The key to motivation lies in the extent to which you as a leader give the members what they are looking for in an organization. But how can you determine what the members of your organization really want? Chances are, there is no single answer to this question. In fact, there may be as many answers as members. Look to each individual member’s reason for joining your organization as a guideline to what he/she wants to gain from group involvement.

Some students may have joined the organization to meet people and make new friends. You must motivate them by involving them in tasks that require working closely with others (committees, events, etc.). Other members may have joined your organization because they strongly believe in what your organization represents. Motivate these individuals by encouraging them to voice beliefs, opinions, and invite them to speak at meetings, seminars, etc.

Students sometimes join groups as a social outlet to learn or explore something new. To motivate these members, try planning programs and events that appeal to their curiosity (or better yet, ask them to assist you in the planning of these activities).

Members are also attracted because they associate the group with their major or future career. You could possibly motivate these members by providing the opportunity to practice theory developed in the classroom.

Finally, students may have joined your organization to have a place where they “belong” -- where they feel satisfied and needed. Providing opportunities for these people to make contributions to the organization is an especially important means of motivation. It is important to note that you should acknowledge their accomplishments frequently and publicly. Let them know and feel how important they are! Of course, this applies to all your members, no matter why they joined your group. The following methods have universal applications too. Try these with your new members:

- Use people’s names often — a person’s own name is the sweetest sound in the world.
- Give titles and build prestige into the job.
- Use team-building exercises to strengthen loyalty and commitment.
- Sponsor contests and give rewards!
- Involve members in goal setting and decision making within your organization.
- Be courteous and respectful at all times.
- Keep your members well informed!
- Clarify your expectations of members and their expectations of you!
- Be honest, fair and consistent. Be an impartial leader.
- Provide honest feedback -- praise successes publicly and privately. Give constructive criticism to help them learn from mistakes.
- Provide individual attention and demonstrate that you understand members and accept their strengths and weaknesses.

*We give credit to the University of Michigan Student Organization Development Center for the development of this information.*

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