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NC Conservation Network Tip Sheet #2: Developing Your Membership

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Developing Your Membership

Last year we brought you a Tip Sheet on *Increasing Your Membership* (<http://www.ncconservationnetwork.org/documents/6%20Increasing%20Your%20Membership.pdf>). This time we want to go a little deeper and focus on how can continue to develop and grow your membership base. *Developing Your Members* explores how to actively engage, renew, and recruit members to your organization.

This Tip Sheet is guest written by Stacy Baker, Institute for Conservation Leadership (<http://www.icl.org/>).

Tips for developing your membership

Tip #1: **Start by calling them "members"** (if you don't already). They'll be more likely to renew and feel a part of your work.

Tip #2: **Form a team to achieve your membership goals.** A team will create accountability and energy for moving it forward, develop better ideas, and spread support for your membership program. (Not to mention, share the workload.) Groups in ICL's [Complete Fundraiser](http://www.icl.org/programs/complete.php) (<http://www.icl.org/programs/complete.php>) typically have greater membership success using teams than when responsibility falls to just one person.

Tip #3: **At least 25% of "membership growth" is recovering from your losses.** With a 70-75% membership renewal rate considered very good, that means you constantly need new blood just to keep the same number.

Tip #4: **Consider the full diversity of your community as you reach out.** Be strategic as your team plans. Are you continually tapping into the same pool of people for members? Who are you not reaching now, but need to succeed? What might be getting in the way? What 3 things could you do differently to attract those members?

Tip #5: **Mail new member acquisition letters more often.** If you're doing an appeal just once a year now, consider reaching out more often. You'll be better capitalize on timely issues, and may improve cash flow throughout the year.

Tip #6: **Distinguish your membership acquisition letter** by focusing on the reader ("you"), and the importance and benefits of being a *member*. Rest assured, you'll offer them other opportunities to donate, upgrade, volunteer, and support the organization later; keep the focus on membership here.

Tip #7: **Longer new member letters work better.** It's not what we want to hear as environmental organizations, but 3-4 page letters (two

sheets, double-sided) get the best response as a general rule. Make it long enough to be compelling and ask the reader at least 3 times to become a member. Finish with a "P.S." reminding them to become a member today.

Tip #8: **Give them 5 reminders to renew.** Just because they leave your letter sitting on the kitchen table doesn't mean they don't like you. Most people need multiple follow-ups, and five (by mail + phone if you can) will maximize your renewal rate.

Tip #9: **Batch renewals in a schedule you can manage.** Although most groups begin doing renewals once a year, growing programs do more. On a quarterly schedule, everyone who joined January – March would receive their renewal letter (and subsequent reminders) at the same time. Create a schedule that is doable for you, and stick to it.

Tip #10. **Large scale direct mail is still the way to go for member volume, but don't overlook super-personal asks.** Ask people that share your passion to become members. Appeal to them personally at events, or send tailored membership letters to new contacts who testify at hearings or write letters to the editor.

Putting it all together:

A successful membership program takes five things: 1) continual cultivation of new members, 2) repeated solicitation, 3) a schedule of multiple renewals, 4) member upgrade/major donor opportunities, and 5) the organizational capacity and systems to make it all work.

Other resources:

For assistance taking your membership program to the next level, contact NCCN or ICL, or check out these resources:

- [Increasing Your Membership](http://www.nccnconservationnetwork.org/documents/6%20Increasing%20Your%20Membership.pdf/) (NCCN tip sheet)
- [Complete Fundraiser Program](http://www.icl.org/programs/complete.php) (ICL 12-month intensive program)
- [Assessing Your Fundraising Readiness](http://www.icl.org/samples-lib/fundraising.php) (online ICL tool)
- [Benchmarking Your Organization's Development](http://www.icl.org/toolkits/benchmarking.php) (ICL tool, includes best practices for membership)

If you have any ideas for future Tip Sheets, please email Nicole Stewart, NC Conservation Network at nicole@nccnconservationnetwork.org.