

ACTIVE

# PARTICIPATION AND MEMBERSHIP TOOLKIT

FIND OUT WHAT IS IMPORTANT  
FOR YOUR COMMUNITY



# OVERVIEW

Ensuring your members are happy should be a key goal for any club. This often comes down to building a community of people who love participating in an activity – which provides many social, cultural and economic benefits. We know that people start participating in sport and recreation for a range of reasons and have their own goals to achieve - whether this is getting fit, having fun, making friends or competing at a higher level.

We know the key to any successful business is giving people what they most want. So how can we go about giving people what they really want when it comes to sport and recreation? Asking them gives us an insight into people's motivation. This means getting and keeping people physically active is all about understanding their motivation, so they can achieve their goals. But how can we tell if we are giving people what they really want? It's simple - people participate in our facilities and programmes more often. So, the big question is... how do we increase participation?

**The latest Voice of Participant survey from Sport NZ says that the key drivers of a positive club experience by members are:**

- Being friendly and welcoming
- The quality of the coaches
- The social environment at the club
- Providing the information when needed
- Fair and equal opportunities
- Being professional and well managed
- Having well maintained playing/ training venues
- Allowing me to fulfil my potential
- Having clean and well-maintained facilities.

**Voice of Participant survey from Sport NZ >>** 

**Successful clubs create these experiences by:**

- Designing a high-energy environment using colour, lights and shapes
- Finding and keeping a great team of people (coaches and volunteers) who have sporting expertise and operate in a professional manner
- Communicating well and appropriately by developing member education and social network communication systems
- Offering a range of facilitated group activities (programmes and events) that help people achieve their health and fitness goals
- Making members and guests feel welcome by providing induction programmes that demonstrates an open and friendly culture
- Building club-within-a-club systems which provides a good social environment for members and guests to enjoy and relax in.

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## THE PURPOSE



Auckland is a complex multi-cultural environment with many challenges and unparalleled opportunities to increase and sustain participation in sport and recreation. This has led to the establishment of *The Auckland Approach to Community Sport*, a strategic response aiming to create a world-class community sport system in *Tāmaki Makaurau*, community by community. This toolkit has been developed (and will be updated) by Aktive, with input from delivery partners CLM Community Sport, Harbour Sport, Sport Auckland and Sport Waitākere, based on insights and good practice examples from across Auckland.

The purpose of this generic participation and membership toolkit is to provide information, insights and ideas that will assist leaders of clubs/codes to ensure long-term participation and membership growth. It can be tailored and implemented as each club/code sees relevant.

## WHY YOUR CLUB / ORGANISATION SHOULD FOCUS ON MEMBERS

**There are many reasons why your club/code should aim to grow your membership, including the ability to:**

- Increase the size of the local, regional and national sport family and have more people to play against
- Create more vibrant local, regional and national competition structures
- Develop a larger database that presents more opportunities for commercial relationships for the benefit of the sport
- Improved financial health for your club to put back into growing the sport and improving your facility further
- Foster a healthier community from sharing the love of the game and helping people play it
- Strengthen your club's brand and ensure future generations can experience the game as well
- Gain a better media profile from having enhanced engagement within your community

## GROWING PARTICIPATION AND MEMBERSHIP

Research has shown that the level of enjoyment that our members experience will determine whether or not they come back the next session.

**Below are some proven ways to encourage participation, including:**

- Providing stimulating facilities using colour and light
- Offering regular education and communication e.g. electronic newsletters
- Creating bonds with members, use of social media [Marketing and communications toolkit >>](#)
- Delivering personal and small group training, e.g. coaching sessions
- Building clubs within your club e.g. book / cards groups
- Relationship selling and member inductions e.g. welcome process
- Lapsed member re-engagement campaigns e.g. database email
- Casual play options e.g. pay as you play

The one thing that has been shown to work better above all others is group activities. After all, we are social creatures and we love spending time with other people – because it is fun!

**No one ever left a club because they had too many friends or were having too much fun!**

# THE MEMBERSHIP PROCESS

To help us understand the participation and membership process we first need to identify and understand your club's target audiences and generate leads.

Once we know what motivates people to try your sport, we can help them to play by leveraging social interaction (friendships) and enjoyable experiences (fun).

This further motivates people, so they choose to join, come more often and end up staying longer.

Once we have satisfied members, they renew their memberships and recommend this to others.



This whole process starts by looking at who plays (or doesn't play) at your club. From here you can start to identify opportunities to grow and develop your prospective member database.

# UNDERSTANDING YOUR TARGET AUDIENCES

Using insights on a regular basis is becoming more and more important to the sport and recreation sector. Used well, insights can give your club an understanding of where it is at, where it is heading and the opportunities that are available by identifying who is playing, who used to play, who isn't playing and more importantly, who could play.

Once you have this information available, you can start putting together solutions to meet the different motivations of the identified leads your club could target.

## WHAT YOUR CLUB CAN DO:

**1** Look at your existing membership database. What age, gender, ethnicity, social status, occupations and playing habits do your existing members have?

**Planning toolkit >>**

**2** Compare your current members to your local area. Use the **Sport NZ Insights tool** (<https://sportnz.org.nz/managing-sport/insights/>) to see if you are reflecting the makeup of those who live locally.

**3** Consider the types of members to target versus keep. How many juniors (5-8 years, 9-12 years)? youth (13-18 years)? school students? tertiary students? beginner adults? social players? competitive players?

**4** Use insights and research tools to help give you a clearer picture. Find out if your National Sport Organisation has been part of the Sport NZ Voice of the participant survey (<https://sportnz.org.nz/managing-sport/voice-of-participant/club-member-experience-survey/>) and ask them for the results. If you haven't been part of the survey, think about how else you can get feedback from your members - such as doing a simple survey.

Now you have an understanding of who, you can start to look at what your club can offer them and how you will communicate with them.



# YOUR MEMBERSHIP STRUCTURE

To help your club/code approach structuring membership offers, we have listed a range of possible categories based on popular segments of the community:

- Adults
- Juniors
- School students
- Tertiary students
- Couples
- Mid-week users
- Weekend-users
- Off-peak users (for access between 9am – 3pm only)
- Summer period only (from Nov – Feb)
- Country members (who live in a rural area)
- 3-month taster
- Senior citizens
- Families (2 adults and 2 juniors)
- Corporates
- Non-playing

Below are a selection of other membership models your club could consider:

- **Multi-club membership** – provides access to several facilities without having to commit to a full membership. This requires a collaborative approach between clubs to put together an attractive package.
- **Concession cards** – a lump sum payment upfront which provides a certain number of facility hire hours.
- **Pay as you play** – a standard fee to use the facilities at allocated times of the day.

## WHAT ABOUT ADDITIONAL CHARGES?

Some clubs charge costs for keys, building and teams travel, grading / ranking list levy, interclub fees and coaching charges. A few clubs also have minimum membership periods and if cancelled within this timeframe, a payment penalty is applied.

## Lump sum or regular payment?

Offering a one-time payment allows your club to receive income in advance and lets you determine your budget for the year. However, the drawback is that people often perceive a lump sum membership as free after a while and may not use it as often. On the other hand, people who pay regularly tend to play more often and perceive greater satisfaction with their membership.

## Incentives?

Some clubs offer discounts for prompt payment or for coaches and committee members as a thank you.

## Penalties?

Some clubs charge a percentage for late payments and withdraw access to facility and associated services until debt is paid.

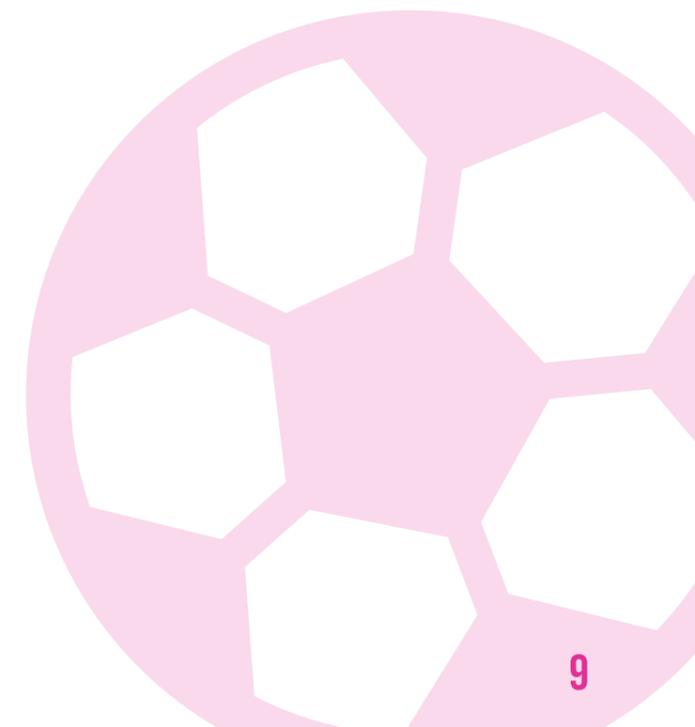
# SETTING MEMBERSHIP FEES

Club membership prices should be affordable, flexible and adjust throughout the year to allow people to join at any time. Using some of the categories mentioned previously, here is an example to show this:

Membership Category	Annual Fee (Mar)	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan
Senior	\$450	\$330	\$295	\$260	\$225	\$190	\$155	\$100
Couple	\$830	\$600	\$550	\$500	\$450	\$400	\$300	\$200
Student	\$265	\$200	\$180	\$160	\$140	\$120	\$90	\$70
Junior	\$130	N/A						
Mid-week	\$230	\$170	\$150	\$130	\$110	\$90	\$70	\$50
Weekend	\$230	\$170	\$150	\$130	\$110	\$90	\$70	\$50
Family	\$900	\$680	\$595	\$510	\$425	\$340	\$255	\$170

Here are some suggested steps to help you do this:

1. Look at what the other leisure opportunities cost in your local area.
2. Work out the weekly cost of your club's annual membership (e.g. \$300 annual fees for 52 weeks = \$5.77 per week).
3. If membership is important to your club, your casual facility hire fees should work out to be slightly more (e.g. \$6.50 versus \$5.77) but competitive against other leisure options.





## COMMUNICATING WHY

When someone is joining your club/code, they are making an investment. To get them to join you need to articulate how they will see a return on their investment.

An example of how you might do this:

**“WHEN YOU JOIN OUR CLUB/CODE YOU ARE MAKING AN INVESTMENT IN YOUR HEALTH AND HAPPINESS. BY JOINING OUR CLUB/CODE YOU WILL GAIN THE KNOWLEDGE, SKILLS AND NETWORKS TO HELP YOU LIVE A BETTER LIFE.”**

Another way of conveying value:

**“WHEN YOU JOIN OUR CLUB/CODE YOU ARE CONNECTING WITH OTHER PEOPLE WITH THE SAME GOALS AND ASPIRATIONS AS YOU. BY JOINING OUR CLUB/CODE YOU WILL DEVELOP LIFE-LONG FRIENDSHIPS, GAIN OPPORTUNITIES TO PLAY IN COMPETITIONS OR JUST SOCIALLY, ARRANGE MATCHES AT CERTAIN TIMES AND HAVE A MEETING PLACE FOR FAMILY AND FRIENDS.”**

The most compelling value statements speak in outcomes and are targeted towards the specific member segment you are communicating with. For example, a young professional may be focused on starting a new career and need to ensure they will get what they need to do this well. On the other hand, someone nearing retirement may be more interested in spending more time with friends, so this is important to them.

To understand what best motivates each member segment group, ask them.

## CREATING INTEREST

If growing membership is important for your club/code, then collecting personal details needs to be part of your club culture. Everyone should understand that it is a part of their role to be alert for membership opportunities and pass these along to the membership coordinators. Your members are your best source of leads because they are on the ground and can make the connection with prospective members.

### THERE ARE PLENTY OF WAYS TO GENERATE LEADS:

- Run a short-term internal member-get-member campaign where the top referrer gets a prize or gift each month
- Create ‘Member Ambassadors’ who are tasked with encouraging people to join. Track how well they perform and publicise their work
- Look for organisations where your members go with a similar target market as your club. Establish relationships and look for reciprocal win-win situations
- Have partners distribute your club’s marketing collateral to their database in their office, via their website or electronically
- Insert a flyer into other organisations mailings with a strong call to action
- Reward organisations who refer members to your club by providing them with a thank you or a corporate membership
- Use a free email newsletter on your club’s website to collect email address. Try to get names and company names as well so

you can personalise your communications

- Ask everyone who comes into contact with your club if they would like to opt in to your newsletters.
- Give away tasters to your club’s programmes and activities with open days
- Engage through social media channels that invites people to directly ask questions and add comments
- Provide positive member testimonials to showcase how fantastic your club is – make sure it is authentic!
- Prove your value by adding numbers where possible, for example 90% of our members recommend us to their friends
- Attend other events such as trade fairs, exhibition shows, networking meetings, conferences and other sports to promote your club to similar target markets
- Display signage outside your building that invites people to come inside or contact your club

No matter how you decide to generate leads, at every point where a prospective member comes into contact with your club there should be a way of recording data basing that lead – whether this is recording telephone enquiries, collecting business cards or capturing online communications. Once you’ve got leads, the next step is to get them engaged.

# WELCOMING AND ENGAGING NEW MEMBERS

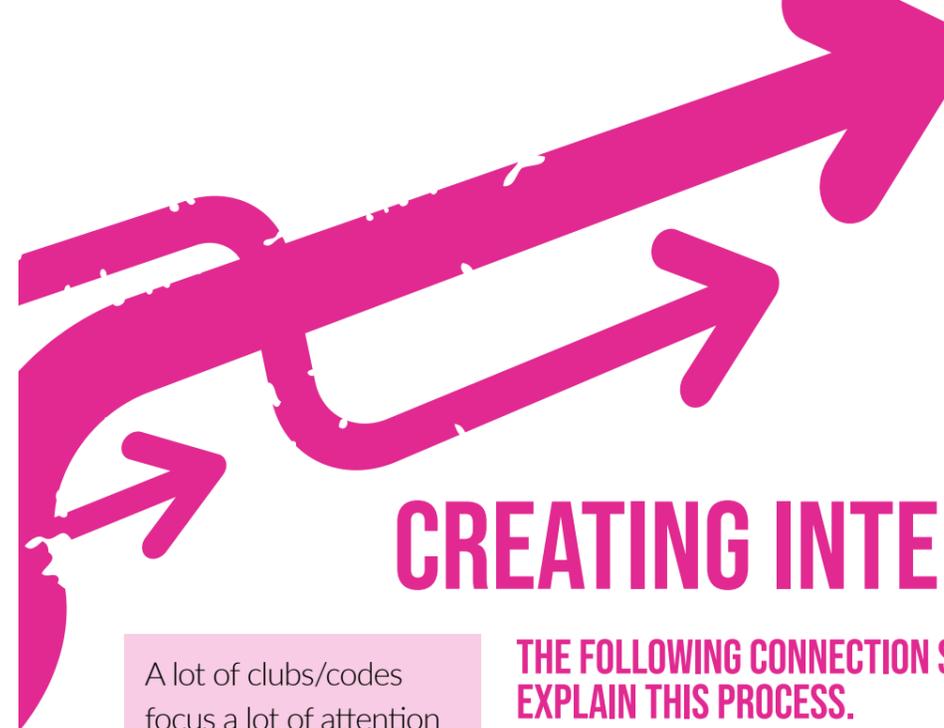
Joining a club/code should be a fun, exciting and engaging experience. An opportunity to meet new people, form good habits, try new things, develop skills and enjoy the environment. Providing an effective new member journey will ultimately depend on the people you have available, the facilities and activities you offer and the joining process (online, paper, in person).

**Regardless of your club/code size, your new member journey should focus on the following:**

- Finding out about the new member – their culture, interests, goals, availability and past sport history
- Asking other members to share how they felt the first time they played and how they feel now. When new members hear that others have felt the same way, they will feel more comfortable
- Getting them involved as soon as possible – this is where structured programmes can help form regular habits
- Offering to get involved with them and give them some tips on playing the game. Try to team new members up with existing members of similar grades so they have others with similar interest with whom to play against
- Providing the new member with a weekly schedule outlining all the opportunities. Help them plan their first few weeks at your club so they establish a playing routine and some good habits

- Focusing on the talk being about playing your sport and inviting them to some of the club’s activities
- Giving them a tour of the facilities and outline parking information, how to access the facility, booking procedures and where to find equipment
- Outlining the various programmes and services your club has to offer so they understand what they each entail and the benefits of each
- Going through their membership terms, payment options and the benefits they are entitled to
- Congratulating the new member each time they come. Thank them by name if you know it and ask when you’ll see them again. Answer any questions and let them know they can invite a friend along too
- Handing the new member a welcome pack which outlines everything the need to know. They can then go away and read through this in their own time
- Create a family friendly environment and encourage whanau to engage with the club, which creates an inclusive community environment and can lead to more members

For best effect, allocate each of the above tasks to a different team member as this allows the new member to interact with more people and means they are more likely to feel connected to your club/code.



# CREATING INTEREST

A lot of clubs/codes focus a lot of attention on getting new members, while little is paid to keeping their existing members and this creates a revolving door effect. Keeping your members happy should be a priority otherwise all the resources you have put in to getting them in the first place will be lost.

**THE FOLLOWING CONNECTION SCALE CAN HELP EXPLAIN THIS PROCESS.**

A positive experience with sport moves someone up in the satisfaction scale, while a negative experience moves them back down.

The journey from negatively to positively satisfied and how long it takes is based on experiences. It is during the slightly satisfied and neutral phase where a lot of members can be lost before they have firmly established themselves within the club and feel they are part of a community and belong.

Extremely satisfied is where someone is heavily involved in the club, they are starting to recommend their friends and they have become advocates for the game.



The secret to moving more of your members up the scale is helping them form connections – which is a great way to get commitment from your members. As a club, you’ll need to be inclusive of everyone and influence them to form connections with each other. The more members your club has, the more opportunities for connections to take place. Also, the more positive members your club has, the more likely that this enthusiasm will rub off onto new members – which creates an upward spiral effect and builds a community.



**SOME THINGS EVERY CLUB/CODE CAN DO:**

- **When you interact directly with your members** you should know some relevant information about them - their playing habits or mention something that would interest them. This is made much easier if you initially gather other information about your members that could be of interest (family related, career related) that shows that you care about them as a person, not just as a membership fee.
- **Ensure that you have multiple methods for members to communicate** with your club if they have a question, comment or complaint. This can be through direct face-to-face interaction, via telephone or answer machine, or through feedback forms placed throughout the club.
- **Capitalise on social media** by creating a group where your members can connect online with each other. Send newsletters to tell your members that you care about them.
- **Build 'clubs within a club'** as a way of creating relationships between members. Use mini-clubs such as book groups, card groups, activity nights or coffee groups to bring like-minded people together.
- **Ensure that everyone who has contact** with your members shows genuine interest through their body language and vocal tones, pitch, volume and speed.
- **Periodically ask your existing members how they are feeling about their membership** and how you can add more value. As a rule of thumb, you should start off more regular with new members

(3-4 times in the first 3 months) and finish off asking quarterly with existing members (every 3 months). You should also ask your visiting guests about their experiences during their time at your club. This is distinctly different to your members experiences and will provide you with external useful information. You could get this feedback through a short survey or talking with members.

- **All your employees / volunteers should actively listen** to the other person before expecting to be listened to. As a result, members are more likely to trust you.
- **Focus on the members you have.** If you treat them right they will bring in more members. Remember that this is a team effort - it only takes one person from your club to undo all of the good work.
- **Provide in-club contests** like a time trial or doing as many skills in a minute. You could also provide attendance challenges, with the individual who visits the most in a month receiving a prize. Another option is to set a target challenge, e.g. all members who visit at least 20 times a month all go in the draw to win a free membership subscription. Not only do challenges give you the opportunity to create a friendly atmosphere of competition and personal bests but they should also give you material (challenge winners / event photos) for your marketing platforms. So, even if members don't get involved with the challenges themselves, they can still engage and support those other members who do.



## KEEPING YOUR MEMBERS

Keeping members is tough, especially as there are plenty of options out there and people's schedules are full.

**Here are some of the signs to look out for to show that members are at risk of leaving:**

### PARTICIPATION FREQUENCY

The major sign of disengagement is a lack of participation. Research suggests most members attend a club at least twice a week. Have someone keep an eye on member attendance and when a member starts to visit your facility less and less, find out if they are having any issues and help get them participating at least twice a week again.

### REPETITION

We are all creatures of habit and when it comes to playing sport, members who fall into the same routine week after week will soon get bored. If this is the case, members need something different. Look at offering a new programme or event to keep things interesting.

### SOCIAL CONNECTIONS

Relationships are the glue which keeps members coming back again and again. When you have a 'loner member', they have no emotional connection to your facility and are more likely to not turn up. These members require group programmes and activities, so they can get to know other members and form friendships. The best thing you can do to engage your members is communication. Build rapport, get to know them (learn their name), discover more about their culture and find out why they are there.

### CLUB COMMUNICATIONS

Keep members up to date with a regular newsletter delivered electronically through an email or social media. Keep it bright and colourful with upcoming club events, lots of pictures showing members in action, results and achievements. Encourage members to forward their story contributions and encourage feedback on their club experiences.

# RENEWING MEMBERSHIPS

Renewals are a sign that the member is happy with what they are getting from being a member. There will always be members who fall into one of the following:

- **Moved** – have changed email or postal address and have not advised you
- **Busy** – have forgotten about renewing and haven't had time to get to it
- **Undecided** – have not gotten what they wanted from their membership and are unsure
- **Dissatisfied** – have had negative experiences with your club and are not going to renew

To maximise the likelihood of keeping your members each year, you should have a number of ways to renew – telephone, email, post, internet or in person. Allowing your members to pay by direct credit will increase your retention rate as the person has to take action in order to not renew. Another useful idea is sending a thank you letter and small gifts to your members on their anniversaries – to show that you value them being a member of your club.



## Here are some tips:

- Ensure your database is up to date prior to renewal time.
- Consider segmenting your renewal forms based on your membership categories. This way you can remind people of the value that their membership provides them with.
- Use a simple mailer with as much information pre-filled out as possible.
- Start sending out renewal notices three months before the membership lapses.

## An example:

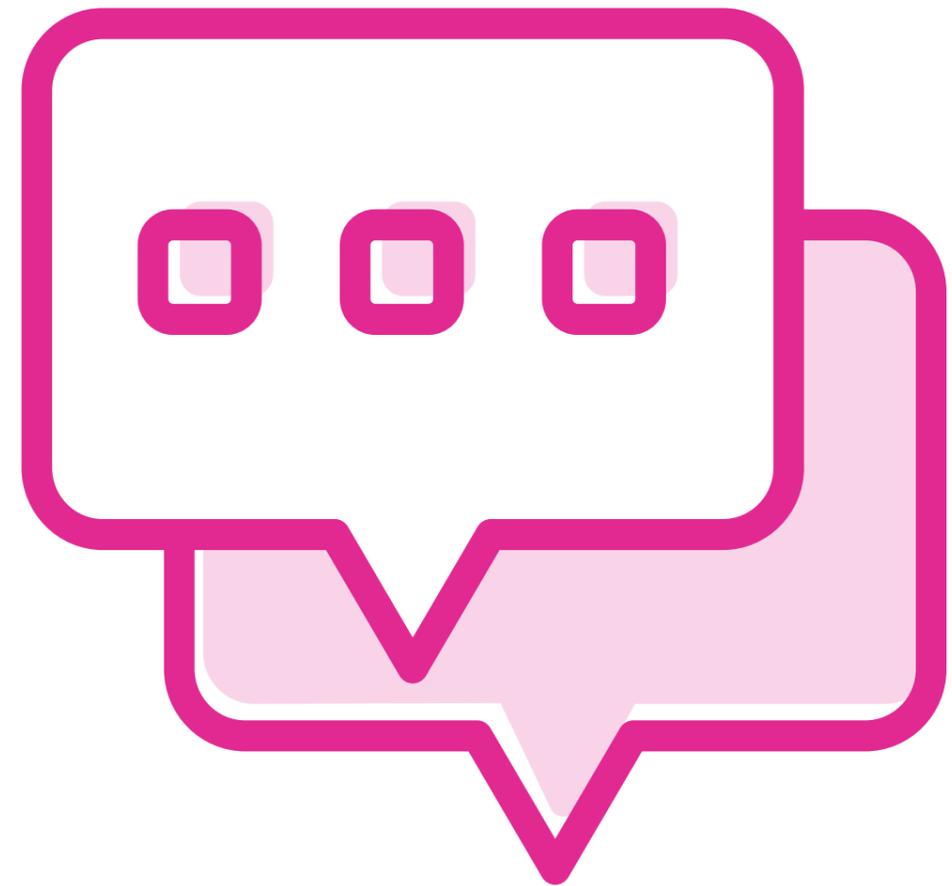
**1 April:** Renewal notice “Renew now for your membership discount”

**1 May:** Reminder notice “Don't forget your membership is due”

**1 June:** Urgent reminder “Have we done something wrong?”

**1 July:** Resigned notice “Your membership has lapsed, contact us right away to have this reinstated”

**Remember:** if the member doesn't renew it is a good idea to find out why and follow up with them at a later date. For many, the decision to renew or not to renew is made before renewal time based on their experience throughout the year. It is better to be proactive rather than reactive!



# RE-ENGAGING PAST MEMBERS

When someone stops being a member at your club, do not delete them from your mailing list unless they are no longer a valid member prospect (e.g. deceased or

left the area of residence) or if they indicate that they would like no further correspondence. Instead you should find out some more information.

**1** Ask them why they chose to leave and use this feedback to learn. This should be a positive experience and can be done in a number of ways: in person, over the telephone, by email or via post. Doing this in person or by telephone shows that you take their resignation seriously and you care about why they have made the decision. All responses should remain confidential and should be used to help improve the overall experience for your members.

**2** Then plan a date when you will attempt to re-activate (6-8 months after resignation) the lapsed member. A “we want you back” email or letter followed by a personal telephone call is a great way to do this. This gives you the opportunity to let them know what has changed since they left so they can see you have made improvements.

# LOOKING FOR FURTHER INFORMATION?

There is a range of resources available to assist with the running of your club/code.

## HERE TO HELP

Your Regional Sports Trust/Organisations are also here to help – please don't hesitate to contact us if you would like to talk through any of this material and/or assistance for your club and/or code.

## MORE INFORMATION CAN BE FOUND AT THE FOLLOWING:

[aktive.org.nz](http://aktive.org.nz) >>

[harboursport.co.nz](http://harboursport.co.nz) >>

[sportwaitakere.co.nz](http://sportwaitakere.co.nz) >>

[sportauckland.co.nz](http://sportauckland.co.nz) >>

[clmnz.co.nz/counties](http://clmnz.co.nz/counties) >> 

Information in this toolkit is for guidance only and does not constitute formal professional advice. Where specific issues arise in your club/code, advice should be sought from the relevant expert(s) as necessary.

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