

http://www.vcn.bc.ca/citizens-handbook/1_07_keepeople.html

Keeping People

People join community groups to meet people, to have fun, to learn new skills, to pursue an interest, and to link their lives to some higher purpose. They leave if they don't find what they are looking for. Citizens groups need to ask themselves more often: What benefits do we provide? At what cost to members? How can we increase the benefits and decrease the costs? Here are some ideas on where to begin.

Stay in touch with one another.

Regular contact is vital. Face to face is best. If you have to meet, getting together in someone's house is better than meeting in a hall.

Welcome newcomers.

Introduce them to members of your group. Consider appointing greeters for large meetings and events. Call new contacts to invite them to events, or to pass on information.

Help people find a place in the organization. The most appealing approach is to say, "Tell us the things you like to do and do well and we will find a way to use those talents." The next most appealing is to say: "Here are the jobs we have, but how you get them done is up to you."

Invite newcomers to assume leadership roles. If the same people run everything, newcomers feel excluded.

Pay attention to group process

Most volunteer groups do not give adequate attention to how they work together. Decision-making methods are not determined explicitly nor are roles, or healthy behaviours. Some groups make process a topic of discussion by appointing a process watcher.

Discuss the group contract

Set aside occasions when members describe what they expect of the group and what the group can expect of them in terms of time and responsibilities. This information should become part of your membership lists.

Act more, meet less

The great majority of people detest meetings; too many are the Black Death of community groups. By comparison, activities like tree-planting draw large numbers of people of all ages.

Keep time demands modest

Most people lead busy lives. Don't ask them to come to meetings if they don't need to be there. Keep expanding the number of active members to ensure everyone does a little, and no one does too much. Work out realistic time commitments for projects.

Do it in twos

Following a practice from Holland, we suggest working in pairs. It improves the quality of communication, makes work less lonely, and ensures tasks get done. Ethnically mixed pairs (such as English and Chinese) can maintain links to different cultures. Gender mixed pairs can take advantage of different ways men and women relate to one another.

Provide social time and activities

Endless work drives people away. Schedule social time at the beginning and end of meetings. Turn routine tasks into social events; for example, stuff envelopes while sharing pizza. Some groups form a social committee to plan parties, dinners, and trips.

Provide skills training

Many people step out of private life in order to learn something. Providing training, or weaving training into acting, is one of the best ways to get and keep people.