

Recruiting and Retaining Members

Recruitment and retention of members should be a focus throughout the year. Many student organizations have a stated purpose that appeals to a broad constituency of potential members. Your organization may be of interest to students regardless of gender, racial or ethnic background, sexual orientation, ability, religion or national origin, college, major or year in school.

Recruitment

Before you begin to recruit members, review your current membership and determine whether you are reaching a wide range of students. Your organization will benefit if you are successful in attracting a number of students from varied backgrounds because of the new ideas, perspective and experience they will bring. No matter what type of organization you have, don't think you can predict the people that will be interested in your group. Even if you are connected to an academic major, there may be undeclared majors or people with a great deal of knowledge about the subject but who have chosen a different academic focus. If your group decides it has not been successful in reaching certain kinds of members (e.g., men, returning adult students, students outside a particular major, students from a range of cultural backgrounds), make a plan for doing focused outreach to the "missing" members. The Student Organization Office can help you in developing a plan. In your recruitment publicity and information you can be welcoming and inviting to the broadest possible range of members by remembering to do the following:

- Use inclusive imagery in posters and pamphlets representing your organization. Make sure that the language you use in your publicity is respectful of all people and that it is gender neutral.
- On your publicity materials, indicate whether your event or meeting is accessible and how to contact your organization if students have special needs or accommodations.

Outreach

Fliers and general mailings may not be enough to entice people to join your group. It is likely you will have to do outreach to get members to come to you.

- When reaching out around campus to recruit new members, visit places where you might meet students with a variety of backgrounds and experiences.
- Be willing to change your method of outreach, for example, by visiting with individual students around campus -- letters or posters may not be effective for all groups.
- Don't wait for people to come to you! REACH OUT!

Retention

Once you have attracted a broad range of members, you need to think about what will keep

them interested and involved with the organizations. Some ways include:

Offer leadership training to all interested members, using campus resources (see the end of this chapter about free workshops available to students and student organizations).

Demonstrate your commitment to diversity by modeling respect for all members. Plan programs that are of interest to all of your members; you may want to offer some specialized programs for subsets of your membership, but be certain you aren't serving some subsets and ignoring others.

Review your programming to attract new members and meet the needs of current members -- make changes to fill program gaps.

Create an organizational structure/governance that encourages participation by all members.

The Americans With Disabilities Act (ADA)

The Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (the ADA) is a federal law that recognizes, and seeks to ensure, the right of individuals with disabilities to participate to the fullest extent possible in the activities and benefits of society. The ADA addresses the rights of persons with disabilities to building access and other accommodations, such as interpreters, note takers, etc. These accommodations help to ensure that, among other things, persons with disabilities can attend college with a minimum of difficulty and that their right to experience the world of higher education is not infringed upon. Although your group is not an official University office, as a Registered Student Organization, you are expected to provide accommodations when possible. Let people know that you are willing to change meeting sites and accommodate their special needs. If you have questions regarding providing reasonable accommodations you can receive assistance from the Office of Student Activities.

A Retention Strategy

Remember, students stay with organizations that are organized, dynamic and meet their personal goals for membership. Prospective members want to know that the organization is moving forward and successful in meeting the group's goals. Identifying the needs of the individual members is the key to having a strong organization with enthusiastic members. To remember why students join organizations and what helps retain them, just think of GRAPES.

The Grape Principle

G is for

Growth

Does your organization provide growth opportunities for all interested members? Are there opportunities for members to move into positions of leadership or are there only a few opportunities usually "saved" for the senior members?

R is for

Recognition

Do you recognize members when great things are occurring in your organization? Don't wait until the end of the year. People need and appreciate being recognized for the hard work they have been accomplishing in a timely manner. Recognition or awards that are presented may also serve as a motivating factor for other members who would like to achieve a certain level of success.

A is for Achievement

A sense of "team" achievement is important. Even if the member wasn't the "key" person who helped accomplish a task, it's important that everyone feels as if they contributed to the success of the organization. When the organization is honored, it is important that the group realizes that everyone from a member who may have done a simple task to the president of the organization contributed and has a feeling of accomplishment.

P is for Participation

Can everyone participate in programs and events? At one time, perspective members of certain organizations had a six month waiting period before reaching "full" member status. This limited the participation of the new members. There was no problem when new members were needed to work on menial tasks but other tasks were reserved for "full" status members only. Make sure your organization is open and willing to accept all student members' contributions regardless of how long they have been with the organization.

E is for Enjoyment

Volunteering and working hard in an organization has to be fun! If being part of a group isn't fun, why be a member? Students' time is valuable and there is a multitude of options for them to be involved with. Make sure one of the best options on campus is being involved with your organization!

How does your organization meet these needs for members? Are there opportunities for new members, as well as the graduating seniors? What opportunities are there? List them. If you think there is an area within this principle that needs addressed, let the Student Leadership Office know how we can help (724/357-2598).

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