

# A Clear, Thorough Membership Process

## ➤ Recommendation from Two Communities on Attracting Desirable Members:

1. **Don't say** you're "seeking people interested in community" or that you're "looking for community members." Don't even use the word "community," if possible, in your initial member-recruitment efforts.

If you do, a certain number of potentially good community members will respond. Yet . . . a certain number of people will *also* respond who are having a hard time in life and believe that living in community will save them. And who, if allowed to join your community, will *still* have a hard time in life (because everywhere they go, there they are) and then your community will most likely have a hard time too.

"Like a moth to a flame" is how inexorably communities can attract people — some of whom tend to mild or serious ongoing emotional distress.

People with ongoing emotional distress tend to drain and exhaust a group.

The founder of a well-known community once told me that his group shouldn't have put their community name and the word "Community" on the sign out front. Given who was attracted to and joined them, he said, their sign could well have read, "Emotional Hospital." While this may seem extreme, it was this founder's way of describing the tendency for communities to attract people with problems who yearn to be taken care of.

Instead, consider saying you're looking for confident, mature people (or similar terms) who are interested in sustainable agriculture, natural building, off-grid power, etc. (or whatever applies to your group's situation) to live with like-minded people in a sustainable human settlement, or something like that.

Two different experienced community founders — one in Portland and one in British Columbia — found after long experience that it's much better not to use the word "community" in their website, emails, brochures — or the sign out front. To not advertise for "people looking for community" or "community seekers." But instead to state the kinds of qualities you want in members (mature, confident, etc.), with the kinds of interests and skills you want. "What a difference it made in the kind of people who responded!" said my friend in B.C.

2. **Seek new members** on your community's website, in "list" websites of various kinds, and in online and print community and Ecovillage publications. Even if the publication says "community," you can still put in an ad for members using the above kinds of terms.

## ➤ Recommended Membership Criteria:

- (1) Thoroughly understands and supports your community's Mission & Purpose.
- (2) Understands and shares your community's values and lifestyle.
- (3) Has a general attitude of, "I love what you're doing here; how can I help?"
- (4) Willing to abide by your community's agreements.
- (5) Willing to be trained in your community's decision-making method (especially if it's consensus or Sociocracy) before they have decision-making rights.
- (6) Generally liked by most people in the group most of the time; i.e., people would enjoy having them there.
- (7) Willing to give you character references, is willing to allow a credit check and/or background check.

- (8) Can afford to join: can pay the fees.
- (9) Can meet the community labor requirements (unless you reduce or waive the requirements because of their age, physical difficulties, or other reasons).
- (10) Doesn't present red flags — doesn't have an addiction, history of financial irresponsibility; criminal record (unless perhaps long ago & they were young); or emotional disturbances that would too-often negatively affect the group. Isn't running from the law and wanting to "hide out" in community; doesn't have an ex-partner trying to hunt them down and do them harm or kidnap their child; or is not mentally ill (or if mentally ill or emotionally disturbed, does not have a habit of periodically going off their meds).

➡ **Recommended Amount of Time for Provisional Membership:**

1. **For a forming community group:** attendance at least 4 sequential meetings, reading and agreeing to the decisions in the Decision Log, and paying whatever dues or fees are required to join the forming group).
2. **For an existing community:** Lives in the community 6 months to a year, at least. Longer if they can only visit periodically.

➡ **Sample Requirements for a Provisional Member (PM) to Become a Full Member:**

- (1) Abides by the group's agreements.
- (2) Understands and supports the group's Mission & Purpose. Understands, supports, and signs the group's Covenants, if required. Understands your requirements for full membership and signs a Provisional Member Contract that outlines your requirements.
- (3) Re your requirements, has a general attitude of, "Of course I'll do what you ask. And what else can I do?"
- (4) Attends all required orientation sessions, including training in your decision-making method.
- (5) Pays all required fees; contributes all required labor hours.
- (6) Attends required number of meetings and required kinds of meetings.
- (7) Gets along well with community members.
- (8) If one or more full members have concerns about the PM, s/he participates in conversations, mediation sessions, and/or conflict resolution sessions, as needed.
- (9) Understands they might not be invited to join; i.e. their request may be declined.