

Retention Tips and Ideas

or How to Develop Newcomers and Encourage Long-term Members

This brief, idea-packed guide is largely derived from ideas shared on the College of Seneschals email list since 2009, with additional elements from the RnR team in 2020. Treat it as a very rich smorgasbord of possibilities and a basis for brainstorming new ones. Take the ideas that might work best for your group, consult with the rest of your team to make them fully-rounded, then try them out!

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If someone asked these questions about your SCA group, what do you think the responses would be?

- a) *am I made welcome?*
- b) *is it fun?*
- c) *do I get relevant help (or even a response) when I need it?*
- d) *are my efforts (even just for myself initially) praised or appreciated?*
- e) *when I get more adventuresome, are my ideas or willingness to help respected?*

Be friendly and engage with people across multiple SCA activities

- The SCA is primarily a social group; find ways to enhance the social aspects right across the group membership without losing sight of the ways different people prefer to play at various times, e.g. research, craft, martial, display and service activities
- Ensure at demos, practices, displays that you have members capable of, and proactive about, striking up friendly conversations
- Find out who is attending their first event or is otherwise relatively new; ask if they'd like to be introduced around, or if they have a particular interest, craft, period and find a member who would be good to talk to about that
- Demonstrate the broad range of SCA activities with combined or sequential activities
eg a Monthly Bash, Stuff Night or other gathering including combat-related activities, archery, A&S, music/singing, dance, group projects
- Ensure key early steps and contacts are very accessible, responsive and user-friendly (e.g. "loaner garb", not "hire garb" - and plenty of it!)
- Have "team challenges" which could combine combat and other elements to draw people in, encourage mixing of skills and interests
- Consider running a series of SCA "Nuts and Bolts" classes, possible in conjunction with practices, Council meetings etc to cover SCA 101 information:
eg SCA Titles and Etiquette; What to Do (and Not to Do) at Court; Awards and Recommendations; Bidding for your First Stewarded Event; SCA Officers – see the resources at <https://seneschal.lochac.sca.org/resources> for some ideas
- Find out what new members want to do and open all possible doors to get them into those areas as soon as possible – establish a buddy/ mentor system with people who are keen to help newcomers get up to speed, and keep an eye on supplies of loan equipment
- Try not to make the participation bar too high early on; make a point of displaying "My First Garb" and/or "My First Piece of Armour", "My First Calligraphy", "My First Blackwork" etc

Enhance buy-in

- Get new people involved as a way of meeting others and investing in the group; ask for their help in set-up, entertainment, cleaning, kitchen crew, gate, serving, water bearing etc
eg “hey, would you like to help set up these tables?”, “you’re tall/nimble, can you please hang a few of these decorations?”, “we need extra hands in the kitchen, are you busy?”
- Actively encourage your members to make such activities available to new folk; they should be aware that asking people to do something increases buy-in, rather than putting folk off, and remember to leave space for others to play/contribute
- Maintain a range of event sizes and prices – not everyone can afford the the or cost of a three-day camping event, and even picnics in the park and pot-lucks can have increased appeal at times, because less costly and more relaxed
- Strongly encourage the development of shared spaces and activities - especially at long events - so that the fun, mixing and period stuff isn’t all hidden away behind household walls
- Support newer folk into offices; find out who has what mundane skills which could be applied; ensure they get a *thorough* handover (including: how to propose projects to Council) and organise a ‘wingman’ if needed
- Encourage them to deputy steward or steward an event; ensure they know that a potluck picnic is as welcome as a Crown Tourney bid and actively encourage more manageable events to be part of a training/mentoring approach
- Group projects can be a good drawcard, especially if it provides useful resources for those involved
eg group garb/banner making with bulk purchases of fabric; testing feast recipes; armour production; specific craft/event focus
- Group activities help integrate people: music, choral, entertainments, event planning, court preparation; swap meets or Beggars’ Markets (someone’s free giveaway junk is another person’s treasure); remember to actively invite and include newer people
- Encourage people to host stuff: music/singing rehearsals, C&I, workshops. People like playing the host and it makes them feel like they belong and have something to offer. (NB for some groups a neutral venue can be preferred to avoid shyness or hosting capture; rotating venues can help)
- Ask people what they want help with or would like to know about and organise related show-and-tell, resource collection, social connections

Show recognition and appreciation (not just with new folk!)

- Demonstrate we value our volunteers: in-game with scrolls, tokens or gifts; mundanely with a letter or certificate with their mundane name thanking them for their efforts, the hours, their skills
*eg Our thanks to Joe Bloggs for project managing [Event Name] where 150 people attended over a two-day fully catered medieval-themed event behalf of the Society for Creative Anachronism in Placename, Date.
Signed Group President/Secretary*
- Ensure outgoing Officers, Stewards, Tournament crew, Cooks etc are publicly thanked for their work at the event, in court, online; include those who contributed significantly even if not part of the official team
- Keep track of people’s activity so you can make award recommendations and encourage others to do so, but don’t wait for the awards process to demonstrate appreciation and thanks

– even a quick word can make a big difference to someone’s day especially if it comes from a pointy hat or Crown itself

- Make a game of chores by building in recognition and teamwork
eg you must have a Court Barony or above (and wear your coronet) to cook breakfast; you must have a license to wash dishes or brew coffee – the idea is to give the chore more cachet (even if only temporarily) to build more respect for the work involved, and also/especially for those who do it

Nurture the Officer corps

- Make up simple writs of appointment for your group Officers (good practice for scribes).
- Make nice regalia for Officers (a good group project): eg badges of office, sashes/baldrics, staffs, medallions, banners
- Run occasional workshops about SCA Officer roles and how to support them, see <https://seneschal.lochac.sca.org/the-sca-needs-you>
- Encourage your better-off folk to occasionally sponsor memberships for Officer roles; this can be a valuable way of getting newer folk into such roles early on, which tends to improve long-term buy-in (obviously, the less experienced the person, the less challenging the role)
- Seneschals/B&Bs should make a point of regularly recognising the Officers and other administrative people who keep the engines running behind the scenes
eg ask Officers to stand at a main feast and remind the populace that they work so the rest of us can enjoy ourselves hence are deserving of our thanks and a toast
- Ensure new Officers know what they are getting into, what they should be doing, and what they should have; ensure assumed knowledge is shared:
<https://seneschal.lochac.sca.org/officer-job-descriptions>
- If you are in the chain of command, communicate both ways: acknowledge receiving reports; answer queries and questions in a timely fashion; provide regular feedback on Office/Kingdom status, news or issues of relevance etc
eg. In the Office of Herald, once the reports have gone from local level up to Kingdom, Crux could report back down that submissions are up/down, some heralds in such and such groups are having trouble with the volumes and others are experiencing lulls and are able to assist.
- Encourage Officers to make their Council reports verbally, focusing on any problems and any successes; the written report can cover general activity

Make use of appropriate technology and/or processes

- Sign-in at large events can be time-consuming. Consider ways to reduce it
eg using Gatekeeper software (see below), filling in event details on required forms in advance; having an express lane for members; encouraging people to pay in full before the event; sorting the lists alphabetically to make it easier to find names.
- For software that helps automate sign-ins, see <https://gatekeeper.lochac.sca.org>
- Provide queue entertainment with simple rounds or busking musicians.
- Avoid allergy problems by providing full ingredient lists in an appropriate location, or publish the menu in advance. Plate special dishes (eg GF, vegetarian etc) in different coloured serve-ware from the standard dishes for easy recognition.
- Remember to plan for people who aren’t “average”. This may mean those with limited transport options, eg by choosing sites near public transport or encouraging carpooling, or those with limited mobility, eg having reserved carparks close to buildings, ensuring there is

wheelchair access to all the important parts of site. It may also mean those with special health needs, such as those needing overnight power for CPAP machines.

Ask the hard questions – together

- Can you have an honest discussion about your group's culture, and possibly the overall culture of the SCA in general, without it getting acrimonious?
- Making a space where people feel welcome is a good start, but do your people (the people in your SCA group, not just your clique or household) also feel wanted and valued?
- Do they feel seen? Do they feel cared for? Should they? Do they feel like you have their back? Do you? Should you? Are you like family? Should you be? Do they feel safe (physically, certainly, but also emotionally and intellectually)? What does "supported" look like?
- These aren't questions for the B&B or the "leaders"; they're questions for everybody, because everyone is individually and collectively responsible for culture.
- If things don't feel right for you - perhaps culturally - think hard about what needs to change, and how to encourage that change. Note "encourage". Most change doesn't happen as a result of standing back and throwing rocks. While that can be very satisfying in the short term - and can certainly point up problems and weaknesses - it's usually not very effective in actually improving matters.
- Model the behaviours that you'd like to see more of and be careful to notice and affirm beneficial changes. Focus on the things that you realistically have some control over, rather than the things that you don't.
- Making good stuff happen in the SCA isn't always wine and roses - but it shouldn't be like working in the mines of Mordor. Have a realistic expectation of your own energy levels, goals and foibles and also those of the people around you. Try to offer support, kindness and forgiveness at least as often as you need them.

Other Resources

See also: **Recruitment Tips and Ideas** – <https://hospitaller.lochac.sca.org/recruitment>

<https://seneschal.lochac.sca.org/resources#officer> – various officer-related guides and resources on the Lochac Kingdom Seneschal's website

<https://hospitaller.lochac.sca.org/resources-2/articles/> - several articles related to SCA recruitment and retention – see also the detailed Hospitaller's handbook on this website.

<https://hospitaller.lochac.sca.org/resources-2/promotional-articles/> - premade flyers, leaflets and other materials you can adapt to help promote your local group.

<https://www.dlgsc.wa.gov.au/department/publications/publication/promoting-your-club> - Western Australia government guide to marketing and promotion strategies for clubs

<https://sportnz.org.nz/resources/marketing-and-communications-for-clubs/> - NZ government guide to marketing and promotion strategies for clubs