

## **RECRUITING NEW MEMBERS**

People join organizations for many reasons. Generally, people join clubs:

- to meet new people, to make friends and to have fun
- for an experience that will add to their résumé
- for opportunities to develop and use their skills and talents
- for a chance to serve others and make a difference
- to get involved
- to explore interests
- and to have fun

Groups need new members because they bring new ideas and talents, as well as replace outgoing members. If your club can effectively articulate how it addresses these needs, your club will be more successful recruiting new members.

With the large number of existing groups on campus, as well as countless newly forming organizations; it is vital that an organization has a well conceived and executed recruitment and retention plan.

First, it is important that both the leadership and membership **know and understand your organization**. Have a meeting to review and discuss your organizational goals and objectives. Are they still accurate? Is it time to update them? Where would the group like to be in six months? A year? During this "organizational housekeeping" process, a certain theme or direction should become clear. What is this? What types of people do you need to help the group succeed? Try to develop a member profile. Who would you like to have join? Who would compliment your current membership?

Now that you know the types of people you are interested in, your next step is to **set your recruitment goals**. How many new members can your organization reasonably assimilate into the group? Will you allow people to join at any time or only during a specific recruitment period? Will you hold a mass meeting or is membership by invitation only? When designing your recruitment strategy you must keep in mind your member profile. What places or "hang-outs" do these prospective members frequent? Do they have special interests? What kind of publicity would attract their attention? But most of all, try to think back to when you first became involved. What attracted you? How were you recruited? If you weren't recruited, how did you hear about the group and why have you stayed involved? The most effective recruiting method is personal contact by club members. Members familiar with the purpose of the organization and the benefits of membership can talk comfortably with potential members. Access what motivated current members to join. Ask each current member to bring one new member to a meeting.

**Get everyone involved in the recruitment process.** Have your current members identify people they know who might want to get involved and personally invite them to attend a meeting. Word-of-mouth is the best and least expensive type of publicity you can use. Talk about your group. Tell people what you have to offer them. Ask them about themselves (and really listen). Tell them how the organization can benefit from someone like them joining it. Let them know how their talents, skills and interests would help the organization.

**Recruitment campaigns need to have a visual element** as well. Have those members with "artistic talents" work on your posters, flyers, banners and bulletin boards, etc. Be creative. Your publicity will be effective only if it's noticed.

### **Recruiting Tools**

- Recruitment is not just a beginning-of-the-year effort!
- Tabling - can be an effective recruitment tool. Clubs can reserve tables for recruiting and promotional activities throughout the year. Remember the Residence Halls as well as the Student Center as good locations for recruitment.
- Student Organizations Center sponsored Organization Fairs - this is an annual event during Campus Ruckus and Student Center Spectacular, the first week of the fall semester.
- Banners and flyers- with information about your clubs recruitment efforts.

Many groups find it beneficial to **schedule a special welcoming meeting or ceremony** for their new members. Group participation in some form of official initiation process is one way to make your members feel wanted, needed and appreciated. It helps to form a unique and memorable bond between experienced and new members. This bonding is hard to break and will help increase your retention rate.

However you choose to welcome your new members it is important to **include some form of group orientation program** for them. Many groups skip this element and begin by getting new members immediately involved in group projects. Although new member involvement is essential, it is equally important to orient them to your group's goals and objectives, organizational structure, rules and norms. This demystifies the group and helps the members feel more comfortable with the group and understanding its processes. Proper orientation leads to better understanding, more commitment, and less frustration.

After you've successfully completed your recruitment and orientation programs, **spend time getting to know your membership and let them get to know you** too. Don't forget your experienced members either, without them you wouldn't have had a group for your new members to join. Talk to all new members about their skills, interests and previous experiences. Once you have this information, it will be easy to get them involved in your group's projects. To be sure that their first organizational experience is a positive one, assign new members tasks that are well within their skill level and that they can successfully accomplish.

Finally, **allow your new members time to get involved and feel comfortable** with the group. After a semester, have them participate in a group evaluation process. Go over your organizational goals and objectives and look at your plans for the future. Ask for their feedback and input. It is a known fact that people are more committed and motivated if they feel that they have a stake in what is going on. It is important to effectively involve your members so that they may help to shape the organization's future.

Some ideas to stimulate participation and improve involvement:

### **Leader, Know Thyself**

Take time to assess your leadership characteristics and know how they impact upon your organization. Is your "style" hindering your group? What behaviors could you change that might stimulate cooperation and commitment among your group members?

### **Delegate Responsibility**

Don't fall into the old "it's easier to do it myself than explain it" syndrome. Allow others within your group to experience the good feelings that go along with successfully completing a given task. Grant responsibility and the authority to make decisions. Have members be accountable for their assignments.

### **Know Your Mission and Purpose**

You can't convince others that you have a worthwhile organization unless you're aware of what the group stands for. Take the time to review your constitution so that all members are aware of your goals as an organization. Group programs should be consistent with your stated mission and purpose.

### **Orient New Members**

Take the time to help new members become a part of the group. Meet with them over lunch or coffee, and talk about your organization with them. Find out why they were attracted and if they have any special skills or talents you should be aware of. Orientation is not simply "telling" about your organization, but acting in a manner that allows new members to become and stay a part of your organization.

### **Match the Person to the Job**

Take advantage of the special skills and talents of your group members. Not only does this benefit your organization, but it gives individual group members an opportunity to "shine."

### **Involve Everyone**

People support what they help create. The more input members have into decisions, the more likely they are to participate in implementing them.

### **Recognize a Job Well Done**

Nothing works quite as well as a "pat on the back" for a job well done. Please take a moment to reward good effort on the part of group members and recognize the work they put into the tasks given them. It will go a long way toward insuring their future cooperation.

### **Allow for Personal Growth and Development**

Encourage and make room for those individuals who might be aspiring to a higher leadership position. Take the time to let them know that rather than feeling threatened by their interest, that it's nice to know that someone is interested in assuming a responsible position within the organization. After all, officers will graduate some day!

### **Make It Fun to Belong to the Organization**

While belonging to any organization requires that group members assume certain responsibilities, the experience of being part of an organization should, above all, be a pleasurable one. In addition to tuning into members' needs, be sure to include group social activities at least once a semester so that everyone has an opportunity to mingle, relax, and enjoy each other's company.

### **Use Meeting Times Effectively**

Start on time and end on time. Come to meetings prepared. Know what needs to be discussed and what needs to be accomplished. Be sure to print agendas for distribution. Well-organized meetings are more effective meetings.

### **When Motivators Don't Work**

Despite all the best efforts, sometimes members don't get organized or can't fit all their activities into available time. Sometimes they just lose interest in what they are doing. Allow them to bow out of their responsibilities gracefully. If possible, find them a more appealing or less time-consuming role.

Above all, **have fun together**. Make time to socialize and celebrate your achievements. If all you do as a group is work, it will become a burden to participate and your members will quickly lose interest. After all, what is an organization without members? What good is a recruitment campaign if no one stays?