

## CHAPTER 15: INCREASING AND RETAINING YOUR GENERAL MEMBERSHIP

A strong affiliate needs at least a constant membership; it is preferable to have increasing membership in order to provide the organization with future leaders, a fresh supply of volunteers for public service projects, new faces to meet at social gatherings, new ideas, money from dues and people to promote the organization in the community. The target audience for potential members is essentially every qualified (by age or experience) young lawyer in the jurisdiction covered by the affiliate.

### A. Attracting New Members

#### 1. Forming a Membership Committee

A first step in attracting new members is forming a membership committee with a Chair, Vice-Chair and several members. In jurisdictions where there is a voluntary and mandatory bar or a voluntary bar alone, the primary goal of the Membership Committee of a voluntary bar is to increase the membership of the senior bar and of the young lawyers section (YLS), both in numbers of members and in numbers of active members. The membership goals of the senior bar and the YLS cannot be separated, because it is likely that the majority of new members will be YLS members. A secondary goal is to maintain a high profile for the Membership Committee in the senior bar and the YLS, so that membership will continue to be a high priority for the organization and resources will be actively used to increase membership on a continual basis.

For those jurisdictions which have only a mandatory bar, then the objective of the YLS will be primarily to attract volunteers for activities and to inspire present members into more activity.

#### 2. Understanding the Needs of Potential and Actual Members

Before the membership committee can launch its annual membership campaign, however, it needs to obtain a better understanding of its actual and potential membership. First, the committee should determine how many members the YLS has and how many of them are active, as determined by the number of hours put in, the number of projects they are involved with, etc. Next, determine identifiable groups of the bar population as prospective members, including: minorities, women, solo practitioners, in-house counsel, attorneys from big firms, rural practitioners, government attorneys, judges, public-service oriented young lawyers, those searching for social interaction, those searching for business contacts, and students and faculty at nearby law schools. Next, determine the percentage of your potential membership that each potential group constitutes.

At this point, you should conduct a needs assessment or draw upon the assessment conducted as part of your long range planning process. To figure out what each person wants out of a bar association/young lawyers group, your membership committee can conduct phone interviews, surveys, focus groups, project evaluations and informal discussion. Then you need to determine whether you are fulfilling the prospective members' ideas of what a bar association needs to do to attract them.

With this information collected, organized and analyzed, you will have a better focus on whom you want to attract and how to bring them into your organization.

### 3. Targeting New Admittees to the Bar

Your membership committee will probably not be able to target every group of potential new members, so you may want to select several for a special membership campaign and plan attractive events accordingly. While the primary source of new YLS members is new admittees to the bar, prospective members can be courted in advance by having the YLS maintain a high profile at local law schools so law students who later choose to practice in your geographic area will be familiar with the organization. This can be done by sponsoring seminars about practicing law in the area or holding a workshop on interviewing followed by a reception so the students can meet YLS members. Getting to know faculty members can provide access to students as potential members. You might also consider having a reception or dinner for summer associates who are working during the summer in your geographical area.

It is easy to promote a voluntary bar association by attending the bar swearing-in ceremonies of new admittees to the mandatory bar, to sponsor a coffee and donut reception, make a brief presentation about the YLS and sign up new members.

In areas where there is a mandatory and voluntary bar, membership information on voluntary bars can be sent to target groups of new admittees to the mandatory bar. The bar staff or membership committee staff can obtain lists of admittees in the relevant geographical area. In addition to new admittees, you can get lists of previous admittees who are not currently members of your young lawyers section. Also, names of new attorneys at major law firms in the jurisdiction may be obtained by calling the firm hiring administrator or hiring partner.

You can send new admittees and other lawyers new to the jurisdiction copies of an edition of the YLS newsletter with a “wrap” offering information regarding membership, committees and activities, including an invitation to the next YLS social event. These materials can also be sent to members of the senior bar for their assistance in distributing to potential young lawyer members within their firms. Postcards may be sent to current voluntary bar members, including senior bar members, offering free trial bar association membership to their colleagues by merely mailing a list of names or phoning in the information.

You may also want to develop a membership brochure that can be mailed to the target audience, distributed at law firms as part of a visitation, or made available at law schools or the bar admissions office. If you go to the trouble of writing and printing such a brochure, try not to use dated material so that it can be distributed during more than one bar year.

Additional groups can be targeted by your membership committee:

- \* Membership and promotional materials may be distributed to existing bar association members in various firms, encouraging them to pass the information on to colleagues who are not voluntary bar members.

- \* Membership materials may be placed at the mandatory bar admissions office, where forms for admission are sometimes picked up in person.
- \* You may try to sell your young lawyers group to large law firms by offering a special reduced rate group membership for a firm.

#### 4. Targeting of Other Groups

As listed above, other groups can be targeted besides young lawyers newly admitted to the bar. In addition to social events, programs, including CLE presentations or “Bridge the Gap” sessions, can be developed to target these potential members.

To target lawyers within specific types of entities, such as the government, law firms, or trade associations, the committee should first develop a contact list, working with a contact list committee. The list should include names of contact people in each government agency, large trade association, etc. The list can be utilized to communicate information about YLS activities and seek new, active members.

A reception can be held honoring a specific audience, *e.g.*, government attorneys, to attract them to the event. Work with the YLS social committee on planning such an event. You may want to co-sponsor events and projects with other community or bar organizations in order to raise the YLS profile within a different constituency. Be careful, however, not to be perceived as trying to raid the other organization of its active members in order to diversity and increase your own membership.

#### 5. Marketing Strategies

Be creative; be well-organized; be enthusiastic and be willing to try non-traditional methods of conducting a membership campaign. Don’t shy away from advertising/marketing techniques used by non-legal organizations. Attorneys with marketing experience or local advertising firms may be willing to help the YLS develop a brochure or other materials to promote the organization among potential new members.

Don’t forget that one of the best ways to publicize your group is through favorable news reports on your activities and programs.

##### B. Introducing New Members to the Current Young Lawyer Members

Once you have attracted new members, you need to retain them. Making them feel part of a group is an important first step.

##### 1. New Member Packet and New Member Event -

New members should be sent a welcoming packet consisting of membership certificate, committee description and sign-up sheet and fliers announcing upcoming events. A reception or

other social event should be held. Major law firms can be contacted to encourage their new attorneys to attend the event. Current members should be encouraged to personally invite their non-member colleagues.

Also prior to the event, you can give your officers and executive council members a list of approximately twenty potential new members to telephone. Each person contacted can be given a personal welcome to the YLS and encouraged to attend the event and/or join the YLS. This serves to make new members more comfortable by having had contact with at least one YLS member prior to attending an event.

At the event or reception, YLS officers, council members and committee chairs should circulate to meet potential new members and seek new talents for committee tasks. You can use a “card toss” at the sign-in table, where attendees put their business card into a cup naming a particular committee to show their interest in getting involved in that committee’s activities. An excellent way to attract and, ultimately, retain members is to get them involved in the organization and assign them something to do.

2. Other Follow-up Measures

- \* Each issue of the newsletter can publish the names of new members.
- \* Committee chairs should be given the names of interested new members and encouraged to assign them committee tasks.

3. “The Enforcer”

Some affiliates have experienced problems in getting new members active on committees. Even those new members who signed up to be on committees were never contacted by the committee chairs. To remedy this, a member of the membership committee can act as “the Enforcer” by contacting committee chairs to see whether they have followed up with those who have signed up for their committees. This should encourage participation of new members and enforce the follow-up required by committee chairs.

C. Retaining New Members

A primary goal of your young lawyers section will be to retain your current members while you are attracting new members, preferably ones who are interested in taking an active role in your organization. You should undertake an inventory of your projects and services and try to determine whether or not you are meeting the needs of your actual members. Use project evaluations and committee member evaluations to assist you in this.

A key to attracting new members and retaining current member interest is effective communication. An easy way to communicate is to publicize your successful events and committee activities. There are several methods available to publicize your events and committee activities.

## 1. Your YLS Newsletter

Your YLS newsletter is obviously one of the most important tools at your disposal to publicize the events of your young lawyers section and, thereby, insure that people will be excited and motivated about maintaining an active role in the organization. Your YLS newsletter is a great way of spreading the word about all of the exciting activities in which you are involved, as well as providing an opportunity to communicate with non-members who might not otherwise attend local or state bar meetings. It is a way to provide in-depth, feature articles on upcoming events, events that have already taken place or issues of general concern and interest to young lawyers.

Use the newsletter to recognize the activities and achievements of your members. Everybody loves to see their name and picture in print. Accordingly, the more pictures you take at your activities and print with captions of the individual's name, the more well-read and popular your newsletter will be. Be certain to note the names and law firms of the individuals participating. The listing of the law firm has become more and more important in helping to give a free plug to those law firms that support their young people's involvement in bar work.

The newsletter also provides a great opportunity to include a monthly calendar of events informing your members of everything from CLE seminars to sporting and social events. It can also be quite useful in giving your committee chairs some space to publicize their projects and seek volunteers for their future events. It also gives the members of the organization, even those who do not actively participate in YLD activities; some sense that they belong to an organization that has a strong presence in the community.

## 2. "Newsflash"

Because of the tremendous time involved in laying out articles, printing the newsletter and mailing it to members, it is unlikely that it can be used to promote events having a short lead time. A quicker and very effective means of communication to members is a monthly one-page sheet of announcements of upcoming events and activities of your young lawyer section sent first class mail. You may want to use it as a kind of bulletin board, with people relying on it for information on the YLS programs and activities.

## 3. Contact List

Another very effective method of communicating with young lawyers in a city is to establish a young lawyer contact person at each major law firm, corporation and government agency. This person serves as a conduit of information to young lawyers in the firm, company or agency about upcoming young lawyers events and projects. Once the contact person receives information from the young lawyers section, he/she can disseminate it by way of memoranda or telephone calls within his or her firm. Use of such a contact list can spread the word to young lawyers throughout a city in a matter of hours. It also encourages new members to attend events when they have a colleague from their firm to accompany them.

In addition to effective communication with members, you as Chair must go out of your way to recognize the achievements of your individual members in order to retain them as members. The newsletter is an excellent place to publicize an individual's accomplishments, but it need not end there. Letters to firms, especially senior partners, praising a member for his/her good work on a particular project or activity can be very helpful for the young lawyer as are articles placed in the local press. Recognition at bar gatherings whenever possible is greatly appreciated. In addition to publicity about a job well-done, a personal telephone call or letter from the Chair thanking a member for help on a project is recommended.