Easy Changes, Dramatic Results

The best practices of nontraditional Kiwanis clubs

In a world of “bigger,” “better,” “faster,” “new and improved,” it’s easy to get lost in buzzwords. But results are results no matter the language, and the DC Metro Young Professionals are getting results worth sharing.

The ideas in this brochure were provided by Troy Dibley, charter president, DC Metro Young Professionals Kiwanis club
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Chartered in 2005, the club maintains between 40 and 50 members, despite significant membership turnover due to the transitory nature of being a young professional in the nation’s capital. New jobs, graduate school, and new opportunities always beckon, but the club beckons, too—to candidates interested in hands-on service and being part of something significant, and socials, an important ingredient in the club’s success.

“We’re constantly recruiting,” says Troy Dibley, a member of the club. “It keeps us energized, looking for ways to make the club more relevant, more interesting.”

Word of mouth is key, too, and the word gets shared through the club’s Web site (www.dcyckiwanis.org), e-card invitations to friends, and social networks such as Facebook (http://www.facebook.com/group.php?gid=2204662651).

Many, about 60 percent of club members, come from Circle K International or other service organizations, but not all, says Dibley. “We’re proud that we draw people from both a service and a nonservice background. It shows Kiwanis’ attraction for voluntarism.”

We at Kiwanis are proud, too, of the health and energy of the club, and of the kind of future that nontraditional clubs such as the DC Metro Young Professionals afford for Kiwanis International.

Here are several best practices from the DC Metro Young Professionals club. Consider trying them at your club.

**Best Practice #1**

**Make service projects hands-on**

Hosting a Halloween carnival for kids, providing food to the homeless and underprivileged, playing sports with the disabled, coordinating a themed Bingo party for nursing home residents—these are the types of hands-on projects that prospective members look for when considering to join civic organizations. How many hands-on projects does your club offer each month? For some project ideas, see below:

- Beach cleanup
- Bingo and lunch at senior center
- Blood drive
- Book drive
- Campground cleanup
• Carnival at Boys & Girls club
• Cemetery cleanup
• Child ID program
• Church maintenance
• Cleaning up a riverside
• Construction of park benches and tables
• Food drive
• Garden maintenance at hospital
• Graffiti cleanup
• Handicap-accessible garden for seniors
• Health fair
• High school beautification
• Family center maintenance
• Mural painting
• Painting community buildings
• Park cleanup
• Playground equipment maintenance
• Pet Day at senior center
• Reading to children
• Safety fair
• School maintenance
• Sporting event for children in need
• Tree planting
• YWCA/YMCA cleanup

Best Practice #2
Mix social and service

Let’s face it: Your members didn’t just join to perform community service. Kiwanis offers opportunities for the development of quality friendships and networking relationships. Emphasize the “fun” aspect of Kiwanis by sponsoring monthly socials.

Here are some examples of great social activities:

• Bowling
• Comedy club
• Hiking
- Dinner and a movie
- Amusement park
- Picnic
- Ice skating
- Sporting event
- Potluck dinner
- Barbeque
- S’mores or chocolate party
- Coffee or dinner after a meeting
- Camping
- Frisbee
- Volleyball
- Local attraction

Service with a smile: DCYP club members enjoy preparing dinner for homeless women at a wellness center.

Best Practice #3
Build a tight leadership structure

Does your club’s leadership structure work best for the club? Do you have too many officers or too few members actively involved in club leadership? Perhaps the leadership model of your club was formed years ago when the club was first chartered, and may not be equipped to meet the current needs of your club. So what can your club do about it?

Below are some discussions on how to structure your club’s leadership. Periodically review the functional roles of each board position and consider changes necessary for the long-term growth and health of your club.

Making directors matter
Some clubs have assigned oversight responsibilities to their directors in order to actively involve their directors in the goings-on of the club. The idea here is that directors aren’t only elected to show up at board meetings to vote, they are also part of the club’s key group of stakeholders. As stakeholders, they should have a lot of ideas on how to improve the club, identify and recruit new members, and plan service projects that make a difference in the community.
Finally, re-evaluate your club’s committee structure, putting first things first. Ensure that your club’s financial and physical resources are channeled to the issues of greatest importance to the club (membership recruitment and retention, community service, Service Leadership Program sponsorship, marketing and public relations, social, meeting programs, etc.). Issues not of great importance should not receive the most funding, time, or attention.

How many VPs do you need?
How many vice-presidents (VPs) does your club have? One, two, perhaps more? What are the roles of those VPs? Are they all in line to be president one day? Some advice: Make the roles of your club’s vice-presidents purposeful, or don’t have them at all.

Secretary/Treasurer
If the check-writing, account-balancing, minute-taking, and reporting responsibilities in your club aren’t overwhelming, consider merging the offices of secretary and treasurer. Particularly salient for smaller clubs, the position of secretary/treasurer has many advantages, including having one officer as the go-to person for the club’s administrative matters.

The Right People
Kiwanis International requires that a club’s board be comprised of at least five directors. Some things to consider in evaluating how many directors are needed and who should be chosen to serve in those roles are: current club size, ratio of board members to club members, and roles of the current directors.

Best Practice #4
Use e-mail and the Web efficiently

The information age is upon us. As Kiwanians, we have to keep up with the changing face of communication. There are four main areas of effectively using Internet and e-mail to communicate with members, recruit new members, and promote your club.

- **Club Web site:** An informative, organized, and updated Web site is an essential tool for a healthy and growing club. Prospective members who are looking specifically for local Kiwanis clubs will be attracted to your club by an updated, informative, and well-organized Web site with interesting projects and upcoming events listed.
- **E-mail updates:** E-mail keeps your members informed of upcoming events in a timely and convenient manner, and allows for quick feedback and suggestions from members.

- **“Groups” mailing list:** Quickly and efficiently communicate with members through a group e-mail list, such Google Groups or Yahoo! Groups. This extremely helpful tool is free! Go to yahoogroups.com or groups.google.com to set up your club’s list today!

- **Postings in Craigslist or other online hot spots:** Reach out to and recruit a large group of interested individuals in your local area by posting on popular Internet sites, such as Craigslist.

Reach out to your membership to find members who have experience with building Web sites, using e-mail groups, or posting on Craigslist. Regardless of age or occupation, you will be surprised at the skill level of some of your members.

Consider hiring someone to build and maintain your Web site if there are no members who can fulfill that role. Sons, daughters, and grandkids are excellent resources for this. Or consider taking a computer course at a local community college.

“Internet and e-mail just aren’t that important.”
In today’s world, that statement just isn’t true. Internet and e-mail communication has revolutionized how we, as Kiwanians, can reach out to prospective members.

Consider these examples: In just one year, DCYP has received hundreds of hits on its club Web site and successfully recruited over 10 new members through Craigslist postings. Businessmen and women (especially younger ones) use e-mail and the Internet on a daily basis, sometimes as their primary form of communication.

Oftentimes prospective members who are new to the area search for apartments, jobs, and volunteer groups through Craigslist and search engines such as Google.
Best Practice #5
Know your product

This last best practice puts it all together. “Knowing your product” is knowing what Kiwanis is and isn’t about. Kiwanis is selling a product to prospective members. Members have an expectation of that product. If the product consistently underperforms, then the member is inclined to leave.

If you’re having a hard time recruiting and retaining members, it’s time to look hard at the club’s current structure, service projects, and social offerings.

There are several tools available from Kiwanis International to assist in evaluating your club’s performance:

- Club Excellence Tool
- Planning Your Club’s Success
- Kiwanis Resources Booklet
- www.KiwanisOne.org

Love to landscape: DCYP club members add a spot of color to the yards in a community of mentally and physically disabled adults.
Serving the children of the world.™