

Dues adjustment FAQ's and guidance

This document provides some FAQ's and guidance around dues adjustment requests that components might receive.

This document should be taken as guidance and not requirements for components. Decisions around hardship dues adjustments start at the component-level and some of the suggestions below may or may not be useful for your chapter. Each situation will be unique.

As always, components should review their bylaws to see what requirements are in place surrounding dues adjustments and follow them accordingly.

Should my component have an 'official' hardship dues adjustment policy?

There is a trade-off in creating 'official' policies for hardship adjustments. Having policies in place can create a structure that facilitates faster, more decisive, and potentially more equitable action when members request hardship adjustments. For example, you might decide to provide a 75% reduction to those on family leave and 100% reduction for those who have been laid off. This policy will allow you to quickly assess incoming requests and give similar requests the same treatment. Of course, policies can make it challenging to facilitate the different nuances with hardship requests, each of which will be unique. Many requests do not easily fall into a single category.

We suggest to at the very least create informal policies for internal use. Having the informal policy will allow you to act quickly on these requests while giving your component the flexibility to deal with complex or unique situations. Unless the policy is fixed and there is a reason to do so, you should not publicize it.

Should we require a minimum member payment (i.e. do not waive 100% of dues)?

Many components feel that members paying for their dues creates a stake for them in their membership. Having some minimum is a good idea, with the caveat that some members may truly need the 100% waiver to maintain their membership

Should we require members who receive waivers to participate in the component (i.e. require volunteer hours, serve on a committee, etc.)?

Components may find this to be a useful tool to engage their members, ensure the individual has a stake in their membership, and even provide much needed support to the component. However, individuals who are requesting an adjustment may be in no position to participate in component activities, especially in a component that covers a wide geographic area. Before a component

considers this, they should ensure that they have enough volunteer activities for members and that it will not be an additional burden for the member.

How should my component facilitate the hardship process?

When conducting outreach, you should not start by advertising the dues adjustment option. However, please include some language that encourages the member to reach out to discuss options if they are experiencing hardship.

While it is not always possible, speaking directly with the member is an important way to determine their level of need, provide solutions outside or in addition to hardship adjustments, and help the member feel connected to their AIA community.

Always look on the member's record to get the exact amount of dues they owe.

Do all components have to coordinate with one another (i.e. Local and State and National)

Yes. As of now, National supports the waiver adjustments that components provide. However, where applicable State and Local components must agree. State components may take the same stance as National by empowering the Local to make the decision, but this must be done between components.

Should my board or a committee review incoming hardship requests?

While a committee can be useful to discuss requests, keep in mind that your members are colleagues or even competitors of one another. Hardship requests often include sensitive, personal information about the health of businesses or individuals. We recommend minimizing the individuals who have access to information on your members.

When members ask about value of membership while discussing a reduction, how do I respond?

If a member is asking for a hardship adjustment to maintain their membership, they see value. If they did not, they would simply allow their membership to lapse. The value discussion should stem from both how they are currently using their membership to how they can engage more with any of the tiers of membership. Survey research has found that most members see the majority of their value being delivered at the local level, so focus on engaging activities your specific chapter has.

How can I leverage my relationship with firms to support the member?

Members' firms often support AIA membership through reimbursing dues in part or total. By strengthening your relationship with principals in your area and reaching out to them on the value of membership, you can ensure renewals of several members at a time who may otherwise not be able to afford membership.

What should I do for the member after the hardship waiver is approved?

The hardship adjustment is just the first step to supporting the member. For members who were recently laid off, you can circulate their resume to firms hiring in the area. Mentorship programs are a useful tool for recent graduates who may be struggling to find employment.

What percentage reduction should my component provide?

The percentage reduction you choose to use should take into account rules you make for the process, whether your component believes there should be a minimum payment, how many reductions are being requested and how it might impact your finances, and what the member indicates they can pay. Having a conversation with the member can help you gauge their true need and find an amount that works for both the member and the chapter.