

Recruiting: Why People Join

Center for Student Involvement Resources

There are four major reasons people join organizations – if your organization can meet the needs of prospective members then you are more likely to recruit and maintain a strong membership. An organization needs to have multiple recruiting plans in order to meet the needs of different types of prospective members.

Why People Join:

1. **Want to get involved** – this is the most common reason people join organizations. When recruiting someone that simply wants to get involved, you need to be able to articulate what involvement opportunities your organization provides. It would be beneficial 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 indicate to prospective members that your organization will provide them with a connection to campus and other students.

Once recruited, it is essential to get these types of people immediately involved in the planning of an upcoming event. Talk to your new members about their skills, interests, and previous experience. To be sure their first organizational experience is a positive one, assign new members tasks that are well within their skill level and that they can successfully accomplish.

2. **Want to meet people** – many students join organizations to make new friends. These people are seeking a sense of belonging. During the recruitment process it is essential to make them feel comfortable and valued – assure them that your 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 engage in social activities besides meetings.

Once recruited, it is essential to immediately provide these types of people with social contact. 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. Icebreaker and team builders are highly suggested as a way to help new members become integrated into your organization (see CSI Resources on Icebreakers and Teambuilding). If the first meeting a new member attends is simply a business meeting where their presence is not acknowledged, they are not likely to return. It is good practice to have a short icebreaker at the beginning or end of every meeting – this keeps the organization fun and interesting for those that are seeking social contact.

3. **Want to develop leadership skills** – some students join organizations because they know they want to be a student leader or because they think it will look good on their resume. These students were usually involved in high school or another college, or they wish they had been involved before and see MSU has an

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opportunity to develop some new skills. During the recruiting process organizations need to assure these types of students that there are opportunities to chair committees or hold positions within the organization.

Once recruited, these members need to feel that the organization is accomplishing something. For these members it is important to have well-organized meetings with agendas so that the new members 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. Members that are seeking leadership opportunities want to feel valued by the organization – give them feedback that you are glad they joined your organization.

4. **Believe in the cause / purpose of your organization** -- the last type of person that joins is one that feels strongly about the purpose of the organization. For these types of prospective members it is important to clearly convey the mission and goals of your organization. It is helpful to have a flyer that describes the purpose of the organization and the activities that you engage in to support the purpose.

Once recruited, these members need to feel the organization is living up to the mission and purpose of the organization. Having a new member orientation where both new and old members review the mission and goals of the organization is helpful (see CSI Resources on New Member Orientation). 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 organization, it is important to include them in the goal setting process (see CSI Resources on Goal Setting).

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 organization. All types of people are needed to have a strong organization. Do not discount members that seem to only be social butterflies; they are fulfilling a vital role in your 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 has fun). Having an agenda will help your organization find this balance. Agendas indicate to all members what needs to be discussed at what time and also indicate when during the meeting it is appropriate to have fun. Agendas allow social people to recognize when it is time to get to business and allows task-y people to enjoy icebreakers and mingling because they know that the organization will eventually get to the business (see CSI Resources on Meeting Management).

Remember that your 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 organization. Help them to feel needed by helping them find their role within the organization.