

## SUSTAINING AND RENEWING CHAPTERS

**Moderators:** Janice Hand, Lake-to-Prairie; Kristin Kauth, Fox Valley; Marty Rice, Twin Cities; Ed Schmidt, St. Louis

**Sustaining chapters:** Fox Valley, Twin Cities

**Renewing chapters:** Lake-to-Prairie, St. Louis

**Goal:** increase membership in chapters as this is the primary source of funds for National Wild Ones. Most of the notes below apply to both sustaining and renewing chapters:

### Organizational ideas:

- Turnover of long-serving officers can help reduce likelihood of burnout. Can be helpful for new officer to keep in touch with prior officer to ask what worked, what didn't, etc.
- Consider a retreat for officers and perhaps chair positions to evaluate current and future status of chapter
- Chapter Board meetings can be more inviting if food is available
- Choosing a meeting site: plot members' homes on a map to determine where most come from.
- Try to make all volunteer positions fun and fulfilling
- Sponsor an annual conference or partner with another organization (Audubon, nature centers, etc.) that sponsors conferences.
- For smaller chapters, consider holding your own event at a library, nature center or other public facility. It can be just a few hours on a weekday evening, a weekend morning, or an all-day event. Invite local native businesses (nurseries, designers, etc.) to talk and/or exhibit. Advertise the event as widely as possible to attract the public at large (invite local garden club members, notify local news media, etc.)
- Surveys: many chapters send out annual surveys to members to help determine future programs, speakers and tours. Surveys can be simple 'check off' answers; others request more detailed info. One chapter includes a survey in their new member packet; another sends one to lapsed members asking what they liked and did not like.

### Chapter Events:

- Create a sense of community by focusing on having fun at meetings, helping people meet others (i.e., use permanent nametags for officers and chairs, hold informal restaurants dinners or potlucks to encourage informal chatting).
- Offer refreshments at beginning of meetings to encourage socializing.
- Three aspects are of key importance:
  1. Consistency: hold an annual meeting/conference or some other event that is unique; do it every year.
  2. Keep workshops consistently high-quality
  3. Revitalize materials periodically (e.g., use key words that resonate with people; right now one of those words is 'sustainability').
- Workshops ideas: 'Show me /Tell me', rain garden planning, or some unique, creative ideas.
- Review current chapter literature/flyers. Some may need revitalizing
- Offer a 'weed and feed' evening for volunteers working on a public garden
- Offer door prizes like books, garden gloves, etc.; raffle off native plant(s)
- Provide agenda for each meeting so attendees knew what to expect
- Include a membership form on the program schedule printout
- Regularly announce/review membership benefits.
- Sponsor some 'member only' events like tours, plant rescues, etc.,

- Charge a fee for non-members which can be applied to membership
- Encourage new members by offering a free 'yard counsel' (i.e., mentoring); can get candidates from the annual survey
- Most chapters keep an e-mail list of non-members who want to be notified of chapter WO events. Discussion followed on whether they should be cut off after 1 year, 2 years, or ever. Argument for 'never': E-mail is free advertising. Argument for cutting off at 1 or 2 years: might encourage becoming a member.

### **Lapsed Memberships:**

Currently, Nat'l WO e-mails members 3 months prior to membership expiration. It's followed up with written notification 1 month prior to expiration. At the time a member is removed from the 'active' list another e-mail is sent advising them of this. This practice could be reduced or dropped when we lose our Americorp employees at the end of 2011.

- Call lapsed members asking what the chapter could do to encourage them to renew. (one chapter sends a survey to lapsed members asking what they liked best and least in chapter activities).
- Expiring memberships: one chapter has Board members divide expiring members between them. It's especially effective if a Bd. Member knows the expiring member.
- Overall the group felt a phone call to a lapsed member is probably the most effective means of encouraging renewal.