



SOROPTIMIST

Best for Women

Recruitment Manual

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Introduction

The importance of Soroptimist to women and girls throughout the world is embodied through our ability to respond to the needs of today while planning for the future. The diverse nature of our work, from building domestic violence shelters to providing relief funding to women who have fallen victim to natural disasters, is reflective of the 19 countries our membership encompasses. As the status of women and girls shifts and changes in the world, so do our programs—ensuring that we are truly an organization of women at their best helping other women to be *their* best.

Individual Soroptimist clubs are as diverse as our membership. It is the goal of clubs to carry out our mission while making membership convenient and relevant within the reality of today’s environment, including increasingly demanding schedules. Recruiting new members within this environment who will sustain clubs as well as lead them into the future often is cited as the main challenge for clubs. This manual is intended to guide clubs through the recruitment process, offering tips and resources that can be used to develop a customized plan that suits individual club needs.

Please keep in mind as you read this manual that the suggestions are just that—suggestions. This manual is not intended to be a set of rules that all clubs must follow. Considering the diversity of Soroptimist clubs, it is not possible to create a “one-size-fits-all” model for recruitment. Additionally, although the manual is comprehensive, it is by no means exhaustive. Every day clubs are coming up with new and innovative recruitment ideas and projects. Clubs should use this manual as a starting point to create a plan that works for them and are encouraged to incorporate as much flexibility into their recruitment practices as possible.

Step #1: Perform a Club Assessment

Before marketing itself to new members, it is important for a club to gauge its attractiveness to prospects by performing an assessment, or “health check.” Just as we sometimes take our own health for granted, clubs also tend to take their health for granted, which may lead to marketing a “faulty” product. Think about your own club for a few minutes and see if you recognize some of the following symptoms:

- Is your club experiencing a slowing down of member involvement?
- Have club meetings become routine?
- Is your club locked in tradition and unwilling to change?
- Are you finding it harder to attract and keep new members?
- Is there *genuine* desire to bring in new members, especially if they are in some way different from current members?
- Do club procedures make it complicated to bring in new members or cause delays?
- Are the same few members doing all the work?

If your club is experiencing any of the above, it’s time to step back and identify areas that could use a new approach. An assessment can provide invaluable insights into a club’s health by identifying strengths and weaknesses—and opportunities for improvement—in the eyes of all members, not just club leaders. What members value changes over time, and so must a club’s ability to adapt.

A sample club assessment is available in the membership section of the members area of www.soroptimist.org. Clubs are encouraged to modify, add and delete questions based on specific areas of concern. It is important that clubs not shy away from including questions that may challenge long-standing practices ingrained in their culture, such as meeting schedules, outdated programs that do not focus on women and girls and preconceived notions about eligibility for membership based on title, occupation, and age.

Once a club has identified areas to address in the assessment and has developed the form, here are some tips for conducting the assessment:

- Assign an assessment coordinator—a neutral, unbiased club member (not on the board or in a leadership position)—to lead the initiative.
- Include all members in the assessment—mailing and emailing the assessment form as necessary. When mailing forms, provide a stamped return envelope to increase the response rate.
- Ask club members to answer all the questions to the best of their knowledge.
- Assure members that all information is confidential and/or anonymous unless they choose for it not to be. Encourage them to be honest and direct and to submit additional ideas.

The results of an assessment can help clubs determine what has kept them from reaching their goals and what must be done to overcome these obstacles. For example, if an assessment reveals that a majority of club members feel the club's projects do not promote the Soroptimist mission, the club should consider revamping current programs or trying new ones.

An annual assessment gives clubs a framework within which members can create a plan for positive change that includes revitalized recruitment initiatives. By continually evaluating and adapting projects and practices, a club will maintain the interest of current members and attract new ones.

Step #2: Know What You're Selling—and Believe in It

After clarifying its focus and identifying strengths through an assessment, a club is ready to develop a strong, succinct message to be communicated to prospective members. Club members are aware of the rewards and benefits of Soroptimist membership and are best suited to craft a message that shows prospective members how they can benefit from belonging to a specific club.

There are two parts to selling: selling to yourself and selling to others. Before you can sell successfully to others, you must believe in what you're selling. If you don't believe in Soroptimist and your club, no one else will either. You must be enthusiastic when conveying your club's value proposition because people want to be part of a dynamic group.

Women join Soroptimist because they feel the organization will provide value to their lives, both as volunteers and as business and professional women. Market research has shown the leading factor in joining Soroptimist is the opportunity for a woman to personally make a difference in the lives of women and girls, in their local community and throughout the world. Thus, it is important that all clubs stay true to the Soroptimist mission and make this element the focus of their recruitment practices.

A club'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 Soroptimist. The list below provides a basis for developing talking points for your club. Clubs should customize their list to include activities and rewards specific to them, and members can also complement the list by describing personal experiences.

Following is an overview of Soroptimist membership benefits:

- **Fulfillment:** Work on projects that improve the lives of women and girls and foster personal satisfaction and recognition.
- **Friendship:** Cultivate relationships with other women who have similar interests and values.
- **Diversity:** Meet and learn about women from different ethnic and cultural backgrounds, and participate in projects that address the needs of women throughout the globe.
- **Networking:** Associate with other women representing a variety of professions to facilitate valuable business contacts.
- **Leadership:** Develop skills at the club level to enhance leadership opportunities at all levels of the organization as well as professional capabilities.
- **Mentoring:** Reach out to women at the beginning of their professional lives and share expertise.
- **Convenience:** Belong to an association with organized programs and professionally developed resources that enable members to concentrate on providing volunteer service.
- **Services:** Receive a subscription to *Best for Women*, SIA's award-winning magazine; access a wealth of resources in the members area of www.soroptimist.org; and take advantage of special offers and discounts through partnering organizations.

More tips

- Modify your message for different markets. What is important to one prospect may not be important to another.
- It is natural for a prospective member to question what will be expected of her if she joins Soroptimist. Club requirements differ, but all members have some basic responsibilities, such as participating in events and meetings, assisting with recruitment, and paying dues. Be open with prospective members about the time commitment and financial obligation of your club.
- If possible, consider subsidizing or waiving club dues for members who are dealing with financial constraints.
- Make the time commitment seem less intimidating by inviting potential members to familiarize themselves with Soroptimist by participating in a short-term project before joining.
- In all contacts with potential members, be quick to share your Soroptimist connection, but avoid being overzealous. No one likes to feel pressured to join. 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 the public is aware of Soroptimist and your club. Even if your club has an 80-year-old history, it is not guaranteed that people will know what a Soroptimist is. Even those who are familiar with Soroptimist may not know what your club actually does to improve the lives of women and girls in your community and around the world.

Understanding the full menu of benefits offered by Soroptimist, being prepared to talk about them knowledgeably and succinctly, and complementing them with personal stories and experiences is a comprehensive, effective approach to communicating the value of membership.

Step #3: Identifying Prospects

Now that you know what you are selling, it is easier to determine who you should be selling it to—otherwise known as prospecting. Prospecting is the process of identifying people who would be attracted to the Soroptimist mission and who would bring ideas, enthusiasm, and needed skill sets to the organization.

Who is right for Soroptimist?

As clubs set out to identify prospects, one question frequently arises: who exactly are they “allowed” to invite to join Soroptimist? An initial, quick and easy response to this question is provided in the SIA bylaws:

Article IV, Section 2 of the SI Constitution reads:

"Section 2. (i) To qualify for membership of Soroptimist International a woman should:

- a) be working in a profession or business or in an occupation of comparable status or responsibilities to those of a person working in a profession or business (regular members); or*
- b) be recently retired from or temporarily or permanently out of work from a profession or business or an occupation of comparable status or responsibilities to those of a person working in a profession or business (retired/unemployed members); or*
- c) be embarking on a career in a profession or business or occupation of comparable status or responsibilities to those of a person working in a profession or business.” (embarking members)*

As clubs are well aware, however, the changing times—and changing pool of potential members—have caused us to stop and think beyond the words of the bylaws to determine who is right for Soroptimist. Inviting members who will be both productive and dedicated involves more than conducting a comparison to requirements included in a governance document. It is worthwhile to take a closer look at the bylaws and explore how recruitment efforts can be expanded within their meaning and intention.

“Profession or business”

Many clubs specifically ask for clarification of the phrase “profession or business” as used in the bylaws. It is understandable why clubs look for guidance in this area, because determining what constitutes a profession or business can be a complicated issue. Even if it were possible to generate an all-inclusive list of titles and occupations considered to be part of the profession and business category, the list would be out-of-date almost immediately as women enter new and diverse fields and their professional lives evolve. Additionally, titles continue to become more and more unique to the industries they serve, not always falling into standard categories and rarely articulating the true meaning of a woman’s responsibilities and capabilities.

Because it is so difficult to provide a concrete definition of “profession or business,” the federation empowers clubs to be inclusive in their interpretation of this phrase rather than exclusive. Instead of focusing solely on title and occupation, clubs are encouraged to look

closely at the actual work a potential member does and how her attitude, enthusiasm, ideas, and skill set would add to the club. In other words, the primary focus of recruitment should be on specific contributions an individual can make to the club and to Soroptimist.

Finding prospects

Following are a host of resources and tactics for generating promising prospects:

- **Former members:** Review old rosters and select names of past members who might be interested in renewing their membership. A majority of Soroptimists terminate membership due to time constraints. This may be a temporary situation or can be mitigated by decreasing volunteer time requirements at the club level. These women believe in the mission of Soroptimist and would probably appreciate being asked to rejoin their local club. This is one of the most overlooked target areas, and should be reviewed on at least an annual basis.
- **Business associates:** Because Soroptimist is an organization of business and professional women, one of the best places to recruit new members is at your place of business. Invite colleagues, associates and vendors to a meeting or event, and encourage members to research and target women in their profession.
- **Donors:** Add to your list the names of donors and individuals who have otherwise supported your fundraisers or charity drives. If you hold silent auctions or raffles, be sure to collect the names and addresses of participants. Published lists of contributors to other charities that relate to your club's interests are also a good resource.
- **Local nonprofits or women's groups:** Invite associates and friends involved in other volunteer and professional organizations to attend events to learn more about Soroptimist. Establishing partnerships with these groups and working together on projects is an effective way to reach the members of similar-minded organizations.
- **Newspapers, local trade publications and magazines:** Look for announcements of women-owned businesses or women who have been promoted or appointed to new positions. Send these women a letter of congratulations, describe Soroptimist, and invite them to your next meeting.
- **Local Chamber of Commerce and Women's Yellow Pages:** Both of these directories are sources of women-owned businesses in your area.
- **Trade shows and community events:** Set up a booth or table, have literature on display, and collect business cards so names can be added to your list. Offer a prize drawing as an incentive for prospects to stop by. (For more tips on exhibiting, see the Exhibit Guide in the public awareness section of the members area of www.soroptimist.org.) Volunteering at these events is also a great way to make contacts and raise the profile of your club in the community.
- **Personal contacts:** Ask members to spread the word about Soroptimist within their parent-teacher association and college sorority alumni, and among family members.
- **Award winners:** Women who have received an award from your club or Soroptimist often want to give back to the organization that helped them, including recipients of the Soroptimist Women's Opportunity Award and the Soroptimist Making a Difference for Women Award. Invite them to join. The judges of the Making a Difference for Women Award are also good candidates for membership.

Another source of leads is the Introduction Forms received at SIA headquarters and forwarded to clubs by the region membership chairs. These prospective members have taken the time to go to the Soroptimist website and complete the form, so their interest level is high and they expect to

be contacted. Do not let these promising leads slip away! A quick phone call or email is all it takes to acknowledge the prospect's interest. Create a standard email response to these inquiries that includes information on upcoming club meetings with an invitation to attend along with relevant contact information, and send a "Living Their Dreams" brochure as an attachment. A sample email response to Introduction Forms is available in the membership section of the members area of www.soroptimist.org.

More tips

- Invite speakers who have presented at your meetings to join.
- Hold an annual "prospecting" meeting to brainstorm additional sources of members in your community.
- For all club functions, including networking receptions, luncheons, and recruitment events, ask attendees to sign a guest list and add this information to your prospect list.
- Keep a record of the source of all prospects (where you obtained the names) because prospects will often ask how their names were added to your list.
- Assign responsibility for maintaining the prospect list to one member, such as the club membership chair or secretary.

Step #4: Making Contact

Now that you have built a list of high-potential prospects, it is time to make contact. Following are some options for reaching prospective members:

Email: Email is an economical, timely method of communication and is often cited as the preferred means of contact by professionals—particularly younger professionals. However, heavily relying on email because it is cost-effective can alienate prospective members who are seeking to join a club because of the personal interaction it affords. When recruiting, email is best used to complement other types of contact. For example, an email could be sent to a prospective member inviting her to a meeting and then be followed up with a phone call.

- *Uses:* Invitation to join, invitation to a meeting, confirmation of attendance, follow up to a meeting, follow up to a mailing.
- *Tip:* Obtain club email addresses that can be used by club leaders during their time in office and then be passed on to incoming officers. This helps prevent communication breakdowns during the transition of leadership.

Mailings: Although direct mail pieces can get lost in the volumes of mail received by professional and business women, they can create awareness among large numbers of prospective members without seeming intrusive. For any mailing to be successful, clubs must carefully maintain their mailing list to ensure materials are reaching the appropriate targets. Contact information must be updated frequently and prospects who are not interested must be removed.

- *Uses:* Targeted or widespread promotion of membership or a meeting/event; ongoing, unobtrusive contact with prospects.
- *Tip:* Personalize direct mail pieces and letters when possible.

Advertising: Like mailings, advertising can create awareness among large numbers of prospective members but is impersonal. However, advertising can complement direct mail efforts by reaching prospects who have not been captured on existing mailing lists.

- *Uses:* Targeted or widespread promotion of membership or a meeting/event.
- *Tip:* When considering purchasing advertising, think beyond traditional venues like newspapers. Online advertising can increase traffic to a club website, and hits can be tracked to determine the effectiveness of the ad.

Phone calls: Calls are effective because they give the organization a personal identity in the form of a person who can answer questions and demonstrate enthusiasm. Calls also elicit immediate feedback, and the caller can address the specific needs of the prospect.

- *Uses:* Invitation to join, invitation to a meeting, confirmation of attendance, follow up to a meeting, follow up to a mailing.
- *Tip:* Phone follow-ups to direct mail campaigns can increase the response rate from 3 percent to 10 percent.

Face-to-face: Inviting prospects to a meeting, whether it is a regularly scheduled club meeting or a recruitment event, is one of the most effective ways to educate potential members about the role of Soroptimist in the community and the benefits of membership. When using an event-based recruiting model it is best to term it as a networking event for women in your community to show the value an affiliation with Soroptimist might grant them.

Some general tips for holding a successful recruitment event include:

- Begin planning well in advance, at least three months before the event.
- Dedicate a club meeting to brainstorming and ask members to bring lists of potential invitees.
- Consider holding award ceremonies in conjunction with the event. This shows prospective members that the club appreciates and rewards participation and effort.
- Keep the event short, informative and interesting. Do not inundate prospective members with too much information.
- Create a brief PowerPoint presentation for a speaker to use as a visual aid. A sample membership presentation is available in the membership section of the members area of www.soroptimist.org.
- Choose a date and time that appeal to your target. Be sure to accommodate women who work during the day or have childcare issues. Avoid holidays.
- Choose a venue that can be accessed via a variety of transportation options. Avoid public areas where the meeting might be disrupted.
- Appoint a member as the contact for the meeting so all questions and RSVPs can be referred to one person.
- Send invitations at least a month before the meeting. Make sure your invitations include the When, Where, What, and Call to Action/RSVP. If all of the information is there, the attendee does not have to research additional information—she just has to RSVP and show up!
- Let invitees know they can bring a friend. New prospects might feel more comfortable attending an event if they can bring a guest.
- Before the event, email members a list of attendees so they are aware of who will be present.
- Download or order Soroptimist materials to distribute: brochures that can be read in detail later; business cards so attendees have easily accessible contact information; and giveaway items that can serve as both a “thank you” and as a consistent reminder of Soroptimist.

- Make name tags for everyone that indicate whether an attendee is a current member or a guest.
- Have all guests sign in.
- Begin and end on time.
- Ask each attendee to introduce herself and describe what she does.
- Consider collecting business cards for a raffle and prize drawing at the end of the evening.
- **Ask prospective members to join!** Have prospective member forms available at the meeting. A sample prospective member form is available in the membership section of the members area of www.soroptimist.org.
- Follow up after the meeting with a phone call, email or letter.

Sample invitation and follow-up letters are available in the membership section of the members area of www.soroptimist.org. General tips to use when preparing letters include:

- Keep communications short and succinct—no more than one page.
- Gear your letters toward your audiences. If a prospective member has been recommended by a member or is familiar with Soroptimist, the letter will have a different tone than a letter sent to a prospect that is less familiar with Soroptimist.
- Send letters on Soroptimist stationery.
- Proofread letters carefully.
- Highlight phrases like “invitation only” and “you have been selected.” This relays the message that the recipient has been chosen rather than solicited from a generic audience.
- Include a call to action, asking for a direct response within a dedicated period of time.
- Send letters from the club president or membership chair.

Step #5: Retaining New Members

A member’s first three years are crucial in her journey as a Soroptimist. This time in the member’s career as a Soroptimist is important for two reasons: first, it is the most important time to build loyalty. Second, this is the time during which members are most likely to terminate membership. Clubs need to inform new members, keep in contact, and encourage participation to increase a new member’s chances of becoming a committed Soroptimist.

- **New Member Education:** Educate members early so they feel invested in the organization. Talk to new members about your club’s individual culture, history, programs and events, and invite them to become part of the SIA Mentor Program. (Information about the program is available in the member benefits section of the members area of www.soroptimist.org.)
- **Getting Members Involved Early:** There is a greater chance members will value their membership if they are actively included in club programs and events. By encouraging new members to become involved early, they will form a vested interest in club happenings, thereby enforcing their commitment to the club and the Soroptimist mission.
- **New Member Feedback:** Once new members join the organization, remember not to let communications drop off. Staying in touch with new members through phone calls and email will show them they are valued. Also, invite new members to meet casually with club officers and other leaders within the first 90 days of their membership. Their input will give new perspectives on the club. Finally, develop a new member survey and ask new members to complete it after their first six months of membership. This will show you how effective

your club is at engaging new members. A sample new member survey is available in the membership section of the members area of www.soroptimist.org.

Recruitment Tools and Resources

The Soroptimist website enables more members than ever to interact, order sales items, register for convention and learn about the history of our organization. Visit the members area of www.soroptimist.org to access the following tools and resources:

- **The “Soroptimist: Helping Women and Girls to Live Their Dreams” DVD, “Living Their Dreams” brochures and “Live Your Dream” pins** can be used to raise awareness and aid in recruitment efforts. (Soroptimist Store)
- **Sample forms, surveys, letters and presentations** can be downloaded and customized to suit the needs of your club. (Membership Resources & Information)
- Review our **generational marketing presentation** for ideas on tools and techniques to use for prospective targets of different ages. (Membership Resources & Information)
- **Soroptimist 101** is a tool for educating new members about the organization. (Membership Resources & Information)
- Several **fact sheets** about Soroptimist programs are available for download. (News Room)
- Visit the networking **Forum** to see what other clubs are doing to recruit members. Use the **club directory** to contact clubs and ask what they’re doing. (Connect with Soroptimists)
- Your **region membership chairs** are there for you! These leaders are available to answer questions and help you tackle your most challenging recruitment issues. Their contact information is listed in the Leadership Directory. (Connect with Soroptimists)

Recruitment Plan Quick Checklist

- Perform a club assessment
- Set realistic goals and establish an achievement date
- Set a budget that includes costs of recruitment events, materials and mailings
- Craft your message and talking points
- Identify prospects
- Choose communication methods
- Download and/or order marketing materials from headquarters
- Plan and hold recruitment event(s)

Conclusion

Membership growth must be a vital concern to every Soroptimist. Therefore, every member has the privilege and obligation of seeking new members. Some ways to involve current members in recruitment efforts include:

- **Recruitment teams.** Divide your membership into teams and make recruitment a contest with an incentive. Studies have shown that while people may not always work their hardest to be the best, they will work their hardest not to come in last place.
- **Issue a challenge.** Conduct a membership challenge and ask every member to recruit at least one new member this club year. Make sure all members have materials to distribute, including Living Their Dreams brochures.
- **Recognize members.** Consider awarding a prize to the member with the most new recruits at the end of the club year, putting her name in the club newsletter, and/or presenting her with a certificate or other small token of appreciation.

Developing and executing a recruitment strategy can seem overwhelming. Start small, take your time and learn not to take it personally when you ask people to join and they say no. Also, don't let budget concerns discourage you. Outreach to a new audience does not necessarily equal extra expenses. An email campaign to targeted prospects followed by a phone call is a cost-effective and simple approach. And remember, the membership team at headquarters is always ready to answer questions, offer tips, and direct you to resources to help you develop and launch your recruitment plan.

Membership recruitment is a year-round activity that affects all aspects of club life, including program, public awareness and fundraising. Set realistic goals, create a calendar of tactics that will achieve these goals, and work together to ensure success. Use your imagination and have fun!