



2023-2024 Optimist International C.A.R.E. Program Planning Guide

PURPOSE

Membership is the key component to our organization and the individual communities we serve. Without active members our clubs run the risk of fading out. To prevent the loss of membership, it's ideal that clubs do a yearly “check in” using this four-step program to keep membership happy, healthy and engaged. C-Celebrate, A-Address, R-Recognize and E-Excel. This structured program is designed to reward and celebrate a club’s accomplishments while also resolving any issues pertaining to member loss while working toward strengthening clubs and individual membership needs which allows everyone to feel they have a voice; this influences a club’s direction and future.



OBJECTIVES

We’ll review what a good retention Program looks like in order to help our clubs sustain and grow. Many clubs and members experience some difficulty in adding new members, so retention is as important as ever to ensure strong, vibrant clubs that serve communities today and for many years to come.

The acronym C.A.R.E. is the cornerstone of this new Retention Program that all clubs should take advantage of at least one each year. After reading this document, you’ll understand what each of the letters in C.A.R.E. represents and how we can apply them to our clubs to make them more resilient.

Finally, the guide will go through the four easy steps of the C.A.R.E. program and how a club can easily run this program at an annual General Member meeting, Celebration night, Anniversary, or membership event. The program is the same no matter when scheduled and is easily fine tuned with specifics to meet the event and the needs of the club.

CLUB MEMBERSHIP

There are three things we need to consider when we think about the membership growth of our Optimist Clubs and the Optimist International Organization.

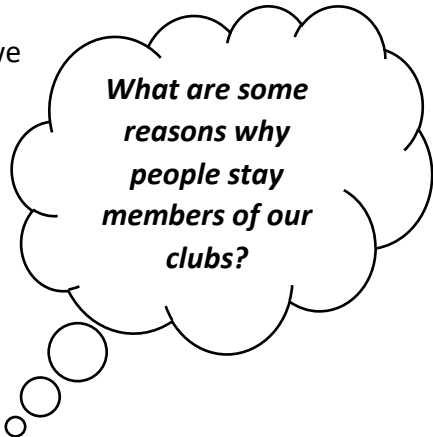


It's exciting when we get new members into our clubs! They bring in new energy, new ideas, and new perspectives on the events we currently do to bring out the best in our communities. When we think of growing our membership and being able to serve more youth, this is where much of our attention goes - Bringing in new members. Historically, too, that's how membership

levels have been maintained in clubs.

Another big component to the membership within our clubs is our existing members. These members

are the ones who volunteer for the events we do, serve our clubs as Club Administration and Board of Directors, serve as leaders within our districts, and serve as leaders within Optimist International. Many of these members stay in our clubs year after year, and we hope that any new member becomes a lifelong optimist bringing out the best in youth, the



communities they serve, and of course, themselves.

Sadly, there is a third component that has a huge effect on the membership in our clubs. That is members that leave.

The C.A.R.E. Program is going to combine all three of these

different types of members into a program that will help us continue the legacy of service our optimist clubs provide. What we're looking at in terms of membership retention is those members that are on the verge of leaving, not those that have already broken up with the club, and completely moved on. There is still time for many of our members who've lost that connection and are on the verge of leaving the club due to "lack of interest." It's not that these people are no longer interested in serving youth, making their community a better place, or improving themselves - its lack of interest in being a member. We need to find out why - to remind them **why** they joined and make sure our clubs are still fitting their needs.



We use the New Optimist Welcome (N.O.W.) program to bring members in.



This is great for adding membership to our roster.

One of the primary reasons members stay within their club membership roots itself down to relationships, how we make them feel and how well we serve their personal WIIFM (What's In It For Me). Most clubs make some kind of conscientious effort to bring members into their clubs. Yet we continue to see a decline in membership.

When our new members bring up ideas are they told that that idea is crazy? We tried that Car Show 25 year ago, and it didn't work - you're crazy to think we could do it again.

Are we welcoming members into our clubs, or welcoming members out? Whenever the club is faced with making a decision or a challenge, think - Are we welcoming in or welcoming out? Optimists are really good at holding the door open.

The question is: are we holding it open to make it easy to enter? Or easy to exit? We can add all the members in the world, but if we aren't also running a program to retain our members, we will continue to watch our membership roll like a roller-coaster. What program do we use to KEEP our members?

ORGANIZING A C.A.R.E. PROGRAM

It is very critical that a club run the C.A.R.E. program by a committee – a committee of more than one.

1. SELECT THE FACILITATOR

The club's C.A.R.E. program committee is going to select a facilitator.

For the C.A.R.E. program we want to offer an unbiased opportunity to the membership so they can bring forth concerns and issues they may be having. Clearly, if they are having a problem with the leadership in the club or to make an example more obvious, the President, then bringing their issue to the President may not be a productive option. This is where we bring in an outside person to play the role of Facilitator for the event.

Who should the facilitator be?

- The facilitator first and foremost **must** be an optimist member, but they cannot be a member of that particular club that is running the C.A.R.E. program. We don't want the facilitator to be a member of the club because we are trying to take a club and resolve any issues that it might be having and it sometimes can be hard to do when



someone from the club is involved in the resolution.

- We also want to have a facilitator that has strong communication skills as sometimes they're going to have to communicate some less than fun aspects of being an Optimist and they're going to have to do it in a way that doesn't make members want to leave out the door that we mentioned earlier.
- They also need to be someone who's respected by the members of the club. If the club dislikes this Optimist member that's not going to go well either and if the club has no idea who this Optimist is, there's no built up trust. The facilitator has got to be respected by a majority of the members of the club and can offer guidance for any issues that may be arising.

Don't let finding a facilitator be a barrier to a club conducting a C.A.R.E. program. Someone like a Past Governor, past Lt. Governor, committee members that work with members are great options. Maybe someone whose career might be working daily with conflict resolution such as a teacher, peace officer, lawyer, or another field. Pretty much, we are looking for someone who is good at conflict resolution

because that's basically what they're doing with a bit of celebration and cake.

We want to reiterate that once the facilitator is chosen they work as a team and collaborate with the club ahead of time to get the information to run a successful C.A.R.E. program and not just show up the night of the event.

The facilitator is key to a successfully C.A.R.E. program.

2. PLAN THE EVENT

Now the committee is going to plan the event! Make sure there is a small budget and one that supports cake because we have to have cake.

The committee is going to select a date, time and place. Maybe, the end of the Optimist year might be the best option, but not a must. ***And remember, never lose sight of this being a Celebration.***

Perhaps the committee wants a theme for the event. If a club always holds a C.A.R.E. program in September when they change leadership, maybe the theme is New Year's. If a theme is important to the club or those members on the committee go all out with it and if it is not an integral part then we don't need a theme. Every party doesn't need



a theme, it can just be celebrating us as Optimists.

Maybe the club can have a full dinner or just appetizers like drinks with crackers and cheese. But, we do need cake. How many of us have been invited to an event and you're on the fence about it and then someone says "there is going to be cake "and then you agree to go.

Plus, we all know that when we're at a function that has cake, we will regard that function as a celebration.

We have to get members to attend. We recommend a three-prong approach to the invitations. Well four prong if the club wants to talk about it at a meeting which we highly recommend.

Prong One:

Mention it at a club meeting.

Prong Two:

We're going to send an email out to all the members inviting them to the event and giving them a deadline to RSVP. We don't just want to mention it at a meeting and assume everyone's excited and they're coming to the C.A.R.E. event and that they will remember the details about it.

Prong Three:

When three to seven days go by whoever hasn't rsvp'd those individuals are going to be the clubs hot targets and those are going to be folks that you are going to send an invitation in the mail to.

Prong Four:

Let's say you've got 30 people in a club and 10 of them rsvp'd from the email so that's 20 that you're sending a in the mail invitation to and then you wait another seven eight days because the mail can take a while and some of our districts are larger.

Then we start doing phone calls or texts to the remainder of the people who still have not RSVP'd because what we want to do is get everybody excited, get everybody invited and we'll make sure everyone knows that they are invited and has an opportunity to consider coming.

We know just "throwing the net out" and talking at a meeting or just sending an email doesn't cut it.



3. MEMBER REVIEW

Now you have the date, the Facilitator, the theme and the cake ordered and are working on getting those invitations out to every member of the club. Again, the club should do its best to make everyone feel wanted and welcome to attend even if you haven't seen them around for a while. There could very well be a reason they haven't been around which you can do something about, and this is that opportunity to possibly right any wrongs.

In addition to the invitation, the club's C.A.R.E. program committee is going to tell the membership that the facilitator is going to be sending a document to all of the members of the club and it is going to contain four questions.

The members will answer the four questions anonymously and send them back to the facilitator. Nothing will be connected back to the club member unless the member does not want to remain anonymous. It is very critical that the club members hear this more than once to emphasize the process.....

The four questions are coming from the facilitator and the responses will go back to the facilitator.

No member from the club itself is involved in any of this part of the process or information gained.

And here's the four questions that the facilitator is going to be asking.

1. ***What do you feel went well with the Club this year?*** – this tells us our strengths as a club.
2. ***What do you feel the Club needs to work on?*** – this tells us our weaknesses
3. ***What makes you happy to be a Member of your Optimist Club?***
4. ***Do you have a new idea for the Club as a Community Service Project/Youth Activity/Fundraiser? Describe?*** – tells us what direction our club should go in, but there is no pressure to bring it up. It also allows members to introduce a new idea or one they have introduced in the past and not have to stand up in front of the group if they don't want to. It also allows someone else to bring up the idea who is not tied to the club directly.

From these questions the Club can find out what their members have enjoyed, where they need to improve, what they have been doing well and get new or newly inspired ideas for future events.



The questions are structured perfectly so that we're not just having a complaint session; it's not just sending pages of complaints, we're talking about what makes us happy to be an optimist.

We want to stick with these four questions so that we make the program as pure as possible and we don't morph into something different.

REMEMBER! All the responses are returned to the Facilitator, not any member of the Club, and ALL members need to be made aware that their responses are anonymous. They also need to know that their response will be going to an outside party. So, at the bottom of the survey there is a spot for information of who to return it to and a deadline.

The Facilitator will need time to read through the responses and find a way to address anything.

If something very sensitive or serious is brought forth on this form, the Facilitator might find it more productive to address the issue with an individual privately then to call anyone out in the middle of the event. The Facilitator might also find it effective to take a complaint or bad communication (as an example) and prepare a 15-minute workshop type

address for the event that everyone would benefit from.

This is why it is so important that the Facilitator be someone who the Club respects and can trust will deal with anything that arises with the best of intentions for the Club's health.

4. FOLLOW THE AGENDA

Keeping to this order helps with the flow of the event. Since you plan to possibly address any issues during this event you need to work with the emotions that this could create.

Year in Review

The facilitator is going to be the lead in the meeting and start by welcoming the members and then bring up the individual leading "The Year in Review".

The "*Year in Review*" starts the program out with a happy Optimist tone. Make this an opportunity to either have a member of the club make a presentation of how the year went or maybe you have someone who could put together a great slide show for everyone to see pictures and remember the events over the last year.



Opportunities for Improvement

The facilitator will then take the lead again with their pre-planned way to address any issues brought forth in the Annual Reviews they received. This is an opportunity to show the members that their concerns whether big or small matter and are being heard.

For example, if one of the issues that was brought up is that “you don't get the agenda for the meeting until you're getting into the car to go to the meeting. The facilitator might address it by saying they have talked to the Club leadership and they are committed to sending agendas out Sunday nights so you can expect to see those in the members email inbox by Monday morning when you connect for the day.”

Facilitators will be trained on this, and will be able to take care of this step.

APPRECIATION

Once the nitty gritty has been dealt with you can get back to the celebrating part of the event.

What better way to bring smiles back to the faces of the attendees than step three which is to show some appreciation. At this

time, the President, or maybe the Board of Directors, will have chosen a few awards to present to different members and the facilitator will turn it over to them.

Maybe the Club already has an annual award or awards it presents each year. Use this event to highlight and recognize the members.

The facilitator will then thank everyone for attending and for their impact on the community.

The facilitator is more of a natural part of the event without pretending to be excited about things they have no idea have happened in the club.

CAKE

And, the final step! CAKE! A party without cake is only a meeting! Make this a celebration - a time to reflect, socialize, and celebrate with fellow members!





C.A.R.E. BENEFITS

- Members feel appreciated.
- Issues are addressed and given direction for resolution.
- A stronger sense of team is fostered.
- Membership is retained with stronger members.
- Productivity is elevated.
- The community witnesses a harmonious happy group of individuals.
- Members set an example to the youth in their community.

If we address members' concerns in a productive fashion, we should be able to retain more of our members. May be discover that we aren't offering opportunities enough or that we bicker too much or whatever the concern may be. By asking and addressing and resolving issues clubs are made healthier and stronger.

We open our front door to welcome new members in with our N.O.W. program but without a C.A.R.E. program we're just leaving the back door wide open to let them right back out.

SAMPLE APPRECIATION

Here are some examples of awards that may be used to show appreciation for members of the club.

- **Contagious Optimism:**

...was just as enthusiastic about the success of others as they were about their own



- **Cheerful Countenance:**

...wore a cheerful countenance at all times and gave every living creature they met a smile

- **Friendship:**made everyone feel that there was something in them

- **Strength of Optimism:** exemplified the Optimist Creed

SUPPORTING RESOURCES

The 2023-2024 Optimist International Membership Engagement Committee has developed supporting resources for the C.A.R.E. program to assist the club with implementing the program. Directions on how to access the resources are located on the Optimist International Learning Management System under Optimist Media Library -> Accessing CARE Documents

Such supporting documents include;

- C.A.R.E. Program Sample Agenda
- C.A.R.E. Program Member Review Survey
- C.A.R.E. Program Sample Invitation