



How to Attract and Maintain Members

There are three areas to be considered for a healthy membership base in any group.

- **Attracting potential members**
- **Welcoming new members**
- **Retaining existing members**

Keeping these points in mind should help the group stay vibrant, active and meeting the needs of the members.

Attracting potential members

Where are you likely find people interested in your group?

Think of places where potential members may see your flyers e.g. hospitals, libraries, doctors, specialists' and alternative therapy clinics, community centres etc. Create an attractive flyer to place at the appropriate places

Get the word out about your group

Local newspapers and radio are always on the lookout for local "human interest" stories. Get to know your media contacts. Find out which ones have an interest in health, social services or community activities and build a relationship with them.

Welcoming new members

It is difficult to walk into a room, on your own, as a stranger, so a warm and friendly first impression and acknowledgment of the step they have taken in coming along will help them feel more comfortable.

- Make sure that your meetings are welcoming. If you meet in a facility with multiple rooms have a sign to show where you meet.
- Think about having a small booklet, or handout to welcome new members. Provide them with information about what to expect at a group meeting, the group's general services and general rules, e.g. confidentiality.
- Offer the potential members the opportunity of attending several meetings before feeling obliged to join.
- Make sure that the new person, is spoken to by most of the members. Think about a buddy system where one person is appointed to help the new person feel welcome, introducing them to other members, showing where the tea, coffee and toilets are and helping with general information about the group
- Arrange the seats in a circle to make it easier to join in.
- If the group socialises after the meeting make sure that everyone is clear that they are all invited.
- Ring them after the meeting. See if it met their needs and gain some feedback to apply to future potential members.

INFORMATION SHEET

Retaining Membership

- Make sure that your group is meeting the needs of the members. Possibly implement a simple questionnaire
- A friendly accepting atmosphere is vital to members' well-being. The group needs to be a haven for members. It is important that the group remains sensitive to the members' emotional needs.
- Offer ways to relax, arrange for treats such as going on group outings, having interesting speakers and providing opportunities to include families for special events.
- Make sure that the group shares the workload, This means that there is less work for 1 or 2 people, more ideas, more skills, a greater commitment to the group and greater democracy.
- Remember that not all members will be consistently active due to other commitments in their lives. Be flexible and understanding.

Don't forget that groups have stages of development just like children and these have been described as forming, storming, norming and performing.

- **Forming** The early stage of a group, where people may feel apprehensive, shy or reluctant to commit themselves so it is very important to be friendly, and welcoming to everyone. Be supportive and encouraging to all, so that they contribute at the level that feels right for them.
- **Storming** As people feel more confident they may start to offer differing views on how the group should run. This is a sign that people are starting to care about the group. At this stage it is important to listen to everyone's views and all be involved in the decision making as much as possible. A confidential voting system may help when deadlocked.
- **Norming** Members are now establishing more trust and a feeling of a sense of belonging to the group. This is a good time to support members to develop new skills and possibly to try something new.
- **Performing** Now everyone feels responsible for the group and for the group working well. Members are able to listen to each other and express their feelings openly.

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