How to Keep the
Members You Recruit

A Guide for Retention & Engagement

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Why Do
Members Quit?

For years Phired Up has been working with partner organizations to conduct major industry-wide research to determine why members leave fraternities and sororities. (We've been doing this research since 2014… we've collected way over 3,000 survey responses… and we've spent well over 100 hours conducting interviews!)

When we survey individuals who have quit their chapter, the initial survey responses suggest that things like time and money are the primary reasons people quit. But Phired Up's research went deeper. We conducted phone interviews with as many survey respondents as possible, and as soon as we pushed for a little bit deeper response -- "Tell me the story of why you left your chapter?" -- the respondents almost always told a story that was not primarily about time or money. Instead, the following four themes (in general) continued to emerge as the top reasons people are quitting our organizations.

Reason #1: Misaligned Expectations

Many former members of fraternities and sororities feel like they were sold one experience through the marketing and recruitment of the organization, but what they actually experienced was very different.

The "recruitment" experience often looks like "fun buddy club," "instant best friends," and "perfectly organized joy." And then the chapter experience feels like "mandatory attendance," "fines," and "house duties."

⊕ Reflection

- **In what ways is your organization/communicating setting unclear or false expectations about membership?** Especially consider the time obligations, cost, participation expectations, and other expectations of a high performing member -- not just minimum expectations you might have.

- **How can your organization more accurately and clearly outline expectations for prospective members about the real experience of membership?** Think about your marketing efforts, the information and experience shared during "recruitment," actual handouts or written information provided, membership agreements you ask new members to sign, etc.

Reason #2: Lack of Connection

Large organizations are almost all made up of smaller "friend groups." Friend groups are not a bad thing. They are natural and normal building blocks of larger organizations. When friend groups become toxic, they are known as "cliques," but most friend groups are completely healthy.

However, there is at least one person in your organization who doesn't have a friend group.

Think about that person (or those people) right now. That is who is most likely to quit sometime soon.

People quit fraternity and sorority… and in fact, people quit college… because too often they don't have a "best friend" or a "friend group."

Now think of your senior members. You might realize that most of their friend group has graduated or disengaged from the chapter. This means they are likely to disengage sometime soon too.

By the way, the best method to build meaningful "friend group" connections is *not events*. Fraternities and sororities have a bad habit of trying to solve everything with events. This is not a problem that can be solved that way. Relationships take time, effort, and intentionality to be built. Brotherhood and sisterhood is not created overnight.

Reflection

- **List all of your current members who lack deep connection to an active friend group**. After you've listed their name, write down the way you'll be personally reaching out to them to deepen your personal relationship with them and to help them connect with another friend group.

- **Draw a map of the "friend groups" that make up your chapter.** Consider what the themes are that help members gather together and feel close to one another.

Reason #3: Discord (Drama)

The third reason people report that they have left their fraternity or sorority is… drama. "Discord" is our fancy research term for it, but we're talking about standard, old fashioned, good old fraternity/sorority drama.

One person said this, and the other person said that.
One group wants more social, the other wants more ritual.
One member thought they'd win a position, another actually did.
One group of members feels threatened by another group.
One member broke a rule, and while some "have their back," others are "holding them accountable."

Fraternity and sorority "drama" comes in many forms. It's almost impossible to avoid.

But a chapter that has well-aligned expectations of membership and healthy connections rarely feels any real pain from the natural and normal "drama" that is inevitably going to happen.

! Reflection

What is the current likelihood that drama/discord in your organization will lead to members quitting?

LOW   **HIGH**

Reason #4: External Factors

External factors such as the return on i*nvestment of membership, perceived value of the experiences, and competing interests* make up the last reason why members leave fraternity and sorority. These factors are most seen in Generation Z members (born around/after 1995-2000) where a higher value is placed on purposeful financial investments and developmental experiences.

Fraternity and Sorority is seen as a premium experience. It is often one of the more expensive extracurricular options on campus where members need to be sure that the financial investment is returning skills and relationships that last beyond the undergraduate experience.

We've all heard that member who wants to leave because of "finances". What that often really means is, "this isn't worth it to me." When the financial investment stops being "worth it" to our members, they are more likely to leave their membership. This is especially important during the new member period when members are in that "try before you buy" mentality.

We're not the only student organizations on campus. When there are handfuls of others that also offer leadership, scholarship, service, and fellowship at a lower price tag, members leave to "competing" organizations when the time and financial investment appear to have a higher return on investment.

The organization that clearly communicates the return on investment alongside the value provided to the holistic development of an individual member rarely feels the struggles of external factors.

❗ Reflection

- **What value does your organization provide?** Write out 5 promises that your organization makes (and delivers upon) in return for an investment in membership. Describe the benefits a member receives in as much detail as possible.

How Do We Keep Our Members?

(and Keep Them Engaged)?

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Phired Up teaches a six step process for keeping your members and keeping them engaged.

1. **ALIGN EXPECTATIONS.** Alter your marketing and recruitment strategies to provide clear and accurate membership expectations to prospects early and often. Reinforce these expectations consistently throughout the membership experience. These expectations should be clear, simple to understand, and if met, should be celebrated.

2. **PEOPLE.** Every member needs to be connected through meaningful personal relationships to other individuals or groups within the organization. This can shift and change over time, and specific efforts should be made to consistently nurture these close, intimate, meaningful friendships.

3. **PURPOSE.** Fraternities and sororities are more than "buddy clubs." Most members join to "be part of something bigger than themselves." When members feel like the group has lost purpose, when it has become a social club, they will often start to drift away (because they aren't interested in paying for their friends). Make sure your chapter is "on a mission" to achieve its purpose, and consistently communicate this with your members.

4. **MATTERING.** Every member wants to know that they matter… members care that they matter in the lives of other members and they care that they matter in the life of the chapter. Help members connect their presence and participation to the overall success of the organization, and consistently shower members with appreciation for playing their important role.

5. **LEARNING & GROWING.** Members must constantly have ways to learn and grow from the fraternal experience. If the organization has stopped challenging them… if it has stopped adding to their life in a meaningful way… they will start to disengage or leave. Fraternities and sororities are too often designed only for the needs of first and second year students. Find ways to help all members to continue to learn and grow from their experience.

6. **REPEAT.** A repeatable, optimized system for retention and engagement should be a top priority for fraternities and sororities. Every chapter should have an individual "in charge" of member retention and engagement. Every chapter should have a plan to monitor and address the retention and engagement of their members every semester.

Our
Suggested
Engagement
Tactics

Tactic #1: Semesterly Engagement Assessment

Every semester, we recommend executing a survey of all members in the chapter. The responses to this semesterly assessment will help your chapter monitor individual retention and engagement, and build an overall strategic plan to ensure all members are gaining value from the membership experience.

1. What is your favorite part of being a member?
2. What is your least favorite part of being a member?
3. How can we help you learn & grow this semester?
4. How many very close friends would you say you have in the organization?
5. What do you expect of yourself as a member this semester?
6. What do you expect of the organization this semester?

You can conduct this assessment via a Google Form, one on one interviews with chapter leaders and members, or in small group focus groups of members from the same pledge class. Gather as a leadership team at the completion of the assessment to review the themes that emerged and how you can help re-engage members.

Tactic #2: Retention Committee

Create an anonymous retention committee with the purpose of identifying "at risk" members and creating custom plans to retain those members. This committee should be led by a chapter leader who oversees standards and/or health and safety.

1. Pick 5-8 chapter members not in leadership positions who are strong relationship builders and are involved in your organization. Do not ask for volunteers, select a group and make it anonymous.
2. Meet with the committee at least once per month.
3. During meetings, discuss what members seem disengaged or are at risk for leaving. Consider members who:
   a. Have not been attending events or are showing up to only required events and are not engaging with others.
   b. Members with challenging/demanding majors
   c. Ran for leadership positions and did not receive them
   d. Have returned from studying abroad
   e. Are late on their membership payments
   f. Have recently had a standards meeting
4. Pick a committee member to connect with the "at-risk" individual. Reach out to the individual and start with building the relationship. The committee member's goal is to seek to understand what is causing the individual to disengage, not to punish or accuse the individual.
5. Create a retention plan of action for identified members. As a committee, assess and prescribe the perceived reasons for disengagement and what can be done to re-engage the member.
   Example: IF the member is lacking connections THEN have committee members invite them to social events and connect them to multiple new friendship groups.
6. Repeat steps 2-5 monthly, selecting a new committee when elections occur.

Tactic #3: Big Brothers & Big Sisters

The "big/little" structure that exists in most fraternities and sororities is an important resource that could be leveraged for higher levels of retention and engagement.

Often, a "big brother" or "big sister" relationship is undefined, casual, and the purpose is somewhat unclear. Too often the "job" of a "big" is to buy gifts and be kind to their assigned younger member. That's fine, but it misses a major opportunity.

What if the job description of a big bro/big sis was more clearly defined and focused on two simple things: keeping your "little" engaged with the chapter and helping them find success as a college student?

The 6 Jobs of A "Big"

1. **Agree.** Immediately upon becoming a "big," meet with your "little" to review expectations of membership and agree upon the terms of your big/little relationship.
2. **Connect.** Help your little get connected and stay connected with a "friend group" (Not necessarily your own friend group -- think of groups that are extra good at welcoming others into their circle and start there).
3. **Assess.** Ask your little the semesterly engagement assessment questions each semester, and advocate for their needs with the leadership of the chapter.
4. **Plan.** Help your little identify their role/job/position/contribution to the chapter each year in writing, and shower them with appreciation every time they contribute to the chapter in that way (or in other ways).
5. **Succeed.** Write a semesterly academic and overall collegiate achievement plan with your little. Identify the choices they need to make daily, weekly, and monthly to succeed in their academic and extracurricular pursuits. Hold them accountable to making those choices.
6. **Love.** Connect with your little in real ways. Care about their whole life, not just their chapter involvement. Shower them with love and appreciation for choosing to be your sister/brother.

Other
Notes

Other Notes

Help members align the value and purpose of their membership by identifying what makes membership worthwhile to their investment and development.

Value	Why does it matter?	How do you experience the value?
What value does your organization provide?	Explain the purpose and why it matters to the individual.	Describe a time where this value and purpose is experienced as a part of membership.
Mentorship	Receive a mentor and mentor others to build supervision skills.	Being a big brother allows me to inspire and develop another member. It has taught me to challenge and support those I manage in a team.

We help fraternities
& sororities grow

We've been helping fraternities and sororities recruit new members and improve their organizations since 2002.

Educational Training

We provide Educational Training to teach organizations how to recruit better and retain more high-quality members. And we put the art and science of relationships at the center of all of it. Our educational trainings include:

- Keynotes
- Chapter Consultations
- Board Trainings
- Interactive Workshops

Strategic Consulting

We provide Strategic Consulting to give organizations a long-term plan for recruitment success and a coach to to keep them accountable and help them on the way. This work often looks like:

- Marketing Strategy
- Long-Term Coaching
- Deep-Dive Consulting
- Research & Data Analysis

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Through our sister company, TechniPhi, we provide a suite of technologies to help organizations easily manage their recruitment processes, vote and score PNMS, and help guide PNMs through recruitment.

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- Campus Director™
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