

## **Recruiting and Retaining Members for an Organization**

- Why Recruit?
  - People are the key resource to building an organization, so finding good people for your organization takes some work and time.
    - Attract New Volunteers  
People volunteer for things they feel good about.  
Communities that promote a positive image of their community are much more likely to attract volunteers.
  - Before you go out to recruit, ask yourself why you are recruiting. Why is it so important to you? You should have a clear perspective and understanding.
    - Have a Purpose: have a project or cause of immediate interest to potential members, a “hot” current issue, a neighborhood needs survey or some other useful information
    - What Kind of Group is it?
    - What's In a Name?
    - Don't Bring People into Mush
  - Some organizations become complacent with the members they have, they don't feel the need to recruit anymore. They become a small organization that has gotten comfortable with each other, and just quit recruiting. These are the organizations that are in trouble, because organizations that want to improve conditions, but aren't always recruiting lose their strength.
  
- Building Up Membership
  1. One of the first and most effective tactics to building membership for your neighborhood group is to have association members go door-to-door calling on their neighbors. This can be a weeklong effort or be done in a day. You could have a membership drive and then have a party for the members that volunteered in the effort.
    - Door-to-Door: hand out brochures and make personal contact with residents through block captains or recruitment committee members
    - Posters and Brochures: place recruitment posters/brochures at libraries, bus stops, schools, churches, Laundromats, and other local businesses,
    - Convenience: mail a membership brochure to all neighborhood residents, provide membership forms and information in your newsletter and/or on your web page

2. Ask members to invite others to join. Members should be encouraged to carry membership forms with them to sign up members on the spot.
  - Reach out for volunteers - don't wait for them to sign up. Many people are shy or never seem to get around to filling out the recruitment paper the board has sent - but they often respond to a personal invitation. Neighbors, residents who've approached the board about an issue, or owners who've expressed interest in an activity are prime candidates for a personal appeal by current volunteers.
3. "Bring a Friend" nights. This method works best when the members bring their guests and walk them through the meeting and do all the talking.
4. Another great way to encourage members to get other neighbors involved is to provide incentives for bringing in people. For example, give each member that recruits three or more people a prize or reward.
  - Competition: have a contest to see who can recruit the most new members
5. Hand out or mail printed materials to encourage residents to get involved. It could be as simple as a letter from the president or a brochure with details on upcoming events or issues.
6. If one exists, send out the neighborhood newsletter to every resident in the neighborhood. This will keep the entire neighborhood connected and provide a reason and a method for joining.
  - Community Visibility: use your newsletter and/or web page to announce the group's accomplishments and recognize volunteers, write your own press releases for the media or develop a good relationship with a reporter
  - Newsletters, websites, bill-boards, and notices all reflect a sense of your community. Utilize these communication tools to publicize the charm and unity of your community to stimulate volunteer interest.
7. Designate block captains that can pass out flyers and newsletters to prospective new members, welcome new residents, serve as a sounding board for specific problems or issues on the block, and organize volunteers to help with activities they might be interested in.

8. Make sure that you encourage everyone to join. Minority language groups, low-income residents, the disabled, the elderly and youth all tend to be under-represented in neighborhood groups.
9. Neighborhood gatherings or other events are also a great way to recruit new members. Holding frequent events throughout the year illustrates how active an organization is. Sponsor a booth at a community festival or event. Have membership sign-up sheets available. You can also have information packets about the association to hand out at events.
  - Promotion: have membership tables at other events – fairs, parades, sidewalk sales, church socials, etc.

### **Retaining Members**

1. Have Fun! Long-term members and leaders need to have fun when they get together. People who take themselves too seriously can turn any task into a chore. Getting together should feel more like recreation than work, no matter how serious the issue. Those who understand citizen involvement stress the importance of having fun over all other considerations. There are many ways to keep involvement fun:
  - a. Have frequent events and get-togethers.
  - b. Turn neighborhood work into a friendly competition between members with awards handed out at the end.
  - c. Recognize volunteers and members through award ceremonies, regular meetings and in the neighborhood newsletter.
2. Help new members find a place in the association. Many will offer to help but will not know where to start. Organize a list of volunteer activities and have those who want to help sign their name next to activities they'd be interested in helping with. This will be a great start for your new members.
3. Always welcome new members and attempt to make them feel at ease with the group. Officers and other members should watch for new faces at each meeting and welcome them. New or potential members should be introduced to someone who lives near them. Designate an official "greeter" at every meeting.
  - Membership Perks: keep membership fees low, provide coupons to local businesses, have interesting and lively meetings
4. Avoid the appearance of cliques. New people who see the same people running every project will feel excluded and may not return. Different people should be appointed to positions of leadership. This will help create a sense of belonging.

5. Encourage new ideas and input at all levels of the organization. People who are new to the organization can see things in a new light and provide new solutions to old problems. New perspectives can assist the whole group in problem solving.
6. Every meeting should represent the strongest commitment to organization. Busy people will not attend meetings or involve themselves in organizations they consider to be a waste of time. Having a well-planned meeting will also display a sense of accomplishment from the beginning. Have a written agenda for every meeting and stick to it.
7. Maintain current membership records. Keep a file with members' names, addresses, phone numbers, family member names, occupations, special talents, areas of interest, etc.
8. Being part of a neighborhood association is not all work. Have fun as well. Sponsor parties and celebrations to get to know your neighbors better. Your events should appeal to all, including children. This will foster a strong sense of community spirit among your neighbors.
  - Have Fun: have a party and invite the whole neighborhood, socialize and have snacks after meetings, do a hands-on project and invite non-members to participate.
  - Short-term projects might be working on a community policy, planning a community event or flipping burgers for the association's 4th of July activity.
9. Don't ask for long-term commitments. Ask residents if they would be willing to participate in a short-term project, such as an ad-hoc committee focused on landscaping the front entrance.

### **Sources**

- Neighborhood Association How To's
- Recruiting People to Your Organization
- Organizing Neighborhood Associations
- Attracting and Retaining Members