16 Fundamental Tips for Membership Growth and Retention in Your Chapter

Chapters with successful growth and retention pay careful attention to certain details, which we’ve summarized below. There are many ways to implement the suggestions. Creativity is welcome!

Welcome new members and thank members who renew with a personal email or phone call.
- Ask what they’d like from IABC and try to connect them with the people, volunteer opportunities and/or member benefits that can meet those needs.
- Invite each member to the next chapter event, so they feel personally invited.
- If you have a large chapter, divide the task among board members.

Host an event for new members regularly.
- Your meeting can be as simple as coffee or breakfast.
- Provide the members with an orientation to IABC and its benefits.
- This small meeting also allows new members to meet a few people before attending a chapter-wide event.

Develop a strong professional development program in your chapter.
- The portfolio of chapter events throughout the year is a major contributor to members’ perception of value.
- Take advantage of the Leader Visit program to book highly-rated speakers and have headquarters subsidize the visit. Chapters are eligible for funding every two years.
- Survey (formally or informally) to find out what members’ topic interests are, as well as convenient times and locations.
- Offer differential pricing that ensures members pay less (at least comparable to $10 for after-work events).

Develop a strong social media presence for your chapter.
- Create a vibrant chapter presence on LinkedIn, Facebook, Twitter and other relevant sites.
- Consider assigning volunteers to such tasks as facilitating discussion, posting notices frequently and answering questions.
- Leverage your presence to disseminate important information such as upcoming events and membership promotions.

Make sure members feel welcome at your events.
- Generate a feeling of welcome and warmth at chapter meetings. How members feel at meetings will have a major impact on their decision to renew.
- Don’t let anyone be a wallflower. Have board members focus on integrating lone wolves into conversations.
- Consider assigning long-tenured mentors to new members to introduce them around.
- Spotlight new and renewing members on your web site and/or newsletter. Thank them publicly for joining or renewing!

Ask members to volunteer.
- Don’t be afraid to ask; the reason most people haven’t volunteered is because they’ve never been asked.
- Volunteering offers great networking; it also increases commitment to IABC and demonstrates dedication to the profession.
- Create bite-sized opportunities to integrate newbies.
- Invite students to volunteer, perhaps in exchange for meeting attendance. They have lots of energy!
- Promote volunteer opportunities at events, in face-to-face discussions, on social media, on the web, in your newsletter.

Host a members-only event at least once per year.
- An exclusive, members-only event has made the difference between someone joining IABC and not—and helps make members feel appreciated for joining the association.
- It can be as simple as a members-only webinar or as festive as an all-out holiday party, depending on your resources.
- A chapter-paid/subsidized event helps support the member value proposition. Sponsors can help defray costs as well.

Facilitate networking among chapter members.
- Allow time at chapter events for networking and socializing, either before or after the main program.
- Have board members make member introductions at chapter events in order to enable connections.
- If resources allow, develop a mentoring program in your chapter.

Encourage members to bring guests to chapter events.
- Attendees at events are great membership prospects.
- Create incentives for members to bring co-workers to events (e.g., guest passes, “Bring Your Boss” events).
Keep a database of non-member attendees and invite them regularly to future events. Also let them know about membership promotions.

Treat guests as warmly as you do new members!

Cultivate corporate packages.

Corporate packages offer discounts to five people or more from the same company. They can help a chapter leapfrog in growth.

Identify chapter members from large companies and/or with three or more members and reach out to them with information about how to get started: http://www.iabc.com/about/membership/memCorpPack.cfm

Offer to host chapter events in the offices of large companies in your area. Bring the value of IABC directly to them.

Create special events for members in existing corporate packages.

Communicate with lapsing/lapsed members.

Make sure members know when their membership is coming due for renewal. Reach out personally if possible.

If a member doesn’t plan to renew, find out why. What are the issues?

If you hear themes that can be addressed in your chapter, work with your board to do so. If the themes are better addressed at the region or headquarters level, let the appropriate regional board or staff member know.

Make sure members know their member benefits.

The more members use their IABC benefits, the more likely they are to value their membership.

Feature a “benefit of the month” on your social media outlets, newsletters, web site and at events.

Have a game show quiz at a chapter event or on your web site that encourages members to learn about IABC member benefits.

Before your chapter event begins, have a PowerPoint or video looping that features member benefits. No speaker necessary.

Have members give testimonials at events, on your web site and newsletter, and even on social media.

Feature this link whenever possible: http://www.iabc.com/about/membership/memProvides.htm

Take advantage of member months.

Member months allow new and lapsed members to join/renew without paying the application fee.

Members enthusiastically respond to this promotion; we routinely have the highest numbers of member sign-ups during member months.

IABC headquarters sponsors two worldwide member months each calendar year.

Each chapter is allowed to choose one other month as a chapter member month each calendar year. Simply email member_relations@iabc.com with your choice of month. The chapter still gets the same amount of dues for each member; headquarters incurs the cost of the promotion.

Read Leader Letter and use other volunteer resources.

Leader Letter (LL) lets you know about new member benefits, upcoming membership promotions and other important news.

LL is emailed monthly to all chapter and region leaders.

Check out winning chapter membership awards entries along with an abundance of templates and tools in the Chapters section of the IABC web site.

Participate on The Wheel eXchange site to find out what other chapters have already learned: http://wheel.x.iabc.com/

Enhance member value as much as possible.

If resources allow, consider producing additional benefits such as job listings and mentorship programs.

Encourage like-minded members to form SIGs (special interest groups). Common groups include senior communicators, technophiles and entrepreneurs.

Encourage members to give back to their alma maters by speaking in classrooms or mentoring IABC student members.

Provide lots of recognition and appreciation for volunteer activities, anniversaries, donations, awards, accreditation, etc.

Make sure you promote membership at all of your chapter events.

What is IABC and how will it benefit a communication professional? Make sure all non-member attendees at your events leave knowing the answers to both of these questions.

Highlight any current or upcoming promotions, such as member month, that allow someone to join at a reduced rate.

Make sure to have membership brochures (available from headquarters at no cost to the chapter) at all events.