

OVERCOMING THE STRUGGLE OF VOLUNTEER RECRUITING AND RETENTION



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Proposal for Lake City Rotary Club

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A proposal on how Lake City Rotary Club can build a strong, sustainable membership with the implementation of strategies and programs carried out by Rotarians.

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Overcoming the struggle of volunteer recruiting and retention

PROPOSAL FOR LAKE CITY ROTARY CLUB

Statement of Need

The Lake City Rotary Club has been making valiant efforts to build and maintain membership numbers since it was established in 2002. Different ways to recruit members have been attempted with some success, but membership consistently fluctuates and the club strives for a larger, more active group of humanitarians. The organization is in need of guidance, objectives, and methods on how to recruit and retain members based upon research on volunteer motivations, rewards, and benefits as well as suggestions provided by other organizations and Rotary Club International.

Introduction

Non-profit organizations rely heavily on volunteers and Lake City Rotary Club is no different. In fact, the entire membership is made up of volunteers. With many new organizations forming in Lake City and people having less time in their busy lives, it is becoming harder for groups like the Rotary Club to recruit and retain members. That being said, it is not impossible to expand an organization; but, requires ample amount of dedication from existing membership mixed with some creative strategies. This proposal elaborates upon what Lake City Rotary Club members, Rotarians, can do in order to entice people to join and remain long-term members.

To begin, Lake City Rotary Club members, referred to as Rotarians, should understand why people volunteer and determine ways to entice those people to join. The proposal contains recommendations on volunteer incentives and ways to keep the club vibrant in order to have a growing

membership. After membership has been established focus can be placed on retaining the membership by providing creating lasting relationships, providing new opportunities, and having good communication with all members.

Providing the vast amount ways to recruit and retain members will be most beneficial in a guide that be easily referenced and followed by any Lake City Rotarian. A membership guide will help with answering any questions Rotarians may have regarding membership, suggestions on how to recruit members, and a list to follow in order to properly retain members.

Recruitment

To be successful at membership recruitment a plan must be implemented by a membership committee. Lake City Rotary does not have a membership committee, but will need to create a strong group of members to serve on the committee in order to focus efforts of membership. The membership committee has multiple duties and responsibilities, but the majority of tasks are followed through by the

membership at large. The tasks of the membership committee include:

"Identifying, attracting, and retaining volunteers continues to be among the most difficult and time-consuming tasks faced by not-for-profit organizations" (Phillips & Phillips, 2010, p. 19).

- Creating a recruitment strategy to be followed out by all Rotarians.
- Conduct club assessments
- Distribute surveys and perform member interviews for feedback on the club.
- Set membership goals and track the progress.
- Develop a retention plan.
- Work with the public relations committee to promote membership recruitment.
- Address member issues.
- Contact potential members (also done by Rotarians).

Prior to creating a recruitment strategy, Rotarians ought to look at where volunteer motivation stems from and ways motivation can dwindle. The Rotary Club is shifting to have a wide range of members from all walks of life, as seen in current membership. Still, the majority of Rotarians are older adults within the community that are either business owners, retirees, or citizens at large.

Reaching the Market

- Distribute brochures and posters.
- Speak to other groups.
- Word of mouth.
- Continually send news information to local media.
- Update and maintain social media, like Facebook, with creative, interesting posts.
- Communicate and solicit those who would be a good fit.
- Play off of what the potential member's motivations are.
- Tell stories about personal Rotary experiences.
- Conduct small volunteer projects and one large yearly project so Rotary becomes known in the community.
- Talk to family, friends, clients, and co-workers about the benefits of being a Rotarian. They are the greatest prospects.

Finding Prospective Volunteers

Finding volunteers may seem like the most obvious part, but it is important to understand what type of volunteer is being sought. There Lake City Rotary Club has an even dispersion of men and women, but the ratio of adults to young adults tilts more

"In addition to their hearts and hands, new members can bring new ideas, leadership, and enthusiasm" (Tips and Tools, n.d., para. 2).

towards older adults. Older adults could potentially have more opportunities to attend meetings at the given times, which may be a reason for the larger demographic in the membership. Young adults may feel less motivation to volunteer as well, but that could also be a reason for older adults too. Both of these statements bring up two key points: meeting times and opportunities should be reviewed by Rotarians and the club needs to find ways to motivate people to volunteer. The Lake City Rotary Club should target young professionals, business adults, and retired persons who can benefit from helping the community while building connections and lasting friendships.

The target market has been established as young

professionals, adult professionals, and retired persons. How do Rotarians reach the target market?

Volunteers can be sought by many means, and some are more effective than others depending on the market. The following text provides detailed information on how the target market can be reached based upon analysis, research studies, Rotary International processes, and volunteer organization experts. The sidebar to the left of the page provides a quick reference list on the ways reach a specific market in order to boost membership and club appeal. Three different types of recruitment methods that have been used by other organizations with success are detailed below.

Warm body recruitment. According to Fritz (n.d.) the three ways to recruit volunteers include: warm body recruitment, targeted recruitment, and concentric circles recruitment (para. 1). Warm body recruitment should be done continually by all Rotarians. This type of recruitment includes distributing club brochures, speaking to groups, and word of mouth (Fritz, n.d., para. 2). Press releases and other forms of PR are more elaborate forms. It is important to keep a list of local media to easily reference for press releases or to propose a newsworthy story on Rotary (*Public Relations*, n.d.).

One of the most effective types of warm body recruitment is social media. Rotary International's guide on membership plans states that clubs should, "Take advantage of social media to raise awareness of your club in the community, attract members and resources, and keep members informed" (*Strengthening*, n.d., p. 8). The Lake City Rotary would only benefit by having a presence on social media sites like Facebook and Twitter. The club currently has a Facebook page that is maintained by a couple Rotarians, but in order to stay in people's mind and show that the club is continually active frequent posts, videos, and photos need to be posted. Twitter can be used to provide quick updates about volunteer opportunities or changes to the club that would appeal to the community.

Targeted recruitment. Rotarians should place a lot of effort of targeted recruitment. In the case of Lake City Rotary, the targeted recruitment refers to anyone within the selected target market that was previously outlined, but catering the plan to a specific part of the target market. This type of campaign

requires a plan that outlines ways to the needs of the club, how to communicate with them, and ways these people are motivated (Fritz, n.d., para. 4). Rotarian's should spend a significant amount of time on creating an elaborate plan to reach the target market.

This plan should include details on motivations of the market being solicited with ways to capitalize on those, membership details like fees and meeting times, a timeframe for the plan with clear goals, and an outline of who will be performing each task. Other details that could be included are club's vision, successes the club has had, and how they benefit the community. Have members identify prospective members bi-annually and approach those who have volunteered for Rotary events but have not become a member.

Concentric circles recruitment. The final type of recruitment is concentric circles recruitment. This method focuses on recruiting people who have volunteer for events the past and are not members, clients, friends, family, and alumni who may have more availability for the club (Fritz, n.d., para. 5). These people are already familiar with the organization and are connected; therefore, it is more likely recruiting them to join will be successful (Fritz, n.d., para. 6).

One of the most effective ways to communicate with people within this group is to speak to them personally. They are someone

who is known with Rotary and most likely

personally by the Rotarian speaking to them. Adding a personal touch and showing how Rotary has impacted the recruiter will help inspire them to join Rotary. Rotary International's guide on strengthening membership (n.d.) suggests considering nonmember volunteers who have participated in service projects, those who have indicated an interest in the club but have never acted on it, or former members (p. 12). Prior to approaching potential volunteers, a clear understanding of what type of people



"MEMBERS OFTEN LEAVE FOR A SHORT TIME
BUT WILL RETURN ONCE THEY ARE INVITED"

(Strengthening, n. d., p. 12)

are being recruited should be reached. The type of recruitment used determines the type of approach that should be used.

Attracting Prospective Members

Approaching potential members requires planning. Rotarians should develop a clear vision for the club, recruitment message, offer incentives, and emphasize the intangible rewards that can be obtained by joining Rotary.

Club Vision. The vision of the Lake City Rotary Club is service above self. Lake City Rotary, like all other Rotary Clubs follows the four way test of the things they think, say, or do. The four questions of the test are:

- Is it the truth?
- Is it fair to all concerned?
- Will it build good will and better friendships?
- Will it be beneficial to all concerned?

This vision needs to be shown throughout all communications with prospective members. It highlights the values of Rotarians, and should be at the forefront when showing others the positive impact the club can have their professional and personal life. A clear recruitment message can be made after the club vision has been determined.

Recruitment Message. The membership committee that will be composed of Rotarians will create the recruitment message to present to the rest of the Rotary. This message will have to be compelling in order to entice people to join. It should outline why Rotary is worthy of the volunteer's time. It must be short, simple, and direct while emphasizing the need for the volunteer and the good they can do (Fritz, n.d., para. 7). Rotary International (n.d.) provides some questions to consider when creating a clear message are:

- What is Rotary good at and how can it be capitalized upon?

- What should Lake City Rotary be known for?
- What are the short-term and long-term goals?
- How do the challenges and strengths of the club shape the priorities? (p. 11)

Key points to include in a recruitment message are how Rotary has a positive impact on one's community through service projects and the ability to establish business connections and friendship (*Strengthening*, n.d., p. 13). Incentive and rewards can be considered once a consensus has been reached on how the Rotary Club wants for a recruitment message.

Incentives. Through meetings and voting, Rotarians can decide different incentives that can be offered in order to attract prospective members to join. Some incentives include offering a free lunch for the first meeting, waiving the first quarter of dues, providing them with a gift such as a shirt, pen, or coffee mug. None of these incentives are monumental, with the average cost being around \$12, but they show that the Rotary values them. Other ways to join is to offer different meeting times and variety.

Incentives may also be good for current Rotarians in order to motivate them to solicit potential members. An incentive for current Rotarians could also be waiving dues for a quarter or providing them with a free lunch when they get a member to join. Another large incentive is recognition. Rotarians should be recognized through newsletters, social media, and in meetings for their hard work and dedication. Incentives are important in getting a potential member interested in the club, but rewards and motivations are what will help show them that the club has much more to offer.

Rewards & Motivations. Each person has their own self-perceived benefits and needs to be met in order to feel fulfilled with volunteering (Morrow-Howell, Hong, & Tang, 2009, p. 98; Phillips and Phillips, 2010, p. 13). Perceived benefits range from an improvement upon the personal life and career of the volunteer to being a benefit for their family and community (Morrow-Howell, Hong, & Tang, 2009, p. 96). The Rotary's membership will grow by trying to understand the motivators and perceived rewards for the target market and then using those key motivations to their advantage.

Helping the community improve, the feeling of satisfaction from completing a project, and other intangible rewards are some of the greatest motivators for volunteers. Showing someone how they are impacting the community is a substantial motivator for volunteers. From the studies outlined in the research paper on this topic the intangible motivations of volunteers became clear.

Morrow-Howell et. al. (2009) conducted a study on 401 volunteers 51 or older from 13 different volunteer programs to understand the benefits and rewards of volunteering (p. 93). Out of the many perceived benefits of volunteering, contributions to others and the community were most widely reported by those surveyed (p. 98). The volunteers in the study perceived that their work was making a difference in the lives of others (Morrow-Howell et. al., 2009, p. 98). Eighty-six percent of the participants in the study recalled a benefit to the community that resulted from their volunteer work (Morrow-Howell et. al., 2009, p. 96). Appendix I shows the various perceived benefits to the community that volunteers in this study found to be rewarding.

Rotarians should focus on showing their impact to the community through media releases, word of mouth, and by being active. As a goal, Rotarians should find at least two humanitarian projects every quarter to perform as group or by representing the Rotary as an individual. Some examples of service projects would be helping stock food at the food shelf, landscaping unattractive areas in town, reading to children, visiting residents at the nursing home, or decorating the town for Christmas. Many of these are simple projects that do not take a lot of time, but have a positive impact. Brainstorming and determining one large project each year would also help the Rotary become known throughout the community while also attracting volunteers who want to make a difference. A while ago, Rotarians paid for and placed benches throughout town, on walking paths and in parks, for people to relax and enjoy the scenery. Projects like this show the Rotary wants to make the community the best it can be.

Tangible rewards also help motivate volunteers. Interestingly enough, volunteers do not prefer extravagant rewards, but instead smaller rewards that show they are being thought of. A study conducted

by Phillips and Phillips (2010) on 294 Meals on Wheels volunteers outlines the perceived values of tangible and intangible rewards (p. 17). Receiving a thank you or a minimal tangible reward like a cookie showed little difference (Phillips & Phillips, 2010, p. 16). Phillips and Phillips (2010) also suggest that not-for-profits may be able to create perceived value associated with rewards by communicating the reward's symbolic message to volunteers so that they associate that reward with being valued by the organization (p. 18). Appendix III illustrates the results of the study through a cluster and indicates how volunteers value different types of rewards. Results from the study also revealed that, "Few do so to receive a tangible reward. Some volunteers may actually be less likely to give their time if they perceive that they are being paid or otherwise compensated for their efforts." (Phillips & Phillips, 2010, p. 18).

Rewards and motivators for the Lake City Rotary Club will vary by event and situation, but some are highlighted below.

- Offer snacks and water at volunteer functions especially if they are held over dinner periods.
- Provide recognition to new members and current members through social media and meetings.
- Show the ways in which Rotarians are helping the community by conducting follow up on projects and analyzing the impacts.
- Provide educational opportunities through guest speakers and workshops.

Finding volunteers to become members is going to make Lake City Rotary Club strong, but in order to have a sustainable club Rotarians need to work at retaining those members.

Retention

Once volunteers have been recruited, it is crucial for the organization to develop ways to retain those members in order to be successful. Retaining members can prove to be just as difficult as

recruiting them. Importance must be placed on maintaining momentum so that volunteers do not become bored and dissatisfied with the organization. In order to keep members driven and a high level of excitement within the organization, Berry (2012) suggests having a strong group of decision makers to keep the group moving forward, which can be in the form of a strong board or committee (p. 12). The Rotary's membership committee will be responsible for creating a membership retention plan and Rotarians will be responsible for following through with the plan and discussing any adjustments that need to be made. The plan should include ways to engage club members, how to involve new members, ways to acknowledge members, and how to communicate with members on a regular basis.

"Strong membership enables your club to do good in your local community and around the world. A strong membership also raises the public's awareness of Rotary"
(*Strengthening*, n.d., p. 4).

Engaging Club Members

One of the hardest parts of being a Rotarian is trying to attend the weekly meetings. This is something that members may not realize upon joining, and it forces them to leave Rotary. These meetings are held over the lunch hour, so anyone who works out of town but resides in Lake City is unable to attend. Lake City Rotary should do a trial of different meeting times. A suggestion is to have the meetings on the first and third Monday of the month at noon, the second Monday of the month would have a meeting in the evening, and the fourth week of the Month would have a designated time set up for doing a community service project. This will help keep interested and involved, while fulfilling one of their biggest motivations which is to help the community.

Having volunteer activities and speakers that appeal to different people will help keep club members engaged. Volunteers should be provided with a variety of volunteer options, different times to help, a learning experience, and socializing opportunities (Fritz, n.d., para. 9-17; Scott, 2014, para. 4-5;

McCray, 2011, para. 5). This shows a volunteer that the service is not always the focal point and Rotary is thinking about the interests and benefits of the volunteer as well. Community service projects need to be inspiring and enjoyable that addresses a current need in the community (*Strengthening*, n.d., p. 9).

Lake City Rotary Club currently holds two fundraising events, The Circle of Life 5K/10K/Half Marathon in the summer and a wine, beer, and appetizer tasting in the fall. Both events are highly successful with Rotarians helping with all aspects of the events. Proceeds from these events go towards multiple organizations chosen by membership. This year, Rotarians selected the Lake City Food Shelf, Lake City Education Foundation, Wabasha County Humane Society, and hosted a foreign exchange student. These events are the focus of Lake City Rotary and showcase the efforts to improve the community.

For Rotarians, the humanitarian side of membership is missing. These events bring in money to give to groups, but the Rotary is not personally doing any manual labor or project to improve the community. That feeling of helping the community, one of the biggest motivators for volunteers, is lacking. In order to keep members engaged, Rotary must keep them motivated and involved through the fundraising projects, by serving on committees, finding speaker for weekly meetings, and by doing service projects that have a direct impact on the community.

New Member Involvement

For member retention to be successful, Rotarians should immediately get them involved. The article *Member Retention* (n.d.) from the Kiwanis website states, “New members join because they want to belong to something meaningful—and they want to know that their involvement is important” (para. 2). A new member can become involved by joining a committee, attending club meetings, participating in district projects, and partaking in the club’s service projects (*Strengthening*, n.d., p. 17).

It is proposed that Lake City Rotary should begin implementing a mentor program for new members that will help them understand ways they can be involved while developing a relationship with

an existing member. A mentor will help keep member active and make them feel like they are a valuable part of Rotary. Mentors can answer questions, be a familiar face, and connect new members with different opportunities available (*Member retention*, n.d., para. 2).

New member orientation is another program Rotary should implement as well as hosting an induction ceremony. Welcoming new members with an orientation should occur within the first two weeks of membership (*Member retention*, n.d., para. 3). The new members will be able to learn more about the club and the where they would be able to utilize their talents (*Member retention*, n.d., para. 3.) Finally, new members should have an induction ceremony (*Member retention*, n.d., para. 4). This is important for Rotary and the new member, so it should be a special occasion. New member recognition is important and it is equally important to acknowledge members throughout the entire span of their membership.

Acknowledging Members

It is important to acknowledge members for their service, after all, they are volunteers. Ways to acknowledge members include:

- Recognizing years of service and other milestones.
- Acknowledging birthdays and work promotions.
- Provide incentives for recruiting members.
- Include photos of members doing service projects on social media and in press releases.
- Talking about achievements in meetings.

Acknowledging members will help them feel like a valuable member of Rotary. Much like acknowledgement, communication also helps members feel valued.

Communicating with Members

Communication is one of the most important aspects of member retention.

Members should be kept informed and up-to-date on information. To keep communication running smoothly, Lake City Rotary should

"REGULAR COMMUNICATION IS
MOTIVATING FOR VOLUNTEERS, WHILE THE
LACK OF IT IS ONE OF THE CHIEF REASONS
VOLUNTEERS BECOME DISSATISFIED"

(Fritz, n.d., para. 12)

have a section on their agenda each week for upcoming events and district news. It would also be beneficial to assess the goals of the club every month at a meeting so everyone is current with the goals and adjustments can be made to them as necessary. Feedback is an important part of the communication process. Member feedback will help ensure the club is doing a good job and keeping members satisfied.

Asking for Feedback

New members and current members should constantly be asked for feedback. Feedback will help ensure the club is on the right track and that member satisfaction is high. Face-to-face interviews, written or electronic surveys, informal discussions, and focus groups are all ways to acquire feedback from members (*Strengthening*, n.d., p. 5). Feedback in the form of a survey should be conducted yearly with members to see what changes they would like to see in the club for the following year. Focus groups and informal discussion can occur more frequently and after special events to analyze how the event went. Some questions to be sure to ask members include:

- What do you enjoy most about Rotary?
- What is Rotary's greatest strength?
- What is something you would change about Rotary? Why?
- Are you satisfied with your membership? Explain.
- Do you feel that events and meetings are held at times when you can attend?
- Do you know Lake City Rotary's purpose?

- How do you feel Rotary has impacted the community?
- How do you feel Rotary could improve?

Conclusion

There are necessary changes Lake City Rotary needs to make in order to produce a larger membership. Those changes are outlined in the above proposal and being with creating a membership committee. From that point, Rotarians need to be committed to following through with the action plan and understanding who they are recruiting so they can appeal to them. Ultimately, Rotarians should be truthful and tell others about how Rotary has impacted them. People volunteer because they want to make a difference and feel good about themselves; therefore, if members show how Rotary has benefited them, people will be more apt to join. Dedication, flexibility, communication, and enthusiasm are all needed for Lake City Rotary to produce a successful organization with a long-standing membership.

Appendix A

Benefits to community from the survey of 401 volunteers conducted by Morrow-Howell et. al. (2009)
on perceived volunteer benefits.

Benefits to Community	Frequency (%)
Community is better off because the clients served are better off.	168 (41.9)
Community conditions are improved, safer, or cleaner.	30 (7.5)
There are higher levels of awareness about community issues.	21 (5.2)
There is increased intergenerational understanding in the community.	13 (3.2)
The community has more productive citizens.	9 (2.2)
There are higher levels of volunteering in the community.	8 (2.0)

Appendix B

Cluster analysis from Phillips and Phillips (2010) study of 294 Meals on Wheels volunteers regarding
volunteer rewards.

Cluster	Items
Intangibles (5.8)	Feeling of satisfaction Using skills to help others Making community a better place Developing relationships with people served
Thanks (3.9)	Thank you from NPO Thank you from people being served Meeting people being served
Organization Specific Tangibles (3.7)	Free Cookie Snack Table Prize (prepaid fuel card)
Miscellaneous Tangibles (2.9)	Certificate of appreciation Service pin Party with volunteers and staff Board of directors appointment Training new volunteers Newsletter publicity Appreciation lunch Promotion to leadership of volunteers Volunteer of the month Volunteer of the year Meet celebrities Media publicity Free t-shirt Wall plaque Free basic medical services Speaking at recognition dinner

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