

MEMBERSHIP BEST PRACTICES

Recruitment

Retention

Recognition

Rewards

Introduction

In a 1998 survey, the ALA Chapters identified membership development as the number one priority. In response to that expressed need, the ALA Chapter Relations Committee did two things. It held a workshop at the 1999 Annual Conference in New Orleans, coordinated by Arleen Farber Sirkin. And it conducted a "best practices" survey in 1999-2000 based on a research study designed and implemented by Ethelle S. Bean, Director of the Karl E. Mundt Library at Dakota State University, Madison, SD. The results of this survey have been incorporated into this publication, which will be posted on the ALA web site, <http://www.ala.org/cro>. Kits of exciting Chapter membership marketing materials are available for loan from the Chapter Relations Office.

The very best ideas found are presented in four broad categories: Recruitment, Retention, Recognition, and Rewards. An overview of each topic is followed by the best ideas, exemplary Chapter web sites, and sample web site pages. We have reprinted two articles that contain essential ideas and have compiled a highly selective bibliography of great resources. Also included is the best practices survey. Since this publication is a work in progress, we encourage all Chapters to update information on a regular basis when a "great idea" comes to you. Updates will appear on the web site.

Special thanks go to the members who contributed so much time and expertise to this project: Ethelle Bean (South Dakota), Kathy Balcom (Illinois), Kay Boies (Oklahoma), Michael Deller (Michigan), Fran Haley (Ohio), Julie Huiskamp (Iowa), Bev Moore (Colorado), Betsy Sywetz (Washington, D.C.), and Jan Walsh (Washington).

Membership is certainly the heart and soul of an association's programmatic and financial health. Membership should also be the most stable and predictable source of association revenue. We are convinced that planning for membership growth is an essential step and worth the time and effort of members and staff. We hope your utilization of these ideas will result in a growing and prospering association.

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Recruitment

“Have the chair of each division send personal letters to possible candidates.”

-West Virginia Library Association

“Hold a contest in which the association member who recruits the most new members during a six- month period receives free conference registration or association membership renewal.”

-Mississippi Library Association

In the area of recruitment, Chapters are continually trying to find ways of attracting members. The survey elicited various techniques such as placing recruitment packages in libraries and forming creative dues structures and ‘member-get-a-member’ incentive programs. The importance of having a personal contact to follow up on communication is stressed in nearly every practice.

Special recruitment projects include great ideas such as creating mentor programs, member recruitment incentives, and offering membership pins. Successful programs to recruit students include forming and maintaining good relationships with schools with library programs, sending personal letters to students and teachers asking them to join, offering student loans to library school students who are association members, and matching all new student members with mentors.

Some respondents addressed the importance of recruiting for diversity. They shared tips such as offering minority students scholarships to attend library school and opening the association to minority affiliate groups.

Best Practices

- Develop a marketing plan.
- Contract an association management marketing consultant.
- If using a member-get-a-member program, make it easy to participate and offer a valuable incentive, such as a gift for participating or a prize for getting the most members. Gift examples might include a free ticket to a special reception at the annual conference, a reward of airline tickets or cash, or discounts on association products, workshops or conferences.
- Set up a nomination program by asking current members to nominate their colleagues for membership. Current members feel honored at being asked for their recommendations. When contacting the nominees, tell them they were nominated personally by a colleague.

- Send letters to American Library Association members who live in your state, but are not members of your state association.
- Establish a group of ambassadors to act as liaisons to existing and potential members.
- Consider free introductory memberships, especially if your benefits package is strong. Give prospective members a chance to test drive membership. Once they've tried it, it's hard to give it up.
- Have a visible membership presence (especially exhibits) at conferences of allied groups (particularly school library media conferences).
- Showcase your association at your conference. Designate an area on the exhibit floor for your staff to display and discuss products and services. Hold drawings for free memberships.
- Offer a chance, with membership, to win conference registration or gift certificates at the association store.
- Mail letters to nonmembers who attend conferences offering a 25 percent discount if they join within 30 days. Or offer a conference fee rebate to non-members who join within a month of the event.
- Make your dues structure more flexible and attractive. This could include offering a reduction in dues overall; giving new members 15 months for the price of 12; allowing library support staff to receive 24 months for the price of 12; or offering free memberships in New Members Round Table.
- Offer members-only programs at conference.
- Price painfully higher for conferences, publications, and other services to people who are not members.
- Establish a roster of contacts at schools with library programs. Participate in the new student orientation program for library and information science students. Have chapter members speak to student groups and encourage them to be involved in your chapter.
- Offer student loans to library students who are association members. Award scholarships to student members and publicize them at schools with library programs.
- Send letters to teachers asking them to join.
- Develop an informal mentor program with students.

- Offer discounted memberships and conference registrations to students. Award grants to library schools to create student association chapters on campuses.
- Give the library school a booth at the conference.
- Reach senior students before and after graduation with direct mail appeals.
- Offer student members deep dues discounts.
- Ask students who are nonmembers to attend an association meeting. Once they have attended a meeting, it is difficult to say no to the benefits of the association.
- Pay the dues for first-time members who complete the Certification program.
- Send a welcome note to all new library employees along with an application.
- Send out promotional mailings to potential new members. Include all employees of designated libraries. Offer new member incentives, such as rebates. Follow up quickly on any leads.
- Use free-trial subscriptions of your magazine or newsletter as a direct mail campaign.
- Use your magazine or newsletter to highlight your association's activities and member benefits.
- When selling an institutional membership, include an individual membership for one key partner – a person not employed by the library but of key importance such as a trustee or dean.
- Recognize corporate members on your web site and in program books. Offer them reduced booth rental rates at your conferences.

- Have volunteers solicit membership from the community.

Great Chapter Web Sites

The Maryland Library Association has a clear, easy-to-read membership page describing various benefits to joining MLA. In addition to offering a coupon to first time members for program registration, MLA makes it simple to join by giving prospective members the opportunity to print out an application or to sign up online.

<http://www.mdlib.org/join/index.htm>

The Idaho Library Association has another wonderful layout of its membership page. The advantages to joining ILA are clearly presented. Scholarships are offered as well as many annual awards.

<http://www.idaholibraries.org/membership.htm>

The District of Columbia has four membership categories – Active, Sustaining, Student and Continuing (Retired) to serve the diverse needs of its constituency. Each category has its own fee structure. It also boasts an electronic discussion group only available to members of DCLA.

<http://www.dcla.org/membershipdesc.htm>

The California Library Association has a colorful membership page which includes a terrific layout of member benefits. The business and institutional memberships become even more attractive, as the CLA gives them a listing and link to their site.

<http://www.cla-net.org/html/member.html>

The Mountain Plains Library Association has a great listing of membership advantages, such as education opportunities, information exchange and grant opportunities. The MPLA offers a half-price incentive on first year dues.

<http://www.usd.edu/mpla/membership/index.html>

Retention

“Have the membership committee send postcards and e-mail to members about to lapse.”

-Oklahoma Library Association

“Keep demographic data on membership to better target marketing efforts.”

-Wisconsin Library Association

Regarding retention, responding Chapters have some great ideas to share, especially in the area of membership benefits. The importance of maintaining high association visibility is cited by many, whose associations have aggressive publicity and marketing plans. Utilizing a web site is a common best practice, providing access to a job line, a monthly e-mail newsletter and publishing a directory containing member names and information. Reduced rates for conferences and workshops are recommended, as well as creating a strong publications program. Providing staff and customer service support is valued, as is expanding opportunities for committee participation, mentoring programs, and networking.

Retention is supported by maintaining an accurate member database and developing effective ways for members to renew memberships and pay dues. Applying a “personal touch” is cited as an effective way to maintain contact and follow through. Personal phone calls to lapsed members is offered as a successful way to keep track of dissatisfied or errant members.

Best Practices

- Create more visibility through newspaper articles on libraries and on the association. Publicize significant legislative victories.
- Create PSA's for libraries.
- Become involved in significant cooperative projects with the state library.
- Hold a reception for state or regional attendees at ALA conferences.
- Develop a mentoring program for all association members. One focus of the program should include meeting the needs of members from diverse groups. Adopt a cultural diversity policy statement.

- Work with your state government to pass legislation that supports recruitment and educational opportunities for people of color in library and information studies.
- When a new member joins, promptly send membership card and membership packet that includes benefits, opportunities for involvement, and other appropriate information such as the annual report or publications regarding current association initiatives.
- Have the chapter president send a personal welcoming letter to each new member. Include in the letter a list of public service projects and standing committees. Encourage the new member to become active.
- Call new members a few months after they join to welcome them to your organization. Make sure they are receiving their publications and ask for their initial impressions.
- Post new member names on your web site and in your journal.
- Respond quickly to all inquiries. Include handwritten notes when you send information or other requested materials to members.
- Use personalization whenever possible in all membership correspondence.
- Use postcards to get your message across quickly and inexpensively. Postcards stand out in the mail, and members will more likely read them because they are brief.
- Obtain a database system that is flexible enough to gather data from a variety of sources. It should have a dues billing function and the software should be able to track member activities and generate letters.
- Outsource marketing/membership database maintenance.
- Find new ways to put members in touch with each other. Use fax-back forms, teleconferencing, online services, and directories to get members talking to each other.
- Have a job placement center at annual conference. Create a telephone and online job hotline.
- Hold first-class, “can’t miss” conferences with reduced rates for members. Have workshops and retreats in various locations.
- Hold a first-year member reception or breakfast at the annual meeting. Hold an orientation to introduce new members to the organization and to other members. Invite committee chairs to say a few words about their responsibilities and ask for

new-member volunteers to serve on committees. Review your association's benefits and services.

- Provide opportunities to get involved quickly in meaningful projects. Make a special effort to involve the newest members of your committees or boards in projects with well-defined objectives that can be achieved in the near future.
- People are busy. When delegating volunteer tasks or assigning projects to committee members, segment jobs into the smallest units possible.
- Provide leadership training and development.
- Establish an 800 number help line for member use only.
- Contact all members at least once a year for something other than money.
- Conduct a regular mailing to all new members on their first year anniversary of their membership. Thank them for their support, and include a small gift and an evaluation form for their assessment of their experience in your association.
- Offer financial incentives to those that renew early and prepay next year's membership.
- Follow up with non-renewing members by mail or phone. Send out 2-3 renewal notices. E-mail members whose membership is expiring. Offer them a chance to renew. Extend the grace period for renewal.
- Place catchy reminder stickers outside of renewal notices, such as "You're Overdue!" or "No You Didn't! You Just Think You Did."
- Conduct exit interviews with non-renewing members. Survey non-members to find out why they don't join.
- Consider allowing members to pay their membership dues in installments. Consider accepting credit card payment for dues.
- Mail a flier along with the dues notice that details membership benefits and services, or send the flier along with the letter asking members to renew one month before invoicing.

Great Chapter Web Sites

The Michigan Library Association recognizes and honors new retirees by offering a one-year membership at no charge. The MLA's membership page has a great layout and also offers incentives to student members such as reduced rates and access to "mentors."

<http://www.mla.lib.mi.us/member.html>

The New York Library Association utilizes its membership page to showcase many long-term benefits such as the Annual Conference, advocacy issues, and continuing education. The NYLA encourages getting involved in committees, publications, awards and scholarships.

<http://www.nyla.org/nylaweb1.htm>

The Colorado Library Association has a great multi-tiered membership set up with incremental increases in benefits. The CLA encourages member involvement and retention by offering great value when it comes to discounts on publications, attendance at workshops and conferences. Providing updated CLA member mailing labels is a great way to increase the value of membership.

<http://www.cla-web.org/benefits.htm>

The Oregon Library Association encourages a deeper level of involvement to members by inviting them to serve on a variety of committees, divisions and round tables. An extensive list is displayed and each of these activities has a link to the OLA's membership site so those interested can connect easily to learn more.

<http://www.olaweb.org/membership.shtml>

Recognition

“Annual awards of cash and/or plaques, certificates, engraved bowls and plates are presented for 12 categories of service.”

-Illinois Library Association

“Awards are presented in many categories, including best student, ethnic minority librarian, and best article published.”

-North Carolina Library Association

Best practices of member recognition include creating special awards for various categories of service. Mentor awards, letters and certificates for outgoing committee members and awarding an Honorary Life Membership for retirees are excellent suggestions for recognizing participation. Offering awards for professional achievements in specialized areas is suggested.

Best Practices

- Recognize your volunteers through awards, letters to management and magazine features.
- Provide an opportunity for members to be published. Offer to let them contribute articles in your magazine or newsletter.
- Let members know their opinions are important. Publish informal surveys in your magazine or newsletter. Print the results in the next issue.
- Give gift certificates to members on their first anniversary to use toward educational offerings, publications, or other products. Consider sending a second gift certificate for second or subsequent anniversaries.
- Provide special ribbons identifying new members for use at local chapter meetings.
- Develop an awards program with annual awards of cash, plaques, certificates, etc., for various categories of service. Areas could include best student or ethnic minority librarian.
- Offer other awards such as Member of the Year and Distinguished Service.
- Create a Mentor Recognition program.

- Offer awards in sections of librarianship, such as Academic, School Media, Children and Young Adult.
- Reinforce the opportunity members have to serve on committees and as elected officers.
- Honor outgoing committee members with letters and certificates.
- Pay for memberships for trustees and retirees in good standing.

Great Chapter Web Sites

The Oklahoma Library Association has a good-looking member site that has a link to its awards page, which lists a number of awards designed to provide recognition in the field of library service. It is also easy to join the OLA, with a direct link to a membership form.

<http://www.pioneer.lib.ok.us/ola/member.html>

The Texas Library Association offers a number of services, grants and awards to recognize its members. There is also a section where current members give testimonials to the value of belonging to TLA.

<http://www.txla.org/html/memover.html>

The Georgia Library Association also lists a number of awards on its member site including a scholarship award to graduate students in Library and Information Science. The GLA regularly honors notable achievers in Georgia librarianship.

<http://wwwlib.gsu.edu/gla/gla.htm>

The Kentucky Library Association offers many awards that are listed on its membership site. Various sections such as Academic, School Media, Children and Young Adult, and Library Trustees are recognized.

<http://www.kylibasn.org/join.htm>

Rewards

“Membership in Sam’s Club and Walt Disney World Club.”

-Ohio Library Council

“Credit card and long distance telephone affinity programs.”

-Texas Library Association

In the past, membership in an association was often simply an expression of loyalty. Now, many members want to feel like they are getting something more for their dues. Rewards refer to the special perks offered in many membership programs. Best practices include offering special member rates on conferences, publications and workshops. Discounts on rental cars and airlines, special coupons, offers of membership in group insurance plans and employee credit unions are some of the member benefits designed to attract and keep members.

Best Practices

- Create continuing education grants.
- Offer member rates for conferences, publications, workshops, “graphics” products, etc.
- Offer discounts on legal advice.
- Offer group auto and group insurance rates.
- Offer membership in commercial businesses such as Sam’s Club and Walt Disney World Club.
- Offer credit card and long distance affinity programs.
- Offer life and health insurance discounts.
- Create a program to provide eligibility to members to join state employees credit union.
- Offer store discount coupons from stores such as Office Max and Home Depot.

- Offer discounts on car rental.
- Offer discounts on library utility bills.

Great Chapter Web Sites

The New Jersey Library Association offers a variety of personal benefits to its members. They include auto insurance, travel benefits, a discount card from Borders Café and Books and disability insurance.

<http://www.njla.org/membership.htm>

The Ohio Library Council offers many perks including eligibility to join a special group auto and homeowners insurance program. Members of OLC also may join Walt Disney's Magic Kingdom Club and Sam's Club.

http://www.olc.org/ola_memclass.html

The Florida Library Association has an excellent list of membership benefits with a visually creative web page layout. Incentives include reduced rates on conference registration, continuing education credits, and a free membership directory.

<http://www.flalib.org/library/fla/benefits.htm>

The Illinois Library Association includes membership in Sam's Club and the Disney Club. In addition to that, the ILA offers discounts on Hertz Rent-A-Car. To its institutional members, the ILA invites libraries to join a gas cooperative that allows a savings on their gas bill. Libraries also can receive discounts on AT&T long distance.

http://www.ila.org/member_benefits.html

Suggested Reading

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