



# Recruiting New Members

People join organizations for many reasons (see below). Groups need new members because they bring new ideas and talents, in addition to replacing old members. 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 house-keeping" process, a certain theme or direction should become clear. What types of people do you need to help the group succeed? Who would complement your current membership? Try to develop a member profile.

Now that you know the types of people you are interested in, your next step is to set some 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 designated recruitment period? Will you hold a mass meeting or is membership by invitation only? When designing your recruitment strategy keep in mind your member profile. What places do these prospective members most likely frequent? Do they have special interests? What kind of publicity would attract their attention? Most of all, try to think back to when you first became involved. What attracted you? How were you recruited? If you weren't, how did you hear about the group? Why have you stayed involved?

Have your current members identify people they know who may 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. Let them know how their talents, skills, and interests would help the organization. Sending special invitations is another nice, more expensive way to invite new members.

Recruitment campaigns need to have a visual element as well. Have those members with artistic talents work on your posters, flyers, banners and sandwich boards. Be creative. Your publicity can be effective only if it's noticed. Many groups find it beneficial to have 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 old and new members and will help increase your retention rate.

## Why People Join

There are four major reasons people join organizations - if your organization can meet the needs of prospective members then you are more likely to recruit and maintain a strong membership. An organization needs to have multiple recruiting plans in order to meet the needs of different types of prospective members.

### Want to get involved

This is the most common reason people join organizations. When recruiting someone that simply wants to get involved, you need to be able to articulate what involvement opportunities your organization provides. It would be beneficial to have a flyer, which lists many of the programs, events, service activities, and social activities that your organization is traditionally involved in. The list of activities will indicate to prospective members that your organization will provide them with a connection to campus and other students. Once recruited, it is essential to get these students immediately involved in the planning of an upcoming event. Talk to your new members about their skills, interests, and previous experience. To be sure 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.

### **Want to meet people**

Many students join organizations to make new friends. These students are seeking a sense of belonging. During the recruitment process it is essential to make them feel comfortable and valued - assure them that your organization wants them to join. Again, it is helpful to have a list of activities that your organization participates in to assure these prospective members that they will have the opportunity to engage in social activities besides meetings. Once recruited, it is essential to immediately provide these students with social contact. Be sure to address new members by name, this makes them feel valued. Every time a new member joins (especially if many new members arrive at one time) it is important to have everyone introduce him or herself. Icebreakers and teambuilders are highly suggested as a way to help new members become integrated into your organization. If the first meeting a new member attends is simply a business meeting where their presence is not acknowledged, they are not likely to return. It is good practice to have a short icebreaker at the beginning or end of every meeting - this keeps the organization fun and interesting for those who are seeking social contact.

### **Want to develop leadership skills**

Some students join organizations because they know they want to be a student leader or because they think it will look good on their resume. These students were usually involved in high school or another college, or they wish they had been involved before and see Adrian has an opportunity to develop some new skills. During the recruiting process organizations need to assure these students that there are opportunities to chair committees or hold positions within the organization. Once recruited, these members need to feel that the organization is accomplishing something. For these members it is important to have well-organized meetings with agendas so that the new members can visually see what is being accomplished and decided. Again, it is important to immediately get these members involved in the planning of an upcoming event. Members who are seeking leadership opportunities want to feel valued by the organization - give them feedback that you are glad they joined your organization.

### **Believe in the cause / purpose of your organization**

The last type of student who joins is one who feels strongly about the purpose of the organization. For these students it is important to clearly convey the mission and goals of your organization. It is helpful to have a flyer that describes the purpose of the organization and the activities that you engage in to support the purpose. Once recruited, these members need to feel the organization is living up to the mission and purpose of the organization. Having a new member orientation where both new and old members review the mission and goals of the organization is helpful. Throughout the semester the organization should review this document to ensure that everyone is still on track. To increase the investment of new members in the organization, it is important to include them in the goal setting process.

Most people join for a combination of reasons. Your recruiting materials and tactics should address all possible motivations. Maintaining your membership is as important recruiting. Be sure you are taking steps to keep your new members involved and invested in your organization. All types of people are needed to have a strong organization. Do not discount members that seem to only be social butterflies, they are fulfilling a vital role in your organization. The key is to find a balance between those who are very task oriented (want the business accomplished as quickly as possible) and those who are more process oriented (don't care if anything is accomplished as long as everyone has fun).