



How to build & maintain your membership

History Victoria Support Group of the RHSV held a Seminar on "How to build and maintain your membership".

This brochure contains the thoughts and ideas of those present on that day.

We hope this brochure gives your society at least one helpful idea.



**How to
build &
maintain
the
membership
of your
historical
society**

MEMBERSHIP

Make visitors welcome when they arrive.

There are three types of members:

- Active helpers (local residents)
- I am here to be entertained
- Members whose sole contact is the newsletter

Analyse your membership, eg. 10 active, 20 involved, 80 subscribers. If you want to have a large number of active members who can be part of the committee and project volunteers, it is important to have members who are local.

Have a look at the location of your members, and if your local membership is low, have a pro-active membership drive to improve that. The 80 subscribers need a regular newsletter to stay with you.

All your members are valuable, even the ones who are not active. Current members should try and get their friends and families to join. Make sure plenty of information is available.

INCENTIVES TO JOIN YOUR SOCIETY

If you join us we will give you.....

- Free access to your collection (have a membership card to facilitate this)
- Low cost books
- Access to workshops, programs, visiting speakers
- Reciprocal rights (eg, RHSV library)
- Volunteer visits to other organizations
- Something money cannot buy, eg, back of house tours, meet a VIP
- Discounts at Museum if you run one
- Assistance with projects
- Access to equipment
- Links with other groups
- Walks, talks, demonstrations
- Opportunity do something. (The “something” should be innocent, not scary or threatening)
- Invitations to special events

- Written acknowledgement
- Uniforms (eg, T-shirt for volunteers), name tags
- Insurance cover while on duty
- Dressing up (eg, Sovereign Hill)
- A Member of the Year award.
- Certificates of Appreciation
- Gift certificates
- Regular newsletter
- Membership and something tangible, such as a small booklet, newsletter, brochure
- Another activity

Have a membership card listing benefits of membership – free entry to museum/research collection, discounts, reciprocal rights, etc.

FINDING NEW MEMBERS

How do you find new members?

Events – walks, talks, or invite people in for a coffee on Tuesdays. Be more visible – displays at the local library, festivals, council, adult education.

Give a free membership to guest speakers.

Target active groups, and up and coming historians. You need to be seen. You need to combat negative attitudes about historical societies (‘pack of old fuddy duddies’.) **Fairs may only attract** those already converted, but they provide a good opportunity for networking. They probably attract more genealogists than historians – and you need to attract genealogists, who are generally active researchers, into your society. If you send out an exchange newsletter to other societies or organizations, and they do not reciprocate, what about charging them? If you charge for the newsletter it can pay for printing and posting.

Some societies keep in touch with members by email, and offer reduced walk fees, free copies of booklets (sometimes produced by local Council.)

MEETINGS

Have regular meetings.

Consider the age structure of your membership – what time is it best to have meetings? Baby boomers are still very active – those in their 20s to 50s have families to look after. Alternatives to guest speakers – “social experience” – show and tell nights.

Have freebies.

Be innovative, be relevant, think of new themes, new ways of networking with other community groups.

Buddy system – appoint someone to welcome new members.

Meeting area – Try to have room to circulate, and have a display.

MEMBERSHIP FEES

Are your membership fees covering the regular expenses?

Do a budget. To determine your membership fee you might determine the costs of:

- The newsletter, (photocopying, postage, paper, stationery)
- Other photocopying, postage, paper, stationery
- Insurance
- Cost of membership of other organizations (eg, RHSV, regional group)
- Telephone, power & water bills
- Any other fixed costs

Don't have your membership fees too low, at least \$15 BUT don't put it up too steeply in one year. Consider an annual review.

THANKING PEOPLE

At meetings, in the newsletter, by mail. Don't take your members, volunteers or donors for granted. List new members' names in your newsletter.

RENEWAL

Put a renewal notice in every newsletter when they are overdue, to make it easy for people to renew. Be vigilant about members who don't renew. Getting 2nd or 3rd year members to renew is more difficult than long term members. Make renewal as easy as possible

MAKING CONTACT

How easy is it for people to contact your society if they want to join? How can they find out?

What technology do you use at your headquarters: if you have an answering machine – does it work properly? Voice mail? Call forwarding? What is important is responsiveness and visibility, information flow, involvements.

NEWSLETTERS & BROCHURES

Newsletters should list contact details for your society, membership fees, guest speakers, coming events. Is the newsletter worth the subscription? Newsletters and brochures should catch the eye -coloured paper is good for newsletters and other brochures. Use images. Have an information brochure which includes a membership form. This can be placed in the local milk bar, library, bookmobile, in replies to research enquiries.

Be innovative! Have fun!



PUBLICITY

Publicity needs to be on the committee agenda every month. A Publicity Officer is highly desirable. **Look for free publicity vehicles**—Council magazine & webpage, local radio, local papers, library noticeboards or newsletter, mailing lists, *My Connected Community* (mc2), links from other webpages. Publicity needs to be thoughtful and eye-provoking. Sandwich board? If outside publicity is felt to be too time-consuming, the best thing might be a personal approach - ‘come and try the organization’.

WEBSITE

A website with contact details is important, to give you that connection with the world wide web. If you do not have anyone to create one for you, contact the *History Victoria Support Group* who can help to get you started. You do not need to be computer literate, to have a webpage. Your society does not have to have a computer, or be online, to have a webpage. HSVG can help with that.

VOLUNTEERS

Appoint one person to be responsible for volunteers.

Have a volunteer book – have them sign in and out, this can be used to collate information for grants applications.

Keep regular hours at your headquarters so that volunteers or visitors can be sure of finding the door open. Give a big greeting for volunteers.

Volunteers do not have to clock on, so don't chide them for being late. **Take them under your wing.** Be available for a little chinwag. Send cards and flowers, make phone calls to make them feel valued. Celebrate the achievements of your members and volunteers. Have a members' and volunteers' Christmas party. Have a special day away for volunteers.

Have fun! Encourage members to do research in your collection and give them a hand. Jobs must be ready to do when volunteers arrive. What are the skills of the volunteers? You don't want to re-do the work later. Appreciate everyone for what they can do (not what you want them to do.) Give certificates of appreciation suitable for framing.

Register with Centrelink to receive volunteers. If you have Volunteers from Centrelink, make sure you are giving them some skills.

WE CAN HELP

HISTORY VICTORIA SUPPORT GROUP

HVSG is a subcommittee of the RHSV.

We can help you:

- Create a free webpage.
- Start a newsletter.
- Create an information/membership brochure for your society
- Join “*My Connected Community*” (mc2), a free internet service from Vicnet.
- Any other advice that we can provide.

YOU JUST HAVE TO ASK US FOR HELP

Email office@historyvictoria.org.au

or

Telephone 03 9326 9288