

# Getting the Band Back Together

## Reestablishing an ACI chapter in New England

by Jonathan M. Kuell

“**W**hatever happened to the New England ACI chapter?” was a question I heard many times over the last decade or so. While I could honestly respond, “We’re working on it,” I can also now report that the work of breathing life back into that chapter took a few years and some inventive approaches.

Now, before I declare how excited I am to finally have a chapter again, I must pay homage to the various people who cared deeply about the old chapter. They did a great job, but the old chapter simply ran out of steam—sometimes work, life, and, unfortunately, death get in the way of extracurricular activities, and that was largely the case for the demise of what was once a very vibrant ACI chapter in New England. There are too many people to name here, but I’m sure we members of the new chapter are grateful to have many of the members of the previous chapter still around, still caring, and excited about the resurgence of a New England chapter. In addition to help from those members, ACI’s outreach and service programs helped to bring back the chapter.

Let me explain: For the past 14 plus years, I have been the Executive Director of the Northern New England Concrete Association (NNECA), a trade association for the ready mixed concrete producers in Maine, New Hampshire, and Vermont. NNECA is the local sponsoring group for ACI certification in Maine, New Hampshire, Vermont, Massachusetts, and Rhode Island. Throughout my tenure with NNECA, we have grown our certification program offerings exponentially—to the

point where the industry regarded us as the ACI of New England. It only seemed fitting that we (NNECA) play a very active part in the formation of a new ACI chapter for our region. With the blessing of my Board, that is exactly what we set out to do.

It should be noted that we weren’t the only ones interested in having a chapter to represent our region. Many of the people and organizations that had been previously involved were still interested but didn’t have the time to get it off the ground. I was granted the time to focus on this endeavor, which was key to making it happen.

At first, we tried to simply bring back the old chapter, but with a lack of activity for such a long time, ACI staff decided that it could no longer recognize it as a chapter. This ended up being a blessing in disguise, as it gave us the opportunity to have a fresh start and build a new chapter from the ground up, with an opportunity to write our own future. Here’s how we did it:

### Step 1: Call John Conn

Nobody wants ACI chapters to grow and succeed more than John Conn; in fact, as ACI’s Director of Chapter Activities, it’s his job. So, if you’re looking to start a new chapter or reinvigorate an existing chapter, start with Conn. Conn walked us through all the steps needed to establish a new chapter and continues to support us in our infancy. He was even nice enough to join us in June for our kickoff



The first meeting of the relaunched New England Chapter – ACI



Brett Holland, New England Chapter – ACI President

meeting in Massachusetts. On behalf of the New England Chapter – ACI, thanks for all your help, John!

## Step 2: Download and Read the “Guide to Chapter Organization and Operation”

This is your playbook; I can’t tell you how many times I’ve referenced it and how many resources within ACI I’ve discovered through its use. From gathering signatures for your organizing petition to seeking direction in creating bylaws and even running meetings, it’s all here.

## Step 3: Gather Signatures

It was September of 2018 when I initially sent out an e-mail requesting signatures for our organizing petition. Conn furnished us with a spreadsheet of existing ACI members in New England, so we had a database of roughly 600 members to target. I sent the e-mail out around 7:00 a.m., and by 11:00 a.m., we had gathered more than enough support to submit our petition to form the chapter.

## Step 4: Create the Bylaws

This is not as daunting as it sounds, as again, ACI has the resources to help. Working off a set of model bylaws provided by ACI, we were able to review and adjust their template to suit our needs. Being that we cover five states, we also had the bylaws reviewed by a local attorney to make sure we were following all state laws where we would be active.

While meeting with the lawyer, we also started the steps to incorporate the chapter. This may have been jumping the gun a bit, as you need to submit the petition and proposed bylaws to ACI for review before you are granted an affiliation with ACI. Incorporating doesn’t have to be done immediately, but without it, establishing bank accounts is difficult, and without a bank account it’s difficult to solicit members and collect dues.

## Step 5: Announce Your Existence and Solicit Members

There are many, many little steps along the way that I’ve neglected to include here, but this should cover the big-picture stuff you’ll need to tackle. If all goes well, it’s time to go public! Reach out to all existing ACI members in your state/country/region and let them know they now have a local fellowship of ACI members to meet with, learn from, and grow friendships with. Find your leaders and who wants to be on the Board. We were extremely lucky to have Brett Holland fully support our effort and raise his hand early in wanting to provide leadership for our chapter. Many others expressed interest in helping guide the chapter as well, so we were able to vote for our inaugural Board of Directors at our first meeting.

## Bonus Tip: Use StarChapter

What’s that, you say? What’s StarChapter, and shouldn’t there be a space there? StarChapter (one word—in what techies call Pascal case) is a turnkey association management software (AMS) company that hosts many chapters’ websites,

plus a whole lot more. They helped us build our website on their platform (I had already procured our domain name), where people can sign up for membership, register for upcoming events, read newsletters, pay dues, and do a host of other things that I’m barely scratching the surface of. This is a powerful tool to help you manage your chapter that even a nontechie like myself can learn. The best part about this AMS resource is that it’s free to all ACI chapters that are in good standing. StarChapter and additional chapter resources can be found on ACI’s website under Chapter Resources. You’ll be pleasantly surprised at how many free benefits are offered.

## Lastly: Attend a Convention

Despite being involved with ACI on the certification side for many years, I had never had the opportunity to attend a convention. Luckily, last March’s convention in Québec City was within driving distance for me (I live in Maine), so we were able to fit it into our basically nonexistent budget. ACI graciously provides complimentary registration if you are representing your chapter and are attending the chapter roundtable. Holland and I attended this roundtable and were able to introduce ourselves and our newly minted chapter to the ACI world.

We were able to interact with chapters large and small from around the globe and it was truly inspirational. We learned about what makes a chapter successful and brought back ideas that we are working to incorporate into our own chapter. The members of the other chapters’ leadership were incredibly welcoming and supportive; I look forward to collaborating and commiserating with them in the future. In addition, you are exposed to so many resources that ACI offers its chapters, such as the Chapter Officer Leadership Training, which is held annually at ACI’s world headquarters.

I was fortunate to be able to register and attend the Leadership Training in addition to attending the convention. And to give you a heads-up, it offered me the opportunity to draw on the experience of others and benefit from great takeaways; plus being able to connect faces with the names of ACI staff was helpful for strengthening relationships between the chapter and ACI world headquarters. It is truly eye-opening to realize the scope of what you’ve just become part of!

Selected for reader interest by the editors.



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