

SECTION 8

RECRUITING AND RETAINING NEW MEMBERS IN YOUR DISTRICT

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The Massachusetts Dental Society (MDS) wants to help our local districts grow their membership. Our state and local volunteer leaders and staff at all levels of the MDS have provided members with up-to-date, valuable resources and guidance. While many dentists have accessed these MDS and American Dental Association (ADA) resources, many more need to be made aware of what is available. Discussing and utilizing these resources is an excellent opportunity to reinforce the value of membership from a member perspective.

Supplied Reports

MDS reports and dashboard updates will be sent to district chairs monthly. These reports and dashboards provide the district leadership with valuable information to evaluate the progress of recruitment and retention efforts. These reports include a list of current district members, nonmembers, and non-renewals. It is important for the district board to review the information in the reports and create strategies to not only engage current members but recruit new members.

Half Year and Quarter Year Dues Promotion

Annually, the ADA offers a half-year and quarter-year dues promotion that allows nonmembers who meet a specific defined criteria to join the tripartite (ADA, MDS, and local dental district). If you are looking for a softer approach to recruit members during this time, the half-year dues campaign (50% dues rate reduction for nonmembers prior to the previous year) demonstrates the tangible value and purpose of tripartite membership and asks dentists to join. The quarter-year dues campaign is complimentary for three months, during the last quarter of the year. Both are offered once in a lifetime. The MDS will continue to work with districts to retain dentists using data analytics to make sound recruitment and retention decisions and improve our overall market share.

Take Stock of Your District

Before marketing your local district to potential new members, it is important to gauge the district's attractiveness to current and prospective members. Think about your district for a few minutes. Do you recognize any of the following?

- Is your district experiencing a decrease in member involvement?
- Have district meetings become routine?
- Are new attendees welcomed to your district programs?
- Is your district locked in tradition and unwilling to change?
- Are you finding it harder to attract and keep new members?
- Is there a genuine desire to bring in new members?
- Are the same few members doing all the work?
- Are there volunteer roles in the district that a new member can help with?

If your district is experiencing any of the above, it is time to step back and identify areas that could use a new approach. By continually evaluating and adapting events and practices, a district will maintain the interest of current members and attract new ones.

The district's recruitment message does not have to be a written script. A more effective tool is a list of informal talking points that all members can refer to when speaking about the benefits of the MDS. Districts should customize their message to include local activities and benefits specific to the area. Members can complement these points by describing personal experiences.

Recruitment Tools

The MDS will supply each district with the following lists upon request:

- Never member (dentists who have never been MDS members)
- Former member (dentists who at some point were MDS members but are not currently members)
- Nonrenewals (dentists that were members last year but have not paid their dues for this year)
- At-risk members (2nd year out, new members on prior year)

Recruitment Steps 1–5

1. Action Item: Create a Membership Outreach Team Focused on Recruitment & Retention

- Identify well-qualified members of your District to be membership outreach recruiter for the district
- Bring together this membership outreach team to review the MDS supplied reports and, together, prioritize your prospects. *Best prospects/dentists are nonmembers one to 5 years out of dental school. (Remember 1-5 years out – receive discounted dues)*
- Review the MDS supplied reports and determine who the right person in the district is to initiate the outreach efforts. Consider business associates (is there a member who works with the prospect?) and personal contacts (is there a member who has a personal or alumni relationship with the prospect?)
- Set a membership net goal for the district
- Once a new member is welcomed to the district, follow the retention steps at the end of this section titled “Member Retention: Best Practices That Win Members for Life.”

2. Market Your District

- Introduce prospective members to the MDS by informing them about how the MDS and your district are helping members through engagement, protection, information, and advancement efforts.
- A recent issue of a district newsletter is also a good introduction to member benefits and engagement activities.
- A prospective member who has been introduced to the MDS by enthusiastic members and is informed about the Society's benefits before joining is more likely to become involved and remain active.

Use the following questions to help develop your own district-level talking points:

- Why did current district members join the MDS?
- What do current district members say is the best part about being a member of the MDS?
- What makes your district unique?

3. Strategize

Invite prospective members to committees, activities, fundraisers, board meetings, and social activities. An involved prospective member will feel a part of the district and make organized dentistry a personal priority. Consider the following steps to get prospects and members involved in local district activities:

- Direct mail
- Email
- Phone calls
- Videos by district members encouraging renewal/joining/getting involved
- Conduct a district membership challenge and ask every executive committee member and District member to recruit at least one or two new members a year
- Have members invite prospects to a district meeting or social event
- Award a prize at the end of the year to the member with the newest recruits
- Dedicate a portion of a district meeting to recruitment of new members; share the list of nonmembers with the executive committee and members
- Create a membership development volunteer position within the district assigned to sending invitations prior to meetings or events
- Let invitees know they can bring a friend; prospective members might feel more comfortable attending an event if they can bring a guest
- Follow up with a phone call, email, or letter from the designated district or MDS representative with any prospect who attends a district program. Invite him or her to lunch or the next CE program you plan to attend. For many, the hardest part is walking in the door alone to their first program.

4. Monitor and Report

- The MDS can provide membership statistics on request and report progress to district executive committees, along with any suggestions for modifications to the recruitment plan
- When recruiting potential members, share your MDS experiences and excitement—the best way to generate interest is to let your satisfaction and fulfillment speak for you
- When communicating your message, remember not to assume that a nonmember is aware of the MDS. Communicate the benefits of the tripartite membership structure (the ADA, the MDS, and districts).

Member Retention: Best Practices That Win Members for Life

Why Do MDS Members Leave?

Most people are reluctant to tell you the real reason they're leaving. They don't want to cause an issue, hurt feelings, or simply don't feel like wasting time. When you're disengaged enough to terminate your membership, you don't generally take the time to explain why or even seriously think about why. However, the one thing most responses will have in common is that **the member simply didn't find enough value in membership.**

Tackling member retention means asking yourself and your district, *how do I make someone like me?* It is personal for each member. What is valuable to one member may matter very little to another. This is the true difficulty with member retention; there isn't a single timeless answer. However, we know that customized member experiences are important in the context of member retention. Thus, as you make decisions regarding what tactics work and don't work for your membership base, keep personalization in mind.

Tip #1: Reach Out Early and Often

It's important to stay in touch with your members. You can do this through messages in your District meetings, online community, phone calls, and emails.

Tip #2: Start Your Retention Program on Day One

Welcome the new member on day one. Educate him or her on the benefits of membership and stay in touch. Pair up the new member at a CE meeting with a seasoned member.

Tip #3: Customize Your Approach/Communications Wherever Possible

One-size membership no longer fits all. People expect a customized approach. Personalization should never fall out of priority. Consider that personalized subject lines in emails are more likely to be opened. This means customizing all types of communications and interactions. If you're not providing an experience that feels personal, you can assume your members feel like a number. And that is never a reason to renew.

Tip #4: Find Out Why They Joined and Do More of It

Every member has a reason why he or she joined. Find out what it was, what problem they thought membership could solve for them, and the "secret sauce" behind member retention. Use that information to customize your offerings and your communications.

Create a Formal Membership Retention Plan

You know the importance of membership retention, but does your district have a formal membership retention plan? Do you have tactical steps in place that you're actively completing to boost district membership renewals? If not, you may want to consider creating one, particularly so district leaders have something concrete to reference (and improve) throughout the year. A good membership retention plan should span an entire membership year (and perhaps even longer). A good example would be as follows: Focus outreach activities on **at-risk** members identified by analytics as having the highest percentage of not renewing (2nd year out and now needing to pay dues).

Below is an example of what a membership retention plan could look like for new members in your district. (Note: This only covers six months, as opposed to a full membership year.)

Example Membership Retention Plan

Month 1:

- Send them a welcome email
- Give them a phone call
- Welcome them on social media and/or in your District newsletter

Month 2:

- Invite them to an event
- Send them a targeted email (based on the interests they checked when filling out the member application form)

Month 3:

- Follow up with another phone call to check in and see how they're doing
- Invite them to a new member orientation

Month 4:

- Send them another targeted email (with relevant and valuable content)
- Invite them to another event or MDS webinar

Month 5:

- Pair them with a member mentor (if they haven't been paired already)
- Send them a personalized email highlighting a specific benefit or area of the MDS website that will help them specifically (e.g., if they're a recent graduate member, direct them to the [Career Center](#))

Month 6:

- Look at who's at risk (based on involvement, meeting attendance, etc.)
- Survey your new members and ask them what benefits they're utilizing, what they'd like to see from your District, etc.

Member Retention Takeaway

Member retention is not a simple equation. It should be a personalized approach to building a better relationship with each of your members. It's about providing them with the value they are seeking and solving the problems they thought you could help address. Put simply: Discovering what they need and providing it to them is the easiest way to increase member retention.