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Migrating shorebirds, Grays Harbor NWR, Washington

Membership

Building membership

Once you have your mission statement and begin working on your activities, you'll want to begin building your general membership. Here are some suggestions for doing this.

Seek diversity in your membership. Diversity creates new opportunities and a rich mix of talents and skills and interests for your group. Consider who you have not invited to join you. A great place to start is with the users of the refuge.

People volunteer because they care. It is as simple as that. Recent surveys show that 51 percent of Americans volunteer an average of at least five hours a week. The Friends Group Survey shows the average Friends board member give about four hours of their time each month.

Suggestions for keeping members

Follow-up – Analyze who your members are and include this information in the database. Do selective mailings to target sectors of members that have particular interests.

Benefits – Offer additional benefits to members who contribute more money (e.g., discounts at the bookstore and life members receive a guided tour of the refuge as recognition).

Personalized welcome – Welcome new members with a personal letter. Also use a personal letter as a reminder to renew. Welcome new members in the newsletters or with a picnic, etc.

Privileges and benefits – Provide special privileges and benefits for members. Let them be the first to tour new trails, etc.

Recognition – Hold volunteer recognition dinners.

“You never know when you’re going to need a friend, so we have lots of them.”

– David Palmer, Friends of Mashpee

Tools for Success

- Develop a computerized membership data base. Make sure it is a flexible program.

- Find a computer expert to help you. Make sure everyone can use the program.

- Develop a list and actively recruit members.

- In the beginning, each board member could be

responsible to contact ten people.

- Find names from such sources as:

- Tax rolls for ownership of land.

- Local environmental groups, e.g., Audubon chapter.

- Visitor registers from the refuge.

- Encourage refuge staff to acquire names and to add addresses to their database.

- Re-structure the refuge visitor register to get addresses and phone numbers.

- Use the newsletter to solicit members.

- Distribute membership information during speeches.

Group Dynamics

Understanding and being aware of group dynamics is important to getting and keeping members. Members must be nurtured – they must feel that their contributions are valued, that their opinions are important, and that their time is well spent. They must feel that they gain something personally by participating in the group.

In any diverse group of people of differing talents and abilities, disagreement will inevitably arise. People don't always see eye to eye. How you handle it is critical. Allow for difference of opinion. Conflict is necessary, and not a problem, unless it prevents the group from making progress.

Here are some suggestions to help develop a positive group dynamic for your new organization.

Practice “active listening.” Give feedback so people know they were heard. If someone is dominating the discussion, put a limit on how long each person can talk,

and give priority in the speaking order to those who have less to say.

Don't ignore problems. Deal with issues, not personalities. Discuss specific problems, and look for causes and solutions. Has there been a misunderstanding? Is someone being asked to do something they are not equipped to do? Suggest a change that will be good for the individual and the group.

Set out clear expectations from the beginning. Regular meetings and evaluations can redirect efforts, identify problems early, and prevent things from getting out of hand.

Watch out for “rogue members” who join only to fulfill their own agendas. Resolve this issue immediately. It may require finding them out of order at a meeting.

Tools for Success

- Initially offer complimentary membership for the first year (to refuge volunteers).

- Consider using banquets, etc. to recruit new members from the community.

- Using personal contacts and asking people face to face gets better results.

- A membership brochure. (Other Friends groups and

NWRA can provide examples.)

- Set minimum membership dues to receive the newsletter and other products to cover the costs of printing and sending.

- Offer a variety of membership levels, (corporate, individual, lifetime). Make sure the amount and level of responsi-

bility are coordinated with the region.

- Consult with other groups that have tried specific membership drives, (hired a firm for a membership drive).

- Honor both those who contribute money and the members who contribute labor and attend meetings. (You need both and strategies to keep them, as members will differ.)

VOLUNTEER RIGHTS & RESPONSIBILITIES

Volunteers have the right to . . .

- Be treated as a co-worker
- Be given a suitable assignment
- Know as much as possible about the organization
- Be recognized and heard
- Receive training and continuing education for the task
- Have a regular evaluation of one's performance, and be given a variety of experiences

Responsibilities of volunteers are to . . .

- Be sincere in the offer of service and believe in the value of the task being done
- Be loyal to the community organization with which one works
- Maintain the dignity and integrity of the community

organization with the public

- Accept the guidance and decisions of project coordinators
- Carry out duties promptly and reliably
- Be willing to participate in orientation, training programs and meetings
- Understand the function of the paid staff and maintain positive working relationships with them
- Stay within the bounds of the volunteer description, unless otherwise asked

**from Starting Up: A Handbook for New River and Watershed Organizations*

Tools for Success

■ Keep volunteers busy, and give them responsibility, or you will lose them.

■ Ensure mutual respect of group members.

■ Listen, listen, listen!

■ Keep things "adult" and professional.

■ Trust and need form a sacred bond.

■ Be honest, enthusiastic, and have courage.

■ Prevent Friends group burn-out – plan your projects well.

■ Do not be too serious all of the time. Expect setbacks and be willing to laugh at them and then re-group. If it is not fun, then do not do it.

■ Deal with problems immediately! Never publicize differences, instead keep them within the group.

■ Encourage action with talk.

■ Know the issues personally.

■ Understand that it is a long-term commitment that you are making.

Membership Checklist

Seek diversity in your membership.	
Create and maintain a computerized database of members.	
Develop lists of potential new members and actively recruit them.	
Offer member benefits such as a newsletter, with additional benefits to members who contribute more than the minimum dues.	
Keep members by personalizing their welcome to your group, giving them recognition, and keeping them well informed.	
Give members responsibilities that fit their skills, and challenge them.	
Always show and expect respect, keep things professional, and give and keep trust.	

