

Attracting and Retaining Members

NEIGHBORHOODS

Recruiting and retaining members is important for the life of any organization. However, it takes a lot of hard work to get people to join and keep them involved. Initially, many groups attract members through well-publicized meetings on issues that concern many people in the neighborhood. Once the project is completed or a problem is solved, formerly active members may dwindle away. Many organizations experience this problem, but with a little creativity and people committed to the organization's vitality you can achieve great results.

Steps to Building 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. This technique is great for building rapport and trust among neighbors. You could have a membership drive and then have a party for the members that volunteered in the effort. Your members would have fun and would have an opportunity to share experiences with each other.
2. Ask members to invite others to join. Many volunteers doing community work said they began because a friend, a family member, or a neighbor asked them to join. Members should be encouraged to carry membership forms with them to sign up members on the spot. Or have "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.

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.

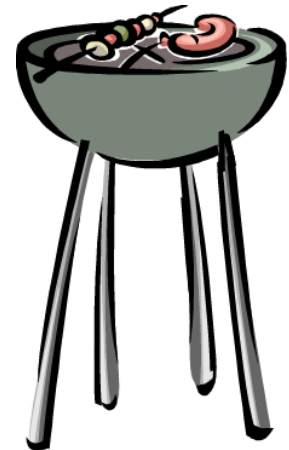
3. Hand out or mail printed materials to encourage residents to get involved. It could be as simple as a

letter from the president or a brochure with details on upcoming events or issues.

4. 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.
5. 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.
6. 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. It may be necessary to find a translator to bridge language barriers.
7. 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. This is a great opportunity to talk to people in your area. Have membership sign-up sheets available. You can also have information packets about the association to hand out at events.

Steps for 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.
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.