

# National Newcomers Association of Canada

## SUGGESTIONS FOR ORGANIZING A NEWCOMERS CLUB

NEWCOMERS' CLUBS exist in many cities and towns across Canada. Their purpose is to welcome new people, to help them make friends and to encourage them to become more involved in the community.

Many of our clubs are for women only, some accept men, and some have family memberships. The Clubs are open to people of all ages and from all walks of life, who have resided in the area for less than a specified period of time. Most Clubs now have a change in circumstances clause as well. This allow people to join if the retire or loose a spouse.

When clubs reach a sufficient size or differing interest level, as deemed by the Executive Board, the bylaws may be changed to limit the length of time one may stay in Newcomers. This time period, at the discretion of each individual club is usually limited to two or three years. An Alumnae Club/Association is then created to allow longer-time residents to continue the friendships they have formed.

Annual membership fees are set by the individual clubs. Newcomers Clubs are non-profit clubs and membership fees are usually collected to meet the operating expenses of the club and to cover the cost of sending a monthly newsletter to each member

Club formation usually consists of a monthly general meeting, plus a variety of special events and group activities. The monthly meeting may be in the afternoon or evening; may take the form of a luncheon, dinner, or may be a planned program with a guest speaker and light refreshments. Ideally, new clubs can hold meetings in an individual's home and then progress to a church, hall, library, or any facility, which can meet a clubs' needs.

Prospective members usually may attend one or two monthly meetings, and may be encouraged to participate in some of the group activities, before joining the club. There are numerous activities that may interest members; Ladies'/Men's/ Couples' Bridge or Euchre, Luncheon Group; Couples' Evening Gourmet, Potluck Groups, Athletic Groups, Craft Groups, Moms & Tots, Book Discussion Groups, Theatre/Tour Groups – the possibilities are endless. The groups that exist depend on members' needs and interests. These individual groups are more successful to organize on a regular basis if a member volunteers to convene the activities. There is no charge to join a Club's group activities, however members are required to pay for the cost of materials used, admission fees, etc. The Club assumes no responsibility for such costs. Members are usually required to take

turns hosting any group's activities that are held in the homes. Many clubs also have a babysitting exchange/co-op to make it easier for mothers with young children to participate in daytime activities.

## To get started:

1) Hold a meeting of interested people to discuss the format of the Club and to draft the Bylaws. Sample by-laws are available on request; see our web-site at [www.nnac.ca](http://www.nnac.ca) to contact the National Association.

2) Fill the Executive positions. These positions may be appointed or filled on a volunteer basis for the first year, since elections may not be possible in the first year of Club formation. Executive members are expected to attend both General and Executive Meetings.

If the Club is formed with low membership, it may be necessary to fill only the mandatory positions: President, Vice-President, Membership Chairperson (if possible) and secretary/Treasurer. These people will then find it necessary to amalgamate some duties (i.e. publicity, hospitality, social activities, etc.) and seek some assistance from the membership to perform all required duties. In such situations, usually the President will also be responsible for doing the Club newsletter

3) Budget: The Club is a non-profit organization and membership fees are used to meet the operating expenses of the Club (i.e. the newsletter, postage, etc.). Membership fees are determined by the individual Club, usually in the range of \$10 to \$25 per year. If this is not sufficient to cover expenditures, you may wish to consider some fundraising endeavours.

4) Draw up a calendar of events so that activities do not fall on conflicting days. Determine the dates for the monthly general meetings and executive meetings. For example, the general meeting may be held on the 1st or 2nd Tuesday or Wednesday of each month. (Mondays and Fridays are usually too close to the weekend for good attendance; however, it will depend upon the preference of your membership.) Most clubs hold their executive meetings one or two weeks after each general meeting in order to have sufficient time to plan the general meeting, do publicity, etc.

5) Plan the Monthly General Meeting. It may be held in the afternoon or the evening; it may take the form of a luncheon or dinner, or it may be a planned program with a guest speaker and light refreshments. (Some clubs are finding that the increased cost of a meal is a deterrent to luncheon or dinner meetings).

Place: Often, when a group is small, it will hold its meetings in a private home. This may not be a good idea, even though it seems reasonable. Prospective members may feel uncomfortable coming to a stranger's home, and it is difficult to publicize a meeting place on a consistent basis if you meet in members' homes. If possible, make inquiries within your community to see if there may be a meeting room available in a church, library, school, etc. Usually, facilities are available at a reasonable cost (or sometimes, free) to non-profit organizations. Sometimes, churches are very helpful when you mention that you are a brand new club (that is affiliated with a National Organization) and have limited funds, especially if you mention that the Club would like to try and give a small donation to the church at the end of the year as a thank you.

Usually, the Vice-President is responsible for obtaining the meeting place and planning the program. A Club will usually have a telephone committee organized to contact each member prior to the general meeting to see if they will be attending, and to pass on any information relating to the meeting or group activities. If light refreshments are served at the general meeting, usually volunteers from the membership are asked to help out with providing such. A list can be passed around to members, so that they can volunteer for a particular month. The telephone committee can then use the list to remind members that it is their turn for refreshments.

PROGRAM: Usually consists of a guest speaker or demonstration. Try to have a good variety with some light and serious topics. Some ideas are: speakers on community services, local history, health and nutrition, cooking, flower arranging, parenting, recycling, travel, crafts, etc. As a non-profit organization, Newcomers usually cannot afford a speaker's fee; however, many clubs give their guest speaker a small gift. If a speaker has the potential of obtaining business as a result of his/her attendance, then a thank you card is sufficient. The Membership Chairperson (or Vice-President) and the Treasurer should be available at the door to greet new members and to accept membership fees. Other Executive members should make themselves available to greet members and guests, and to make them feel welcome.

6) Publicity: There are many avenues of publicity available free of charge to non-profit organizations:

(a) Local Newspaper: usually will make announcements in the community events section free of charge; may be interested in doing an article about the Club; and may wish to cover some of the Club's special events, photographs are always good publicity

(b) Radio and Cable T.V.: make community service announcements and may wish to do an interview

(c) Club Brochure: to be distributed to people and posted at various locations (library, supermarkets, and other businesses);

(d) List the Club with the local Chamber of Commerce, the Information Centre for the community, Parks and Recreation Department or Welcome Wagon

(e) Approach real estate firms and moving companies for assistance as they are dealing with new arrivals to your community. Publicity releases should include a description of the Club and where and when the general meeting is held. In some cases, you may be able to elaborate on some of the activities as well. Always include at least one or two names and telephone numbers of people to be contacted for further information. (Sometimes, Clubs include only telephone numbers and not names, since that helps to eliminate “crank” calls).

7. Newsletter: Each club publishes a monthly newsletter to notify members of the general meeting and other upcoming events. A club will usually elect a newsletter editor, who is part of the executive group. In a very small Newcomers Club, a core executive member, or a volunteer from the general membership will often assume the job of newsletter editor. The newsletter should be available to members approximately two weeks before the general Meeting. The Club newsletter, photocopying and mailing costs, is usually one of the biggest costs for Clubs.

8. By-Laws and Membership Roster: Each member should have a copy of the Club By-Laws and Membership Roster. A roster should contain the following for each member: Name, Address, Telephone Number and Husband's Name. Other information that could be made available through the Membership Application would be: names of children, birthdate of member (for celebratory purposes), where the member moved from, e-mail address and any other particulars the Executive might find necessary. Most clubs state in their By-Laws that the membership roster is “NOT TO BE USED FOR SOLICITING OR SELLING”.

9. Activity Groups: Activity groups are formed when there is sufficient interest in a particular activity. These groups are self-supporting and may make their own rules as long as they do not conflict with the By-Laws of the club. Usually, the second Vice-President is responsible for the club's activities groups. She appoints the convenors and helps to organize new activities, and acts as a liaison between the groups and the executive. One must be a member in good standing to participate in groups. If a particular activity takes place in the home, members usually take turns hosting.

There is usually no fee to join activity groups, however, members are responsible for any expenses they may incur. There are many different ideas for interest groups.

## SUGGESTIONS FOR ORGANIZING A NEWCOMERS CLUB

10. Coffee Parties: Some clubs hold coffee parties for new and prospective members to welcome them and introduce them to club activities. The hospitality chairperson usually arranges these.

11. Club History: Some clubs make a point to keep a record of their history, including pictures and press releases. Often, a volunteer from the general membership will agree to be club photographer and historian.

12. Charities: The extent to which groups become involved in charity donations is up to the individual club. Many clubs do make charitable donations if they have extra funds, or often clubs will volunteer their members' time to assist charitable associations. The above information is meant to offer information as a guide to organizing a Newcomers' Club. The extent to which these suggestions will be followed will depend very much on the feeling of the membership of your new Club. It is important to note that whatever works best is usually what the members feel most comfortable with.