



# Regional Development Australia

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Membership

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*Regional Development Australia is a national network to grow and strengthen Australia's regions. It is a new beginning for regional advocacy and community development.*

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**M**embership is a great idea for any community organisation, providing a way of bringing together people who are interested in what you do. This allows supporters a chance to deepen their commitment to your organisation and what it does. These members may end up converting their appreciation of your services to regular donations outside of their regular membership fees.

You might call it a "Friends-Of" program, or if you're a school, you might refer to the group as your "Alumni". For most community organisations, "Membership" is sufficient. Membership schemes are a useful way of not only fostering a sense of belonging for those involved with your group, but also providing a constant revenue stream for your organisation.

You need your members' enthusiasm more than you need their money, so it's only in unusual circumstances that you're going to get a large net gain from this source. You can't set your fees so high that they'll deter people from joining, you can't squeeze them too hard or they'll leave, and you have to spend money servicing and informing and inspiring them.

On the other hand, a membership/alumni/friends-of income - even a small one, can constitute a regular, predictable and renewable revenue stream for your group, and one that you should be looking to grow over time.

### **What are you going to offer?**

In return for their payment, members will expect to receive something - a benefit, discount, newsletter, or offer - which non-members would not receive. Some people may feel that they receive enough return by just knowing that their subscriptions are working towards supporting a cause close to their hearts, but others want more tangible signs of membership - membership cards, bumper stickers, privileged access to a venue, preferential seating, or regular newsletters. Hold a brainstorming session to work out what you can afford, and what will be enticing and suited to your organisation.

### **What form will it take?**

Membership schemes can take on many forms, but most frequently involve either:

- The ability to join for free, but then the payment of an annual fee, or
- A small initial joining fee to cover membership processing costs, or possibly the printing of a membership card. Following that, an annual fee would still be charged, but that fee could be a little less expensive.

There are a number of variations on this theme and you can work out for yourself what will suit your members.



In setting up a membership scheme for your organisation, there are a number of different things you will need to consider, such as:

### **What is the purpose of your group?**

A membership scheme requires people to join something. What they join must have meaning for them. So the purpose of your scheme needs to have meaning not only for your organisation, but for members as well. Ask how membership of your organisation will help people to achieve your supporter's goals.

### **What are you going to offer members?**

You need to think about what your group can offer those who choose - and pay - to become or remain members. Some of the more popular "offers" that crop up as part of membership include:

- Membership cards
- Monthly or quarterly newsletters
- Bumper stickers
- Access to your services, venues or facilities (for example, a gym, reference books, other information)
- Preferential access to any tickets, seating, etc for your group's special occasions
- Discounts to goods and services in your local area provided by your business supporters

### **What's it going to cost?**

How much is membership to your organisation going to cost? Make sure what you charge it is commensurate with what you are willing to offer to members. Make sure it also covers the cost of any of the membership benefits they are getting while still providing you with a good revenue stream. Think too about how your membership and joining fees are going to be charged. For example:

- Will your group have a joining fee to cover any administrative or printing costs, or will there be no joining fee?
- Will your group have a discounted first year membership fee, or will there be a discount in the second year as an incentive?
- Will you have a tiered membership system, or one that has different membership categories?

### **It has to be easy to join**

Make sure information about your membership scheme is easy to find and the scheme itself is easy to join. Provide a number of payment options (cash, cheque, credit card, direct deposit, for example).

### **Ways to boost your Membership**

Members are the core of community organisations, providing the financial and human resources needed to perform the group's work. A healthy membership



leads to a vital organisation, yet even strong groups need to pay close attention to boosting their membership numbers, examples are:

- **Be relevant to their concerns:**  
If members have joined your group because of its work, its stance on an issue or the cause it supports, better make sure you stay true to it.
- **Have a structure that makes sense:**  
Make sure you have a constitution, an organisational chart, and an office culture that allocates responsibility and emphasises teamwork.
- **Consult with members:**  
Where you can, ask members what they want. Surveys and mail-outs can be handy for this, as can a few random phone calls each month.
- **Appoint a membership co-ordinator/registrar:**  
Choose someone who can not only look after existing members, but knows the networks well enough to recruit new ones.
- **Put memberships on the agenda:**  
Include membership growth as an agenda item at your group's board or committee meetings every quarter.
- **Set, revise and review targets:**  
Targets for memberships should be set each year, reviewed regularly and revised if needed.
- **Set a membership "season":**  
Set aside a period of time where your group and its volunteers work extra hard to attract memberships.
- **Use the public domain:**  
Think about the criteria for membership of your organisation, and then where you would find these people so you can attract them as new members.
- **Provide the right member services:**  
Strike a balance between encouraging them to do the right thing for "doing the right thing's sake" and having special offers if possible.
- **Lobby for your cause:**  
Lobbying for your cause shows you to be an active and vocal group, means people will be more attracted to become members.
- **Use public relations to build your profile:**  
Building your group's profile through being in the public eye will increase your chances of membership growth.
- **No joining fees:**  
Don't discourage potential new members by charging them a joining fee over and above normal membership fees. Think about giving them a discount in fact.
- **Keep existing members before recruiting new ones:**  
Be sure that you know your retention rate from year to year. If it's less than ninety percent, investigate.

