

ENGAGING NEW MEMBERS

The excitement and energy that you exhibit to your group will determine whether others want to join, participate, and stay involved. Think about how you will model enthusiasm and engagement as a leader. Research indicates it is not just what you do to be involved that matters, but how you do it. If you put in more time and energy into your leadership, you will learn more, have more engaged members, and a more successful organization.

The first step in engaging new members is to know why you are engaging them!

Establishing a clear purpose for your group will allow potential members the ability to see what they are joining before they come to a meeting. The purpose can be established through a few shared ideas, creating your organization's vision and mission, goals and values, and articulating what functions your group will perform.

Goals and Values

Before you can engage members, your group needs to have a set of goals and values for which it stands in order to clearly articulate to potential members what the purpose of your group is. Developing long and short term plans helps to keep your group centered and prepared for the entrance of new members. Showing potential members your group's goals and values will increase your retention efforts.

Functions

Your group does many things, but how does the rest of the community know what they are? You need to develop a list of your group's main functions and objectives to communicate to members, as well as to all of your potential members.

Marketing

Marketing is another key component to finding new members. Marketing is important in recruitment and name recognition, however marketing can only catch the eye, the internal goals of the group will keep them interested. When marketing for your group; finding a common theme, logo, or slogan that is used on all materials will help with name recognition. In finding a logo, be sure to do your research. If another group is using something similar, you may confuse the viewer. Be sure to utilize your mission, vision, values, and functions in determining the logo. Being clear and consistent in your communication is the most important part of your marketing strategy.

Make sure you are using your resources! Is your *group profile page* up to date? Make sure to include all of your contact information. Include your group-specific email, website, and Twitter and Facebook information. Don't forget that students are also looking to get in touch with you – both via the *group directory* and the *Engage! Search*.

Mailing Lists

Mailing or distribution lists, like using an email Listserv, are a free resource for your group to consider. Consider having either electronic options or paper sign-up sheets available at your meetings and events, and also on your group's website or social media accounts. Think through your messaging type and timeline so that your message is read and your members don't unsubscribe. If developing a mailing or distribution list, make sure you include information on how to unsubscribe at the bottom of each message.

Leadership Experience

Offering leadership opportunities is another great way to keep members interested in your group. Offering members the chance to get experience as officers, through internships, or by being active within their chosen field of study, will increase the number of prospective members. Giving people what they are looking for will give your group more credibility, as well as more attention from members looking for involvement opportunities.

Once We Get Them, How Do We Keep Them?

Organization

Organization within the group is the first part of keeping members interested. Once a person joins a group, they will want some sort of structure to work within: for example, keeping a president, vice president, and officers are a good start; having those officers keep good records, know what's going on within the group, and keeping projects and events organized will help eliminate frustration from members. Know who is doing what and when. Utilize your membership for completing projects or tasks (don't just have them come to a meeting and listen to what the officers are doing this week).

Create a Friendly and Welcoming Feel

Creating a Friendly and Welcoming Feel for your new members is key in getting them interested and keeping them coming. If a new member does not feel needed or welcome in the group, they will not come back. The key is to get them involved from the get-go. Include them in on social opportunities, event planning, and invite them to help out with some of the important aspects of the group. Do not overwhelm them, but be aware of their need to feel part of the group.

Shared Vision

A Shared Vision can make or break a group. If the people within the group believe in the same thing, foresee the possible future of the group, and are all working toward that common goal, your membership is likely to join in the shared vision. They will become more actively involved with the group and help to accomplish your goals. If no one can see what you are focused on or where your group is headed, your members may lack motivation to be involved.

Offer Resources

Offer Resources to your membership. People join groups because they are looking for an opportunity to gain something from their membership. Become a resource yourself, by being active within the campus community with a variety of departments, faculty and staff. Provide resources, such as officer binders or manuals, access to the group's files to create a sense of history, and access to your advisor. Also, offer them the opportunity to become an officer or a key player within the group, so they have the opportunity to gain leadership experience and skills.

ATTRACTING, ENGAGING AND RETAINING YOUR MEMBERS

- 1. Use age differences to your advantage.** Set up programs where older members can mentor younger ones. Your present, and generally older members, have the benefit of many years of experience and wisdom. Both generations will benefit from this. Of course, your focus should be on the industries where your members are prominent.
- 2. Use social media (Twitter, Facebook, LinkedIn) to attract younger people.** The younger generation loves technology and 24/7 access to your association. You will need to blend technology with the personal. Social networking online is great but don't forget face-to-face meetings.
- 3. You don't need an elaborate campaign to recruit and maintain younger members.** Keep the message simple and fresh. As a matter of fact, think Twitter's 140-character limit! Shorter messages facilitate dialogue. Don't just rehash your program's message. Get young professionals to interact with your organization.
- 4. Showcase the diversity of age in your printed and online publications and materials.** Check to see what the average age of your members are in brochures and bulletins. Make sure some of your younger members are depicted in the information.
- 5. Have your association guide young people to your group.** For instance, if you are a real estate group don't just try to attract young real estate professionals to the assembly. Start earlier and attract young professionals to real estate.
- 6. Make sure you welcome younger members to your organization.** At meetings assign an older member to each younger member to be their host. Introduce the younger member to everyone. It may also be a good idea to team up a seasoned member of your group with a new one for a period of time until the newer member gets a better feel for the organization. The younger person will have a built-in mentor to get started and feel comfortable.
- 7. Recognize young members of your organization.** A great example of this is many engineering groups have young engineer chapters. This allows younger members to associate with their peers in leadership programs and networking. If you can get younger members involved in the process early they are more likely to stay engaged and become successful and influential leaders later on.
- 8. Start early with your recruitment efforts.** College-aged young people are excellent candidates for your organization. High-schools may be a great place to start also. Groom these young people to become interested in your group. After all, these young people are going to be the leaders of tomorrow. Latch on to them early and insure your group's continuity for years to come.
- 9. Don't get too radical when trying to attract younger members.** Ascertain the average age of the member's of your organization. If the average age is over 50 begin by trying to attract newer members in their 40's. Lower the age of your group slowly.
- 10. Keep younger, and newer, members of your group in the loop.** Don't get them to join your association and then forget about them. Engage them in as many ways as you can. Find out what these younger members are interested in. Appoint them to committees that cater to their likes. If enough new members have certain interests start up a new program or incorporate these interests into an existing program with younger members playing some lead roles.
- 11. Remind them: It's more than just a membership—take advantage of all the benefits.** What we've learned working with prominent associations is that they offer a lot of value to members. But sometimes retaining membership can be a challenge because those members aren't engaged. They have the membership for the sake of slapping it on a document somewhere as street cred but never take advantage of membership benefits. It's not all their fault.
- 12. Improve engagement to nurture your stakeholders—It's not enough to just communicate about benefits.** If you want to keep up momentum and retain members, you need to continuously produce content that engages members to take advantage of those benefits. Engaged members are long-term members. Roll out your message in a variety of formats that work best for your audience segments. That means websites, social media and even online private forums. Develop mobile content that appeals to your current and prospective user base. And, depending on the audience, you can't rule out direct mail