

# Membership Recruitment Strategies

Contributed by Angel C. Saqui, FAIA

December 2003

---

*The AIA collects and disseminates Best Practices as a service to AIA members without endorsement or recommendation. Appropriate use of the information provided is the responsibility of the reader.*

---

## SUMMARY

A membership recruitment and retention strategy requires a great deal of coordination, dedication, and investment of resources. Recruitment efforts—whether on the local, state, or national level—are more likely to succeed when led by a membership committee with an entrepreneurial spirit and a willingness to coordinate with counterpart committees at the other component levels.

## INITIAL STEPS

The first step is to know who your prospective recruits are by preparing and maintaining a database of non-AIA architects in the component's geographical area.

The second step is to prepare a membership recruitment kit for distribution to your prospective membership. Available financial resources may limit the possibilities for the design of the kit, but the basic elements can be developed professionally using a personal computer and stationery supplies from your local office supply store. Much of the information needed to develop a customized membership kit is available on [www.aia.org](http://www.aia.org). Contact the national AIA Membership Services team for available preprinted materials. Membership recruitment kits should contain the following items, at a minimum:

- A letter from the chapter president that invites the prospective new member to join the AIA
- A list and brief description of the services, programs, policies, activities, opportunities, and goals that the AIA offers at the local, state, and national levels
- A list of reasons why architects should join the AIA
- A membership application form
- A sheet explaining the dues structure
- A list and brief description of any special membership recruitment programs in effect, such as the 15/12 program (those who join in

the last quarter of the year receive up to 15 months of membership for the cost of 12), a complimentary first year of national membership for current-year architecture school graduates, and any other incentive programs at the state or local levels

- An invitation to attend the next chapter meeting or event

## ADD THE PERSONAL TOUCH

Membership recruitment is most effective when personal contact is an integral part of the effort. Though recruitment should continue throughout the year, an annual membership recruitment drive is a good way to mobilize the troops for a high-visibility effort. The Membership Committee should begin by recruiting as many members as possible to participate in the annual drive. Volunteers can be organized into teams of six members, each with a team captain.

The campaign can begin with a kickoff breakfast or luncheon to energize volunteers and outline strategy. Each volunteer member should choose or be assigned to “sponsor” 5 to 10 prospects, preferably persons whom they already know. Ask each sponsor to contact the prospects personally within five days of receipt of the membership kits. If it is possible and convenient, sponsors might even deliver the recruitment kits personally.

Sponsors might ask prospects the following questions:

- Have you received the kit?
- Do you have any questions?
- Do you know the importance of the AIA to the profession?
- Would you be interested in attending the next chapter meeting or event to learn more?
- Do you have any questions about the dues structure?
- Do you need help completing the application?

- Have you checked with your employer regarding any membership dues reimbursement benefit at your company?

### **FOLLOW UP**

Recruitment efforts need to continue after the initial contact. Reluctant prospects may need to know that you have a personal interest in welcoming them to the AIA family. Some additional follow-up techniques include the following:

- For an introductory period, send prospective members copies of the chapter's newsletter or announcements.
- Forward the list of prospects to the state or regional component office, so that recent publications may be sent from those levels as well.
- Continue to show interest through personal contact. Sometimes it may take a year or more of effort before a prospect finally decides to join. Patience and perseverance are important.

Be sure to maintain and publish a schedule of events related to the membership recruitment campaign to maintain volunteer energy and to let prospective members know that the effort is not just a once-a-year effort to pump up dues revenue.

### **SUSTAIN EFFORTS THROUGHOUT THE YEAR**

Once an active recruitment campaign is underway with a committed group of volunteers, it becomes easier to sustain the effort throughout the year.

If your state periodically publishes a list of newly registered architects, send a letter from the chapter president to each one who is not already an Associate member, welcoming him or her to the profession, along with a membership kit. Be sure to add these names to your database of prospective members if they are not already included. Immediately assign a sponsor to follow up personally with each person.

Consider hosting an annual luncheon or dinner to congratulate newly licensed architects on becoming registered. The event provides an opportunity to share with them the benefits of membership. Assigned sponsors should make a special effort to attend the event and introduce the prospective members to others.

Devote a regular column in the chapter newsletter or other publication to the membership drive, continuously encouraging members to get

personally involved, asking them to talk to nonmember friends about the advantages of joining the AIA, and giving them helpful recruitment tips and notice of available resources.

Consider dedicating one or two newsletter issues per year to membership recruitment, coinciding with the annual recruitment drive and highlighting the involvement of the local, state, regional, and national components with issues of concern to all architects. Mail these issues to member prospects as well as to members. If your chapter does not publish a monthly newsletter, consider publishing an annual or semiannual newsletter that could serve this purpose.

### **INVOLVE THE ENTIRE MEMBERSHIP**

Most AIA members are interested in participating in some AIA activities but have too little time to attend meetings or serve on committees. Membership recruitment is an excellent volunteer activity that members can tailor to their busy schedules. Ask every member to recruit at least one new member each year.

Consider offering members a tiered reward program (the greater number of members recruited, the greater the incentive reward). With a little imagination, every chapter can develop such a program. Typical incentives might include the following:

- Complimentary registration for a seminar
- Complimentary registration for a state AIA convention
- Complimentary registration for the AIA national convention
- Gifts made available by corporate sponsors

### **LOOK TO THE FUTURE**

If your chapter's geographical area includes any schools of architecture, maintain close contact with the local chapter(s) of the American Institute of Architecture Students (AIAS). Invite students to attend or participate in local AIA events at no cost or at a heavily discounted rate. Invite students to participate in planning chapter events to help ensure that events will interest students.

Maintain close relationships with the faculties of local schools of architecture. Consider making the deans of the local schools of architecture *ex officio* members of the chapter's board of directors. Invite deans and faculty members to participate in AIA events at no cost or at a heavily discounted rate.

## **KEEP MEMBERS IN THE FOLD**

It is as important to retain members as it is to recruit new ones. Ideally, programs offered at the local, state, and national levels will demonstrate the value of AIA membership. But from time to time, members may drift away. Devote the same effort to retaining AIA members as you do to recruiting new members. Components can tailor any of the aforementioned recruitment strategies to membership retention strategies—for example, the formation of a membership retention committee.

As soon as a member is reported as being “at risk” for termination for nonpayment of dues or failure to meet continuing education requirements, assign a sponsor to the member, preferably one who knows the member. The sponsor should ask why the member has become “at risk,” actively recruit the member to remain in the AIA, and offer to assist the member in overcoming any obstacles such as meeting continuing education requirements.

## **RESOURCES**

### **More Best Practices**

The following AIA Best Practices provide additional information related to this topic:

- 21.03.03 Government Affairs Day: Advancing Vital Interests Person-to-Person
- 21.03.04 Building Relationships with Elected Officials
- 21.04.03 AIA Florida Membership Program

### **Feedback**

The AIA welcomes member feedback on Best Practice articles. To provide feedback on this article, please contact [bestpractices@aia.org](mailto:bestpractices@aia.org).

### **Key Terms**

- Leadership
- Associations
- Design associations
- Architectural associations
- The American Institute of Architects
- AIA components