

Newcomer Task Force 2022
Minutes, April 21, 2022
revised

Club Mission: To welcome new residents of the area and those who have experienced recent major lifestyle changes.

Process for the task force:

1. Keep open minds and think about what will best focus on our mission and serve all of our members, without emphasis on our own preferences.
2. Communicate clearly to the membership what challenges we are facing
3. Encourage input from all members as we work toward a solution
4. Generate ideas/solutions to present to the incoming Board of Directors, and to the membership in general

Present state: We have 429 members. We paused new membership as of April 1, but will honor any members who request entry who had been given the complete application form before April 1. Anyone else filling out the form will be placed on a numbered waitlist. We are an unincorporated social group, so we have been told in the past that the club cannot carry umbrella liability insurance.

What we like about the club (these qualities should be remain in place):

1. We have FUN because of the many ongoing and fresh, one-of-a-kind activities. There is always something happening.
2. It's a great way to connect with others & make friends in a welcoming, accepting environment.
3. We serve as a support network for one another.
4. The club helps us learn the many diverse communities and neighborhoods that make up San Diego county, and gets us outside our comfort zones.
5. We fill a real need for many women who are experiencing sudden changes in their lives, and who are feeling isolated and adrift.

Challenges/Issues we face:

1. We have add 75 new members in the last nine months and much of it was by word of mouth. With this large membership, we can expect that we will be increasing interest in membership each year. The number of people leaving the club each year has remained relatively static through the years (generally about 30 per year), but the numbers joining continues to increase.
2. The large size puts a strain on the administrative side of the club (membership, treasurer, communications). Volunteers express anxiety at times over the amount of time their job entails.
3. Analysis is showing that members tell their friends about the club and those people want to join. Vetting and screening new members for eligibility becomes very difficult.

4. Nepotism (Current members advocate for friends and family who would not otherwise meet eligibility criteria.)
5. About ½ our members have been in the club longer than 5 years. With almost equal numbers of seasoned members and newer members, the needs and reasons for remaining in the club are diverging. Many long-term members remain in the club for the on-going activities and opportunities to take part in interesting events with their friends in a situation where they do not have to do all (or any) of the planning. New members are generally here to make friends. Those connections with others are often the most important reason they are members.
6. Venues that can hold our numbers are difficult and expensive to secure. General meetings now draw upwards of 50 people each month as opposed to the numbers we drew 3-4 year ago, when we could hold meetings in members' homes. The same applies to game nights, happy hour, breakfast club, luncheons (should we wish to resume them), Wanderers events, pickleball and golf to name a few. Fall, winter and Spring parties become so large that people will gather only in their own already known pods. That makes it difficult for singles and newer members to feel welcome and included. Themed parties that encouraging lots of mixing become difficult to manage even if a suitable venue is secured.
7. Caps on participation means the mix of attendees is different at nearly every activity meeting. This makes it harder to meet our core mission of connecting folks in comfortable setting so they can make friends, as friends develop over time and repeated interaction.
8. Otherwise inactive old members sign up early for the most attractive whole club events. With the need to cap event size, more active members and newer members may be cut out of participating.

Potential Solutions identified today:

Continue to grow the club with changes:

1. Identify which activities are most impacted by caps on participation. Run concurrent groups of the event in two or more locations according to need.
2. For certain activities, concurrently run a north group and a south group. Members can participate in the region of their choice.
3. Allow new members (maybe during their first year) to register for events a couple of days before opening registration to the rest of the club; alternatively, could reserve 10% of the spots for new members. Those spots would be released near the time of the activity if new members did not take them.
4. Form a sub-club for new members with activities, ongoing coffees, etc. only open to them.
5. Shrink the geographic regions which we serve. There are some areas currently being served by more than one Newcomer Club.
6. Be stricter with the vetting of new members.
7. Potentially hire out some of the administrative duties to reduce the burden on members.
8. Require members to participate on an activity committee.

Split the Club:

1. Split the club into two clubs by north and south.
2. Split the club by the number of years you have been a member (over 5 years and under 5 years was suggested due to the fact that the club has doubled in the last 5 years). This would make each club start with a little over 200 members. New members would join through the current means. At 5 years, members would be offered the opportunity to join the other club, but they could not stay in their current one regardless. This is similar to what was done in the earlier years in which members were allowed to stay in for a few years, then were given the option to go into Newcomers II (now Newcomers & Friends).

Next steps:

1. A sub group will speak with other Newcomer clubs to determine how they handle membership, including, group size, incorporation or not, eligibility, limits on number of years you can belong, administrative duties, and activity caps.
2. A sub group will look into the cost of hiring professionals to fill some of the administrative tasks.
3. All task force members will review the generated list of solutions and make of list of rewards and challenges of adopting each one. Measure each solution against the core challenges we identified
 - Current size and potential exponential growth
 - Divergent needs of the long-term members versus the new members
 - Administrative overload
 - Too many waitlisted events.

Keep in mind the club mission at all times.

Future meeting schedule:

1. Tuesday, May 3, 3:00-5:00pm in Louise's backyard
2. Friday, May 20, 2:00-4:00pm in Louise's backyard

Attendees: Phyllis Atkins, Kathy Bratcher, Judy Gechman, Carol German, Louise Godici, Trish Hardy, Melissa Lee, Vivianne Moskowitz, Pam Shetler, Jo-Ann Smith (Chair), Melanie Sowa

Submitted by: Carol German with edits from Jo-Ann Smith

