

# Club Membership Retention

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Successful GFWC clubs go after new members to bring new energy and new ideas to their clubs, but clubs also need to focus on retaining current members. Keeping current members is a sign of a club's stability and overall well-being.

## ENGAGE, ENGAGE, ENGAGE

Members who actively participate in their club activities are those who will likely continue their membership. Whether your club is rich in new members, established members, or both, your club should seek to fully engage all of them. Engaged members participate in club activities, meetings, events, projects, and club leadership. They also feel a strong attachment to their club because they enjoy the friendships and fellowship that come with being a member of a woman's club. They are motivated to put extra effort into club activities and projects and are proud to tell others about the impressive work their club is doing. Here are a few suggestions to keep club members coming back:

- Make members feel appreciated by recognizing their achievements and celebrate club membership milestones, work promotions, or birthdays.
- Develop a formalized mentoring program for involved members to support less active or new members.
- Request regular feedback from members to confirm they are experiencing the benefits they were promised when they joined.



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- Encourage them to serve on committees that suit their skills or interests.
- Give members a clear sense of your club's long-range goals and mission.
- Invite them to attend a district, region, or national conference.
- Keep a list of service projects and have members take turns leading projects that interest them.
- Poll members on their interests and schedule speakers who are stimulating and inspiring.
- Feature photographs of your members at recent club projects and events on your club website, Facebook page, and in newsletters to recognize their contributions.
- Update members regularly on progress toward club goals as a way to build loyalty, pride, and an understanding of the need for long-term involvement.



### IDEAS FOR CLUB RETENTION

- Give an incentive, such as a free gift, to members who renew by a certain date.
- Have a renewal lottery – renew by a certain date to be entered into a lottery for a prize.
- Communicate club successes to members regularly.
- Send a special certificate of thanks to first-time members who renew.
- Recognize longtime members and send a message to current members that people stay a long time.
- Establish an involvement committee whose purpose is to get members to participate in some way.
- Institute a “thank you” column in the club newsletter to recognize members for involvement and leadership.
- Send a member profile form to new members to gain information.
- Give members points when they participate in any activity, like frequent flyer points. The member with the most points can be recognized yearly.
- Institute a carpool for older members.
- Celebrate member birthdays.
- Have informal get togethers after club meetings.
- Send get-well wishes when members are sick so they will know they were missed at meetings.
- Establish a telephone tree. Call each member before each meeting.
- Give yearly awards for attendance.

### IS MY CLUB RETAINING ITS MEMBERS?

Many clubs do not recognize their retention problems if the number of their members remains somewhat steady. However, clubs that consistently lose members and compensate by inducting new members are not managing their growth or retention well.

- Clubs need to determine when and why members leave their club. Knowing at what point members are likely to leave can help identify the club's retention strengths and weaknesses and help focus efforts accordingly.
- Once clubs determine when and why members are leaving, they need to generate strategies for keeping members. Clubs should consider who is leaving the club. New members? Long-time members? Both?
- Clubs should then develop an action plan to retain membership. Discuss how to address areas of weakness and build on what the club is already doing well.

### THE FIRST YEAR MEMBER

Many members who leave after spending one or two years in a club do so because they do not feel engaged in the club's events and activities, their fellowship expectations are not being met, or they have difficulty meeting the attendance requirements because of competing priorities.

Clubs should take action to keep members who have been in their club for one to two years:


- Identify members who have been in the club for one to two years and make sure they are involved in a project or committee that interests them.
- Ask these members for their feedback. They may have ideas for energizing the club's fellowship activities or service projects.
- Assign a mentor to members who do not have them or suggest they change mentors if they would like to.

### MEMBERS WHO STAY FOR 3 TO 5 YEARS

Members who leave after spending three to five years in a club may leave because their fellowship expectations are not being met or they have competing priorities, but they may also be frustrated with the club's leadership.

For members who have been in a club for three to five years:

- Provide leadership opportunities. Members can get more involved by serving as club officers. Encourage those who have already held club leadership positions to mentor



newer members or participate in district or state activities. In taking on leadership roles, they will feel useful, valued, and connected with the club's decisions and events.

- Organize new activities or revitalize established club activities so members remain engaged and excited about attending club meetings and fellowship opportunities.
- Get member feedback on their club experience and ask for their ideas on what could be improved.
- Put member expertise and skills to use and recognize them for their efforts.

### **CLUBS SHOULD CONCENTRATE ON CONTROLLABLE LOSSES**

A small fraction of membership loss cannot be prevented, for reasons such as death, economics, declining health, business conflicts, or moving from the community. Effective clubs will concentrate on dealing with controllable losses.

### **CLUB LEADERSHIP**

Some clubs lose members because they fail to assign responsibilities to a variety of members or current long-time members continually take leadership roles. Sometimes internal politics within the club becomes an issue or a club president operates a one-person administration.

Club leadership problems can immediately be corrected by applying the right remedial measures. An effective club will:

- Delegate responsibilities to give more members the opportunity for service and recognition.
- Provide opportunities for all members to use their talents and leadership skills.

### **CLUB ACTIVITIES**

Some clubs lose membership because their service projects are too narrow, lack variety, or there is an absence of service opportunities. Some projects require too much time or work. Maybe the club does not have enough social opportunities or does not have activities that include a member's spouse and family.

Clubs with a wide variety of activities will motivate a greater number of members than the club with limited projects. Without activity, club membership will soon diminish to the few who joined simply to belong to something.

Clubs should share assignments and responsibilities so members do not feel overburdened and resent those members with less responsibilities.


### **CLUB MEETINGS**

Club membership loss can also come from poor meeting planning. If no program is planned, the program is poorly planned, or if there is a lack of punctuality in starting or adjourning meetings, members may be reluctant to attend meetings. Clubs should plan an agenda for meetings and strive to start on time and end at a reasonable time as well.

The meeting place, location, and refreshments are also important factors affecting attendance and tenure. Clubs should meet in a space to accommodate their numbers comfortably and at a time when most can attend. Ask for member feedback on what snacks might get them successfully through a meeting.



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### PERSONAL SITUATIONS

Various kinds of personal objections may contribute to membership loss. They are seldom voiced, as the very nature of the reason inhibits the individual from speaking up. A member may instead claim other reasons, such as loss of interest or lack of time as a reason for resignation.

Clubs should create policies and practices that will reduce, if not eliminate, the chance of insult or embarrassment of members, such as adherence to Parliamentary Procedure during meetings.

Club officers should be aware of their relationship with members. The president should strive to seek the friendship and confidence of every member. Fellowship is the keystone of club membership.

### FINANCIAL PROBLEMS

Excessive dues and frequent demands for contributions may cause membership loss. Clubs should realize costs are a significant factor in member tenure and attempt to prevent unusual or unexpected financial demands on members.

### KEEP YOUR MEMBERS ACTIVE

While membership renewal is always a continuing process, regardless of how long someone has been paying dues, retaining membership presents a constant challenge – and opportunity – for GFWC clubs. While always on the lookout for new members, healthy clubs should also strive to retain their current members.

Club members will find a variety of suggestions for engaging members and retaining members in GFWC's resources. The *GFWC Club Manual* has many ideas to start a retention plan and can be accessed on GFWC's website, [www.gfwc.org](http://www.gfwc.org). *GFWC Clubwoman Magazine* and the weekly e-newsletter, *News & Notes*, also highlight ideas and projects that have been successful in retaining members for clubs across the nation. Club members can subscribe to the magazine and sign up for the weekly newsletter on the GFWC website under "News and Publications."

### FOR MORE INFORMATION

Access the Membership Advancement Guide, which is packed with recruitment information, on the GFWC website at [www.gfwc.org](http://www.gfwc.org). Look for "GFWC Resources" on the homepage, and then click on "M" to find the Guide and a variety of membership tools.

The GFWC Membership Committee is energized and committed to helping all clubs. Contact Henrietta Belcher-Stack, Membership Chairman, at 302-354-4102 or [hstack@aol.com](mailto:hstack@aol.com)

GFWC Membership Services at GFWC Headquarters is also available for assistance. Reach Melanie Gisler, Director of Membership Services and Programs, at 202-347-3168 or [mgisler@gfwc.org](mailto:mgisler@gfwc.org)