



Your Moray

# INCREASE YOUR MEMBERSHIP GUIDE



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## INCREASE YOUR MEMBERSHIP GUIDE

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## **Introduction to the manual & its aims**

This handbook is designed for:

- groups
- committees
- individuals tasked with the role of recruiting new members
- professionals supporting the capacity building of community groups

Attracting and maintaining membership is often cited as one of the main concerns for community organisations/groups today. This manual can assist groups and individuals with recruiting new members. This handbook is not designed to be the only answer to this but a tool to support and offer practical solutions in attracting new members and ways to initially support new members.

Readers are encouraged throughout this manual to self reflect on their organisation and practice at sections highlighted with the following icon: **?**  
By doing so, this assists not only with the task of recruiting new members but allows for a continual review of the organisation / group.

Before undertaking this task the manual encourages the reader to consider key aspects of their organisation / group in order to implement a successful recruitment campaign.

## **INTRODUCTION TO THE PROCESS OF RECRUITING MEMBERS**

A successful and healthy community organisation / group is one with an active and sustained membership. This is often an indication that your organisation / group is serving its aims and therefore is valued and respected within the local community.

Trying to recruit members is often regarded as an overwhelming task but it does not need to be if a planned approach is taken. In order to have a strong membership it is important that there is a real understanding of the organisation / group in the first instance and this manual recommends that the Committee or those identified members tasked with recruitment and membership consider the following:

**?** Reflect:

Can members speak knowledgeably and confidently about the organisation / group?

The following prompts should be useful in answering this:

- What does your organisation / group set out to do?
- Are your goals realistic and achievable?
- How do you achieve your goals? What is it you do?
- What resources are available to your organisation / group? Are these applied correctly to the right areas within the organisation / group?
- What commitment from others do you have internally and externally?
- How do you communicate within your organisation / group and with others?
- How do you know you are operating effectively? When was the last time you reviewed the way your organisation / group conducts itself?
- How are decisions reached and implemented within your organisation / group – what is your structure?

If there is a gap in knowledge here it is recommended that this is resolved before advancing any further in the recruitment process, after all if current members can not answer these what chance does a potential new member have of getting their head around it?

By ensuring that this knowledge and understanding is applied within your organisation / group you have already mastered the first step in ensuring long term membership. The culture of your organisation / group will also determine what opportunities and support are available to potential new members.

In this manual we will discuss the following key areas to a successful recruitment campaign:

- Why do you need and / or want new members?
- Who will do it?
- Who are the new members?
- Where are these new members?
- How are you going to do it?
- Have you been successful?
- Support and retaining your new members

Before starting to recruit and retain members it is crucial that you have a plan.

? As part of this plan consider the following points:

### **1. What does membership mean in your organisation / group?**

The following prompts should be useful in answering this:

- Who are your members?
- How do people become members?
- What rights and duties do members have?
- Are these questions implicit in your constitution?
- What does your organisation / group offer members?
- What does your organisation / group expect from its members?

## **2. What is the current situation of your membership?**

By assessing your current membership this should help you visual your future membership. It will also aid you in deciding which type of approach to adopt and ways in which you can retain new members.

The following prompts should be useful in answering this:

- Is your current membership diverse? - Is this an important element to your organisation / group?
- Are there similarities in your current membership?
- How did your current members get involved?
- How have members felt about their experiences with your organisation / group?

### **WHY DO YOU NEED AND / OR WANT NEW MEMBERS?**

In this section of the manual we will explore why your organisation / group is considering a recruitment campaign. It is not uncommon for community groups to raise this as an issue for concern or as an urgent need. Does it have to be this way? Do you really need new members?

There is no getting away from the fact that a recruitment campaign can be time consuming and in some cases have costs attached to it. Therefore it is important that you understand for what purposes you need additional members? What added value can they bring to the organisation / group? It is also important to decide whether you can support new members and fully understand the implications of taking on new members. Again these are questions to ask the wider organisation / group to ensure they fully understand and support a recruitment campaign.

Before setting out to attract new members review your current membership list and find out if these people still want to be members. This is a task which is worth being persistent and proactive with - send reminders or even call to those not active and find out why they have not replied or renewed their

membership. This will either help in retaining existing members or provide you will valuable information on how you can possibly improve your organisation / group in terms of membership. If current or old members have views or ideas on how to improve your organisation / group take these on board as a way of improving your organisation / group – do not take these personally and do not avoid this valuable feedback.

The following areas are a sample of common reasons for recruitment campaigns:

### **1. A need to increase membership?**

The most important element in this scenario is to know your limit as an organisation / group.

? Carefully consider the following questions:

- What is your current member level and what is a realistic maximum level for your organisation / group?
- What is more important the size of the membership or the number of members actively involved within your organisation / group?
- How many members do you actually need to operate effectively?

### **2. A need to make membership more reflective / diverse?**

The benefits of being more representative of your community are that it will assist in your efforts to gain greater community support. Being more diverse can also bring a wider range of opinions, a wider skill base and a wider contact base to your organisation / group. Assessing the demographics and diversity of your local community can assist in understanding whether your membership is currently reflective and help inform ways of accessing target audiences to ensure diversity.

This is, however, a difficult task and you must be realistic about the results.



? Carefully consider the following questions:

- Who is underrepresented within your organisation / group?
- How do the diverse areas of your community view your organisation / group?

In order to find this out you will need to communicate directly with these sectors of the community to ascertain this and their needs. Alongside this you may need to consider translation - can your group realistically accommodate this at present?

**As a community group / organisation what type of membership opportunity are you offering?** You have to ensure that you are clear about this right from the start of any campaign. It may be that your organisation / group can offer a variety of opportunities and with this you must be in a position to provide the appropriate support.

People may want to get involved with your organisation / group for a variety of reasons: an opportunity to learn new skills, an opportunity for a challenge, an opportunity to tap into their existing skills / knowledge, others may simply support your cause. Ask yourself, can people get involved in specific aspects of your organisation / group that reflect their main interest or current priorities? Are there opportunities for people to utilise or improve their skills in the general running of the organisation / group – if yes ensure that these are clearly highlighted. Where you will find these people with these skills, interest and availability?

Membership opportunities can be long or short term. Short term opportunities offer people a start and end date or occur at regular intervals – these can be as successful as long term opportunities as these allow people to get involved who have time constraints and it also provides an opportunity for people to see how well they get on within the organisation / group.

So who is the right member for your organisation / group? Remember that everyone within the community is a potential new member. The challenge is to identify who out in the community matches with your aims and what is the most appropriate way to approach them and vice versa ensuring that that there are opportunities for them to approach your organisation / group.

## **WHO WILL DO IT?**

An effective recruitment campaign takes time and effort and therefore ideally a committed group of people should work on it. Before getting started is there a consensus and support within your organisation / group that recruitment is required? Are all members committed to contributing to the process in some way? Remember by listening to your organisation / group new opportunities can emerge from feedback.

There is a role for all members to play in a recruitment campaign however are there certain people in your organisation / group who can take the lead in this process? Has anyone in your organisation / group been involved with this process before? Do any members have an interest, or specific skills and knowledge in this area? For those leading the process are they up to date, knowledgeable and confident about what is required? Is the person recruiting new members a happy member themselves – will they be portraying this to potential new members?

For others in the organisation / group are they ready to respond to queries / requests from potential new members, (golden rule never ask a potential new member to call back or wait for information!). Delegate specific tasks to one another – do not have everyone going out trying to do the whole process. The lead person needs to keep everyone up to date to ensure efforts are not duplicated.

Remember to look out with your organisation / group for assistance in this process as there are a range of professionals who can help out.

## **WHERE ARE THESE NEW MEMBERS?**

The reality is that they are everywhere in your community. By understanding why you want new members and what opportunities exist within your organisation / group for them you can begin to identify what skills you would like new members to have and where will people be who have these skills?

No matter what you require new members for it helps to have some ideas of where to look within your local community for potential new members. One way is to create or get access to a directory of other local groups / organisations in your area to get a better understanding of people and your community.

Such a directory will highlight the various local groups out there and it may be possible for your organisation / group to go along and speak to their members in order to attract new members for your organisation / group. Points to consider with this approach are:

- Carefully select the group beforehand. There will be certain groups who already exist which have a membership whom regularly like to help out within the community and those groups which run a similar theme / cause to your organisation / group
- Establish a relationship with a member of the group who can in turn act as an ambassador for your organisation / group – other members will probably be more receptive in this case
- If you are attending other community groups be prepared - be prepared for people to show an interest there and then, you want to capture this enthusiasm. Do not leave without their name and number and commit to responding and as quickly as possible, alternatively have membership forms with you.

The following list is intended to help you to begin thinking about the wide range of potential areas to explore when looking for new members.

Remember these will vary according to each area:

- Business and professional organisations
- Churches and religious groups
- Conference and special events
- Schools (nurseries, primary and secondary)
- New residents to the community
- Parent groups
- Retired groups
- Uniformed groups
- Colleges – students and staff
- Libraries
- Sports groups / organisations
- Volunteer centres

## **HOW ARE YOU GOING TO DO IT?**

By this stage your organisation / group should know exactly what it is you are setting out to achieve. By understanding the meaning of your membership, your current membership situation and the varying opportunities available to new members it is now time to decide how you want to accomplish this. Set short term goals to ensure that you can evaluate the success of your campaign. By adopting a planned approach this will yield better results rather than just jumping in and hoping for the best.

It is really important to understand what has worked well and what has not worked well in the past within your organisation. Think about the following:

- How have you attracted members previously?
- Who has been involved in this process before?
- How have members felt about their experiences with the organisation / group?
- What publicity have you had before, good and bad?
- What is the public perception of your organisation / group?
- Can you and other members speak knowledgeably about your organisation / group?
- Do you feel comfortable talking about it?
- Can you articulate how members can get involved and how they can contribute to the organisation/group?

Finding the right people for your organisation / group requires careful consideration and planning before going out. In particular your organisation / group needs to clearly identify and describe what opportunities are available to potential new members. Is your organisation in a position to answer the following ?:

- What are the positions available? What are the functions of the role?  
This assists potential new members form a sense of identity within the organisation / group and understand their role.
- What are the essential / desirable attributes from new members that your organisation / group is looking for?
- Where is the location for the opportunity?
- What is the impact of the opportunity for the organisation / group? This again helps inform the potential new member of the importance of their contribution to the development of the organisation / group and its aims.
- What are your organisations / groups expectations of the new member, what are the responsibilities / duties? What is the commitment required of a new member?
- What support is available for new members?
- Who is the identified person in the organisation / group that new members can call upon to discuss opportunities / take them forward?

Your organisation/group should ideally have a range of opportunities ready for new members and ensure mechanisms are also in place to support and retain members.

### **Why promote your organisation?**

In doing this you are attempting to educate the local community on what it is your organisation / group does and what are the values and benefits to becoming a member?

## **Promoting your organisation**

Most often than not getting new members is an ongoing task. Always consider how you plan to keep your organisation / group in the public eye - keep visible within your local community. Ensure knowledge and relationships are up to date within your local community. Also ensure your promotional materials are relevant and up to date to ensure you can grasp opportunities at short notices.

When promoting your organisation / group, consider the following: ?

- What success stories have you got about your organisation / group which you can share with others?
- Advertise the activities of your members in visible locations
- By offering a range and choice of opportunities this will appeal to a wider range of potential new members
- Do you have a flyer or a brochure that informs people about the organisation / group? What makes your flyer / brochure stand out from the others? Can you include a membership form on this? Can you include contacts should people want to chat about becoming involved your organisation / group?
- Do you have a website with the above information and an online membership form?
- Are you on email which can assist with timely and regular communication?
- Can you co-ordinate your membership campaign? – Is it to be a one off annual event or an ongoing campaign? Can you link in with other larger campaigns locally / nationally such as Volunteer Week?



- Can you offer incentives for those renewing membership or for new members?
- Get involved with local companies / businesses. Local organisations often want to be viewed favourably by their local community. They may wish to support your campaign through such resources as the printing of leaflets / brochures.

### **What is your recruitment message?**

Your “recruitment” message should explicitly state what your organisation / group is about and committed to doing. Decide on your wording, who is your audience, is your information accessible – clear, comprehensible, attractive?

? Does your message answer the following key elements?

- What is your organisation / group about?
- What kind of people are you looking to attract?
- What would be the demands of getting involved?
- What would be the benefits of getting involved? What would motivate people to get involved?
- What are the types of attributes that members need?
- Is training available for new members and will there be ongoing support?
- Are expenses available?
- What are the achievements of the organisation / group?

Your message needs to be **interesting** enough to encourage people to continue reading / listening and ultimately interesting enough for the potential new member to sign up or make contact with your organisation / group. Have your message focus on the need for new members and the benefits as opposed to information about what days and times you meet. You need to capture their interest and enthusiasm.

Another crucial element to your message is to ensure it is clear and **avoids misinterpretation**. To check for this try it out on a sample of people for feedback – both people who know about your organisation / group and those who do not. Ask friends, family and colleagues for honest feedback.

Your message needs to be **comprehensive** in that it contains all the necessary information for a potential new member to sign up – do not have a scenario where a potential new member has to search for further information.

Be **open and honest** about your organisation / group - give new members a realistic idea of what is expected of them. Most importantly in your message exhibit passion for your organisation / group – this is often contagious!

### **When is a good time to look for new members?**

Ongoing is best however, the reality is that certain times may be better for example if you are working on a specific issue this may attract people – a hook is often a good means of getting people involved.

Develop a timeline which clearly shown the stages that you will work through in your recruitment campaign. If you are adopting an ongoing approach always ensure that you have opportunities available for people to join your organisation / group. Information will also need to be kept up to date and someone has to be identified within the organisation / group to deal with membership. By implementing a year-round process this will ensure that your organisation / group's name, profile and membership opportunities are constantly in front of people. By having this as a regular agenda item at Committee meetings this ensures it is regularly discussed, developed and evaluated. By also having dedicated individuals working on this it ensures consistency.

An effective recruitment campaign ultimately links in with a successful marketing campaign. If you can get the public to identify the name and purpose of your organisation / group you can target your recruitment

campaign to those people most likely to say yes. For further information on successful marketing refer to the Community Support Unit Marketing Manual.

### **How should you approach potential new members?**

Do not assume people know about your organisation / group or that they are aware that you are looking for new members. By ensuring you develop a system of letting the community know what you are doing throughout the year they begin to understand and get a sense of what they would be supporting / contributing to if they became a member.

Have you prepared for responses? Do you know what to do if someone says yes, no or maybe? What if they say no - is that a definite no or a no not just now? The key is not to be caught out so as an organisation / group, always have answers ready.

### **What approach will you take?**

This is dependent upon why you need new members. Where you require new members for specific tasks or specific reasons a targeted approach is considered best. Implementing a targeted approach requires your organisation / group to be specific and focused on your need and clear on where to access your target audience. What type of message will motivate this person to get involved – consider key words in your message; specific messages are required for specific target groups – there is not one standard message that will suit all potential new members.

**Targeted recruitment** focuses your organisations/groups efforts on specific areas of interest and on specific people who are best matched for your organisation / group. Points to consider for best results for this type of approach:

- Clearly describe your organisation / group
- How do you reach out to those groups that you have identified as your target group? What agency / professional staff work in those areas?
- Create specific and not generic marketing materials for this target audience
- Where will you place your marketing materials – a broad sweep of the community is not the way, carefully pinpoint locations to match your identified audience
- What follow up will be done and who will do it? – Remember this should not be a one off effort this is an ongoing process of developing and maintaining relationships.

Where a more general need for recruitment is required a **broad base approach** should be implemented. This can be effective for less specific requirements of membership or when you require high levels of membership. This approach is most effective through a high profile recruitment campaign geared towards the general public as opposed to a specific target audience.

Examples of a broad based campaign include:

- **Media work** - consider a feature article about a specific area / task of your organisation / group in the local press or use a current member in a feature article? Or consider regular advertising in the media such as radio / press / newsletters / TV / websites which promote a consistent and clear message about your organisation/group and indicate very clearly that you are need new members.  
The challenge in the latter is to ensure that your message concentrates on what the need is of your organisation/group - what are the motivating factors to getting involved and how do people go about getting involved.

- **Strategic distribution of printed materials** - consider where in your community are the most effective outlets for such distribution. Which areas have high foot counts? Your materials have to be of a quality standard if you want them to stand out from others. What is your unique “selling point” that makes you more visible than the other leaflets / brochures on display? What is the unique opportunity that your organisation / group offer that will motivate interest in your organisation / group.

The following are some examples of how and where to place materials within the community:

- Create a display board which you can use in alternate identified sites
- Community centres
- Churches
- Doctor surgeries
- Libraries
- Local authority and Community Planning websites
- Community newsletters (such as housing, health)
- Local press
- Nurseries / schools / colleges – notice boards / newsletters or school bag drops (with school bag drops find out how many are required per pupil / family / class and have these batched in preparation – staff are more likely to be supportive to this than just turning up with a box of leaflets)
- Service clubs
- Retail outlets
- Volunteer centres
- Door to door flyers
- Shopping bag inserts
- Hospital foyers
- Sports / leisure centres
- Hall notice boards

- **Use existing volunteer services** - ensure that you have registered with your local volunteer centre and other volunteer based opportunities within your local community. Think about who will be looking for opportunities such as you are offering (for example Duke of Edinburgh Award Schemes, colleges / university students, schools, adult learning provisions, uniformed groups, youth groups)
- **Get to know what is going on with other community groups / organisations.** Ascertain where and what are the common organisations in your area, what are the specialised groups? Create a directory with this information; this will be a useful tool to your organisation / group for a variety of purposes. Ensure that you prioritise this directory according to the needs of your organisation / group. Remember such a task will take time and will need to be regularly updated as names and contact details change. Once you have your directory in place get to know other community reps / groups. Liaise to see if there are opportunities to link in with each other.

Consider using an approach which combines the two methods (broad based and targeted) and this will provide your organisation / group with far more opportunities.

Other areas that your organisation should give consideration to are:

- **Face to face contact** - this is generally proven to give the best results. The more personal the contact the greater chance of success. This does take time and is not always possible. The person / people conducting this task should be knowledgeable and enthusiastic about your organisation / group. They should also be aware of their body language and tone as these are non verbal characteristics which play a fundamental role in this approach.

- **Phone contact** – this is a quick and easy task as a number of calls can be conducted over a short period of time. Have a script of what you propose to cover in your conversation for reference. Think how you are going to say these things. Remember it is your voice and tone that you are reliant on in a telephone conversation. You must also be prepared for several attempts as you may not reach the person first time around and ensure you are prepared for example to speak to an answering machine? With this type of contact you may not get the same amount of attention as face to face contact and you are solely reliant on verbal communication and loose out on body expressions and facial expressions.
- **Door to door** – this has challenges but being planned and having the right attitude all help out. Find out about the area before hand – do your homework. Give yourself a target of how many doors you will approach in a given time. Have materials to leave with people. Be prepared to conduct your input in the space of approximately two minutes – you need to be able to cover who you are, what group you are representing, why you are on their door step, what you want them to do. You also need to be prepared and skilled to strike up common interests, to act upon their response, to thank people for their time. Remember to record your visit. More often than not this task will get easier the more you do.
- **Letters** – once drafted these can be used time and time again, can be produced on a large scale quickly and can be perused at the other persons own time. Letters are also good if you are working alone or in a small group, working to a tight deadline and not seeking specific members. However, consider that your letter may never be opened; it is one way traffic with no opportunity to respond there and then. By writing letters it is also more difficult to establish a relationship with the reader. Set aside time to write the letter and remember this is a persuasive letter that you are compiling so you need to get their attention quickly.

Think about the following:

- Consider your design - do you have a logo? Would using larger letter wording be easier to comprehend? Would colour be more appealing?
- Make your letter personal to that person, use their name in the letter, hand sign it. Written letters are not totally out of fashion, some people like the idea of a personally addressed letter.
- Make your opening sentence appealing then get straight down to detail: Why are you writing? What are the benefits to becoming a member – be specific here, what are the benefits to your organisation / group? Do not overload the reader with too much information about the organisation, if you have a leaflet / flyer/ brochure include it. Detail what action you want the reader to take and how they can do it.
- Thank the reader.
  
- **Emailing** – this as an approach also has its place. Emailing is quick and a cheaper alternative but for some it is less formal than a written letter and may be considered less. Is the person you are contacting a regular on email? Will your email stand out from potentially hundreds of other emails the person receives?

Combining all of the above methods to suit the various people you wish to contact is the best approach to adopt.



## **HAVE YOU BEEN SUCCESSFUL?**

Take the time to conduct an evaluation of the exercise as often good ideas and lessons learned are lost because the time is not taken to record and discuss these.

Given that you will have developed a time line for your campaign and you will be clear on who and where you wish to target and most importantly for what reasons you should be able to easily define if you have been successful.

By keeping a record of your information during your campaign you will be able to determine which aspects of your campaign have been successful and which have not.

Results of your campaign will vary, are you as an organisation / group prepared for too much success? Can you handle a number of enquiries and requests to join? Rejection may also happen, remember not to take it personally and do not be discouraged.

Remember to ask new members how they heard about your organisation / group and the opportunity to join. This way you will begin to get a feel of what worked well and what did not work so well and this will help inform the next campaign you undertake for new members. It also helps you focus your time and efforts in the places with the greatest return for future campaigns.

If you determine that your campaign has not been as successful as you had hoped it is really fundamental to identify and understand why not. As an organisation / group review and reflect the planning and implementation elements of your campaign to seek answers.

Consider the following points in terms of evaluating your campaign:

- What were the goals you set out to achieve and did you meet these? If not, why?
- Did people understand about your organisation / group or did they have preconceived ideas - Do you need to do something to change these?
- Were people reluctant to join? Did you find out why and what would have made the difference for them?
- What would you change next time?
- What worked well and what did not?

Also give consideration to celebrating your successes and reflect on how you can make your next campaign as successful - if not more successful!

To recap:

- **Plan your campaign**
- **Implement your campaign**
- **Evaluate your campaign**

## **SUPPORTING & RETAINING NEW MEMBERS**

Now that you have recruited new members you need to understand the importance of keeping them. Ultimately do they have a sense of belonging to the organisation / group and are they valued within your organisation / group?

By offering training and support this helps send out the message that your organisation / group is proficient in its operations and should be taken seriously.

The minimum support / training package that is provided should include:

- Induction sessions to the organisation / group
- What are the objectives, short / long term targets?
- Regular support and supervision through both formal and informal opportunities to address issues / concerns / ideas
- One to one opportunities for coaching / problem solving / mentoring
- Opportunities to get to know other members. Would it be worth having an event that brings new and existing members together?
- Encourage peer support between your members as most often they will draw upon one another for support, encouragement etc.

The following sections are some of the key areas that your organisation should consider implementing and developing:

**Keep members regularly informed of what is happening in your organisation / group.**

- Ensure that you have mechanisms for members to communicate within the organisation / group and to the Committee / Board
- Respond to members' requests and concerns promptly and appropriately
- Be open to members' ideas and suggestions.

**Training and development of new members**

In order to get the best out of your members training and development should be viewed as an investment in them and for the future of the organisation / group. Further benefits can be gained from members new and old contributing to the development of training and support mechanisms within the organisation / group.

As members needs' will be diverse it is important that training and development is identified, prioritised and met in a way that meets the differing needs of members. Good practice should be that training and development is readily available to all members new and old and that members are encouraged to take up these opportunities as this allows individuals to develop new skills, knowledge and more importantly increase their confidence.

As it is increasingly difficult to attract funding from funders specifically for training and development it is crucial that the Committee / organisation give consideration and priority to this need ensuring that a methodical and prioritised approach is adopted on a continual basis and is reviewed and evaluated on a regular basis.

## **Involve your members in how you operate**

The value your members new and old can bring to the development of your organisation / group can be immense. They can help with accountability, effective delivery and how the organisation / group moves forward.

In conclusion when you have new members find out what their interests and motivations are, let them know the description of their role, the benefits of being a member to them and the organisation as a whole, what their responsibilities are, what the induction system is, what support is available. Provide new members with any appropriate paperwork. Allow new members the opportunity to express concerns, interests and observations. Match members' roles according to interests and abilities and recognise achievement.

By implementing such areas of development this should result in a healthy and active membership for your organisation / group.

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