

MEMBERSHIP DEVELOPMENT: RETENTION

Given the intense competition every nonprofit faces for members, money, volunteers and attention, treating members like customers who may "shop" elsewhere makes good sense. It's not enough to reach out for new members; it is also critical to reach in to maintain high levels of existing member commitment.

According to Trudy Aron (as quoted in *Keeping Membership*, by Serkin & McDermott-see the Resource Guide): *Retention is even more important than recruitment. You can always get new people into the fold, but keeping them is the real challenge. You have to be an evolving association, keeping on top of the wants and needs of the members.*

Clearly an organization cannot keep every member; some reasons that people leave are out of an organization's control. And it is not possible to provide all members exactly what they want at all times-that's not what most members expect. There is much, however, that can be done to keep interested members from becoming dissatisfied and alienated. Keep up with what members are thinking and whether they are satisfied with their membership.

- Everyone needs to pay attention to diversity issues. Don't leave diversity-oriented work just to members of racial and ethnic groups in the minority in the League, which could lead to individuals feeling marginalized.
- Everyone can initiate conversations about diversity issues, read books and educate themselves, attend diversity-training workshops, and bring concerns to the attention of the entire group.
- Every member should help make sure that every member is listened to and has a valuable role to play.

Pay special attention to new members.

- Communicate with new members frequently.
- Provide new members with an orientation.
- Offer a new member a volunteer job that is in keeping with his or her expressed interests and time limitations.
- Assign someone to be the new member's "buddy" and mentor. Being a mentor doesn't necessarily have to take a lot of time. Check in with the new member by phone or at meetings; get together for lunch or coffee; send notes and e-mail messages with encouragement.

Ensure that internal record keeping is accurate and accessible.

- Make sure that the League has up-to-date information on all members.
- Keep member records accessible for use by officers, committee chairs, membership coordinators and others.

- Ensure that renewal notices are sent out promptly every year. Follow-up (through a personal call, if possible) with anyone who doesn't renew or has not been heard from in awhile.

Compiled from the LWVUS Diversity Toolkit

Membership Development: Retention Worksheet

ASSESS

1. Survey new and long-term members to assess what they love about the League, their interests and their concerns.
2. Ensure the League's member records are accurate. Can you accurately state your League's retention rate?
3. Contact members who have left or not renewed to find out why.
4. If meeting attendance or volunteer involvement is low, find out why.
5. Review the reasons people join and stay members of nonprofit organizations. Is your League offering these benefits to members?

PLAN

1. Set challenging retention goals for the next two years. (It is typical for organizations to retain between 50 percent and 80 percent of their membership.)
2. Brainstorm a variety of ways to improve member retention and encourage more members to become active volunteers.
3. Develop a strategic retention action plan that includes:
 - New member orientation
 - Mentor/buddy system
 - Regularly scheduled surveys of member interests and concerns
 - Volunteer management system that provides small and large opportunities and time flexibility.
4. Determine whether member's need additional training or educational materials on communication skills, volunteer management, diversity awareness, what other experts say about retention and other issues.
5. Determine measures that will help you monitor the success of the retention plan as things proceed. For example, ask mentors to note details of every time they contact or meet with their new member and what was discussed.
6. Write down the retention action plan and note who will do what by when.

ACT

1. Mentors/buddies promptly follow up on concerns and requests made by new members.
2. Keep careful records to monitor progress toward retention goals.
3. Celebrate successes and share praise with everyone that helps. Develop a variety of ways to thank members personally and publicly for their contributions of time, money and attention. *Compiled from the LWVUS Diversity Toolkit*