

Chapter 7: Membership

The membership chairperson (or “coordinator”) is responsible for maintaining a section’s membership records and keeping section leaders aware of new members, renewals, and correct addresses. The membership chairperson presents summary information (such as membership counts) to regular meetings of the executive committee and to the annual section meeting. In some sections, the membership chairperson also functions as treasurer. Both positions will find spreadsheets to be a useful tool.

The section as a whole, and especially its leadership, is responsible for retaining existing members and recruiting new ones. Each section assigns the relevant tasks in its own way; not even the strongest membership chairperson would be able to do all of this alone.

The following paragraphs describe the administrative tools available to the section membership chairperson, and offer advice for the complex task of keeping existing members in the fold, gaining new members, working with fellow section leaders, and using several communication media to reach section members, new and old.

Membership Assistance from the GMC Office

Your primary contacts at GMC headquarters will be the Membership and Volunteer Coordinator and the Membership Assistant.

Monthly Updates

GMC headquarters maintains a data base for processing member information including dues payments and donations. Once a month, the GMC Membership Assistant sends reports to section membership chairs and section treasurers. If there is no membership activity within a section during the previous month, the section does not receive a report.

Membership chairs receive information about new members, address changes, transfers from at-large or other sections, expired memberships, and renewals. Section treasurers receive the same information as well as a check for dues received during the previous month. Sections are entitled to 25% of dues from their respective renewals or new memberships and 100% of all contributions designated specifically for section use.

The membership chair will normally share new member information with the section president and newsletter editor. The president can initiate personal contact (telephone or e-mail) and the newsletter can present the new names to the general membership.

Membership Renewal Process

Each month, office staff and volunteers send “rolling” renewal notices to at-large and section members prior to the anniversary of their respective join dates. Second and final notices are later mailed to members who have not responded to previous notices. In January of each year, the

GMC Membership Coordinator works with officers to write or revise the renewal letters for each of the sections.

Members are dropped when they do not renew within the four months following their expiration date. The section Membership Coordinator might consider taking additional steps to retain members, such as writing informal notes or making telephone calls.

Transferring Members

At-large members and members of other sections are welcome to transfer to the section of their choice. Either the prospective member or a section officer can contact the GMC membership staff to request the transfer.

As confirmation, the transferred member receives a section membership card and a copy of the section's most recent newsletter or activity schedule from the GMC's main office. The section membership chairperson may wish to send an additional welcome note. The GMC notifies sections about membership transfers in its monthly reports. In most cases, unless the transfer takes place during the month when the member has joined or renewed, sections do not receive their share of the transferred member's dues until he or she renews.

Mailing Labels and Membership Lists

Mailing labels and membership lists are available from the GMC membership office at no cost. Respective requests should be made at least two weeks in advance. Include a mailing date and specify whether labels should be organized in alphabetical or ZIP code order. Membership lists can also be sent electronically. The club maintains all membership data in Raiser's Edge and can convert information into a variety of formats, including Word, Excel, and Microsoft Access.

Access to Mailing Lists of Other Sections and At-large Members

On June 3, 1995, the Board of Directors approved a policy regarding the internal distribution of mailing lists. Lists or labels are available at the discretion of the Executive Director. Approval is granted based on the following guidelines:

- Purpose. The mailing is an invitation to members beyond the section to help with a special project, to subscribe to a section newsletter, to attend a special event, or to consider the formation of a new section. Any requests for internal mailing lists with the intent to solicit new section members will be declined.
- Procedure. Submit a written request to the Executive Director. Where appropriate, prior approval should be obtained from the trail management committee, the fundraising committee, or affected section presidents. If approval is denied, the petitioner may appeal to the Executive Committee. The Executive Director may request reimbursement for mailing label costs.

The GMC New Member Welcome Packet

New Member Welcome Packet

Every new GMC member receives a welcome packet from the Green Mountain Club. Packets are prepared and mailed weekly by staff and volunteers.

The ***GMC Welcome Packet*** contains a membership card, a welcome letter signed by the Executive Director, a set of GMC bylaws, a current issue of the *Long Trail News*, a list of information about each of the sections, a summary of member benefits (see Appendix D), a logo sticker, a publications guide, and information about upcoming workshops and special events. For new *section* members the packet additionally contains a copy of the section's most current newsletter or activity schedule and (if so arranged by the section president) a welcome letter from the section.

Some sections send a separate welcome letter and may include the section bylaws, and even a token gift, such as a section patch.

Strategies for Recruiting and Retaining Members

While recruiting new members may be done in a carefully planned membership campaign (see below), it is mostly an ongoing job shared by section leaders as well as members. As one section leader points out, many new members are outings participants who see an activity advertised in the local news or through web listings such as maintained by GMC and other outdoors organizations. At their first outing, they talk to the trip leader and other members, and get a copy of the section newsletter or other club hand-outs. Hopefully they come back to the next outing. People like to help with trail work or participate in various trips. When you talk with current and potential members you may find that there are enough families, seniors, young adults, backpackers, peak baggers, canoers, bicyclers, or Sunday strollers in your area to merit scheduling trips specifically suited for them.

Trip leaders should obtain name and contact information for any nonmember participants. A section officer can then invite the participant to become a member.

If you launch on a section membership campaign, take time to think whom you are trying to reach. Many people (our at-large members) prefer to support the GMC and its goals financially, without being physically involved in the trips of a section. These may be reached by communication through public media, including newspapers, web sites and appropriate mailings.

An ample supply of brochures, membership applications, and copies of the *Long Trail News* is available at your request from the main office. The GMC staff can also help with examples of letters and flyers for outreach and publicity.

The following list is a collection of ideas that have worked for some sections.

Make Use of Free Publicity

- Include your events schedule on the section web site.

- List outings and events in local newspaper calendar.
- Mail your schedule to other groups, such as outdoor or environmental clubs, social networks, trails associations, and churches.
- Post outing schedules and GMC membership brochures on community bulletin boards or in sporting goods stores, book stores, supermarkets, co-ops, health food stores, laundromats, fitness centers, libraries, and information kiosks.
- Host a Taylor-Series presentation and use the posters for publicity in the same locations.
- On flyers include tear-off telephone numbers for the membership chairperson.

Follow up on Inquiries

- Have extra copies of the section's newsletter/schedule along on all outings. Some sections have a membership application form printed on the back of their newsletter.
- Mail or e-mail your schedule, application form, and newsletter to people who inquire about your section;
- Keep the names of interested people on your mailing list for several months.

Make New Members Feel Welcome

- Welcome new members in your section newsletter;
- Write a welcome letter from your section and send it to the GMC office for inclusion in the section welcome packet;
- Create a section membership application form which allows new members to list their preferred activities;
- Invite newcomers to a specific event such as a potluck or a pancake breakfast.

Keep Existing Members Engaged

- Categorize your mailing list - if you have one - to make it easy to send information, invitations, or requests to particular groups depending on the type of outreach: newcomers, seniors, families, volunteers, trail workers, etc.
- Make such demographic information available to other section leaders to help them tailor activities to specific group preferences.

Member and Membership Counts, Category and Status

When reporting the section membership totals, remember that a membership can represent either one or two people (voting members.) Any comparison of membership strength must count one or the other – either memberships or people. Be explicit about which you are reporting, so that

someone looking at the results from different years or from different sections can make valid comparisons. Also look at the “standing” attribute in the membership report; you probably want to count only the “active” memberships.

When preparing a budget, the treasurer should note membership “category.” Life memberships produce a large but one-time income, while “complementary” memberships produce little income.

The membership count determines the number of newsletters mailed, while the voting member count determines a quorum for the annual meeting.