

X. Membership

The guiding principle on membership for branches is that ASALH will continue to grow total membership focusing on both recruitment and retention strategies to solidify its position as the organization to continue the Woodson legacy.

A. Definition of Membership

An ASALH National member is an individual or organization that believes in its mission and pays dues to support that mission. Members may belong to a branch or be at-large (non-branch).

A branch member is first an active/current member of ASALH who joins the branch based on criteria established for local membership.

B. Member Value Proposition

A member joins ASALH and the branch based on some promised or perceived value to be delivered. It is the primary reason an individual joins and stays with an organization.

For ASALH, the member value proposition is a global platform for scholarship, promoting African American history and advocating for its recognition as American history. The value proposition for the branch is essentially the same but the community aspect of a branch adds to that value.

When a member's experience does not match expectations, the membership will not be renewed.

C. Member Benefits

1. Benefits of ASALH National Membership

Member benefits linked to dues payment are shown at <https://asalh.org/members/join/>. In addition, members enjoy their individual contributions, whether it be adding to the body of scholarly works on African American history, serving on the Executive Council/Committee or volunteering in some other capacity.

2. Benefits of Branch Membership

In addition to the ASALH benefits listed above, branch members enjoy greater engagement with their community and opportunities to:

- a. Develop leadership, managerial, public speaking and group decision making skills by serving as a branch officer.
- b. Obtain exposure and opportunities based on branch volunteer experience to be considered for elective service on the Executive Council¹².
- c. Build recognition for ASALH/ branch as the voice of the community on African American issues.
- d. Educate people about African American history and life in their community.
- e. Help to perpetuate the Branch by volunteering for work that needs to be done.
- f. Help to grow ASALH membership through branch member recruitment and engagement.
- g. Network with other branch members to develop relationships or even friendships.

D. Importance of Branch Membership

Branches were conceived as an integral part of the ASALH structure to deliver on the mission through sustained membership.

Research shows that members who belong to local affiliates of national associations generally have a higher level of engagement with their association and its mission than at-large members. It is also well established in the association world that there is a strong relationship between member engagement and member retention. Combined, these two factors show the importance of branch members to ASALH's growth and long-term viability.

One reason for the higher engagement at local affiliates may be the local nature of community, which allows members to have a more personal interaction, engagement, and volunteer opportunities. Some branch members may even value branch peer networking as their primary reason for belonging to ASALH. These are aspects of branch membership that can be used to appeal to prospective members.

¹²When ASALH's Nominating Committee is ready to seek nominations for the Executive Council and Executive Officers, it will issue a call for nominations identifying the open positions, eligibility criteria and submission requirements and it will also post the information at <https://asalh.org/members/executive-council-member-selection/>

E. Growing Membership

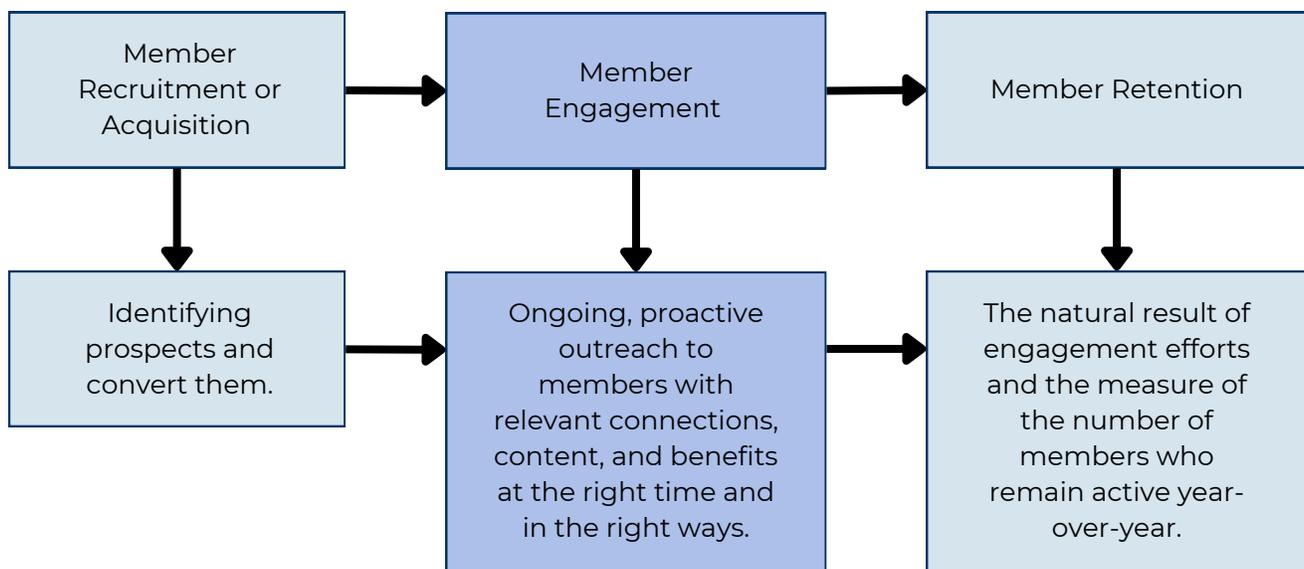
Membership is the most direct and tangible way to support ASALH's mission. Overall organizational health improves as membership grows to support programs, share volunteer work and donate. The ideal way to grow membership is to simultaneously renew current members (through engagement) and recruit new ones. However, we know that retention of existing members is a challenge, which puts pressure on recruiting new members. Even to maintain the required membership level of 15, branches must continuously acquire members because of inevitable attrition each year.

1. Membership Growth Strategy

Branches can increase membership by developing and executing a growth strategy. The strategy can be tied to an overarching plan that ASALH may develop, or a branch can develop its own. A membership growth strategy is generally a long-term plan executed over a number of years because it takes time to identify, recruit and engage members.

Three inter-related elements to growing membership are shown in the figure, below.

Figure 7: Elements of Membership Growth



The framework for developing a strategy for any of the elements shown would have these primary components:

- a. An overall Goal
- b. Objectives to support the goal that are measurable
- c. Activities/tactics to support objectives with specific timelines, which may include marketing
- d. Goal status (a check to determine progress on meeting the goal)
- e. Objectives status (a check to determine progress on meeting the objectives)
- f. Activities status (a check to determine progress on the activities)
- g. Results
- h. Year-end evaluation of strategy and recommended adjustments for the next cycle

2. Recruitment Strategy

Membership strategies in general must be developed, revisited, and tweaked over time as the needs and expectations of members are always changing. One important recruitment consideration is the need to understand exactly who the ASALH member is, as to know who good prospects are, how to communicate ASALH's mission, and how to persuasively convey the value proposition of branch membership. It is also helpful to develop a budget and determine what funds are available to support the priority items that emerge from the strategy.

Although no market research data are available to create branch member personas, by observation, they generally are passionate purveyors of African American history, admirers of Dr. Carter Woodson, and individuals who find meaning in helping to carry on the Woodson legacy. At the same time, many branch members self-identify as retired and growing older, and they have expressed a dire need to recruit younger members who can assume the role as guardians of this legacy.

Even with this limited context, it is possible to develop a useful recruitment strategy that will have everyone working toward the same outcomes from a common set of assumptions. A recruitment strategy template is provided below.

The output of a membership recruitment strategy may look as follows:

Table 15: Illustrative Membership Recruitment Strategy

Goal (multi-year)	Elevate the impact of ASALH and improve member services with an expanded base of members to serve in volunteer roles.
Objectives	Tactics
1. Leverage family members and the presence of institutions in the community to recruit members to the branch.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. By January 30. Document what the branch needs from members, the population that can meet those needs and who among that population should be targeted. 2. By May 31. Gauge interest to identify 20 prospects who would be a good fit from: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ Registered attendees at the branch's public events. ◦ Former branch members ◦ Professors and students at nearby colleges, with the understanding that student membership has a high turnover rate. ◦ Among targeted family members, ASALH's at-large members and such groups as: local business owners, churches, and other institutions. 3. By December 31. Convert 10% of the 20 prospective members. (Conversion of a prospect can extend over many years but valuing the prospect's ideas and gaining their trust is important): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ Make the ask of prospects to get a definitive yes, no, maybe or not ready. ◦ Revisit prospects, with due diligence paid to ensure that converted prospects and individuals who are a definite "no" do not continue to be contacted. ◦ Get to know your prospect, through conversations, social media, etc., to better engage. ◦ Nurture prospects with information or invitations to public events of special interest to them, with no strings attached.

Table 15: Illustrative Membership Recruitment Strategy (cont.)

<p>2. Build recognition for the ASALH brand</p>	<p>1. May 1- September 30. Set up a table at 6 free community events and farmers markets with the Journal and other branded material displayed to initiate conversation.</p> <p>2. January 1- December 31. Leverage the three (3) public events to promote the brand using at least one media platform for each event: website, social media, newsletters, and bulletin board.</p> <p>3. January 1- December 31. Take advantage of public service announcements (PSAs) offered by radio and TV stations to publicize the branch's mission and events at least one (1) time.</p> <p>4. January 1- December 31. Engage at least 5 people with diverse back-grounds, perspectives and life experiences in a discussion about Dr. Woodson.</p> <p>January 1- December 31. Use branch logo for official business.</p>
<p>Goal Status at 6/30</p>	<p>No Change</p>
<p>Objectives Status at 6/30</p>	<p>No Change</p>
<p>Activities Status at June 30</p>	<p>Objective 1: Revise projected number of prospects converted to 5% from 10%</p> <p>Objective 2: Revise projected use of 1 media platform to 2 for Woodson's birthday.</p>
<p>Results</p>	<p>1. The branch is aligned with ASALH National on the need for an annual membership drive.</p> <p>2. The branch exceeded the minimum membership level with 16 members and increased institutional membership to 2.</p>
<p>Evaluate goal and overall process and make tweaks.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Set objectives for the next year in this multi-year strategy. • One objective may focus on young members with programs for young members as a prime tactic. 	

3. Engagement Strategy

A strategy like the one for recruitment can be developed for member engagement. Consider engagement the centerpiece of membership renewal model and an indicator of how well the branch is delivering on the member value proposition. Membership renewal rates are always below 100% because of attrition for normal reasons. However, a low renewal rate should be a concern, and there should be an examination of possible underlying causes: did members get reminders to renew, was website performance an issue or did the member not have a sense of belonging? Each of the contributing factors would need to be corrected.

One important tool for managing renewal/engagement is a membership database that can help determine who have not renewed their membership and who have been active (attend events, votes and receive communications). This can tell who may need to receive an outreach.

Another key to successful engagement is understanding the general makeup of the membership and what it is enthusiastic about, so that activities can be tailored to those interests.

In general, branch officers need to develop a member centric mindset to ensure that members feel acknowledged and valued, have the needed education about their role and feel that communication is adequate. Some of the tactics to consider in an engagement strategy include:

- a. Provide a personal welcome to each new member.
- b. Maintain high contact during the first three years to answer questions. This contact gradually tapers after the first year but devise subsequent 6- and 12-month check-ins because the renewal rate in the first three years is lower than for other cohorts.
- c. Get to know members, and at their own pace.
- d. Publicly recognize members for a job well done to let them know that they are personally valued.
- e. Celebrate and thank them for their membership each year.
- f. Inquire from members if they are realizing the value they expected from the branch and how their experience can be improved.
- g. Determine if any lack of engagement is due to the branch or an external cause, and once determined, find a way to resolve the problem or support the member.
- h. Invite active participation in the work of the branch that best suits skills and interest—as an officer, on a committee or with an event.
- i. Maintain a feedback loop to receive suggestions and reactions to events and other engagement activities and be open to making changes.
- j. Foster belonging with theme items, such as, t-shirts or items from the ASALH store for social or special events.
- k. Make time for fun with social events.

Engaging members is a continuous process, which takes consistent effort to deliver ongoing value to members that matches their expectations. Members who stay involved with the branches are generally more satisfied and want to continue as a member.

4. Engaging Younger Demographic

There is a huge generational difference at play in recruiting and engaging younger members. Branches have stated that Gen X and younger are severely underrepresented among their members, like the experience of many associations today. The generational differences is evident in processes for engaging, learning, communicating, decision making and building community.

Branches will require a different engagement model from those of previous generations, for example, social media, to bridge the gap. This is a necessary investment to attract young members. In general, opportunities to engage a young population include:

- a. Modernized content, which is minimalist, designed with graphics and delivered digitally.
- b. Video participation where practicable, even after covid.
- c. Information delivered in the-moment.
- d. Information delivered in bite-sized pieces.
- e. Information delivered on media that young people engage with.
- f. Strategies that focus on purpose, relevance and outcomes.
- g. Time management including micro-volunteering (short projects and short commitment of time).

5. Retention/Renewal of Membership

Retention is the outcome of successful engagement and a member experience closely aligned to expectations. High retention is the prime objective as it brings stability, builds membership, maintains a team of experienced branch members and reduces dependence on recruiting new members.

The cost of recruiting a new member is estimated to be five (5) times the cost of retaining existing members because of the investment of time, effort and in some cases marketing cost needed to build a relationship, even when there is no certainty that the prospect will become a member. This makes another case for retention.

A high retention rate signals member satisfaction and that the branch is doing the right things and a low retention rate signals that the branch needs to work more on engaging members.

F. Branch Membership Dues

At its discretion, a chartered branch may charge annual local dues. The branch collects its own dues and the income is retained at the local level. Ability of members to pay and the amount needed to financially support branch programs are key considerations in setting the dues amount.

Current membership in ASALH is a prerequisite for branch membership. Members may join or renew their ASALH or branch membership at this link <https://asalh.org/brand/> on ASALH's landing page.

When branches register members and collect dues, they must use the approved membership form located at <https://asalh.org/join/>

ASALH maintains a membership directory for each branch and supports branches in keeping their directory current. However, ASALH relies on updates from the branches to maintain its database as it does not collect branch dues nor place individuals in branches. Branches should submit new member information to reconcile the databases to membership@asalh.org.

The branch directory reconciliation process calls for:

1. ASALH to send each branch a directory of their members every month.
2. Upon receipt, the branch officer with responsibility for membership should confirm the information to complete the process. To confirm the data, ensure that the list contains the name and contact information for each branch member: - mailing address for mailing the complimentary issues of the JAAH; email address for invitations to meetings, general ASALH updates, and importantly, ballots for upcoming election(s); and phone numbers.
3. The branch must promptly report omissions or errors to ASALH.

G. Terminated Membership

A terminated membership is defined as a member who resigns or dues that have expired for at least one (1) day. A terminated member will cease to receive **all** membership benefits.

If an individual's membership in the National Association has expired, that individual's membership cannot be counted toward the requirement for the 15-member branch minimum. Branches should keep a list of expired members and continue to encourage them to reengage and renew their membership.

H. Reinstatement of Terminated Membership

A terminated membership may be reinstated at any time with the payment of annual dues.

I. Member Code of Conduct

ASALH has adopted a Membership Code of Conduct that specifies a standard of behavior that members must adhere to by acting honestly and responsibly in all their interactions. Members who knowingly violate any provision of the Code of Conduct may be subject to having their membership terminated.

Branch Officers must in addition avoid conflicts of interest where their personal interest and the interest of ASALH and/or branch are in conflict. A **Conflict of Interest Policy** for officers is incorporated into the Model Constitution and Bylaws.

Procedures for regulating and adjudicating violations are included