

MEA

Michigan Education Association

Just Between Presidents

Generation Next

Ideas for Engaging New Members
in the Association



Building Full Capacity Locals

At the beginning of the school year:

First impressions are lasting impressions!

Your first contact with new members should be positive, professional and upbeat (a little fun would be good, too). Step one in getting new members engaged in the association is to make them feel wanted, welcomed and important—you need to “sell” the idea of union membership. Keep in mind that the start of a new job (and a new school year) can be overwhelming, so try not to inundate new members with too much right away.

- Prior to the start of school, send a welcome letter to each new member. Include information on an upcoming association event/program for new members.
- During the first week of school, either you or association/building reps visit each new member to make a personal introduction and to distribute union “goodie bags” containing MEA pocket calendars, MEA Membership Cards, Proud Union Member items, MEA New Member Tips, etc.
- Make individual phone calls to all new members prior to the first day of school to introduce yourself, welcome them, etc.
- Prior to the start of school, send a welcome letter to each new member. Include information on an upcoming association event/program for new members.
- Take a picture of each new member and hang on association bulletin board along with a short description of the member—job description, likes/dislikes, etc.
- Have an association welcome table at the district’s opening day event and distribute information about the association. Give each new member a special “welcome gift.”
- Host a “Meet Your Union” breakfast or cookout for new members with your officers/executive board.
- Distribute copies of the school district/college or university calendar and a list of pay-day dates to new members.

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- Hold a new member association meeting/dinner. Invite the executive board and committee chairs to attend and talk about their roles in the association and why/how they first got involved in the association. Distribute association information.
 - Host a new member orientation dinner just prior to a school board of trustees meeting and then attend the meeting with the new members. Request time on the agenda to introduce the new members to the school board.
 - Hold a “Survived the First Week/Month” get-together for new members at a local watering hole. The association can pay for the snacks and members can purchase their beverages.
 - Start a new member blog or Facebook page.
 - Assign each new member a “union buddy.” If possible, this person should be a newer member with less than 7 years of experience in the district and from the same work site/building.
 - Produce and distribute an association handbook to new members which contains:
 - Contract information
 - Employee handbook/building policies
 - Certification, tenure, evaluation information
 - Association information—contacts, meeting calendar, goals for the year, committees,
 - Web site and other social networking information, Weingarten rights, etc.
 - Information on the importance of association membership
 - Child protection laws
 - New member tips
 - Information on MEA Financial Services and MESSA
 - MPSERs

Note: MEA has information and posted/printed materials on many of these topics. Check with your UniServ director to see what is available or contact BFCL 800-292-1934, extension 2941 with your specific needs.

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- Provide an “Important Document” folder to each new member so that they can keep track of important documents. Include a list of important documents that members should have/keep.
 - Make up a “first week survival kit” for each new member containing such things as bottled water, apple, granola/candy bar, mints, gum, Band-Aids, stress ball and safety pins. Enclose a welcome note from the association which contains contact information for association/building reps.
 - Purchase school/desk supplies on sale and make up welcome kits for new members. You can include such items as pencils, pens, Post-It notes, highlighter, staples, paperclips, etc. Enclose a welcome note from the association.
 - Develop and distribute a “professional survival guide” for new members which contains information on topics such as: certification, handling parent-teacher conferences, classroom management, reporting abuse, planning for a substitute, field trip dos and don'ts, professional development requirements, etc.
 - If your district holds an orientation for new hires, attend the event – even better, get on the agenda to speak. Give an upbeat, positive welcome along with information about the new member event(s) the union has planned.
 - Help new members fill out their union membership forms. These forms can be confusing, and assisting with this is a great way to begin building a relationship with new members.
 - When the first paychecks arrive, encourage association/building reps to sit down with new members to ensure that their pay, sick leave, etc. is correct.
 - Download important documents onto USB drives and attach lanyards on which your local association's name is printed to distribute to new members.

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- With the help of the association/building reps, develop a “Fast Facts” sheet for each new member which provides specific information on the things they will need to know during the first week or two of school: location and protocol for using the copy machine, where employees eat lunch, start and end time for work day, how to sign out equipment, where supplies are stored, location of employee bathrooms, time/day of staff meetings, etc.
 - Design a brief survey for new members to take so that you can learn more about them and their interests. Use the information to plan events and to involve them in association activities and committees, etc. at a later date. You can do a paper survey or check out a free survey site such as www.surveymonkey.com to design an electronic survey.

Things to include would be:

- Personal/home email address
- Cell phone number
- Favorite area hang-out/restaurant
- Hobbies and Interests
- Where do you see yourself in five years?
- Family—kids, etc.
- Your specific job in the school district
- Best way to communicate with you? (text, Facebook, email, phone, etc.)

Throughout the year

In order to get and keep new members engaged in the association, it is important that the association be a positive, supportive presence in their professional lives throughout the school year. Addressing the needs, concerns and issues of new members will go a long way to making the association relevant in their lives.

- Hold monthly 20-30 minute “Bagels with the Building Reps” meetings for new members prior to the start of the school day. You can also do this at the end of the day with cookies, etc. These meetings are a great time to discuss specific building/worksite issues.
- Host a mid-year get-together for new members and their union “buddies” or professional mentors.
- Have your association/building reps regularly check in with new members to see how they’re doing, what problems they’ve encountered, concerns they have, information they need, etc.
- Set up a special section on your association Web site, Facebook page or blog where new members can share tips, ideas and lessons learned with each other.
- Create an email group just for new members and encourage them to use it to communicate with each other. You can also use this to send out quick messages and brief information pertinent to new members (be careful not to overuse!)
- Have a special section just for new members in your association newsletter or on your website. Highlight a new member in each edition of the newsletter or whenever you update the website.
- Use text messaging to inform new members about specific issues and events.
- Have each building/association rep bring a new member with him/her to an executive committee meeting.

Note: The more organized, positive and constructive the meeting, the better the impression new members will have of their association.

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- Send out bimonthly email “contract facts.” These brief emails should focus on specific parts of the contract including personal/sick/vacation days; class size language; evaluation timelines; contractual workday; staff transfers and reductions. The more timely the “contract fact,” the more attention members will pay to it. For instance, you should focus on class size language at the beginning of the year or semester, transfers and layoff language in the spring, etc.
 - Schedule a meeting with new members during their lunch period (treat them to lunch) or meet individually with them during their preparation time to see how things are going and to discuss their concerns.
 - Schedule a series of information and/or professional development sessions throughout the year on topics such as: keeping your certification current, the local and state political scene, financial planning for the future, the evaluation process and tenure, RTTT legislation and school reform, FMLA and child care leaves, legal issues for public school employees and health and safety in the workplace.

These sessions can be scheduled during lunch periods—“Lunch and Learn”—or as part of an after-work program for new members/teachers—“New Member/Teacher Academy”—which includes dinner. Be sure to schedule a few minutes to talk about the union prior to or following the formal program.

To make these sessions even more relevant to members, check to see if professional development/certification credit can be given for these sessions.

In addition to your UniServ director, MEA headquarters staff members are available to present and facilitate these sessions at no charge. Talk with your UniServ director about this.

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- Hold an event for new members at the end of the first semester, e.g. a “not-so new member” or “you survived first semester” get-together/ meeting. By this time, they may have a lot of questions and be more interested in their contracts and the association than they were at the beginning of the year.

A good activity at this event is a contract scavenger hunt. Have members bring their contracts.

Pair them up and have them search through their contracts for answers to commonly asked contract questions. Award prizes to those who finish first. Have members staple their answer sheets to the front of their contracts for reference.

- Encourage new members to get involved in the association by helping out with various events/projects. Serving on the association’s communications (PR) committee, helping to plan an association get-together, maintaining the Web site or other social networking sites, or organizing community or charity projects are great ways to get and keep newer members involved. Keep the following in mind about people who volunteer:
 - They liked to be asked *personally* to volunteer for a project.
 - They like projects that are meaningful and have clear goals.
 - They like to work with others (especially people they know).
 - They like to have fun while working.
 - They like to feel empowered and appreciated.
 - They are much more likely to volunteer again if their previous volunteer experience was positive.
- Ask a new member (or various new members) to write a “Generation Next” column for your local newsletter.

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- Hold a SPARKS retreat with other local associations in your coordinating council. SPARKS is a program designed to get new(er) members engaged in the association. It is targeted specifically toward members in their 20s and 30s who are potential leaders and have little or no association experience. To learn more about SPARKS, contact your UniServ director.
 - Encourage new members to go to **www.mea.org** and search on New Members or go to www.mea.org/new-members-tips to read and download MEA's monthly New Members Tips.

Resources for New Members

New Member Tips

www.mea.org/new-members-tips

Tips for new EA, ESP and Higher Ed members

www.nea.org

Click on Tools and Ideas in the pull-down menu at the top for great ideas for K-12 teachers. Search ESP to see all the information available.

Mentor Center

www.teachers.net

This site fosters peer support and development for teachers.

PBS Teacher Source

www.pbs.org/teachersource

3,000-plus free lesson plans and activities

Teachers First

www.teachersfirst.com/index.cfm

A collection of lessons and web resources for K-12 classroom teachers, students and their families.

Timesavers for Teachers

www.timesaversforteachers.com

Specializes in interactive, teacher created forms, report card comments, worksheets, etc. regularly used by teachers.

Resources for ESP Members

www.mea.org/esp

Contains a wealth of information and resources for ESP members.

ESP Action Guide

www.nea.org/assets/img/content/ESPAction.pdf

Contains professional development ideas and best practices to help ESP members excel in their work and careers.

ESP Resources

www.nea.org/home/1604.htm

Resources and tools for specific ESP groups/jobs.

MEA Higher Ed Welcome Packet

www.mea.org/highered/welcome_packet.html

Research and Tools for Higher Ed

www.nea.org/home/1602.htm

Higher Ed Best Practices—Teaching and Learning

www.nea.org/home/33508.htm

Database of information, literature and materials designed to improve higher ed services.



MEA

www.mea.org

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The mission of the MEA is to ensure that the education of our students and the working environments of our members are of the highest quality.

