

# Membership Recruitment Ideas

*Provided by Marcia Wheatley, 2010-11 National Membership Committee Vice Chairman*

Whether or not you believe that you as an individual can make a difference, imagine what almost one million Auxiliary members, who are committed to helping veterans and the community, can do when we work together. Keep the spirit alive and talk about this great organization. If you publicize your goals and accomplishments, they will come.

Let's make this organization even stronger by recruiting/engaging/retaining members. Remember, membership is everyone's job, not just the membership chairman's. We should all be enthusiastic when talking about the Auxiliary and its great programs. You never know when someone might be listening from the far side of the room. Remember TEAMwork – Together Everyone Achieves More. Here are some recruitment/engagement/retention ideas for you to try:

- ❖ Know your competition. Ask members why they belong to the VFW or other veteran service organizations and then explain why they need to belong to the American Legion Auxiliary as well.
- ❖ One of the most critical aspects of any membership program is new member orientation. Do you remember how overwhelmed you felt when you first started trying to figure out how it all fits together? New members need to know that their unit is active and interested in them. Make new members feel welcome. A "Welcome" letter should be sent to let the new member know that her membership is appreciated. Provide her with local contacts if she is new in the area and notify her of upcoming activities at the unit, district and department levels. Add new member names to your mailing list so that they will receive regular unit publications. Match each new member with a mentor.
- ❖ Create a packet of information for new members highlighting unit activities and introducing your officers and committees. Include with your welcome letter items such as a list of committees and chairmen, a calendar of events and volunteer opportunities, a recent newsletter, and facts about the Auxiliary.
- ❖ Hold a "Get to know your local Unit" meeting once each year so that members and interested parties can meet officers and other volunteers and see what the unit is all about.
- ❖ Hold a membership "sale" for renewals and new members where dues are a dollar or two cheaper. Ask The Legion to cosponsor a "two for one" sale. Sign up the Legion member and Auxiliary member for, say, \$4 less than the full cost of separately paid memberships. Both groups get a new member and the new members get a break in price. Challenge the top recruiter of your post to sign up Auxiliary members with each new Legion member.
- ❖ Take the first five minutes of every meeting to have the audience introduce themselves to someone they have not met.
- ❖ Most Department headquarters have blank renewal forms you can order to send from your unit. One side of the form reads "Dear Auxiliary member, it is time to renew your membership in the American Legion Auxiliary for another year. Whether or not you have taken part in the activities of your local unit, you have by your enrollment and payment of dues contributed to the achievement of the Auxiliary during the past year. Renew NOW that together we may build a stronger America and give aid and comfort to those in need who served and are serving that we might continue to enjoy the blessings of Freedom."
- ❖ Nurture the needs of the younger members in the unit (i.e. if possible offer child care so your members can attend a meeting). If you have a junior unit, perhaps they can provide the childcare.
- ❖ District Presidents – why not sponsor a day on the phone for all units. Hold a competition to see which unit can bring in the highest percentage of membership for a Saturday afternoon or within a two-week period, for example. Give a prize to the top Unit President and Membership Chairman.
- ❖ If you haven't approached the Legionnaires at your post about signing up the women in their lives, do so today. Remind the legionnaires that we are there when they need letters written, cakes, baked, items made for the VA centers and many other activities, so now is the time for them to help us.
- ❖ Take your membership roster and divide the list of non-renewals among several people of the unit. Make a personal phone call to those members that have not renewed. Take some time to speak with them and see how they are doing. Be sure to invite them to your next meeting. (They may not even know when that is.) If necessary, offer to stop by their house to pick up the check for the renewal. Drop off a membership application and ask the member to pass the application on to a family member or friend.
- ❖ Invest in a booth at the mall, county fair, and other locations. Develop road shows where selected unit speakers and materials are presented to other organizations – a good way to solicit membership.
- ❖ When speaking with a member, inquire if there is any other member of their family who is not currently a member of the Auxiliary.
- ❖ Include membership literature with all non-member speaker gifts. Consider a gift membership for appropriate speakers.
- ❖ Offer to pay membership dues each year for the person who sponsors the most new members. Develop membership recruitment contests in which all members can participate.
- ❖ Conduct a full member survey. Find out what your members think and need. Survey non-renewing members to find out why they don't renew.
- ❖ Hold an annual kick-off meeting in September to share successes of the prior year and plans for the upcoming year.
- ❖ Maintain an open door policy. Encourage members to call you with their concerns.
- ❖ Price social events higher for non-members.

- ❖ Solicit a “bigwig” in your company to be a supporter of the Auxiliary and use her/his influence to promote your activities and membership. Always carry Auxiliary, Legion and SAL applications and information packets with you.
- ❖ Have designated “greeters” at every meeting, outgoing people who have volunteered to chat with people as they arrive. Take the first five minutes of each meeting to have the audience introduce themselves to someone they have not met.
- ❖ Make an effort to talk about the Auxiliary at least once a day..... Evangelize!
- ❖ Wear your Auxiliary pins, not just on meeting days.
- ❖ Send members and prospects a year in review document every July highlighting all accomplishments and benefits.
- ❖ Conduct member blitz days during which officers make “How are you doing and what can the unit do for you?” calls.
- ❖ Send to member a “Don’t miss out” flyer describing upcoming member only benefits at dues bill time.
- ❖ Use your newsletter to print the questions and answers most asked by your members.
- ❖ Find your most contented member and ask her what she enjoys most about the Auxiliary. Then use those ideas in your recruitment campaign to answer the questions “Why should I join the American Legion Auxiliary?” Solicit quotes from satisfied and enthusiastic members to use in a brochure or newsletter.
- ❖ Offer a series of special meetings limited to members only and feature a significant speaker.
- ❖ Recognize your volunteers through recognition, awards and newsletter features. Implement a peer recognition program. Ask the President to recognize outstanding service.
- ❖ Contact all members at least once a year for something other than money or dues.
- ❖ Hold an annual leadership training session for your officers and committee chairmen.
- ❖ Use your enthusiasm as you approach new members. Use the newspaper, newsletter, flyers and other publications and the Internet to kick off a renewed membership drive.
- ❖ Hold a membership sale during the months of February and/or March. Anyone that signs up during those months receives a discount in price.
- ❖ Use members’ areas of expertise by using them as speakers. If you have a member of your unit who works for Congress, invite them to speak on how the legislative branch works or better yet, get them to invite their boss!
- ❖ Give early bird renewals one raffle ticket for each month they renew before January. In December, hold a drawing and the winner gets a prize.
- ❖ Put early bird renewals names in a hat. Draw one at a dance or other event; the winner gets her membership paid for the following membership year.
- ❖ When a junior member converts to a senior membership, pay their dues for the first year. This will help retain members as they convert.
- ❖ Send letters to the members of the Legion offering an easy gift for loved ones – Auxiliary membership. Explain the benefits of membership and offer to deliver the membership card with a note explaining the gift.
- ❖ For those units located near a military installation, why not bake cookies and visit the NCO club. You might pick up a member or two. And if not today, they will certainly remember your kindness later.
- ❖ Each unit has some wonderful stories of activities/programs that have helped the unit’s community of veterans, children and others. Publicize your activities and put a note in the news release that unit #000 is accepting membership applications and how to apply. Place notes of meetings everywhere, both in the community (newspaper, grocery stores, etc.) and at your place of work. Get to know someone in the local media and tell them about the Auxiliary and its activities.
- ❖ Since active service personnel are not paid so well, how about offering them a discounted price to join? Then once they leave the military, they can pay full price. You might want to charge them just the amount necessary to send to Department.
- ❖ Give a raffle ticket, free dinner, discount to the lake or other gift idea to each person (Auxiliary, Legion or SAL) who recruits a new member.
- ❖ Hold a prospect party: Set membership objectives – 25 names brought in for the prospect party will usually yield about 5 new members. Develop a list of awards you can use to persuade members to bring more prospects. Set a date and a place – Make sure the date does not conflict with any major events. Announce the event – through written communications and word of mouth at meetings or at social gatherings. Arrange for the distribution of brochures, pens, pencils, name tags, etc. Make phone calls five days prior and on the day of the event. The most important aspect of the Prospect Party is the follow-up. A person may be interested in joining, but was never contacted or shown personal interest. Keep a list of all attendees, and even if they do not sound interested in joining, invite them along. You may make a new member out of them over time.
- ❖ Did you know that renewal notices are not sent to Juniors? Each unit should develop, or work with their Department to develop, their own renewal form.

Why do members leave and not renew? Members leave because they are not involved/engaged, not aware, not educated about the unit’s mission, goals and activities; and/or they are excluded from decision-making. Retain those new members by making them feel welcome, providing meaningful opportunities to contribute, involving them in decision making, using their skills and talents and by valuing their contributions.

Your passionate belief in yourself and your abilities can make the difference right now. Communicate your enthusiasm for the Auxiliary and its programs—and people will pay attention. Remember to be your most persistent self and you might just get what you want.