

# Morning Table Discussion: *Focus on Membership*

## Summary of Ideas

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The morning panel discussion focused on various areas related to society membership. Participants were asked to share their reactions to the ideas presented by the panelists as well as any other ideas or experiences related to society membership. Considerations might include: Meetings, new members, social media, remote members, volunteers, or beginning researchers. Questions to consider might include: What activities or efforts have been successful? What challenges or roadblocks to success do you see?

Following the table discussions, one person from each table shared their table's key discussion points. This paper is an outline of the points presented.

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### **Social Media**

- A closed Facebook group (versus a FB page)
  - Active management needed:
    - Welcome new group members; Solicit posts about their ancestors
  - Encourage existing members to join group & contribute; post about value of membership
- Societies need to be involved in social media
- Can be intimidating to members; face-to-face contact is important as well

### **Membership Growth & New Members**

- Common society problem
- View members as “customers”
  - Identify & match their needs
- Get new members involved [in specific activities]
- Offer specific programs and workshops for new members
  - Beginning genealogy workshops
  - Specific “how to” workshops
  - Library orientation programs
- Establish an outreach committee focused on reaching out to new members
- Establish a mentorship program for new members/new researchers
  - One-on-one is important
  - Create opportunities for building relationships
  - Identifying mentors can be a challenge
- List new members in newsletters

### **Outreach to Attract Members**

- Go after new members: Be optimistic & engage in marketing efforts
- Establish an outreach committee focused on:
  - Reaching out for new members
  - Reaching out to remote members

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- Reaching out to new members
- Identify outreach opportunities: Advertise programs, meetings, projects etc. in their newsletters or communications tools/apps
  - Neighbor to Neighbor
  - [Nextdoor](#)
  - Retirement centers & communities
  - Neighborhood associations
  - Home owners associations
- Advertising is a challenge: Where to advertise?; “death of newspapers”

### Membership Retention

- Common society problem
- Encourage more than showing up to meetings
  - Call them (v. email communication only)
- List members in newsletters
- Feature members in newsletters
- Feature projects in newsletter

### Virtual Meetings, Webinars, Remote Speakers

- Interesting idea
- Present technology challenges
- Internet access at meeting locations can be problem
- Partner with other societies if technology is a roadblock
- Zoom.us platform: Remote sessions can be recorded for posting to YouTube channel

### Projects

- Cemetery Database
  - Make value-added: Add more information; link to pictures (e.g., tombstones)
  - Encourage contributions
- Digitization Efforts
  - Partner with Universities; e.g., Portal to Texas History at University of North Texas
- GenWeb Special Projects
  - <http://www.txgenweb.org/tx/projects.html>
  - Offer opportunities for members to be involved
  - However, projects have a marginal return on gaining new members

### Societies

- Include a president-elect on new board
  - Continuity of past officers on board is a benefit

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- Narrow society's focus
- Identify alternate fundraising options:
  - Restaurant social events, with restaurant kick-back
- Exploit TXGenWeb opportunities
  - <http://www.txgenweb.org/>

#### Focus on Youth

- Host a competition
  - Write or record (video) a family history related story/memory
  - Cash prize; Free membership
- Boy Scouts
  - Work with boy scouts working on genealogy badges
  - Assist Eagle scout candidates with community service projects related to genealogy or family history
  - Reach out to explorer troops
- Girl Scouts
- Exhibit at history fairs in schools, 2-year colleges
- Partner with schools/teachers to provide extra credit opportunities, e.g., write something or compile records
- LDS youth groups: Presentations