



2017 NNAC Conference – Round-Table Discussions

The 2017 NNAC Conference in Toronto featured Round-Table Discussions on a variety of topics of interest to Newcomer and Alumni clubs across Canada. Here is a summary of the conclusions from these Round-Table Discussions.

1. HOW TO INSPIRE VOLUNTEERS TO THE EXECUTIVE

- Invite members-at-large to be a member of the executive. These member-at-large positions could have minimal responsibilities, but still get members used to the idea of serving on the board or executive.
- Word of mouth is one of the biggest and best ways to recruit board/executive members. Talk to new members as they come on board and help them get to know the organization; encourage them to get involved in special interest groups or other volunteer duties, which might eventually lead them into board / executive duties.
- Invite specific individuals to participate (i.e., make it a personal invitation, one-on-one); but also make sure there is still a process for calling for nominations from the entire club membership.
- When recruiting, make people feel they'll be great at the job in order to give them confidence (“you're fabulous, we want you!”)
- Split up jobs to make them smaller
- Create co-positions (shared positions) so that two people are sharing or splitting a role. For example, have 2 people coordinate the program; this makes it less daunting for people new to the position.
- Ensure there is flexibility in the positions; make the positions seem attractive and not too intimidating
- Ensure there are clear job descriptions for each role, so that those filling the roles are clear on what is expected.
- Have a party to thank all the conveners and volunteers, and encourage them to take on board / executive positions
- Recognize volunteers / executive members in the newsletter; profile volunteers or executive members and new members
- At the second last board meeting for the year, bring along a potential person to the board meeting who might be intimidated otherwise; serve wine, and encourage them to participate on the board or executive the next year
- Create an effective nominating committee that is good at encouraging new people to get involved in the board or executive
- Put regular messages on your website or Facebook page to let members know what happens at board / executive meetings
- Some clubs choose their next year's president from within the executive, while other clubs have a succession path that requires the Vice-President to move up into the role of President. (However, for Newcomer clubs, having a VP move into the president's role might create a problem if there is a 2-year or 3-year rule about moving into the Alumni club.)



2. MONTHLY MEETINGS - MAKING THEM ENGAGING AND WELCOMING

- Most clubs have a monthly meeting, but the formats seem to vary tremendously.
- Much of the variation seems due to the general socioeconomic status of the club. Some clubs have many members who can afford a monthly lunch or dinner meeting, while other clubs have members who prefer to attend a monthly meeting with free speaker, coffee, and cookies.
- Making the monthly meeting affordable for the majority of members is important to ensure good attendance at the monthly meeting.
- Most clubs seem to get about 30% - 50% of their members in attendance at their monthly meetings.
- Many Newcomer clubs focus their monthly meetings on having an interesting speaker to help members learn more about their community
- Speakers often talk about local services (e.g., speakers from local city council, hospital or medical facility, museums, art galleries, and a wide variety of local services or activities like dragon boat races, music clubs, hospice, etc.)
- Some clubs focus their monthly meetings on an outing such as a tour of a local facility, museum, etc. This helps new members to get to know their community, but this may involve costs for entrance fees.
- Some clubs give their interest groups the opportunity to talk about their year's activities at a special meeting each year (e.g., hiking group, photo group, book club, etc.)
- Having a fixed place where the monthly meetings are held seems to help with attendance. It seems best for attendance purposes if the meeting is always held on the same day/time each month in the same location.
- Having good publicity for the monthly meeting is also important (e.g., notice in the local newspaper, Facebook page, website, etc.)

3. CONFLICT RESOLUTION

- There are several ways in which there may be conflict within a club:
 - Between executive members
 - Between club members
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- While there are a variety of sources of conflict between executive members or between club members, the advice seems largely the same:
 - Encourage dialogue among the members of the club or the executive members who are in conflict, in order to try to solve the problem
 - Stay positive; executive members and club members all have common goals, and focusing on these goals in a positive manner can help to resolve conflict.
 - If the club President is not involved in the conflict, then the club President can serve as a mediator and meet individually with the person or group of people who are in conflict, to help them resolve the situation.



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- In some cases where there is conflict between desires and needs of different groups of members, the board / executive may need to vote on a resolution; in this case, the board/executive would need to have the final decision.
- Discussing the issues during NNAC President calls can result in obtaining advice from a variety of club presidents, which may be helpful in resolving the conflict.

4. PUBLICITY

- All clubs have a need for publicity to recruit new members and keep members aware of the variety of activities available.
- Technology helps tremendously with publicity – email, newsletters, websites, Facebook.
- Many clubs still have a few members who do not have access to email, and require a hard copy of the monthly newsletter.
- Monthly meetings are still an important way to publicize upcoming events.
- Many good ideas for information that could / should be included in a monthly newsletter:
 - Profiles of new members
 - Profiles of executive members
 - Profiles of conveners or volunteers
 - Call for nominations for executive positions or for conveners
 - Brief job descriptions for executive positions
- Facebook is a tool used by many clubs.
 - There is a need for public Facebook page or website, in order to recruit new members
 - There is also often a need for a private Facebook page or website, in order to post information about upcoming events that is private or accessible only by club members.
- Technology is a difficult issue for many clubs (especially smaller clubs), who do not have any members who are familiar with building web pages or web sites. These clubs expressed an interest in having NNAC assist them with website building.
- One club mentioned that WEEBLY is a very affordable website builder which is very easy to use.

5. WAIVERS

- While many clubs use a waiver form for their members (and even for guests / spouses), other clubs do not use a waiver form.
- Opinions seem to be divided on the value of having a waiver form.
 - On the one hand, it makes club members more aware that they need to take responsibility for their own safety at events.
 - On the other hand, it has been pointed out that if there is an accident involving a member, a lawsuit can occur even if a waiver has been signed.
- Clubs who use waiver forms recommend having the waiver form as part of the membership sign-up form.
- Clubs also recommend that if guests are allowed to attend events (e.g., spouses), that they could also be required to sign a waiver as part of the guest registration form.



6. ALUMNI CLUBS

- Some Newcomers Clubs now let everyone stay in the club and not advance to Alumni; this means the Alumni club won't grow any more.
- When alumni clubs no longer have a 'feeder' Newcomers Club, it leads to concern about how these alumni clubs can maintain their membership numbers in the future, since there is usually some level of alumni member attrition each year.
- It has been suggested that such Alumni groups can develop into a 'friendship' group with membership open to a wider audience, rather than just newcomers.