

2007 EDITION

AMERICAN
QUARTER
HORSE
ASSOCIATION

AFFILIATE RESOURCE CENTER

Membership Development

AQHA Affiliate Toolkit

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Membership Development

- I. Membership Overview
 - A. Membership Philosophy
 - B. Assessing Your Affiliate
 - C. Action
 - D. Effective Oversight
- II. Retention
 - A. Overview
 - B. Tips for Retention
- III. Recruitment
 - A. Creating a Recruitment Plan
 - B. Recruitment Ideas

Section I

Membership Overview

A. Membership Philosophy

Imagine if your affiliate were to lose 10 percent of its members. What affect would that have on your association? Members are the heart of your association. Without them there is no reason for existence. Yet many associations devote very little time to actually developing their membership. Why then, when members are so important, would any group not concentrate on membership growth? One main reason would be they don't have a plan. Maybe they don't know how to build a plan or even worse, they simply don't place membership growth as a priority. Let's face it, most affiliates are centered on competition (be it racing or showing). Why would you want to recruit people to join your association when they pose a competition threat? Perhaps the affiliate or individual with this thought should consider what will happen when they don't have any one else to compete against.

If your affiliate believes in the words printed in their mission statement, then there should be a major focus toward membership development. Think about the professional expertise you could add to your affiliate and all the new ideas and projects that could be initiated by additional people taking on leadership and committee roles. Even if a member does not aspire to hold a leadership role they should be treated as a valuable contributor to the success of your affiliate and the horse industry.

Without a constant emphasis on membership development, AQHA Affiliates and AQHA cannot hope to keep pace with the growing need for service or to remain relevant to the needs and interest of the horse industry. Membership in your affiliate must provide value for the club members' money, time, energy and thoughts.

As important as it is, membership development is not a stand alone indicator of an effective affiliate. When combined with a solid foundation, membership growth is one piece of the overall picture necessary for a sustained level of performance.



B. Assessing Your Affiliate

There are a ton of methods and tools that can be used for assessing your affiliate. The important thing is to use a system that meets your specific needs and helps you identify opportunities to make yourselves more relevant to your members. Any system is only as good as its result. Once your assessment is completed and the results are compiled, ensure that action is taken. A well developed action plan that includes goals, target completion dates and identifies those responsible will help keep your affiliate focused on the larger objective of membership growth.

In this particular assessment, the purpose is to learn who your members are, what their needs are, and what they expect from you. This can be accomplished through a formal member survey and by instilling an environment where members feel their input is welcome. For some reason it is so easy for a board of directors to get closed off from the membership. It is your job to ask the members for input – you can't expect them to attend every board meeting and offer their opinion on agenda items.

AQHA can assist with formal surveys but to give you an idea of the type of information you might collect there is a template member satisfaction questionnaire at the back of this toolkit (Exhibit #). There is also a member inventory document that will provide insight on your current membership situation.

C. Action (Planning and Implementation)

The down fall of a well intentioned effort starts at the beginning. People by nature are impatient. An “I want results now!” approach may get you out of the blocks in a hurry but the momentum stalls when people feel misguided or lost. Take the time in the beginning to develop a plan of attack. Now don’t freak out. I realize the p-l-a-n word is about as well received as the m-e-e-t-i-n-g word, but it doesn’t have to be so overwhelming. Here are some tips on how to conquer your fear of ‘the plan’.

1. Find Your Quarterback – Any project or plan needs the right person leading the way. You need a person that can pull the best from the team and guide the project through a multitude of distractions. In cases, you may be the quarterback. In this instance, lead by example.
2. Pick Your Fantasy Team – Surround yourself with the right people to get the job done. Just like in junior high, picking the most popular person does not always mean your side will win the game. You need a team with the right mix of attitude, skill, vision and dedication.
3. Carry A Big Stick – When you enter into battle (either preparation or implementation) there will be obstacles. As the quarterback it is your responsibility to direct your resources accordingly. There will be people who don’t support your plan and that is fine. You can still learn from your opponent. However, don’t be weak and let them determine your direction.
4. Don’t Jump Ship – Times will be rough. No way around it. If you want your team to stay focused you, as the quarterback, must remain true to the mission regardless of the tribulations. Nothing can destroy a plan quicker than having your leader bale of the boat.
5. Share Your Toys – We have to be practical and realize that not every person needs to know everything. Nonetheless, communication is key to developing and implementing any plan. As the quarterback you will need the assistance and advice of many others for your plan to be successful. Don’t be a control freak.
6. Party Like A Rock Star – Plans equal work. All work and no play gets old in a hurry. In the early stages of your plan it is imperative to celebrate your successes. People want to be a part of something that is positive. The best form of motivation is to make a person feel good about their contribution, no matter how small. Positive breeds positive.

D. Effective Administration

Maintaining accurate affiliate membership records is a key activity of effective affiliate administration. Successful affiliate administration is vital to maintaining satisfied membership. If your affiliate offers interesting programs that are relevant to many members, more members will take an active role in the association's activities.

Here is an example of effective administration. You have just been asked to serve on the membership committee for your affiliate. You had heard the affiliate really did not listen much to members but you agreed to serve because the committee chairman is a close friend. During the first committee meeting there was a great deal of discussion about how the affiliate could attract more members. You were pleasantly surprised when the committee chair asked each person to go and discuss the ideas with five other affiliate members and bring the feedback to the next meeting. One of the issues discussed was how the affiliate took in memberships. Memberships were good on a calendar year basis with every membership ending on December 31 regardless of when it was purchased. When your committee gathered back up it was announced that over half of the members who had been asked their opinion on this matter felt it would make things much more user friendly if the membership ran for a full year regardless of purchase date. After more committee discussion a more seasoned veteran volunteer informed the group the affiliate has always done it that way because it is easier to administer. Did we not just say earlier in this toolkit that members are the heart of the association? Nothing about this process is based on cost savings but rather the fact it is simpler for the affiliate. Truth be told it is simpler for whoever keeps track of the memberships. Long story shorter...the committee recommended a change in the process and the board adopted it. Now, did this one change create an influx of new members? Most likely not; however, the current members are now better served and thus are more satisfied with their affiliate membership.

Membership development is a process. One small tweak may not be the saving grace but that one small tweak might just be the kick start to future growth.

Section II

Retention

A. Overview

Retaining members is as critical to your affiliates' long-term success and health as the influx of new members. Retaining current members, while building your membership through recruiting is more productive and effective than continually replacing members lost to attrition. Additionally, your recruitment efforts will be more effective if your affiliate has a large number of experienced and informed members in its ranks.

The first three years you have a new member plays an important factor in retaining that member for years to come. Because people who are committed to and involved in the affiliate are more likely to maintain their membership, involving members in the affiliate is a successful retention tool – and one that should be used early in their membership. Involve them in projects, appoint them to committees and consider them for future leadership roles in the affiliate.

B. Tips For Retention

1. Inform – Get information out to prospective members. If you sit back and think they will find you, they won't. Where are your prospective members? Advertise in newsletters or publications that are well received by your target audience. Get involved in your state/district/county 4-H horse programs. Put up flyers at all types of horse activities like horse fairs, county fairs, open shows, etc.
2. Invite – There are lots of horse enthusiasts out there who are not currently participating in your programs. A personal invite will go a long way to bringing new people to your affiliate. Sometimes a person just does not feel wanted or welcome and a personal conversation can help break those barriers. It is the duty of every member to invite new people to join the affiliate. This might be tough since you are basically recruiting potential competitors but if you don't strive to bring in new people you will soon be competing against yourself.

3. Orient – As leaders within the affiliate it is your responsibility to ensure new members receive a proper orientation about your association. For starters a packet should be provided that at least includes the following:
 - Welcome letter
 - Membership card
 - Affiliate newsletter – contains leadership contacts and calendar of events

4. Welcome – There are numerous methods, some formal and some informal, to welcome new members. The key is to be consistent and timely; however, the important thing is to make sure it happens. Some ideas are:
 - Listing in newsletter
 - Listing on web site
 - Recognizing all new members at annual convention – special nametags, stand up at meetings, etc.
 - Provide list of new members to the board and have them personally welcome at events, etc.

5. Educate – Associations, by nature, can appear closed off to the new comer. Members need to understand the processes of the affiliate so they can determine their level of involvement (i.e. volunteer, committee member, board member, etc.).

6. Involve – There is an entire toolkit devoted to volunteers. The exact same information applies to ideas for member retention.

7. Efficient Processing – Processing of new members should only take days, not weeks or months. If you are having difficulty getting member packets sent out it is recommended to have this remedied before making any major push for new members. Start them off on the wrong foot and you are in an uphill battle to keep them.

8. Timely Renewals – People are human and often can be guilty of procrastination. If you can afford to do so, it is recommended you provide at least three different renewal reminders. Reminders at 60 and 30 days prior and on the ending date

of their membership will help increase member retention. Be sure these reminders include the benefits of membership and promote upcoming events or programs they don't want to miss. You can also utilize incentives or sweepstakes to encourage renewal.

9. Mentors – Assigning a mentor to a new members actually provides two benefits to the affiliate. First, all new members will feel more at ease by having a person they can go to with questions. In addition, this is a great way to get your current members involved in the affiliate. A piece of advice – don't always go to your board members first. There are other members who can be tapped for these types of project.

Section III

Recruitment

A. Creating a Recruitment Plan

Here comes that p-l-a-n word again. Don't be frightened, just work the steps. When writing your growth plan you will begin by determining your recruitment targets – who you want to target and then evaluate past recruitment practices to determine which strategies will best enable your affiliate to achieve its new member goal. Next you should identify the resources necessary for each recruitment program, and finally you should specify a timeline for the completion of each component of the recruitment program.

- Step 1: Identify Recruitment Targets and Strategies – Targets can be broken up into a variety of segments. For example: age, skill level (open, amateur), owner, non-owner, trainer, jockey, fan, breeder, 4-H, open shower. You will need to identify the specific strategies you feel will best suit recruitment.
- Step 2: Developing a Timeline – Your timeline will depend on the strategy. For example: you determine racing fans are a target market. You would need to plan some sort of function at the races to encourage interest in your affiliate. Your timeline would be determined by the racing calendar at the track(s). The purpose of the timeline is to keep the project on task and all your leaders informed.
- Step 3: Identifying Resources – These could be as varied as a promotional brochure or an invited speaker. Need resources are dependent upon the particular strategy you have chosen.

It is highly suggested to look at past efforts and capitalize on the parts that worked and either revamp or avoid those areas that did not. Often times, a missed opportunity can be approached in a different fashion and can get different results.

Remember it will take three to six attempts before a target member pays serious attention to your affiliate. It is unrealistic to think you can attend an open show one weekend and walk away with a ton of new members. Those prospects will need to see/hear from you on a consistent basis if you expect to draw them into your affiliate.

B. Recruitment Ideas

Approaching prospective members can be done by using various methods. The number one factor for successful recruitment is having a product/service that the prospect desires. If you don't offer what they want then you probably should not spend your time and money trying to convince them to join.

Because involvement in the horse industry requires a certain amount of investment, your recruiting procedures will be different than other member oriented associations. For example, the Rotary Club could enter into a membership drive and target local business owners as prospective members. While your affiliate could try that approach it probably would not net a great return. The point is that an appropriate target audience is crucial for any prospecting effort and your existing members will be a great tool for identifying new members.

Here are some ideas that might help your affiliate identify viable prospects.

- Make it a point of honor to recruit a new member. Recognize the person in your affiliate responsible for that recruit.
- Have five affiliate members join together with the goal of recruiting one new member.
- Have your affiliate president ask three members to propose one new member each. After one of those three proposes a member, have the president make the same request of another affiliate member so the affiliate has three members always working on a personal pledge to the president.
- Ask each member to submit three potential member names to the board.
- Remind affiliate members to share their 'story' of horse involvement with prospective members.
- Conduct American Quarter Horse 'tail-gait' parties at various equine events.