

# The Grand Lodge of Ohio

## Membership Initiative Implementation Guide



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Grand Lodge of Ohio

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**Table of Contents**

BACKGROUND .....4

REALITY .....5

CHOOSING YOUR COMMITTEE.....5

RECRUITMENT .....6

    Explanation .....6

    Implementation .....7

RETENTION .....8

    Explanation .....8

    Implementation .....9

RESTORATION.....10

    Explanation .....10

    Implementation .....11

SUMMARY .....12

APPENDIX I: Consent Agenda.....13

APPENDIX II: To Our New Brother,.....14

## **BACKGROUND**

The Grand Lodge of Ohio, like every other Grand Lodge, is concerned with membership in the individual Lodges. A committee of Masons from across the state was assembled and given the task of creating a membership guide for the Lodges, which was published in 2014. Listening to the response from the Lodges, we have rewritten the manual with a different focus and a different intention. The first guide has great information and a lot of research, but Lodges wanted a document that was a little more focused.

We recognize that every Lodge in Ohio is unique. It has its own personality, its own way of doing things, and its own relationship to its Brethren and community. When asked, "If, for some reason, you could no longer attend your home Lodge with your Lodge Brothers, would you still be a Mason?" most Masons will answer 'Yes'. When asked, "If you could not attend your home Lodge with your Brethren, would you be as active in another Lodge?" most Masons will respond "No." Brethren recognize that there is a special and unique experience in their home Lodge that they cannot get elsewhere. It is the goal of the Grand Lodge of Ohio's Membership Initiative to protect and preserve that unique experience in each Lodge.

To that end, it is the belief of this Committee that Lodges should not be chasing numbers, which does sound counter-intuitive to a Membership Initiative. It is the belief of this Committee that if Lodges will get active and visible in their communities, if they will revitalize the Lodge experience to provide a quality alternative to other distractions, if they can provide a reason and an avenue for Brothers to return to Lodge, that this will benefit the membership of the individual Lodge.

The key ingredient of this Initiative is the Brethren of the Lodge itself. They need to take it upon themselves to fight for the health of their Lodge, to invest in their Lodge so that it is still healthy twenty years from now, and to take the time to make their Lodge and its health a priority. Ultimately, the Membership Initiative is not about checking off boxes to meet the requirements of Grand Lodge, but about protecting and preserving Freemasonry in an individual Lodge and in that Lodge's community.

## **REALITY**

The Brethren that take it upon themselves to fight for the health of their Lodge need to remember that it is a long war made of many, many small battles. Small changes now may have long-term effects years down the road. Likewise, some activities or ideas may need to be tried multiple times in order for them to be successful. Remember that Time, Persistence, and Patience accomplish all things.

Realize that you may face opposition, quite possibly people in your own Lodge who are resistant to change, who do not want to support these activities, and may even seek to derail them. Do your best to involve, encourage, and change the minds of these people; and remember that you are investing in your Lodge and in your community. Freemasonry and the Masonic Lodge enrich the individual man, his family and his community. This is unique and must be preserved, protected, and promoted.

## **CHOOSING YOUR COMMITTEE**

Membership and the Lodge Experience is everyone's responsibility; but you will need a core group of people who are committed to take the time and do the necessary work. Choose the people in your Lodge not based on position or history, but on those who can best work, best agree, and who are willing to fight for the health of your Lodge.

In many of our early discussions, we would ask each other "Why should I be a Mason?" To us, that is an essential question, and if a Brother cannot answer that question themselves, how can they help someone who asks them that question at work, in the elevator, etc.; how will they help a Brother who is considering leaving Lodge, or how will they help a lapsed Brother return?

It is the suggestion of this Committee that the answer to that question will help you choose the right people for your Lodge's Committee.

Remember that your Lodge has a Membership Committee, as do the other Lodges in your District, as well as a District Committee. If a Lodge is interested in attracting and retaining members, they should talk to and work with other Lodges in their area to share ideas, activities, and Brotherhood. Territorial boundaries should not divide Lodges with good ideas, good activities, or prevent them from working together

# RECRUITMENT

## Explanation

The Membership Committee spoke with Lodges across the state and discovered the following things in every District:

- Every Lodge, for better or worse, is the best at something in the District, has their own unique cast of characters, and does things in their own particular way;
- Every Lodge is in a unique position to meet the needs of their Brothers and their community;
- Most new members join because they have personal knowledge of or a personal connection to Freemasonry.

All of that can be reduced to this: **If a Lodge is seen as being visible and necessary in their community, living their beliefs and putting Masonic values into action, potential members will seek out the Lodge.**

We do not solicit membership as an organization and this will never change. We do have the opportunity to suggest to people that we know that they would make a good Mason and talk about our experiences in and the benefits of the Fraternity. It is the suggestion of this Committee that the best way for Lodges to recruit new members is to be visible in their communities, active in meeting a community need, and living out Masonic values and ideals. Lodges that are successful in accomplishing these things will see quality people seek out the Lodge for membership. In short: good Lodges doing good things attract good people.

Remember that when a Brother takes his obligation, he creates a Masonic Family consisting of his spouse, children, and loved ones. The Lodge that is successful in attracting and retaining members has activities that are supportive of that Masonic family. Sometimes the best way to attract new members is to have people see the Brethren of the Lodge enjoying themselves as Masons with their families at events like a Pancake Breakfast, a Lodge Family Event in the local park, or serving the community as a family.

Masons have historically been men of note, men of honor, and men of action in their communities. It is the belief of the Membership Committee that a return to this is one of the key components of improving membership.

## Implementation

- Form your Lodge Membership Committee
- Look at the ways that your Lodge is visible and necessary in your community.
  - What does your Lodge do in and for your community?
  - What else could it be doing?
    - Ideas from the Membership Guide
    - Service Options
      - Help for Seniors, Veterans' families, Masonic Widows.
      - Helping at community or school functions
    - Fundraising Options
      - Local charities (preferred)
      - National charities
    - Public Options
      - Parades
      - Informational tables
      - Open Houses
    - Historical Options
      - Celebrating “everyday” Masons who strengthened their communities through presentations, articles, etc.
    - Increase your involvement
      - Does not need to be expensive or large-scale
      - Must be repeatable or sustainable
        - Month-to-month, season-to-season, year-to-year.
- Look at the ways that your members are living their Masonic values
  - Wearing a ring, belt-buckle, hat, or having an auto emblem is a promise made to the Fraternity and to the individual Brother to live according to a certain standard.
  - Remember that you may be the only Mason that someone ever meets, act accordingly.
- Do not hide your Light under a bushel
  - Every member should have a response ready if asked “Why should I be a Mason?”
  - Inviting potential candidates to meet the Brethren before they petition is the best way to create a strong member. This can be done during refreshment or during a public event.
  - Involve the Masonic Family. Often the best way to attract new members is to have people see the Brethren of the Lodge enjoying themselves with their Brothers and their families.
- Work with your District Committee and other Lodges to develop, share, and implement ideas.

# RETENTION

## Explanation

In talking to active members, the Membership Committee discovered that Masons stay active because the experience in Lodge provides the following three things:

- **Substance**-A Lodge that is successful in retaining members provides an experience worth leaving your family and children for an evening. It provides something of substance, whether it is through education, ritual work, a good meal but it provides a more substantial experience than the other alternatives.
- **Standards**-More and more in our society, we do not expect of another. We do not expect that people will live a certain way, behave a certain way, or act a certain way. Many members are looking for a Lodge experience with standards, whether it is in the ritual work, the memory work, in the education, or in the accountability or behavior of the Brethren. They want to be expected of and held to those expectations.
- **Solidarity**-Members want to belong to an organization that is universal; where the things that we choose to divide us like religion, politics, race, etc. just don't matter. They want to belong to an organization where they are accepted, cared about, where they experience true Brotherhood through activities and attitude. Superficial connections are as close as your Web Browser, Members want something that can only be found in a Fraternity.

Likewise, Brethren leave because one or more of these things are not being realized in the Lodge. Recruitment efforts get members in the door, but it is retention efforts that keep them there. Many of these retention efforts overlap with the work of the Lodge Education Officer, but retention should be the concern of all Brethren fighting for the health of their Lodge.

When you speak to older Masons, they will tell you that substance, standards, and solidarity were hallmarks of Lodges when Masonry was at its peak. When you speak to younger Masons, they will tell you that they are looking for a Lodge where substance, standards, and solidarity are the hallmarks. Regardless of age, Masons are all looking for similar things, they may just have different ideas about how to get it. The more that Brethren discuss what they value and expect from the Lodge Experience, the narrower the generational gap seems to be and the more focused the Lodge is on what the Brethren are truly looking for. It is the belief of this Committee that getting the Lodge experience back to being one of substance, one with standards, and one with an atmosphere of solidarity is one of the key components of improving membership.

## Implementation

- Form your Lodge Membership Committee.
  - Discuss your Lodge Experience, in what areas is your Lodge strong and where is it weak?
- Substance
  - Ask your members why they come to Lodge, what is the best part of coming to Lodge?
    - Restructure Lodge meetings to emphasize why members come to Lodge
      - Consent Agenda (Appendix I)
      - Move Education earlier in the night
      - Move meal before Lodge.
  - Ask your members what your Lodge prides itself on?
    - Your Lodge wants to be known as the best in the District at what?
- Standards
  - “To Our New Brother” (Appendix II)
    - Discuss and communicate what the standards are for your Lodge.
  - Make a concerted effort to improve the standards of your Lodge
    - Ritual and Protocol
      - This can be as simple as just making sure that everyone is passing the Word or giving the due guards and signs the same way.
      - Use your District Education Officers and Past Masters
    - Memory work
    - Education
    - Behavioral Standards
  - Mentor less experienced officers and Brethren.
    - Expect that every officer will mentor the one behind him in line.
- Solidarity
  - No one sits alone. No Brother should ever have to sit by themselves in Lodge, there should always be someone by them to talk to or answer questions. We pledge that we will always be there for each other, we should put that value into action in Lodge.
  - Take care of each other. Put our values into action by helping out a Brother, whether it is helping him clear brush, fixing his computer, giving wise counsel, or walking him to his car.
  - Work to prevent Brethren leaving. An older Brother in a nursing home may need help paying his dues, a young husband may need help explaining Lodge to his wife, a Brother may feel frustrated because they aren’t getting what they want out of Lodge. Talk to these Brethren and see what help they may need to remain active.
  - Travel to other Lodges and visit, not just at Inspection time.
- Work as a committee with your Lodge Education Officer, Past Masters, and Current Master to reorganize your Lodge Experience.
- Work with your District Committee and other Lodges to develop, share, and implement ideas.

# RESTORATION

## Explanation

In talking to members who have fallen away, the Membership Committee has found that one of three things tend to be the reasons why once active Brethren stopped coming to Lodge:

- **Priorities**-Brethren who fell away did so because something else in their life took precedence. This could be a job, family, travel, or that they weren't getting what they wanted from Lodge to justify making it a priority.
- **Fear**-Many Masons were out of the habit of coming to Lodge and now have the time to make it a priority, but they feel like they would be out of place, that they won't fit in because they don't remember the due guards and signs, they may not think that they are wanted back.
- **Missing a Piece**-There are many members who do not come to Lodge because they are missing a piece of what it takes to get to Lodge. This could be transportation, this could be knowing when the meetings are, this could be that they do not have appropriate dress.

From a membership perspective, these are the easiest members to have return to Lodge. Lodge was important to them once, and now they may just need an invitation or a level of support to return. It is the belief of this Committee that providing that invitation or level of support to Brethren who have fallen away is one of the key components of improving membership.

## Implementation

- Form your Lodge Membership Committee
- Identify the Brethren.
  - From your secretary, get a list of members who pay dues but have not been coming to Lodge as well as members suspended for non-payment of dues.
- Contact these Brethren
  - This may be something that can be delegated to Past Masters.
  - Letters are great, but nothing beats a phone call or the personal touch.
- Invite them back to Lodge
  - Let them know that they are missed in Lodge
  - Let them know when the next Lodge meeting is.
  - Let them know what the Lodge is up to and how it has changed since they last attended.
- Offer support to get them back to Lodge
  - Transportation
  - Education
  - Reassurance
- Don't give up
  - We are not telemarketers and we do not pester Brethren, but an occasional reminder that the door to Lodge is always open to them may be appreciated.
  - Sometimes it does take a few months of asking to get a "yes."
  - Oftentimes, when a Brother has something else that is a priority like family or work, they greatly appreciate that the Brethren of the Lodge have not forgotten about him and check in with him.
- Work with your District Committee and other Lodges to develop, share, and implement ideas.

## SUMMARY

We know that men interested in Masonry want the following things:

1. To belong to an organization with values
2. To belong to a society that puts those values into action through service.
3. To belong to an organization that is both visible and necessary in their community.
4. To belong to an organization that has standards
5. To belong to a spiritual community without the dogma, stigma, or label of an organized religion.
6. To understand what it means to be a man, due to waning male influence in the American family.
7. To be a part of a true Brotherhood, because it is difficult to find in today's society.
8. To belong to an organization that is worth taking time away from family or vocation

The goal of the Membership Initiative is not about checking off boxes to meet the requirements of Grand Lodge, but about protecting and preserving Freemasonry in an individual Lodge and their community. To that end, Brethren must be of the mindset to fight for their Lodges, investing in their Lodge so that their Lodge is still healthy decades down the road.

Much of the Initiative is getting Masons back to being Masons: involved in their community, providing a quality Lodge experience, being involved with their Brethren, and tending to the Masonic Family.

It is not the recommendation of this Committee that Lodges should be “chasing numbers,” but instead working on getting Lodges back to the basics: Brotherhood, Relief, Truth, Universality and living their Masonic Values. Essentially, it is better to have 90,000 active and involved members in vibrant Lodges than 200,000 members who do nothing more than pay dues.

If a Lodge is interested in attracting and retaining members, there are support and resources for them to do so. It can be the previous Membership Guide or other materials, but the best ideas for a Lodge and its health typically come from the Brethren themselves.

If a Lodge is interested in attracting and retaining members, they should talk to and work with other Lodges in their area to share ideas, activities, and Brotherhood. Territorial boundaries should not divide Lodges with good ideas, good activities, or prevent them from working together.

**The Membership Initiative is truly about getting Masons back to being Masons and Lodges back to being sacred and extraordinary places.**

In the end, it is all about ensuring that Freemasonry is alive and well in the future in at least as many communities as it is now. Freemasonry and Masonic Lodges enrich the individual man, his family and his community. This is unique and must be preserved, protected, and promoted.

Grand Lodge Membership and Retention Committee

Dan Rannebarger, Chair;

Jon Bennet,	John Rannebarger,
Bill Carter,	Thomas Savage, US Army, Ret;
Chad Kopenski,	Jeremy Sharninghouse

# APPENDIX I: Consent Agenda

**What It Is:** A way, according to Robert’s Rules of Order, to speed up meetings by allowing members to vote on a group of business items as a bloc without discussion. These items are usually non-controversial, require no real action, or are usual, customary, or routine. This has been successfully implemented in dozens of Lodges in Ohio.

**What Could Be On a Consent Agenda:** Minutes of the previous meeting, routine monthly bills (gas, water, electricity, etc.), committee reports provided for informational purposes only, correspondence that requires no action (thank-you notes, announcements, Short-Talk Bulletins), anything that does not really require discussion or action.

**What Should Not Be On A Consent Agenda:** Petitions, Suspensions, Grand Lodge correspondence and edicts, correspondence requiring action (request for donations, etc.), anything that could be considered controversial, requires discussion or debatable action.

## How Is It Done:

1. The Consent Agenda is presented to the Brethren before the meeting: A list of items can be e-mailed, printed out, posted on a board or table in the Lodge Room. The Brethren must have the opportunity to see what is on the agenda.
  - a. Example:
    - i. Consent Agenda
      1. Minutes from 1/13 Meeting
      2. Minutes from 1/20 Meeting
      3. Gas Bill: \$43.36
      4. Pancake Breakfast Report: Proceeds: \$455.
      5. Thank you from Logan Rainbow Girls
      6. Announcement of Scottish Rite Festival in Gallipolis
2. Individual items like the minutes, thank you notes, etc. should be available for the Brethren to review, either in the e-mail or on a board or table in the Lodge Room before Lodge opens. Many Lodges just place them on a table or chairs by the Senior Deacon.
3. Before any business is transacted, the Master asks the Brethren if there is anything that needs to be extracted from the Consent Agenda.
4. To extract an item, a Brother rises and asks that a particular item be extracted because he wants to discuss it and vote on this issue separately. Because the Agenda is passed at the *consent* of the entire Lodge, an item must be removed from the consent agenda at the request of any one Brother. The request does not need a second and is not discussed, and no vote is taken to remove it from the consent agenda.
5. After any and all items are extracted from the agenda, the Master presents the new consent agenda and takes the vote by general consent. Any extracted items are discussed at the proper time and order during the regular meeting.
6. Secretary includes items as usual in the minutes for the Stated Meeting.

Example:

Master: “Are there items that the members want to remove from the consent agenda?  
[Pause; if no one rises, continue.]  
If there is no objection, the consent agenda will be adopted.  
[Pause; wait to see if anyone objects.]  
Hearing no objection, the items, as presented on the consent agenda, are adopted.”

Example Two:

Master: “Are there items that the members want to remove from the consent agenda?”

Brother: [Rises] “Worshipful, I would like to request that the gas bill be removed from the consent agenda for discussion.”

Master: “All those in favor of approving the consent agenda minus the gas bill, signify by the usual sign of ‘Aye.’”

## Requirements

- Consent Agenda must be created before Stated Meeting: typewritten, e-mailed, hand-written.
- Secretary must have minutes for the previous meetings ready for review before the Stated Meeting
- Correspondence needs to be opened, categorized, and ready for review prior to the Stated Meeting.
- Routine reports must be submitted in writing before the Stated Meeting
- Items must be available and in time for Brethren to review before the Stated Meeting, either printed, posted or presented in the Lodge Room.
- While not a requirement, a vote of the Lodge to begin utilizing the Consent Agenda is recommended.

## APPENDIX II: To Our New Brother,

To Our New Brother,

We are so excited to welcome you fully as a Brother to your Lodge. We look forward to many years of travelling with you. We observe that more and more in the everyday world that less and less are asked of people and we disagree with that. We believe that there should be standards and that, as Masons, we should expect more from ourselves. We should expect more from our Brothers.

Every Lodge has their own standards and their own expectations, their own set of things that they ask from their members. We are asking the following from you like we ask of every Brother in this Lodge. These are not meant to trifle with you, discourage you, or embarrass you, we ask these things so that you feel comfortable and understand what we expect of each other.

- Lodge: \_\_\_\_\_
- Stated Meetings: When are they held? How often should you attend? When should you plan on arriving at Lodge? If you are an Officer, when should you plan on arriving at Lodge?
- Stated Meetings, Expectations for Dress:

_____ Suit and Tie	_____ Suit and Tie for Officers Only
_____ Shirt and Tie	_____ Shirt and Tie for Officers Only
_____ Collared Shirt or Lodge Shirt	_____ Collared Shirt or Lodge Shirt for Officers Only
_____ Whatever is comfortable and clean.	
- This Lodge holds the following regular events. We expect that you will participate so far as you are able without injury to yourself or family. Examples include Pancake Breakfast, Highway Clean-Up, Lodge Clean-Up Day.
- New Members should expect to participate in the following:

_____ Fellowcraft team	_____ Officer Corps
_____ Master Craftsman/Mentor Candidates	_____ Travelling for Inspection
_____ Investigation Committee	_____ Membership Committee
_____ Other Committee: _____	
- Other:
- The Lodge prides itself in:
- In our District, we want to be known as the Lodge that: