



Membership Strategy

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SANS Membership Strategy

1. Managing Membership Information

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2. Communicating with Members

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- 5.5 Provide support for junior surfers
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1. Managing Membership Information

A key component of any organization's membership program is having a system for managing information about its members. Having up-to-date information on SANS members is useful for communicating with members, event planning, monitoring membership trends, and designing recruitment and renewal campaigns. The following recommendations will help SANS improve how it manages information about its members.

1.1 Draft Membership Guidelines for SANS

There is some uncertainty within the surfing community about membership in SANS. The 2010 SANS Membership Survey found that 26% of respondents did not know if they were a member a SANS. In order to administer an effective membership program SANS needs to create membership guidelines. The guidelines should include criteria for defining the organization's members and outline the approved methods for joining SANS.

1.2 Collect and Maintain Up-To-Date Information about Members

SANS currently lacks key pieces of information about many of its members. For example, SANS does not have any contact information for 42% of the people listed in the SANS Membership Database. SANS also lacks information on the spatial distribution of SANS members. The city or region of residence (e.g. Cape Breton, Halifax/Eastern Shore, South Shore, Other) is unknown for 64% of the people listed in the Database. SANS should take every opportunity to collect information about its members in order to communicate more effectively with them as well as track membership trends. The SANS Membership Database is an important step towards maintaining and organizing information about members, but the Database should be updated regularly.

SANS should aim to collect the following key pieces of information about each of its members:

- First and last name
- Phone number
- E-mail address
- City/town of residence
- Province of residence

These fields should be marked as required on all future SANS contest/event registration and membership forms. SANS should also be sure to make note of the registration date to

contact members when it's time to renew their membership¹ as well as the registration method (i.e. contest, online form, etc.) in order to determine which methods are most effective for recruiting new members.

2. Communicating with Members

It is essential that any organization be able to communicate effectively with its members. It is important to remember that this not only requires having ways for SANS to contact its members, but having ways for members to provide feedback to the SANS Board as well. The following recommendations will help SANS communicate more effectively with members, prospective members and the local surf community in general.

2.1 Develop a Position Statement

SANS should develop a position statement in order to provide a clear, compelling, concise and consistent way for everyone involved with SANS to talk about the organization and explain the benefits of joining the organization to prospective members. A position statement is a standard message, usually no more than two or three sentences long, used to guide all of SANS's communications to members and non-members and would be included on all SANS communications such as the website, news releases, brochures, posters, etc. The statement should emphasize SANS's Strategic Goals and the benefits of joining the organization. The following statement found under the About Us section of the SANS website could potentially be used as a position statement:

Established in 1987, SANS is a community-based non-profit organization dedicated to: building an inclusive, fun and respectful surf community; supporting recreational and amateur surfing; and fostering coastal stewardship.

2.2 Use the Website and other Social Networking Sites as Communication Tools

The SANS website is arguably the most important tool for communicating with members and prospective members. Although significant improvements to the SANS website have been made recently, a few additional changes should be made to further improve how it is used as a communication tool:

¹ Applies only if SANS decides to charge an annual membership fee (see Section 3).

1. Display SANS's position statement on the home page in a location obvious to all visitors to the site so that new and prospective members know what SANS is about. A good place would be just above the current news feed section.
2. Expand the About Us section of the webpage. SANS should add specific information on the recent accomplishments of the organization and its future plans. This information could be taken from the most recent Annual Report and the Strategic Plan.
3. Encourage visitors to the website to submit feedback via e-mail. The SANS e-mail address should be displayed on the home page under the position statement or in the left column on the home page. SANS Board Members should make a commitment to check the e-mail account regularly and respond to all messages.

Members and prospective members should be encouraged to join SANS social networking sites, such as the Facebook page. SANS should take advantage of these social networking sites to communicate with the surfing community and advance their Strategic Goals.

2.3 Promote Attendance at SANS Annual General Meetings (AGM)

The AGM is an important tool for communicating with SANS members. Members have the opportunity to provide feedback and discuss their concerns and ideas directly with the Board. The AGM should be well advertised on the SANS website and social networking sites and notifications should be sent to all members by e-mail well in advance of the meeting so that members can make arrangements to attend. The notification should highlight the significance of the AGM as a means for members to provide feedback to the Board and encourage all members to attend. Meeting minutes should be posted on the website and sent to all members so that those who weren't able to attend can read about what was discussed.

2.4 Make SANS Financial Information Accessible and Transparent

The Membership Survey revealed that there are concerns among some within the surf community about how SANS uses and manages its finances. It seems as though these concerns are largely the result of a misunderstanding about the costs of holding contests and how the funds from the registration fees are used. Making financial information accessible to members can help educate members about the limited resources available to SANS, the costs of holding events (e.g. insurance) and how membership/registration fees are used. Members will be able to see for themselves how their membership/registration fees are used to support the goals of SANS and how their contributions are helping to make

a difference. In order to make SANS financial information more accessible and transparent, it is recommended that SANS:

- Post financial statements on the their website
- Provide individuals with a breakdown and explanation of how membership and registration fees will be used at the time of payment

3. Membership Fees

The results of the Membership Survey suggest that it would be feasible for SANS to charge an annual membership fee as a means of generating additional revenue while maintaining a strong, albeit reduced, membership base. Based on the survey results, there are three options for membership fees to consider for the membership strategy: (1) continue to offer free membership in SANS; (2) begin to charge a \$10 annual membership fee; and (3) begin to charge a \$20 annual membership fee. Implementing an annual fee for SANS membership is a major change in the organization and SANS must carefully consider the advantages and disadvantages associated with each option. The following information is intended to help SANS weigh the costs and benefits of implementing an annual membership fee.

The Membership Survey found that 90% of respondents would be willing to pay \$10 for an annual membership in SANS and 79% would be willing to pay \$20. The SANS Membership Database currently has the names of 367 people, but has contact information for only 210 of these people. The SANS Facebook Group currently has 201 members. Therefore, it is reasonable to use 210 as an approximation for the total number of active SANS members². Using this information, it is possible to estimate the annual revenue that would be generated by implementing an annual membership fee of \$10 or \$20 (Table 1). The advantages and disadvantages of each of three membership fee options are outlined in Table 2.

Table 1. Estimated annual revenue generated by implementing a \$10 and \$20 annual membership fee.

Annual Fee	Estimated Total Number of Active SANS Members (2010)	% of Members Willing to Pay Fee³	Number of Members Willing to Pay Fee	Estimated Annual Revenue Generated
\$10	210	90%	189	\$1,890
\$20	210	79%	166	\$3,320

² Active SANS members are considered to be people who participate or attend SANS sanctioned events one or more times per year or have a general interest in the activities of the organization.

³ Figures based on the results of the 2010 SANS Membership Survey.

Table 2. Advantages and disadvantages of various membership fee options.

Option	Advantages	Disadvantages
Option 1: SANS continues to offer free membership	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Less time and effort is required from SANS Board to administer the membership program • Easier to attract new members and maintain existing members 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No revenue is generated from the membership program • Difficulty differentiating “active” members from “passive” and former members
Option 2: SANS begins to charge a \$10 annual membership fee	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Moderate increase in revenue (estimated to be \$1,890 per year) • Easy to determine total number of “active” members and track membership trends • Gives SANS more credibility as an organization 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • An estimated 10% decrease in SANS membership base is expected⁴ • Greater difficulty attracting new members • Requires a strong commitment in terms of time and resources from SANS Board to administer the membership program
Option 3: SANS begins to charge a \$20 annual membership fee	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Large increase in revenue (estimated to be \$3,320 per year) • Easy to determine total number of “active” members and track membership trends • Gives SANS more credibility as an organization 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • An estimated 21% decrease in SANS membership base is expected⁵ • Greater difficulty attracting new members • Requires a strong commitment in terms of time and resources from SANS Board to administer the membership program

Information collected about the membership/fundraising programs of six other not-for-profit organizations reveals that all charge an annual fee to members (Table 3). Four of these organizations have implemented a tiered system. A tiered system provides prospective members with a range of options which vary in the amount they are charged to join the organization. Typically the quantity and/or quality of benefits offered to members will increase with amount they pay. In addition to the annual membership fee, three of the organizations gave individuals an option of making a one-time donation or monthly contributions to the organization. Depending on the organization, the donation and contributions may or may-not entitle the donor to benefits from the organization.

⁴ Figure based on the results of the 2010 Membership Survey.

⁵ Figure based on the results of the 2010 Membership Survey.

Table 3. Information on the membership programs of other not-for-profit organizations.

Organization	Annual Fee	Tiered Structure	Donations	Monthly Contribution
Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society (NS)	Y	N	Y	Y
Canoe Kayak Nova Scotia (NS)	Y	Y	N	N
East Coast Blues Society (NS)	Y	Y	N	N
Ecology Action Centre (NS)	Y	Y	Y	Y
Southwest Paddlers Association (NS)	Y	N	N	N
Surfrider Foundation (International)	Y	Y	Y	Y

3.1 Charge a \$20 Annual Membership Fee

Based on the above information, it is recommended that SANS begin to charge an annual membership fee of \$20. The \$20 is recommended over the \$10 fee because, as shown in Table 1, it is expected to generate 43% more income while resulting in an additional loss of only 11% of SANS current membership base. While it may be easier to attract new members and build SANS membership base by continuing to offer free membership, this strategy focuses on the *quantity* of SANS members rather than the *quality*. People who choose to pay an annual fee to become a member of an organization demonstrate that they value the services provided by the organization and that they are willing to pay to support its goals and objectives. For this reason, organizations that charge fee-based membership programs are generally seen as more credible, even if the fee results in the organization having fewer members.

3.2 Provide an Option for One-time Donations and Monthly Contributions

In addition to charging an annual membership fee, SANS should provide an option for individuals to make one-time donations and monthly contributions to SANS. Individuals who make one-time donations should be given one-year membership in SANS while those who contribute monthly should be given membership for as long as they continue to donate.

4. Recruitment and Renewal

Well planned recruitment and renewal campaigns are important components of any membership program because they help organizations attract new members and maintain

existing members far more effectively than just leaving it up to individuals to inquire about membership. The following recommendations are intended to help SANS build and maintain a strong membership base.

4.1 Offer More Ways to Join SANS

The Membership Survey found that 26% of all respondents were uncertain about their SANS membership status. Currently SANS does not provide information on how to become a member on their website and it seems the only clear way for people to become members is to register for a contest.

Information collected about the membership/fundraising programs from the websites of six other not-for-profit organizations found that they offered one or more of three different methods for people to become members: an online form, a phone number or mail-in form. Four of the six organizations had an online registration form on their website (see Table 4). The form would ask individuals to provide certain information about themselves as well as a payment method (usually a credit card). Three of the organizations provided a phone number through which people could purchase a membership or inquire about the membership program. Five of the organizations had a printable mail-in form on their website which required people to provide certain information about themselves as well as a payment method including a credit card, cheque or money order.

Table 4. Methods available for joining other not-for-profit organizations.

Organization	Online Form	Phone	Mail-In Form
Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society	Y	Y	Y
Canoe Kayak Nova Scotia	Y	Y	N
East Coast Blues Society	N	N	Y
Ecology Action Centre	Y	Y	Y
Southwest Paddlers Association	N	N	Y
Surfrider Foundation	Y	N	Y

One of the most effective ways for SANS to recruit new members would be to provide information on the website about membership benefits and to offer individuals a variety of ways to join including an online membership form⁶, a mail-in form, and a contact phone number for membership requests and inquiries.

4.2 Design and Implement a Recruitment Campaign

SANS should organize annual recruitment campaigns to promote awareness of SANS and the benefits of becoming a member. The campaign should have clear numerical goals and a

⁶ Providing an online membership form will require secure software for individuals to pay with their credit card.

timeline. The ideal time period for the campaign is June-October because it the busiest time of year for surfing with many new and seasonal surfers. SANS should ask existing members to volunteer to help out with the campaign.

Initiating the recruitment campaign will require developing a recruitment brochure for volunteers to distribute to prospective members. The brochure should include the following information:

- SANS's Position Statement and Strategic Goals
- A summary of membership benefits
- FAQ about membership
- Contact information and a link to the website

The campaign should include one or more membership drives similar to the one held at the Seahorse Tavern in 2009, but should also target locations and events frequented by prospective members such as SANS contests⁷ and surf shops/schools.

It is a good idea to find ways to measure the success rate of the various recruitment tools as well as locations and events used in the campaign in order to develop more effective campaigns in the future based on this information.

4.3 Marketing

Selling SANS-branded merchandise such as clothing and stickers is not only a new source of revenue for the organization, but it can help to help spread awareness about the organization. The merchandise should feature the SANS logo and possibly a slogan related to SANS's Strategic Goals. Providing free stickers in the welcome packages and selling SANS-branded merchandise is an effective, low-budget advertising technique that can help attract new members.

4.4 Membership Renewal

Monitoring and targeting individuals whose membership has, or is about to, expire is an important element of an organization's membership strategy.⁸ SANS should keep track of these members and send them a notification letter/e-mail informing them that their membership will soon expire. The letter should outline the benefits of membership, provide some highlights of what their membership has helped SANS achieve, and provide a

⁷ Nearly half of the respondents to the Membership Survey who attended the 2009 Shut Up and Surf Classic and the Back to the Beach contests were non-members or were uncertain of their membership status. Therefore contests are an ideal location to recruit new members.

⁸ Applies only if SANS decides to charge an annual membership fee.

means for the individual to renew their membership. The SANS Membership Database is programmed to monitor membership registration and expiration dates and notify the user when an individual's membership has expired. This feature should help SANS ensure members renew their membership annually.

5. Benefits

Providing benefits to members is essential for building a strong and loyal membership base. The benefits of being a member in an organization can be tangible (e.g. discounts, gifts, etc.) or intangible (e.g. social networking). Benefits do not need to be costly or elaborate and there are a number of basic benefits SANS can provide its members at low cost.

The Membership Survey gave members of Nova Scotia's surf community the opportunity to suggest benefits that they would like to see SANS provide to its members (see Figure 1). Contests were the most common membership benefit expected by survey respondents (24%), followed by information on surf etiquette (17%) and support for junior surfers (17%), coastal access (15%) and social events (15%), SANS news and updates (9%) and beach clean-ups (9%), and clinics and camps (7%). Eighteen additional benefits were identified by respondents.

The survey results give SANS an idea of the range of benefits that are expected from their members. SANS should focus on delivering the most frequently requested benefits to members; including contests, information on surf etiquette, support for junior surfers, coastal access, social events, news and updates, and beach clean-ups. SANS could also explore the possibility of offering some of the additional benefits identified by respondents.

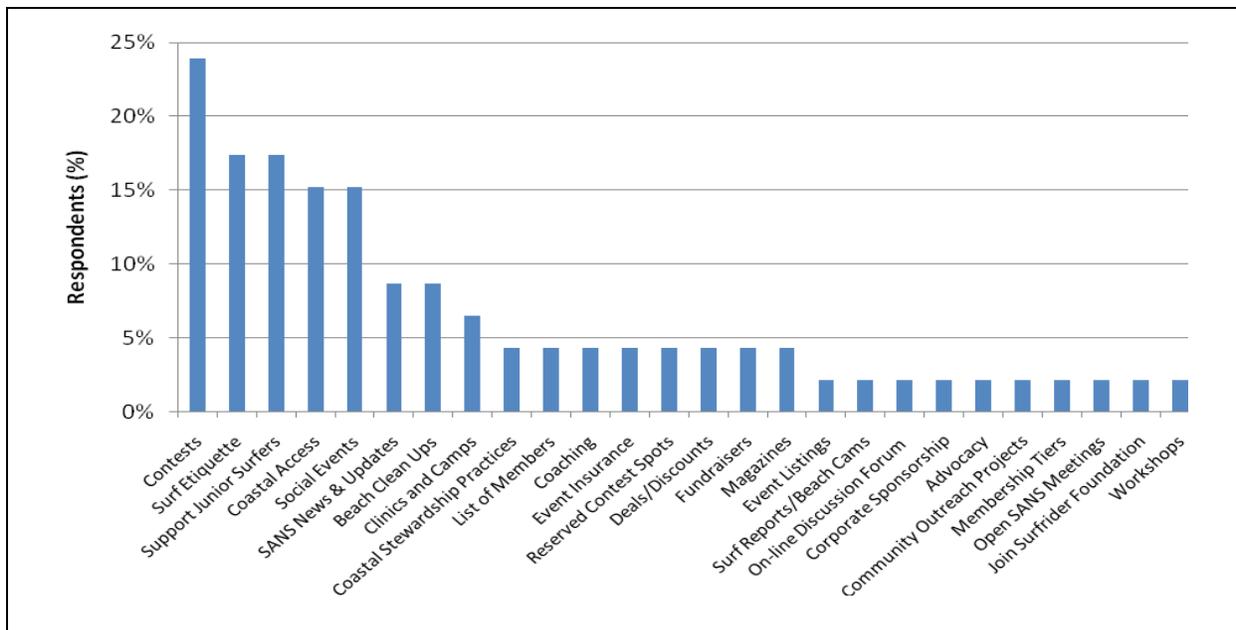


Figure 1. Membership benefits suggested by respondents to the 2010 SANS Membership Survey shown as % of total respondents.

A review of six not-for-profit organizations identified four of the most common benefits offered to members including newsletters, magazines, courses/clinics and discounts (Table 5). All six organizations provided members with newsletters and three provided magazines. Two of the six organizations offered courses and clinics and three offered discounts to members for a variety of relevant expenses such as admission to social events or purchases from selected retailers.

Table 5. Membership benefits offered by other not-for-profit organizations.

Organization	Newsletter	Magazine	Courses/ Clinics	Discounts
Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society	Y	N	N	N
Canoe Kayak Nova Scotia	Y	N	Y	Y
East Coast Blues Society	Y	Y	N	Y
Ecology Action Centre	Y	Y	N	N
Southwest Paddlers Association	Y	N	N	N
Surfrider Foundation	Y	Y	Y	Y

5.1 Welcome Package

New or renewing SANS members should be provided with a welcome package. The purpose of the welcome package is to welcome new members into the organization and provide them with some immediate benefits. This will be particularly important should SANS decide to start charging an annual membership fee. The welcome package should include the following items:

- **Thank You/Welcome Letter:** Thanks the individual/company for joining SANS; explains how their membership fees will be used; highlights SANS's Strategic Goals, recent accomplishments and key elements of the annual strategic plan; and encourages them to provide feedback to the SANS Board.
- **Membership Brochure:** Highlights the benefits of membership in SANS.
- **Newsletter:** A copy of SANS more recent newsletter (see Section 5.2 below).
- **Gift:** SANS stickers, etc.
- **Educational Brochures:** Provides information on proper surf etiquette and coastal stewardship practices (see Section 5.6 below).

5.2 Newsletter

Newsletters are likely the most common benefit organizations provide to their members (see Table 5 above). News and updates was one of the most requested benefits of being a member in SANS by respondents to the Membership Survey and newsletters are the most effective way of delivering this benefit.

Newsletters do not require a great deal of effort from volunteers to prepare. Since SANS already posts news and updates on their website, preparing a newsletter would only require copying and pasting the existing website content into a newsletter template. It is recommended that SANS prepare and distribute newsletters to all active members on a quarterly or semi-annual basis.

5.3 Discounts

Offering discounts is another common benefit organizations offer to their members and can be a powerful tool for persuading individuals to join an organization. Organizations typically offer internal discounts to members on registration fees, cover charges for events hosted by the organization and merchandise. Some organizations also partner with other organizations and retailers to offer discounts to members.

It is recommended that SANS consider offering discounts as a benefit to members. Specifically, SANS should offer discounts to members on contest registration fees and admission fees for social events. Table 6 (below) shows a breakdown of the recommended contest registration fees that SANS could charge for members, non-members and non-members who purchase a membership at the time of registration. SANS members would be charged a fee of X , which represents the minimum amount required for SANS to recoup the costs associated with running the contest (i.e. insurance). Non-members who register for a contest, but do not want to become members of SANS would be charged a fee of $X + \$10$. This is based on the assumption that by participating in the contest, these people are

receiving a benefit from SANS (i.e. the volunteer work associated with organizing a contest) and should be required to pay a fee for these benefits. This fee would be used to support future SANS activities and events. These individuals would receive no additional benefits from SANS beyond their participation in the contest and associated social events. Non-members who register for a contest and decide to become a member would be charged a fee of $X + \$20$ representing the minimum amount required to recoup costs plus the \$20 annual membership fee. As an example, imagine the total cost to run a contest is \$2,500 and there are spots for 60 contestants. The cost per contestant would be \$42. The registration fee for members would be \$42, the fee for non-members would be \$52 and the fee for non-members who choose to join SANS at the time of registration would be \$62. Using this fee structure and the discount it provides to members creates a strong incentive for surfers to join SANS, particularly for surfers who participate in more than one contest each year.

Table 6. Recommended contest registration fees and associated revenue by membership status.

Status	Total Cost per Contestant	Registration Fee	Revenue
Member	X	X	\$0
Non-Member	X	$X + \$10$	\$10
Non-Member Plus Membership	X	$X + \$20$	\$20

SANS should offer its members discounts on SANS merchandise (see Section 4.3), such as t-shirts and stickers, and approach local businesses about becoming SANS corporate sponsors. These sponsors could provide discounts to members on a variety of common surfing related expenses. This would require creating a way for businesses to be able to identify SANS members. One relatively easy approach is for the welcome package (see Section 5.1 above) to include single-use coupons for discounts on specific items (e.g. gear, wax, clothing, meals, etc.).

5.4 Contests

Contests were the most common benefit that respondents to the Membership Survey thought SANS should provide to its members and many respondents called for more contests to be held each year. Given the substantial resources required by SANS volunteers to hold a contest, holding more annual contests could present some challenges. SANS may need to look for alternative contest models that reduce the amount of time and effort required by SANS volunteers. Some potential options include:

- Shifting towards a contest model where SANS plays more of a supportive role rather than assuming primary responsibility for contests. This could be accomplished by partnering with local surf shops to hold contests. One or more local surf shop would take on the primary responsibility for organizing the contest and SANS would play a supportive role.
- Holding separate contests for the various divisions. This contest model has a number of advantages over the current model. First, it increases the number of annual contests without substantially increasing the time and effort required of volunteers. By using this model a contest could be run in a half-day, therefore reducing the time commitment required of volunteers. Second, it focuses attention on the competitors within a particular division. In the past, the Men's Open division has received the most attention at SANS contests and perhaps overshadowed the achievements of surfers in the other divisions. This could be an effective way of supporting and promoting junior surfers; another important benefit which members expect SANS to provide (see Section 5.5 below).

5.5 Support Junior Surfers

Support for junior surfers was the second most common benefit respondents to the Membership Survey thought SANS should provide its members. SANS can support junior surfers by organizing all-junior contests, providing mentorship, and providing funds for junior surfers to participate in contests held outside of Nova Scotia such as the ISA World Junior Championships. There are a number of ways SANS could raise funds to support junior surfers:

- Collect membership fees
- Organize fundraising events
- Sell SANS merchandise such as clothing and stickers
- Request donations from members

5.6 Information on Surf Etiquette and Coastal Stewardship

Many respondents to the Membership Survey thought that SANS should provide information on proper surf etiquette and good coastal stewardship practices. This is particularly important given the attention generated by the recent court case involving some local surfers. SANS could prepare brochures on these topics and include them in the welcome package as well as post them on the SANS website. The brochures could also be distributed to local surf shops. Some potentially useful links to information on surf

etiquette, coastal stewardship practices and public coastal access are provided in the Appendix.

Appendix

Surf Étiquette, Coastal Stewardship and Public Access Web Links:

Surf Étiquette:

<http://www.surfrider.org.au/2010/01/the-surfers-code/>

<http://www.surfinghandbook.com/knowledge/surfing-etiquette/>

<http://www.surf-etiquette.com/text/Tribalaw.pdf>

Coastal Stewardship:

<http://www.birdscanada.org/volunteer/nslover/NSHealthyBeaches.pdf>

Public Access:

http://www.surfrider.org/files/Free_the_Beach.pdf