



Recruiting members and keeping them active

What is in this guide

1. [Why do you need to recruit members and keep them active](#)
 2. [Important things to know about recruitment](#)
 3. [How to set up a membership system](#)
 4. [How to develop a recruitment strategy and plan](#)
 5. [How to keep members active](#)
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1. Why do you need to recruit members and keep them active

All organisations have a reason to exist and work to do - having active members may be crucial to implementing your plans successfully. This guide is aimed at organisations that have a membership base. It will help you to set up a system for membership, a strategy for recruitment and a plan for keeping your members involved and active.

Organisations usually have members because:

- the organisation represents its members [for example a trade union or civic] or
- the organisation needs members to do its work [for example a welfare organisation], or
- a combination of both [for example a political party]

Your constitution should be clear about your goals and about the role and tasks of members. The constitution together with your action plans should guide you about who you should target for recruitment. For example a political party may wish to recruit as many people as possible, but only people who agree with its policies. A trade union may wish to recruit all the workers in a factory, regardless of their views. A welfare organisation may only want members who are prepared to work as volunteer counsellors for a certain number of hours every week.

Members are the base of most organisations and we should take them very seriously. Organisations often get off to a good start and recruit many people, only to lose them after a few months. Once you have recruited someone, you should work hard to keep them happy and active in the organisation. There is a natural process in organisations where:

1. Some of your supporters in the community will become members
2. Some of your members will become committed activists
3. Some of your activists will become leaders.

If you want to keep on generating more activists and leaders for the future, you have to have programmes to develop members into activists, and activists into leaders.

2. Important things to know about recruiting members and keeping them active

Amongst many reasons that organisations have for recruiting members the following are the common ones:

The more different types of people you have in your group/ organisation, the more representative it is of your target community. This will ensure greater community support for your group/ organisation.

Members bring skills and experience that they can use to benefit the organisation.

More members mean that you can do more work as an organisation.

The more members you have in your group/organisation the more different ideas and opinions are expressed and discussed, this will lead to better decisions being taken.

Who should you recruit as members?

Think carefully about the members you want to recruit. Look at the aims and programmes of your organisation and the kind of people you need. Target people who:

- Form part of the constituency you want to represent or work with
- Identify with the aims and objectives of your organisation.
- Support and want to work for your cause.
- Have skills and experience that will help your work.
- Can influence other people and get them to also join the organisation.

Membership system

Every organisation needs a proper system to record members, their contact details and their status. Discuss the type of system that will work best for your organisation. Here are some of the issues you should consider:

- Will you screen members or can anyone join?
- Will you charge membership fees - if yes, how much.
- Do members have to renew membership every year?
- If you have a renewal system, how will it work?
- Will you give members a card or some other proof of membership?
- Will you keep your records on computer or on paper?
- What details do you need to know about members?
- Who will administer your membership system?

Recruitment strategy and methods

Before you start a recruitment drive, make sure you have a proper strategy in place.

- You have to be clear about who you want to recruit - your target group.
- Decide a goal for how many members you want to recruit and how much time it should take.
- Your recruiters must understand your organisation and the interests of the target group and what they can say to persuade people to join.
- Different areas, organisations and sectors where you will find potential members, must be identified.

- A membership system must be in place.
- Look at the human and material resources you have available to use for recruitment.
- Decide on the best methods and times for recruitment.
- Work out an action plan and budget

Keeping members active and involved

Recruiting members should be only the beginning - if you do not manage your members well, communicate with them and motivate them to work for the organisation, you will soon have to recruit more members. You should have a clear plan and process for keeping members involved.

On the next few pages we give more detailed tips on how to do everything discussed in this section.

3. How to set up a membership system

Type of system

Discuss the type of membership system that will suit your organisation. For all the systems listed below you will still need a form for members to apply. You can give some proof of membership like a card or a badge, or you can simply keep a register of members. Here are a few different types of membership to choose from:

- **Free membership**

Members apply to join, fill in a form and if approved, become a member.

- **Voluntary contributions**

Membership is free, but members are encouraged to make donations to the organisation. Churches are a good example of this system.

- **Paid membership - renewed each year**

Members pay a membership fee every year - decide what people can afford and make provision for people who cannot pay. If you choose this system you need a clear process for renewal every year. Remember that people will join in different months and will have to renew one year later. You need a system to let them know and to collect their fees from them. You will also have to suspend members who fall behind.

- **Paid membership - monthly contribution**

Members pay a small amount each month. This system needs a lot of administration to keep it up to date. It works best for organisations like trade unions who can get deductions made from wages.

- **Paid membership - once-off fee**

Members pay once to join the organisation and remain members until they resign or are expelled.

- **Automatic membership**

People in a certain area or sector automatically become members and there is no fee or system. Anyone can attend meetings and vote. An example of this is a residents organisation in a block of flats.

Process for joining

Once you have decided on the type of system you have to develop a process for joining.

- Decide whether people should apply on a special form, if yes, design the form
- Should new member be nominated by existing members?
- Will there be any interview or screening process to exclude people you may not want as members?

- How will you inform people once they have been accepted as members?
- Will you have a probation period or will new members have the same rights as existing members?
- Will you organise training or induction for new members?

4. How to develop a recruitment strategy and plan

Set your goals and targets

Do not start recruiting members until you are clear about what members your organisation needs. Think about your organisation's goals and plans and discuss who you should target to become members - for example: are you looking for people from a specific constituency or people with specific skills or people with specific views.

Decide a target number for how many members you want to recruit and where you are most likely to find them. Set a deadline for by when you want to achieve your goals and target number.

Decide the message you want to communicate to potential members

Why should anyone join your organisation? Unless recruiters can answer this question, they will not be able to persuade people to join. Discuss what you can offer your target constituency and how you will persuade them to join.

Identify where potential new members can be found

Once you have decided who your target members are, you have to discuss where you can find them. You have to know your area well and understand the constituency you are targeting. If our constituency is, for example, school learners, you can simply go to all schools in the area. If you want to recruit more broadly from a geographic community you have to look at the best way to find new

members. Work out whether you should recruit by calling a public meeting, or by going from door-to-door, or by approaching organisations and sectors and going to their meetings and events, or through sending recruiters to busy public places like shops and taxi ranks.

Recruitment methods

- **Set up a team**

The task of recruitment is enormous. No person can do it alone. A team of people (between 5 - 10) should do work on recruitment and develop the recruitment plan and implement it. Other members should also be encouraged to recruit new members whenever they can. Recruiters should be well trained to persuade people to join.

- **Gather necessary resources for recruitment**

It is important for the recruitment team to ensure that before recruitment starts, all resources like recruiter forms, pamphlets, telephone numbers of members that can be contacted for joining, etc are available

- **Time recruitment well**

Recruitment can happen at any time and should be an ongoing part of your work. But it is an especially good time when you are:

- Doing a membership drive
- Running a campaign on a topical issue
- Holding other public events.

- **Sectoral work**

If you want to recruit through other organisations and sectors, make a list of all the sectors and organisations, the name of a contact person and the telephone numbers where they can be reached when needed. Write to them or meet with them and

ask if you can come and address one of their meetings or set up recruitment tables at their events.

- **Target key people for recruitment**

Your organisation will also need additional skills and talents and may want to target specific individuals for recruitment. You could also target someone who has influence over others and will be able to popularise your organisations. Make a list of key individuals in your community that you would like to have as members and go and visit them individually.

- **Door-to-door**

Identify a target area in your community and send recruiters from door-to-door to discuss your organisation and to try and persuade people to join.

- **Information tables**

Tables staffed by recruiters can be set up in public places like shops, sport events and taxi or bus ranks. You should always have a table at all your own meetings or public events. Make posters and decorate the table so that it attracts attention.

- **Personal contacts**

The best recruitment method is through personal contacts. We all know people who share our interests and members should be encouraged to bring their friends to meetings.

- **Meetings and Advertising**

Advertise in local papers and community radio that you are looking for members. Invite them to a public meeting or provide a contact person for them to approach. You can also send letters to individuals or use pamphlets to encourage people to join your organisation.

5. Keeping members active

Many organisations lose members as fast as they recruit them. There are common problems we all have in keeping members involved and active. Here are some typical ones:

- The organisation's meetings are long and boring
- Members do little other than to listen to leaders talk
- A small clique has all the power and does not encourage others to get involved
- Members are not valued and are never thanked or praised for the work they do
- Members feel useless or frustrated
- The organisation has no projects that members can be involved in
- Members feel that they are getting nothing out of the organisation.

People usually join an organisation because they want to do something for their community. But they also want something out of being a member. You should find out what motivates members and make sure you manage them so that they stay motivated and involved. Members are usually motivated by:

- Feeling that they are valued by the organisation and making a contribution
- Opportunities to learn new skills or get education about issues that interest them
- Working on issues that will improve their lives or the lives of their families and communities
- Feeling part of a team

- Activities that entertain them or add to their social life
- Rewards in terms of status, personal development or access to employment opportunities.

Here are some of the things you should do to keep members motivated and involved:

- Do an introductory induction workshop for all new members so that they understand the organisation and its work
- Welcome and introduce all new members at the beginning of each meeting
- Run regular education and development sessions for all members - either as part of regular meetings or in special workshops
- Encourage members to get involved in projects and campaigns
- Give people responsibilities and tasks and team them up with experienced members - they will feel useful and valued
- Thank people and praise them in meetings for work done
- Structure your meetings so that they are exciting and everyone gets a chance to participate
- Organise social events for members such as picnics, parties and outings
- Leaders should spend time talking with members and getting to know them