

# Membership

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## Integrating Membership efforts and the High Quality Member Experience (HQME)

In 2016, the American Inns of Court undertook an extensive research project to determine what factors motivate members to join and remain active in Inns of Court. An analysis of the survey responses resulted in a series of attributes members identified as comprising a High Quality Member Experience (HQME). The findings are summarized below. Inn Membership Chairs and Executive Committees should consider the how each of the attributes can be applied to all areas of the Inn. Membership Chairs can also consider incorporating these reasons and attributes when creating any presentations or marketing materials for membership recruitment.

- **Collegiality:** We are a welcoming, engaging, and passionate community of legal professionals fostering career growth and discovery.
- **Innovation:** We inspire our members – and the profession – through innovative learning opportunities and cutting-edge content that ensures ongoing excellence and professionalism in the field.
- **Respect:** For more than 40 years, we have been driving the standard of excellence, civility, and professionalism in the legal profession.
- **Education:** For decades, the legal profession has relied on AIC to develop future leaders through progressive, accessible, and quality education that fosters respect, ethics, and excellence.
- **Connection:** We are the only place where the Bench and Bar come together through local programs to collaborate, share knowledge, and develop relationships that lead to professional and personal growth.
- **Mentorship:** We are a trusted source for unparalleled career support and life-long mentoring that challenge our members to grow, connect, and give back to the profession.

Offering, fostering and ensuring these elements of the HQME will create a vibrant Inn of Court and will further our ability to advance our shared mission. While this responsibility should be shared by all members of the Inn’s Executive Committee, the Membership Chair role can be pivotal to a successful HQME and vibrant Inn.

## Membership Categories

Active membership in an American Inn of Court may be in one of four categories as determined by years of experience. The experience levels indicated here are guidelines only. Each Inn may determine its own experience requirements within the membership categories. They are typically captured in the Inn’s bylaws and/or membership policies.

- Masters of the Bench—consisting of lawyers with at least 10 to 15 years of experience, judges and law professors;
- Barristers—consisting of lawyers with at least five years of experience;

- Associates—consisting of lawyers with zero to five years of experience; and,
- Pupils—consisting of law students.

The Inn must weigh the need for a diverse membership against the realities of the community it is serving. The charter requires the Inn to have a mix of active members in all categories: Masters of the Bench, Barristers, Associates and Pupils, if available. Inns are not required to have law school affiliations or pupil members, although a majority of Inns do enjoy this element of the Inn experience.

This intentional ratio of member experience levels fosters mentoring, creates more diverse programs and is one of the things that separates the Inn of Court experience from a bar association. Intentionality in creating your Inn’s membership is a key element to the Inn of Court’s ability to achieve its mission.

## Member Status

Beyond their membership category, each member of an Inn has a membership status. These statuses are: Active, Emeritus or Honorary. Former members of an Inn are considered Alumni.

**Active** members are those who currently pay dues, attend meetings, and participate in program presentations and mentoring activities.

**Emeritus** members are those individuals who have served as a Master of the Bench for at least 5 years, may be retired or less active in practice, and have been granted Emeritus status by the Inn’s Executive Committee. These members are exempt from attendance requirements and do not participate on pupillage teams.

**Honorary** members are designated by Inn’s Executive Committee and are granted this status on the basis of distinguished service to the bench or bar, in furtherance of the American Inns of Court’s mission, or other noteworthy achievements. Honorary members need not be in the legal profession, and this status is sometimes extended to the family members of the Inn’s namesake. Honorary members are also exempt from Inn meeting attendance requirements.

### Alumni Association

*The American Inns of Court has a national [Alumni Association](#), designed to allow alumni to maintain a level of engagement with the American Inns of Court. Alumni Association members retain access to the national website, receive *The Bencher* magazine, and receive information about select programs open to current and alumni members. Members of the Alumni Association may contribute directly to the American Inns of Court national organization, with a portion of the contribution remitted directly to the alumnus’ former Inn.*

**Alumni** members are individuals who are no longer actively participating in the Inn and its activities. These former members may have rotated out of the Inn due to term limits (i.e., some Inns require Associates or Barristers to serve a specific length of time before “graduating” from the Inn) or have withdrawn for other reasons and do not attend meetings or pay dues.

## Emeritus, Honorary and Alumni Member Engagement

Although Emeritus, Honorary and Alumni members are not considered “active” membership statuses for the purposes of national dues billing, it is still important for the Inn to extend opportunities for these individuals to participate in or support the Inn. Here are a few ways Emeritus, Honorary or Alumni members may be engaged in the Inn:

- Invite them to Holiday or end of the year banquets
- Invite them to participate in community outreach events
- Include Emeritus members in mentoring opportunities, whether formal or informal
- Feature Honorary members as speakers in Inn programs

Emeritus and Honorary members can still contribute and participate in Inn functions, and the Executive Committee should have an engagement policy in place as a best practice. While there are many reasons a member may become an Alumnus of the Inn, they can remain engaged and give back to the American Inns of Court through the national Alumni Association.

## Membership Targets, Ratios and Rotation

The Executive Committee, working with the Membership Chair, should set targets for membership, including how many members should be maintained in each membership category. Setting membership targets gives the Membership Committee clear objectives that support the overall operation of the Inn. The maximum number of active members of each local Inn should not exceed the number of people who can participate actively in programs, discussions, and other activities of the Inn. That number is generally thought to be approximately 80 members, while the average Inn size is approximately 70 members.

When we discuss ratio, we are talking about the number of active members that must be spread among the membership categories. This works best when it is related to the number of pupillage teams. For example, each pupillage team might have one judge, two or three additional masters, two barristers, two associates and two pupils. If the Inn has eight meetings and eight pupillage teams with 10 members, this would keep the total number of active members to 80.

Over recent years, some Inns have started 1-2 teams that are dedicated to identifying, organizing and conducting community outreach programs/activities. These team members may volunteer or are assigned to the group for one year with the understanding they are to actively participate in the work of the team. This outreach team should develop an activity that supports the mission of the Inn.

## National Dues

Inns are required to collect and remit national dues from each active member each year. Inns receive an invoice in July of each year based on the number of Active members (Master of the Bench, Barrister and Associate categories only) from the prior year.

Inns do not pay national dues for members whose status was Honorary, Emeritus, Pupil or Alumni during the year. Pupil (law students) members are considered fully active and receive all the benefits of membership from the national organization. However, they are not included in the count for national dues billing.

Membership rotation provides opportunities for practitioners to experience Inn membership, while keeping the Inn at a manageable size. Masters of the Bench may continue in Inn membership indefinitely or for at least five years. Associates and Barristers may have a membership term of 2-5 years, as established by the Masters of the Bench. These members may then be allowed to reapply for extensions of their memberships, based on their levels of participation and contribution to the Inn experience. Pupil members join the Inn for one year, usually during their third year of law school. Inns should strive to maintain a waiting list of qualified applicants can fill slots as they become available.

## Membership Diversity

One of the attributes of a high quality member experience is engaging with colleagues in an environment that is cordial and welcoming – one that is open to diverse ideas that foster professional and personal growth. Inn membership should reflect the diversity of the community in which it operates.

- **Personal Diversity:** Inn membership should reflect the open and equal opportunities available to all segments of the population.
- **Professional Diversity:** An equally important consideration is the inclusion of as many segments of the legal community as possible. Federal and state judges, law school deans and professors, and law students should be included in the membership structure of the Inn wherever possible. It is important to include a cross section of legal practices, such as solo or small practice attorneys, large firm attorneys, plaintiff's bar, defense counsel, public defenders, prosecutors and other government attorneys.

### Resources:

[Diversity Policy](#)

[Samples of Diversity  
Policy promotion](#)

This balance of legal practice should be deliberately and methodically encouraged. By attracting and retaining a diverse membership, the American Inns of Court demonstrates its commitment to creating and maintaining a culture that promotes and supports diversity not only throughout the organization, but in the profession as well.

As part of the Achieving Excellence program, Inns are asked to promote the national diversity policy at the Inn level. This is far from a “test of diversity” but rather a request to communicate one of the fundamental tenets of our organization’s culture and mission. Samples of how Inns have accomplished this are available on the Inns of Court website.

## Structured Recruiting Efforts

A successful Inn continually strives to retain its existing members, and to fill any vacancies with committed, quality candidates. Finding and keeping members should be an ongoing, thoughtful process. Inn leaders should work to fully understand why their members joined, and then work to deliver on those expectations.

Members look to their Inn experiences to enhance their professional lives and to connect them with peers and colleagues in the legal field. Based on recent HQME research, Inn members see their Inns as welcoming and engaging communities that support career growth and discovery. Recruiting efforts should highlight the Inn’s efforts to promote and nurture professional development through interesting and innovative programming and

### Resources:

[Sample Membership  
Application](#)

[Sample Membership  
Renewal Form](#)

mentoring opportunities with the best legal minds in the community. Most importantly, Inn leaders must work toward ensuring that their Inn delivers on its promise to members and seek on-going feedback about their needs.

Approaching membership recruitment in a systematic way ensures this important function occurs regularly, and that the Inn will have a full complement of members when the new Inn year begins. Vibrant Inns typically have a Membership Committee that reviews applications or nominations. The chair of the committee is part of the Inn's executive committee. The committee meets periodically throughout the year to review and assess the waitlist, membership openings and applications or nominations.

It is important that whatever process is implemented, whether nominations or applications, is followed consistently and fairly. If the Inn strays from a consistent approach to recruiting and admitting members, it can be perceived as elitist, exclusionary or even discriminatory. A sample membership application can be found on the Inns of Court website. Inn leaders often post this document on their local Inn website, enabling them to direct potential members to the site to learn more about the Inn and to apply for membership.

At the end of the Inn year, members who are eligible and wish to continue their membership into the next year may be asked to complete a membership renewal form. A sample renewal form can be found on the Inns of Court website. Set a firm renewal deadline to allow the Membership Committee to determine how many and in what categories openings are available for the coming year.

## New Lawyers: Handle with Care



A critical membership category for any Inn is the Associate member. These early careerists are navigating a number of competing pressures and can sometimes be difficult to recruit into the Inn because they simply can't see how they could possibly add another obligation to their already full schedules. Inn leaders can and should be creative when it comes to meeting the needs of this membership category. In addition to gaining the critical skills needed to be a successful attorney and demonstrate value to the law firm, new lawyers may have important and active social lives, may be newly married or may be raising a young family, all of which creates demands on personal time. Some Inns have met these concerns head on using the following methods:

- First, remember that not all new lawyers are the same. Some may be younger and fresh from law school, while others are career changers who are facing different pressures at work and at home. Be sure to treat each member's unique needs with appropriate strategies.
- Lighten the attendance requirement. While the face-to-face monthly dinner meetings are the "meat and potatoes" of the Inn experience, it may be a barrier for Associate level members. Consider a more "fluid" attendance requirement that still provides a vital link to their Inn and the legal community.

- Hold lunch meetings. Even if it's not a full Inn of Court meeting, creating opportunities during lunch hour timeslots may be just what an Associate member needs to lighten the demand for evening time with family.
- Meet them halfway: Can the Inn provide for spouses and family during some of the Inn's events? Either social or community outreach programs can be made family-friendly, allowing for the new lawyer to balance work and home while encouraging family support of work-related activities. A strong support system is a critical element to any challenge, and the Inn can foster this through its meetings and events.
- Make additional efforts to incorporate new lawyers into structured mentoring efforts. Going above and beyond to make sure newer members of the bar are integrated into the Inn makes their decision to join and renew easier.
- Ask them! Have an open conversation with individuals or a group of new lawyers and ask how they can be best served or what they would like to experience as part of belonging to the Inn. Some Inns have an Associate position on the Executive Committee specifically for this purpose. Not only will you get new ideas to invigorate the Inn, you'll have built a stronger relationship with a very important group in your Inn- your future Masters of the Bench.

#### Resources:

[Benefits of Judicial Engagement flier](#)

[Instructions for Engagement flier](#)

## Judicial Recruitment and Membership

Another essential part of the American Inns of Court membership experience is the involvement of judicial members. Inns provide lawyers and judges with the opportunity to connect face-to-face in a casual environment and interact in a collegial way. This engagement between the bench and the bar is a compelling value for all members.

Judges have been an integral part of the Inns of Court experience since the organization's founding. Inns with strong judicial engagement have more successful programming, member participation, and operations in general. However, over the years, Inns have found it challenging to get the judiciary more involved with their programming and membership.

To respond to the concerns about judicial recruitment, a **Judicial Engagement Benefits** document was developed by the Judicial Task Force to help Inns promote the benefits of membership to judges and enhance Inn experience for them. It speaks to common hesitations judges may have about becoming involved in the American Inns of Court and provides insights to address those concerns.

## Member Recruitment and Community Engagement

Once membership openings have been determined, the next step in the process is to recruit new members. The Membership Committee should explore a number of options to identify and contact potential new members:

- Encourage Inn members to help recruit. The first and best source for member prospects is the Inn's existing members. Specific membership openings should be communicated to the Inn's members, who can either nominate or encourage their colleagues to apply. Existing members should understand the specific membership levels being sought. Inn leaders should also clearly



convey what is expected of new members, such as the membership duration, attendance and participation policies, and adherence to the American Inns of Court Professional Creed.

- Announce membership opportunities through the local bar associations, either at meetings or through publications.
- Use the press. If there is a local legal press outlet, or if the local newspaper has a legal section, consider placing an ad or informational article about your Inn.
- Invite prospective members as guests. Keep in mind that one of the best recruiting tools you have is your monthly meeting. Use it! Based on responses from an Inn membership survey, many current members joined after attending an Inn meeting as a guest. Send out a general invitation to the local bar association and encourage Inn members to personally invite a guest or two.

## Member Recruitment and Community Engagement

Make a presentation to a legal organization. State and local bar associations are frequently searching for good CLE programs for their meetings. Arrange to present one of your best programs for them, and don't forget to bring along a supply of membership applications with your Inn's contact information included.

Your members are distributed throughout the legal community and have wide networks. Including your members in the recruitment process encourages them to talk to others about the Inn of Court and its benefits, which will increase your members' sense of ownership of the Inn. The American Inns of Court is a respected organization with more than 40 years of history. As part of that history, your Inn and its members are known and respected in the community. They are a tremendous recruiting tool and represent the professionalism and standards of the organization. Engage them in your efforts.

## Member Orientation

Each year, Inns across the country welcome thousands of new members, ranging from law students to senior judges. Many Inns go to great efforts to recruit each new member but do not know what to do with them once they sign up. One of the simplest solutions to this problem is to conduct a formal orientation for new members, where they are introduced to the Inn's leadership, given an overview and history of the Inns of Court, and are engaged in discussions regarding what they can expect and what will be expected of them. Establishing participation and attendance expectations early can be the key to successfully onboarding new, active members. This same orientation meeting allows Inn Leaders an opportunity to understand where new members are in their careers and why each person has joined the Inn. Examples, resources and an "Orientation-in-a-Box" program can be found on the website.

## Orientation Agenda

Orientation meetings may follow different formats, but here are a few key elements to consider when building your orientation agenda:

- Welcome new (and returning, if applicable) members
- Introduction of Inn leadership and description of duties

### Resources

[History of AIC](#)

[Orientation Samples  
and Resources](#)



- Discuss participation expectations of members
  - Attendance Policy
  - Actively participating in pupillage teams
  - Participation in mentoring or outreach opportunities
- An overview of the National organization, history and our mission
- A brief history of the Inn & namesake if applicable
- Discuss operation details and logistics
  - Meeting locations
  - Day of meetings, start and ending times
  - How to RSVP to meeting invitations
  - Parking instructions
  - Security instructions if using a secure building like a courthouse
- Protocol followed at the Inn
  - How to address each other, especially judges. Is your Inn on a first name basis?
  - Inns value both civility and open discussion. The Inn is a safe place to ask questions.
- Outline the Inn's program structure
  - Role of pupillage teams and how they are assigned
  - Requirements of pupillage teams: meetings outside of Inn meetings, sitting together at meals, etc.
  - Importance of participation, both on pupillage teams and Q&A during programs
- Welcoming constructive feedback from its members.
  - Membership satisfaction surveys
  - Program surveys
  - Informal feedback and an emphasis that all honest, constructive criticism is welcome.

## Marketing Your Inn

For better or for worse, because of our grassroots founding and member selection process, many practitioners are unfamiliar with the American Inns of Court. Others may have the wrong idea of who we are, what we do, and what we stand for. Increasing your Inn's visibility is a great way to boost interest in membership and to promote the mission of the American Inns of Court as an open and collegial mentoring organization. A few ideas to get the word out include:

- Write an article for local and state bar publications. Your Inn's programs can provide the basis and much of the body of a good article. The Benchers are also a good source for great articles, with reprint permission easily granted through the national office. These articles, along with information about your Inn, are great ways of promoting the Inns of Court as a resource for the community.
- Encourage Inn members to serve on panels and programs for local law schools and legal organizations. Be sure to arm them with the latest membership or guest opportunities available at your Inn.
- Honor a local hero, incoming or retiring judge, bar president or founder of a firm with a special reception before the regular meeting. Invite members of the community to attend
- When your Inn has a special program or speaker, invite the newspaper's legal reporter to cover it. Or send a press release to the local newspapers and bar journals. Provide information about the Inn, the organization and the event. Be sure to include a contact name, number or your Inn's website address.

- Many Inns engage in an annual community outreach effort to get members engaged in the community and to demonstrate the good works of the American Inns of Court. Consider which community engagement ideas could have the greatest impact, both on existing members and on the Inn's ability to recruit future members.
- Leverage your community outreach effort for additional publicity about the Inn by submitting press releases and articles to local bar journals with photos and leader contact details for more information about the Inn.

## Available Resources

Your Director of Chapter Relations can provide additional resources to assist with your recruiting efforts, including back issues of The Benchers magazine and reprints of interesting articles, copies of the AIC Professional Creed, and Sample Membership Applications or Renewal forms, as well as general information about the American Inns of Court organization.

Your Inn is provided with a free website from the national organization, designed to allow you to post information about your Inn and the value it brings to members. Keep the website updated with membership information, highlights and photos of past education events, and relevant news about the Inn and its members, and refer potential members to the site. Make sure information about how to join your Inn is easily accessible on the site and the membership chair's contact information is kept up to date.

### Resources:

[Sample Member Satisfaction Survey](#)

[Sample Survey Results](#)

## Membership Satisfaction

Have you ever wondered if the topics that the Inn selects for the program year are relevant and meaningful for the Inn's members? Are members satisfied with their Inn experience? Do they wish they could have more meetings per year, or if they'd prefer that the meetings always end before 8 pm?

Membership satisfaction surveys can help your leadership team make data-driven decisions based on member feedback. Using data to support your actions puts the quality of the Inn member experience at the top of the list, making the deliberations of a new executive committee easier. You can even share feedback from the survey with the members so they know your team is listening and aware of their needs.

Your Director of Chapter Relations has sample surveys that you can use in a few different formats. From paper forms to electronic surveys that can be customized, you can send an annual survey to your members. Inns that are focused on the HQME may find it helpful to benchmark their member satisfaction year over year, or compare it to a similar Inn in another part of the organization.

Survey Monkey® ([www.surveymonkey.com](http://www.surveymonkey.com)) is a free online surveying tool. Inns can choose to create an account and set up their own survey (limited to 10 questions) or can work with their Director of Chapter Relations to build a custom survey using the American Inns of Court's business account.

Another resource is the leadership team as a whole, and their ability to reach out personally to members. While a survey instrument provides specific actionable data, consider a personal approach

to data gathering. Several high performing Inns make it an annual mission for their leadership team to make personal phone calls to each member. While time intensive, these calls go a long way to informing the leadership team about their members and their goals for belonging to the Inn. It also helps the member to know that their leadership team is making an effort to get to know them as individuals and as a vital part of the Inn's on-going success. Real opinions sometimes get sanitized in surveys, so personal phone calls can be very revealing and provide actionable insights for the leadership team.

## Leadership and Succession Planning

### Effective Leadership Strategies

Effective Inn leadership should be an intentional process, as the leaders of the Inn set the tone, expectations, and culture. All Inn leaders should “model the way” and be the example that they expect all members to follow in terms of comportment, collegiality, decorum, inclusiveness, and to provide a welcoming and inspiring membership experience. There are many strategies that can be put in place to maintain effective leadership.

- Consider rotating leadership to keep your Inn strong by consistently developing new leaders. While legacy leadership is an asset to an Inn, they can also be limiting if there is no room for new voices or new ideas.
- Set term limits for officer positions to avoid burnout. A typical term is two years. Occasionally, the Treasurer or Administrator role can be longer, but the Executive Committee should plan for an annual option for officers to transition off as the Inn grows and matures.
- Elect officers and appoint committee chairs/members before the Inn adjourns for the summer. This allows the new leadership team to plan for the coming year, learn about their officer responsibilities, become familiar with AIC resources, and fill membership vacancies.
- Enlist volunteers to help with the tasks of running the Inn. Some Inns have co-chairs with staggered terms of office to help ensure that continuity is maintained in the position. This has many benefits:
  - Individuals avoid having to carry too heavy a burden
  - Someone can continue the operation if one co-chair is unable to fulfill his or her responsibilities
  - New leaders are cultivated in an on-going manner
- Remember, aside from president and counselor, officer and leadership roles can be held by any member category. Members at all levels may be more than willing to lend a hand in the operations of the Inn. Be sure to ask members to volunteer. Don't overlook this source of energy and enthusiasm.
- Consider having an Inn Administrator, without specific term limits, who can assist with continuity from year to year, allowing for leaders to rotate while knowing the Inn's operational duties are carried out by the administrator. A sample job description is available from your Director of Chapter Relations.

## Leadership and the High Quality Member Experience

It is the Inn leader's responsibility to set the tone and support a culture of civility, ethics, and professionalism in the Inn. As leaders, keep in mind the elements of a high quality members experience when planning for the year. Some of the questions leaders should ask themselves include:

- Are we doing all we can to provide great networking opportunities within each Inn meeting and outside of the regular meetings?
- Are our programs engaging, entertaining and relevant to our member's professional development?
- How can our Inn activities raise our member's professional profiles?
- Are we encouraging participation in mentoring activities and are those activities meeting member needs?
- Do our outreach efforts have the desired outcome of contributing to the mission of the Inns of Court?
- Are our efforts meeting member needs as expressed in the most recent Member Satisfaction Survey?

As these questions are asked and as improvements to programs and opportunities are made, leaders can foster a culture that is supportive and integral to delivering a high quality member experience.

## Recognition

And finally, remember that holding an office or providing other leadership requires work and personal sacrifice, and should be rewarded. Members who have assumed these responsibilities deserve recognition. The year-end dinner or final meeting is a good time to acknowledge the service these members have given to the Inn.

