



A Series on Memberships, Part I:

Take Two Steps Back to Move Many Steps Forward

March 2015

When devising a membership program, many usually start with benefits, pricing, and the brochure. We suggest you take a step back and start with a basic question: what are the goals of your membership program? Are you looking for a revenue stream? A volunteer source? A way to find donor prospects or engage them? A way to get folks interested in your collection or preservation initiative? Knowing why you want to recruit members provides the framework for the rest of the program's development.

With the "why" in place, then establish the "who": the profile of the ideal member, or the one who will help fulfill your goals. Is it the familiar face at your programs? Someone who offers money or time? Loves the content? Is a life-long learner seeking educational opportunities? Is engaged and involved in the organization? Wants to connect with those who share their interests? Families? Use the answers to "who" to help you target the program to the appropriate audiences.

Next up is the "what" or your ideal member's wants and needs. Understanding this is the ultimate way to determine benefits. Gathering this information is easy - just ask! While surveys can vary in success, the information from comment cards, member feedback studies, focus groups, or informational interviews is key in helping you determine how those you wish to recruit use the institution, what their interests are, the benefits they'd use, and what would encourage them to

join. Unless you ask you'll never know if you are giving members what they actually want or just what you think they want.

This may seem like an E-blast that asks more questions than supplies answers, but it's asking those questions that lays a solid foundation for a successful membership campaign. You can offer benefits, but if they aren't what your member wants, or help you reach your goals, then it's just a futile exercise that isn't helping move your organization forward.

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