

Wisconsin Chamber of Faith — Modernizing Membership & Operations

Client: Wisconsin Chamber of Faith (WI-COF) · **URL:** thechamberoffaith.com

Engagement: Aug–Oct 2025 (*assumption; confirm*)

Mission: Connecting businesses, ministries, and individuals through shared values and collaborative growth.

Partner: Five Letter Agency (FLA) — Strategy, design, engineering, and rollout.

Summary

The challenge (Before)

- Fragmented stack: MembershipWorks, Constant Contact, Squarespace, PayPal, Microsoft 365.
- Rising SaaS costs and rigid workflows that no longer matched how WI-COF operates.
- Outdated site content and difficult updates for non-technical staff.
- Email list quality degraded over years ($\approx 10\%$ bounces); renewal ops manual and error-prone.
- Growth beyond Milwaukee would multiply admin work and costs.

The solution

FLA built a **custom admin portal + public site** that consolidates membership, payments, email, and content updates into one workflow tailored to WI-COF. Non-technical staff can publish updates, manage members, and run renewals in minutes.

Stack: Next.js 14 (app router), Convex (data + server functions), Clerk (auth/roles), Vercel (hosting), SendGrid (email).

Payments: PayPal Subscriptions + discrete links; webhooks for receipts, membership state, and dunning.

Email: SendGrid dynamic templates, ASM groups, DMARC/SPF/DKIM alignment, list hygiene.

Outcomes (After)

- **Time saved:** 5+ hours/week reclaimed from manual renewals and multi-tool updates.

- **Costs:** Project delivered $\approx 3\times$ less than agency quotes; **5-year SaaS savings** projected **\$15k+**; avoided $\approx \$20k$ in one-off feature/customization fees.
- **Deliverability:** Bounce rate $\sim 10\%$ $\rightarrow <1\%$ after hygiene + authenticated sending (TBC); opens/clicks trending up (TBC).
- **Renewals:** Prior $\approx 75\%$; early cohort trending **+5–13 pp** (TBC as annual cycle completes).
- **Content:** Site brought fully current with **2+ years** of updates; non-technical edits now self-serve.
- **Board impact:** Green-lit continued build-out for networking tools; FLA awarded **Arn Quakkellar Legacy Grant** for public-service automation/AI work.

“Use this as a template for any values-driven org: consolidate, automate, and put staff back in front of people—not dashboards.”

Detailed Case Study

Context & Goals

WI-COF needed a modern platform to **scale beyond Milwaukee**, reduce reliance on **costly, rigid SaaS**, and restore **operational agility**. FLA proposed a phased, custom portal that retains only the parts of the legacy stack that add clear value.

Starting point (Before)

- **Tools:** MembershipWorks, Constant Contact, Squarespace, PayPal, Microsoft 365.
- **Pain:** Tool sprawl, rising costs, slow content updates, list decay, manual renewals, limited reporting.
- **Baseline metrics:**
 - Traffic: minimal (no reliable baseline; instrumentation added).
 - Conversions/donations: unknown; proxy set to **membership renewal count** going forward.
 - Renewal rate: $\sim 75\%$ (self-reported).
 - Email: $\sim 10\%$ **bounce**; authentication incomplete.
 - Admin time: **10+ hrs/week** maintaining outdated pages/workflows.

- SaaS spend: ~\$95/mo (ex-soft costs; did not include future per-seat or add-on escalators).

What we built (Solution)

- **Unified admin portal** with role-based access (staff, chapter leads, volunteers) and audit logs.
- **Content management for non-technical staff** (news, events, resources) with live preview & rollback.
- **Membership system** (tiers, chapter affiliation, renewal dates, status, payment history).
- **Payments**: PayPal Subscriptions & discrete links; webhook pipeline for receipts, renewal status, and dunning; exportable ledger for finance/audit.
- **Email & messaging**: SendGrid dynamic templates, ASM groups (Announcements, Renewals, Events), bounce/complaint handling; DMARC/SPF/DKIM alignment; list cleanup and opt-in flows.
- **Reporting**: At-a-glance dashboard for renewals due, failed payments, chapter growth, and email KPIs.
- **Ops automation**: 30/7/1-day renewal nudges, welcome series, receipt PDFs, role auto-assignment by plan/chapter.

Tech & Hosting

- **Next.js 14** (App Router) for the site/admin UI.
- **Convex** as data store & serverless functions (schema-migrated, row-level security).
- **Clerk** for authentication, SSO, and roles.
- **Vercel** for deploys, previews, and edge caching.
- **SendGrid** for email; DNS updated for DMARC/SPF/DKIM.

Constraints & how we handled them

- **Zero-downtime cutover**: Staged DNS and content freeze; parallel runs for renewals during switchover week.
- **Legacy exports**: Inconsistent MembershipWorks fields; built mappers and validation to normalize.

- **List hygiene:** Deferred blasts until authentication + suppression lists set; re-permissioned stale contacts.
- **Board governance:** Weekly demos; acceptance gates tied to chapter-expansion milestones.

Outcomes (After)

Quant (current & projected)

- **Admin time:** 10+ → **≤5 hrs/week** (content + renewals).
- **Renewals:** **75%** → **80–88%** (early; confirm after full annual cycle).
- **Deliverability:** **~10% bounces** → **<1%**; opens +8–15 pp (*TBC after 90 days steady-state*).
- **Page performance:** LCP **<2.0s** on 4G; Core Web Vitals pass (*TBC with Search Console*).
- **Costs:** **≈ 3x cheaper** than competing quotes; **5-year SaaS savings \$15k+**; avoided **≈ \$20k** in custom add-ons.

Qual

- Site content current; staff can ship updates without vendor tickets.
- Fewer support questions from members; clearer renewal status.
- Board confidence increased; roadmap funded for networking features.

Evidence & attribution

- **Screenshots:** Before/after pages, admin portal, dashboards, email auth & bounce reports.
- **Testimonial:** *Nick Galezewski — Executive Director*; Quote Provided.
- **Logo use:** Approved (assets on file).
- **Grant/recognition:** FLA received **Arn Quakkellar Legacy Grant**; Board green-lit phase 2 networking features.

Budget, timeline, and why it was cost-effective

- **Timeline:** Scoped → Board approval → Build → Launch in **≈10 weeks**.
- **Why it pencils out:** Consolidation eliminates overlapping seats and per-feature upcharges; automation reduces recurring staff time; custom fit avoids vendor lock-in and price hikes.

Risks & mitigations

- **Payment edge cases:** Handled upgrade/downgrade and past-due states via webhook-driven ledger + admin overrides.
- **Email compliance:** CAN-SPAM, opt-outs via ASM groups; verified sender + domain alignment.
- **Data integrity:** Import validators; reversible migrations; nightly backups.

Accessibility & privacy

- **WCAG 2.2 AA:** color contrast checks, keyboard navigation, focus states, form labels/ARIA, skip links, semantic headings, alt text policy.
- **PII:** Role-based access; encrypted transport; least-privilege admin tools; audit trail for member edits; export & delete on request.

What's next (Roadmap)

- **Member directory & offers** with granular privacy controls.
- **Events & ticketing** (RSVP, volunteer shifts, QR check-in).
- **Chapter hubs** and leader tools; content delegation.
- **Networking graph** (who-knows-who, intros, needs/offers).
- **Job board & vendor marketplace.**
- **Analytics:** Chapter growth, engagement cohorts, renewal predictors.

Transferable Playbook

1. **Consolidate** the stack to a custom portal that mirrors your real workflows.

2. **Authenticate & clean** email; separate announcements vs renewals for consent.
3. **Automate the boring** (renewals, receipts, onboarding, dunning).
4. **Instrument** what matters (renewals, admin time, deliverability, costs).
5. **Iterate** with short board-demo loops and reversible migrations.

Quick Fact Box

- 5+ staff hours/week saved
- 3× cheaper than alternatives
- \$15k+ five-year SaaS savings
- Bounce rate ~10% → <1% (*TBC*)
- Renewal rate 75% → 80–88% (*early; TBC*)