
ORIENTATION FOR NEW MEMBERS

Developing and conducting an organizational recruitment campaign is very important. Yet, retaining these new members is another matter entirely. All too frequently groups skip any form of orientation and just place their new members 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 culture is equally as important. By taking the time to orient new members, you have a more educated membership-people who can and will make significant contributions to the organization.

A SUCCESSFUL ORIENTATION PROGRAM SHOULD INCLUDE:

- The rights and responsibilities of members
- Organizational purpose, structure or governance, operating policies and procedures
- Welcome and assimilation of new members into the organization
- An overview of campus resources for student organizations

When planning your orientation program, keep this word in mind – **AIM**

ACCQUAINT

INFORM

MOTIVATE

ACQUAINT

The purpose of any orientation program is to welcome your new members and acquaint them to both the organization and each other. Knowing the ins-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 reasons: they want to get involved, learn new skills, make friends and/or have a good time. For this reason, it is important to structure time for the members to get to know each other and to develop personal relationships and commitments. The following is an often used get-acquainted exercise:

- Pair off with someone you don't know
- On a sheet of paper, write down ten words or phrases that describe yourself.
- Take 5 minutes to tell your partner about yourself-do not go over the list
- After you've talked to your partner, write down 5 words or phrases to describe him or her.
- Gather into a group of 6 or more and introduce your partner to the rest of the group. Try to include as much information as you can recall.

Officers/leaders should be included in this exercise. When all the groups have finished, have the officers take the time to tell the entire group about themselves; be sure they include their job descriptions.

If new members join the group during the year, be sure to find ways to welcome and introduce them to the group!

INFORM

This section of the orientation process should cover the organization's history, purpose and structure. If there are written records, give everyone a copy. Be sure to include organizational charts, officer job descriptions, and a membership list. Have the new members included on this list!

If you do not have a written history, have the group write one. To do so, place newsprint on the wall and choose a scribe. Next, ask the membership to tell what they know about the organization: how the group was formed, when and where it started, what past members were like, the programs and/or services they offered, how the organization was structured, and how it has evolved over the years. Go back as far as you can. When recording this information be creative 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. These may, in fact, not be totally accurate. However, they are important perceptions. They impact how people, both members and non-members, think and feel about the group. The collective writing of your group's history also provides an opportunity for the leadership to dispel any myths and rumors that may be brought up.

MOTIVATE

Get all your members, returning and newly recruited, excited about the group. Provide time for them to meet each other and to share ideas and expectations. The exercise below is one way to accomplish that goal.

Have the group break into groups of experienced and new members to discuss the following:

Experienced Members

- If you had last year to do over again, how would you do it differently?
- What advice would you offer to the new members?
- What accomplishment(s) are you most proud of?

New Members

- What would you like this organization to mean to you one year from now?
- What would you like to ask experienced members?
- What goals would you like to accomplish this year?
- What problems do you anticipate and how would you solve them?

Spend at least 15 minutes in your group discussing these questions, then gather as one large group and report what you discussed. It is usually more effective to have the experienced members report first, followed by the new members.

It is also very important to find out what the new member's interests are and what skills they bring to the group. Using this information, try to involve them in tasks which will successfully use their talents and give them a reason to be committed. Whenever possible, recognize members' accomplishments both publicly and privately.

<p>The purpose of orientation programs (or organization education) is to develop better members, who in turn will transform the group into a better organization!</p>
