RETAIN MEMBERS

Though you started out strong, you may eventually find group membership dwindling or members not showing up to meetings and events. This is one of the most common challenges for student organizations. First, focus your efforts on finding out why members have left or potential members are not interested. Then make informed changes. We’ve got several suggestions for you.

IDEAS

- **Conduct informal interviews** or focus group studies with members who have left. Remember oftentimes it’s not personal. Many reasons could lead someone to leave—other priorities, unexpected life changes, lack of personal growth, lack of ownership, expectations not met, personality conflicts, feelings that they’re not making an impact, group cliquishness, lack of enthusiasm, lack of personal connection with members, group disorganization, lack of fun, lack of clear goals, different goals than the rest of the group, perceived bias related to their race, sexual orientation, gender, ability, class, (lack of) religion, etc.

- **Boost energy.** Plan every year to send students to the [Student United Way Leadership Retreat](#) and [Alternative Spring Break](#). At the retreat passionate student leaders from around the world get to inspire each other, share ideas, get training, hear expert speakers, connect with professional opportunities, find support and receive resources. Alternative Spring Break reminds members what it’s all about: community change. Participants trade their beach towels for tool belts and help out in week-long service projects around the U.S. Students often head home on fire and motivated to make their communities and their Student United Way the best they can be.

- **Create an inclusive, supportive atmosphere.** Ward against cliques and inside jokes that exclude members. Hold regular low-key, fun, relationship-building events. Be hyperaware in welcoming diversity of all sorts. Make sure to do regular group self-care: check in with members individually and as a group to see how they’re doing. Volunteering can become emotionally heavy. Talk about that. Find ways to support each other outside of Student United Way: bring soup to sick members, put together a study group for members struggling academically, celebrate members’ birthdays and successes, ask questions and be vocally conscious of what’s going on in the members’ lives. If your group is too large to do this well, consider creating a mentor/mentee program so experienced members can support newer members, or so memberbuddies or small groups can support and be accountable to each other.

- **Thank your members.** Acknowledge their work for the group both privately and with the group gathered if they’re comfortable with that. Be specific in your thank yous: “Thank you for coordinating the audio equipment and keeping a cool head when the rest of us were stressing. You showed great foresight and leadership under pressure.” Reward them with leadership positions, thank you notes and shout-outs.
• **Be organized.** Provide agendas before meetings and stick to them as much as possible. Be clear about each member’s role. Make timelines and deadlines. Consistently answer texts, emails and messages with promptness.

• **Empower members.** Give them ownership of projects and let members decide as a group what projects to pursue. Listen when they speak and respond to their comments and questions with thoughtfulness.

• **Create value.** Make sure your members are personally benefitting from participating. This could be through highlighting project outcomes—what one hour of your group’s tutoring translates to in terms of grades, college acceptance, professional development, feelings of confidence, etc.—so members see they’re making a difference. It could be through providing professional trainings so members know how to translate and communicate the skills they’ve gained through Student United Way to their jobs and schoolwork. It could be through fostering experiences where members can build sustained relationships with each other. Work proactively and check-in to make sure you and they are having positive, meaningful experiences.

We’re here to help! Reach out to us at student@unitedway.org.