

# Membership Structure and Recruitment

Having a diverse and engaged membership is a cornerstone to a high-quality member experience. The following areas will help Inn leaders recruit and retain Inn members:

- Categories of Membership
- Member Status
- Vacancies
- Diversity
- Structured recruiting efforts
- Finding active and engaged members

## **Categories of Membership**

Active membership in an American Inn of Court may be in one of four categories as determined by years of experience. The experience levels indicated here are guidelines only. Each Inn may determine its own experience requirements within the membership categories.

The Inn must weigh the need for diverse levels of member experience against the realities of the community it is serving. The charter requires the Inn to have active members in the Master of the Bench and Barrister categories, and also in either the Associate or Pupil category. Many Inns have members in all four categories.

This intentional striation fosters mentoring, creates more diverse programs and frankly is one of the few things that separates the Inn of Court experience from a bar association. Intentionality in creating your Inn's makeup is key to the Inn of Court's ability to achieve its mission.



## **Member Status**

Each member of an Inn has a membership status of Active, Emeritus, Honorary or Alumnus.

Active members are those who currently pay dues, attend meetings, and participate in the program presentations and mentoring activities.

Emeritus members are those individuals who have served as a Master of the Bench for at least 5 years, and may be retired or less active in practice

Honorary members are designated by Inns on the basis of distinguished service to the bench or bar, in furtherance of the American Inns of Court's mission, or other noteworthy achievements. Both emeritus and honorary members are exempt from attendance requirements.

Alumni members are individuals who have rotated out of the Inn due to term limits (e.g., some Inns require Associates or Barrister members to serve a specific length of time before "graduating" from the Inn) or have withdrawn for other reasons and do not attend meetings or pay dues.

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## **National Dues**

Inns are required to collect and remit national dues from each active member (currently set at \$85) each year. Inns receive an invoice in July each year, based on the number of ACTIVE members in the Master of the Bench, Barrister and Associate categories from the PRIOR year. Inns do not pay dues for members whose status was Honorary, Emeritus, or Alumni during the year. Pupil members are considered fully active and receive all of the benefits of membership from the national organization. However, they are not included in the count for national dues billing.

## **Alumni Association**

The American Inns of Court has a national membership alumni association, designed to allow alumni to maintain a level of engagement with the American Inns of Court. Alumni Association members retain access to the national website, receive The Bencher magazine and receive information about select programs open to current and alumni members. Alumni Association dues are paid by members directly to the national organization, with a portion of those dues remitted directly to the alumnus' former Inn.

## **Membership Ratios and Vacancies**

The Executive Committee, with participation by the Membership Committee chair should set targets for membership, including how many members in each category. Setting membership targets gives the Membership Committee clear objectives that support the overall operation of the Inn. The maximum number of active members of each local Inn should not exceed the number of people who can participate actively in programs, discussions, and other activities of the Inn. This is generally thought to be approximately 80 members. The average Inn has approximately 70 members.

When we discuss ratio, we are talking about the number of active members that must be evenly spread among the categories of membership. This works best when it is related to the number of pupillage teams. For example, each pupillage team might have one judge, two or three additional masters, two barristers, two associates and two pupils. If the Inn has eight meetings and eight pupillage teams with 10 members, this would keep the total active members to 80.

Membership rotation provides opportunities for membership to more people, while keeping the Inn at a manageable size. Masters of the Bench may continue in Inn membership indefinitely or at least for five years. Associates and Barristers may have a membership term of 2-5 years, as established by the Master of the Bench. These members may then be allowed to reapply for extensions of their memberships, based on their levels of participation and contribution to the Inn experience. Pupils, who generally are third year law students, join the Inn for one year. Inns should strive to maintain a waiting list of qualified applicants who may fill slots as they become available.

## **Membership Diversity**

One of the attributes of a high quality member experience is engaging with an Inn that is cordial and welcoming – one that is open to diverse ideas that foster professional and personal growth. Inn membership should reflect the diversity of the community in which it operates.

Personal diversity: Inn membership should be diverse and reflect the open and equal opportunities available to all segments of the population.

Professional Diversity: An equally important consideration is the inclusion of as many segments of the legal community as possible. Federal and state judges, law school deans and professors, and law students should be included in the diversity of the Inn. It is important to include a cross section of legal practice such as solo or small practice attorneys, large firm attorneys, plaintiff's bar, defense counsel,

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public defenders, prosecutors and other government attorneys in the membership of the Inn. This balance of legal practice should be deliberately and methodically encouraged.

Only by drawing and retaining a diverse membership will Inns guarantee the success of our unique organization as well as our respective professional pursuits. Therefore, the American Inns of Court are committed to creating and maintaining a culture that promotes and supports diversity not only throughout the organization, but in the profession as well.

As part of the achieving Excellence program, Inns are asked to promote the national diversity policy at the Inn level. This is far from a “test of diversity” but rather a request to communicate one of the fundamental tenets of our organization’s culture and mission. Samples of how Inns have accomplished this are available on the Inns of Court website.

### **Structured Recruiting Efforts**

An Inn must constantly drive to retain its existing members, and to fill any vacancies with committed, quality people. Finding and keeping members should be a year-long, thoughtful process. The Inn must understand why people join in the first place and be able to use that knowledge to recruit members and to keep them coming back for more.

Members look to their Inn experiences to enhance their professional lives, and to connect them with peers and colleagues in the legal field. Based on recent research, Inn members see their Inns as welcoming and engaging communities that supports career growth and discovery. Recruiting efforts should highlight the Inn’s efforts to support and nurture professional development through interesting and innovative programming, and mentoring opportunities with to the best legal minds in the community.

Approaching membership recruitment in a systematic way ensures this important function occurs regularly, and that the Inn will have a full complement of members when the new Inn year begins. The Inn should have a Membership Committee that reviews applications or nominations. The chair of the committee should be part of the Inn’s executive committee. The committee should meet periodically throughout the year to review and assess the waitlist, membership openings and applications or nominations.



It is important that whatever process is implemented, whether nominations or applications, it should be followed consistently and fairly. If the Inn strays from a consistent approach to recruiting and admitting members, it can be perceived as elitist, exclusionary or even discriminatory. A sample membership application can be found on the organization’s website.

The selection process for incoming members varies from Inn to Inn, but many Inns have found it useful to have a Membership Committee to gather information and screen potential members for recommendation to the Masters of the Bench. Selection of Barristers and Associates is ultimately approved by the Masters of the Bench. When an Inn is affiliated with a law school, Pupils are usually chosen by the school or a member of the faculty.

At the end of the Inn year, members who are eligible and wish to continue their membership into the next year should be asked to complete a membership renewal form. A sample renewal form can be

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found on the website. There should be a firm deadline for members to indicate their renewal intentions, so the Membership Committee can decide how many and what categories of openings are available for the coming year.

### **Finding Active and Engaged Members**

Once membership openings have been determined, the next process is to recruit new members. The first and best source for member prospects is the Inn's existing members. Specific membership openings should be communicated to the Inn's members, who can either nominate or encourage their colleagues to apply. Existing members should understand the specific types of members being sought. Also the Inn should clearly convey in its recruitment efforts what is expected of its members, such as: the membership terms, the level of participation required, and agreement with the American Inns of Court Professional Creed.

The Inn should announce membership opportunities through the local bar associations, either at meetings or through publications. If there is a local legal press outlet, or if the local newspaper has a legal section, consider advertising in those outlets. Many local courthouses and law schools have bulletin boards where membership notices may be placed. Keep in mind that one of the best recruiting tools you have is your monthly meeting. Use it! Based on responses from an Inn membership survey, many current members joined after attending an Inn meeting as a guest. Send out a general invitation to the local bar association and encourage members to personally invite a guest or two.

State and local bar associations are frequently searching for good CLE programs for their meetings. Arrange to present one of your best programs for them, and don't forget to bring along a supply of membership brochures and applications with your Inn's contact information included.

Your members are distributed throughout the legal community and know interested prospects. Including your members in the recruitment process encourages them to talk to others about the Inn of Court and its benefits, which will increase your members' sense of ownership of the Inn. The American Inns of Court is a respected organization with more than 35 years of history. As part of that history, your Inn and its members are known and respected in the community. They are a tremendous recruiting tool, and represent the professionalism and standards of the organization. Engage them in your efforts.

### **Promoting Your Inn**

There are many other ways to promote your Inn. Make your Inn the brightest spot on your city's legal skyline. Stand up, stand out, and be seen and known in the legal community. Many practitioners know nothing about the Inns of Court. Others have the wrong idea of who we are and what we do and stand for. Increasing your Inn's visibility is a great way to boost interest.

Write an article for local and state bar publications. Your Inn's programs can provide the basis and much of the body of a good article. The *Bencher* is also a good source for great articles, with reprint permission easily granted through the national office. These articles, along with information about your Inn, are great ways of promoting the Inns of Court as a resource for the community.



## **Membership Structure and Recruitment**

Encourage Inn members to serve on panels and programs for local law schools and legal organizations.

Honor a local hero, incoming or retiring judge, bar president or founder of a firm with a special reception before the regular meeting. Invite members of the community to attend

When your Inn has a special program or speaker, invite the newspaper's legal reporter to cover it. Or send a press release to the local newspapers and bar journals. Provide information about the Inn, the organization and the event. Be sure to include a contact name/number or your Inn's website address.

### **Resources Available for use**

There are a number of resources available to help your recruiting efforts. Back issues of The Bench, copies of the Professional Creed, and Sample Applications/Renewal forms are available from your Chapter Relations Director

Maintain updated membership information on your Inn's website, and refer potential members to the site. Ensure that information about how to join your Inn is easily accessible on the site. Additionally, make sure the membership chair's contact information under the Officer's committee roster section is up to date.