

Membership Recruitment and Retention Manual



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It can't be stressed enough: PTA is a membership organization. We rely on our nearly 6 million members to contribute their time and skills to school communities from coast to coast and overseas, where U.S. military families are stationed.

Every individual who joins PTA is giving something not only to his or her child but also to every child. Imagine how much stronger your community could be if every parent, every community member, and every business leader who could be involved in PTA *did* get involved.

Attracting new members and retaining existing members are among the most important duties of a PTA. A strong membership is essential for PTA to be a force in decisions involving the welfare and education of children.

You can lead the way. The level of enthusiasm and PTA knowledge that you, as a PTA leader, are able to demonstrate will have a ripple effect throughout your membership. Your active leadership will help create strong programs in your school community and strong commitment among your members.

To help your PTA increase and retain membership, here are concise descriptions of membership committee and chair responsibilities to provide direction for recruiting, tips that you can use to make your membership take off, and a collection of best practices from PTAs.



The Membership Chair

The membership chair is responsible for facilitating the work of the membership committee and ensuring timely, accurate communication with other PTA committees and officers. The membership chair and committee should develop a membership growth plan that will direct the activities of the committee. This plan should include membership recruitment and retention strategies that will lead to overall membership growth. Other responsibilities of the chair include

- Attending scheduled meetings as determined by the local president,
- Recruiting a membership committee,
- Leading the membership committee in recruitment efforts,
- Administering the distribution of membership cards to local members,
- Working with the state membership chair to reach membership goals,
- Collecting and processing fees,
- Sending fees and remittance forms to the council/state PTA on a regular basis,
- Maintaining accurate membership records and relevant information on the committee's work, and
- Attending leadership and membership training whenever possible.



The Membership Committee

The goal of the membership committee is to build an informed, active membership that supports the Mission, objects, policies, and programs of the local, state, and National PTA. Under the direction of the membership chair, the committee should develop a membership recruitment and retention plan that emphasizes a year-round effort to involve new members. Well-thought-out committee plans made early and carried out with enthusiasm and imagination throughout the year will contribute much to the success of membership development. To succeed, the membership committee must be aware of the local community's concerns about matters that affect the well-being of its children.

Size. Most membership committees have five to 10 members. The optimum size of the committee will vary, depending on the needs of the local PTA.

Composition. A local PTA membership committee should include parents, teachers, and the principal. It should also include representatives from underrepresented areas of the community and, when bylaws permit it, at least one student.

Consult your state PTA office for program planning materials that will provide program ideas and activities and help you map out your year, month by month.

Keys to a Successful Membership Campaign

Membership growth is a sign that your PTA is a vital and relevant organization that is making a difference in your community. If your PTA is an effective, respected, and fun association, people will be eager to join.

Lay the groundwork for success:

- Ask your PTA board to explain to potential members what your PTA does for the children of your community.
- Determine whether your PTA/PTSA is meeting the needs of your members and community.
- Align your goals with the needs of your members and community.
- Make sure you have the support of your principal and school staff.

Make preparations before school starts:

- Set a goal for membership for the year—challenge yourself!
- Find out how your treasurer would like to handle the collection and deposit of membership fees. (The Online Membership and Dues Reporting [OMDR] database is in its pilot phase and will be implemented in all states by June 2007. The database is designed to give local units a direct means to enter data into the system, making their information available at the council [depending on state structure], district [depending on state structure], region [depending on state structure], state, and national levels. This unprecedented access will help all levels of the association handle funds more efficiently, respond better to member needs, and highlight areas where PTA can expand service.)
- Prepare membership forms, take-home fliers, and promotional signs.

- Send letters to last year's members asking them to join again.
- Make sure the memberships of PTA board members are current.
- Plan a special invitation to join, as well as a follow-up thank-you, for school staff. School staff can be great allies in encouraging parent participation.

Take advantage of back-to-school enthusiasm:

- Send membership forms and fliers home with first-day packets.
- Have a membership table at all orientation and back-to-school events.
- Design a visual representation of your growing membership (e.g., a cardboard or illustrated tree to which leaves with new-member names can be added, a jar to which beans, marbles, or ping pong balls can be added) for display in your school.
- Ask people to join your PTA—don't wait for them to offer.
- Make it easy for people to join your PTA: have all the sign-up materials close at hand.

Promote membership throughout the year:

- Set up your membership table at every PTA and school event (maintain a current list of members in case people forget if they have joined already).
- Publish a list of PTA members in your newsletter.
- Regularly include articles about membership and a clip-out membership form in your newsletter.
- Publish your current membership count in your newsletter. Check it against your goal often.



A Successful Membership Program

The goal of developing the membership of PTA is to build an informed team of individuals working on behalf of all children and youth. Members' involvement and programs are both part of an ongoing process of strengthening your PTA. An involved PTA membership is a valuable resource that will help you start and maintain programs and projects that benefit children and the community. Meaningful programs make PTA membership and active involvement worthwhile.

Promote PTA involvement to other organizations. PTA involvement is not limited to parents, teachers, and students. An open-door policy should be established with local businesses, places of worship, service organizations (e.g., Kiwanis, Rotary), government agencies (e.g., the health authority, the police department), and other youth and community service groups. Building these relationships will assist overall community efforts to expand parent and community involvement.

Make sure you and your fellow PTA members welcome newcomers to meetings and activities. Start a welcoming committee to reach out to newcomers. Match veteran members of your PTA board with new recruits to help the new members get to know the people, organization, and procedures. Promote membership at every opportunity.

Make membership a team effort. It takes a team effort to increase PTA's membership. Form work groups for organizing membership activities (e.g., ice cream socials, membership dances); use the talents and expertise of members, local business people, community residents, etc. Delegate and ask for help from other members to help lighten the membership recruitment load.

Survey prospective members. One of the best ways to determine the types of programs, projects, and activities that will attract members is to ask. A simple survey will give you valuable information and help your PTA develop a plan that will motivate parents and people in the community to get involved.

Develop an action plan. Develop an activity calendar and activity budget for your membership efforts that reflects your membership goals. Determine the tasks necessary to achieve the goals, who will do them, and when they need to be done. Devise a way to evaluate whether you have achieved your goals.

Use available resources. Does your school district have a public relations or communications office that might be able to help you promote your PTA? Do any of your members have relevant talents you can tap? Send out a call for help that describes the jobs you need done. Use state PTA and National PTA materials (such as National PTA's magazine, *Our Children*) at your membership sign-up table as examples of member benefits and member discounts.

Delivering the Message

A 2004 PTA survey asked local PTA presidents for reasons they were given by prospects who were not joining PTA. Seventy-one percent of responding PTA presidents answered that prospects not joining said they “Don’t have time to participate.” The second most commonly noted reason given by prospects not joining (cited by 28 percent of responding presidents) was that they were “Not certain of the benefits of joining.”

As PTA membership recruiters, we can’t tell people how much or even whether they’ll value being a member. What we can do, however, is deliver a powerful message about the value of PTA that will encourage prospective members to consider joining. Here are some tips:

Be prepared to describe at least three recent accomplishments of your PTA. Include objective facts and figures on the number of people touched by a program or activity (e.g., the number of children reached, the number of volunteers participating, the number of letters sent). For instance, if one of your programs is Books for Breakfast (a reading program for children), know the number of parents and community members who volunteered to read to children, the number of children who participated, and the number of books donated, distributed, and read to children. Gather testimonials from a diverse range of participants, including parents, teachers, school administrators, and community volunteers.

By providing both objective and subjective information about your PTA’s accomplishments, you will appeal to a prospective member who is mission-driven and wants to see that the results have a significant impact on children and communities. You will also appeal to individuals on an emotional level, reaching those who want to feel passionate

about what they give their time to and want to make a difference through their personal involvement.

Develop a list of state and national accomplishments.

One difference between PTA and other parent groups—and a major selling point—is the strength of local PTAs because of their affiliation with state PTAs and National PTA. Because every member of a local PTA is also a member of his or her state PTA and National PTA, be able to describe accomplishments of your state PTA and National PTA. For examples of your state PTA’s accomplishments, contact your state PTA or call (800) 307-4PTA (4782).

Below are three examples of recent National PTA accomplishments that align with PTA’s priorities—parent involvement, support for public education, and safe and nurturing environments.

- National PTA and the Advertising Council teamed up to launch a three-year public service campaign encouraging parents to “Know More. Do More.” about their children’s education.
- State and local PTAs have been participating in National PTA’s Five Cents Makes Sense for Education campaign, calling on lawmakers to increase the federal investment in education to at least five cents of every current federal budget dollar.
- National PTA hosts an event each October to promote the benefits of school-based after-school programs.

Describe the current goals and expected outcomes of your PTA.

Are you continuing and/or expanding upon past accomplishments? Are you undertaking new projects? Be prepared to explain how your PTA decides on the projects to be implemented each year and why there is a need

for your PTA's programs. Let the prospective member know how he or she can contribute to the goals that have been established.

Highlight the benefits of being a member of your PTA. Include both tangible and intangible benefits. Tangible benefits include parenting resources, leadership training, a vote in the selection of programs and activities, and possible member discounts from local businesses. Intangible benefits include supporting the Mission and Purposes of PTA and becoming part of a network of local, state, and national advocates for all children.

When talking to prospective members, here are two points that should be made:

- **As a member, you receive/have access to...**(a newsletter with school information; parenting tips; training that can carry over to your personal and professional life; etc.)
- **As a member, you have the opportunity to...**(share your talents on projects of interest to you; vote on programs, events, and planned activities; take a leadership role; share your culture with others; meet people in your community; etc.)

Once again, include testimonials from a representative sample of current members; the testimonials should pinpoint how the members benefited from their membership.

Also, be sure to mention state and National PTA benefits. Combining the benefits of local, state, and National PTA will demonstrate to prospective members that the benefits far exceed the cost of joining. Be sure to convey the important message that the true benefit of PTA membership is being able to advocate for all children.

Highlight volunteer opportunities as a benefit. When recruiting members, it is important that the message is one that encourages prospects to join PTA and become active volunteers. When asked why they joined PTA, 93 percent of respondents to a 2004 PTA survey said, "To make a positive impact at school for the benefit of my child/children." As you talk about volunteer opportunities, you should stress how your PTA is making a positive difference at your school.

It is easier to involve volunteers if you have a good track record in achieving goals, communicate your mission and goals clearly, and allow your volunteers to have genuine input. Help individuals understand how they can achieve more working with a group than they could alone.

Make sure your message about volunteering stresses flexibility. It is important to stress the many ways a member may contribute, help, or volunteer. Attending meetings is only one aspect of membership. Don't focus on meeting attendance as a way to involve volunteers. There are some members who will never be able to attend a meeting but who can contribute in many ways. Include a number of examples of ways they can contribute.

Break down ongoing projects into short-term activities. Shorten tenures, and provide job-sharing opportunities. Consider providing "virtual" ways to volunteer using the Internet; anyone with Internet access can contribute time and expertise to PTA. Here are a number of tasks members can perform online:

- Design newsletters or other promotional materials
- Conduct member surveys via e-mail
- Distribute minutes and event notices to members and community leaders via e-mail
- Research program ideas, funding sources, and legislative issues
- Update the membership database
- Update lists of PTA volunteer opportunities on volunteer-matching websites
- E-mail new-member kits and welcome information
- Update the PTA's website periodically

Offer choices within the framework of volunteer jobs. "Our way is the only way" is a turn-off.

Match member interests and skills with volunteer jobs. The most effective way to find volunteers is to say, "Tell us what you like to do and we'll find a way to use your skills and interests."

Keep all members "in the loop." Keep members who have not yet volunteered informed of activities. Personally contact inactive members to thank them for their support and to update them on your PTA's goals and progress. By keeping all members informed and asking them for feedback on projects and activities, you keep them involved and encourage their future participation.

Most important, ask for their help. The number one reason people volunteer is that they were asked to. Don't be afraid to keep trying.

How to Build a Successful Membership Campaign

Develop a recruitment and retention team, and formulate a goal. Work together with other PTA members to establish a team goal and individual goals, and to assign specific responsibilities and completion dates. The team should examine prior years' membership recruitment efforts and membership numbers, then compare the data with the number of students and teachers at the school to formulate the new goal. Make sure the goal is challenging, but not unattainable. For example, if there are 250 students at your school and you have 100 PTA members, you might set your growth goal for the year at 25 new members. Make it your goal to have at least half of the student population with an involved parent.

While seeking new members, be sure someone on the team works on member retention—getting previous members to renew. If you gain 25 new members but fail to renew 50 current members, you'll have gone one step forward but two steps back.

Target potential members. It sometimes helps to have one or more specific targets in mind, such as attracting new male PTA members. Then you can formulate strategies that will help you reach your target audience and make your pitch; to reach men, for example, you can make a presentation at a local Rotary Club or Kiwanis meeting. Pick strategies and methods that fit your individual strengths and constraints—comfort level, budget, time, and expertise—and run with them.

Never hang up your marketing hat. Every day you will encounter someone who is not a member of PTA. When you do, you should ask yourself if it's appropriate to talk to him or her about joining PTA. Remember, the number one

reason people don't join an organization is that they haven't been asked to! Make sure you keep asking throughout the membership year.

Model inclusiveness. Does your PTA mirror the demographics of your community? Is there an opportunity to involve more parents and other caring adults from diverse backgrounds and age groups? Tailor your recruitment plan to better reflect the diversity of your school community. Make sure that materials you produce take into account the background and interests of those whom you are targeting to join, and that the materials are available in the languages families speak at home. Consider, too, having a translator present at meetings and other events, and assigning buddies to help bridge linguistic and cultural differences.

Make use of key resources. Recruitment can be easier if you employ authoritative and trustworthy materials. Reliable resources include the *Get Involved for Your Child—Join PTA!* brochure, the *Back-to-School Kit*, and countless other print and online resources from National PTA. Don't forget that people are resources, too. Contact your region, district, council, state, or National PTA for information and guidance.

Implement your PTA's membership recruitment and retention plan. Plans are worthless unless they are put into practice. Be sure to schedule your recruitment and retention activities throughout the year. Assign a specific person to be in charge of coordinating the different events, and, as much as possible, have all your members involved in recruiting. Every event your PTA holds is a chance to have more people join, so always have your sign-up sheets and information ready!

How to Build a Successful Membership Campaign

Be responsive and motivating. Satisfied members are the best recruitment resource available! They'll renew their membership and urge others to join. Seek feedback from all members to find out what's working and what needs improvement. Keep members motivated through ongoing communication, opportunities to volunteer, and recognition. Talk to all PTA leaders, including officers, board members, and committee chairs, as well as aspiring leaders, about participating in more state and National PTA training activities. Get everyone involved and let them see the value of their membership.

Orient and integrate. One of the barriers PTA faces in recruitment is that new members and nonmembers may view PTA as an exclusive club to which they are not invited. A regular orientation evening with new and old members is an effective way to educate new members about PTA and make them feel welcome. A buddy system that pairs veteran members with new members is another way to help new members feel a sense of belonging.

Evaluate and adjust accordingly. Continuously seek feedback from members on issues such as how many new members they are recruiting, how they are helping these new members acclimate to PTA and get involved, and how many new members are staying. Regardless of whether the evaluation is done through a formal survey or through informal communication, it should be systematic, recorded, and used to adjust and improve the recruitment and retention plan.



How to Ask People to Join PTA

In a recent PTA survey, 49 percent of respondents said the reason people don't join PTA is that no one asked them to. The way we ask people to join needs to be personal, powerful, and meaningful. Yet, even with the passion we have for PTA's Mission, asking other people to join can seem daunting. Why is it difficult to ask parents to join? Fear. The fear of hearing "no"; fear that asking will strain friendships; fear that a "no" is failure. If the person you ask to join PTA says "no," you have not failed. You have simply provided that person with an opportunity to help children that he or she chose not to take advantage of right now. Be sure to ask again sometime—the answer might be "yes."

And it's those millions of "yes" responses we receive each year and the way in which communities nationwide benefit from parent involvement that make asking all the more worthwhile. To help those involved in PTA membership drives and recruitment activities overcome their fears, this section provides practical tips and the know-how for making "the ask" easier and more successful.

Reasons for Asking

Consider why someone would join PTA. One way to focus your sales pitch is to consider the most likely reasons a prospective member might have for joining PTA. In a National PTA survey conducted in October 2004, the number one reason given for joining PTA was "to work to improve the school for the benefit of my child/children." That's an important place to start your pitch.

PTA is the most recognized school organization. A 2002 survey by the National Family Opinion survey company found that 92 percent of adults are aware of PTA and more than 85 percent have positive impressions of PTA. People

understand what PTAs do for schools and are more inclined to join a recognized school organization than join an unfamiliar one.

You are asking for a good cause. By asking someone to join PTA, you are empowering that person to help make a difference in his or her child's life. Surveys show that, in general, children of involved parents have better school experiences, higher grades and test scores, fewer disciplinary problems, and more supportive teachers. One of the best ways parents can be involved and show their support for their children is by joining PTA.

The audience probably expects you to ask. It's no secret that PTA success is based on membership. So it's logical that someone from PTA would ask parents, school administrators, and community members to consider joining. If people expect you to ask them to join and you don't, they might think they are not needed or are not welcome. People involved with children's education expect to be invited to join PTA, so go ahead and ask!

Methods of Asking

Build your case. Going straight to a yes-or-no question—especially "Do you want to join?"—can cut off a conversation and result in a "no" before you've had an opportunity to build an effective case for joining PTA. Therefore, begin by asking nonthreatening, open-ended questions, such as, "You may be aware that parent involvement is important to a child's success in school. What type of parent involvement activities would you like to see at your child's school?" Always be respectful and aware of the prospective member's time. If someone is late for a meeting, don't corner him or her in the hall. Find a time to talk that is good for both of

you; 15 minutes is usually sufficient. Don't forget to ask for the membership. It's easy to get into the conversation, enjoy the rapport, and then forget to make "the ask."

"The ask" should be powerful, personal, and meaningful. Typically, membership "asks" are made to large groups of parents—for example, at a back-to-school night or assembly. You can help the success of that "ask" by making eye contact with parents, asking if they have questions, and sharing why PTA is important for your school. Most important, be sure to tell parents "When PTA gets involved, children benefit; when you get involved in PTA, the child who benefits most is your own."

Use the "backpack express" only as a supplementary route for recruitment. For decades, PTAs have placed invitations, event announcements, and PTA communications in children's backpacks, hoping these materials would make it safely home to the parents. This method may have worked better when parents felt more obliged to join PTA, but those days are past. Faced with many choices of where to spend their resources, parents will weigh their involvement in PTA against other competing interests. If other groups make face-to-face "asks," explaining in detail why the parents should be involved, while PTA is sending home fliers that may or may not make it out of children's bags, then PTA is not going to win as many members. The "backpack express" can certainly be used as a reminder, just as e-mail can be used to follow up. However, if it is the only method of recruitment, your membership efforts will not be seen as personal, powerful, or meaningful, and membership may actually decline.

Overcome objections. Most objections to joining PTA fall into one of four areas:

- Time
- Impact
- Perceived value
- Cost

Following are some suggestions for responding to those objections.

Time. When parents say they don't have time to join PTA, what they are probably saying is that they don't want to volunteer dozens of hours each week. Some people think that to be a PTA member you have to be a volunteer. Therefore, you need to explain that PTA appreciates everyone's membership, whether or not the member volunteers, because

each member increases PTA's ability to advocate for children. It's true that PTA cannot operate without volunteers, but if you emphasize volunteering and dissuade individuals from joining altogether, you'll never have them as members or as volunteers.

Impact. Parents want to know if their membership in PTA is going to have a positive impact, if it will benefit their children. You can tell them, emphatically, "Yes!" Decades' worth of research shows that when parents are involved, students perform better in school. They receive higher grades and test scores, have better school attendance and lower rates of suspension, are more likely to graduate high school, and are more likely to pursue postsecondary education. Children of involved parents also exhibit increased motivation, better self-esteem, less drug and alcohol use, and fewer instances of violent behavior. Those great benefits come from parent involvement, a major focus of PTA.

Perceived value. Explain to prospects what they get for their membership dues. In addition to materials and benefits from the local and state PTA, members also receive these benefits from National PTA:

- Access to the online version of *Our Children* magazine
- *The PTA Parent*, an electronic newsletter published twice a month that covers parenting topics
- *This Week in Washington*, an electronic newsletter produced when Congress is in session that explains national legislation affecting families and public education
- Exclusive National PTA member benefits, including discounts, special offers, and promotions from national companies
- Free e-learning courses on PTA basics, as well as on subjects that can be applied to their personal lives, including conflict resolution and goal setting
- Discounted member rates for National PTA's annual convention and on subscriptions to the print version of *Our Children*
- Access to join the Member-to-Member Network, the grassroots advocacy system that connects PTA members with members of Congress

People like to join organizations that make a difference in the lives of others, are educational and beneficial to the community, allow them to network with successful people, and provide opportunities to have fun. Highlight that they will be able to mix with diverse individuals through local PTA activities.

Emphasize once again that the number one benefit of PTA membership is the ability to help their children. For many parents, that is reason enough to join.

Cost. PTA membership is one of the most cost-effective investments parents can make in their children's education and schools. For an average of two cents a day, parents can help improve their children's school experiences. PTA members are better connected to their schools, are better informed, and have access to money-saving discounts and benefits.

Scripts for Overcoming Objections

Objection #1: "I don't have the time!"

Possible replies:

- "I can certainly understand that. It's not the amount of time you can contribute that's most important, but rather your commitment to help PTA make a difference in the lives of children. You don't have to be a volunteer to be a member. Our members are involved in many activities in addition to PTA. We value their time and strive to use it effectively." (Give examples of events or projects that might appeal to this person.)
- "Your time is valuable, and we certainly value any time you could provide. However, we understand that you may not be able to make a commitment of time. Please consider joining to show your support of our efforts; you can decide how much time you invest in volunteering. We will keep you informed of our activities, and we welcome your input."

Objection #2: "I don't have any children in school!"

Possible replies:

- "You don't have to have children in school to belong to PTA. Anyone who cares about children belongs in our organization. It is important that we all have a voice in the decision-making process relating to the laws and regulations that affect children. You can have that voice through PTA. Every child needs you. You will make a difference."
- "Many of our members do not have children or have children that are grown up. The common ground is the belief that we can collectively make a difference that will affect our next generation. Our future depends on preparing all children. Don't you agree?"

Objection #3: "I don't agree with a lot of the PTA positions!"

Possible reply:

- "The only way to avoid disagreement would be to adopt a 'do nothing' policy. As a grassroots organization, our policies are determined by a democratic process. We welcome your involvement in this effort. It is through members like you that our direction is determined."

Objection #4: "Your organization doesn't really do anything!"

Possible replies:

- "I cannot speak for what may have happened in previous years, but let me bring you up-to-date on what we are doing now. (List current activities, programs, accomplishments, etc.) As you see, we are a very active group, doing many things that benefit all our children. On a state and national level, PTA has been instrumental in many initiatives from which all children have benefited. We have a long history of accomplishments. (Have a list of accomplishments at the state and national levels available for reference.) We need time, funds, and goodwill from people like you to keep it happening."
- "PTA has nearly 6 million members across the country and a history of accomplishments going back more than 100 years. Locally, we have been able to influence positive changes for children, such as... (list accomplishments). It is only through the work of our members that we are able to make a difference. That's why you are so important to us. Join us and help us advocate for our children."
- "There is so much for us to do, but we need people like you. Join us and help us do even more."

Objection #5: "Not right now—maybe later!"

Possible reply:

- "If you put off being part of PTA, you may miss out on having your voice heard when it is needed most. Our members are the heart of the organization and, by participating in PTA activities, determine the course of action we need to take. Please make the time to put children first."

Objection #6: "I just can't join another organization. I belong to too many already!"

Possible reply:

- "I know that there are many good organizations to belong to, and it is difficult to support them all. But I think PTA is very special. Let me tell you a little about what we are doing. I find it helps to have information

when I'm making a choice. (Talk about the value of PTA.) Remember, PTA works to prevent problems and, of course, address those concerns that affect us right now. We really need people like you in PTA."

Additional Tips for Making "the Ask"

Be yourself. If you're genuine and your reasons for joining ring true, people will be more likely to join. Don't be afraid to explain why you joined, and why you believe it is a good organization with which to be associated.

Be enthusiastic. When you show excitement and enthusiasm about PTA, it's infectious. If you are uninspired, the listeners will be, too.

Offer them a challenge. Tell prospective members what PTA has accomplished in the past, and challenge them to contribute to the bright future of PTA at your school.

Draw on your own recruiting experiences. Reflect on your own experiences with good and bad membership recruitments and try to emulate techniques that work for you.

Don't apologize. You don't have to apologize for respectfully asking people to join an organization in which you believe.

Come prepared. Showing up is half the battle; being organized is the other half. Your attention to detail strengthens the reputation of PTA and demonstrates respect and concern for a potential member's time.

Don't put off "the ask." Many people want to put off the "unpleasantness" of asking for membership dues until the very end of a meeting or event. If you leave the important business of membership until the end, you may run out of time to answer questions and overcome objections, and you risk having people leave before you have a chance to ask them to join.

Bring backup. Bring another PTA volunteer to help you. People join for different reasons, and giving people the opportunity to talk to another member might help sell them on PTA. Ask the volunteer to give a testimonial as to why he or she joined and what the experience has been like.

Make lemons into lemonade. Sometimes even the most reluctant person can be turned around. While some people may just be looking for an excuse not to join, others may have a legitimate concern that's keeping them from joining. Maybe they volunteered last year but were never thanked. Maybe they had a conflict with another member. Try to find the source of their reluctance. Don't let concerns or complaints go unresolved.

Don't be argumentative. Sometimes you just have to accept "no" for an answer. While it's OK to clarify any misgivings or misinformation someone may have about PTA, be respectful of other opinions and choices. An argument will be remembered long after your membership drive is over. If you show you understand why someone can't join right now, you won't turn him or her off to joining later.

Don't take rejection personally. If the person you ask to join PTA says "no," don't take it personally. He or she simply decided not to take advantage just then of the opportunity you offered. Be sure to ask again later—the answer might be different. Feel good about all the people who said "yes." At the end of the day, you will have done a great deal of good.

Follow through. If you promise someone an answer, get him or her one in a timely manner. If you agreed to meet, be there.

Say "thank you." Everyone appreciates acknowledgment. It is possible that the potential members you are approaching were members elsewhere for years. Thank them for their support. Thank nonmembers for their time. Thank everyone for his or her attention. If prospective members know their membership not only makes a difference but also is appreciated, they will be more likely to join.



Partnering Ideas for Units

A great way to experience growth in membership and in stature is to hold events with local businesses and organizations. Listed below are a few events hosted by PTAs to boost recruitment efforts.

Event	Business Type
Bike safety rodeo	Insurance companies
Community development	City council
Readathon	Local libraries
Safety: traffic, home, school, playground	Local police and fire departments
Educational fair	Community groups with expertise in dance, crafts, storytelling, and science
Info share	Any local organizations and businesses
Literacy program	Senior citizen groups and local libraries
Public service announcements	Local radio or television stations
Work fair/career day	Area businesses
Discount incentives for members	Area businesses
Health and safety fair	Area health groups
Forum on special needs children	Assistance groups for people with disabilities
Adopt-a-grandparent program	Retirement homes, senior citizen groups
Mentoring programs	Business leader groups, other service organizations
Storytelling	Retirement homes, senior citizen groups
Tutoring program	University/college student organizations



Ways to Recruit Men to Your PTA

Many people, when they hear parent involvement and PTA, automatically think of mothers. Women are vital to fulfilling PTA's Mission, but male involvement in PTA is just as important. A strong, vibrant PTA needs the support of moms *and* dads!

How can we get more men involved? National PTA surveyed nearly 2,700 men in fall 2004 to find out. The findings from that survey have been used to develop the following 10 strategies a local PTA can use to break down barriers to male involvement and increase male PTA membership.

1. Make the membership pitch relevant to males. The number one reason survey respondents joined PTA was "to work to improve the school for the benefit of my child/children." Therefore, your recruitment materials and your membership pitch should explain how men's involvement in PTA would benefit their children and their children's schools. A dad's involvement in PTA:

- Shows added interest in his child's education and school activities,
- Shows greater support for his child's teachers and school, and
- Improves relationships between parents and school personnel.

2. Use specific messaging and advertising aimed at men. When asked what would encourage men to join PTA, men most frequently answered male-oriented advertising. Eighty-seven percent of the men surveyed believe that PTA values men, but 67 percent don't believe PTA does a good job of promoting male involvement. The message that dads are welcome and encouraged to join should be brought out in advertising, as well as in newsletter articles, public events,

speaking engagements, and other communications about PTA. Be sure to mention men's involvement in your PTA in your communications to members and potential members.

3. Just ask them. Nearly half of the men who responded to the survey said men don't join PTA because *they aren't asked to*. How you ask men to join must be powerful, personal, and meaningful. Doing this could pay big dividends in membership recruitment for your PTA! Tips on making "the ask" successful are included in this brochure and in the "Membership Development" section of the *Annual Resources for PTAs 2005–2006*.

4. Ask the women in your PTA to invite the men in their children's lives to join PTA. Research reveals that women can influence men to join PTA. More than 90 percent of the male PTA members who responded to the survey indicated that their spouses, who were already members, significantly influenced their decision to get involved in PTA. Yet, both mom and dad are PTA members in less than 50 percent of families with children in school. Moms can (and should) influence dads to join PTA!

5. Create more volunteer opportunities and special events for dads. When survey respondents were asked what would motivate fathers to be involved in PTA, the number two response was activities or events aimed specifically at dads. Men stated a preference for hands-on projects and suggested events such as "dads only" events, school carnivals, sports activities, father-daughter and father-son activities, and back-to-school fests. Events aimed at fathers can raise awareness that other fathers are actively involved. When men see that other men are involved, they are more likely to join.

6. Emphasize that becoming a PTA member does not have to involve a large time commitment. Seventy-one percent of the men surveyed indicated that lack of time to volunteer is a barrier to men's involvement in PTA. While PTA cannot operate without volunteers, it also cannot operate without the support of membership dues. Assure new members that membership is not synonymous with volunteering. Keep this in mind: *If they join, they may eventually become volunteers; but if they never become members, they'll never become volunteers.*

7. Give it to 'em straight. Almost half of the men surveyed indicated that they want volunteer roles and expectations clearly defined. Telling them the what, when, where, why, and how of volunteer opportunities would make them more likely to join and to volunteer. Survey respondents also indicated that they are results-oriented and want to work on projects that use their skills.

8. Communicate with men the way they want to be reached. Surveys have indicated that men want fewer meetings, and they want the meetings PTAs do have to be at convenient times for them, such as after work. In addition, men want meetings to have a clear agenda and be results-oriented, rather than exploratory sessions on an issue or topic. Men prefer to receive PTA communications in bullet lists, as summary points, in e-mails, or as quick bits of information in newsletters. Brief communications tend to make men pay more attention to the message and tend to encourage men to participate.

9. Seek out male members in the community. Instead of waiting for men to come to your PTA, take your PTA to where men often meet. Present the PTA message at local service clubs that have high levels of male participation, such as Rotary, Kiwanis, or Lion's clubs. If men see that other club members support PTA's work, they might be more likely to join. Invite these groups to help with a service project for the school. Their participation will give them a better understanding of what your PTA contributes, a sense of responsibility toward the school, and more incentive to join PTA. Sending information to houses of worship, community centers, and municipalities also can make a wider circle of community residents aware of your PTA, what you are doing, and why they should become members.

10. Recognize and celebrate members. When you start getting more men involved in your PTA, let the community know. Publicize your successes. Success begets success. Reinforcing men's contributions, while being mindful of

what all members do for PTA, creates a positive atmosphere. People want to be associated with vibrant, successful groups. Recognize members, thank them often, and celebrate your PTA's accomplishments and success!



How to Retain Members

Getting new members is only one reason for your PTA to put a membership growth plan into motion. There's a second reason: It takes more effort to recruit a new member than it does to keep an existing one. In addition, it is the returning member who will more likely take on leadership roles. The future success of your PTA depends on having a good mix of returning and new members.

Treat membership marketing like the business it is. Understand that you're in the business of marketing and selling memberships. That means a membership is a product, with many useful features and services. Be ready to explain the existing and developing benefits of PTA membership to renewing members.

Study your niche carefully. Learn about the successes of other PTAs and volunteer organizations. There are a number of websites with volunteer and membership ideas from other organizations—you may be able to implement these ideas in your PTA. Participate in National PTA's electronic bulletin board on membership to pose questions and respond to other PTA leaders about best practices.

Get testimonials from lapsed members who returned. Perhaps the best kind of testimonial comes from people who were unhappy and then rededicated themselves to PTA. Contact members who have recently rejoined and ask them what spurred their decision to come back. Contact a few former members and ask them what made them leave and what they miss most about belonging to PTA.

Understand that your retention rate goes right to your bottom line. Growing competition for members requires an all-out communications plan with sound strategies to encourage feedback from members, determine the services

they need, communicate how to use those services, and increase member satisfaction. If you make these efforts, your members will reward you with membership renewals.

Get all of your members involved. The most active members will always be the ones who get the most out of their membership, leading them to renew year after year. Therefore, getting members involved is the key to keeping them. It's not always easy. Many members don't understand the value of being involved, or don't feel comfortable. To help them get their feet wet, draw up a list of activities that members can choose from, and continue to modify this list as new opportunities arise. Members are more likely to get involved in a short-term activity with clearly defined roles.

Open the door to two-way communication. Many organizations rely on a magazine or newsletter to communicate with their members. It has never occurred to them that not all members want their information this way. Make it clear on everything you print how you can be reached: by phone, fax, snail mail, e-mail, voice mail, online, etc. Give members all the options you can.

Post basic information on your website. In addition to posting a list of events, names of board members, and PTA information and activities (all with contact names, phone numbers, and e-mail addresses), post membership and registration forms that can be either downloaded or submitted online. This will make it easy for new and renewing members to join.

Keep the material on your website current and relevant. Outdated material is a sure sign that no one is monitoring or maintaining your website, which makes a bad impression on existing and potential members. Find relevant

material (from your print publications and from noncopyrighted sources) to post on a regularly scheduled basis.

Teach new members how to use PTA services. Provide details about the benefits and resources PTA offers to its members. Most importantly, inform new members exactly how to use these great services. Many complaints are heard from new members who say they do not get information about PTA services and how to use them. Put a brochure of benefits and services in your new-member packets. Be sure to show members the many resources available on National PTA's website; many things that were available only to PTA leaders are now available to all members.

Find out why your members are leaving. Exit surveys can provide you with crucial information that can help you plug holes in your membership system. Nonrenewing members can be one of your best resources for determining how your PTA can improve its membership retention. Ask past members for honest feedback on their PTA experience. Use this feedback to evaluate your current membership practices.



Best Practices: Ideas for Special Membership Events and Activities

Take turns inviting guests. Ask volunteers to bring potential members to PTA meetings or events. Be sure to introduce special guests and welcome them. Consider inviting your spouse or other adult family members. Everyone's a potential PTA member!

Consider a contest. Give away free memberships, or reward those who recruit the most members during your membership campaign.

Feature great programs. Enhance your school's art classes with the Reflections Program, set out to be recognized as a Parent Involvement School of Excellence, host a walkathon to demonstrate your concern for children's physical well-being, invite speakers from within the community to talk to parents of middle school students about bullying, conduct a series to help teens make decisions about what to do after high school, etc. The key is finding out what your school and families need. Let your PTA be seen as a valuable resource and as an organization that gets things done.

Make the most of meetings. Make sure you are keeping people interested at the meetings they do attend. Always invite an interesting guest speaker or have your meeting hosted by other groups and organizations (and invite their members to join). Don't just hold a meeting for meeting's sake. Set out to make the best use of each member's time.

Start a speakers' bureau. Think about the untapped talent within your PTA. Chances are there is at least one person who could speak to community groups, businesses, and organizations about the importance of PTA and the work your PTA is doing. Have speakers hand out PTA information and membership brochures at the end of their presentations.

Look up old friends. Pull out old membership rosters and circle the names of the people who have let their membership lapse; ask them to join again. Have members ask friends, colleagues, and those who belong to other organizations with which they are involved to join PTA.

Knock on doors. Visit stores, businesses, and homes in your community and let people know about the great work your PTA is doing. Invite individuals to accompany you to a PTA meeting or event.

Set up shop. Does your city or town have community fairs or trade shows? Consider renting booth space and highlighting the work of your local PTA. Set up a booth at school orientation nights, plays, musical performances, sporting events, etc., and let people know your PTA is working for their children. Have plenty of membership brochures and a sign-up sheet on hand.

Sing your own praises. Don't be bashful about what your PTA is doing in your community. If you don't highlight your successes, who will? Develop a website or monthly electronic newsletter and share your successes with others. Don't forget to contact the media about every major project that you do!

Recognize recruiters. Recruitment is hard work and a little thanks can go a long way. Recognize recruiters verbally and in print monthly, quarterly, or yearly. Offer them certificates or other small tokens of appreciation.

Roll out the welcome mat. Let guests know they are welcome to attend every meeting and event. Make sure you assign to each new person a buddy or mentor who can answer questions. Recognize guests at every meeting.

Give new members a chance to shine. Rather than having the usual suspects manage your newsletter, science night, or the family dinner and movie, let a newcomer take the lead. If you've asked people to tell you what skills they'd like to share with PTA, be sure to take them up on their offer throughout the year.

You're Ready to Begin!

These ideas, tips, and techniques should help you with membership recruitment throughout the year. If you need additional resources, please visit National PTA's website, www.pta.org.



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