

# 49 WAYS TO KEEP YOUR MEMBERS

From "101 Ways To Keep Your Members"  
Compiled by Mark Levin, CAE for the American Legion  
President, B.A.I., Inc.

1. **Have a program, not a campaign.** Retention is a year-round priority and needs to be planned. Any unit that is, or wants to be, successful at retention must be able to identify the specific steps it takes to increase its retention rate. In addition to having a series of activities that make up a retention program, your unit should be able to identify resources that can be allocated to help implement the program.
2. **Recognize members who reach milestone membership anniversaries.** If members stay in the Auxiliary for five, ten, twenty or more years, they are probably not among those who are likely to drop out. When members reach one of these membership milestones, it provides two retention opportunities for your unit. First, it is another opportunity to recognize a member or group of members for their continuing support. Doing that solidifies their membership even more. Also, by publicly recognizing these membership milestones, you inspire other members to strive to earn the same recognition by maintaining their membership, too.
3. **Start a regular column in your newsletter to thank members for their involvement.** One organization featured a column in their monthly newsletter that was called "Tip of the Hat." This column's sole purpose was to say "thank you" to those members who had helped the organization in some way since the previous newsletter. The member's name and the specific service they had performed were all mentioned. It became the most popular feature in the newsletter because every month members saw their name or the name of someone they knew.
4. **Provide and encourage the use of The American Legion Auxiliary Emblem.** There are good reasons for members to want to display the American Legion Auxiliary emblem or

other Auxiliary artwork. The emblem can be an effective membership and marketing tool.

5. **When important issues come up, call some inactive members for their opinions.** It's natural for units to contact their leadership people when an issue of importance arises, such as a legislative crisis, a local election or the setting of a new standard. These issues and events are also opportunities to involve some of the unit's least active members simply by asking their opinion. When the opportunity comes up, have a list of inactive members ready to call, fax or write and ask for their opinion on how the unit should react. The fact that the unit cared enough to contact them might make the difference at renewal time.
6. **Accept credit cards for dues payments.** Credit card payments have become the norm for almost all purchasing transactions. If your unit does not already accept them, you should consider doing so. Credit card acceptance is especially useful to units during difficult economic times because it allows members to renew and still be able to make installment payments to the credit card company. Your unit would also be able to accept dues payments on-line, which is a very popular method of payment for the younger veterans. Your finance officer must take the fee paid to the credit card company into consideration.
7. **Send an audio CD with your regular publications.** Even members who don't have time to read your regular publications will have time to listen to a CD on their way to or from work.
8. **Create an annual slogan or theme for membership each year.** It's often easier to get someone's attention if they have an image of the goals of the unit. Having an annual theme or slogan can rally the existing members around a specific program or set of objectives and create an image in the minds of those thinking about dropping. If your unit is celebrating a milestone year, that entire year can be dedicated to an anniversary theme.

9. **Recognize your members as often as possible. Thank him or her for their participation in each and every program or function.** Whether you do it formally or informally, it pays to express appreciation to members whenever possible.
10. **Get members involved at SOME level. “Involved” members don’t drop.** Your unit needs to try to find ways to get members involved in a meaningful way without taking up too much of their time. This is especially true with newer members.
11. **Publish an annual report in the local media. Thank the community for their support and send a copy to members.** Publishing an annual report allows your unit to summarize all the accomplishments from the previous year. It shows the community that your unit is an asset to that community and it shows your members that the unit is run in a business-like manner and will remind any members thinking about dropping out that they would be giving up all of the benefits listed in the report.
12. **Set up “car pools” to get people to meetings, especially new members.** Car pools help raise the attendance at meetings therefore increasing the involvement of those who may not have shown up if it weren’t for the car pool. Some of the drivers may have even found excuses not to attend had it not been for their assigned driving duties.
13. **Set up a speaker’s bureau: Speak at other organizations’ meetings.** Units are always trying to spread the word about the American Legion Auxiliary and the unit’s activities in that community. One of the best ways to do this is by finding speaking opportunities for your unit’s leaders. You can establish a unit speaker’s bureau, a pre-qualified group of members who are capable both in terms of knowledge and speaking ability to represent your organization to the media or to other civic groups. When these representatives speak, current members are instilled with a sense of pride in membership, which can make a difference at renewal time.

14. **Be sure non-members pay a higher fee than members for programs and functions.** There are two ways to make this idea support your retention efforts. First, be sure that your unit charges more for non-members to participate in any of your unit functions or to purchase any of your goods or services. Second, be sure to remind your current members about this additional fee that non-members pay. This serves to remind members of the money they save each time they take advantage of your unit's services.
15. **Remind members how much money they have saved by participating in programs and functions at the member rate.** Remind your members of the money they may save by participating in the national member benefits program and the discounts for unit functions.
16. **Keep members' names and addresses current and accurate—it's the best sign of a "caring" organization.** It is common courtesy and good business practice to keep your membership records as accurate as possible. This becomes even more important because members' expectations increase as they compare your unit's communications to those they receive from other sources.
17. **Make sure you capture e-mail addresses whenever possible. Also make sure your members know your unit e-mail address so they'll accept e-mail from you.** E-mail is the quickest and least expensive method of sending information and documents to your members and to receive correspondence from your members.
18. **If you ask a member to do a volunteer job, make sure it's a WORTHWHILE job!** Even the smallest volunteer jobs need to provide some sense of accomplishment for the members assigned to do them. Although there is a lot of pressure to get members involved in the unit's leadership structure, just having a title is not enough to justify the valuable time members have to give up in order to participate. Be able to pinpoint the contribution each member makes to your unit's

success and be certain to mention that contribution when thanking the member.

19. **Call your annual dues an investment rather than “dues”.** Referring to your dues as an investment will create an image that your unit isn't spending the members' dues but rather investing it in programs and services that bring value to the members, to the unit and to the community.
20. **Assign an officer to contact a certain number of inactive members each month – just a little “say Hi!” call.** Some members believe the only time we contact them is when we need money, information or support. This impression is strongest among the less active members. To alleviate some of these feelings ask officers and E-board members to make some random calls each month to your inactive members. These courtesy calls will remind these members that the unit knows they're still out there and that their opinion is valued. Be sure to give the callers something substantial to talk about, such as getting input on an upcoming legislative issue or proposed unit policy changes.
21. **Bring a list of inactive members to a unit meeting and have members contact them.** It's an important sign to members when a volunteer leader takes the time to contact a member simply to say that the unit misses them and to also relay to the member that the unit is there to assist if there's anything the member needs.
22. **Get spouses active – it assures renewal.** When you have multiple family members simultaneously belonging to the Legion, the Auxiliary and the Sons of The American Legion, your chances of having them renew is much greater than the renewal rates of individual members.
23. **Bring in National speakers to describe how National adds benefits to state/local membership.** Units should try to get representatives from the Department and National organization to speak at a Unit or District function to

emphasize the member benefits available through affiliation with the National organization.

24. **Hold leadership-training programs – give your members the tools to be successful volunteers.** It is important for members who do get involved to have a good experience during their involvement. Leadership training is becoming one of the best services that organizations can give their members. The skills developed through leadership training are transferred back to the members' workplaces. At renewal time, members will remember where these skills were developed.
25. **Create a new member welcoming committee.** When a new member joins, ask someone who is already a member to call the new member. Tell the new member what a good investment membership has been for them and congratulate the new member on making a great decision to join. In as little as ten seconds the welcoming member has validated the new member's decision to join by making that person feel more welcome in the Auxiliary unit.
26. **Send a "New Member Newsletter" to first year members during their first year.** New members are special because they are the least likely to know everything that is going on in your unit, the least likely to be involved in a leadership position, and therefore the most likely to drop out. Several groups have developed new member newsletters that new members get throughout their first year of membership. These newsletters are basically a summary of the most important information that has been sent to them via other formats, such as newsletters and magazines, with further explanation and background. These publications usually go out three or four times during the year. New members stop receiving it as soon as they renew for the first time.
27. **Send new members a letter or card saying, "Here's where your \$25.00 dues went: \$3.00 for VA&R Programs; \$3.00 for Americanism Programs, etc.** This technique can be used

effectively to show members that their dues investment is working for them. Even if the members are inactive, they can feel good that their dues are helping to support some very important programs sponsored by the unit. Their dues are helping to make their community a better place to live.

28. **Offer plenty of member-only programs and benefits.** Your unit needs to constantly remind members of the exclusive benefits they get as regular, dues-paying members. Depending on the legal requirements of your unit, there will be many services and programs that can be reserved for members. These programs and services need to be highlighted whenever possible.
29. **Send a mini-survey to members about six months after they join to see how they rate your unit's services.** One educational organization called this their "six month report card." It was sent to members half way through their first year and asked the members to grade the organization in several service areas. Any members that rated a program below an A or B was given a phone call to get more information. Then the organization used that information to try to correct that problem. The organization was also able to spot potential dropped members by noting which new members didn't even bother to return the card. These members also got a phone call.
30. **Get new and inactive members to attend Department Conventions or Conferences.** They are more likely to renew when they witness the importance of the business conducted at these functions. Even if they don't attend every year, the stature of the event and the impression they get by attending will help remind them of the benefits of membership.
31. **Hold a new member reception at Conventions.** Whenever your unit, district or department sponsors a meeting or educational program, use that opportunity to invite new members to attend a special reception. These receptions are usually held prior to the start of the convention or educational

program. In addition to talking about the Auxiliary, and learning about the expectations of the newer members, it is also a chance to explain how to get the most out of their participation in the event.

32. **Give new members a special ribbon to wear.** Identifying newer members does several positive things. It lets the new members feel special and it reinforces for them the fact that joining was a good idea since there are others who have the same designation. Most importantly, it allows Auxiliary leaders to spot new members and try to make them feel welcome.
33. **Use groups of volunteers for renewal phone-a-thons.** This project not only helps your renewal efforts, but it makes the callers feel more like an important part of your Unit.
34. **Make sponsors or recruiters responsible for the first renewal, too.** If your unit has a sponsorship program where the recruiters are known, contact the recruiters at renewal time and let them know the new members they brought in during the past year are about to receive renewal notices. Ask that the recruiters call their recruits to let them know they are looking forward to having them with the unit again next year. It reminds the recruiter about his or her efforts, and keeps those efforts from being wasted if the members they sponsored drop out a short time after joining.
35. **Give discounts or perks for early renewals.** One of the hard parts of retention is trying to figure out who among those who are late renewing is really a potential non-renewing member who is just putting their renewal off. One way to help resolve this problem is to give some sort of small discount or perk for members who renew early. Your unit's financial managers need to work out the appropriate discount and accounting methods, but having the early renewal money in interest-bearing accounts may more than offset any discount given. In addition to the financial rewards for your unit, there

is the main benefit of being able to identify the unit's most likely drops earlier in the renewal process.

36. **Give rebate vouchers for early renewals.** Instead of giving a discount for early renewals, try giving a rebate. When you ask your members to pay the full amount at renewal time, tell them that the unit will send them a rebate voucher as a reward if they renew early. The voucher would have a monetary value or be in the form of a certificate good for a certain amount of credit when the member participates in a unit function or social activity.
37. **Send a checklist entitled "What's your reason for not renewing?"** Send a survey that lists the most common reasons for dropping out to those people who have recently dropped their memberships and ask them to check off the reasons that apply to them. Be prepared to follow up and address each of the reasons. While a written form is not as effective as actually talking to these members, it does give the unit one more chance to reinforce the value of membership and to personalize the next contact.
38. **Have the President send a pre-renewal letter on his/her letterhead a few weeks BEFORE the renewal is sent.** Tell of the great year you had, and how she is looking forward to working with the member again next year. This is usually done to remind members of all of the value they received during the past year and to tell them what they can expect in the future. By sending the report or letter prior to the renewal notice, you alert members that the renewal is coming and raise their anticipation level and their need to respond. This usually raises the number of early renewals. Having the letter on your unit stationery adds to the credibility of the message and increases the chances it will be opened promptly.
39. **Have a retention committee – give it goals!** There is a need for member involvement in the recruiting process and there should also be member involvement in the retention process. Your unit should have either a separate retention committee or

a retention subcommittee of your membership committee. The retention committee needs to have goals and a plan of action with very definite steps that can be taken to raise the unit's retention rate. The retention committee should be assigned to develop these steps and undertake them.

40. **List names of non-renewals at leadership meetings. Have a "10 Most Wanted Renewals" list.** Select 10 non-renewed members for each meeting and assign members at that meeting to contact those lapsed members. This shows your lapsed members that the unit still cares about them and it draws your current members into the membership retention process.
41. **Reward renewal efforts as much as you do recruitment efforts.** There is nothing wrong with building in an incentive or recognition program for retention efforts. Such a program can even be integrated into your recruitment incentives by giving the member who recruits a new member some form of appropriate recognition when the new member joins, and again when the new member renews.
42. **After a couple of renewal notices, begin personal contacts.** When members fail to respond to dues notices, it isn't always because they intend to drop out for a particular reason or because they are generally disappointed with your unit. Some members just want to know if your unit cares that they are out there. A personal call to let members know they are missed can make a big difference at renewal time.
43. **Send non-renewals a newsletter with the front and back cover printed and the inside blank. Print a message inside about what the former member is missing by not renewing.** Your unit's newsletters are among its most valuable membership benefits. When members drop out, they need to be reminded that they are losing these valuable benefits forever. By sending a newsletter with nothing in it except the table of contents listing all of the valuable information the former member *isn't* getting, you graphically describe the lost benefit.

44. **Dig beyond the “never did anything for me” answer. Try to find out exactly why they chose to not renew their membership.** There’s always something more. Your unit should prepare questions that probe beyond the surface and get to the heart of why members are leaving.
45. **Pay special attention to those who renew last.** They are the most likely to not renew next year. As your unit begins identifying the non-active members it needs to contact, add these late payers to the priority list.
46. **Hold a retention contest, just like a recruitment contest.** If your members respond well to incentives and competitions consider having a retention contest among your leaders. Divide the membership roster among the unit officers, executive committee and the membership team and assign a certain number of current members to each leader. Give prizes to the leaders who renew the most members. Help them out by giving them suggestions on how they can get reluctant members to renew.
47. **Offer incentives to the first 10% who renew (free dinner, etc.).** Why not have a contest among your members to see who can send in their renewal dues the fastest? Give some type of incentive to those who renew before a certain date or are among the first to renew.
48. **List first-time renewals in a special section of your newsletter.** In addition to giving special recognition to new members, list those who are renewing for the first time in a special section of your newsletter. This will remind these members that the decision they made a year ago to join your unit was a good decision. It will also remind them that the unit is glad to have them back again for a second year.
49. **Be sure to acknowledge renewal checks, just like new member applications.** Your unit probably makes a big deal when new members join by sending them welcome letters and new member kits and by putting their names in your newsletter. Yet, few units do anything to acknowledge

renewals other than sending them their new Auxiliary card. Find some way to thank them for their renewal. Put a letter or a card in the return envelope with their membership card. After all, these renewing members are making the same financial commitment as first-time members and they deserve some recognition.

Do everything your unit can to be a reason a member wants to renew. For many members, the Auxiliary is the staff and the leadership. If they perceive that they have a group of dedicated, qualified staff and volunteer leaders, they'll probably be back.

**KEEPING OUR MEMBERSHIP 100% .....**



**.... AND BEYOND!**