

Recruiting Members and Keep Them Active

1. Why do you need to recruit members and keep them active?

All organizations have a reason to exist and work to do – having active members may be crucial to implementing your plans successfully. This guide is aimed at organizations that have a membership base. It will help you to set up a system for membership, a strategy for recruitment and a plan for keeping your members involved and active.

Organizations usually have members because:

- ✓ the organization represents its members
- ✓ the organization needs members to do its work
- ✓ a combination of both

Your constitution should be clear about your goals and about the role and tasks of members. The constitution together with your action plans should guide you about who you should target for recruitment. For example we want to recruit as many people as possible, but only people who agree with our mission.

Members are the base of most organizations and we should take them very seriously. Organizations often get off to a good start and recruit many people, only to lose them after a few months. Once you have recruited someone, you should work hard to keep them happy and active in the organization. There is a natural process in organizations where:

1. Some of your supporters in the community will become members
2. Some of your members will become committed activists
3. Some of your activists will become leaders.

If you want to keep on generating more activists and leaders for the future, you have to have programs to develop members into activists, and activists into leaders.

2. Important things to know about recruiting members and keeping them active

Among many reasons that organizations have for recruiting members the following are the common ones:

- The more different types of people you have in your organization, the more representative it is of your target community. This will ensure greater community support.
- Members bring skills and experience that they can use to benefit the organization.

- More members mean that you can do more work as an organization.
- The more members you have in your organization the more different ideas and opinions are expressed and discussed, this will lead to better decisions.

Who should you recruit as members?

Think carefully about the members you want to recruit. Look at the goals and objectives of your organization and the kind of people you need. Target people who:

- Form part of the constituency you want to represent or work with
- Identify with the aims and objectives of your organization.
- Support and want to work for your cause.
- Have skills and experience that will help your work.
- Can influence other people and get them to also join the organization.

Membership system

Every organization needs a proper system to record members, their contact details and their status and I believe we have a system in place. We can discuss the system and see if improvements need to be made. Here are some of the issues we can consider:

- Will we screen members or can anyone continue to join?
- Do we need to make adjustments to membership fees?

Recruitment strategy and methods

Before we start a recruitment drive, we need to make sure we have a proper strategy in place.

- We have to be clear about who we want to recruit – our target group.
- Decide a goal for how many members you want to recruit and how much time it should take.
- Any recruiting members must understand our organization and the interests of the target group and what they can say to persuade people to join.
- Different areas, organizations and sectors where you will find potential members, must be identified.
- Look at the human and material resources we have available to use for recruitment.
- Decide on the best methods and times for recruitment.
- Work out an action plan and budget

Keeping members active and involved

Recruiting members should be only the beginning - if we do not manage our members well, communicate with them and motivate them to work for the organization, we will soon have to recruit more members. We need to have a clear plan and process for keeping members involved.

3. How to develop a recruitment strategy and plan

Set your goals and targets

Do not start recruiting members until we are clear about what members our organization needs. Think about our organization's goals and plans and discuss who we should target to become members, for example: are you looking for people from a specific constituency or people with specific skills or people with specific views.

Decide a target number for how many members we want to recruit and where we are most likely to find them. Set a deadline for by when we want to achieve your goals and target number.

Decide the message we want to communicate to potential members

“Why should anyone join our organization? Unless we can answer this question, we will not be able to persuade people to join. A point of discussion would be what we can offer our target group and how we will persuade them to join.

Identify where potential new members can be found:

Once we have decided who our target members are, we have to discuss where we can find them. We have to know our chapter area well and understand the group we are targeting. If our group is sport bike riders or new motorcyclists, we could simply go to all the gathering places in the area. Let's discuss other ideas and whether those efforts should be more casual or more formal.

Recruitment methods

1. Set up a team. The task of member recruitment is enormous. No person can do it alone. A team of people (between 5 - 10) should do work on recruitment and development of the recruitment plan and implement it. Other members should also be encouraged to recruit new members whenever they can. Recruiters should be well trained to persuade people to join.
2. Gather necessary resources for recruitment. It is important for the recruitment team to ensure that before recruitment starts, all resources like forms, brochures, telephone numbers of members that can be contacted for joining, etc are available.

3. Time recruitment well. Recruitment can happen at any time and should be an ongoing part of the work of the organization. But it is an especially good time when you are doing a membership drive, running a campaign to garner support on a topical issue such as the helmet law and by holding other public events.
4. Sectoral work. If you want to recruit through other organizations, make a list of organizations, the name of a contact person and the telephone numbers where they can be reached when needed. Write to them or meet with them and ask if you can come and address one of their meetings or set up membership booths at their events.
5. Target key people for recruitment. Our organization will also need additional skills and talents and may want to target specific individuals for recruitment. We could also target someone who has influence over others and will be able to promote our organization. We can develop a list of key individuals in our biker community that we would like to have as members and go and visit them individually.
6. Information tables. Tables staffed by members can be set up in public places that will allow it. Brunswick County has had some success with Wal-Mart. We should always have a membership table at our own meetings or public events. Make posters and decorate the table so that it attracts attention.
7. Personal contacts. The best recruitment method is through personal contacts. We all know people who share our interests and members should be encouraged to bring their friends to meetings.
8. Meetings and Advertising. Advertise in local papers and community radio that you are looking for members. Invite them to a public meeting or provide a contact person for them to approach. You can also send letters to individuals or use promotional brochures to encourage people to join our organization.

Keeping members active

It seems that our organization loses members as fast as we recruit them. There are common problems we all have in keeping members involved and active. Here are some typical ones:

- ✓ The organization's meetings are long and boring
- ✓ Members do little other than to listen to leaders talk
- ✓ A small clique has all the power and does not encourage others to get involved
- ✓ Members are not valued and are never thanked or praised for the work they do
- ✓ Members feel useless or frustrated

- ✓ The organization has no projects that members can be involved in or they are not asked to participate. Many times people want to be asked to be involved
- ✓ Members feel that they are getting nothing out of the organization.

People usually join an organization because they want to do something for their community. But they also want something out of being a member. We need to find out what motivates members and make sure we manage them so that they stay motivated and involved.

Members are usually motivated by:

- ✓ Feeling that they are valued by the organization and making a contribution
- ✓ Being given opportunities to learn new skills or get education about issues that interest them
- ✓ Working on issues that will improve their lives or the lives of their families and communities
- ✓ Feeling part of a team
- ✓ Activities that entertain them or add to their social life
- ✓ Rewards in terms of status, personal achievements and a feeling of satisfaction for accomplishments.

Here are some of the things we can do to keep members motivated and involved:

- ✓ Do an introductory induction workshop for all new members so that they understand the organization and its work
- ✓ Welcome and introduce all new members at the beginning of each meeting
- ✓ Run regular education and development sessions for all members - either as part of regular meetings or in special workshops
- ✓ Encourage members to get involved in projects and campaigns
- ✓ Give people responsibilities and tasks and team them up with experienced members - they will feel useful and valued
- ✓ Thank people and praise them in meetings for work done
- ✓ Structure our meetings so that they are interesting
- ✓ Organize social events for members
- ✓ Leaders should spend time talking with members and getting to know them

STRATEGIES TO BUILD MEMBERSHIP

Strategy #1 Understand Change

Look at changes in the biking community but also consider how the expectations of the membership are increasing, where our future competition for membership dollars may be emerging and the impact of generational issues.

Strategy #2 Build Value

To build value we need to increase the benefit to the member or decrease the cost which is not an option

Strategy #3 Learn Why They Join

Ask our new members about the most important reasons behind their decision to join and find out what motivated them to join when they did.

Strategy #4 Start Them Off Right

Give them tools and information they need to take full advantage of their membership, help them get involved in activities that interest them and don't forget to make them feel special.

Strategy #5 Change Your View

Review our internal procedures from the member's perspective.

Strategy #6 Listen to Members

Use both regular formal research and ongoing informal information gathering to understand our members' needs and priorities.

Strategy #7 Anticipate Their Needs

Our organization whether it be at the BOD level or the chapter level have a responsibility to lead our members. This means we have to stay ahead of the curve, understand our community and constantly be looking at external influences

Strategy #8 Use Segmentation

Different members have different needs. Learn what those needs are and address them productively.

Strategy #9 Plan for Success

We need to develop and then use a written membership plan.

Strategy #10 Select Our Strategy

Look at all available membership strategies and adapt them to our target audience and our available resources.

Strategy #11 Trade on Credibility

Seek out testimonials from our members and use them in our recruitment activities

Strategy #12 Refine Our Message

Be sure that we are stressing benefits to our members.

Strategy #13 Don't Give Up

We have to continue to repeat our message.

Strategy #14 Do What Counts

We will need to track and evaluate any cost/benefit of every membership development activity. Build on those that are effective and discontinue the ones that are not.

Strategy #15 Set SMART Goals

Smarts goals are those that are Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Realistic and Time-specific.

SAMPLE MEMBERSHIP PLAN OUTLINE

The following are key elements that should be included in a membership plan.

The key elements are to set objectives for retention and recruitment. We need to think through the strategies to be used, and develop a time line and budget for implementation. Strategy sections should indicate activity, target, materials needed, person or persons responsible and deadlines.

INTRODUCTION

SITUATION ANALYSIS

Recap of past year's membership trends, brief analysis of historical trends, description of market potential and description of competition.

PLANNING ASSUMPTIONS

Brief statements regarding key assumptions that would affect the plan's success, such as the state of the economy, membership trends and availability of resources.

OBJECTIVES

Measurable goals for overall membership for the year, broken down by goals for recruitment (i.e., how many new members in each chapter) and retention (how many members will renew in each chapter).

RETENTION

STRATEGIES

Description of the strategies to be used, including those for new members (welcome calls, new member packets, special offers, new member survey), special communications to existing members, renewal mailings, telephone followup to members that don't renew and finally a lapsed member survey.

RECRUITMENT

STRATEGIES

Description of the strategies to be used in all three types of recruitment: responsive (responding and following up on inquiries); activity-based (opportunities related to organization participation and membership recruitment) and proactive (targeted visits, chapter activities and direct mail).

IMPLEMENTATION

- ❖ **Budget:** Listing of the potential costs to implement the plan including printing, postage
- ❖ **Schedule:** It is useful to compile all membership activities into one master activity schedule by organization or chapter
- ❖ **Evaluation:** Decide how results will be tracked and analyzed.

SUREFIRE WAYS TO ALIENATE MEMBERS – Do we see ourselves here?

1. Tell them, “it’s not my responsibility.”
2. Always assume the member is wrong
3. Shove the problem off onto someone else.
4. Blame the member for the problem
5. Assume the member is trying to pull a fast one or is up to no good.
6. Arrange your schedule so there is no opportunity to “waste” time talking with our members.

Follow these six rules and we can guarantee that the members and possibly the organization won’t be around for long!

It is my hope that the committee can work together to come up with a membership plan and then implement the plan to build our organization.

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