



Membership Engagement – Non-Engaged Members Guide for Clubs

PURPOSE

This guide is intended to assist Optimist Clubs in reconnecting with non-engaged members—those who have become less involved or have stopped attending altogether. These members were once inspired to join; our mission is to reignite that spark. With intentional outreach, empathy, and personalized support, clubs can foster renewed engagement and help every member feel valued again.

OBJECTIVES

This guide provides a framework for clubs to identify why members disengage, rebuild personal connections, create welcoming reintegration pathways, and foster a culture that makes every member—regardless of how long they've been away—feel genuinely seen, heard, and valued.

1. Rebuild Personal Connections

The most effective way to re-engage a non-active member is through sincere, personal outreach. A general email blast or newsletter won't convey care; instead, it's the personal phone call, handwritten note, or one-on-one conversation that has the greatest impact. Establishing a small committee composed of trusted and friendly members allows the club to check in with those who have gone quiet in a respectful and compassionate way. Reaching out with a message like “We’ve

missed seeing you—how have you been?” creates space for reconnection without guilt or pressure.

Often, disengaged members appreciate the opportunity to share their experiences. Asking them why they joined the club in the first place and what their Optimist journey has meant to them can reignite their original passion. Some may feel hesitant to return to meetings, especially if it's been a long time, so informal meetups—like coffee dates or brief phone chats—can offer a more relaxed opportunity to reconnect. Clubs should always make the effort to reach out in the way each member prefers, whether that's a text message, a personal call, or even a handwritten card. The key is consistency and kindness, not just once, but through continued gestures that show genuine care.

2. Understand Their “Why Not”

Every member has a story behind their disengagement, and clubs must be curious rather than assumptive. Some may be struggling with transportation or evening driving. Others may be facing financial constraints, caregiving responsibilities, health issues, or simply feel that they aren't needed. A respectful conversation—or an anonymous survey—can help uncover these barriers without making the member feel exposed or embarrassed.

If cost is a concern, clubs might consider offering quiet assistance or flexible dues arrangements. Some clubs also offer “sweat equity,” where members can contribute their time or skills in lieu of dues. For those with dietary restrictions or mobility limitations, simple accommodations can go a long way in making them feel welcome. In cases where a

member left due to negative experiences, unresolved conflict, or feeling excluded, the club must be willing to listen, reflect, and—if necessary—take steps to address those concerns privately and constructively.

3. Invite Them to Reconnect

Once the conversation is started and barriers are understood, the next step is offering a meaningful, low-pressure invitation to participate again. It's important to meet people where they are. Instead of asking them to attend a full business meeting right away, consider inviting them to judge a youth contest, volunteer at an event, or attend a fun social like a game night or guest speaker presentation. These small steps can remind the member why they joined in the first place—connection, contribution, and community.

Some members may feel nervous about re-entering after a long time away. In those cases, sending the meeting agenda in advance, offering to sit with them, or even hosting a special “Welcome Back” gathering can ease the discomfort. Providing recaps after meetings also helps keep non-engaged members in the loop and reminds them that the door is always open.

If attending in person is a challenge, consider offering hybrid meetings that allow members to participate virtually. This flexibility shows that your club values all members—regardless of location, transportation needs, or scheduling conflicts.

4. Create a Supportive Culture

Welcoming back non-engaged members isn't just about logistics—it's about atmosphere.

Clubs must foster a culture where members feel good returning, without judgment or embarrassment. This starts with small, intentional acts of kindness: a birthday card, a check-in call, or a quick “thinking of you” message during a tough season.

Clubs should also be mindful of any negativity or unintentional cliques that may make returning members feel like outsiders. Rotating meeting roles (e.g., who washes the tablecloths, sets up, brings dessert or drinks), and ensuring all members are included in decision-making processes help build a culture of belonging. Celebrating the past contributions of members—even those who haven't been active recently—sends a clear message that they matter, their time was appreciated, and their return would be welcomed with open arms.

Also, consider how family obligations may play a role in disengagement. Members with young children may find it difficult to attend evening meetings. Could your JOI (Junior Optimist International) club assist with childcare during meetings or could your club host family-friendly meetings that are fun and interactive for all ages? These small adjustments could make a big difference in member participation.

Lastly, recognize that it might not be the right time for some members. Life changes, and someone who isn't active now may become re-engaged in the future. Keeping the lines of communication open ensures they'll know they're welcome when the time is right.

5. Use the C.A.R.E. Program

Optimist Clubs already have a powerful tool in the C.A.R.E. (Celebrate, Address,

Recognize, Excel) Program, and it can be a vital part of engaging non-active members. For those who've been away, start by celebrating what they've done in the past even if it's been a while. Address the reasons for their absence with understanding and solutions. Recognize their value to the club and any steps they've taken to re-engage. Finally, invite them to excel by rejoining projects that fit their skills, availability, and passion.

This program isn't just a once-a-year formality. When applied thoughtfully it can turn lost connections into renewed friendships and re-energized club dynamics.

CONCLUSION

Every Optimist who's stopped attending meetings once raised their hand and said "yes" to being part of something bigger than themselves. The spark that led them to join may still be there—it just needs to be rekindled with warmth and understanding. Through compassion, consistency, and creativity, Optimist Clubs can bring these members back into the fold and build a community that truly lives out the values of optimism, service, and fellowship.