

7 steps to enhance membership retention

1. Start on day one

The time to try to keep a member is not when he or she has “one foot out the door,” but rather when they walk in the door; start retention efforts the minute that a member is invited to join.

2. Monitor reasons for attrition

Try to find out why members are leaving the council by conducting exit interviews. Life issues and planning council process account for the majority of people leaving the council. Also, the time commitment is a reason some leave the council if they are not as involved or feel ignored, uninformed, and isolated.

3. Disperse responsibility among members

Involving members in the operations of the council is a successful retention tool. When new members join, appoint them to a committee.

4. Make fellowship a reality for everyone

Rotate seating assignments to break up exclusive groups and rotate or establish a meeting greeter.

5. Make sure all members stay well informed

Send out email correspondence or monthly newsletters so everyone knows about upcoming meetings, deadlines, and other events.

6. Keep track of members that move on

Conduct exit interviews with departing members to learn from their experiences and keep them in the loop about key developments.

7. Invigorate your programs or activities

Have programs and speakers that vary and are interesting to the overall membership and not just geared to a certain segment of the membership.

10 **steps** to build planning council membership

1. **Invite** colleagues to meetings as potential members.
2. Organize a **member recruitment program** guided by a plan of action.
3. Arm all council members with the information and tools they need to be recruiters and initiate a **membership development** day.
4. Build a reputation as a group that **starts and ends meetings on time** and plans significant, meaningful **agendas that can be accomplished** in the allotted time.
5. Develop a document or presentation that illustrates to prospective members the outcomes of the council's previous work and explain its **contributions to HIV care** in your community.
6. Show a **genuine interest** in prospective members and determine **what information they need** to make a decision about joining.
7. Develop a **council web site** that explains mission, accomplishments, operations, and membership requirements and responsibilities.
8. Submit information about planning council accomplishments and membership needs to local **newspapers, electronic media, and relevant listserves**.
9. Develop a **planning council business card** to hand out at appropriate functions.
10. Wear **"Ask me about being a planning council member" button** at functions and conferences with potential members.

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12 steps to retain planning council members

- ▶ Hold a **new member orientation** or special gathering at certain times of the year to recognize new members. Include a date for the function on a yearly calendar of events.
- ▶ Distribute **a questionnaire** to new members to gather information and ask for their bio and a photo. Recognize members in the monthly newsletter or website, or establish a small exhibit area at each meeting and feature one of the members.
- ▶ **Survey new members** after a designated period (3-6 months) to determine their level of satisfaction, any concerns, and additional support they might need.
- ▶ **Maintain a database** or directory of all members (an email directory is ideal) to contact members quickly and efficiently and keep them abreast of new developments.
- ▶ Send a **thank-you letter** to each member's organization acknowledging them for allowing their employee to be involved and highlighting the employee's activities and the benefits of the planning body to the community.
- ▶ Conduct **an exit interview** survey for memberships that lapse.
- ▶ **Place a call** to members who've missed several meetings, let them know they are missed, and bring them up-to-date.
- ▶ **Issue a yearly calendar** including meeting dates, trainings and other special events.
- ▶ **Create an unsung heroes award** to honor those who make valuable contributions to the council but are not usually recognized for their efforts.
- ▶ Ask for **member input and feedback** and respond to members' expressed needs and interests.
- ▶ **Honor longtime members** on the anniversary of their membership.
- ▶ **Assign a new member** to be greeter or introduce a guest speaker or program.

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20 Questions: Take A Look At Your Planning Council—Do You Like What You See?

- ▶ In order to recruit new planning council members, it's key to first make sure one's **"house is in order."** Looking at planning council operations as others will before they join will help the council recruit the new members it needs to be effective.
- ▶ Following are some questions to help review planning council operations. Be as objective as possible when answering them. Only by starting with the council's positive **"curb appeal"** do you have a real chance bringing new members onto the council.

Answer "yes" or "no" to the following questions.

1. Each meeting is **orderly and well conducted**?
2. A monthly **bulletin** is published and distributed to all members?
3. Regular, well-planned **trainings** are held frequently throughout the year?
4. The quality of training or workshop **speakers** is normally rated as **"excellent?"**
5. **All planning council members serve** on at least one or more **committees** during the year?
6. There is an **active community outreach committee** promoting the council in the community?
7. Visiting potential members are **warmly welcomed** and recognized at the council meetings?
8. The council has an **appropriate induction ceremony** or procedure when a new member is introduced and welcomed into the council?
9. New members receive **training** about council operations, the CARE Act, and the local HIV care network and are assigned a **mentor** for their first year?
10. The **executive committee** meets on a regular basis with a well-planned agenda?
11. The **meeting room** appears to be part of a well-run meeting, complete with appropriate equipment, materials, refreshments etc.?

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12. The **council attendance** at meetings consistently tops **60 percent** and gives recognition to those with **100 percent attendance**?
13. The **membership** is balanced and representative of all segments of the community?
14. Members are **surveyed annually** about council operations and suggestions for improvement?
15. The council **sets and meets appropriate deadlines**?
16. Members who show interest and commitment have the opportunity to **move into leadership roles**?
17. Members **thoughtfully consider** the needs of all people with HIV in the EMA and work together to **set priorities that meet those needs**?
18. Members and committees have the **support and information they need** to meet their responsibilities?
19. There is an active membership and **membership development committee**?
20. Overall participating in the planning council is **a rewarding experience**?

► How did your council score?

Count the number of yes and no answers. If you have more yes answers, then your planning council doesn't need much improvement, but if you have more no answers, then your planning council needs some work.

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21 reasons why members leave planning councils

Each year, 65 percent of membership loss on planning councils is for reasons over which the councils have no control:

- ▶ Life issues (work, illness, family, lack of time etc.)
- ▶ Deaths

That means, however, that 35 percent of membership loss is avoidable. These statistics, compiled from the 51 EMAs in 2002, highlight the fact that councils and consortia can improve retention by looking at the other reasons that members leave.

The following list highlights areas that need to be considered carefully to increase membership retention:

- ▶ Poor explanation about the planning council process
- ▶ Lack of commitment
- ▶ Lack of involvement
- ▶ Lack of awareness of CARE Act programs
- ▶ Lack of interest
- ▶ Included then not involved
- ▶ Formality and complexity of procedures
- ▶ Not enough interactive events
- ▶ Poor venue or food
- ▶ Lack of incentives
- ▶ Lack of well prepared meetings
- ▶ Cliques
- ▶ Change of circumstances
- ▶ Not looked after in terms of special needs
- ▶ Not looked after when in need
- ▶ Fed up with elitism
- ▶ Fed up with made up rules
- ▶ Cost
- ▶ Disclosure of HIV status
- ▶ Inconvenient meeting times
- ▶ Lack of information