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# Volunteer/Membership Recruitment/Retention Plan

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All USBC associations are dedicated to promoting the sport. Recruitment and retention is an ongoing process that must be actively pursued each season to ensure the growth of the sport. Benefits of bowling and belonging to USBC must be shared with current and potential members.

## **Understanding Your Membership**

Many associations describe their membership by saying “We have 873 members this year” or “Our membership is down 3%.” Both are accurate, but neither provides the necessary information to understand who belongs to your association, who is leaving, and what opportunities are available to build your association.

### **“Net” vs. “Turnover”**

In the example above the association had 900 members in the previous year, lost 3% or 27 members, and now has 873 members. Were all 873 members also members last year? Or, did 250 members leave and 223 new members join this year? On average, 27% of USBC members in a given year do not return as members the following year.

### **Who are Your Members?**

- Is the average age of those leaving similar to the new members coming in?
- Is the association serving an audience that is different than it was 5 years ago?
- Are new members experienced bowlers?
- Should the association provide some introductory sessions?
- How many have family members who would enjoy a family tournament or adult/youth league?

There are many factors that an association can use to build a member profile that will help your association find members and provide the programs and services that will keep current members. WinLABS is the perfect tool for looking at categories such as age, average, number of leagues, and years as a member.

An association can also survey members to find out general profiles or specific program preferences. Ask new members what their expectations are – why did they join and where did they hear about USBC. Evaluations of event participation – or non participation – will also help the association deliver programs that keep members involved and attract new members. Finding new members requires knowing the market and your programs and finding the best match. Successful recruitment campaigns will evaluate new opportunities and develop targeted communications for that group. Looking at the demographics of your community and how it is changing will help generate new ideas.

The best way to understand the association’s membership is to talk to and listen to them!



## **Recruitment Basics**

Both recruitment and retention of members are based on solid marketing principles. Those areas of member recruitment and retention are tactical – or part of your association’s operating process – are included in this section.

### **Why Recruitment is Critical**

- Revenue from membership dues and/or processing fees helps the association provide a variety of diverse offerings. An association with a large membership can increase membership services, such as coaching classes and workshops, programs for prospective youth members and investing in larger tournament prizes – all of which also can be used as recruitment tools.
- The size of the membership of an association determines the size of the voice of an association at the state and national level. A larger association is entitled to more delegates at the annual meeting(s) and can be influential in policy and program decisions, as well as present suggestions that could benefit other associations.
- More members can lead to more opportunities. A large association membership base creates opportunities for the association members to become involved in activities that would benefit both the membership and the community – for example, hosting a “Big Brothers and Big Sisters” day of bowling, forming a “Toastmasters” club for the membership and establishing state or local association scholarships for youth bowlers.
- The size of the membership increases the association’s presence and credibility in the community. This can be particularly beneficial for establishing programs with local schools and assisting in charitable events/programs such as USBC Bowl for the Cure® and the Bowlers to Veteran’s Link.
- Successful recruitment contributes to retaining members – people enjoy being part of a successful organization. Membership can function as a support network and a large membership base provides chances for its members to explore a variety of interests.

### **Elements of Successful Recruitment**

- Establish committees to take ownership of specific responsibilities. This eliminates confusion and potential misunderstanding. The underlying rule should be that each committee represents one part of the overall plan.
- Be energetic and excited about USBC membership. When members talk about the association, they should express how they honestly feel about being an active member and what opportunities membership has provided.
- Be knowledgeable about USBC nationally and at the state and local levels. Members should be prepared to explain what a USBC membership has to offer and what USBC stands for – operating principles and the vision and mission statements.
- Promote the benefits of participating in USBC certified leagues (scholarship opportunities, philanthropy, tournament participation, etc.)
- Make it as easy as possible to become a USBC member. Attend league organizational meetings and help members complete the necessary forms.
- Recruitment is an ongoing project. Recruiting does not stop when a tournament ends or when a league season is over. Continue recruiting at bowling centers and at community events.



## **Membership Recruitment Ideas**

Welcome Letter for Potential Members. The letter should be concise and include a list of membership benefits, as well as local, state, and national activities and projects. It also should contain the names of the association recruitment committee, contact numbers and best times for contact, and should be properly “branded” (USBC logos, etc.).

Recruitment Materials. Display samples of magazines that come with membership, sample awards for bowling achievements, newsletters, bowling center and pro shop discount coupons, etc. – items that are tangible and can be viewed by the potential member at his/her convenience.

Select an Energetic Committee Chair to Coordinate Recruitment. This person will be very visible, so select someone who is at ease with groups of people and has the stamina to oversee all aspects of recruitment events from start to finish.

Develop an Orientation Program for New Members. Hold an orientation meeting to inform individuals on how to become a USBC member, dues or processing fees and what it covers, membership benefits, opportunities, tournaments and general information about USBC National, state and local associations.

Create Partnerships with Proprietors. It is good practice to involve bowling center management in recruitment projects. In addition to a venue, a proprietor may offer suggestions that could enhance any recruitment effort. Ask the proprietor how association activities such as recruiting can benefit the bowling center. Also ask if the proprietor would like to be included on the communication distribution list.

Follow Up. Establish regular contact with new members immediately to actively demonstrate support and appreciation. Ask them if they have any questions. Also, DO NOT overlook the value of regular communication with the rest of the membership.

Troubleshoot. After each recruiting effort discuss the positive and negative aspects of the effort with the recruitment/retention committee. Generate and record suggestions for improvement for upcoming recruitment projects, and review ways to incorporate the suggestions.

Follow the Plan. Staying on task (efficient meetings and following through on job responsibilities) demonstrates professionalism and dramatically increases the success of activities.

## **Recruiting Board Members**

Members deserve highly skilled and active board members. Board members must understand their responsibilities and know what is expected of them. Their work is a contribution to the identified goals of the association.

In targeting potential future board members, consider the following questions:

- What responsibilities will the board member have?
- What skills are required of a board member?



- Will they be required to assist in promoting the association or identifying potential sources of capital?
- Are there any potential conflicts of interest with the candidates?
- Can the candidate add diversity of experience or culture that can improve the association?
- Is the board an accurate reflection of the membership?

## **Recruiting Steps**

A few possible ways of recruiting board members include:

Advertising. Make use of the association's internal communications.

Ask Proprietors for Input. Many board members will be involved in promotions at bowling centers. Seek advice from proprietors regarding who they feel works well with people.

Auxiliary Members. For the purpose of training and educating a potential board member, the association board may implement an auxiliary board member program. The auxiliary members perform specific duties for the association, as determined by the board. (See the USBC Association Policy Manual Chapter 5, Section M, for authority.)

1. Auxiliary members should:
  - a. Serve on committees.
  - b. Provide special reports at the request of the board.
  - c. Participate in league secretary training.
  - d. Serve as an association representative.
  - e. Distribute awards, etc.
2. To be eligible to serve as an auxiliary member, an individual:
  - a. Must be a USBC member of the local association, in good standing throughout his/her term.
  - b. Should not have served on a previous state or local association (USBC, ABC, WIBC or YABA) board. However, those individuals who have only served on a board as a youth member are eligible to serve as an auxiliary member in a non-merged adult association.

Maintain an Up-to-date List of Potential Board Candidates. Schedule time to regularly review and edit this list. Utilize the Auxiliary Board Member Program – This program allows potential candidates to experience first hand how the board functions. This is very beneficial for helping the candidate decide if he/she wishes to pursue a board candidacy. **For more information refer to the USBC Association Policy Manual on BOWL.com under Forms and Manuals-**

Solicit Feedback from the Membership for Nominations and Suggestions. Asking the members demonstrates the association's commitment to involve and listen to the membership on important issues, such as the makeup of the board.

## **Membership Retention Plan**

Retaining current members is as important as adding new members.

Almost one-third of members do not return from one year to the next. These "dropped bowlers" stop bowling for a variety of reasons. However, research on member retention has indicated most



bowlers drop for reasons unrelated to their bowling experience. Health issues, the birth of a child, relocation, or a job change are the most frequently cited reasons for not continuing as league bowlers.

It also is worth noting that most dropped bowlers plan to return to league bowling sometime in the near future. More than half state they are going to bowl in leagues again. It is the responsibility of all of us, as USBC members, to keep bowling accessible for this group.

It is just as important to maintain a strong and positive bowling presence for bowlers who remain members.

### **Membership Interest**

Generally, members are more likely to remain interested if the association:

- Has an announced direction and stated purpose (communication).
- Keeps members involved and actively seeks input from members.
- Recognizes the efforts and achievements of its members.
- Provides exceptional service (distribution of awards, returning phone calls, etc.)
- Is dedicated to important projects.
- Is organized and stable.
- Provides leadership opportunities for its members.

### **Maintaining Membership Interest**

The following is not an all-inclusive list of ways to maintain interest in the association, but it does represent major considerations. An association must adopt strategies that fit its situation and reflect the concerns of its membership.

Set Clear Goals. Communicate the mission, the proposed direction, and the steps required to reach a specific destination. Keep all members regularly informed of progress and invite responses and suggestions.

Pay Attention. Actively search for positive moments and publicize them. Ask questions and be curious. An active and concerned association leader generates support and involvement from the membership.

Personalize Recognition. When a member receives an award for superior performance or volunteer efforts, an anecdote or personal memory about the member can make the ceremony a unique and memorable experience for the individual. This can make a lasting impression on other members in attendance, as well.

Celebrate Together. Highly visible public recognition builds self-esteem and a sense of community and belonging. It demonstrates the value of working together to achieve shared goals; even personal awards for bowling achievements become shared victories. Making achievements public creates lasting and positive memories that translate into commitment.

Ensure All Necessary Membership Information is Processed and Transmitted in a Timely Manner. This is not only a requirement, it demonstrates concern for the membership. It also establishes a standard of conduct by modeling responsible behavior.



Explore Possibilities to Accommodate Members. Members have commitments beyond bowling and these should be respected. Work with proprietors to create and promote alternative formats and season lengths that could be a better fit for members and prospective members.

Contact Other Associations and Ask What They Do. Establish communication with other associations for an exchange of ideas, suggestions and results. The USBC Convention, state annual meetings, or jamborees are tremendous opportunities for the exchange of ideas. Contact information for other associations may also be found through BOWL.com.

### **Transitioning Members from Youth to Adult Leagues**

When a youth bowler reaches the age limit when he/she no longer qualifies for youth eligibility, the association can play a key role in ensuring that the individual continues as a certified bowler. Ultimately, the association should make an effort to ensure these bowlers are comfortable in their transition from youth to adult leagues. This is especially important if the bowler is joining a different association, as would be the case in non-merged associations.

Consider the following possible strategies for transitioning members from youth to adult leagues:  
Generate a List of Previous USBC Youth Members. Prepare and send a letter that invites previous youth members to join a USBC league that fits their schedule. Include bowling center and association personnel contact information. After the letter is mailed, follow up with a phone call.

Orientation Program and Party. Organize an orientation program for youth bowlers who are about to qualify as adult bowlers. Conduct the program at a bowling center and stress the benefits of remaining a USBC member.

Adult/Youth Leagues. Establish an adult/youth league. However, before determining any awards, review all rules regarding youth status – especially USBC Rules 400 and 100d.

<p><b>NOTE:</b> An adult/youth league is one in which youth members bowl with adults, and awards to both adult and youth bowlers conform to awards permitted under USBC Rule 400.</p>
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