



## **Florida Native Plant Society Membership Strategies for Chapters**

### **The 20-Minute Membership Survey**

Once a year ask your Chapter's members to write down the names of friends, neighbors, colleagues, and business acquaintances in the community who might be interested in joining FNPS.

This activity helps remind members of their own commitment to FNPS and generates a list that can be included in an annual membership campaign.

Add the personal touch and develop a system for inviting these individuals to meetings or other Chapter activities.

### **Recruiting Younger Members**

Many mid-life adults have hectic schedules which include business and family obligations. Consider developing an outreach event which considers their needs. Include their children in an activity, or provide incentives for them to join FNPS. Gardening workshops usually work well for this demographic, but here are other incentives to consider:

- Offer a New Member gift – a plant, calendar, book, etc.
- Invite a small group of younger individuals to join at the same time so they feel more comfortable.
- Offer some family-friendly meetings to encourage young families to join.
- Mentor new members with veteran members who will encourage chapter involvement.
- Post meeting notices at libraries, community colleges, technical institutes, and other learning institutions.

### **Get FNPS into Your Community**

Get active in your community. Make your Chapter a volunteer source for conservation activities, environmental education events, and garden projects. Make sure that volunteers are wearing a shirt, hat, or other item which identifies them with FNPS. Here are some other ideas:

- Invite community project leaders to your meeting and have them invite members to get involved.
- Print generic business cards with an invitation like "Be My Guest" printed on one side; members can write the event, date, time and location on the back.
- Hold a membership luncheon and invite prospective members; entertain them with a brief program about FNPS and your Chapter.
- Invite prospective members to participate in a Chapter project to demonstrate the meaningful work that FNPS does.

- Ask members to wear pins or T-shirts that read “Go Native” or “Ask Me About Natives” when involved in community projects.
- Use social media wisely; less is more. Avoid becoming “spammy”.
- Obtain space in a prominent shop window or the lobby of your local City Hall to display information about FNPS, Chapter activities, and native plants.
- At each meeting, collect contact information from guests and speakers and follow up with a note or postcard thanking them for coming. Invite them back!
- Display the FNPS logo wherever appropriate.

### **Membership Action Steps:**

- Identify and discuss volunteer opportunities in your community that will give your Chapter public exposure and further the FNPS mission.
- The membership committee should plan outreach activities to include several non-conservation groups. Reaching beyond those organizations already involved in conservation will help span gender, age, religion, and ethnicity gaps, and offers the opportunity to educate people about the benefits of native plants.
- Make sure all members understand their role in growing the Chapter’s membership.
- Develop informational materials for New Member kits; make sure to customize information to your Chapter.
- Create an online publications library which members can access. Include handouts, brochures, plant profile pages, and any other material which members create for schools, scouts, or other groups. Encourage members to use these materials when engaged in outreach events.
- At least annually, inventory Society provided materials. Don’t wait until you run out of brochures or membership forms to ask for more. Membership brochures and forms should be displayed at all meetings, field trips, or other Chapter activities. Always invite visitors to join FNPS!
- The membership committee should develop and prepare customized materials for distribution to prospective members; ideas include a Chapter profile, previous year’s accomplishments, community-based projects, native plant gardens to visit, and where to purchase native plants locally.
- Get the word out! Your Chapter needs an active public relations committee that works to obtain media coverage for meetings and events.
- Make sure all committees are communicating and collaborating!
- Make sure to routinely remind members to invite guest to meetings and events!
- ALWAYS follow up with new and prospective members: everyone wants to feel appreciated.

### **Educating and Nurturing Existing Members**

Continuing member education is a primary means of retaining FNPS members. The more members know about FNPS and native plants, the more likely they are to become engaged in Chapter activities and remain members. At least a couple times a year, the Membership Committee should present a brief program aimed at the care and feeding of current members. Here are some ideas for topics:

- Discuss the Annual Conference program in detail; get members excited about attending.
- Discuss member involvement in upcoming projects and activities.
- Discuss annual goals for the Chapter; ask for member input.
- Poll members for program ideas.
- Provide Membership Satisfaction Survey, and then discuss the results.

### **Membership Satisfaction Questionnaire**

Here are some tools which may help your Chapter create a membership program that will actively recruit new members while making existing members feel valued, effective, and appreciated.

- Encourage members to choose a committee to work with.
- Make social time a dynamic part of your meeting schedule and allow members to network with each other.
- Publically recognize members who volunteer, mentor, or otherwise engage in membership recruitment or other Chapter activities.
- Organize a Membership Workshop to discuss membership issues and action plans.
- Create and maintain a Chapter web site.
- Create PowerPoint presentations for new members; include information about active projects, Chapter events, committees, and Chapter goals. Update this presentation regularly.
- Working with surrounding Chapters, develop a program to share recruitment activities, meetings, and other outings.
- Develop a communication circle with membership managers from surrounding Chapters; freely share ideas, materials, and information to build a unified FNPS presence in your region.

## **New Member Orientation**

Customize the following outline to fit your Chapter's needs, and incorporate and distribute relevant FNPS materials. Focus on opportunities for immediate involvement in Chapter activities and projects. At the end of the orientation, make sure to ask for questions and be sure to address concerns.

- Provide a brief history of FNPS and your Chapter
- Discuss the FNPS mission, your Chapter's objectives, and how they're connected.
- Outline the benefits of FNPS membership.
- Outline membership responsibilities.
- Provide an overview of Chapter finances.
- Briefly describe one or two previous projects and any current ones.
- Provide an overview of Chapter committees and their goals.
- Discuss the FNPS annual conference.
- Outline Chapter resources: library, web site, social media, continuing education, etc.
- Ask for help! Make them feel needed.

## **Orientation Resources**

New members don't know what your Chapter has accomplished over the last five years, so tell them! Distribute specific information about your Chapter, including:

- Profile (a brochure or flier that highlights your Chapter's past and present projects and includes the web site address)
- Latest issue of your Chapter's newsletter.
- Chapter financial report (provided by Chapter Treasurer)
- Chapter membership roster
- List of Chapter officers and committee chairs
- Brief description of each committee and its duties

## **Mentoring Members**

Mentoring is an effective way to promote a new members' involvement in Chapter activities. The membership committee should choose mentors who are good communicators and positive thinkers. Here are some things to consider before asking existing members to mentor a new one:

- Does the person have good knowledge of FNPS and an interest in Chapter activities?
- Is this person willing to help? Do they have the time to telephone or email new members, help them with transportation issues, or otherwise engage in one on one communication?
- What does this person have in common with a new member? Try to find some common interests.

### **Mentoring Responsibilities**

- Monitor the new member's comfort level and involvement in Chapter activities through personal communications.
- Accompany the new member to meetings or events, or otherwise arrange to meet new members at the event.
- Introduce the new member to others.
- Invite the new member to committee meetings and to join a committee.
- Answer questions as related to FNPS or the Chapter.
- Encourage participation in the Annual Conference.

### **Mentoring Resources**

Chapters should provide the new member orientation materials to mentors so they can answer questions or concerns. In addition, mentors should have the following:

- A Chapter business card with their contact information
- A copy of the new members completed survey

## **10 Ways to Attract and Retain Members**

### **1. Promote**

Use local media to promote Chapter activities. Good public relations will help your Chapter gain support for projects, attract new members, and promote the FNPS mission.

#### **Know your local media**

Approach the media strategically by linking your story to larger trends and current events. Use water rate increases, septic tank seepage, beach erosion, and similar hot button news to increase public awareness of native plants. Develop a "media script" for member use; ask your local environmental columnist to write articles about pollinator connections to native plants, etc.

#### **Appoint a Chapter PR spokesperson**

Attracting media attention requires hard work and research. A significant advantage can be gained by appointing a Chapter PR person to act as a single point of contact for the press. Use members who are involved in the communications or public relations field.

### **2. Develop a Chapter web site and encourage community organizations to link to it**

It's the age of social media and technology, and it's important to keep pace. The Internet is a powerful tool for sharing Chapter activities with the community.

### **3. Solicit third party endorsements for FNPS projects**

It's important for FNPS members to get their message out into the community, but it's more credible to have other organizations recognize the FNPS mission and deeds. Seek partnerships with other conservation organizations or civic groups by co-sponsoring important speakers, speaking at County or municipal meetings, or participating in high-profile community projects.

### **4. Ask the beneficiaries of an FNPS project to speak on behalf of the Chapter**

No comment is more powerful than one made by a person or organization that has benefited from one of your Chapter's projects. Don't forget to invite the media to your meetings so they can report on the testimonial.

### **5. Publicize Chapter activities**

FNPS members spend a lot of time volunteering in their communities. Have their work recognized by sending a press release to community publications. For example, publicize a completed pollinator garden at a school by sending press releases to the County Commission, the School Board, and the neighborhood HOA's.

**6. Set up a FNPS display in local libraries, city halls, and other public buildings**

Ask to set up a small display in municipal or county buildings. Materials might include a native wildflower poster, locally produced brochures which highlight native plants for your area, and a meeting schedule. Be sure to maintain the display at least monthly.

**7. Produce a video of your Chapter's activities**

Enlist the help of a member who has video production experience, or ask at the local community college. Student videographers may be willing to produce PSA's or project videos as class assignments. Use your videos at outreach events, as presentations, and at conferences. Tell the story of your Chapter!

**8. Promote your Chapter's work with youngsters**

The media is often interested in programs for youngsters, particularly if children are engaged in a project like a pollinator garden. Invite the press to workdays, outreach programs at schools, or other child-related activities. And don't forget to provide FNPS information to parents through their children.

**9. Actively solicit speaking opportunities**

Visibility is an important component for membership recruitment; be aggressive in finding speaking opportunities for Chapter members. Don't rule out any opportunity; outreach means stretching beyond our current sphere of influence; don't be afraid to speak to groups who love their lawns – change their minds!

**10. Speak at the local Chamber of Commerce meetings**

Learn about the local Chamber of Commerce and get on their speaking circuit. Choose a topic which local businesses can relate to, like stormwater run-off, flooding, or low-cost landscaping. Don't forget to take membership brochures and infiltrate the business community with the native plant message!