



A Series on Membership, Part III:

Getting Them to Join and Making Sure They Stay: Recruiting and Retaining Members

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Our last two issues addressed membership plans - taking a step back to determine your membership program's goals and how to offer benefits that would appeal to your various audiences. Now that these are in place, the next step is finding - and keeping - members.

Getting Them to Join:

We all know the basics of member recruitment - using newsletters, appeal letters, social media, pretty brochures - to encourage people to join. To help you further, we're going to focus on two key opportunities that organizations forget when starting membership campaigns:

I. Whether it be a new membership plan or a push to revive an old one, your membership campaign should be used to market your organization in addition to the program, since it's your organization they are joining. The brochure or other membership communications should emphasize membership benefits, especially those identified as the ones most valued by current members, but also highlight the quality of your organization and the things that attract visitors, whether it be your collection, buildings, or outstanding lectures, workshops and family programs.

II. The number one reason why visitors don't become members is because they haven't been asked to join. Your membership brochure can't be your sole way of

promoting the program. You need to market it as you would any other aspect of your institution:

- Ask every visitor and attendees at programs and special events.
- Incorporate a membership invitation or ask into newsletters, promotional literature, and other mailings.
- Feature membership opportunities prominently on the website, with that ask. Be sure to include the membership ask in all promotional literature and all advertising.
- Following a special event, send a direct mail letter or e-solicitation ask to participants who are not members.

Making Sure They Stay:

Membership campaigns often focus on recruiting members, and give little attention to retaining them. However, a retention plan is equally important, as evidence indicates that it is easier (and cheaper) to keep existing members than find new ones.

Usually, an organization will use member renewal letters, special "gifts" and the like to entice members to re-join. Instead, we suggest making members feel special during their membership year, so that they will want to renew (or, if you make them feel really special, join at a higher level.). Whether it be value members or affinity members, show appreciation for members every time they cross your Museum's threshold by offering them additional benefits tailored to their specific needs:

- At major events, provide a membership entrance so members do not wait on admission lines. This is especially good for family members with children.
- Offer members advance ticketing for popular programs. That's good for both affinity and value members.
- Make affinity members feel important and a part of your "family" by: welcoming new members through an event or with a small token; steady communication, so they feel like they are privy to inside information; and recognizing them at events.

We would be remiss if we did not address the issue of renewal letter frequency. Some feel that too many is not good; others feel the same about too few. We suggest sending the renewal letter early, and a minimum of three times, as often multiple reminders increase the response. Try this simple schedule: send one letter 30 days before expiration, one at the expiration date, and one 30 days after.