

Introduction

The success of every Association depends heavily on having an active and varied membership.

Associations should recruit new Members and Friends throughout the year, avoiding large one-off membership drives, which are often expensive, time-consuming and difficult to administer. Recruiting Members and Friends should be done on a regular basis and become a normal part of your Association's activities.

Many Conservative supporters would consider joining the Party, but have never been asked. No Association has too many Members and Friends and even the best organisation could do more to attract and retain them. In drawing up this advice we have gathered best practice from Conservative Associations across the country.

Where do you start?

As with every other aspect of campaigning, you will need to undertake an honest review of your present situation before drawing up a recruitment plan.

Before deciding where to start, look at the strengths and weaknesses of your current membership. There is little point in just looking to increase the overall membership; instead you will need to target your efforts on those areas that are weak and need building up. You will also need to prioritise your programme based on the resources and information you have available.

You will need to review the number of:

- Active branches*
- Electors in each branch
- Conservative votes at the most recent local election
- Conservative votes at the most recent General Election
- Known Conservative pledges
- Paid-up Members**
- Active Members***
- Lapsed Members
- Registered Supporters
- Helpers who are not Members
- Donors who are not Member

* An active branch must hold an AGM, produce minutes and annual accounts, pay a quota/target to the Association's central fund, field candidates at local elections and fight election campaigns.

** A paid-up Member must be in accordance with the definition in the Party Constitution.

*** Active Members are those who take part in a campaigning activity at least once a year.

The first and most obvious place to start is with those Members who have not renewed their membership.

Ask yourself why they haven't renewed:

- How many reminders have they been sent?
- How long have they been paid-up Members?
- Has someone asked them why they have not renewed?
- Have they moved or died?

Only when you are sure that they are not going to renew their membership should they be allowed to lapse.

It is important to find out why lapsed Members and Friends decide to leave and use this information to improve the way you involve people in your Association. Don't just assume that because they haven't renewed that they are no longer interested in being a Member or Friend. Call them and find out why they have failed to renew.

This information could prove invaluable in improving the relationship you have with your membership and stabilise levels of retention.

Review the way you involve people in your Association:

- Have you advised them to sign up to the e-newsletter?
- Have you told them about the Affinity Programme?
- Have you included an Events listing with their welcome letter and card?
- Have you sent them Today's Conservative Party booklet?
- Do you send each qualifying Member an AGM notice?
- Do you send an Association "In Touch" or newsletter? If so, how often and what information does this contain?
- What invitations do Members and Friends receive to social and political events at both branch and Association level?
- Do you invite them to Party Conference?
- How often do Members and Friends have the opportunity to meet with their MP, PPC and Councillors?
- How often do you ask them to help with political and fundraising activities?
- What type of membership card do you send?
- What other information do you give to new joiners?

Why not ask new Friends and Members for their views and see if they can suggest areas for improvement?

Recruiting new Members and Friends

Before you start you must first identify who will be responsible for recruiting and retaining Members and Friends both within the Association and the branches. Having established your current strengths and weaknesses you will now be in a position to plan a recruitment campaign.

Using the information already compiled you will be able to decide which areas to target. You may decide to target those wards that are weakest, or stronger areas where you should have a higher membership. Whatever approach you use it should be based on what will bring the greatest benefits to your Association.

The first step should be to set a target such as:

- 5% of the Conservative vote at the last local election
- 5% of Conservative pledges
- A percentage increase above the current Membership
- A numeric increase in the current Membership

Remember to set realistic and attainable targets and that one formula may not suit all your branches. For example, if you have a Branch with a high Conservative vote but little or no canvass information then it will be more difficult to achieve than in a branch with a lower Conservative vote and good canvass information. Likewise setting a 5% increase in membership across the board could be difficult for a successful and active branch with an already high level of membership.

When setting your targets remember the following:

- Clearly identify the tasks and gain acceptance from all those involved.
- Ensure that everyone is aware of the campaign and the targets and that they understand what is happening and why.
- Maintain interest with regular progress reports.
- Regularly review progress and amend your plan accordingly.
- Recognise success and learn from your failures.

Key pointers for success

Start in an area where you are likely to have a good response. A good start motivates everyone and helps sell the concept to the Association.

Run small but regular campaigns. Large campaigns are expensive and take a great deal of organisation. Regular campaigns of a few hundred pledges each month with a reminder the following month not only keeps down the costs but also becomes a part of the office routine.

Always plan your campaign and ensure that you send out a high quality product with a positive message.

Emphasise the benefits of joining the Conservative Party as a Member:

- Sign up to the Affinity Programme
- Take part in Association social events
- Take part in campaigning
- Attend Party Conference
- Vote in any election for the Leader of the Party
- Vote in the candidate selection process for Councillors, MPs and MEPs
- Vote at the Association AGM

Emphasise the benefits of joining the Conservative Party as a Friend:

- Sign up to the e-newsletter
- Sign up to the Affinity Programme
- Take part in Association social events
- Take part in campaigning
- Attend Party Conference
- The recruitment campaign

Once the above steps have been completed it is time to start recruiting new members and you will need to decide upon the best method to use.

There are five basic methods of recruitment:

- Direct Mail
- Door-to-door
- Telephone
- Leaflets
- E-campaigning

Direct Mail

This is the most popular method of recruiting, which can be targeted on pledges or sent out in a blanket mailing. Targeted mailings always get a better response, and the better your targeting the more cost-effective the process will become. Any mailing must aim for the following:

- Letters and accompanying literature should always look professional.
- Write letters on your Association letterhead and use printed membership application forms.
- Ensure that the application form is simple to understand and complete.
- Personalise the letter by mail merging the recipient's name and address.
- Mail merge should also be used for the application form.

- Avoid generic letters addressed “Dear Resident” – these always get a poor response.
- Include recent literature.
- Include a two-way help section on the application form detailing the various ways in which members can become involved politically and socially.
- Enclose a reply paid envelope for convenience. The costs are outweighed by the increase in responses.
- Letters should be no more than one page. Running on to two pages creates difficulties with the mail merging process and makes it considerably longer to organise and complete the mailing.
- The letter should be positive and go to the point.
- Explain in the first paragraph that you are asking them to get involved with the Party, and clearly present the ways they can do so.
- Although you may want to be critical of Labour, ensure that this is balanced with a positive Conservative message.
- Emphasise the benefits of joining the Conservative Party.
- Give them a guide as to how much you would like them to pay.
- Never set a maximum subscription.
- Always include a PS to emphasise the main point of your letter as people often read this first.
- Examples of a suggested letter and a membership application form are included in this Toolkit.

Doorstep

There are two types of doorstep recruitment: a straightforward recruitment campaign and a follow-up to direct mail or a telephone call. Whichever method you use you must ensure that you are well prepared and your recruitment teams are fully briefed:

- Plan ahead which streets you are going to visit.
- Decide upon the best time to call, when most people will be at home.
- Always work as a team; don't send individuals out on their own.
- Let the team know who they are targeting – e.g. pledges, response to a direct mail, blanket coverage etc.

The teams will need:

- Marked registers or canvass cards
- Maps highlighting the areas to be covered
- Relevant and up to date literature
- Membership cards
- Recruitment forms
- Briefing notes and a script
- Pens and pencils

On the doorstep:

- Don't have two recruiters on the same or adjacent doorsteps.
- Be friendly and act naturally.
- Be positive; don't make excuses or apologise for calling.
- Address the resident by name and confirm your records are correct.
- Introduce yourself and tell the resident you are from the local Conservative Party and explain why you are calling.
- Follow the script.
- Don't argue – refer problems to the relevant Councillor, MP, MEP etc.
- Tell them about the benefits of joining the Conservative Party.
- Be specific about the membership subscription (CCHQ recommends a minimum subscription of £25).
- Never set a maximum subscription.

If you are following up a direct mail campaign and are handed an envelope containing a membership subscription don't open the envelope in front of the resident. Thank them for their subscription and explain that they will receive their membership documents shortly.

Telephone

This can also be used in two ways: either as a direct approach for membership or as a prelude or follow-up to a letter or leaflet drop. It is more likely that this approach will be used in conjunction with a survey canvass. The main drawback of using the telephone is that unless you have credit card facilities you will not be able to collect the subscription.

However, the benefits of using the telephone are that you can:

- Make more personal contacts on the phone than going door-to-door.
- Contact people at all times – wet or dry, light or dark.
- Follow up responses to surveys or feedback from leaflets, to assess how keen to join the person is.
- Reach people by phone who would otherwise be inaccessible.
- Set up appointments to sign up members.
- Recruiting by telephone is most successful when calls are followed up by a letter or personal call, and can be an efficient way of finding new members.

A number of electors are now registered with the Telephone Preference Service (TPS). You should not call someone who is TPS registered unless they have given the Party their telephone number themselves. There is a potential fine and it does not matter if the person is listed in the local telephone directory – you must always check if a number is TPS registered before calling.

For advice on ensuring your data has up to date TPS information contact the MERLIN Helpdesk (helpdesk@conservatives.com).

When you produce a leaflet or form to send to potential new members, remember to include discreetly the following wording:

- “If you are registered with the Telephone Preference Service, by giving us your telephone number you are giving us permission to ignore this and occasionally call you.”

Leaflets

Never miss an opportunity to recruit new Members and Friends. All of your campaign leaflets should include some mechanism to join the Party, depending on the type of leaflet and the space available. There are numerous examples of different ways to do that throughout this Toolkit, which you can cut and paste from the templates provided on the CD.

E-campaigning

Sending regular emails is an excellent way of communicating with your Members, Friends and supporters – and it is absolutely free. You can inform them of upcoming Association events, future campaigns, news from your MP/PPC, information on your Social Action projects, and competitions and special offers from our Affinity partners.

Every Association should have a website which is regularly updated with information about their Association, MP/PPC and Councillors, and the website address should be prominently displayed on all campaign literature.

Make sure you include news and photos, and when you send out newsletters upload them onto the site in PDF format.

CCHQ’s field Campaigning Department will build and host an Association’s website for £150 + VAT per annum. This service has been developed to be very simple for a constituency to maintain - no special software is needed, and some updating is carried out automatically from the Party’s national website.

Online campaigning works best in conjunction with an offline effort. Make sure that your message is the same online and offline.

Ensure you collect and record supporters’ email addresses and mobile numbers for careful and selected use in addition to everything else you do for your campaign.

Be careful when collecting such data: under the Data Protection Act (DPA) people must explicitly opt into a mailing list. If they don't opt in and you contact them, under the DPA you will be sending them unsolicited communications and you will be breaking the law.

Be sure to always include a note at the end of each email saying that they can stop receiving emails whenever they wish. It should be easy for them to do this.

For example you could include the following wording:

"If you no longer wish to receive emails from us, please reply changing the subject line to "unsubscribe."

Also make sure that all your e-campaign materials (both website and emails) carry an imprint.

Membership retention

Having worked hard to recruit new members it is vital you work just as hard to keep them.

- Send the Member or Friend welcome letter and card promptly, together with professionally presented information about the local Association, such as Today's Conservative Party booklet and your Events listing.
- Contact the Member or Friend personally upon joining to welcome them and find out how active they would like to become.
- Keep accurate records and send out renewal reminders in a timely fashion.
- Send out regular updates on the Association's events, fund-raising and political activities.
- If you have been particularly successful in recruiting new Members and Friends, invite them to a drinks party or similar gathering to meet their MP/PPC and Councillors.
- If a Member or Friend has indicated that they wish to help, follow this up promptly and give them something to do.
- Try not to bombard Members with mailings. Too frequent mailings are perceived as wasteful, and mailings with too many enclosures are unlikely to be read.
- Carefully plan your mailings for the year and make the most of them. For example, when you send out your AGM notice, include a newsletter or report from your MP or PPC outlining their political activities.
- Avoid constantly asking Members for money. Limit your requests and justify them in simple campaigning terms.
- If a Member or Friend has indicated that they simply wish to make a financial contribution, avoid constantly asking them to become more actively involved.