

THE ART OF PUBLIC RELATIONS:

Inspiring Our Members



"Public relations is the art of inspiring our members to feel great about the organization to which they belong and the art of convincing the public that our organization is a good one with which to be involved."

How can we inspire our members to feel great about belonging to the Women's Institute? There are several ways for each Branch to practice on a regular basis. They include meeting the needs of the members, conducting meetings efficiently and effectively, providing interesting programs which involve the members, and giving recognition to individual members.

"It's your life; it's your day.

The Women's Institute leading the way."

These are the introductory lines to the new Women's Institute radio sound image now being heard across the province. They are indicative of all the opportunities we have to get involved. We are so fortunate to be part of an organization where we can hear new ideas, where we are free to use our abilities, where we can learn new ways of accomplishing tasks, where we can express our opinions and make them heard beyond the community through resolutions. The possibilities provided by membership in the Women's Institute are limited only by the scope of our imagination. Sometimes we need to be reminded of what the Women's Institute is all about and of why we became members in the first place.

What are the needs of our members?

The needs of our members are as diverse as the programs Women's Institute offers. Some are looking for personal development; others want to get involved in community activities. For others, there is a social void created by early retirement, by being relieved of a job or by the loss of a spouse and the moving away of children. Young mothers may be in search of uninterrupted adult conversation.

These needs can be filled in a variety of ways at an Institute meeting. Diverse programs and projects offer both personal growth and community involvement. Social activities help fill the void in a person's life. Offering babysitting services as a group for young mothers can provide them with an opportunity to converse and share ideas. The flexibility of holding meetings at various times of the day can also meet the needs of some members.

What about the efficiency and effectiveness of our meetings?

Executive and committee members need to recognize the value of a member's time by not wasting it at unorganized business meetings. Planning the agenda and then following it, reviewing the business beforehand, planning the year in advance, using a theme, having long-term and short-term goals for the Branch – all these have a positive effect on the way the business of the Women's Institute is conducted. A good balance at a meeting is to divide it into three equal parts – one third Women's Institute business, one third program and one third social time.

What are the challenges of planning interesting meetings?

It only takes a spark to come up with interesting program ideas. The Program Coordinator is a good source of information; she has suggestions about speakers, projects, workshops and activities for each program convenership.

One key to interesting programs is variety. Another is to involve as many members as possible. They may take part in a discussion, act in a skit, or introduce part of the activities.

A provincial theme is suggested yearly by the Program Coordinator. An interesting way of treating the theme is to plan a year's programs incorporating the theme into the different convenerships. An example might be using the environment theme. A film about no-till methods of farming for the Agriculture meeting, visiting a wet-dry waste facility for the Canadian Industries meeting,

a panel discussion on the latest legislation governing landfills for the Citizenship & Legislation meeting, a craft workshop on how to make items from "junk" for Educational Activities, a speaker about clean indoor air for Family and Consumer Affairs, a discussion of the Associated Country Women of the World resolutions about the environment for International Affairs (etc.).

If your Branch prefers a less rigid structure, it can use the initiatives of its members as meeting topics. These can be stimulating and often more pertinent to the interests of the community.

It should always be remembered when planning a program that this is a Women's Institute meeting. If a visitor were to attend, how would s/he know that this is Women's Institute and not just any other organization?

How do you encourage individual members?

Each Branch is made up of members who are very active, who are not so active and who would be active if asked. No matter how involved they get, it is important to recognize the efforts of each and every member. This may be done simply by saying "Thank you – a job well done" or it may be a more tangible means of acknowledgement.

There are many means of recognition. Some Branches give badges, pins or gifts to encourage members; others treat themselves to a dinner or night out periodically. Has your Branch given a Certificate of Merit to any deserving members recently? Perhaps during Volunteer Month in April photos and/or members' profiles could be submitted to local newspapers to honour members that have made a special contribution.

Meeting the needs of the members, encouraging members, conducting efficient meetings, providing interesting programs and involving the members in all aspects of the organization - these are some of the ways of inspiring our members to feel great about the Women's Institute.

Next time: The Art of Public Relations: Convincing the Public

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