



# Retention

## **What is Retention?**

Retention is the process of ensuring that your members or volunteers remain active with your organization. Retention is not a particularly formal process. Instead, it focuses on maintaining a welcome environment, member morale, and organizational progress.

## **Why is Retention important?**

Retention is important for a variety of reasons, which includes having:

- A pool of members who you can count on to help when needed
- A pool of members who could potentially be future leaders
- A strong indicator of the long term health and success of your organization

## **How to enable members rather than disable?**

It is important to acknowledge that members can be active with your organization at a variety of levels. Some members like to help with planning programs, some like to attend programs, some like to help set-up the programs and attend the event and some just like to be on the listserv.

### *Avoid Alienation:*

Often leaders and/or active members of an organization talk with each other and not with general members who aren't as active or who are shy. One negative outcome of this unwelcoming environment is a feeling of alienation from those who already know each other or are more outspoken. And as a result of this alienation, other negative outcomes such as discomfort, disenfranchisement, and resentment may occur.

## **How to retain members?**

If you are losing members, you can safely bet that one or more individuals in the organization are contemplating leaving the organization as well.

### *Maintain a Position of Strength and Expectation:*

Maintaining a position of strength and expectation, rather than weakness and desperation, is crucial to the process and extends beyond merely passing on inappropriate members.

Begin this process during the recruiting process; by conveying key information, i.e. the benefits, and expectations about your organization, or program. Doing so increases the likelihood of attracting sincerely interested applicants—applicants whose abilities and experience correspond to your needs. This process should continue beyond the initial

stage of recruiting. A vision for vision's sake can prove mundane and useless—returning consistently and practically to a vision can keep members focused and motivated.

*Fairness:*

The perception of fairness and equitable treatment is important in member retention

*Conversations:*

Simple conversations help create a welcoming and friendly atmosphere. Do your best to create conversation with members, especially those you haven't met before or don't see often. It may feel uncomfortable or weird at first, but it's relatively easy once you get over the initial shyness or awkwardness.

Communicating with members is critical for retention because it is the power by which members stay informed and involved. With communication, organizational leaders can impart information and updates to members. In addition, members can use communication channels such as emails and meetings to voice their opinions, participate in decision making, and share their ideas.

Does your organization solicit ideas and provide an environment in which members are comfortable providing feedback?

*Show Them You Care:*

Once you have recruited your members, don't forget about them. Just as it is easy for good teachers or counselors to neglect the best-behaved children in their classroom or camp group, so too it is easy to take for granted your members—who rarely bother you with problems or complaints. Just as you exhort your members to notice and reinforce the organization's principles and to stay involved, so too must the organization leaders notice and reinforce them. Failure to do so can lead to their departure from the organization.

*Development:*

Members need frequent opportunities to learn and grow in the organization, knowledge and skill. Without the opportunity to try new opportunities, sit on committees, attend possible seminars/workshops and read and discuss issues, they feel they will become stagnate.

*The quality of organization leader is critical to member retention:*

People leave organization leader(s) more often than they leave the organization. It is not enough that the leader(s) is well-liked or a nice person the supervisor has a critical role to play in retention. Anything the organization leader(s) does to make a member feel unvalued will contribute to turnover. Frequent complaints center on these areas.

- lack of clarity about expectations
- lack of feedback about organization activities
- failure to hold scheduled meetings or beginning the meeting late.

*Involvement*

Get your members involved with program planning and implementation. Invite them to help with as many aspects of your organization and programming as possible. Remember individuals generally dislike just sitting at meetings and hearing others speak. Offer them things that are active.

*Ownership*

Let your members participate in decision making, or at least give them opportunities to openly voice their needs, interests, and opinions.

*Benefits*

Offer benefits or incentives for your members to be active in your organization. Benefits can be tangible, intangible, or both. Important benefits include sense of belonging and community

*Updates*

Members can generally lose interest in an organization if they don't know what the organization is doing or what it has planned. Constant updates, whether through emails, newsletters, websites, or meetings, are keys to maintaining a base-level of interest.

*Gains*

Effective Organizational Development: Organizational development is the continual process of developing and maintaining a strong organization through deliberate and meticulous planning as well as periodic and purposeful assessment; via a strong mission, vision, goals, and constitution for the organization.