Retaining New Chapter Members During COVID-19 Era

As state and local governments begin to ease coronavirus restrictions, many Izaak Walton League chapters are reporting a spike in interest from potential new members, and many more have received questions about joining and using chapter properties and facilities. With outdoor activities becoming more common again, it is time to begin holding chapter activities and events that are open to the public and will directly support new member recruitment.

The League’s National office is here to help support chapters’ recruiting efforts for new members.

Discounted Dues for New Members

Beginning July 1, you can offer two types of discounted memberships for new members:

• **50% off half-year memberships:** Any new member who joins the chapter after July 1 is eligible for a 50% reduction in membership dues for 2020. This option is only available for new members and not for 2019 members who have not renewed for 2020.

• **18-month memberships:** An even better deal! A new member can also join now for 1½ years (18 months) with an expiration of December 31, 2021. This is a win-win for everyone: the member gets to skip the fall renewal cycle and the chapter has a guaranteed member through the end of next year!
Other Recruitment Strategies

Some ways to find potential new members to whom you can offer discounted memberships:

- **Hold a recruiting contest:** Conducting a membership recruitment contest, with incentives to encourage current members to bring friends and family into the chapter, can generate great results.

- **Reconnect with previous members:** Consider reaching out to former members from 2017 and 2018 as another source of recruits. These returning members would be eligible for the above-mentioned half-year and 18-month membership options. The National office can provide you with a list of lapsed members. To request a list, email members@iwla.org

Retaining New Members

The surge in interest from new members is great news! However, we have to work a little harder to retain these members this fall. Consider one fact: chapters have, on average, a 50 percent retention rate for first-year members. Compare this to retention rates higher than 80 percent for people who have been members for a few years.

So, special considerations are needed to engage new member and make them feel welcome. Here are a few tactics:

- If you do not already have a membership committee, put one together to help promote the availability of memberships and greet potential members at chapter functions.

- Don’t stop there! Send follow-up emails and make calls to membership applicants. The personal touch matters and can bring great results, especially while in-person meetings remain limited.
• Present a simple, friendly message during your chapter’s new member orientation session.

• Invite new members to participate in a project or attend chapter events to get to know other members.

• Ask new members about their interests and talents. Connect them to opportunities to share their skills – perhaps by hosting a small activity, organizing a project, or completing a task.

• Again, your membership committee should reach out to newcomers to answer questions and help them settle in.

Summer is also the perfect time to follow up with folks in your community who asked about membership in April, May or June or wanted more information about the chapter. Pursue those contacts proactively in the weeks ahead.