

HOW TO EXPAND YOUR PROBUS CLUB

For PROBUS clubs wanting to expand in their communities, there are a variety of mechanisms that can be used. Regardless of which ones you employ, you'll need volunteers to help in many facets of such expansion efforts. And expanding a club is not simply an exercise in marketing the club. It also should include a close look at your club and its activities to ensure they are of the quality and diversity that can readily attract new members.

Some of the expansion measures that could be considered include:

1.) KNOW WHAT THE MEMBERSHIP WANTS THE CLUB TO BE - Have a good understanding of what your membership wants in the way of activities and size of the club. Survey them in person at membership meetings and social activities or by phone or through social media and email. And ensure the survey provides examples of the types of activities the club could offer if it has the resources (mainly volunteers) to implement them.

2.) KNOW WHAT NON-MEMBERS IN THE COMMUNITY WANT IN A SOCIAL CLUB - Get a sense of what the over-55s in your community (who are not club members) might want in a social fellowship club like PROBUS. In other words, do some very basic market research by asking acquaintances who are not club members, guests at club functions, representatives of other senior groups in the community, etc. And try to target a broad mix of over-55 ages in the club since this can help attract a wider range of potential members.

3.) USE CLUB MEMBERS TO RECRUIT NEW MEMBERS - Some of the best promoters of the club are the club members themselves. Encourage them to bring in new members (often starting as guests to the meetings and events) and maybe provide occasional incentives (contests, etc.) for joining the club or bringing in new members. Make sure your visitors to club meetings and activities feel especially welcome, and maybe contact each one occasionally to encourage them to join the club.

4.) HAVE AN OPEN HOUSE - If you have room, perhaps advertise to the community that one of the monthly club meetings will be an open house where anyone 55 and over can attend for free. Maybe have free cake and beverages. And try to get contact information for all of the guests at the meeting so the club can follow up later with those potential members. Obviously make sure such membership meetings are fun and very interesting!

5.) VOLUNTEER RECRUITMENT - Include a focus on finding volunteers. Club expansion usually involves having more club activities, and that takes volunteers. Also be aware that it's unfortunately easy to overlook the importance of the contributions made by club volunteers. So ensure all volunteers are provided with support and regular recognition and encouragement.

6.) SEEK OUT ACTIVITIES REQUIRING LITTLE VOLUNTEER TIME - Identify club activities that require minimal volunteer contribution of time. These can easily expand the activities of a club without putting much pressure on limited club volunteer resources. For instance, all that is required in the majority of special interest groups, once formed, is an email to the group members (usually monthly) advising them when and where the next meeting will be held and then a second reminder email the day prior to the meeting. Many smaller social events can be done similarly with a couple email blasts to the membership and several emails to the venue or service provider.

7.) EXPLORE A VARIETY OF ACTIVITIES - Clubs memberships that have an interest in growth often focus on a wide variety of activities. In this way there's a better chance members will find things to do that are of interest to them and that the members will have a greater number of opportunities to socialize and make friends. And try to periodically spice up your membership meetings with something special.

8.) LOOK FOR RANGE OF ACTIVITIES AS REGARDS COST - Not all members want or are able to afford more expensive social activities like trips and dinners. So make sure there's a good balance of club activities at

different cost levels. For instance visits to museums, galleries, wineries, gardens, parks, local community events, etc. often can be found for free or for very low cost. And most special interest group activities are free as well.

9.) ACTIVITIES THAT INCLUDE MEALS ARE POPULAR - Combining social activities with meals is almost always a winner. It could be a dinner & theatre, a drink & snack after a hike, or a breakfast group or simply a small group meeting weekly for coffee for instance. But opportunities to have a group meal tend to really bring PROBUS members together.

10.) SEEK OUT PARTNERSHIPS WITH OTHER PROBUS CLUBS - Having reciprocal social event opportunities between PROBUS clubs can substantially increase the number of activities offered to club members with almost no additional volunteer time needed in any of the participating clubs. And where there is a definite member interest in a special interest group within a club but the group lacks critical mass and/or a coordinator, having a nearby club or two joining together to offer the interest group can help solve those types of problems.

11.) LOOK FOR ACTIVITY PARTNERSHIPS WITH OTHER LOCAL NON-PROBUS CLUBS - There may be occasional opportunities in local communities to partner with other seniors clubs (or other fellowship clubs in general and maybe retirement homes) as regards community activities that might be of interest to the club membership. It might be a seniors fair, participating in a national day parade, a community BBQ or a holiday celebration for example. Such activities also provide an excellent means to raise the profile of the PROBUS club and attract new members.

12.) MARKET THE CLUB FOR FREE - Market the club and its activities through as many free avenues as one can find in the community. These include community periodicals (e.g. local newspapers, etc.), online calendars of community activities/events (including municipal ones), newsletters of local clubs and seniors organizations, local radio, flyers in local stores, covering club activities through social media, having a table or representatives at local seniors' fairs, retirement homes or shopping centres, etc.. And make sure the club has a website and a digital newsletter (both can be done by volunteers and very inexpensively) that are open to the public to provide even greater visibility. Websites and newsletters provide a much larger palette to show the club in action with all its fun stuff and photos of activities.

13.) SEEK ADVICE FROM OTHER PROBUS RESOURCES - Those PROBUS clubs that have grown substantially in size and have been able to maintain that size (or even continued their growth) have obviously found some useful vehicles to achieve such success. Look at their newsletters and websites, talk with their presidents, see what they do and what are the reasons for their success. Then determine if any of that would apply to your club's current situation. Also check with your PROBUS district representative who may be able to provide some input about growing your club. And don't stop at your national border since clubs in other national jurisdictions may have some innovative ideas that might apply just as well to your club (check this out through PROBUS Global).

So there are a lot of ways to expand a PROBUS club. But marketing, volunteers and interesting and diverse club activities are central to successful growth. To paraphrase a movie line - offer a great club experience and they will come.

Good luck!!