



## **Recruiting New Members**

People join organizations for many reasons: they want to get involved, meet people, make new friends, explore interests, develop leadership skills and have fun. Groups need new members because they bring new ideas and talents, in addition to replacing old members.

With the over 300 existing groups on campus, as well as new forming organizations, it is vital that an organization has a well conceived and executed recruitment and retention plan. This handout is designed to assist you in the development of such a plan.

First, it is important that both the leadership and membership know and understand your organization. Have a meeting to review and discuss your organizational goals and objectives. Are they still accurate? Is it time to update them? Where would the group like to be in six months? A year? During this "organizational housekeeping" process, a certain theme or direction should become clear. What types of people do you need to help the group succeed? Who would complement your current membership? Try to develop a member profile.

Now that you know the types of people you are interested in, your next step is to set some recruitment goals. How many new members can your organization reasonably assimilate into the group? Will you allow people to join at any time or only during a designated recruitment period? Will you hold a mass meeting or is membership by invitation only? When designing your recruitment strategy keep in mind your member profile. What places do these prospective members most likely frequent? Do they have special interests? What kind of publicity would attract their attention? But most of all, try to think back to when you first became involved. What attracted you? How were you recruited? If you weren't, how did you hear about the group? Why have you stayed involved?

Get everyone involved. Have your current members identify people they know who may want to get involved and personally invite them to attend a meeting. Word-of-mouth is the best and least expensive type of publicity that you can use. Talk about your group. Tell people what you have to offer them. Ask them about themselves (and really listen). Tell them how the organization can benefit from someone like them. Let them know how their talents, skills and interests would help the organization. Sending special invitations is another nice, but more expensive way to invite new members.

Recruitment campaigns need to have a visual element as well. Have those members with "artistic talents" work on your posters, flyers, banners and diag boards, etc. Be creative. Your publicity can be effective only if it's noticed.

Many groups find it beneficial to have a special welcoming meeting or ceremony for their new members. Group participation in some form of official initiation process is one way to make your members feel wanted, needed and appreciated. It helps to form a unique and memorable bond between old and new members and will help increase your retention rate.

However you choose to welcome your new members it is important to include some form of group orientation program. Many groups skip this and begin by getting new members immediately involved in group projects. Although new member involvement is essential, it is equally important to orient them to your group's goals and objectives, organizational structure, rules and norms. This demystifies the group and helps the members feel more comfortable with the group and understand its processes. Proper orientation leads to better understanding, more commitment and less frustration.

After you've successfully completed your recruitment and orientation, spend time getting to know your membership and let them get to know you too. Don't forget your old members since, without them, you wouldn't have had a group for your new members to join. Talk to all new members about their skills, interests and previous experiences. Once you have this information, it will be easy to get them involved in your group's projects. To be sure that their first organizational experience is a positive one, assign new members tasks that are well within their skill level and that they can successfully accomplish.

Finally, allow your new members time to get involved and feel comfortable with the group. After a semester, have them participate in a group evaluation process. Go over your organizational goals and objectives and look at your plans for the future. Ask for their feedback and input. It is a known fact that people are more committed and motivated if they feel that they have a stake in what's going on. Have them help to shape the organization's future.

Above all have fun together. Make time to socialize and celebrate your achievements. If all you do as a group is work, it will become a burden to participate and your members will quickly lose interest. After all, what is an organization without members? What good is a recruitment campaign if no one stays?