
Orienting New Members & Volunteers to a Local Group

Side One:

Three Tips for Plugging People In

Bringing in new members or volunteers is essential to any local group that wants to grow in size and capacity. However, attracting or recruiting new people to your group is only the first step. Getting them to stick around can be a much bigger challenge! The good news is that there are tried and true methods you can use to plug new members and volunteers into tasks and roles that will build their investment and leadership in the group, and will increase what your group is capable of achieving.

1. Schedule one-on-one welcome interviews.

When someone says they're interested in finding out more or getting involved in your group, don't just invite them to come to your next meeting. Even the most welcoming and inclusive groups tend to develop their own meeting culture that can unintentionally make new folks feel like outsiders. To increase your new member *retention* rates, schedule one-on-one intake interviews with new folks *before* they come to a group meeting. Get to know the person. Find out about what attracted them to the group, what kinds of tasks they enjoy or are good at, and how much time they have. Then tell them more about the group and discuss with them what their involvement could look like. You can use and adapt the questions on side two of this sheet. While this level of orientation requires more time in the short-term, it saves time in the long-term; people tend to plug into the work faster and stick around longer. It may make sense for one or two members of your group to take on orienting new folks as an ongoing role.

2. Accommodate multiple levels of participation.

In short, some people can give a lot of time, and some can give a little. Organizers with more time on their hands should avoid projecting this as an expectation onto others. A foolproof way to drive new folks away from your group is to consistently ask them to give more time than they are able. Instead learn what kind of time commitment is realistic and sustainable for them. Help them plug into tasks and roles that suit their availability. Check in with them about how it's going. Are they feeling overextended, or would they like to take on more? Take responsibility for helping new folks avoid over-commitment and burnout.

3. Make people feel valued and appreciated.

If you want to inspire people to stick with your group for the long haul, you'll need to make them feel valued and appreciated. It's basic. People like to be around people who respect them, and who are nice! If social movement groups want to compete with the myriad of often more appealing options for people's free time, then we have to treat each other well and take care of each other.

Notice and acknowledge new folks' contributions, however small. Make time to check in with them outside of meetings. Ask their opinions often: What did they think about the meeting? the event? the action? Bounce your ideas off of them and ask for their feedback.



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Side Two:

Welcome Interview Template

Below is a basic welcome interview template to help you orient new members and volunteers to your group. Add questions or adapt these according to what information is most useful to your group. A welcome interview is as much about relationship building as it is about information gathering. For this reason it's better for the "interviewer" in your group to fill out the form, rather than to just hand it to the new person.

Meet over coffee or lunch or whatever is most comfortable or convenient. Schedule an hour, and spend the first half asking the new member/volunteer about herself or himself. Start with the basic getting-to-know-you stuff (are they from the area? in school? working? involved in other causes or groups?) before moving into the more formal questions below. Spend the second half of the meeting telling them more about the group and discussing with them possible ways they may want to plug in.

Enter the information into your member database and keep it safe.

Name: _____ Email: _____

Phone: _____ Address: _____

1. How did you find out about the group?
2. What attracted you to the group?
3. Are you interested in volunteering time? If so, what is a realistic and sustainable amount of time you would like to commit (a number of hours per week or per month)?
4. Are there specific days or times when you could be *regularly* available?
5. Do you have skills that may be useful to the group (e.g. finance, book-keeping, fundraising, design, photography, public speaking, writing, management, facilitation, mediation, DJing, performance, other)?
6. Are there areas of work that you are particularly interested in helping with?
7. Are you interested in skills and leadership development opportunities?
8. Is there anything else you would like to add?