

Characteristics of an Effective Student Organization

Core Activities of an Effective Group:

- ◆ Accomplishing its goals
- ◆ Maintaining itself internally and externally
- ◆ Developing and changing in ways that improve its effectiveness

Eight Essential Characteristics of a Successful Organization

1. Members know each other well.

This characteristic, which provides a means of team and community building within an organization, is the keystone on which all of the remaining characteristics are built. It must be present and continuously renewed if the organization is to function effectively. Some good ways to accomplish this is to have **retreats**, create **mentor relationships**, do **teambuilders** often, and divide up your organization into **subgroups** with 4-5 members so that each week they do something together. Switch it up every 2-3 weeks so that different members have the opportunity to interact with different people throughout the year.

2. Members are involved in defining organizational purposes.

The level of motivation of group members to work for group goals is increased in proportion to the level of involvement by members in establishing those goals. Examples of how to accomplish this include asking for input and creating committees. **Retreats** are a great way to start your year out right in dealing with your organization's purposes.

3. Members help to generate ideas.

While it may be quite simple for a few group leaders to produce ideas for special programs, this does little to develop a sense of ownership and participation among other group members. Involve the entire group in brainstorming ideas and then narrowing those ideas down.

4. There is a commitment to group decision making.

People support programs they help to create. Involving the group in decision making helps to insure a full measure of group participation and support.

5. Skills, resources and liabilities of the group and community are identified.

Many groups are often rich in natural resources and skills available through members. Likewise, the university campus and surrounding community are a rich source of additional resources. Take advantage of the Office of Campus Involvement's Resource Library, other organizations ideas, and University staff. In addition to this, it might be helpful to do a SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats) analysis.

6. Systematic problem solving techniques are used.

Resolve conflicts when they appear. Do not wait for them to fester. For example, if you see that a problem might erupt at a meeting or an event, attempt to get those people who are arguing away from everyone else and help them to resolve their differences. Stress the importance of **compromising**. Invite someone from the Office of Student Life to conduct a **Conflict Resolution session** during your meeting.

7. The group effectively communicates itself and its projects to its members and the community.

The timeline with which a group communicates itself to others outside the group and members inside the group has implications for such important factors as recruitment of members and attendance at functions sponsored by the group. For example, make sure that you have a Public Relations (PR) chairperson to coordinate PR for your organization. PR can be done **externally** via **BG News, press releases, and marketing e-mails**. PR can be done **internally** via **newsletters, meeting minutes, and listprocs**.

8. The group participates in periodic evaluation and assessment.

Groups need to become accustomed to routinely evaluating a variety of aspects of group life, ranging from the way meetings are handled to assessing the success of a particular project or program. This might require an outside facilitator. You could work with your advisor as well.

The following organization and member statements have been selected as the ingredients most often found in highly successful organizations. Rate your own organization in each area so you can see the areas which need to be strengthened in order for your organization to be stronger. This activity would be helpful to complete in a group at various transition points during the year or at the beginning of new officers' terms at a retreat.

4 - We do exceptionally well on this 3 - Satisfactory, but room for improvement 2 - Sometimes okay, often weak 1 - Needs a great deal of improvement

- ___ 1. Group's goals are clearly defined at least once a semester and reflect the interests and needs of the group members at that time.
- ___ 2. Group's desire and acceptance of change are enthusiastic and accepted by officers and members alike.
- ___ 3. Officers AND members have a strong understanding of the group's purpose and a continuing orientation program for broadening knowledge.
- ___ 4. There is a high degree of member involvement and willingness to assume responsibility.
- ___ 5. Officer training is comprehensive in leadership and group operation's information, with officers being challenged to reach beyond "what was done by the previous officer(s)."
- ___ 6. There is strong leadership, influence, and support exerted by advisors by installing a desire to constantly be better.
- ___ 7. The organization's membership growth philosophy is one of "making friends continually."
- ___ 8. The group has a program that builds strong commitment, friendships, and awareness.
- ___ 9. The group has financial stability and a sensible plan for group operations.
- ___ 10. The group has a high level of respect and a strong reputation on campus with students, staff, and faculty.
- ___ 11. The group demonstrates the ability to relate and work well with other campus organizations.
- ___ 12. The group has good continuity and strong direction because of the advisor's experience and willingness to assist.
- ___ 13. The group has an awareness of potential problems and the ability to solve them before they become problematic.
- ___ 14. The group has officers who are able to withstand and impose peer group pressure.
- ___ 15. Members are committed to the organization.