

MEMBERSHIP HANDBOOK

The Gardeners of America/Men's Garden Clubs of America

INTRODUCTION

As membership chairperson, you have one of the most important assignments in your club. You have the opportunity to make your club one of the best. This requires a continuous effort to retain existing members and recruit new ones, along with the cultivation of their talents in support of a successful club.

Without these efforts, a club will decline and perhaps pass out of existence. A study of over 100 clubs indicated that the average club must retain 90 percent of the previous year's members to maintain its present level. The membership chairperson should be the club's salesperson and leader of the membership effort, communicating the benefits of membership to all members and prospects.

One of the membership chairperson's greatest responsibilities should be to be well informed on the materials available from the TGOA/MGCA office. Contact them at 515-278-0295, Email: tgoasecy@qwestoffice.net

CHECKLIST FOR THE MEMBERSHIP CHAIRPERSON

1. Soon after your appointment or election discuss your duties and responsibilities with your president.
2. Recruit committee members. Committee size depends upon your club size, but keep your committee from 3 to 5. Research shows that more than 5 on a team can lead to endless discussion, indecision and lack of action.
3. Review the activities of past membership committees. Determine what was successful and appreciated by club members.
4. With your committee, determine plan of action and set goals for the coming year. Goals should be attainable.
5. Divide responsibility for each action among team members. Communicate your goals and actions to your club board.
6. Have a calling committee to remind members of the meeting, plant sale, picnic or other event.
7. Communicate the goals to the membership to enlist their participation in the effort.
8. Monitor those who have not renewed their dues and follow up with them. Recruit individuals' sponsors to follow up with them as well.
9. Always have club membership applications available for meetings, event visitors, and for recruiting new members.
10. Stress to the membership that it is everyone's responsibility to communicate the benefits of membership as well as to the enjoyment from socializing with other gardeners.
11. At all club meetings and events collect names and addresses of visitors. Have a committee member follow up with them to remind them of the next meeting or send them the next newsletter.

12. Make visitors welcome! Introduce them to the club at large and give them a schedule of events and newsletter.
13. When you receive a new member, let everyone know! Publish their name, address and phone number in the newsletter and publish a new roster. If they have a particular talent, introduce them to the member that needs their skills. Involve them immediately in club activities.
14. Maintain a roster of members. Include name, address, phone numbers(s), E-mail address, and committee affiliation. Have this available at every club meeting to encourage members to contact each other outside of the meetings.
15. See that the sponsor or other member contacts the new member to remind them of meetings and other events. This person should introduce them to other members so they begin to make new friendships.
16. Review Spade Club Member and Trowel Award requirements, determine Spade Club and Trowel Award members and complete applications and send them to the TGOA/MGCA
17. Work with publicity chair to distribute press announcements regarding club events.
18. Keep the TGOA/MGCA roster updated and ensure that dues are paid.

MEMBERSHIP ACQUISITION AND RETENTION

Club growth is dependent upon the club's program of activities and what it offers prospective and existing members. Some thought should be given to:

- Why people join a garden club.
- How to keep members active and interested in club activities.
- How to communicate the club's accomplishments to the community.
- How to get member support of club goals.

The club board needs to consider these issues and decide which club activities are coordinated by which chairperson.

MEMBERSHIP CHAIRPERSON

Due to the natural attrition of members, a club must acquire new members each year in order to thrive. The Membership Committee should review the goals for membership growth.

The Membership Chairperson should interface with the National Membership Committee. In most instances there will be a member on the National Membership Committee within the club's geographic area to consult. Successful methods of recruiting or retention of members should be shared with the National Membership Committee. Good ideas should be composed for an article in the National newsletter or The Gardener.

MEMBER ACQUISITION

New members bring a wealth of talent, energy and experience to the club. Your community is full of potential club members. There are many “weekend warriors” in search of a better yard and garden, and many others who simply find that gardening is relaxing and therapeutic. How do you reach these prospective members?

1. Be enthusiastic! Stress the benefits of club membership, both the tangible and intangible.
2. Develop a list of prospects from visitors to club meetings and other events such as plant sales. Offer incentives to join, such as a percent-off discount on plants. Mail them a copy of your newsletter and an invitation to join you at the next meeting.
3. Leave club brochures with the meeting schedule and topics and an application form at county extension offices, public libraries, and garden and home improvement centers.
4. Work with publicity chair to send out press releases to local papers, radio stations and TV stations on club community events. Invite local garden editors to join the club.
5. Have an annual “open house” and ask each member to invite a gardener in order to acquaint them with the club. Have a special speaker or booths for people to browse through different topics.
6. In all notices make it clear that families and children are welcome.
7. Once you have their attention, you can describe the club’s purpose, what you personally find valuable about the club and how you’ve become involved in the different activities. Tell them about:

Newsletters
Meeting topics
Picnics, garden tours, and other social outings
How members help each other with garden design and problems
Club services, such as free compost, woodchips, etc.
Regional and National services and activities

Benefits should be detailed in a brochure or other written document and given to each current and new member.

MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION

Information about members is important, not only for club communications but also to tailor meeting content. Be sure to capture:

Name, address and occupation
Spouse’s name

Phone number(s)
E-mail address
Birth date
Gardening interests and other hobbies – there might be a hidden talent!
Sponsor's name

MEMBERSHIP RETENTION

Just as important as the recruitment of new members is the successful retention of existing ones. Suggestions to do this include:

1. Asking sponsors to follow up with their recruits periodically
2. Calling members to remind them of meetings and special events
3. Having members network regarding gardening problems and interests
4. Inviting members to be on committees and recognizing their contribution

AWARDS

Formal recognition is one way to get greater participation and make members feel they are valued and important to the club. Awards are available from the TGOA/MGCA national office; ribbons and other certificates can also be found in many local stores such as office supply centers.

Consult with your local club's Awards Chairperson regarding criteria for Local Awards, which include:

Spade Club Award, given by TGOA/MGCA to any member sponsoring two new members in any calendar year. Trowel Award is given for renewing the same two memberships the second year. The membership chairperson must complete the application form and return it to the TGOA/MGCA office by the deadline of each year.

The first year award is a pin and ribbon. Each succeeding year is a ribbon stating the number of years being a Spade Club member. The Trowel Award is a gold trowel lapel pin. See "National Awards Manual" for other awards and honors.

KEEPING A CLUB STRONG

Encourage club members to:

1. Continually network with club members, encouraging them to attend meetings and events.
2. Accept appointment to a club office, committee or task.
3. Don't wait to be asked, volunteer to serve in some capacity.

4. If a member, attend your board and committee meetings. Even if you're not a member, invite yourself to these meetings!
5. Always feel free to voice your opinions and relate your experiences at these meetings.
6. Participate in a variety of club activities. You may have a hidden talent waiting to be found!
7. Be thoughtful when spending club's funds.
8. Attending the social events bring people closer together, helping to form lifelong friendships.
9. Pay dues on time. This helps the board set its budget for the year.
10. Read your club newsletters, and contribute an article of your own!

THANK YOU! The National membership committee appreciates all the efforts of the Membership Committees throughout the country. You are truly the lifeblood of our organization, and we stand ready to help the clubs in any way possible.

