

Recruiting New Members

Why Recruit?

The exasperated feeling of "I have to organize not only the members to staff the table, but also get all of the materials ready, reserve the space, *and* clean everything up at the end of the day" is all-too-common among leaders of student groups. If you've ever felt this way, there is a good chance that your group doesn't put enough time and resources into recruitment. Real change is usually not made by one person alone. But how do you get other students to join you in your group's effort to protect the planet when they are worrying about classes, jobs, and exams? If they wanted to join the group, wouldn't they have already done so?

To make recruitment a little less daunting, consider these facts: nearly 84 million adults volunteer 16 billion hours of their time. This is the equivalent of 7.7 million full time staff. As a comparison, all branches of the US military only employ 1.4 million active service personnel. What this means is that you have more than an army of people out there willing to give their time to a good cause! The trick is getting them involved in *your* group. Here are some steps to lead the students with passion and time to your group and efforts:

First, never assume that students on campus know about your group. While this is especially true for new groups, older, more established groups often fall into the trap of thinking that their 10-year history on campus and last year's impressive achievements mean something to new freshmen just arriving on campus. All students, including the new transfers and freshmen, are literally bombarded with information upon arrival to school. Others have their heads buried in books or their minds of their classes. To be an effective recruiter, your group must get out there and be seen. Have membership sign-up forms and pens ready at 'quad day' events and other tabling opportunities, make flyers announcing your first meeting to hand out *en masse*, and chalk the campus to announce your group's first meeting.

Second, new members are critical for maintaining your organization over the years. All too often, groups get comfortable with their current core group of members. Recruiting new members seems like too much work, and it's easier just to plod along with your current bunch. While older, long-time members may be more comfortable in this close peer setting where everyone knows their roles and are familiar with the projects, this 'streamlined' process of getting things done just sets the group up for disaster. The critical mistake? All these 'old timer' members are seniors, or about to enter their most strenuous year. While they may be able to accomplish some additional goals during the school year, upon graduation or entering their senior year, the group falls apart with no one prepped to take the reins. There are no new, younger members to bring up through the ranks, to mentor to be new group leaders. The next school year, any bright-eyed students wanting to make a difference on campus will have to begin with a clean slate, making the task much larger than it needed to be. On-going recruitment is essential not only for eliminating the burdens of one or a few dedicated members, but vital to the health, longevity, and stability of your group.

Types of Recruitment

Mass Recruitment

Mass recruitment reaches out to large numbers of people at once by creating visibility of your group on campus and in the community. The most common mass recruitment event for student groups is a university sponsored day early in the semester where students learn about the groups on campus. Mass recruitment events are important opportunities to recruit large numbers of new members. Typically, the most important event for student groups is the university's student organization day which introduces new students to the campus's organizations. Other mass recruitment tactics include: sidewalk chalking, flyering the campus, hosting events, media coverage, and tabling.

1. **Catch their attention!** Some students will be attracted to your group solely because they are interested in environmental issues. Most need a little something more. Recruitment for your group should have specific, but not an overwhelming amount of information on what you are working on. Having a well planned issue campaign is an excellent way to attract new members.
2. **Get their information and be sure to give them yours.** If your group is engaged in a mass recruitment event, they should have multiple clipboards ready with a place to put at least their name, e-mail, and phone number and also possibly categories like environmental interests, major, or year in school. If this isn't possible, for example if your group is chalking, be sure that your groups contact information is available by way of a website or e-mail address.
3. **Follow up with new recruits!** Don't just let that new contact information sit there! Be sure to add the names to your group's e-mail list right away, but also follow up with these new recruits. Divide up the list among group numbers and have them contact each person. Phone calling with a short script is recommended (i.e. "Hi, My name is Joey and I'm calling from the Environmental Club. We had your number from our sign up list and I wanted to invite you to our next meeting in 100 Lincoln Hall. Do you think you'll be able to come? Do you have any questions about the group? Is there anything specific that you're interested in?) Don't call members too many times and be sure to record any information that new recruits give you. If phone calling will be just too time consuming for your group, be sure to write individual e-mails to new recruits. (Copying and pasting the message is fine, but be sure to send and address it to each individual).

One-on-One Recruitment

One-on-one recruitment reaches out to individual students by making a personal connection. Brainstorm a list of students you think may be interested in joining and helping your group (i.e., the woman in the next row in English class who has all those environmental patches on her backpack, that guy in the ice cream hut on the quad that always wears environmental t-shirts).

1. Sit down and talk to them about the group and its projects and campaigns.

2. Be sure to listen to what the other person has to say, and tap into why the recruitee might want to participate in your group. (i.e., "You mentioned that you had been instrumental in launching a recycling program in high school. Our campus has a pretty good recycling program, but we are now seeking to implement a waste reduction component. I think you'd be perfect on such a project, since you have so much great first-hand experience in similar campaigns. Would you be interested?")
3. Frame your discussion so that the person is able to see that they will have the opportunity to make a difference in your group and that their values are the same as other members of the organization. (i.e., "The campaign is just beginning. We have someone that is willing to co-chair the campaign committee, but is seeking another co-chair with some real on-the-ground experience. She has already been sketching out some goals and ideas, and I know there's a lot of support in the group for really starting this campaign up.")

Mass Recruitment Tactics

Mass recruitment raises awareness about your group, activates your campus, and involves students in your group and the issues on which you are working by reaching out to large audiences. Mass recruitment is essential to sustaining your group and educating the public, campus and community alike. Here are some tactics to move students into action through mass recruitment.

Class Presentations

Contact friendly professors or those teaching environmentally-related courses and ask if you can make brief presentations at the beginning of their classes, around three minutes. These types of presentations tell large numbers of students in one setting ~ and a captive audience ~ about current environmental problems, what your group is doing about them, and how they can get involved. Be sure to keep a list of the friendly professors and maybe even a list of classes that each of your group's members are taking to make this easier each time. Here are tips for successful class presentations:

- Speak to a variety of classes, not just the ones with an environmental theme or focus. Contact instructors of large introductory courses in all departments to reach large, diverse groups of students. Often new students in these intro courses are looking for activities and groups to join and class presentations give your group an advantage in attracting these new students.
- Keep presentations short and structured (introduction, problem, solution, and how to get involved). Practice ahead of time. Be sure to mention the group's next meeting time, date, and location. During your presentation, announce in passing that your group will be serving food at the next meeting. This certainly helps draw a crowd!
- Write a contact name, phone, and email on the black or dry erase board, pass around an interest sign-up sheet, and leave flyers by the door announcing the next meeting. Follow up by contacting new recruits on the sign-up sheet to immediately involve them in the group.

Surveys

Surveys are designed to give your group an opportunity to talk to fellow students about issues, demonstrate how much (or little) people actually know about various environmental issues, and spread information about your group or a specific campaign. Surveys are also tools for recruiting new members to your group.

For instance, Earth Doctors at University of Illinois recently conducted a survey as part of their campaign to implement a recycling program in the city of Champaign. The group decided to conduct a survey to accomplish several goals. First, the group wanted to determine the demand for recycling among people in apartments. They also needed to know if people used the city's drop off center. They needed this information to combat the city's argument that they were doing enough to promote recycling in town. The group also wanted to let folks know about the group's efforts and how they could get involved in the campaign. Earth Doctors developed the survey questions, had petitions for people to sign, and letters they could send to landlords and city council representatives. Group members split into teams and went door to door to apartments with their surveys. The results were then submitted to city council members to show demand for a recycling program. From the base of people the group surveyed, they recruited lots of new members.

Conduct a campus survey through the school mail system (if this is an option at your school), at tables in high traffic areas, door to door, or contact your school's statistics department to see if a professor will allow her students to use a survey already in print or conduct your survey as a part of a class project. Students may be able to receive class credit for developing the survey, implementing it, and analyzing survey results.

Guerrilla Postering and Chalking

Smother the campus with information about your group's activities and campaigns by chalking sidewalks and posting fliers around campus. Two important elements include making sure your message is clear and putting all your posters or chalkings up at the same time (i.e., on the same evening), making your message more visible than if you were to only display a few at a time over a period of time.

Events

Planned events raise awareness, increase visibility, build your membership, and provide opportunities to attract the media. One of the critical goals of any event should be to build your group's membership. After the event, you should find that your group has more members, increased enthusiasm, increased press coverage, and added momentum. Events can also generate great media coverage to help reach an even wider audience. Great events start with good planning.

Teach-Ins

While teach-ins require a good deal of planning to execute, they can be excellent tools to raise campus awareness. For one day, engage the entire campus in a discussion of environmental issues. On this day, every class in each discipline will somehow integrate into their lesson plans those issues on which your group is working. Sponsoring a series of speakers in the evening will further encourage discussion and thought about environmental issues - try anything creative to get people talking. Speakers and campus debates not only educate audiences, but also get more people

involved in your group (remember to bring those sign-up sheets!). Invite representatives from local, state, and national environmental groups, members of faculty, members of the student body, elected officials, and industry representatives. Don't forget to notify the media!

Tabling

Setting up tables in high traffic areas where people pass by or congregate provides excellent opportunities for distributing educational information, signing up new members, or gathering signatures on petitions, postcards, or letters. Great places to table include: dining halls, on the quad, in or around the student union, at Earth Day events, on student activities day, at campus cafés, in the lobby of a concert, in movie lines, along a busy sidewalk, or any other place where you can find a lot of people who might be interested in your group and the protecting the planet. Tabling provides great visibility for your group and enables your members to reach large numbers of people who you might not otherwise reach. Plus tabling gives you a chance to talk with students one-on-one. Here are some tips for setting up a successful tabling:

- Set goals. The typical volunteer can sign up to 5 new people to volunteer and collect 25 signatures.
- Staff the booth appropriately. Have at least 2 volunteers at the table at all times. For times that will be busier, consider recruiting 3-4 volunteers. Give members plenty of notice so they can work around their busy schedules, and remind them of the time and place they are scheduled a day or two in advance. Slightly over-staffing the table (without having dozens just standing around) reduces stress in the event of last minute changes or cancellations.
- Approach people. Don't wait for people to come over to your table. You don't need to accost people, simply use the table as a base, and stand along side it and talk to passers by. At busy times during the day have 1-2 volunteers walking around handing out literature and talking to people.
- Have enough supplies. Make sure pens, clipboards, petitions, fact sheets, stickers, flyers are fully stocked. Include 'emergency' materials such as tape and twine to hold papers on windy days or to hang posters on walls behind the booth. Include the sign-up sheet for the day so volunteers know when and who to expect next shift. Include a sheet of executive committee members' names, phones, and emails. Have enough materials so volunteers don't have to leave to restock. Also, be sure to have a plan of what to do with leftover materials and supplies when the day is over. Someone will need to take the materials somewhere.
- Use your imagination. Use creativity in how you attract people to the table. One group, for example, handed out "Earth S'mores" to get people to sign petitions asking the US to curb greenhouse gas emissions. Another group gave out chocolate sundaes to people willing to take action against oil drilling in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge. Do something that will attract people to your table and help them remember your group and your issue.

- Have a collection jar. Tabling may not raise a lot of funds, but every little bit helps. A dollar here, a dollar there can really add up for student groups.
- Evaluate. Tabling is an excellent way for group volunteers to gain experience. Following the tabling, be sure to evaluate the event. What worked? What didn't work? What could have been different? What should be changed for next time? Keeping notes on what is determined will make tabling more successful next time.

Media

Don't forget about the media as a tool for mass recruitment. Use the media to magnify your recruitment activities. Do not have media show up for your tabling events, but entice them to cover your environmental education work, or an upcoming teach-in, demonstration, or rally on the quad.

Tips for Top-Notch Recruitment

Recruiting new members into your group can be tricky. Often we take the appearance of new faces in our groups for granted and assume they'll continue their involvement. Other times we get our new recruits involved in tasks they aren't interested in or equipped for. Here are some tips to help your group avoid such pitfalls as well as other problems associated with recruiting new members.

- **Build recruitment into campaign plans.** Keep outreach opportunities in mind when the group develops its strategic plan. Think about the different tactics that can be used to invite new students to not only see the group in action and learn about its programs, but also give them an opportunity to get involved with the group and its campaigns.
- **Know why you are recruiting.** Recruit for specific purposes such as needing volunteers to staff tables, conduct research, or work on projects. Turnout to meetings should never be used as a measure of success for the group. Recruiting people solely to turn out to a meeting and nothing more will bore people and cause them to lose interest in the group. Make attendees feel important by involving them in activities right away. Instead of just turning students out to meetings, turn them out to a river clean up, a demonstration, or an outdoor adventure activity.
- **Dismantle the "in crowd".** Imagine yourself walking into a room full of strangers where everyone knows each other and they are all talking about things that you don't understand or know anything about. It's an uncomfortable situation for anyone, but especially for someone looking for a place to get involved. Keys to successful recruitment for your group is to dismantle the "in crowd." People who've been involved with a group for a long time naturally become close and spend lots of time together working on projects. When new semesters begin and people haven't seen each other for a while, there's a strong desire to spend first meetings chatting about summer vacations and internships. It's important to remember that there will be time for returning members to catch up with friends and that the first few meetings should focus on recruiting new members and making them feel welcome. When students show interest in joining your group and take the next step of attending a meeting or activity, they need to feel an immediate role, camaraderie, and a sense of belonging. At the first few meetings of each semester, have each returning member of the group be "assigned" to greet and make comfortable new members that show up to meetings. This will help to form bonds and friendships, learn more about new members interests and reasons for wanting to join, and ensure that new faces turn into returning faces throughout the year.
- **Avoid using jargon about the issue and organization.** While acronyms like EPA or DCCA, terms like Superfund, and even campus-based jargon ("let's meet next week at the Y") may be familiar to you and returning members, new members may feel left behind when such terms are used.
- **Avoid talking about people and campaigns with which new people might not be familiar.** Saying things like "Remember when Browner proposed those arsenic regs, then Whitman decided to reverse them?" will leave new members out in the cold and wondering what in the

world you're talking about. Be clear and concise until everyone is up to speed in issues, lingo, and key players.

- **When talking about your organization to potential members avoid using unfamiliar terms.** For example, when staff members at ISEN talk about our organization with other people not affiliated with the group, we always explain the work we do in terms that everyone can understand. "The Illinois Student Environmental Network is a nonprofit organization with a professional staff that works with students in colleges and high schools across Illinois working to protect the environment. We train students how to make positive change in their communities and on their campuses by teaching them how to work with the media, fundraise, plan successful events, and other skills necessary to winning victories for the environment". This detail is much more helpful than "ISEN's a 501(c)(3) charitable organization employing best practice capacity building strategies and coalition building techniques to increase the impact students have in protecting Illinois' environment."
- **Avoid talking about old members and old campaigns if it's not relevant.** Focus on the present and what your group is working on now. Bring up historical information only when it is relevant and in context for new members.
- **Involve new members.** As soon a student displays interest in your group, try to get her involved in a project. Find out what that person is interested in, match her to a needed task, and get her started. Ideas include: staffing an informational or petitioning booth alongside a veteran group member, writing letters to campus administrators about expanding the recycling or campus composting program, or making posters for an upcoming event or rally.
- **Listen.** The most important aspect of recruiting new members is listening. Of course, you will have to talk to the individual and possibly be the force striking up the conversation. However as you are talking with potential recruits, be sure you listen for clues about why they seek to get involved in your group, as well as for their interests. For example, if you're talking with a recruit and she says she's a communication major, you should immediately begin to brainstorm group needs that would incorporate her talents and interests. Wouldn't she be great working on media for the group? Mention it to her, then wait for her response. Listen carefully here. Is she interested or excited about taking on this task, or reluctant to get involved? Listen to her concerns and provide her with the support she needs. The same applies when you are initially promoting the group to individuals. Listen carefully to what they tell you about their interests and let them know what the group can offer them.

Recruiting new people to work on group projects is a huge task for any group. When you are finally successful in enlisting new members you should feel extremely lucky to have these new faces among you. Make every effort to retain them and make them feel welcome and needed. Their work will be valuable to the group's efforts and with the right stimulation, they can become group leaders in years to come.

Maintaining and Involving Members

Getting a large showing to group meetings is, by and large, not *too* difficult. But getting that same level of turnout at meetings, events, and calls to action throughout the school year requires more finesse, time, and talent. It's not enough just to get one person at an event, action, or meeting. Group members must be nurtured; make them feel important and a real part of your group. There are 4 basic steps to maintaining group members: *Ask*, *Thank*, *Inform*, and *Involve*.

Ask

Figure out exactly what your group's needs are, then ask various members to help you meet those needs. You mustn't wait for members to come to you asking for responsibilities. Ask both for members' time and financial support to the group (if each of 10 members donated just a dollar at each week's meeting, you'd have about \$150 to work with over the semester ~ great for copies, phone calling, and supplies for events). Build relationships with your members and really get to know their skills, interests, and backgrounds. Keep in regular and consistent communication with them. Offer a variety of ways for people to volunteer and donate, always looking for ways to capitalize on and maximize their strengths and needs.

Thank

It's amazing what a simple "thank you" can get. When people feel valued and appreciated, they tend to continue helping out for a long time. Make your members feel the group truly appreciate everyone's commitment and contribution to the group's efforts.

Inform

Don't just expect volunteers to know what projects need work and where opportunities exist. Give your members the help they need to accomplish the tasks your group needs done to advance your goals. Talk about various issues with your members and make them see opportunities as a part of their life and schedule and how the work they will do will directly impact them.

Involve

Give people tasks matching their skill levels and interests. For time-strapped people, that may mean donating money, for others, it may mean coordinating projects or assisting others with events. Involve your members in the organizational and campaign planning processes. Don't expect people to get excited about helping out with an event or campaign if they feel their voice hasn't been heard during the planning process.

The stages do not occur in a linear fashion, but more like a cycle. It can start at any place, but it always includes all four steps, and then the cycle starts again. For example, You may inform a prospective member that your group is working on campus recycling during a class presentation you gave in front of a Econ 101 class. You let the class know there was a problem and a solution. At the same time you asked them to get involved by coming to a meeting and signing up on your email list. At the meeting you take it a step further by thanking them for coming. At the meeting you inform people more about the specific work that needs to happen for your group to make head ways on the recycling program. Then you involve people by having them do one of the tasks on the list of things to do to accomplish your goals.

Creating a Recruitment Plan

Recruitment involves not only bringing new people into an organization, but also means maintaining that membership and getting people to take on responsibility and leadership roles over time. If recruitment is not a part of your group's plan, no one will be there to organize the organization once current members graduate. Never underestimate the power of recruitment! Protecting the planet is a tough job and no one can do it alone. But a small group of people can accomplish a great deal by inspiring others to join in their efforts.

Every group needs to recruit, no matter what their stage of development and no matter what time of the school year. Recruitment should be a basic—and ongoing—part of your group's plans and structure. Just because your group's been around for 2 years or even 20 years, doesn't mean you can put recruitment on the back burner. If you do, you'll face a fast and furious game of catch-up later as older members graduate, and those with the knowledge of your group leave, taking their experiences and history with them. Think recruitment is an uphill battle now? Don't wait, or you'll really be facing a mountain recruiting new members when the core of your group is marching down the aisle to *Pomp and Circumstance!*

Groups grow and succeed when they are infused with new people who bring fresh ideas and energy. New people not only increase your group's power in terms of numbers, but they also bring new knowledge, skills, and ideas. Oftentimes, new members can also play a very valuable "revitalization" role in pumping new energy into group stuck in a rut or a little worn out. Never underestimate the power that solid recruitment practices can bring to your group. Be sure that recruitment appears in your group's annual plans, and that you have members dedicated to bringing new blood into your group year-round. Before you know it, your group will be a force with which to be reckoned.

Establishing Goals

The first step to any good plan is to establish your goals. Figure out how many people it will take to accomplish the goals you've set for the group - i.e., having the administration pass a campus energy efficiency plan by year's end, expanding campus wide recycling to include plastic by January, etc. In addition, the group needs to decide at what level you want these new members to get involved. How many people do you need to become leaders and organizers of your group? How many people will you need to show their support of your group and sign a petition or write a letter to a decision-maker, rather than make a larger time and leadership commitment? How many people will you need to turn out to your events? Be specific about your goals. Think about not only how many people you need to have join your group, but what you want these people to do as members of the group. Do you need someone interested in working with the media? Look to communication majors studying media or public relations. Someone savvy in politics? Try the Political Science Department.

Goals:

How many people? Set concrete goals for the different legs of your campaign.

What level of involvement?

When do you need them?

Specific tasks you need people to take?

"We need 5 new core members by December to work with the press, plan events, plan our outreach activities, and head up our environmental education program."

"We need 50 people to attend our benefit concert"

"We need 250 signatures on our petition for the energy efficiency initiative."

Recruiting the people

Your goals are set, now you just need to go find the people to help you reach your goals. Finding people really isn't hard at all. During the recruitment series we talked about the methods for recruiting and maintaining members. Now we'll put it all together by looking at what your group already has planned for the semester and work recruitment into each of your activities. So, pull out your campaign plans and let's get to work. ('Plans! What Plans?!' If this is what your group's saying, look at pages ___ for help on creating a campaign plan.)

Building your group works sort of like a pyramid of involvement. Your job is to work people up into higher levels over time. Your plan for recruiting new members should involve several steps ~ don't try to recruit new people for leadership positions ~ recruit them as members first, involve them and train them, then move them up the responsibility ladder.

Generate Visibility

First, educate the campus. In campaigning lingo, it's called 'creating demand'. The idea is that you want people to know about your group and the work you're doing. Let people know there is a problem, and that your group is working on the solution. Flyering, chalking the sidewalk, class presentations, and tabling in high traffic areas help you get the word out about your group and the campaigns on which your group is working.

Activate the Campus

Next, talk to people and get their contact information. Recruiting is building relationships. Flyering and chalking get people thinking about your group and the issues you're tackling. Now, you need to talk to people. This is where class presentations and tabling in high traffic areas come in. It's like a two for one: you get the general visibility, but you're also able to form relationships and get people's contact information. During presentations, always have a sign-up sheet to gather names, phone numbers, and email addresses. Petitions also help. They give people a chance to participate in your campaign from the get-go, give people a sense of accomplishment, and as a bonus provide your group with a copy of signers' contact information.

Increase Involvement

Just because you've flyered, presented in some classes, and passed around a sign-up sheet, you're work is far from over. Now, the real work begins. You must USE the new contact information you've gathered. Give people a call and ask them to help out at your group's next activity or event. Ask them to attend the next meeting or ask them to attend a rally on the quad. They'll feel great ~ you thought of them as important enough to call and ask them for their input and help. People join groups for a variety of reasons (professional development, to do good, meet new people). Don't rob them of an opportunity to get involved.

Planning is the only real way to truly increase membership in your group. Your job is to look at every activity, event, and campaign as a way to bring new people into your group. Always work into your plans the time and energy it will take to email, call, and meet with the people who expressed interest in the group and campaigns. Planning for recruitment prevents you from neglecting the job of bringing new people into the group.