Member and Leadership Development

This section will:

- Discuss five guidelines for successful membership recruitment
- Review principles of transitioning members to active volunteers and chapter leaders.

What motivates volunteers to get involved? One study gives the following summary:

44% were asked directly to get involved.
29% have family or friends involved.
31% participated in an activity sponsored by the organization.
25% got involved on their own initiative.
6% responded to publicity about the organization or its activities.

Although Audubon chapters vary across the county, there is one challenge they all seem to share – *recruiting new active members and leaders*. With more women joining the work force and the many demands on everyone's time, volunteer organizations are often finding it more difficult to recruit new, active participants. Studies of volunteer organizations consistently show that about 10 percent of the membership is likely to be active to some degree in the group. The percentage that actually takes on leadership roles is far smaller. Not surprising, Audubon's membership surveys show that about 10 percent of total members identify themselves as involved in chapter activities.

There is a tendency among chapter leaders to feel that they should have at least 50% of their members involved in chapter activities. Such expectations simply are not borne out by repeated studies of organizations like Audubon. If your chapter has over 10 percent member involvement, you are doing wonderfully! Sometimes Audubon chapters find it easy to attract large audiences to their programs and enthusiastic participation on their field trips. However, the problem seems to come when chapters are looking for new leaders to chair committees and run the business of the organization.

Are there magic solutions to member and leadership recruitment? Of course not. There are, however, some keys in the study described above to building recruitment within your chapter.

Recruiting Active Members

If a chapter follows five principles of successful membership recruitment, we can just about guarantee that it will bring in new blood and new leadership.

1. Recruitment works best when it is done <u>one-to-one and in person</u>. A second choice is to recruit members over the telephone or via email. Successful recruitment cannot be done through the mail.

2. Recruitment should be <u>built into every chapter activity</u>.

3. Every chapter leader should take responsibility for recruitment and actively participate in finding new members. Recruitment cannot be assigned to one or two people.

4. Recruitment should be a part of the chapter's annual planning process and should be consciously built into the year's activities.

5. Tasks assigned to new recruits, whether leaders or new volunteers, should be commensurate with their abilities and self-confidence level.

Recruiting one-to-one

While it is completely appropriate to seek volunteers through the chapter newsletter, do not be disappointed if you receive little or no response. People are bombarded daily with requests for help through the mail, and most of us are immune to it. Even more important, if a chapter member does not know the chapter leaders personally, it is unlikely he or she will volunteer to help a group of strangers.

The first order of business is to attract new members to a chapter program or event, and to make the "outsider" feel welcome. But getting him or her there is just the beginning. Then the serious "one-to-one" work begins.

- Pass around a sign-up sheet (don't leave it on a desk) seeking help on various activities. This will identify new members' interests.

- Assign a welcoming committee to greet new members before and after the program and during refreshments to find out more about what aspects of the chapter they are interested in.

- Follow-up with phone calls inviting participation in specific program activities. If a new member signs up and does not hear from the chapter within a few days, she or he will most likely lose interest or feel unappreciated.

Another recruitment strategy is to identify the lively, actively involved members of your community and recruit them to do their work for your chapter and for Audubon. Did someone write a really good "letter to the editor" on an issue your chapter cares about? Find them and invite them to work with you on that issue. Did someone show up at a public hearing on a critical zoning issue and give terrific testimony on saving your favorite wetland? Recruit that person to work for the Audubon cause.

Recruiting through every activity

Every chapter activity during the year should include a recruitment component, whether it is the monthly program, field trips, Audubon Adventures, conservation or newsletter committees. When this is consciously done, new members will flow into the chapter.

A responsibility of every chapter leader

Some people like to handle all recruitment themselves. Every time one of your chapter leaders decides that he or she can recruit members more quickly and efficiently alone, he or she is cutting off a little of the life breath of the chapter. It takes time to recruit, train, and turn loose new energy into the chapter, but the benefits of investing in this process will pay off in spades. Encourage other chapter leaders to take part in recruitment and your efforts will be multiplied.

A key part of the annual planning process

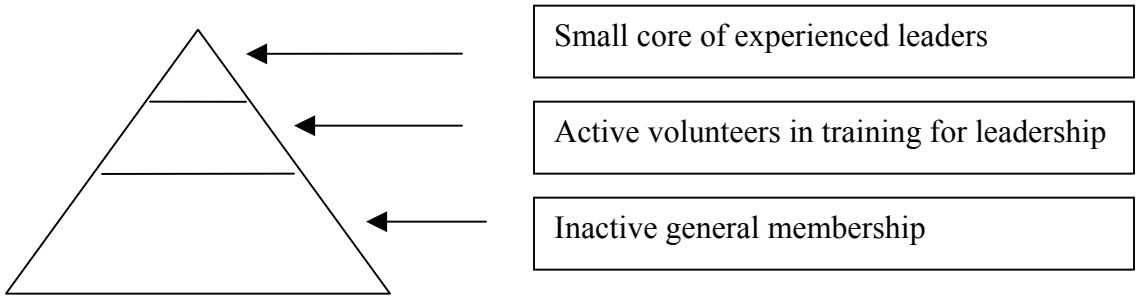
For recruitment to really work in a chapter, it needs to be incorporated into the annual planning process. At the annual planning session, officers and committee chairs can brainstorm ways to use monthly programs and field trips to recruit new members. Committee chairs who need ideas can get help from others who are more experienced. Techniques for recruiting new members are infinite, and if the chapter board will take the time to discuss and plan for recruitment, you will find some wonderfully creative ideas.

Fitting the task to the volunteer

Perhaps the most destructive thing we do to volunteers is give them tasks at which they cannot succeed. Too often, desperate chapter board members ask green recruits to take on key chapter positions when they have not had enough experience in the chapter to understand how to do the job. The new recruit is swamped, struggles mightily, and may even do a very good job, but at the end of the term he or she disappears forever, totally burned out. But you were desperate, you say? There was just nobody else? This may be so, but if you do your work well, and recruit carefully through the ranks of the committee structure, you will be able to save a number of volunteers from the burn-out syndrome.

Evolving from New Volunteer to Chapter Leader

Participation in most volunteer organizations looks like this:



Whether your chapter has 30 members or 3,000 members, its activities are most likely carried out by a small core of leaders and supported by the large base of inactive members. The middle of this organizational pyramid tends to have a large VACANCY sign flashing. This is where planning comes in. The following questions can help guide the process of building new leaders.

1. Does the chapter have terms for officers, or does it have officers for life?

2. Does the chapter hold elections in the spring, so that new officers and committee chairs have the summer to think, plan, organize, recruit and be ready to roll in September?

3. Does the chapter have a training program for key positions such as president, vice president, or membership chair?

4. Does the chapter have job descriptions for officers and committee chairs?

5. Does the chapter have a spring orientation session for new officers in which retiring the chairs provide full briefings on the workings of the committees?

6. Do the committee chairs keep well organized files that can be passed on to the next chair? Does the chapter need to do some training in this area? Effectively passing on information to incoming chapter leaders can make or break the success of their tenure in the chapter.

Planning for Recruitment

Recruiting for leadership roles needs to be as carefully planned as recruiting new volunteers into the chapter ranks. If the board brainstorms collectively about ways to do this, the chapter will find out that its leaders are better prepared, more sure of themselves and have more fun than they used to.

As you plan the chapter year, highlight major leadership recruitment opportunities, assign recruiters and brainstorm about new recruitment methods. For example:

- Invite a new member to help with a chapter exhibit or participate in the annual bird seed sale. Next year, ask him or her to assume more responsibility for either of these events.

- Invite a personal friend who you know is interested in birds to participate in the chapter Birdathon. Next year, ask them to help organize the chapter's Birdathon.

- Invite a new member to write an article for the newsletter or help find new graphics. Ask good writers to be assistant editors and help with layout. They are future newsletter editors in the making.

- Ask new members to go with you to meeting with a public official, reporter, or editor about an issue of concern to the chapter. Next time, ask him or her to make a statement or to write a "letter to the editor" on the issue.

- Ask a member to help recruit others to be on a telephone tree to get in touch with public officials as legislative or other political developments occur. Next year, ask them to be in charge of the telephone tree.

When recruiting new leaders:

- Ask directly and personally.
- Be specific about expectations.
- Listen carefully to concerns raised.
- Give positive feedback about the work done.
- As an old hand, be available to help.
- Check in often to see how things are going.
- Do not assign a job that beyond the volunteer's capability or experience.

There is no end to the opportunities for recruiting volunteers and leaders to participate in your chapter. The surprise is that it does not involve extra work. With adequate planning, successful recruitment is woven into the fabric of the chapter's life. It becomes second nature to every chapter leader, and is the secret to every successful chapter's vitality and growth.