APCO

MEMBER CHAPTER SERVICES Committee

November newsletter

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A LITTLE GRATITUDE
Goes a long way.

Some shifts leave you with more to unpack than your lunch bag. Before you head home - or settle in for sleep - jot down three things you appreciated: a coworker who made you laugh, something you handled well, or that first sip of coffee while it was still hot.

No fancy journal required. A few lines in your phone count. You don't have to call a tough day a good one to notice a bright spot.

Membership momentum.

45,016

TOTAL MEMBERS • OCTOBER 1, 2026

+7.5%

3,157 more members than October 1, 2025

The year-over-year picture

OCTOBER 1 SNAPSHOTS

MEMBERSHIP TYPE	2025	2026	CHANGE
Associate Members	1,883	**17,66**	**-117**
Full Members	3,770	**3,623**	**-147**
Full Group Members	10,190	**11,105**	**+915**
Online Group Members	25,158	**27,601**	**+2,443**
Commercial Members	430	**434**	**+4**
Commercial Group Members	398	**420**	**+22**
Student/Educator Members	30	**67**	**+37**
Total Members	41,859	45,016	**+3,157**

Our group network

MEMBERSHIP TYPE	2025	2026	CHANGE
Total Group Agencies	1,763	**1,785**	**+22**
Commercial Groups	57	**59**	**+2**

Counts as of October 1 in each year. Change shows the difference from 2025 to 2026.
Overall percentage growth is rounded to one decimal place. Group counts are reported separately from member counts.

CCAM PERSPECTIVE / MEET MARIAM BALLOW

Show up. Give back. Make a difference.

By **Mariam Ballow**
CCAM, Southern California APCO



Southern California has been my home for more than half of my life. Over the course of my career I've worked with public safety agencies across the country, and one thing has held true everywhere: this is an industry that puts serving people first.

That's why becoming a CCAM for the Southern California Chapter means so much to me. I wanted a real way to give back to a community that has given me relationships, opportunities, and lessons I couldn't have found anywhere else.

More Than a Commercial Partner

In sales, it's easy to live in a world of services, products, proposals, and quarterly goals. Those things matter. But APCO has reminded me that the most valuable things we bring to the table are sometimes an introduction, a resource, support for a training opportunity, or recognition for someone who has earned it. Sometimes it's simply being in the room.

Most of the time, it starts with one question: "How can I help?"

I've found that question changes the conversation. It moves us from what we sell to what people actually need, and that is where trust gets built.

Partnership in Action

Agencies and industry partners each depend on the other, and together we make public safety communications better. That's easy to say, so here's what it looked like at a recent chapter meeting hosted by the University of California, Riverside Police Department.

Chief Talbott and his team welcomed everyone and shared some of their department's history. Our industry partner sponsors, PowerDMS by NEOGOV and CARFAX for Police, brought retired chiefs who spoke from their own experience. Chiefs J. Chris Debbie and J.T. Manoushagian showed how PowerEngage reduces callbacks, increases morale, and keeps citizens informed. Chief John Fisher showed how Driver Exchange 9-1-1 helps close PDO calls faster. CARFAX for Police also sponsored lunch, which didn't hurt the mood in the room. Samantha Hawkins, ECC Engagement Lead, then delivered a spirited keynote for our trainers, "Trainers: Are You Killing Your ECC Softly?" Her passion as a lifelong 911 advocate came through in every minute, and she gave everyone plenty to take back to their centers.

The best connections start with showing up.

Nobody in that room was just a vendor or a customer. We were a community learning from each other. That's the standard I want to help set, and it builds on a long chapter tradition of commercial partners supporting the work of APCO, from the Monthly Meetings to our Awards Banquet to the Installation Dinner.

Connecting With Purpose

Commercial members have a unique vantage point. We work with agencies of every size and see how different centers solve the same problems. That means we can carry a good idea from one agency to another, or introduce two people who should have met years ago.

There's a difference between networking and connecting with purpose. The goal isn't to collect more contacts. It's to listen, understand what someone is facing, and ask whether I, or someone in my network, can help. It might mean pairing a public safety leader with a peer who has already navigated the same challenge. It might mean introducing an APCO member to a partner whose expertise fits. Or it might mean making sure someone knows a resource exists. These small connections often matter far more than we realize.

We Don't Have to Reinvent the Wheel

One of the best parts of this role has been the CCAM community itself. CCAMs across the country are generous with their time, their playbooks, and APCO's CCAM mentoring and roundtable efforts make it easy to learn from peers who have already tried something. Every chapter is different, but the best ideas travel well. My job is to borrow the good ones, adapt them for Southern California, and share what works here in return.

Celebrating the People Behind the Mission

Telecommunicators. Supervisors. Communications managers. Technicians. Administrators. Volunteers. Public safety leaders. So many people show up every day and do difficult work because they care about their communities.

I believe commercial partners have a responsibility to help shine a light on them. Technology, systems, and solutions are tools. People are the reason any of it matters.

Why This Matters to Me

My career has taken me to public safety organizations across the country, and serving as a CCAM here in Southern California feels personal. This is home. I want to use the relationships I've built, the experience I've gained, and whatever resources I have to make a difference, not just for the agencies we work with, but for the people who serve our communities every day.

I don't believe you need all the answers to make a difference. Sometimes you just need to show up.

Show up. Listen. Make a connection. Offer to help. Celebrate someone else. Share what you know. Open a door.

And then do it again.

I don't want to be known simply as a commercial partner. I want to be known as someone who showed up, cared, and helped. To me, that's what being a CCAM is all about.

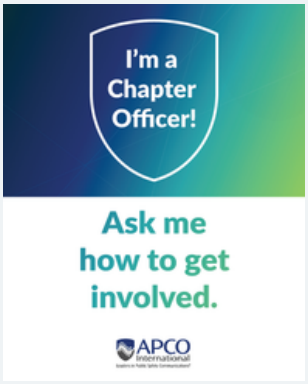
“Technology, systems, and solutions are tools. People are the reason any of it matters.”

You lead.
Let your network know.

Chapter leaders keep members connected, engaged and involved. Celebrate the role you play with an APCO Chapter Leader social media badge.



FOR OTHER SOCIAL MEDIA PLATFORMS



INSTAGRAM VERSION

01 / Pick your badge.

Choose the version that fits the platform where you're sharing.

02 / Make it personal.

Add your badge to social media and share why chapter leadership matters to you.

03 / Tag APCO.

Help APCO celebrate chapter leaders and the work you're doing.

Need a caption? Start here.

Use this sample message as written, or make it your own:

Eager to step into a leadership role? I'm happy to share my experience! As an APCO chapter officer, you can help shape training opportunities, advocate for public safety communications professionals and build strong connections across the industry. Becoming a chapter officer is a great way to give back and grow professionally at the same time.

Your leadership deserves a little spotlight.

Download your badge and let your network know you're an APCO Chapter Officer.

Download Your Badge →

AI: A Helping Hand or a *Crutch?*

Finding the Balance Between Technological Convenience and Human Independence

By Stephanie Reed

Artificial intelligence (AI) helps people work more efficiently, learn new skills and accomplish tasks that once required considerable time or expertise. From organizing schedules to developing software, its applications continue to expand. Yet that convenience presents a challenge: Excessive reliance on AI can affect how people learn, make decisions and interact with others. Understanding its benefits and limitations is essential to using it without sacrificing our skills, judgment and human connections.

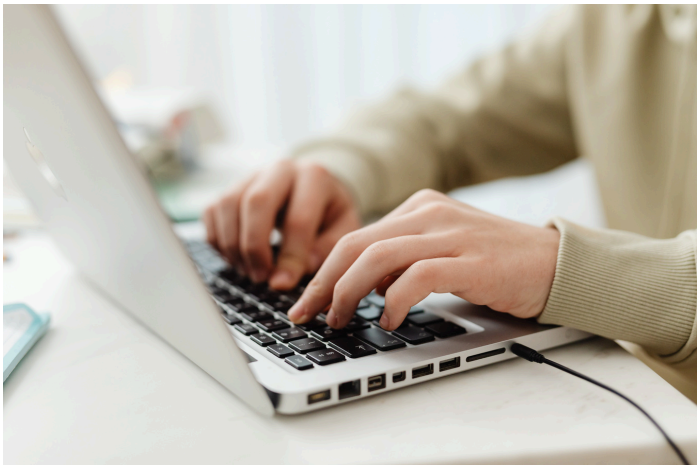
Expanding Human Capabilities

AI makes complex tasks more accessible. Someone planning a vacation can organize an itinerary, while a student struggling with a difficult concept can request a tailored explanation. Writers, artists and developers can use it to explore ideas and solve problems.

AI can also enhance expertise rather than replace it. In a field experiment involving 791 professionals at Procter & Gamble, individuals working with AI performed comparably to two-person teams without it on certain product development challenges.[1] The findings illustrate how AI can improve productivity and help people tackle unfamiliar problems.

AI-assisted coding offers a practical example. It can generate code, identify errors and accelerate application development, allowing experienced developers to concentrate on complex decisions.

But generating code isn't the same as understanding it. AI can introduce errors, overlook accessibility requirements or create security vulnerabilities.



In a 2025 Carnegie Mellon University study, developers using AI coding assistants often didn't ask for accessible code and couldn't verify that it complied.[2]

A 2025 Veracode benchmark of more than 100 large language models found that AI-generated code introduced a flaw from the Open Worldwide Application Security Project (OWASP) Top 10 list in about 45% of tasks.[3] Without technical knowledge to recognize those problems, a developer may produce an application that works but cannot be reliably maintained or secured.

When Assistance Becomes Dependence

> *"A convincing answer, therefore, isn't necessarily a correct one."*
>
> KEEP HUMAN JUDGMENT IN THE LOOP

That distinction matters especially for learning and critical thinking.

Cognitive offloading means using external tools to reduce mental effort. Calculators, calendars and search engines are familiar examples. Such tools free us for other tasks, but saving effort isn't always beneficial when that effort helps build knowledge or skills.

A 2025 randomized controlled study examined ChatGPT's effect on knowledge retention. Of 120 undergraduates initially assigned, 85 completed a follow-up assessment 45 days later. Those who used ChatGPT without restrictions as a study aid averaged 57.5%, compared with 68.5% for those using traditional methods, a statistically significant difference.[4] While one study can't establish long-term effects, the results suggest that assistance may sometimes interfere with learning.

Another concern is automation bias, the tendency to trust automated recommendations too readily. A polished AI response can seem authoritative, encouraging users to accept it without adequate scrutiny.

That confidence can be misleading. Generative AI constructs responses from learned patterns, sometimes supplemented by retrieved information, but doesn't verify every claim. The National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST) calls its tendency to present false information as fact confabulation, known colloquially as hallucination or fabrication.[5]

A convincing answer, therefore, isn't necessarily a correct one.

Clear prompts, useful context and defined boundaries improve results but can't eliminate errors. Research should draw on credible evidence, preferably primary sources, and even citations require verification. AI can misinterpret legitimate documents or cite sources that don't support its claims. Its mistakes are a useful reminder that AI may be a capable research assistant, but its answers aren't canon.

Dependence isn't only about what we stop doing for ourselves; it's also about what we hand over. As AI tools gain access to documents, email and personal information, users should understand the permissions they grant and set appropriate limits. Convenience shouldn't dictate how much control we surrender.

> *"Convenience shouldn't dictate how much control we surrender."*

Preserving Human Connections

Conversational AI also affects how people relate to technology. It can engage in lengthy discussions, offer encouragement and respond in seemingly human ways.

An unfamiliar topic can lead to rewarding exchanges and unexpected discoveries. Such conversations may entertain users or offer temporary comfort when they're lonely.

But humanlike conversations also raise questions about emotional dependence.

In a 2025 four-week randomized study of 981 participants by the MIT Media Lab and OpenAI, which funded the research, the assigned chatbot conditions did not significantly change loneliness or social interaction. However, participants who chose to use the chatbot more reported more loneliness, emotional dependence and problematic use, as well as reduced social interaction.[6] Because usage wasn't randomized, those findings don't prove AI caused the outcomes, but they warrant attention to how attachments form.

AI can simulate empathy, but it cannot fully replace relationships built on shared experiences, mutual understanding and responsibility to one another.

Emergency communications professionals already understand where technology ends and people begin. Technology helps telecommunicators process information and coordinate responses, but it's their experience and judgment that make the call. That's the right relationship with AI everywhere else, too.

Frequent use of AI isn't necessarily unhealthy dependence. What matters is whether people continue exercising the knowledge and judgment needed to evaluate its work.

AI's value shouldn't be measured only by how much it does for us, but by how well it helps us do more for ourselves. That distinction lets us benefit from the technology without surrendering our independence.

Stephanie Reed *is a Web Specialist for the Metro Nashville Department of Emergency Communications.*

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Wellness Starts with You

Beyond the Workout: Building Total Wellness

When you hear the word “wellness,” exercise might be one of the first things that comes to mind. And while getting regular movement is certainly important, taking care of yourself involves so much more than what happens during your workout.

Wellness is also about the everyday choices we make. Getting enough sleep, drinking plenty of water, eating foods that fuel us, managing stress, spending time with people we care about, and making room for things we enjoy can all contribute to how we feel.

There's Something Special About Doing It Together

Sticking with a fitness routine can be easier when you have people in your corner.

There's something motivating about walking into a workout and seeing familiar faces. Your fellow members understand what it's like to have a tough workout, celebrate a personal win, or show up on a day when motivation is nowhere to be found.

You're working toward your own goals, but you're surrounded by people who are working toward theirs, too. The encouragement, accountability, and energy can make showing up feel a little easier and a lot more fun.

Movement Is an Important Part of Wellness

There’s a reason we often feel better after moving our bodies. Exercise can help build strength and endurance, increase energy, and give us a chance to step away from the stress and busyness of the day.

But your workout routine doesn't have to look a certain way. For some people, it's strength training. For others, it's a run, a walk around the neighborhood, a group workout, or simply finding more ways to stay active throughout the day.

The most important thing is finding something you enjoy and can stick with.

Start Where You Are

You don't need to have everything figured out before you start taking better care of yourself.

Start with one thing that feels doable. Schedule your next workout. Take a walk. Drink a little more water. Get some extra sleep. Give yourself a few minutes to slow down and recharge.

Wellness isn't about reaching some perfect finish line. It's about the habits we build and the choices we make along the way.

So, what's one small step you can take this week?

Maybe it's getting to your next Burn Boot Camp workout. Maybe it's taking a walk with your family, making time for yourself, or simply giving your body the rest it needs.

Whatever you choose, start there. One small step can be the beginning of a healthier, stronger you.

Submitted by
Christina L. McKay, Senior Emergency Communications Officer/CTO/Assistant TAC, Cary Police

APCO INTERNATIONAL • NEW MEMBER OFFER

Get a head start on 2027.

Your APCO community is waiting.
Why wait until January to join?

JOIN FOR 2027. START CONNECTING NOW.

FREE membership for the rest of 2026

For new members who join October–December 2026 and pay the 2027 membership rate.

01 / JOIN

Make your move.

Join APCO between October and December 2026.

02 / START NOW

Skip the wait.

Your membership includes the remainder of 2026.

03 / STAY CONNECTED

Keep it going.

Enjoy membership throughout all of 2027.

Already part of the APCO community? Bring a coworker into the conversation! Share this offer, tell them why you joined, or help another agency explore group membership options.

Ready to join? Have questions? Let's connect.

membership@apcointl.org

APCO Membership Team • www.apcointl.org

Offer applies to new members joining October–December 2026. Payment of the 2027 membership rate is required; the remainder of 2026 is included at no additional cost.

A lifetime on the line.

From the dispatch console to national leadership, Harlin R. McEwen helped shape public safety communications.

By Lawrence Lafferty, RPL



Chief Harlin R. McEwen, right, at his Atlantic Chapter recognition during APCO 2022 in Anaheim, California.

Before he became a police chief, an FBI executive and a national advocate for public safety communications, Harlin R. McEwen was a teenager listening to police and fire calls on a radio monitor. When the siren sounded in Waverly, New York, he would run next door to the volunteer fire chief's house and climb into the car for a ride to the call.

That early curiosity grew into a career devoted to helping first responders serve their communities and communicate when it mattered most.

Honoring a lifetime of service

On August 8, 2022, the Atlantic Chapter of APCO recognized Chief McEwen for more than 50 years of public safety service during its business meeting at APCO's 88th Annual Conference & Expo in Anaheim, California. Chapter President Michael Davis and President Elect Tammy DeWolf presented him with a plaque honoring his contributions.

The recognition celebrated a career that began at the dispatch console and extended to local police leadership, state government, the FBI and the national effort to improve emergency communications.

It started with a radio

McEwen's first police job was as a part-time dispatcher with the Waverly Police Department in 1957. After earning an associate's degree in retail business from Mohawk Valley Community College, he became a full-time officer in 1958. He was named a Tioga County deputy sheriff in 1962 and joined the Cayuga Heights Police Department in 1964.

In Cayuga Heights, he advanced to sergeant in 1967 and police chief in 1972, serving as chief until 1985. Along the way, he earned a second associate's degree, this time in criminal justice, from Cayuga Community College.

His leadership also reached beyond his department. In 1983, he was elected president of both the New York State Association of Chiefs of Police and the New York State & Eastern Canada Chapter of the FBI National Academy Associates.

1957 → 2022 From his first dispatch job to the Atlantic Chapter's recognition: more than six decades of service & leadership.

Building a more connected public safety community

Leading through change

After serving as a deputy commissioner with New York State's Division of Criminal Justice Services, McEwen became Ithaca's ninth police chief in 1988. There, he paired modernization with a stronger community presence.

He expanded police training, introduced community policing efforts in the city's south and west ends, and opened a satellite police office at the Southside Community Center. He also oversaw a major headquarters renovation that included relocated administrative offices and a new training room. Following his retirement from Ithaca in February 1996, FBI Director Louis Freeh appointed him a deputy assistant director at the FBI in Washington, D.C. He retired from the bureau in 2001.

A national voice for communications

Public safety communications remained a defining thread throughout McEwen's career. He joined APCO and the International Association of Chiefs of Police in 1972, later achieving APCO Life Membership and serving for 37 years as chair of the IACP Communications and Technology Committee.

He advised the Major Cities Chiefs Association, National Sheriffs' Association and Major County Sheriffs' Association on communications. He also served as vice chair of the National Public Safety Telecommunications Council and chair of the Public Safety Spectrum Trust, the 700 MHz public safety broadband licensee.

Through work involving the Federal Communications Commission, other federal agencies, and state and local governments, he championed the tools first responders need to communicate effectively.

A legacy that carries forward

Two awards bearing McEwen's name reflect the reach of that work.

Established in 2017, the FirstNet Authority's Chief Harlin R. McEwen Public Safety Broadband Communications Award honors service, commitment and dedication to public safety. It recognizes his expertise and leadership as the founding chair of FirstNet's Public Safety Advisory Committee.

The National Public Safety Telecommunications Council also created an award in his honor. Reserved for exceptional cases rather than presented annually, it recognizes significant contributions to nationwide public safety communications, along with the character, ethics and commitment to community that McEwen exemplified.

For the Atlantic Chapter, the 2022 recognition honored more than a list of titles. It celebrated a member whose decades of service helped advance the communications systems—and the people—on which public safety depends.

A career built on service. A legacy built on connection.

APCO OPPORTUNITIES / PARTICIPATE • SHARE • CONNECT

Your voice matters. Your well-being does, too.

Take APCO's national survey on public safety telecommunicator health and wellness.

25–30 minutes

Time to share your experience

Confidential

Your responses will be kept confidential

How does emergency communications work affect the people behind the headset? APCO's national study explores how job demands—including stressful and traumatic calls—may relate to health, wellness and workforce experiences.

STRESS • SLEEP • BURNOUT • WELL-BEING

Share your experience to help identify opportunities to strengthen wellness and support across the profession.

Take the Survey →

APCO 2027 / CALL FOR SPEAKERS

Have something worth sharing?

PROPOSALS DUE

DEC 7

Bring your expertise to APCO 2027. Thought leaders and industry experts in emergency communications are invited to share their knowledge with thousands of attendees and connect with industry peers.

Learn More & Submit Your Proposal

Submit your proposal by December 7.

Teammates in Action



SERVING MEMPHIS SINCE JANUARY 2007

COMPASSION UNDER PRESSURE

Nzinga Withers

Police Radio Dispatcher
Memphis Police Department • Tennessee

A steady voice. A human connection.

When panic made it difficult for a caller to speak, Police Radio Dispatcher Nzinga Withers brought calm, clarity and care to a critical emergency.

PERFECT QA SCORE

A randomly selected call revealed an exceptional standard of care.

On March 13, 2026, a woman returned home to find her boyfriend suffering from a suspected self-inflicted gunshot wound. She called 9-1-1 in extreme distress, struggling to communicate clearly. Withers remained attentive and composed, guiding the conversation while gathering the information responders needed.

She obtained and confirmed the address so police and Memphis Fire Department personnel could be directed to the correct location. Throughout the call, she asked necessary questions without losing sight of the frightened person on the other end of the line.

Withers encouraged the caller to take deep breaths, reassured her that she would stay on the line until officers arrived, and checked whether she had been able to reach her mother.

She gathered the details responders needed—and cared for the person who needed them.

Her attention also extended to responder safety. Hearing a dog barking in the background, Withers asked the caller to secure the animal before units arrived and documented the information in the call remarks.

When QA/ECS R. Webster later evaluated the randomly selected call, Withers earned a perfect score. The evaluator praised her professionalism, empathy, attentiveness and ability to manage a highly emotional, critical incident.

A member of the Memphis Police Department Emergency Communications Bureau since January 2007, Withers is also a certified Communications Training Officer. She handled 1,885 emergency calls in 2025 and another 471 in 2026 as of the nomination. The care she demonstrated on this call is also the standard she helps teach to the next generation of telecommunicators.

Teammates in Action

COORDINATION WHEN IT COUNTS

Khari Tukufu

Police Radio Dispatcher
Memphis Police Department • Tennessee

Clear communication. A coordinated response.

During a reported active shooter and bomb threat at St. Jude Children's Research Hospital, Police Radio Dispatcher Khari Tukufu helped keep a complex response organized.

COMMAND RECOGNITION

Personally commended by North Main Station Precinct Major Gary.



SERVING MEMPHIS SINCE DECEMBER 2020

On July 21, 2026, a caller falsely claimed to be inside St. Jude Children's Research Hospital, firing shots and carrying homemade explosive devices. The report required an immediate, coordinated response across the hospital complex.

Tukufu dispatched units promptly and supplied clear location information. As officers provided updates, he relayed them to responding personnel, keeping the developing situation current for everyone involved.

He also coordinated directly with the Memphis Safe Taskforce Joint Operations Center to support a systematic search of the hospital and surrounding buildings. Managing radio traffic, maintaining call remarks and keeping command staff informed demanded sustained concentration and situational awareness.

His clear, timely updates helped keep a complex operation moving together.

Throughout the operation, Tukufu balanced multiple priorities while giving officers and command staff the information they needed to make decisions about resources and search locations. His clear, timely communications helped keep the response structured as the search progressed.

The incident was resolved without harm. Afterward, North Main Station Precinct Major Gary called the communications bureau to personally commend Tukufu for his assistance.

Tukufu has served the Memphis Police Department Emergency Communications Bureau since December 7, 2020. He was named Dispatcher of the Month in March 2023 and consistently received satisfactory or outstanding QA ratings throughout 2026. As of the nomination, he had handled 1,375 emergency 9-1-1 calls and 711 non-emergency calls during the year—a record of service reflected in his composed response on July 21.



APCO SUMMIT SERIES / DECEMBER 1–2 • ORLANDO, FLORIDA

Help shape what's next in responder communications.

Explore the full arc of public safety innovation at the **Public Safety Innovation Summit featuring 5x5** - from emerging broadband capabilities to next-generation tools being developed and deployed today.

Discover the tools.

Explore cutting-edge solutions and emerging communications capabilities.

Hear the ideas.

Learn from industry leaders working on the future of public safety technology.

Make connections.

Connect with peers from across the profession and join the conversation.

Be part of the next chapter.

December 1–2 • Orlando, Florida

Register Now →

apcosummits.org/innovation/registration/

Brought to you by APCO and the First Responder Network Authority.
With technical contributions from the National Institute of Standards and Technology's Public Safety Communications Research Division.

Member & Chapter Services
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The right connection. A great place to start.

Keep these committee contacts and workgroup abbreviations handy as you connect with the Member & Chapter Services team.

APCO representatives

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Know the workgroups

LMC
Life Member Content Working Group

NWG
Newsletter Working Group

PWG
Polls Working Group

TIA
Teammates in Action Working Group

TWG
Toolkit Working Group

WEB
Webinars Working Group

Chapter connections. Shared ideas. A stronger community.