



Recruiting and Retaining Members for Your Neighborhood Organization

Note: Make this document your own by deleting or modifying these suggestions, and adding techniques that work for you.

Why Recruit?

- There is strength in numbers.
- Organizations that want to improve conditions, but aren't always recruiting, lose their strength.
- Organizations will wither if they do not replace people who move, drop back, drop out, burn out, get sick, pass on...
- Recruiting brings in new blood, new energy, new ideas, and new talents & skills.
- Members of groups tend to get complacent and comfortable with each other... If they do not actively recruit, welcome, accept, and involve new members, they get too ingrown and too cliquish. Eventually they find it hard to bring in new people, and newcomers can sense they are not really welcome.

I just want to say that the association meetings have seemed to be a closed, clicky group... over the years people have lost interest in joining... and NO interest at all in paying dues... I think the in-crowd likes being select and not OPEN... the officers have complained about a lack of interest but it is really a result of NOT reaching out... Not much help... maybe I am saying that low attendance is a result of an attitude... not because people don't care...

-- Email sent to the Office of Neighborhoods circa 2010

When Should an Organization Recruit New Members?

- When planning and executing a special project
- When there is a hot button issue
- When you distribute a "Neighborhood Needs" Survey
- ALL THE TIME
- Only when you are ready to take them in.

Golden Rule of Recruiting

*Don't recruit new members
until you have a plan
for retaining current members*

Corollary to the
Golden Rule of Recruiting
Don't bring people into mush.

Why do People Stay in a Neighborhood Organization?

Residents remain active in a neighborhood organization because they:

Understand the mission of the organization

- Do you state your mission at the beginning of each meeting, and give an example on how the mission is carried out?
- Do you help newcomers understand how the organization helps improve or maintain the quality of life in the neighborhood?

Feel Welcome

- Do you have one or more persons designated to welcome new and old faces as they walk in the door?
- Do you set aside time at the beginning of your meetings to allow folks to introduce themselves?
- Do you follow up with those newcomers after the meeting?

Feel Needed

- Put people to work – but on short-term tasks at first.
- Match talents & interests with group's needs.
- Old Organizer's Adage: Never do with one person what you can do with two. Never do with two what you can do with three... Find ways to involve people!
- Someone with a job to do at the next meeting is more likely to attend the meeting!

Feel Heard

- If someone brings up a problem, issue or concern, or offer to help, do you follow up at the meeting or afterwards?

Feel Appreciated

- Are you recognizing the contributors of members and celebrating what they do for the organization?
- *Let's hear it for Mike who brought the cookies tonight!*

Feel Missed

- Do you follow up on members who have missed a meeting to make sure they are okay and to fill them in on what happened at the meeting or event?

Feel they are working toward something positive

- People volunteer for things they feel good about.

Feel there is room for them at the table

- Do you meet in a neutral location such as a church or community center, rather than in someone's home?
- Is it easy to become a member?
- Do you hold regular elections and ask for volunteers so that it is clear they can become involved in the organization at different levels?

Can participate in meetings / express their ideas

- Meeting facilitator tries to draw people out rather than expressing his personal opinion or pushing his agenda... Regular members give newcomers a chance to speak.
- *Sherry, I realize this is your first meeting, but do you have any experience with this issue?*
- Are new folks encouraged to offer new solutions and perspectives to old problems?

People who are new to an 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.

Can help make decisions

- Is it clear how your group is organized, how people become leaders, when elections are held? In other words, is the governance transparent and accessible?
- Do you strive to avoid even the appearance of cliques that might shut out a newcomer?
- Is leadership shared? (Does one person do all the talking or do different people lead on different things?)

Can bring their children

- Do you provide child care?
- Do you examine whether you are putting up other barriers to attendance and participation, such as the time of your meeting?

Can have fun and make friends

- Do you build some light-hearted elements into your meetings? (door prize, refreshments...)
- Do you hold social events in addition to your regular meetings?
- Do you foster an atmosphere where members can make friends and strengthen relationships that survive disagreement and controversy?

Perceive that the group is organized

- Do your meetings begin and end on time?
- Do you follow an agenda that everyone can see?
- Is there a clear decision-making process?
- Do you get things done?
- Do you offer interesting programs and speakers?
- Do you handle disagreements appropriately? Is everyone is treated with respect? (versus open conflict or uncomfortable atmosphere)

Recruiting & Retention Techniques**Follow up. Reach Out and Touch.**

- For any newbie who attends any gathering, follow up with a phone call or personal visit. Thank them for attending and ask about their ideas for the neighborhood.
- Touch base with those who promised to show up but did not. No guilt, just a low key inquiry. Share what happened at the meeting.
- Conduct a confidential "exit interview" with someone who decides s/he wants to drop out of the organization or step back indefinitely. Why has s/he made this decision? What can you learn that might help the organization going forward?

Create and Publish a List of Volunteer Opportunities.

- What are leaders doing that others can do?
- How can you break down tasks so that you can involve as many people as possible?
- Asking someone directly is always best, but a widely distributed list may attract some volunteers.
- Can be used for a New Member Orientation.

Create a Brochure...

- ...or a flier with your organization's mission, projects, meeting times and place, names and contact information of officers and committee chairs, upcoming special events, etc.
- Use this in all of your other outreach efforts.
- Posters (up to 11x17) placed in store windows can also be effective.

Develop a Welcome Packet for New Neighbors.

- Include coupons from local businesses, information about city services, and your organization's brochure.

Knock on Doors

- A door-to-door campaign can occur in one day, one weekend or longer, depending on how many active members you have.
- Throw a party afterward for campaign volunteers
- Have a good reason for your campaign such as:
 - A "Neighborhood Needs" Survey
 - A New Members Drive
 - A Request for Ideas on Neighborhood Improvement Projects.
 - Input for a major decision facing the neighborhood.
- Distribute a brochure or flier with your Mission, Projects, Meeting Time & Place, Contact Information, etc.
- Capture contact information.
- Have a contest to see who can recruit the most new members.

Recruit Block Captains.

- If a door-to-door campaign seems daunting at first, try to locate one person in each block or each section of the neighborhood who will serve as a block captain for that area.
- Because they have a smaller area to cover, block captains can spend more time visiting neighbors door to door, identify potential members, distribute newsletters and fliers, welcome new residents, and serve as an initial sounding board for specific problems or issues on the block.

Cast a Wide Net

- 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.
- There are many good reasons to reach out to renters. See the Office of Neighborhoods flier on this topic.

Publish a Newsletter.

- A newsletter distributed to every resident in the neighborhood helps raise the profile of the organization among residents. It is a physical manifestation of the community and the organization.
- Use your newsletter to recognize volunteers, welcome new neighbors, make announcements, inform neighbors of issues, include photographs of neighborhood socials, etc.
- A website can serve the same purpose, but neighbors have to have Internet access, and they have to elect to go to the site.

Develop a Relationship with Your Local School.

- The principal may be willing to send a flier home with students.

- If neighborhood group members get involved in volunteering at the school, this is a great way to meet parents who live in the neighborhood.

Bring a Friend Night.

- Plan this one carefully. Make sure your regular members have committed to this drive.
- Ask yourselves what issue or special speaker would draw your neighbors to a meeting.

Advertise Meetings in Multiple Ways.

Don't rely on just one means to remind everyone of meetings and events. Use as many of these as possible:

- Face-to-Face Ask/Reminder
- Phone Calls
- Email
- Newsletter
- Flier – *can be a newsletter on one side.*
- Postcards
- "Meeting This Week" Yard Signs
- Facebook, Twitter, other social media
- Website
- Community TV Calendar
- Office of Neighborhoods Newsletter Calendar

Recruit Around a Hot Button Issue.

- Don't make major decisions for the neighborhood without informing everyone affected. Give them a chance to weigh in.
- Create and distribute a flier, making sure that one person's name and contact information is on the flier.

Maintain Membership Records

- Keep a file with members' names, addresses, phone numbers, family member names, occupations, special talents, areas of interest, etc.
- Do not include information that a member consider sensitive or private.

Stick with it.

- Regular communication, month in and month out, helps your neighbors realize that the organization is here to stay, that you are serious, and that you are in it for the long haul.
- Analyze your recruitment efforts. What worked? What did not work? What can you do differently?
- Don't give up.

A Job Well Done!

Active members of a neighborhood association and other local volunteers are special people who should be praised for the time and energy they have given towards making the community a better place. Provide certificates and awards at a special event for your volunteers or at your regular meetings. Here are some award suggestions:

COMMUNITY VOLUNTEER AWARD

Recognize those special persons who have sacrificed endless hours of their free time.

SPARKLING SENIOR AWARD

The oldest or the most active seniors in your neighborhood can be given special recognition for their involvement in the association's activities.

BEAUTIFICATION

Award the owners of an attractive yard that brightens your neighborhood.

FUND RAISING AWARD

If there is a particular group or person that has helped to raise funds for your organization, let them know you appreciate them.

ACTIVE YOUTH AWARD

Always encourage the youth in your neighborhood and recognize their contributions for the improvement of the community. They are the neighborhood leaders of tomorrow!

TERRIFIC TEACHER AWARD

Poll the youth of your neighborhood to see if there is a teacher who should receive special recognition by your association.

GREAT NEIGHBOR AWARD

To a person who has helped a neighbor over and beyond the ordinary. Nominations could be made by neighbors. Do once a year so that it is special.

HOME OF THE MONTH

Recognize the homeowner that has done an exceptional job of landscaping or making the outside of their home attractive.

Be creative! Tailor your awards to the specific accomplishments of your neighbors. The award names can be unique to that individual's contribution.

Office of Neighborhoods
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