



TROUT UNLIMITED

Volunteer Operations

Building Strong Chapters and Councils

The key to an effective and viable organization, in the long run, is that organization's ability to regularly attract and activate new members, volunteers and leaders. However, among the top challenges expressed by current volunteers are: 1) not having enough "active members;" and 2) trouble attracting new volunteer leaders. The following is a collection of ideas on how chapters can recruit more members, involve those members as volunteers and foster new leaders who will carry the organization into the future.

What Attracts People To TU:

People become a member of TU for a variety of reasons, but the most common can be broken down into the following three categories:

Conservation: They have conservation interests. The majority of TU members join because they are concerned about rivers and aquatic ecosystems that they have connected with through fishing. They have a vested interest in the health and viability of their "home waters". Many members have expressed that they want to give something back to the resource that they enjoy and ensure that they pass on a healthy resource to their children.

Fishing: They like to fish or want to learn to fish and being a member of TU opens doors to opportunities and information. For many TU members, conservation concerns have largely stemmed from an initial interest in fishing as a sport and a love of the outdoors. By attracting people to the sport, you can then educate them on the need for conservation.

Friends: They want to make friends with shared interests or join to be with current friends. Often members have been encouraged by a friend to become involved. Friendship is a powerful motivator, and by keeping activities and events fun, you create an organization that casts a broader net when it comes to membership involvement.

Caveat: For healthy group diversity, you must plan ways to encourage involvement at EVERY level (members, volunteers, leaders). Be open to different points of view and ways of doing things. At your next TU meeting or activity, look around. How many participants are women? How many people are under the age of 30? How many members are non-white? If your chapter suffers from an obvious lack of diversity or you are simply looking for new ways to bring in more members, you may want to start purposely reaching out to these large segments of the population – if not, your group may be missing the boat.

How to Catch New Members:

There are millions of trout and salmon anglers in North America. The challenge lies in finding ways to encourage those anglers to be active TU members. Keeping the above "hooks" in mind, plan activities that will not only further your conservation agenda, but also build your membership. The following are suggestions that you can use in your strategic membership development plan:

- Place membership applications and local chapter information in places that anglers frequently visit (e.g. tackle shops, sporting good stores and local businesses.)
- Build a TU kiosk at a stream restoration site.
- Create a website that illustrates your programs and upcoming events. Utilize the bulk e-mail tool in the Leaders Only Tools section of the website.
- Develop a good relationship with local media. Get your events publicized in newspapers, radio and T.V.
- Plan outreach activities that piggyback on larger events (e.g. Earth Day, National Fishing Week, TU's annual stream clean-up days and local community festivals.)
- Hold events that involve the whole family.
- Hold special youth events. The future of TU will be in their hands sooner than you think.
- Organize fly fishing clinics to introduce more people to the sport, and consider youth and women specific events.

How to Involve Your Membership:

Good job! Your recruitment has increased. What now? Effective leaders create an organizational environment conducive to member involvement and the successful retention of loyal members. The following is a checklist of activities and insights that will help you keep active members and create opportunities for members to get involved as volunteers:

A New Member Comes to a Meeting:

- Make people feel comfortable. Have a designated greeter at your meetings who personally welcomes new members.
- Encourage participation. Encourage newcomers to participate at your meetings. Make sure you ask them to introduce themselves and give them a chance to talk about their interest in being a part of the group.
- Have a “social hour” after your meetings to get to know people better.
- Make meetings fun and definitely provide refreshments.

A Member Expresses Interest in Helping:

- Have a plan. Don't let someone slip away because at the time they offered to help, you did not have something for them to do. Keep a list of things that people can always do (e.g. placing membership brochures in businesses around town.)
- Keep it simple at first. Realize that often people feel intimidated to take on big tasks when they are new to an organization. Don't ask them to put out the next newsletter right off the bat; instead invite them to help stuff envelopes.
- Provide opportunity with varying levels of responsibility.

Developing Volunteers into Leaders:



“People are more likely to say “yes” when they understand the potential rewards.”

Keep this in mind when asking someone to take on a new task. Instead of saying “I can't find anybody else to coordinate this outing. Will you do it?” Think first about what rewards might be associated with it for that person, and then tailor the reward to the individual. For a new angler, you might suggest, “it would provide an opportunity for you to make new fishing buddies. For a young member, “it would be a chance to learn organizing skills.” And for a long-time member, “you'd be making an important contribution to the chapter's conservation goals.”

- Delegate: Consider taking an item from your to-do list today and finding a capable volunteer to take it over. It's one less task for

you, and an opportunity for someone else to become involved and take more ownership in your chapter or council.

- Provide recognition and feedback: It is very important for volunteers to know that they are doing a good job and that they are recognized for their efforts. This will make them feel that they are a real asset to the group, and encourage them to take on more responsibility in the future.
- Invest time: Invite a volunteer sit on a committee or ask a committee member to chair that committee. Invite a volunteer to sit in on National Leaders Only trainings or a one-on-one leadership training. Spend the time to develop an up-and-coming volunteer's skills.

Your Strategic Plan:

Like every aspect of organizational development (successful conservation initiatives, effective fundraising, coordinated media outreach,) membership development needs a plan with goals and strategies that is integrated into an overall strategic plan for your chapter or council. When developing your plan you should:

- Assign a committee to focus on membership development and create a written plan of action.
- Consider getting input from your current membership via a member questionnaire. Ask things such as: How did you first hear about TU? Why did you join this chapter? What type of programs would you like to see? How can we improve our newsletter? Have you ever been to a meeting? An event? If no, why not? You can also ask members to answer questions about themselves and special skills that they may have to offer. This can provide valuable information and suggestions that you may not have thought of and good insight about the make-up of your membership.
- Set number goals for new members, volunteers and leaders.
- List concrete activities that will help you achieve your number goals.
- Assign timelines for these tasks and people to carry them out.
- At least once a year, evaluate your success meeting your goals and reassess your plan.