



Orienting New Members

Developing and conducting an organizational recruitment campaign is very important. Yet, as we know, retaining these members is another matter entirely. All too frequently groups skip any form of orientation and just place their new recruits directly on committees or organizational projects. Although involvement is crucial to the longevity of the group, understanding the organization and its goals and objectives, structure, norms and taboos is equally as important. By taking the time to orient new members to the responsibilities and privileges of membership, the organization will develop people who can and will make significant contributions.

A successful organizational orientation program should include:

- Organizational history, traditions, and programs
- Assimilation of new members into the organization
- Rights and responsibilities of members
- Organizational governance, operating policies and procedures
- An overview of campus services, activities and programs for student organizations
- Information about any support groups or affiliations the group may have

When planning your orientation program, you should keep the word **AIM** in mind.

Acquaint

Inform

Motivate

The purpose of any orientation program is to **Acquaint** your recruits to the organization and to each other. Knowing the in's and outs of the group is only one aspect of being in an organization. It is important to note that people join groups for many different reasons such as:

- Wanting to get involved*
- Learning new skills*
- Making friends*
- Having a good time*

Therefore, it is important to structure time for the membership to get to know each other and develop personal relationships. A get-acquainted exercise that is helpful is:

Pairing off with someone you do not know

Take five minutes to tell your partner about yourself

After you have talked to your partner, write down five words or phrases to describe him/her

Swap lists and compare yours with the one your partner made of you

Gather into a group of six or more and introduce your partner to the rest of the group. Try to include as much information as you can recall. Officers should be included in the exercise. When all the groups have finished, have the officers take time to tell the entire group about themselves; be sure they include their job descriptions.



Inform

Informing your members should include the *organization's history, purpose and structure*. If there are written records, be sure to give everyone a copy. In addition, include organizational charts, officer descriptions and a complete membership list. If you do not have a written history, have the group write one. The following will be helpful in starting this project:

Place newsprint on the wall and select a recorder

Ask membership to tell what they know about the organization

How the group was formed

When and where it started

What past members were like

Programs and/or services they offered

How the organization was structured

How the organization has evolved over the years

When recording this information, utilize your creativity and think up interesting chapter titles

It is important to remember that this is an oral history and that you are recording people's perceptions about the group. Although these may be inaccurate, they are important because they influence people's feeling about the group. This history also provides the leadership with the opportunity to dispel myths and rumors.



Motivate

Motivate your members and *get them excited about the group*. Provide time for "older" members to meet the new recruits and share ideas and expectations. Below is a good exercise for both your old and new members. Have the group break into groups of old and new members to discuss the following:

Outgoing Members

What accomplishments are you most proud of?

What advice would you offer to new members?

If you had your year to do over again, how would you do it differently?

New Members

What would you like this organization to mean to you one year from now?

What would you like to ask the old members?

What goals would you like to accomplish this year?

What problems do you anticipate and how would you resolve them?

Spend at least 15 minutes in your group discussing these questions. When time is up, gather together as one group and report what you discussed. It is often most effective to have the outgoing members report first, followed by the new members.

Finally, *it is important to find out what the new members' interests are and what skills they bring to the group*. Using this information, try to give them tasks that will successfully use their talents. Further, give them a reason to be committed. Whenever possible, recognize members' accomplishments, both publicly and privately. If they report to a committee chair, be sure to let their superiors know about their contributions.

By including the above suggestions in your new member's orientation program, you will discover that you have built group cohesion.

By following these tips you will ensure:

New members know the organization and are able to articulate its mission
Members understand their rights and responsibilities to self and organization
Leadership and discipline

From Mercer Univeristy website: <http://www2.mercer.edu/CampusLife/default.htm>