

Positive Expectations: Engaging New RSO Members

You want your new members to grow and learn through affiliation with your organization and at the same time, you want them to feel like they worked hard to achieve something great—the privilege of representing the organization you value. You want to challenge them AND you want to do that in a way that isn't hazing. Below are a few ideas for activities that challenge new members to work together, test their personal courage, and teach them new skills.

Step 1: Think about what you want new members to know about your organization and how activities can achieve those goals while reflecting your organization's values.

Possible Goals of a New Member Program

- Encourage individual leadership development
- Promote adjustment to college life
- Build respect for the individual
- Stimulate intellectual growth
- Promote an understanding of the club's history and goals
- Promote social skills
- Develop club-related skills (public speaking, performance, marketing, etc.)
- Provide an environment where all members can express their opinions safely
- Promote friendship among all members

Step 2: What activities and events can safely accomplish the goal(s)? See the next page for ideas.

Step 3: Evaluate the options and select an activity.

- Talk with other members to determine interest level. Don't assume what your group will or won't be interested in doing. You may be surprised!

Step 4: Make it clear to participants that all activities are "challenge by choice," meaning that each person feels comfortable not participating should the activity be too challenging for them. Anything that is excessively challenging does not help people learn. It actually results in the opposite—they shut down. If new members are afraid to say 'no' they can't really consent to an activity.

Step 5: Lead a discussion following the activity to talk about what everyone learned. Help make connections with your organization's values. This is the most important part of the activity! Sample questions include:

- What was challenging about this activity?
- What did you learn about yourself?
- What would you do differently if you could do it over?
- What did you learn about the group?
- How does this relate to being a new member in this organization?
- How can you take what you learned and apply it to the club?

Please note: Do not do any advanced physical activities without a trained guide or facilitator with you.

Goal: Leadership Development

- Invite staff from your student activities/engagement office to attend a meeting to give an overview of their leadership development programs and/or provide a leadership program for your club.
- Ask new members to identify someone in the club they think is a leader. Interview the person to learn more about their background and goals. Present a five-minute summary at the next meeting.
- Work with Student Activities/Engagement office or the community services clearinghouse to develop a plan for improving your philanthropy events.
- Invite someone from the Career Center at your school to talk with the group about how to market skills gained from the organization when applying for a job or graduate school.
- Have a competition for new members to see who can develop the best recruitment plan.

Goal: Self-Knowledge

- Ask new members to set aside an hour with a current group member. Ask them to talk about what the club means to them, how they will become better because of it, and how they will positively contribute with their membership.
- Ask parents of all the new members to send a letter of support to their son/daughter as a surprise. Read them or give them to new members during the final day of the new member program.
- Invite a faculty or staff member to teach mindfulness/meditation exercises at a meeting.
- Ask new members to write a paragraph about the values they think the club represents based on their experience prior to joining— see how close they get to your actual goals/stated purpose. This will tell you if the group is living its values in a visible way to others.
- Attend a program on diversity, equity and inclusion or request a custom program for your chapter.

Goal: Relationship Building

- Schedule with campus recreation for a climbing training class, GPS orienteering challenge, or time on the challenge course. On the challenge course, mental and physical team-building activities are conducted by a trained facilitator. These activities also develop group unity, leadership, and conflict management. **Note:** Do not do physical activities without a trained guide or facilitator with you.
- Schedule a time with campus recreation to learn a new sport (water polo, squash, pickleball, etc.) or to learn correct use of equipment. New members can then teach the sport to the entire organization.
- Take a hike together as a new member class or for the entire club.
- Ask new members to create a game show to teach the club's history. Have them present the show with the current members as participants. By teaching the history, new members are much more likely to retain the information and it's a great refresher for members. This activity also teaches presentation skills, self-confidence, and organization.
- Divide the club into two groups. Give each group a box full of miscellaneous materials, including paper, markers, tape, scissors, etc. Give them one hour to devise a competitive game using all of the items (only rules: everyone must play, no alcohol, and no risk of injury). Have each group play the other team's game.

Goal: Accountability

- Work with the Student Activities/Engagement office or the community services clearinghouse to find local community service needs. Ask new members to do an hour of community service as a class each week during the new member period.
- Host a training on bystander intervention for the club. People who understand the bystander effect are more likely to act.
- Ensure that event clean-ups are for all members, not just new members.

Adapted from materials developed at Worcester Polytechnic Institute