

Developing a Great Organization

You already know that your organization has a great purpose. But beyond that, how can you ensure that your organization is built to last, creates excellent programming, and provides a meaningful experience for its members?

- **Put a great deal of emphasis on recruiting, orienting, and retaining members.**
Members are the lifeblood of any organization. Great organizations orient new members to the group and go out of their way to make membership an enjoyable and beneficial experience.
- **Set realistic, achievable, and challenging goals that move the organization forward.**
Forward-moving organizations set goals at least once every year and use maximum input from members in the process. These organizations also keep their goals visible as a motivator and check in on progress regularly.
- **Involve as many members as possible when making decisions.**
As the saying goes, “people support what they help create.” Wide-spread involvement usually results in better decisions, and when members feel their input is valued, they are more invested in the success of the program.
- **Develop current and future leaders.**
Pay attention to your new members: orient them formally and informally, offer shadowing and mentoring opportunities. Encourage them to think of their future in the organization and how they can develop their talents and move up. It is essential to prepare the up-and-coming leaders in order to have the next generation of officers.
- **Hold productive and effective meetings.**
Meetings can have a couple purposes: first, the discussion of business and decision making. Second, taking time to socialize, bond members to the organization, and enjoy each others’ company. Some organizations separate business from social time while others run informal meetings that incorporate both. It is important for your organization to periodically look at how your meetings are conducted, whether they accomplish their purpose and whether more or fewer meetings are required.
- **Communicate frequently and effectively.**
Good communication keeps members involved with an organization. Most students are very busy people, and there are times when they will not be at meetings and/or will be out of touch. Routinely sending out meeting notices and agendas, meeting minutes, and requests for opinions and ideas will keep members engaged with your organization. How and when your organization communicates should be a well-coordinated plan.
- **Program for a purpose.**
Programming for a student organization covers a lot of ground. It can include group activities, a campus-wide program or event, and community service projects. Carefully consider how programming opportunities relate to the purpose and goals of your organization and select those opportunities that are the best fit. Great organizations plan, promote, and participate in programs in an energized and high quality manner.
- **Build and maintain traditions.**
Most great organizations have some long-standing traditions – annual events, a logo, standard t-shirts, ways in which they run meetings, start and end the year, welcome new members, etc. Traditions make an organization unique and help members realize that they are part of something special.
- **Maintain a historical record.**
Members of special organizations use pictures, scrapbooks, journals, and files to keep a record of who has belonged to their group and what it has accomplished. Consider having a historian as an officer; future members will appreciate it and so will you when you come back to campus in 10 years for Homecoming!
- **Effectively utilize your advisor.**
Many great student organizations have a productive and positive relationship with the advisor. Ask your advisor what his or her expectations are of the members, and share your expectations of the advisor’s role. Don’t be afraid to ask questions, especially regarding the organization’s history or university context.
- **Plan for transitions.**
Maintaining a successful student organization over a number of years is a difficult thing to do due to annual turnover of officers. Summer constitutes a sudden and lengthy break in operations. Great organizations plan ahead to ensure quick start-up in the fall with well-trained officers. They also leave excellent records from the previous year.