Advice and Best Practices for Recruiting New Activists and Leaders

DON’T:

- **Expect a mass member email asking for volunteers to succeed.** While you might get one or two individuals to respond if you are lucky, this kind of passive communication does not help us build real relationships with colleagues or to identify who would make a good activist. To do that we need active, one-on-one interactions that, while more labor-intensive, are the only way to build a sustainable activist core in the long-term.

- **Underplay the level of commitment you are asking from someone.** While it is sometimes tempting to preemptively soften the expectations of activism because you do not want to scare someone away, you are only setting your organization up for failure by not being honest about expectations. It is better to be realistic and upfront about what the commitment entails so the member can make an informed decision.

- **Expect a new activist to immediately take initiative or know what you want them to do.** New activists need to be supported and trained into their new roles before they are comfortable taking initiative. You need to have a plan in place for training and development over time if you expect your activists to succeed.

- **Keep activists in the dark on key organizing decisions.** Your activists are your chapter’s future leaders, and the strongest chapters are those that make space for real democratic decision making. Your members and activists should share decision making responsibility, both because it is ultimately their organization, but also because it gives them ownership over the campaign and inculcates a sense of shared responsibility for its success.

DO:

- **Have a specific task or assignment for them.** Your colleagues might be daunted by an abstract commitment like “join the organizing committee,” at first so you should instead be concrete and specific in your conversation. Ask them to help with data entry, speaking to a specific colleague in their department, attend a meeting, or look over a draft event flyer.

- **Follow up and check-in.** Remember that your goal is to develop someone to take on leadership in the chapter over time. Make a plan to check in regularly with the person, see if they have any questions, or work with them on a project or task.

- **Increase levels of responsibility gradually over time.** No one likes having a huge amount of responsibility and tasks dumped on them at once. Instead, ask the person to take on more responsibility gradually, and help them out along the way. You can start
with something as small as reviewing a document, and then ask them to speak to a colleague, present at a meeting, and eventually to run for chapter office.

- **Hold them accountable.** If the person says they will do something, follow up with them and confirm it was actually done. If it was not, have an open but direct conversation about why not and what they need to be successful. If it was completed, debrief how it went and find out if they have any questions or concerns. Leadership and activism are fundamentally about trust and responsibility, so it is important to build an expectation of holding each other accountable for the chapter to succeed.