

RECRUITMENT & RETENTION

There are at least four major reasons people join student organizations – if your organization can satisfy these reasons, then you are more likely to recruit and maintain strong membership. You may find it necessary to have a variety of recruiting plans in order to reach all prospective members.

Desire to get involved – this is the most common reason people join student organizations. When recruiting someone that simply wants to get involved, you need to be able to explain what involvement opportunities your organization provides. It would be helpful to have a flyer which lists many of the programs, events, service activities, and social activities that your organization traditionally is involved in. The list of activities will show prospective members that your organization will help them get connected. Once recruited, get these members involved in the planning of an upcoming event. Talk to your new members about their skills, interests, and previous experiences. To be sure their first experience is a positive one, assign new members tasks that are well within their skill level and that they can successfully accomplish.

Desire to meet people – many people join student organizations to make new friends, to feel a sense of belonging. During the recruitment process make them feel comfortable and valued – assure them that your student organization wants them to join. Again, it is helpful to have a list of activities that your organization participates in to assure these prospective members that they will have the opportunity to take part in social activities. Be sure to address new members by name, this makes them feel valued. Every time a new member joins (especially if many new members arrive at one time), it is important to have everyone introduce him or herself. Icebreakers and team builders are a good way to help new members feel connected. If their first meeting is simply a business meeting where they are not acknowledged, they are not likely to return. Have a short icebreaker at the beginning or end of every meeting – this keeps the student organization fun and interesting for those who are seeking social contact.

Desire to develop leadership skills – some join student organizations because they know they want to be a student leader or because they think it will look good on their resumes. They need to be assured that there are opportunities to chair committees or hold positions within the student organization. Once recruited, these members need to feel that the student organization is accomplishing something. For these members it is important to have well-organized meetings with agendas so that they can visually see what is being accomplished and decided. Again, it is important to immediately get these members involved in the planning of an upcoming event. Make them feel valued by the organization – give them feedback that you are glad they joined your student organization.

Belief in a cause – some people join because they feel strongly about the purpose of the student organization. For these prospective members it is important to explain clearly the mission and goals of your student organization. It is helpful to have a flyer that describes the purpose of the student organization and the activities that you engage in to support the purpose. Once recruited, these members need to feel the student organization is living up to the mission and purpose of the organization. Having new member orientations where both new and old members review the mission and goals of the student organization is helpful. Throughout the semester, the organization should review this document to make sure that everyone is still on track. To increase the investment of new members in the student organization, it is important to include them in the goal setting process.

Ideas for Recruiting Members

- Talk to your friends or people you believe would be interested in the activities of your student organization.
- Send out general notices, brochures, and flyers requesting that students sign-up to join your organization. Keep notices short and appealing. Include some of the benefits of involvement.
- Have each existing member responsible for bringing one new member to the next meeting.
- Ask RA's and other student employees if they know of students who may be interested in joining your student organization.
- Work with the Assistant Coordinator of Student Organizations to be a featured group in the Spotlight Program by presenting/holding a special meeting in the residence halls.
- Participate in Student Organizations Fairs in the fall and spring. Fairs are an excellent way to promote your student organization each semester.
- If you need students with special talents (i.e. artists, public relations) or if your student organization's purpose attracts certain majors, ask faculty in that department for their advice on potential members. Faculty may even be willing to announce or post your meetings.
- If your student organization relates directly to a specific major, talk with people in your core classes and invite them to your meetings and events.
- Utilize the privilege of free booth space in the Wood Center during the busy lunchtime hours to promote your student organization.
- Host and/or co-host events and activities which are open to students, staff and faculty.

Retaining Members

Most people join for a combination of reasons. Your recruiting materials and tactics should address all possible motivations. Maintaining your membership is as important as recruiting. Be sure you are taking steps to keep your new members involved and invested in your student organization. All kinds of people are needed to have a strong organization. Do not discount members who seem to be only social butterflies. They are fulfilling a vital role in your student organization. The key is to find a balance between those that are very task oriented (want the business accomplished as quickly as possible) and those that are more process oriented (don't care if anything is accomplished as long as everyone is having fun). Having an agenda will help your student organization find this balance. Agendas indicate to all members what needs to be discussed at what time and when it is appropriate to have fun. Agendas allow social people to recognize when it is time to get to business and allow work-oriented people to enjoy icebreakers and mingling because they know the student organization will eventually get to business.

Remember that your student organization is only as strong as its weakest link. If you have members that seem to be doing nothing but taking up space, ask them why they joined and what they want out of the student organization. Help them to feel needed by helping them find their role within the student organization.