ALDA

**ASSOCIATION OF
LATE - DEAFENED ADULTS**

ALDA NOTE #6
INCREASING MEMBER INVOLVEMENT

At some point every ALDA leader faces a situation like this: You know, from your membership roster or mailing list, that people are interested in your ALDA Chapter or Group. You want to start new projects, perhaps moving from a primarily social group to one providing advocacy and community education as well. You believe you can do it, but you need help.

Experts in the field of managing volunteer organizations all emphasize two key points that are essential to success when you are trying to get people more involved. First, **start small with specific tasks.** And second, **focus on the benefits to the person** rather than the value to you or to your organization (your ALDA Chapter or Group).

The following ideas are consolidated from numerous sources. Some of the more theoretical insights derive from research into motivation and group dynamics. Other practical strategies come from organizations such as the United Way and the National Center for Nonprofit Boards, both of which either rely on volunteers or else provide services to primarily volunteer groups.

Understand why people join groups. People join groups for a reason. Understanding what members want to get out of the group is a necessary first step to getting them more involved in its activities. Here are a few reasons why people may have joined your ALDA Chapter or Group:

- To meet other people, make new friends, and feel that they "belong" somewhere. *These people are well-suited for high-people-contact activities, such as planning socials.*

- To learn new things or to create something unique. *These individuals are terrific for researching issues, planning educational programs, and undertaking projects that have never been done before.*

- Because they believe in the group's purpose or cause. *These folks are ideal for recruiting new members, making presentations at meetings, and doing publicity.*

- To have fun. *Here are your ideal hosts for social activities, event planners, and individuals to staff booths or information tables.*

- Because the group relates to their current or future career. *These people will respond favorably to activities that bring them into contact with service providers, practitioners, and other professionals.*

Choose appropriately. Some activities are well-suited to being done by other people. These include jobs for which someone has a special talent, detail work that can be taught easily, activities that someone expresses specific interest in doing, routine or repetitive tasks, and projects providing an opportunity for personal growth.

But some activities should <u>not</u> be assigned to others. These include projects with a high risk of failure, projects with a high negative consequence of failure, tasks requiring an official and high-level group representation, matters of policy development, and activities likely to involve hostility or controversy.

Know what you need. Make a list of the tasks and activities you want help with. Make a note of any special skills or experience the person should have, and whether that experience is mandatory or not. Be sure to indicate how long you estimate the task will take, and whether the time commitment is only for one time (say, an afternoon spent stuffing envelopes) or ongoing (for example, three hours every other week to make phone calls). You should be able to describe what you are seeking clearly and concretely.

Ask the right people. The goal is to match the person with the task. All effective leaders, in ALDA or otherwise, know their groups. They understand the many reasons why individuals join groups, and they know in general terms what each member wants to get out of his or her affiliation with the group. As early as possible in your group's development set up an "inventory" of each member's interests, skills, expectations, and experiences. This can be as simple as a checklist on an annual membership form, or as extensive as regular telephone interviews with each member. The point is to develop a sense of the person's interests and background, and to keep it accurate and up to date. This inventory allows you to match what you need with what other people can provide.

Ask people the right way. Once you have an idea of who might be able to help you, approach her or him privately so that she or he isn't put on the spot. Tell the person what you'd like him or her to do and why you thought he or she was the best person for the task. Describe the assistance, supervision, guidance, and other resources that will be available. Emphasize the benefits and satisfaction that he or she will gain, rather than the benefit to you or your ALDA Chapter or group. *And then listen carefully to what the person says.* The person may be lukewarm about the task you are offering but might be enthusiastic about something else that needs to be done. If the activity is one requiring specific knowledge or experience, the person may be better able than you to organize it.

Keep an open mind about the details. If you can't recruit one person for a job, why not divide the task among two or more people? Instead of a few people working on their own, how about letting everyone do their thing over coffee and cookies on a Saturday afternoon so that they can socialize while working?

Be lavish with praise and recognition. Give plenty of positive feedback along the way, and when the people are finished thank them profusely. Then thank them again. Thank them privately (one-to-one) <u>and</u> publicly (in your newsletter, for example, or at meetings). When you acknowledge contributions publicly, be sure to explain <u>what</u> was done and <u>how</u>, in addition to <u>by whom</u>.

Reward completed work. A tangible acknowledgment is always appreciated. It can even be something as simple as a certificate made on your computer that you sign and frame.

Don't stop when the job is done. A person who gave time and effort once will probably do so again as long as you sustain his or her commitment. Make sure newly-involved people know how their efforts contribute to the goals of the group as a whole. Keep them informed. Involve them in group goal-setting and decision-making activities. Encourage them to propose their own projects and activities. All of these strategies enhance motivation by increasing the sense of "ownership" and personal investment.