

Why Recruit New Members and Board Members?

“Why aren't there more people at our meetings? Why is it always the same few?”

Take time to answer these questions.

Why are you asking people to join? Why do you need them? Why are you doing this recruiting? What does the organization need? Do these statements sound familiar to you?

- We need people to take on committee and/or leadership roles.
- There is strength in numbers.
- With more people, we can get better ideas.
- We need more skills.
- We need a "critical mass" to be effective.
- A larger membership will make us more powerful more meaningful.
- We need a larger group to meet our goals.
- More people equals more idea.
- I can't do this all myself.
- More diverse membership makes us more representative.
- Our neighborhood will be more cohesive with larger membership.
- This is so much fun we want to share it with more people.

Organizations that are not growing are dying.

SHORT RUN

It may seem efficient for an individual or a small group to "do it yourself."

LONG RUN

A “do-it-yourself” mentality is deadly to the organization—and will burn out your leaders. The ability to recruit new members shows your organization still means something to people today. It is a litmus test of an organization's worth and present importance. It is also a great opportunity to review and clarify your mission and goals.

Know what you're asking people to join.

People want, need and deserve to know what they are getting themselves into. Neighborhood Association leaders need to know **WHAT** they are asking people to join. Unless you are clear about this **NOW**, you will run into problems later.

Can you speak clearly about:

- What kind of group is it?
- Who can be a member? And what it means to be a member?

Don't bring people into mush.

Most organizations start off informally. Defining membership may seem unnecessary or obvious.

But over time with more people, you need to think:

- What does it mean to be a member of this group?
- What does a member need to do?
- What does a member have to believe in?
- What kind of person do we want?
- What variety of people do we need?
- Do we take everyone who walks in the door? If we do, what might that mean in the future for our organization?

If you are going to be successful in recruiting people, you need to know what constitutes membership. Membership might have its privileges. It may also have its responsibilities and criteria.

Some common criteria for membership:

- All members should agree with the **mission** of the organization
- All members agree with and act according to the **values** of the organization
- **Equality:** All people—regardless of race, sexual orientation, gender, ethnic origin, religion, culture, disability—are allowed to become members and are treated with respect.
- **Democracy:** All members agree that they will abide by the will of the organization, democratically decided.

- **Accountability:** All members agree that they will do what they say they will do for the organization. They will be accountable for following through on their word.

These three general agreements—**equality, democracy and accountability**—form the basic criteria for membership. They express certain values, make the expectations of membership clear, define how the group makes decisions, tell what to expect and what is expected.

Putting these criteria to work

- Pay attention to the power dynamics in the group.
- Facilitate the ability of each person to speak at meetings.
- Evaluate if you have a representative group.
- Recruit people who share the values of your group and are willing to help.
- Recruit people who care about specific neighborhood issues, but not *only* about the issues.
- Look for people who have a personal "self-interest" in what you are working on as well as in the group as a whole.
- Have a mindset that is ready and willing to give members responsibility.

Why do people join organizations? 80% of people report that they joined a group *because someone they know asked them*. Face to face, eyeball to eyeball. This is an important finding.

Reach out to people *You have to go to people to get them involved*. You have to show up in person, face to face, look them in the eye and ask them to help, to come to your meeting or join your organization.

Know what's in it for them: simply asking may get someone to join, this is not likely enough to keep them motivated and involved for very long. If they know and like you well enough, they may join as a favor to you. But it won't keep them involved for very long. They need to join for their own reasons and needs.

Build a relationship, not a following. You are looking for enthusiastic participants and potential leaders, people who will take responsibility, people who will, eventually, take on work on their own initiative.

Strong relationships build effective organizations. You need to develop a beginning relationship. Find out what new and existing members are interested and get a sense

of who they are. Strong relationships are a reward in themselves. For many it is the quality of the relationships they find in the group that keeps them involved.

Teamwork. It is not enough to have a common goal for an organization to be productive. It takes coordination and communication. The tasks the organization undertakes will be done most efficiently and effectively when relationships, morale and communication are strong.