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Ask Ishbel

Q. How do we go about recruiting new members and retaining current members?

A. This is a question often asked by Home Owner Association (HOA) board members and others interested in growing their organizations – indeed I will be conferring with the Mobile Home Owners Association of Illinois (MHOAI) on this very subject in the very near future.

Recruiting members can sometimes be very easy – people will want to join a vibrant group of educated, informed, articulate leaders, especially if they can answer questions, provide resources, and assist home owners through a crisis situation. When no crisis exists the challenge is much greater. This is particularly true in parts of the country where home owners fear retaliation, intimidation, or eviction if they choose to stand up and speak out. The important piece here is to ensure that nobody is alone. Partner them with others in their community or in neighboring communities where the problems are similar or where a strong HOA is already in existence. Provide members with ways to connect with each other and with the board – mentoring, regular check-ins, and hosting social events for new members are other ways to help people connect.

As for **retaining members** – ask yourself: why do I stay involved? I suspect your answer will revolve around the companionship you receive from other board members, the joy you get in being of service to others, the impact you feel you have made on policy initiatives, and/or the recognition you have gained for your leadership in the organization. Now use this understanding to find out how you can more deeply involve members in the life of the organization. Are members encouraged to participate actively in the running of the organization or do they just show up for the annual meeting and sit passively listening to the board members give reports? Does your HOA check in with members throughout the year, are they encouraged to get involved in committee work, or to do their own outreach and recruitment? The more people are involved the more they will continue to stay involved.