

MEMBERSHIP DRIVES: ORGANIZING EFFECTIVE TRAININGS



How to coordinate trainings that will help volunteers get the most out of their time with you and learn to effectively ask for money on the air.

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TOPICS

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- Goals and Audience
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[SETTING THE TONE FOR A SUCCESSFUL DRIVE]

Myth #1: Membership Drives are boring.

For 7 years I volunteered with WEFT in Champaign, Illinois. One year after extensive station-wide training, a long-time caller called and said, “You know, I actually don’t mind listening to you guys talk this year.” Why was that? The trainings focused on using our limited time on the air as a Station History and Information Program, a chance to educate our listeners about the station. Volunteers were excited to be on the air and they were telling great stories. They had well-prepared pitch breaks and they were comfortable asking for financial support.

So what’s your attitude? How you approach your trainings will affect how the participants respond. From your very first e-mail announcement or notice on the bulletin board, you can affect how volunteers will respond to the training and what they’ll get out of it.

Membership Drives are a time to celebrate our stations. It is one of only a few times a year when we all come together to raise the funds necessary to keep the station growing and getting stronger. Have you ever spent time observing the myriad of fascinating conversations that occur around the phone-answerer table? Emphasize the celebratory, not obligatory, aspect to workshop participants. Let them know you’re thankful they’re signing up to get the skills they need to do the best possible job.

Start your workshop off right by telling the participants how excited you are for the Membership Drive, what you like about it. If you’re not excited and you feel obligated to be there, perhaps you’re a good person to prepare the materials and someone else should lead the workshop.

[GOALS + AUDIENCE]

Who is your audience for the training?

Experienced pitchers should be encouraged to attend. They can offer tips from their experience and they can gain fresh ideas. Their input in the workshop dialogue will be a great contribution and help people stay attentive.

Depending on your structure, it’s often very helpful to have a special training for programmers who will be pitching DURING their program. It helps them learn to decrease the length of their program. It also helps them learn to introduce pitchers as special guests and encourage listeners to stay tuned. With good training, they’ll be more engaged and the pitch break will be more integrated into the program, which reduces the number of listeners who tune out. When listeners hear an ask directly from their favorite programmer, it is more meaningful.

Target specific problems your station is having or improvements to be made. For example, at many stations programmers have the bad habit of saying, “And now we’re doing to take a break and go out to Pledge Central.” Another bad habit you may want to break is the use of lingo such as premium instead of thank you gift, pitcher instead of special guest on the program and pledge instead of membership or financial support.

[WHO FACILITATES?]

Choose a facilitator who is excited about the Membership Drive and is confident and engaging. Perhaps that person is you!

If the person is a volunteer, follow good protocol for working with volunteers: be very clear in your expectations, assess the volunteer’s skills, find out what sort of support the volunteer needs, verify the volunteer understands the project and is excited to be involved, offer training, meet in person, avoid asking the person to help with unrelated projects at the same time, be thankful, be respectful of the volunteer’s time, and give reminder and follow-up calls.

[TIME CONSIDERATIONS]

A workshop with 6-12 people should be 2 hours long to allow ample time for questions and an exercise. If you have more than 12 people at a time, the workshop should be 2.5 hours, which starts to get long. I don’t recommend a workshop of more than 18 people and I don’t recommend a workshop longer than 2.5 hours.

Make sure you keep an eye on how much time is remaining during your workshop. Radio people like to speak and sometimes they can steal the show, causing the workshop to run over. Encourage people to stay after the workshop to ask more detailed questions. Be respectful of participants’ time, stay on task, and end on time.

[GETTING PEOPLE THERE]

Like any good volunteer opportunity, promote it well in advance with frequent reminders closer to the date.

Consider on-air promotions to get the general listening audience to attend. If done with good forethought, getting listeners involved with Membership Drives can be a great way to recruit new volunteers.

Use your usual methods for communicating with volunteers, provided those methods work well. Direct e-mails are great. Have convenient sign-up sheets on a bulletin board at the station.

Make sure a volunteer or receptionist makes reminder calls to people two days in advance. Have these people thank volunteers for signing up and say something like, “We’re really looking forward to having you at the workshop. We’ll be covering a lot great information that will get everyone ready to ask for support over the air during the Membership Drive.”

If people do not show up, call them and let them know of other workshops that are still available, if any.

TIPS FOR A SUCCESSFUL WORKSHOP

APPROACH WITH EXCITEMENT

Your excitement is infectious and participants will be engaged as you set the tone for the Membership Drive.

FRAMEWORK

Let participants know you are providing them with the framework for a pitch break and that it is up to them to fill in the content with their own reasons, styles, and emotions.

EXERCISE

Incorporate an engaging exercise so your workshop is not all talk and to give participants some pitching experience.

OTHER EXPERTS AMONG US

Draw upon the knowledge of participants. Experienced pitchers can sometimes offer good input. Listeners often comment on what they’ve heard during a Membership Drive that speaks out to them.

AMPLE TIME

Be respectful of participants’ time by not running over. Prevent running over by scheduling ample time.

[TOOLS]

Create two different, useful handouts for workshop attendees. One handout should be somewhat extensive and detailed. Call this your handbook, though it need not be longer than 4 pages. Go over the handbook in detail during the workshop. Make this THE SOURCE for information on how your station wants people to be asking for money on the air.

If you do a separate training for programmers, make a separate handbook. In some cases, this will be a shorter, more concise handbook that doesn't go into as much detail and is has information that is specific for programmers.

In both handbooks, include catch phrases and concrete ways to say things in call-out boxes that are very easy to locate after the workshop. Participants appreciate having something to fall back on and you'll be amazed how they start to use the phrases when asking for money on the air.

Create a separate handout that is a checklist of what to cover in the pitch break. Make this a handy, bulleted, large typeface piece of paper. See the example included in this packet. Encourage volunteers to make sure they are covering every single item on that list in their pitch breaks. Have a copy of this on the wall near the pitching mics.

"Good morning! It's our Spring Membership Drive and I want you to go to the phone right now and dial 503-232-8818 and become a KBOO member. I'm Travis and I'm a volunteer here at KBOO. I'm joined by Julie, another volunteer, and we're excited to be on Bob's program today to share with you why it's important to support this vital community resource."

FYI: WHY USE THE 20 SECOND START

In the first 20 seconds, you still have a lot of your listeners. As they very quickly realize you are asking for money, they drop like flies. In your first 20 seconds, you want to convey as much vital information as possible.

Identify the cause, tell listeners to call with support, give the phone number, THEN introduce yourself. Earlier introductions often lead to conversations in which the volunteers forget to give the phone number and ask.

[WHAT KINDS OF WORKSHOPS DO YOU LIKE?]

Think about workshops you've been to that are effective. What works?

For stations that are fortunate to have been doing trainings for years, they are often in the unfortunate situation of having a workshop that's dry. Until you're sure you've got a handbook that's working, you should update it and make revisions for every workshop season. Once you're sure you've got something you like, run it by other staff and key Membership Drive volunteers every two years for freshening up.

Hands-on, engaging, interactive workshop delivered well always work. Give participants plenty of time to ask questions and encourage it. Even prompt them if necessary. Avoid the use of worksheets and other handouts where participants write down responses but don't share them out loud with the group. Incorporate an exercise that engages participants and gives them an opportunity to try asking for support from listeners.

Give people opportunities throughout the workshop to talk about what works for them, what they're nervous about, what they've liked hearing. Don't let these discussions dominate, especially if you don't think they're valuable, but give people an opportunity to speak, which helps break the workshop up from just you speaking. If you have the time you can either go around the room and have everyone mention one thing or ask for a specific number of people to respond. For example, you may ask for five people to mention one thing that they have a hard time remembering to do while asking for support on the air. Let them know that they'll have an opportunity to work on that issue in the exercise.

[PREPARING PARTICIPANTS]

Start off the workshop with introductions. Have people say more than their name. Encourage them to say two sentences, and two sentences only, about why they like the station. Keep people on task and avoid letting this intro become too drawn out. After everyone has answered, introduce yourself. Tie this exercise into the workshop. Say something like, "Those are all great reasons. They're something we could never put in this handbook as exactly what to say because they're your personal reasons. Remember them when you're on the air and be proud to ask listeners for their support."

In the very beginning, offer an overview of what to expect in the workshop, topics covered, when there will be a break, and a little about the exercise you have planned. Let them know the workshop is interactive and engaging so they aren't caught off guard when asked questions.

[EXERCISE]

Leave ample time in the workshop for an exercise, usually 40 minutes for a group of 6-12 people. Participants sometimes feel awkward going into this exercise even if they're experienced pitchers. This is where your preparation at the very beginning of the workshop is helpful. Make sure the exercise is explained thoroughly and that participants understand what is expected of them. Ask them if they understand to make sure. It's easy to set people off on an exercise they don't fully understand and have it flop.

After the exercise and critique, participants will find the exercise very helpful in most cases, especially if it is tied in well to the Checklist.

[CLOSURE]

The end can really tie it all together. Don't skip this!

⇒ To end the workshop have everyone go around in a circle and mention one thing they learned that was new or something that hit home for them, something they will carry forward with them when they ask for money on the air.

⇒ This gives closure and lasting power to the workshop.

⇒ It allows the participants to sum up the workshop.

⇒ It helps them remind each other of what was covered.

⇒ It's a focus on positive points (which is always a good note to end on), and it allows you to learn what was most helpful in your workshop.

⇒ This closure compliments the effort you put in to the beginning of the workshop to prepare people for what to expect.

THE PITCHING EXERCISE

For new pitchers and experienced pitchers

EXPLANATION

- Have people get into groups of 3.
- Explain the workshop.
- Let them take a break and practice pitching as a TEAM - all three involved - for 15 minutes.
- They should use the Checklist and make sure they are covering all the essential points of a break.
- Let them know it may be awkward because it is not real, but to just do their best and pretend they're on the air.
- Tell them what time to return.

THE PERFORMANCES

- Ask groups to "perform" a pitch break for the rest of the group.
- You are responsible for keeping the performers on track. Tell them *"I will let you know when your 4 minutes are up by giving you a 20 second warning. Wrap up your pitch when I say that."*
- Everyone should listen and follow along on the Checklist. Ask people to check off the Checklist items as the performers cover them.
- On the board, write additional things the performers do well and count the number of times they say the phone number. Extremely wrong points should be noted but not emphasized. Keep it positive.
- Applaud the group when they finish. Ask people *"What worked? What did the group do well?"*
- Focus on the positive, **but still be constructive**. Add in your own feedback for things that the group forgot to do, referring to the Checklist, and also go over your notes on the board. Take only 2-3 minutes for this or you will run out of time. Encourage participation.

EXAMPLE OF A CHECKLIST

OUTLINE OF AN EFFECTIVE PITCH BREAK

10 EASY STEPS

- Introduce yourself and your partner
- Give the phone number and ask them to become a member.
- Give a reason, tell a relevant story
- Create an atmosphere - make it lively + fun
- Suggest a specific amount
- Suggest a payment type
- Give the phone number
- Interact with the programmer
- Relate the pitch to the program
- Reiterate your main point
- Closing statement that gives closure and hands it back to the program
- Give the phone number

503-232-8818
or if you're outside the Portland calling area, it's toll free at
1-877-500-5266

