

# Leadersheet

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## **Orienting New Members**

Developing and conducting an organizational recruitment campaign is very important. Yet, as we all know, retaining these new members is entirely another matter. 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, objectives, structure, norms and taboos is equally as important. By taking the time to orient new members to the privileges and responsibilities of membership, you create a more educated membership and a more productive organization - people who can and will make significant contributions to the organization.

A successful orientation should include:

- The rights and responsibilities of members
- Organizational governance, operating policies and procedures
- Organizational history, traditions and programs
- Assimilation of new members into the organization
- An overview of campus services, activities and programs for student organizations
- Information about any support groups or affiliations the group may have

When planning your orientation program keep this word in mind – AIM: Acquaint Inform Motivate

## **Acquaint**

The purpose of any new member orientation program is to acquaint your new members 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 remember that people join groups for many reasons: they want to get involved, learn new skills, make friends and 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. A weekend retreat is usually the most effective method. The following is an often-used getting acquainted exercise:

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

Officers should be included in this exercise. When all of the groups have finished, have the officers take time to tell the entire group about themselves; be sure they include their job descriptions. For additional ideas on how to acquaint new members to your organization, visit the SAL office to meet with someone who will share with you any ideas he/she may have and will show you the printed materials available.

## 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, complete with phone numbers. 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 that 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 not be very accurate. However, they are important perceptions. They influence how people, both members and non-members, think and feel about the group. This 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 your members, returning and newly recruited, excited about the group. Provide time for them to meet each other to share ideas and expectations. Below is a good exercise designed 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 would you do anything differently? If yes, how so?
- What advice would you offer to the new members?
- Of which accomplishment(s) are you most proud?

### New Members

- What would you like this organization to mean to you one year from now?
- What would you like to ask the 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. When time is up gather as one group and report what you discussed. It is usually most effective to have the experienced members report first, followed by the new members.

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

By including the above suggestions in your new member orientation program, you will discover that you have built group cohesion. By following these tips, you will ensure:

- New members know the organization and are able to articulate the purpose
- Members understand their rights and responsibilities to self and organization
- Leadership and discipline.

The purpose of organization orientation is effective members who make an efficient organization.