be stronger together. It is a story of collaboration, shared purpose, and the recognition that association professionals across the western states face many of the same opportunities and challenges – and achieve more when they learn and lead collectively.

A Community Formed by Local Societies

Associations West traces its roots back to 2002, when three long-standing state chapters – the Sacramento, Southern California, and San Diego Societies of Association Executives – made the bold decision to merge and form the California Society of Association Executives (CalSAE). The goal was simple but ambitious: to create one unified professional home where members could learn, collaborate, and advocate for excellence in association management.

In the years that followed, other regional societies saw the value in joining forces. In 2009, the Northern California Society of Association Executives (Bay Area) merged with CalSAE, completing the organization's reach across the state. Each step in this evolution was member-driven – rooted in the idea that consolidation could mean greater access to education, more meaningful networking, and a stronger collective voice.

The same spirit of collaboration guided the 2022 integration of the Oregon Society of Association Management (OSAM). Oregon's members brought new perspectives and energy to the organization, while preserving their local identity through a dedicated Oregon Regional Council. Their success demonstrated that the model works – local autonomy paired with shared infrastructure and expertise creates a vibrant and sustainable future for everyone involved.

Becoming Associations West

It was becoming clear that CalSAE's name no longer reflected its scope or community, so in 2024 we began the process to rename and rebrand. Not only had we expanded geographically, but for years now we have served more than just executives. CalSAE enthusiastically rebranded to Associations West (AW) in July 2025!

Today, Associations West represents a thriving network of more than 1,400 association professionals and industry partners unified by a commitment to community, learning, and leadership.

Structure and Local Identity

Associations West is intentionally structured to preserve the strengths of its local communities. The organization includes five regions – Bay Area, Capital, Southern

California, Oregon, and (proposed) Washington – each with its own Regional Council. These councils oversee local programming, events, and member engagement, ensuring that regional priorities and relationships remain strong.

Every council is empowered to develop its own annual plan, supported by the AW staff team, while aligning with the association's overall strategic goals. This community of regions model means that members enjoy the best of both worlds: localized preference and personal relationships, backed by the strength and stability of a larger, professional organization.

Governance and Leadership

AW is governed by a volunteer Board of Directors composed of association executives and industry partners from across the regions. The Board ensures the organization's mission and vision are advanced with transparency, fiscal responsibility, and inclusion. Regional Council Chairs participate in Board meetings and planning sessions, keeping local voices directly connected to the decision-making process.

This structure has proven to be both nimble and resilient – allowing the organization to serve diverse member needs while operating efficiently and sustainably.

AWs Timeline Summary

- 2002 - CalSAE formed (Sacramento, SoCal, San Diego societies merge)
- 2009 - Bay Area joins
- 2022 - Oregon joins
- 2025 - Rebrand as Associations West
- 2026 - Proposed merger with WSAE

Culture and Values

Associations West's culture is grounded in serving and connecting members. In a recent survey, members described AW's most prevailing traits as:

- Professionalism
- Collaboration
- Trust
- Innovation
- Approachability

The organization's volunteers and staff work together with a shared sense of mission – to advance the association profession across the West.

A Proven Model for Growth and Sustainability

The story of Associations West is, at its heart, a story of partnership. Each merger – from Southern California to Oregon, and now potentially Washington – has

strengthened the organization's collective voice, financial stability, and capacity to deliver member value.

The Oregon experience is especially instructive: following the merger, last year's membership renewal rate was 99%, event participation has grown, and Oregon members quickly took leadership roles across the organization. The result has been both stronger local engagement and a healthier, more sustainable association overall.

"It is through Associations West that I finally found a professional 'Home'. More than an association, the people-first culture provides a rewarding experience. This is most evident in their thoughtful inclusion of Oregon, giving those of us up north a new place to belong without feeling like an outsider. The support of staff has provided more resources to our state, allowing our Oregon community to thrive. The enriching connections I've made with peers across both states makes me look forward to each new event. It is through this association of people that I am better at my job and have the confidence to take on any career challenge."

Amanda Parsons, CAE,
Immediate Past Chair, Oregon Regional Council
Executive Director, Oregon Recreation & Park Association

Looking Ahead

Associations West continues to evolve while holding fast to its origins as a community of local societies. Each region adds its own perspective, expertise, and traditions to a shared framework that values collaboration and service. For more on Associations West's history and structure, visit these pages on our website:

[About us](#) and [Organizational Structure](#).