

Chapter 3: Profile of a Healthy Section: Leadership Recruitment and Transition

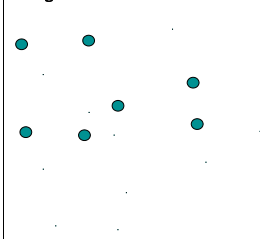
How Section Leaders Describe a Healthy Section

The well-being of a section depends mostly on the make-up of its membership and how people work together. A combination of many traits contributes to a section's viability. Below, GMC section leaders identified a list of characteristics that can be found in a healthy section.¹

A healthy section...

- is visible to the local general public;
- maintains a high retention rate;
- has a growing membership;
- has a diverse membership in age and social background;
- has an active membership which participates in meetings, events, etc;
- has many volunteers;
- provides a variety of activities including activities suitable for families;
- balances trail and social activities;
- pulls its weight in maintaining the Long Trail System;
- is financially well managed;
- encourages depth of leadership;
- practices a leadership succession plan;
- provides job descriptions for officers;
- maintains close ties with the main club and makes use of available club programs;
- maintains communication with other sections;
- maintains a sense of GMC history;
- practices traditions and continuity;
- is familiar with other sections;
- recognizes that there is no perfect section: everyone is different with different accommodations.

Is Your Sections Leadership Doing All the Work?



You can tailor the list to be as long and diverse as you want your section membership to be. Does a large number of members make a good section? Financially it may be healthy, however trail and shelter maintenance and other activities need participating volunteers. Ask how many active volunteers your

¹ This list was compiled by section leaders as part of a workshop on leadership recruitment and development at the GMC Section Presidents' Meeting in Rutland, Vermont, on April 10, 1999.

section has: Aim for 20 to 25% in a medium size section (200 members). Smaller or just established sections may need 50% or more active volunteers.

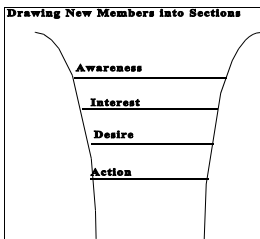
Likewise, a healthy section profile cannot be achieved by a single leader or a handful of activists.

Graphically, the diagram with the dots describes that situation. The dots represent members and there are many. The four volunteers in the circle do all the work. Not only do they suffer from overload but they can also form an elite circle that may be difficult for other section members to access.

Nurturing an active section means encouraging participation by all willing members.

Now that we have identified the need to have a volunteer base, how do you draw members into your section and get them to become volunteers or section leaders? The funnel diagram illustrates the necessary steps to take to grow section membership and volunteer participation.

1. Make the public aware of the section, its goals, activities, and volunteer needs, and make members aware of volunteer positions and needs.
2. Generate interest in projects and assignments.
3. Make a leadership role or project desirable.
4. The result will mean not only more members but also volunteers motivated to take action.



How to Attract and Develop Section Volunteers

Potential volunteers are out there just waiting to be asked to help. (For example, after the 1998 ice storm, hundreds of people, members and non-members, called the GMC to offer their assistance in restoring the Long Trail.) A few simple steps can help promote a section's needs and recruit volunteers eager to lend a helping hand.

- Tell your section members and the public that you need help.
- Describe your needs and volunteer opportunities: fieldwork (trails etc.), education and leadership (nature studies, outdoor skills, kids' activities), communications (home publishing, Internet communication including website management).
- Seek out teenagers and college students who need to fulfill community service hours as graduation requirements.
- Survey members to find out what they would like to volunteer for.
- Use a volunteer application with a return address to a section officer or someone willing to contact prospective volunteers.
- Have the GMC office put section volunteer applications in welcome packets that are mailed to your new section members.
- Update bylaws to include term limits, thus opening positions for new volunteers to fill.

Some volunteers are naturals — give them whichever task and they'll run with it. But many need guidance and encouragement. Others may turn down a project for fear they might fail. Here are some suggestions of how to encourage section members to become active volunteers:

- Clearly describe the task and what is expected. Don't diminish it. For example, if attending four committee meetings a year is expected then don't suggest that only attending two will be okay.
- Make projects less overwhelming by breaking them into smaller or incremental tasks.
- Identify levels of involvement and the number of hours necessary to handle specific projects.

- Identify start and completion dates for projects.
- Host section workshops and education programs to teach new volunteers trail and officer skills.
- Implement a buddy system for section officers, board members, and other volunteer positions to provide training for new leaders.

Don't forget your volunteers once they have been found, trained, and given a job. Volunteers need support, help, and sometimes supervision. There needs to be follow-up on their assignments as well as encouragement and acknowledgment. A volunteer satisfied and proud of his or her achievement will help again at the next opportunity.

Grooming Section Leaders for Succession

Do you sometimes think that you work too many hours for your section? Do you get a feeling of impending burn-out? Do you think there is nobody available or ready to take your job? Nobody is irreplaceable — those who think they are tend to drive away the folks who might be able and willing to assume a larger role over time. Part of successfully serving an office is to pass the baton to another competent individual.

As section leader you need to think about what happens when you step down. Look around early for somebody interested and willing to take on new responsibilities. Get the person involved and share a specific task. Get your potential successor ready for being considered by the nominating committee.