

Army, Navy & Air Force Veterans in Canada



Membership Retention Guide

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FORWARD

Members are the lifeblood of any association and retaining those members through superior service should be our core business. Retention is more important than recruitment. Most Units seem to get new people into the fold, but keeping them is the real challenge. We have to be an evolving association, constantly keeping on top of the wants and needs of the membership.

The guide will aid in letting you know what your members value about their membership and how their needs are changing. This will allow your Unit to respond to those changes in a meaningful way. Clearly, retention is a fundamental measure of how relevant our association is to our members. For growth to occur, two members must be recruited to replace one lost member. When a member is retained, growth occurs with each new recruit. Retention is tied in part to how a member was recruited; it starts with the first contact, even before joining. Paying special attention to first year members can convert them into very active lifetime members.

Renewal is only the last step in the long process of retention. Members pay their dues again if they are satisfied and feel they have value throughout the year. We as an association must ensure that retention efforts permeate every part of ANAVETS; otherwise, retention will become nothing more than a stack of empty paperwork. This means we must be flexible enough to continually meet and exceed our members' expectations, involvement and satisfaction.

Many organizations spend the majority of resources (time and money) on recruiting new members. Recruitment shows short term results, while retention is a long term strategy which is the wisest investment an association can make. We seem to be paying less attention to the members leaving through the back door because we have new members coming in the front. But what happens when people stop knocking on the front door? If that back door is still open, we are going to be left with an empty house.

Research has shown that it is 5 to 15 times more difficult to attract a new member than it is to keep an existing one. Satisfied members will give ANAVETS a "can-do" image and are more willing to recruit new members themselves. We must recognize each member as an individual, identify their expectations and exceed those expectations whenever possible.

The retention process will require research in two areas: Why members leave and what prompts new members to join. Exit surveys may identify issues that we can address in order to reduce future losses. There is also a possibility that when contacted, non-renewing members will reinstate their memberships. It is also critical that we concentrate on the needs and satisfaction issues of our current membership. The earlier we take action, the more likely members will be to retain their membership. The decision to stay is often made well before each year's renewal date.

As we prepare to incorporate retention into ANAVETS plans and processes, use this guide to conduct an audit of your Units current operations. By systematically analyzing activities, you will put the actions and services of your Unit into another context. You will see them from the prospective of the member making the renewal decision. You'll also see how your Units actions affect that retention decision. As your most precious resource, your membership deserves to be your primary focus. If they are, the payback could be for a lifetime.

Although the membership committee may develop and spearhead member services, retention is everybody's job.

INTRODUCTION

The Membership Retention Guide was developed to keep Unit memberships interested and engaged. The program focuses on three primary threats to retention and offers proven solutions to address these challenges.

This guide will help make your Unit become more successful and rewarding. Research has shown that 50% of all non-profit association volunteers drop out within the first three years. Fortunately, we know the main reasons why:

- **Lengthy/boring meetings**
- **Unit cliques and politics**
- **Lack of meaningful involvement**

The Membership Retention Guide will also focus on three issues which directly affect membership retention and Unit productivity.

- **Executive / Membership Harmony**
- **Evaluating your Unit**
- **Former Member Satisfaction**

The Guide will spotlight each of these challenges individually, helping you uncover weaknesses in your Unit and develop a plan. Each chapter will follow the same simple formula for identifying and solving the challenges:

- **LOOK** closely at the current state of your Unit
- **LISTEN** to input from Unit membership
- **LEARN** where problem areas exist
- **RESPOND** by implementing appropriate changes

This Guide was developed to stress the importance of the direct relationship of each issue to the final outcome of harmony, camaraderie, cooperation, communication, growth and the future of our association.

**This evaluation and implementation process is simple and not time consuming.
The benefits to your Unit will be well worth your efforts.**

“Shoulder to Shoulder”

PRODUCTIVE UNIT MEETINGS

Retention Challenge:

Lengthy/boring meetings are a major reason for losing interest in the ANAVETS Association.

Meetings are a significant part of the ANAVETS experience and have a big impact on how the association is perceived by members. Meetings are also important to the efficient functioning of your Unit. Holding effective meetings will help you accomplish *two* things:

- 1) Keep members interested
- 2) Keep your Unit running successfully

LOOK at Your Unit

Taking the time to examine your Unit and honestly assessing its current status is the key to successfully making changes. Without pinpointing the areas that need attention, you might be fixing a problem that doesn't exist and ignoring a potential trouble spot. It is helpful to write down your observations as you undertake this process.

Begin by observing membership during meetings:

- Are your meetings well attended?
- Do you notice any attendance trends?
- How do your members act during the meeting?
- Do they seem interested? Enthusiastic? Bored? Impatient?
- After meetings, do members feel inspired and motivated?
- What is the atmosphere during meetings? Friendly? Tense? Lively? Boring?

Then take a good, honest look at your performance during meetings:

- Are you comfortable running meetings?
- Do you regularly prepare an agenda in advance?
- Do you follow your agenda?
- Do you have a good command of parliamentary procedure?
- Are you able to handle interruptions and difficult behavior?
- Do you convey excitement and enthusiasm for being a member of ANAVETS?
- Do you allow members to actively participate in meetings?
- Do you willingly accept suggestions?

LISTEN to Input from Membership

It is a good idea to enlist the help of several Unit members whose opinions you trust, or even your entire membership, to help with the evaluation process.

RESPOND by Making Appropriate Changes

Most people would agree that good meetings:

- Accomplish their goals
- Are relevant and interesting for attendees
- Start and end on time

However, there is wide latitude in what elements actually constitute a productive, efficient and interesting meeting. What worked for your predecessor might not work for you. People have varying management styles and will approach things differently. That is how it should be. Trying to adhere to something simply because it worked for someone else or because “it has always been done that way” can create an uncomfortable atmosphere for you. As the Unit president, you have the opportunity to set the tone for your term in a manner that works well for your management style and your Unit’s unique personality.

Think Positively: When considering any changes to your Unit, keep a positive attitude. Your Unit might be steeped in tradition and used to doing things a certain way, but that doesn’t mean you shouldn’t try something new. Today’s “experiment” could be tomorrow’s new tradition.

When discovering the best Unit meeting strategies for you, there are some basic principles that will help you run an efficient, productive meeting:

- Being prepared
- Knowledge of parliamentary procedure (such as Robert's Rules of Order)
- Ability to deal with difficult behavior
- Ability to assert yourself when necessary

Agendas that Work: Most Unit presidents would agree that having a detailed agenda is crucial to running a successful meeting. What you choose to include in the agenda is an important consideration. There are really only a few items that are necessary to include. After those basic items are covered, you can embellish your agenda with elements that will help make the meeting more lively and interesting. In all cases, be sure to write down the time allotment for each agenda item.

A Typical Agenda Includes:

- Call to order by president
- Introduction of guests
- Program (guest speaker, entertainment, etc.) may either precede or follow the business portion
- Reading and approval of minutes of previous meeting
- Old or unfinished business
- New business
- Adjournment

Ask yourself:

- What are the items currently on your typical agenda?
- Did the membership surveyed identify agenda items that they feel are extraneous or make the meeting boring or too long?
- Do the items on your agenda reflect your Unit’s personality?

Newsworthy Newsletters and Web Sites: Make your Unit’s newsletter and Web site a valuable source of information for all members. Use these devices to reinforce items mentioned during

meetings, or more importantly, to communicate details of agenda items that would slow your meetings down. Let members know that your newsletter and Web site are important sources of Unit news and encourage use.

Keeping it Brief: When developing an agenda, keep brevity in mind regarding the number of items on the agenda and the content of those items. Reports and explanations of business items should be kept as short as possible. Prepare for the “unexpected” and be sure to include time for discussion and questions. Overloading an agenda and not leaving time for questions, discussion, or unplanned interruptions will lengthen your meetings unnecessarily.

The key to keeping it brief? Make sure meeting content is relevant for your membership.

Try Trimming Time: Do you feel that your agenda is as lean as it can be, but your meetings are still running long? Examine the content of your agenda items and try trimming just a little time from a few items. Those small time adjustments will add up. Communicate your shortening of agenda items to all affected, so they can plan accordingly.

Program Pointers: Including an interesting program in your meeting will go a long way toward keeping members interested. Unit programs can inform or entertain. They can enrich your members personally and professionally. There are many places to find good programs.

They include:

- **Recipients of Club Service:** Hearing from those who have benefited from Unit efforts is a great way to motivate members to continue their dedication to serving those in need.
- **Local Community Leaders:** Such as a mayor, member of congress, chief of police, school superintendent, etc. – not only will your Unit benefit from their programs, but you will have the opportunity to introduce these influential people to your Unit.
- **Local Business People:** Such as representatives from your members’ companies, the chamber of commerce, or convention and visitor’s bureau – programs from these diverse groups can offer variety.
- **Cultural Organizations:** Such as museums, theaters and orchestras – interesting and informative programs from these organizations are a good way to add variety.
- **District Councilors:** Learn about the status of your district’s important projects to encourage Unit support.

Programs in a Pinch: Have a few programs ready that can be put on quickly and easily in the event of a last minute cancellation. Some ideas for quick programs include: holding a membership recruitment “summit” and brainstorming creative ways your Unit can recruit new members, or having your public relations chairman report on the status of publicity efforts and your Unit’s perception in the community. You can also ask members if they have any programs one of them would be willing to present at the last minute if requested. Keep a list of these “emergency” programs on hand and you’ll be prepared to act quickly.

Staying on Track: As president, it is your job to adhere to the agenda and get the meeting back on track whenever necessary. This is the place where your knowledge of parliamentary procedure and ability to assert yourself will be very useful. You need to remain in control of the proceedings. Your members will look to you to lead, and running meetings is one of the primary ways you demonstrate your leadership skills. A form of parliamentary procedure will help your meetings run smoothly and efficiently and guarantee that the proceedings are fair for all

participants. Without established ground rules, meetings can easily become disorganized and unmanageable, regardless of the president's skills. Asserting yourself when appropriate is often a skill you become more comfortable with after time and experience. Utilizing your skills, you can keep the meeting on track while still letting Unit members know you value their participation. You may have your authority tested every once in a while. It may be because the member is impatient, doesn't understand parliamentary procedure, or is excited or angered about something. No matter what the situation, you must stay calm and focused. If the situation is a misunderstanding about meeting ground rules, explain to the member how he or she should address his or her question, comment or concern. If it is not the time or place for discussion on this topic, explain this also and let the member know when it will be handled.

Use Your Gavel: Do you use your gavel, or are you intimidated to call order with it? Using your gavel is one of the quickest, easiest ways to get the attention of your members and allow you to get your meeting back on track.

Attitude is Infectious: How you conduct yourself during meetings will have a big effect on attendees. Do you enjoy running meetings? Do you feel confident and in control of the proceedings? If you exude positive feelings, your membership will mirror your enthusiasm. Conversely, if you are unduly uncomfortable or bored, your membership will be influenced by those negative feelings. If you aren't comfortable speaking in public or running a meeting, there are helpful resources available with many tips and suggestions for improving your performance. A thorough knowledge of your Unit's ground rules (parliamentary procedure and its Constitution and By-Laws) will help with your comfort level. It's also advisable to practice your delivery when possible. Keep in mind that nobody expects you to be perfect in your abilities. Projecting confidence and enthusiasm, even if you don't always feel completely confident in your abilities, will go a long way toward inspiring and motivating your membership.

Mix it Up: Keep your Unit meetings fresh by trying something new every once in awhile. Consider having people change where they sit every few meetings to encourage camaraderie with new people, add a new quick agenda item to boost morale (such as suggestion of the month or recognizing a member who went beyond the call of duty) or change the order of your agenda items (make sure everyone involved knows if you do this so they will be prepared!).

Implementing Changes: Involving your Unit in changes will help make the transition smoother. Even if all you do is trim some time from the agenda, let your membership know that the action is being taken and why. Your membership will respond positively if you demonstrate your concern for their time and interest. A dramatic or potentially controversial change, such as the complete reorganization of your meeting or the elimination of a long-standing tradition, will require more care in implementing. Stress that the changes you are making are good for the Unit as a whole and explain your reasoning behind it. The changes you make might meet with some resistance, but if you are confident in your decision, simply forge ahead. Your positive attitude, comfort and control of the situation will help the transition go smoothly. Whether the change is big or small, be sure to explain how it affects the functioning of the Unit.

For example, if you feel that committee report times need to be reduced and report contents evaluated for relevancy, your committee chairmen will need to know and understand your thinking. Your Unit's newsletter and Web site will be very helpful in communicating the details

and reasoning of your meeting's makeover. Be sure to let those members who are "slipping" and not regularly attending Unit functions know what changes you are making. Call these members personally, or enlist the help of a few members to phone these members and let them know that their attendance is missed, and what new changes are taking place. Chances are, if they aren't attending meetings, they won't actively read the Web site or newsletter to learn about the changes. Phoning them will let them know you care about the status of their membership.

Plan a Program on Member Retention: What better way to demonstrate how important membership retention is than by planning a program about the subject? Tell members what improvements you are making in the Unit to keep them interested and involved.

A Final Note...

Retaining members is a critical, ongoing process. While advice suggested in the Membership Retention Guide should have a positive impact on the functioning of your Unit and therefore, the successful retention of members, you should always keep your eyes open for potential stumbling blocks. Each year, the dynamics of a club change. Sometimes these changes are subtle, with the effects not being easily recognizable. Other changes will be obvious. Keep your observation skills honed and handle challenges as they occur. Be flexible and willing to make adjustments when needed. Offer to help the next leadership team make their meetings the best they can be. Share your success stories with other Unit presidents. With a little extra attention, you will have shown your membership that their time is valuable and that Unit meetings are an essential part of the ANAVETS experience. **Keep up the good work!**

HANDLING CLIQUES AND POLITICS

Negative cliques and Unit politics can leave members feeling left out and resentful. It is one of the chief reasons members drop out of their Units.

How people fit into the Unit and how comfortable they feel can have a big impact on Unit functioning. If your Unit is splintered into “us” and “them” groups, or Unit proceedings are mired by politics, the ANAVETS experience can turn into a negative one, making your Unit unattractive to new members and ineffectual in reaching its goals.

LOOK at Your Unit

Begin by observing members during meetings and service activities:

- What is the general atmosphere of your Unit?
Friendly? Welcoming? Fun? Boring? Tense? Dedicated? Productive?
- Are there well-defined, established “groups” within your Unit?
- If so, do these “groups” interact with each other? How is their relationship?
Friendly? Respectful? Tense?
- If so, do these “groups” have any effect on the functioning of the Unit?
- Are new members warmly welcomed into your Unit?
- After an initial introduction, are new members made to feel a part of the Unit?
- Do you feel that your Unit is focused on meeting its service goals?
- Do Unit politics make it difficult for the Unit to meet its service goals?
- Do all members, new and old, feel that they are an equal part of the Unit?

Attendance Cues: Paying careful attention to attendance trends can help uncover retention problems. Not attending meetings is one of the first signs of lack of member interest. Confer with your secretary and get a list of members who are “slipping.” If they have missed three meetings or more in a row, call them to find out why. Personally calling them will show that you care about them.

RESPOND by Making Appropriate Changes

Start by recognizing that cliques very typically form in large groups, and that not all cliques are inherently “bad.” People will naturally gravitate to those that they feel comfortable with, or that they have known for a long time. However, if these sub-groups are making some members feel left out, or are affecting Unit functioning, they are detrimental to your Unit. Cliques can be minimized if all members feel a part of the group as a whole. You can help keep members focused on their important role in the Unit by making sure they are involved; understand the goals and objectives of your Unit and by implementing team-building strategies to bring the group closer together.

Handling Unit politics involves understanding your Unit’s goals and objectives, open communication, and leadership. Following are strategies for helping bring your Unit together to effectively serve our Veterans and your community.

Set the Tone: As Unit president, you have the ability to set the tone for the Unit. How you manage the Unit will have an effect on how both current and new members will feel about being involved. When developing your goals for the year, keep in mind the kind of atmosphere you want the Unit to have. Make it a point to let your membership know what kind of Unit atmosphere you would like and how they can help achieve it.

Building Your Team: Making your Unit into a cohesive, productive team will help keep members interested, involved, and meet your Unit's service goals. Promoting a team atmosphere begins with open communication, shared goals, and positive reinforcement. Think of yourself as a coach as well as a Unit president. In order to have a high-functioning team, members must know and trust one another. This will happen as the group works together on service activities. Unit meetings are a good opportunity for the team to connect and learn more about one another, which is why it is important that meetings be well attended, interesting and productive.

Kudos to Club Members: Give praise often to Unit members for a job well done, a good idea or an effort beyond the call of duty. A simple "thank you" in front of the entire Unit will go a long way in building members' pride. Another terrific team-building exercise is to hold brainstorming sessions. Besides the team-building benefit, brainstorming promotes the free flow of ideas. Sessions can be used within committees or by the Unit as a whole. You can brainstorm membership recruitment and retention ideas, new service activities, ways to improve existing service activities and ways to improve Unit meetings, etc. During a brainstorming session, all members are encouraged to participate, bouncing ideas off one another and building on what others have said. Have someone keep notes on all the ideas generated. Keep things positive – no idea is considered bad or unworkable. Once all the ideas are "out there," they can be reviewed for relevancy. Open communication is vital to the success of a team. Team members need to feel that they will be heard and that their input is valued. You can do this through brainstorming sessions, program evaluations, or implementing a suggestion box. It is also important for members to feel like they have an open forum to discuss more troubling issues and handle disputes. Working through problems successfully will help bring the team closer together.

Retention is for All Members: While making sure new members feel welcomed, involved and comfortable, it is important to remember long-term members. As people belong to an organization for a longer period of time, their goals and needs may change. Let long-time members know that their continued membership is important by periodically asking them if they are still satisfied with the Unit.

Keeping Things Fresh: Long-standing, ingrained cliques often will form in Units when things remain the same year after year. If people are allowed to be on the same committee indefinitely or perform the same function at a Unit activity, the clique will become tighter and tighter, making it harder for new people to become a part of the group and harder for new ways of doing things to be introduced. Eventually, your Unit becomes stagnant and loses its relevancy in the community. Additionally, this can impact members negatively. People in the same position for a long time may become bored and complacent, while new members, at the same time, might become frustrated because they feel unimportant to the functioning of the Unit. This doesn't mean that every year there must be a dramatic change in how your Unit functions and the projects it pursues – that would be very unproductive. However, there are strategies that can be

implemented each year that lessen the formation of cliques and that keep Units fresh and vital while still meeting service goals.

To keep Unit atmosphere fresh for members, rotate committee members every year where possible to give people new opportunities. Not only will you be giving members a chance to try something new, the committees themselves will benefit from fresh perspectives. After projects and service activities are completed, have the Unit work together to evaluate what went well and identify what could be improved next time. Make detailed notes for next year's committee. This can keep the activity successful, make members feel involved and promote team building.

Making New Members Feel Welcome: Many Units do a great job warmly welcoming new members, but after the initial introductions, don't follow up with members to make them feel part of the Unit. This often occurs if your current membership is very close or there are well established cliques. Most new members need a period of nurturing to really feel a part of the Unit – both socially and in terms of their involvement. Make sure your Unit properly inducts, orients and involves new members in all aspects of the Unit.

New Members Make Great Greeters: Have new members serve as greeters for Unit functions for the first several weeks of their membership. It's a great way for them to meet the entire membership. Sponsors are very helpful during this nurturing process. Enlist them to help with initial introductions and orientations, as well as guiding their recruits through their first few years of membership. Have sponsors monitor their recruits periodically to make sure that these new members feel comfortable with their membership. If not, the sponsors can help the recruits seek solutions to their problems. Ask sponsors to report their findings to you so you can keep track of member satisfaction. Current members should be made aware that involving new members fully in the Unit is a priority. Let them know that it is the responsibility of all members to make newcomers feel like an important part of the team. Another good idea is to periodically solicit feedback from new members regarding their orientation into the Unit and ask them if they have any suggestions to improve the orientation/involvement process.

Getting Back to Basics: People join ANAVETS for many reasons, to serve Veterans, to serve your community, for comradeship etc. If politics are interfering with the efficient functioning of your Unit and preventing you from meeting your service goals, then you are not fulfilling the core objective of the association. An ineffective Unit can be unattractive to potential members. It risks not being viewed as a vital part of the community.

Consider setting the theme of a Unit meeting around "reacquainting your Unit with its goals, objectives and mission." Review your projects, look at how many people you've helped over the year and decide what can be done to help even more people in the future. Write down your Unit's goals and have them available for all to see. Draft a mission statement that solidifies how your Unit feels about its goals. Not only will this strategy refocus your Unit, it will also function as an excellent team-building exercise.

Use Your Newsletter: Share information about the changes you are implementing in your Unit's newsletter and on your Web site. Explain the importance of building a team and retaining members. If your Unit has written a mission statement and/or redefined its goals, the newsletter and Web site are excellent vehicles for communicating this to your membership.

Be a Strong Leader: Being a strong leader doesn't mean authoritarian and heavy-handed, but rather, fair, open-minded and decisive. These traits are important facets to being a successful Unit president. Your ability to lead the Unit, build a team and guide it through decisions is vital to the effective functioning of your Unit. If politics are making it tough for your Unit to make decisions, you should exercise your authority to navigate through the process.

Learning Leadership Skills: If you feel you need more leadership training, there are many excellent reference materials to help you discover your personal leadership style and learn techniques for becoming a more effective leader.

Implementing Changes: The key to successfully implementing changes in your Unit is communication. Answer all your members' potential questions –
WHAT the changes are,
WHY you are making them,
WHEN they will be implemented and
HOW they will affect them.
Understanding the reasons behind changes will help obtain your members' support, which is critical to your success. Be sure to let those members who are "slipping," and not regularly attending Unit functions, know what changes you are making. Call these members personally, or enlist the help of a few members to phone these members and let them know that their attendance is missed, and what new changes are taking place. Chances are, if they aren't attending meetings, they won't actively read the Web site or newsletter to learn about the changes. Phoning them will let them know you care about the status of their membership.

A Final Note...

Good luck as you continue to make changes to your Unit that will not only help retain members, but will also improve the functioning of your Unit. Over time, you will see that your attention to these matters will be well worth the effort.

KEEPING MEMBERSHIP INVOLVED

RESPOND TO MEMBERSHIP NEEDS

It isn't hard to involve members (especially enthusiastic new recruits!) in your Unit's activities. After all, they joined your Unit to participate and serve the Veterans and their community. However, the key is to offer meaningful involvement opportunities for all members, and keep their participation at a comfortable level for them.

Good, thorough communication will be very helpful as you keep members actively involved in your Unit. Ask them about their skills, interests and goals, follow up with them periodically to make sure they are getting the experiences they want and encourage them to seek new opportunities for service.

Retention is a Team Activity: Explain the importance of your retention campaign plans to Unit officers and committee chairpersons. Make sure they understand they share the responsibility for involving members in all aspects of the Unit.

Harness New Recruit Enthusiasm: Getting new members involved immediately is important. It will keep them interested and motivated. Don't squander their enthusiasm by making them feel they need to wait before actually participating in Unit activities. Create an atmosphere that will make them feel comfortable "diving in" and participating fully in Unit activities. However, don't overwhelm new members by giving them too much responsibility right away. This could lead to frustration. Identify responsibilities for new members that are important to the Unit, but don't require a vast knowledge of Unit functioning to successfully perform them. Try matching a new member's skills and interests to an appropriate Unit task to help him or her feel involved, but not overwhelmed. Periodically ask new members about their level of involvement – is it too much or not enough?

Share Praise Freely: Important to all members, and especially new members, is positive reinforcement for a job done well. Often, simple acknowledgements are best – a special thank you during a Unit or committee meeting, a personal note of thanks, a word of encouragement. Consider creating a "Kudos" column in your newsletter or Web site to list those members who have done their jobs well, made great suggestions, or gone above and beyond the call of duty.

Emphasize Social Involvement: You want to involve members in your Unit socially as well as through activities. Socialize with members during and outside of meetings. Share happy occasions – birthdays, anniversaries, a special achievement or the achievement of a spouse or child. The Unit newsletter and Web site are great places to list these special occasions.

Keep the Interest Level High: Members who have belonged to the Unit for a while may get bored if allowed to remain in the same position for many years. Letting them get complacent is a sure way to lose interest and participation. It will also make new members feel that there aren't any opportunities for advancement or change within the Unit. There are several tactics you can employ to keep the membership actively involved:

- Periodically ask members for their input regarding their interests, skills, experience and personal membership goals. These will change over time and should be monitored regularly by Unit leadership.
- Rotate committee assignments annually to give all members a chance to try something new.
- Encourage members to try new challenges – a totally different responsibility, an increase in the level of responsibility, a new service activity. Both the membership and your Unit will benefit from the experience. When recommending new assignments, broaden your thinking about the membership. Use your observation skills, coupled with membership input, to decide on some unexpected and interesting choices for him or her.
- If a small group of members is interested in taking on a new challenge, and is very open to what assignment they receive, make a game of it. Write down the names of the responsibilities and let members draw their new assignments. Be sure the tasks are of an equal level and time commitment.
- As members gain experience and confidence, encourage them to seek leadership roles. The leadership experience builds self-esteem and keeps members actively engaged in Unit activities. Leadership roles could be anything from heading up a service activity to seeking a committee chairmanship, or running for a Unit office.

Communicate Constantly: Open communication is vitally important to the success of your Unit. It creates a comfortable, productive environment that will motivate members to do their best. Encouraging input from members (see below) and using your Unit meetings, newsletter and Web site to communicate unit happenings will help you with this task.

Encourage Input: Making all members feel that they have a voice in the Unit is vital for sustaining involvement. Members should feel that they can offer suggestions during Unit and committee meetings, comment on activities or express a complaint. They should also feel that their comments, suggestions or complaints are valued and will be appropriately addressed. Encouraging input, but not following up will create frustration for your members. Some ideas for actively encouraging input:

- Hold brainstorming sessions to discuss new service activity ideas or a new way of handling an activity or Unit function. During a brainstorming session, no idea is considered “bad.” The goal is to create a free flow of ideas and get participants thinking in a different way. Write down all ideas that are presented. At the end of the session, cull workable ideas from the list. Brainstorming not only produces fresh ideas, but also promotes healthy team building.
- Evaluate activities at their conclusion. Have members comment on service activities – did the activity run smoothly? Did the Unit meet its goals? What could be improved for next time? Write the suggestions down for future reference. This should be done as soon as possible after the activity so the experience is fresh in everyone’s minds.

Plan a Summit: Including members in your retention campaign plans is an excellent way to involve them in your Unit. Consider holding a membership and retention summit. During the summit, review your Unit’s recruitment and retention strategies, look at your Unit’s strengths and weaknesses, brainstorm new ideas and develop an implementation plan. You could also hold summits on the individual retention challenges: boring/long meetings, cliques/politics, and lack of meaningful involvement.

WORKING TOGETHER EFFECTIVELY

Retention Program:

The Membership Committee Retention Guide was developed to keep our quality members interested and engaged. The campaign focuses on the three primary threats to retention and offers solutions to address these challenges. This program will help make your term as a Unit Executive more successful and rewarding.

We also understand that Units are also struggling with additional retention issues. One that has come to the forefront is; working together effectively. This new program has been created to address the retention challenges that most directly affect the ability of a Unit to form a productive, cohesive group.

The program will spotlight each of these challenges individually, helping you uncover weaknesses in your Unit and develop a plan. Each section follows the same simple formula for identifying and solving the challenges:

- ***LOOK*** closely at the current state of your Unit
- ***LISTEN*** to input from fellow Unit members
- ***LEARN*** where problem areas exist
- ***RESPOND*** by implementing appropriate changes

This evaluation and implementation process is simple and not time-consuming. The benefits to your Unit will be well worth your efforts.

Building a Support System

As you go through this process, it will be helpful for you to share ideas, comments or concerns with other Unit Executives. You can contact other Units in your area and suggest a brainstorming session. It is an excellent opportunity to learn what challenges others have faced and what solutions worked for them.

Retention Challenge

Units that are unable to bridge differences and unite for a common goal will create dissatisfied members.

People join ANAVETS for many reasons, but chief among them is to volunteer their time and help Veterans and their community. If they are not given the experience they are looking for, and don't feel that their contributions are needed or valued; they will look elsewhere for an outlet to volunteer.

LOOK at Your Unit

Taking the time to examine your Unit and honestly assessing its current status is the key to making changes successfully. Without pinpointing the areas that need attention, you might be fixing a problem that doesn't exist and ignoring a potential trouble spot. It is helpful to write down your observations as you undertake this process.

Begin by observing your Unit closely:

- Does your Unit warmly welcome new members?
- Do you have a diverse membership base?
- Is there friction between your members?
 - If so, is it between the men and women members, younger and older members, or outgoing vs. more reserved members?
 - If so, does the friction interfere with the Unit's functioning?
- Do you encourage members to actively voice their opinions?
- Are there people in your Unit that you feel uncomfortable talking to?
- Do you regularly communicate with the membership?
- Does your Unit feel like a unified group?
- Does your Unit have common goals?
- Do all your members know your Unit's goals?
- Has attendance at your meetings dropped?
- Has participation during your service activities dropped?

Share Your Enthusiasm: Attitude is infectious.

Be upbeat, and enthusiastic about making positive changes in your Unit. Your members will be motivated to support your efforts.

LEARN Where Problem Areas Exist

Study your answers and the surveys from the membership. Note the following:

- What trends do you see?
- Which areas need attention?
- Were you surprised at the responses you received?
- Was there a big difference between your assessment of your Unit meetings and your fellow members' assessment?

RESPOND by Making Appropriate Changes

Members need to work together if a Unit is going to be successful. There is no way around it. For a lot of Units, this is an easy task – members get along, share a common goal and work together to achieve it. However, in some cases, Units need to work hard at trying to work together effectively. This is especially true in Units where the membership is evolving. Why is this the case? If a Unit has had many long-standing, dedicated members, and there is an influx of eager new members, the existing group can feel threatened by the likely redistribution of authority. This fear can lead to stereotyping and discrimination. It is important to nip this behavior in the bud and not let it fester. Allowing it to fester will lead to an “us vs. them” atmosphere that will do nothing but cause resentment, potentially tearing apart the group. It will certainly not help your Unit be effective in serving the Veterans and the community!

Dealing with Diversity: Diversity is at the heart of ANAVETS. You are a part of an organization composed of men and women from different social environments, various ages, professions and ethnic backgrounds. Some are from rural areas, others from suburban areas or cities. Some Units are very diverse in and of themselves, others not as much. However, whatever the composition of a Unit's membership, the association's diversity should be embraced and

celebrated. It is one of the qualities that make us the Nations oldest Veteran's service organization.

Appreciating Differences: All people approach things in different ways, whether it is because they are a man or a woman, younger or older, have an outgoing personality or are more reserved, or because of their upbringing or culture. If a member's approach to something is unsettling, take a look at his or her point of view. For example, members who like to take things slowly and deliberately may not appreciate those who are more aggressive and proactive; people who are sticklers for detail might not like those with a more casual attitude.

Accepting the differences that are inherent in the members in an organization such as ANAVETS will help form a more cohesive, better functioning association. Whether there are large issues to be bridged, or subtle differences, approaching either of them with understanding and patience is the key to success.

Avoiding Stereotypes: There are certain characteristics that are often attributed to different groups of people. It is important, however, not to make blanket assumptions about people based on their gender, race or age. It is far better to learn about the individual. Your efforts to understand the member will be greatly valued and will help bridge differences in your Unit.

Accepting Change: Change can be very threatening to some people. They are comfortable with how things are, and don't want to confront the uncertainty that change may bring. As a Unit Executive, you need to be a champion of change in your Unit. You need to reassure those who are threatened by an influx of new members, revision of Unit goals or the introduction of a new project that the changes are meant to strengthen the Unit and allow it to be more helpful to those in need. Quelling their fears and assuring them that their contributions to the Unit will always be valuable can help alleviate the situation.

A special note: It is vital that your Units attitude toward the introduction of new members be positive. If new members enter the club and they feel unwelcome, they are likely to drop out and relate their negative experience in your Unit to others. Do not let a fear of change jeopardize the potential of your Unit.

Establishing Meeting Manners: You can create a positive atmosphere during Unit meetings by establishing ground rules for personal conduct. These guidelines allow members to express themselves freely and set the stage for constructive discussion. Ideas for meeting conduct guidelines include:

- All members should be treated as equals and peers.
- All members are encouraged to voice their opinions on subjects.
- All members should be encouraged to ask questions to clarify what they do not understand or if they want further elaboration.
- Members should be allowed to express themselves openly and candidly, however, all members must understand that personal attacks are not acceptable and all members should be treated with respect.
- When brainstorming ideas, no idea should be considered "bad." Every contribution helps pave the way to the solution.
- Unit officers should take care not to show favoritism to individuals.

Set the Tone: Executive leadership has an enormous impact on the atmosphere of the Unit. Making it clear that all members are to be accepted and respected as essential parts of the Unit, and setting a welcoming, tolerant atmosphere will go a long way in bridging potential gaps.

Benefits of Diversity: Pointing out the benefits of diversity often helps to bridge gaps and bring people together. The benefits of diversity are:

- **Fresh Ideas and Perspectives:** New members carry with them their collective life experiences, which helps them bring new ideas to the Unit. All Units benefit from perspectives that help them see things in a different way.
- **Better Ability to Serve:** A diverse membership allows the Unit to reach a broader spectrum of people.
- **Develop Personal Relationships:** Diversity allows your membership to develop friendships with people that they may not otherwise have the opportunity to meet.

Finding a Common Ground: No matter what your members' backgrounds or beliefs, they all have one thing in common: the desire to serve the Veteran and the community.

While they may have become ANAVETS members for varying other reasons, their commitment to community service was among them. Sharing this common ground can help bridge myriad gaps that may come your way. If differences of opinion ever seem to be too great, take a step back to remind everyone why they joined ANAVETS in the first place.

Building a Team: You will find that the membership will respond positively if they feel they play a significant role in the Unit and are an important part of the team. Team building fosters cooperation, enthusiasm, gives your Unit direction and helps bridge differences. Team building requires shared goals and effective communication.

Have your membership help set yearly goals and develop a plan to reach those goals. The team then works together to implement the plan, address challenges, evaluate the process and celebrate successes.

Dealing with Conflict: Even in the best, most productive Units conflicts arise at one time or another. As an Executive, you will need to deal with conflicts that develop in your Unit. It is essential to handle them in a timely manner. Ignoring the situation and hoping it will go away, or making vague, broad-based comments during a Unit meeting that do not directly address the parties involved will not solve the problem. One of the best ways to handle the situation is to discuss it with the parties in a relaxed, non-threatening manner. You don't want to put anyone on the defensive or take sides. You want to listen, mediate and help the parties to come to a mutually satisfying conclusion.

Welcoming New Members: It is essential for new members to feel immediately welcomed by the Unit. The sooner they are made to feel like part of the team, the quicker they will become active, vital members. If you are finding that your Unit is having a particularly difficult time welcoming others into the fold, or that well-established cliques are having an adverse effect on your Unit, the section that focuses on Cliques and Club Politics has many helpful suggestions to combat this retention challenge.

UNIT EVALUATION GUIDE

HOW ARE YOUR RATINGS?

Why Evaluate Your Unit?

Periodically taking a look at your Unit is a very beneficial exercise. It offers an insight into the state of your Unit – showing both its strengths and weaknesses. It also allows you to discover little problems and correct them before they become big ones that can require much more time, attention and resources. Plan on conducting an evaluation at least once a year.

Involve Membership

While having the Executive assess the Units status works very well, involving members is an excellent idea, too. Enlist the help of several members whose opinions you trust, or even your entire membership, to take part in the evaluation process. General members provide a different perspective than Unit officers and soliciting many varied opinions will give you the best overall view of the Unit. It is also a great way to show members that their participation and input are valued. Encourage honest, frank feedback. The best way to do this is to conduct your evaluation anonymously. People are more likely to tell you how they really feel if they are allowed to do so anonymously.

How to Conduct an Evaluation

A “*Membership Questionnaire*” is provided on pages 22-23 of the guide. Plan on no more than two week’s time for the completion of the forms. Consider distributing the evaluation forms during a Unit meeting and having members complete them then and there. The advantage to this is a higher response rate. If you hand out the questionnaires and ask people to return them at another time, be sure to follow up with members to ensure a good response rate.

Tallying Responses

When a significant number of responses are received, it is time to begin tabulating the results. An efficient way to do this is to create two lists arranged by subject and whether they are positive/negative feedback. As you work, you will see your Unit’s strengths and weaknesses emerge through your members’ eyes. Some of their observations may be quite surprising; some may not. It is important for you to keep an open mind to membership opinions, even if there is some harsh criticism. Remember – every criticism is an opportunity to make improvements to your Unit.

When you have finished tabulating results and comments, make two lists: Unit strengths and Unit weaknesses. Put items on the list in order of their scores. For the strength list, begin with the item that received the highest average score. Do the same with the Unit weakness list; beginning with the item that received the lowest average score.

Look carefully at your lists. Do you notice any trends? Are there specific areas where your Unit is strong and others where it is weak? (For example, your Unit scores high on all meeting questions, but low on membership recruitment issues.) Or are you seeing strengths and weaknesses randomly throughout different areas of your Unit? (For example, Unit meetings score high on all questions except interesting programs. And recruitment activities generally

score high, except on the orientation question.) Looking closely at the answers will help you uncover the seriousness of any problem areas.

Present Results to the Unit

Present survey results to the Unit during a meeting and invite open discussion. The more you learn, the better able you will be to develop an effective action plan to address problem areas.

Create an Action Plan

It may only take a few minor adjustments to correct some problems in your Unit. Other problems will likely need more time and attention. If the Unit meetings as a whole rated low, then it will take more time to correct the many problems that are present. If only the meeting program portion of your meetings scored low, that change will be easier to implement.

Consider making two lists: One of major problems, one of minor problems. Develop a prioritized action plan for addressing the areas in need of attention. When developing an action plan for improvements, look at the time and resources needed for each item. Be realistic when developing your action plan. If your Unit has many items that scored low, you will not be able to improve them all overnight. To help boost morale and show results, incorporate some “quick fix” items early in your plan so members will see improvements right away. Below is a very basic example of an action plan for one item that needs attention:

Sample Action Plan

Item: Improve Communication with Membership

Steps Toward Improvement: Time / Budget

- 1) Discuss deadlines with newsletter editor - **Immediate / \$0**
- 2) Add new “President’s Corner” column to newsletter - **Next issue / \$0**
- 3) Add “News and Notes” section to the Web site - **January 1 / \$50**
- 4) Improve news updates during meetings - **Immediate / \$0**

Once your plan is completed, present it to your board of directors for any necessary approvals.

Implement Your Plan

Begin implementing your action plan as soon as possible. Share your plan with the Unit and report progress on a regular basis. For any large-scale changes, ask for membership input again to make sure that your solutions are working. Celebrate your Unit’s successes when positive changes are implemented. It will keep your membership motivated and excited about their contributions to making their Unit the best it can be.

What to Expect

The evaluation process will likely take a month from the time you distribute the survey to the tabulation of results. The time required to implement changes will depend on the seriousness of the issue and the number of problems that need attention. However, you will find that taking the time to conduct a thorough, annual evaluation of your Unit -- and following through on the results -- will yield many benefits. It’s never too late to begin making positive changes! A strong, efficient Unit keeps current members satisfied and motivated, is attractive to new members and is able to successfully serve our Veterans and its community.

ANAVETS Membership Questionnaire

All members should complete this questionnaire to help assess member satisfaction with Unit activities and projects. Please return completed forms to the Unit secretary. Your response is confidential.

Do you feel welcome in our Association? Yes No
 If no, why not? (Please mark all that apply)

- Unit cliques
- The Executive seems unapproachable.
- I have not made an effort to meet other members.
- Other members have not made an effort to interact with me.

Do you feel comfortable sharing concerns with Unit Executive? Yes No
 If no, why not? (Please mark all that apply)

- The Executive have so many responsibilities. I do not want to burden them.
- The Executive have their own agenda and are not interested in other ideas.
- I have not been a member long enough to feel comfortable approaching the Executive.
- I do not want to be perceived as a complainer.
- Other: _____

How do you feel about the level of your Unit's involvement in the following types of activities?
 (Circle the appropriate response)

Type of Activity	Level of Unit Involvement			
Membership Development	Excessive	Adequate	Insufficient	Not Aware
Member Orientation and Education	Excessive	Adequate	Insufficient	Not Aware
Community Service Projects	Excessive	Adequate	Insufficient	Not Aware
Unit & Provincial Sports	Excessive	Adequate	Insufficient	Not Aware
Unit Public Relations	Excessive	Adequate	Insufficient	Not Aware
Unit Fundraising	Excessive	Adequate	Insufficient	Not Aware
Unit Camaraderie	Excessive	Adequate	Insufficient	Not Aware
Conventions (Provincial & Dominion)	Excessive	Adequate	Insufficient	Not Aware
Other _____	Excessive	Adequate	Insufficient	Not Aware

Have you participated in Unit projects and activities? Yes No

How did you become involved (mark all that apply) I volunteered I was asked

Please indicate your involvement in the following types of activities:

Type of Activity	I am currently involved	I would like to be involved
Membership Development	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Member Orientation and Education	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Community Service Projects	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Unit & Provincial Sports	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Unit Public Relations	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Unit Fundraising	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Unit Camaraderie	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Conventions (Provincial & Dominion)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other _____	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

I am *very satisfied / satisfied / dissatisfied* with my participation in Unit activities and projects.
 (Circle the appropriate response)

If you are dissatisfied, why? (Please mark all that apply)

- | | |
|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Insufficient knowledge | <input type="checkbox"/> Lack of resources |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Personality conflicts | <input type="checkbox"/> Lack of support from other members |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Cost | <input type="checkbox"/> Insufficient family involvement |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Personal time conflicts | <input type="checkbox"/> Other (please explain) _____ |

How do you feel about the following costs associated with membership in your Unit?
 (Circle the appropriate response)

Type of Cost	Perception of Cost		
Unit Dues	Excessive	Reasonable	Inadequate
Bar Prices	Excessive	Reasonable	Inadequate
Unit Activities (Dances, Socials etc.)	Excessive	Reasonable	Inadequate
In-house costs (Tickets etc.)	Excessive	Reasonable	Inadequate
Sports	Excessive	Reasonable	Inadequate

Do you enjoy your Unit meetings? Yes No

Please circle the appropriate response in the following questions:

The length of our meetings is *adequate / excessive / insufficient*.

Our Unit should have *more / same amount / less* fellowship activities.

Our meetings are *well organized / poorly organized*.

Our meeting time is *convenient / inconvenient*.

Which of the following aspects of your meeting place do you find to be **unsatisfactory**? (Mark all that apply)

- | | |
|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Accessibility | <input type="checkbox"/> Décor/atmosphere |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Parking availability | <input type="checkbox"/> Safety of the area in which it is located |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Other (please explain) _____ | |

Suggestion(s) for change: _____

The following changes would improve your Unit meetings:

- | | |
|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Better speakers | <input type="checkbox"/> More focus on fellowship |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Increased variety of program topics | <input type="checkbox"/> Implementing seminars on duties, by-laws etc. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> More involvement of membership | <input type="checkbox"/> Better time management |
| <input type="checkbox"/> More service opportunities | <input type="checkbox"/> More leadership opportunities |

Is there anything else you would like to see changed?

How does your spouse/partner/ family feel about your involvement in ANAVETS?

- | | |
|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> proud of my involvement | <input type="checkbox"/> feels it takes too much of my time |
| <input type="checkbox"/> wants to know more/be involved | <input type="checkbox"/> feels it is too expensive |
| <input type="checkbox"/> seeks interaction with other ANAVETS spouses/partners/families | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Other (please explain) _____ | |

Thank you for taking the time to complete this questionnaire and your dedication to our Association.