

Ideas to Increase Membership for Your Association

Create a referral program

To encourage your current loyal members to participate, offer an incentive for those who send you successful new recruits. Providing a reward—a discount on dues, a gift card and handwritten note, a gift card for a fancy dinner—shows your appreciation for current members.

Host a “bring a friend” meeting or event

Create an event with networking opportunities for pros in your specific industry, complete with group introductions (like icebreaker activities). You can also take this opportunity to review all your membership benefits to pique the interest of any prospective members in attendance. To help members get engaged, offer door prizes for people who bring a plus-one, or incentivize them.

Host a free luncheon or speaker series

Put together a free luncheon that allows prospective members to gain insights from a leader—this not only positions you as an authority in the space, but also gives you the opportunity to tell them about membership with your association.

Solicit feedback from existing members

Ask your members for honest feedback via a member needs assessment. What are the best benefits of belonging to your association, and are there any gaps you can address? Then take those notes and incorporate them into your offerings. Listening and acting on feedback from your members can help your membership be even more appealing to prospects.

Ask members for recruitment ideas

Ask them to go back and imagine not being a member. What kinds of offers would they find appealing? What tactics would convince them to join? Have they seen any strategies used by other nonprofits or businesses that resonated with them?

Create a recruitment committee

This will allow you to delegate some of your recruitment tasks to people who are passionate and committed to your cause. Prospective members will be much more likely to join if they hear from a peer, rather than a member of your staff. Not to mention, members of your recruitment committee will enjoy a special role and a deeper connection to your organization.

Distribute merchandise

Members, both new and old, enjoy a little bit of free swag. You can offer new member items like branded gifts (pens, T-shirts, stationary, water bottles, etc., with your logo). Then, you can also sell these items on your website and at events. Not only does branded swag offer an additional revenue stream, but everyone who carries or wears these items acts as a billboard for your association.

Offer perks to new members

A few perks you could try include:

- A discount on dues (like a “new member promo” of 15% off annual dues)
- Free tickets to a chapter or district event (District Meeting, Special Night, Event Fundraiser, etc)
- Entry into a giveaway for all new members
- Gift certificates to local businesses, cafes, restaurants, etc.

Offer a positive, engaging welcome series

New members want to feel welcomed, acknowledged, and valued. One of the best ways to do this is with a welcome program. Here are a few ideas:

- Send a welcome letter, email, or card
- Send a welcome package with everything new members need to know
- Host a welcome event for new members
- Spotlight new members on your website or in a newsletter

Call prospective members

There's nothing wrong with relying on older forms of communication to try to boost your membership. Get on the horn with a targeted list of prospective members to discuss the benefits of joining your association. This old-fashioned way of chatting can feel more personalized than other digital means, like emails or social media posts.

Reach out via direct mail

More than 76% of younger members said that direct mail they'd received from their organization was somewhat or very effective. In a time when most means of communication are digital and our mailboxes are mostly bills, direct mail can actually help you cut through the noise. So consider creating tailored flyers, postcards, or one-page mailers to send to prospective new members on your list.

Demonstrate membership value via social media

To catch the eye of prospective members, it helps to demonstrate your membership benefits online—particularly on social media. Create posts for your branded social channels that highlight members being awarded continuing education certificates through your organization, photos of member-only events and conferences, etc.

Host a membership drive

A membership campaign, also known as a membership drive, is a strategic, concerted effort to get your organization (and your many benefits) in front of as many new prospective members as possible. This kind of concentrated drive comprises of a multi-pronged plan where you promote your membership across channels, including digital outreach, recruitment at events, and incentivizing current members to refer new members.

Partner with similar organizations

When working to boost your membership, you don't have to go it alone. Instead, partner up with other organizations to send one another prospective members or customers. You can partner up with non-profits, other associations, or businesses to hold events, member drives, and build awareness with both audiences. For example: An OES chapter can partner with a Masonic lodge to host a large fundraiser, fellowship, or event. They could also partner with a nearby food bank.

Sponsor a local event

If you aren't up to the task of hosting your own conference or major event, you can sponsor an ongoing event instead. Sponsoring a local networking event or even sponsoring a booth at an existing conference gets your organization's name out locally and in the industry without having to put together an entire event yourself.

Host a philanthropy event

You can also give back to your community while increasing your association membership. To achieve this, plan and host a volunteer event or fundraiser in partnership with a nonprofit or charity. Promote the event and open up participation to anyone in the community. This kind of charitable event builds awareness of your association, and demonstrates that you're active with philanthropic efforts within your area.

Reach out to lapsed members

You don't always need to reinvent the wheel to boost your membership. Don't just recruit brand-new members—it also pays to reach out to previous members. Members lapse for a variety of reasons, but sometimes they just need a reminder that they can still rejoin your organization. Create a targeted campaign to re-engaged these once-active members with email marketing, direct mailers, and/or phone calls.

Put up flyers

Don't solely rely on digital outreach to bring in new members. Design and distribute one-pagers and flyers at popular meeting spaces within your community. Depending on where your prospective members might normally congregate, you can post flyers on bulletin boards in your local library branches, community and recreation centers, grocery stores, cafes or coffee shops, and other relevant businesses.

Connect with colleges and universities

Call up deans and the heads of your local post-secondary institutions to discuss how you can connect with current students or recent alumni who are studying subjects in your industry. Ask whether you can come to speak to a class or participate in any upcoming career fairs. This is a way to recruit young members who might spend many years ahead enjoying the benefits of your membership.

Place ads in local media

Lean on local media to get the word out about your association. Try doing a small media buy for ads in your community's newspaper, radio, and/or broadcast station. Placing media ads can help you promote the advantages of your membership to a broad audience—and you can run the same ad whenever your membership numbers need a boost.

Ensure existing members are satisfied

Keeping your current members happy can pay dividends—even compared to recruiting new members. According to Bain and Co. research, increasing member retention by only 5% can boost profits anywhere from 25% to 95%. Plus, happy members often tell their friends. So, don't lose sight of keeping your current members satisfied. To do this, make sure member appreciation efforts are top-notch. Communicate regularly how much your members are the lifeblood of your organization.

Enhance your organization's online community

Networking is a common reason people join associations—so make it easy for members to connect. Create an online community that allows your members to chat with one another and discuss industry trends and issues.

Start a mentorship program

A mentorship program is one of the most valuable member benefits you can offer. Simply match interested mentors and mentees and provide them with a structured process to help them develop a mutually beneficial relationship.

For young members, mentorship is a great opportunity to learn from experienced and knowledgeable professionals in their field. For mentors, it's a chance to give back, help shape the future of their industry, and develop their own leadership skills.

Brand your membership program

For charities, membership is about much more than providing member benefits in exchange for member dues. Members join because they share your values, care deeply about your cause, and want to help make a difference in your community. In that sense, their member dues are almost like a donation, and the member benefits are simply a nice add-on. In order to attract new members, try to appeal to them with clear messaging about your mission, vision, and values. Create an inspiring tagline and use it in all membership related materials.

Explain what your membership program helps fund

Asking prospective members to pay member dues is not too different from asking them to donate. The key is to be as transparent as possible about where their money will go, what it will support, and what impact it will help to create.

People who are passionate about your mission will happily support your organization, as long as they can be certain that their contributions are needed and will be used in the most effective way possible.

Promote your membership benefits

If, in addition to having a mission worth supporting, you offer amazing membership benefits, you can use them to entice people to join. Remind prospective members about these benefits in your communications, on your website, and on social media.

Promote your membership program at your nonprofit events

Another great place to promote your membership program is at events. Your organization likely already puts on fundraising, stewardship, educational, and advocacy events, and there are probably lots of non-members in attendance. Use this opportunity to set up a membership booth at your event, talk to prospective members about joining, and include membership information in your event materials (event program, registration website, goodie bags, etc.)

Create an outreach cadence for prospective new members

Hearing about your membership program once probably won't convince someone to join. More often than not, they need to be exposed to your messaging a few times before they will start considering becoming a member.

To help make this happen, create a communications plan for direct mail and email, as well as a content plan for social media. Plan out a strategy that will allow you to gently remind your prospective members about your membership program through different channels and at regular intervals.

Segment prospective members for better communication

Because your membership program is not your only focus, your community is likely made up of all kinds of people — donors, volunteers, partners, etc. They all have the potential to become members, but the key thing to remember is that they shouldn't all receive the same message. When sending communications to your prospective members, segment your mailing lists and customize messages to reflect the prospects' involvement with your organization.

Offer an opportunity to sign up for your membership program on your donation page

You likely already put in a lot of effort to send people to the donation page on your website. Maximize the results of these efforts by including an option for people to sign up for membership. People who visit this page already care about your cause and are ready to show their support with a financial contribution, so there's a high chance that they'll seriously consider becoming a member.

Launch a membership drive social media campaign

Social media continues to be one of the most effective marketing tools for organizations and businesses across all industries. Use it to grow your membership by launching a special campaign to attract new members. You can run social media ads, create a content strategy that will reach potential new members organically, or even recruit your existing members to become peer-to-peer influencers.

Offer exclusive events for members

Incentivize more people to join by offering exclusive events for members. Alternatively, you can host events that are free for members but paid for non-members. Either way, once people see the value in joining your membership, they'll be more likely to sign up.

Provide incentives for referrals

Referrals are one of the best ways to attract new members. Simply ask your current members to refer someone they know or bring a friend to one of your events or meetings.

When the recommendation comes from someone they know and trust, people will be much more likely to listen and take action. Not to mention, since these prospects are identified by your current members, they likely share the same interests and values, and will turn into engaged and long-lasting members.

To incentivize your members to refer their friends and acquaintances, offer them something in return, such as an additional benefit, more access, or entrance to win a prize.