

Engagement – Getting Members Involved in the Affiliate

One of the greatest challenges faced by any association, including ACNM affiliates, is *how to involve individual members in activities*. Let's begin by defining a difference between engagement and involvement.

You first want to *engage* the members in your affiliate. You want them to know about the affiliate, be interested in it, and want to know you better. Think of this as building a community. You want to get to know each other better. You want your members to develop some interest in you before proceeding further.

Communicate regularly. Tell members what the affiliate is doing. If you are still in the process of organizing you can describe the steps you are taking, indicate future plans, and invite input (ideas for programs, goals, activities, etc.). At this point you should not recruit members to serve on boards or committees because asking for that level of commitment before you have gotten to know each other could scare them away.

You can, however, be alert to offers to help. If someone comes forward, ask about her/his interests, experiences, and thoughts on how she/he can become involved. Roughly 20% of the general population can be classified as “joiners,” who are generally eager to participate in organizations and causes in which they have interests. The person who privately or quietly says “how can I help” is someone to follow up with.

Regular communication is important. Try to avoid long periods of time with no communications. Regular (at least monthly) communication helps to build confidence in the competence of the group.

How do you communicate? Email is easy, low cost, and acceptable. You may need a mailed announcement initially that alerts members to your emails. The greatest challenges to email communications are getting them through spam filters and getting them opened and read. To increase your open rate, consider setting up a specific email address for your affiliate. Many members won't open an email from someone they don't know. Subject lines are also critically important; ideally the subject line should be something interesting and fairly short. Marketers have discovered that the shorter the subject, the higher the open rate.

If you cannot create an e-newsletter, a “newsy” email to share information works just as well. When using email, ensure that the message is fairly short, substantive and gets to the point. Use value statements and language to tell your story. Don't be modest. Highlight your affiliate's activities as much as possible. Since you are part of ACNM you can also share ACNM's efforts.



Examples of Value Statements

The _____ ACNM Affiliate continues to work with, ACNM and the Coalition for Quality Maternity Care continues to foster dialogue and federal lobbying.

The _____ ACNM Affiliate will be hosting a presentation of XXXXX next month for interested midwives.

The _____ ACNM Affiliate expressed concerns about women's health issue to the state legislative task group this week, speaking up on the behalf of certified midwives and certified nurse-midwives in the state.

The experience of many different marketing organizations tells us that email newsletters and messages work well and cost efficiently as a means to engage people.

Send Personal Messages

It is ok to get personal. You might want to invite people to share accomplishments and challenges, professional and personal, with you that can be incorporated in your messages.. Asking someone for their thoughts and suggestions is a complement. Think of it as checking in electronically.

Ideas for Other Means of Engagement

Using your various communication avenues to support one another can help. When you send out a "newsy" email, post it on Facebook and on your website. Post birthday and anniversary greetings. If ACNM sends out any special information, report it on your site with a note on Facebook linked to your website.

Personal contact with new members of the affiliate is an excellent idea. Consider phoning or sending personal notes to new members to welcome them, let them know you are here, and inviting them to your next program.

At meetings and programs, ensure that new members are welcomed and invited to be part of a table or group. They need to have a positive experience and leave planning to return. Friends will always gather together (it is part of the value of membership); just make sure that newcomers are not left alone.

Set up car pools or room sharing to attend the ACNM convention.

Post information about job openings.

Create a list of key addresses and phone numbers of licensing authorities and other information important to midwives in your state. Make this information available via email and on your website.



Conduct a periodic survey of members to ask them about their concerns, likes, and wishes.

When you are engaging, you are developing relationships. Think of how you might act with friends. Send cards on birthdays (or via email); send congratulations on achieving a professional objective or the birth of a child or grandchild.

What do We Communicate About? What do Midwives Want?

People usually join associations – or become involved in organizations – for two basic reasons:

- **Specific benefits that come with membership – what is in it for me?** Benefits can be discounts, access to information, networking opportunities, attendance at CE programs, etc.
- **Does the association act for the “good of the order” – or for what I believe in?** Does the organization represent my concerns, my profession, and my beliefs in public? Does it stand up for me?

It is interesting that in the landmark study, *The Decision to Join*, the American Society of Association Executives identified the latter reason as slightly stronger than the former (<http://www.asaecenter.org/Resources/decisiontojoin.cfm>).

As an affiliate leader, you can take advantage of ACNM resources. In the 2012 and 2013 Member Assessment Surveys, members told us what is important to them. Even though this is a national survey, the data likely apply to midwives in your state. Activities that focus on the following issues will resonate with members.

The **greatest challenges** facing midwives personally and as members of a profession were

- Lack of public awareness
- Lack of awareness among health care professionals
- Physician/medical systems barriers
- Career development and help in finding employment

Key motivators based on the 2013 survey included

- Advocacy, including federal and state legislatures and regulatory agencies
- Promoting midwifery to the general public and other medical professionals (this was by far the highest rated item when asking what challenges are faced by midwives)
- Providing up to date information and knowledge



- Setting high standards; maintaining standards of practice and core competencies
- Career development resources



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