

RECRUIT and RETAIN for Programming Board Success

- Virginia Adair

It's the beginning of the school year and you're in the midst of fall programming board recruitment. The executive board has some great ideas on how to fill the gaps that are left over from last year. You also think there are other ways to get more people involved and, more importantly, stay involved. But how are you going to do it?

Recruitment and retention are equally important to your programming board, because getting people involved and keeping them involved will help sustain your organization. Successful recruitment and retention helps build a foundation of excellence for the board that will be visible at your meetings, events and across campus.

RECRUIT

Ideally, your officers should begin recruitment plans well before the academic year gets under way. In late spring or early summer, designate a time during which the officers of your programming board can meet before school starts. A retreat is a great way for you to focus on the purpose and mission of your board, which in turn will help you define your recruitment and retention goals. Clearly defining your purpose will help establish the specific goals you wish to achieve during the coming year. Also, you can brainstorm themes and different ways to get new members interested and involved with the program board.

You may want to talk to your advisor to see if formal training or a retreat is necessary for each of your officers. Working with your advisor during this process can assist you in focusing on what your board can do to strengthen itself.

There are several key characteristics you must keep in mind when recruiting new members to your programming board. They include being receptive, inviting, enthusiastic, unique, and having a unique theme. Other aspects to consider are your communication within the organization, as well as regrouping and looking carefully at your organization's structure. Consider these characteristics as an acronym that is easy to remember and will help guide you:

R-Regroup
E-Enthusiasm
C-Communicate
R-Receptive
U-Uniqueness
I-Invite
T-Theme

At your end of summer/fall retreat, REGROUP and look carefully at your organization from a different perspective. Look at what you did last year and what you want to do this year. Ask yourselves, "How can we accomplish our goals? What resources do we need? How can our new members get involved? Are there any positions we need to fill?" By identifying slots you need to fill and knowing how you're going to accomplish your goals, your programming board will be stronger from the very beginning.

As you begin your recruitment, be sure to be enthusiastic about the work you do and excited to see new people. Be energetic when meeting people who express interest in your organization. Also, have fun with your recruitment process—people are drawn to fun and enthusiasm. It shows you believe in what your programming board does. Don't be afraid to step out of your comfort zone and talk to people.

As you tell others about your program board, be sure to COMMUNICATE your purpose. At the beginning of the year, identify your mission and main goals. Share your goals with prospective members whenever possible. People looking to get involved want to know what your organization does, especially if they are new to campus.

To start the recruitment off right, be receptive to new people. Extend a special welcome to people who

are different than you (class, age, ethnicity, residential, commuter, academic major, etc.). The more diverse the composition of your board, the easier it will be for you to program for the entire campus. Also, be sure to welcome any fresh ideas your new members have to offer. They will be eager to contribute and probably aren't familiar with all that you do throughout the year. Their ideas might spark new programs.

As you are talking to prospective members, promote your UNIQUENESS on campus. Program boards are unique! Sell this to people as you share the benefits of joining. Show people or share with them T-shirts and giveaways from previous years because some people need a little more incentive to get involved. Another way to show your uniqueness is to make scrapbooks of previous years to show what you've done. It's easier for them to understand what you do when you can provide tangible evidence.

Also, when talking to people, ask them why they are interested in the program board. Be sure to share with them what drew you to the program board and why you're still involved. This helps promote the uniqueness of the board to your prospective members.

Instead of waiting for people to find out about the program board, INVITE them to your meetings. Hand out special and customized invitations to people who have indicated an interest and have each member give out three to five personal invitations to others on a random basis. This lets the recipients know that you are especially interested in having them become a part of the program board.

Another way to attract people is to hold several interest meetings at different times, which allows for a variety of people to attend based on their class schedules.

If your board is based on a committee structure, invite people to committee meetings. Anytime you have a potential new member present, be sure to welcome them at the beginning of the meeting and later send them a thank you card for coming.

If your board doesn't have money in the budget for invitations, use publicity to invite people to your meetings. Flyers, banners and advertisements in your newspaper are great ways to get the word out. Even though this kind of invitation isn't direct and personal, people will still know when and where you meet and can approach you if they're interested in your organization.

One easy way to stand out on your campus (remember the importance of being unique) is to have an exciting and catchy theme for the year. Once you choose a theme, stick with it. Such consistency helps people instantly recognize your board with respect to anything you do during the year. Your handouts and giveaways need to incorporate the theme. Also, all publicity throughout the year needs to look consistent and include the theme. If you have a logo for your board, or for your theme, you should use them consistently on all your materials so that people can associate the theme with your program board.

RETAIN

Why is retention important? For one thing, your board experiences a much smoother transition to the next year when experienced members return. Retention is also a good indicator of a strong organization that can expect to improve over time.

There are several components of retention efforts—rewards, enjoying the time spent with the board, task delegation, acclimation to the programming board, induction ceremonies, and input from everyone. These will help you keep your programming board members coming back to meetings throughout the year as well as into the next and also create a helpful acronym:

R-Reward
E-Enjoy
T-Task Delegation
A-Acclimate
I-Induct
N-"N"-put

The easiest and most successful way to keep your members is to Reward them. Give members tokens of your appreciation. To ensure a great reward system, budget money for volunteer recognition. Rewards can consist of anything from a pat on the back, a thank you card, a sticker, public recognition at a meeting, or a certificate of appreciation to movie passes, CDs, T-shirts, plaques, or a drawing for prizes.

Be creative with your reward system, but if you find that you're having a hard time with that, there are some great, inexpensive books to help you devise ways to reward people. Some recommended books are *Beyond Banquets, Plaques & Pins: Creative Ways to Recognize Volunteers* and *Secrets of Motivation: How to Get & Keep Volunteers & Paid Staff*, both of which were written by Sue Vineyard.

One easy way to reward people is to use pun gifts. They can be cheesy, but people really enjoy them. For example: a pack of gum for sticking with the board and making a difference, a cupcake for taking the cake as an outstanding member, or a lollipop for licking challenges. When you reward people, be sure you continue the reward system throughout the year and are consistent with it. Commitment to the people who make your programming board work keeps them coming back.

In order to keep your new members involved, you need to be sure they are ENJOYING the time they spend with your organization. Keep it fun! Your weekly meetings should be professional, but you can include activities to help people learn about each other. Also, keep things upbeat—as long as people are enjoying their time with your board, they are likely to stay.

Additionally, create opportunities for socialization—include everyone and do it often. Go out to eat, go bowling, or just hang out together. People will see the resulting synergy within your group at your events and they'll want to join in the fun, too!

Another key to keeping members involved is TASK DELEGATION. Find out what people's talents are (i.e. artistic, socialization, vision, details) and let them use their skills. When they contribute to the group, they feel that their presence matters. When they do something well or above your expectations, be sure to recognize their accomplishment. This will help keep them interested in doing more for your board.

Also, be sure that the same people aren't doing everything. Let a variety of people use their skills to bring the best to your board. This will get everyone involved and your programs will be better than you ever expected.

Once you have new members on board, be sure to thoroughly ACCLIMATE them to the organization and communicate clearly any rules/policies of which they should be aware. Also, remember that programming events on your campus isn't easy for everyone; some people need more direction. Develop a checklist of tasks for each program. This helps members, especially new members, stay focused and know where they stand at all times.

Answer any questions your new members may have and if anyone comes to you with a concern/issue, listen to them completely and do your best to help them resolve it. Be careful not to take anything personally and always react rationally. When people are comfortable in their environment, they will be more successful.

A special way to get your new members excited about joining your board is to Induct them. If your organization holds a ceremony for new members, this is a great way to help them feel a part of something unique and special. An induction doesn't always have to be formal—it can consist of a simple welcome to the meeting with food being served. This is also a great way for your board to socialize, as well as make everyone feel special.

Another good time to induct people is at the end of the year. Recognize your new officers formally and install them into their offices. They are more likely to feel honored in taking on their new roles when there is formal recognition of their positions.

Lastly, be sure to get "n"-put (input) from everyone on the board. Input is crucial in keeping a successful

programming board going. Ask for input on anything from programs and events to decision making that affects the entire board.

Experiment with brainstorming differently. Some people work better by writing their ideas down first, while others feed off the energy of the whole group during a brainstorming session.

When an important decision comes up concerning the board, it makes it easier to make difficult decisions when ideas come from everyone. This way, your members will feel more empowered and are more likely to continue volunteering with your board.

Good Luck During the Coming Year

With these ideas about recruitment and retention in mind, work closely with your advisor to ensure that your board meets all its goals and enjoys a successful year. Your advisor is always an excellent resource. He or she may be able to offer training tips, creative publicity ideas, budget guidance, and certainly the willingness to help you succeed.

If you follow these simple guidelines and maintain them throughout the year, your board should see a rise in the number of new and returning members for years to come.

Good luck during the coming year!

About the Author

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