



**MISSION:  
RETENTION**

*The Playbook*

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## Welcome to the Retention Playbook!

This playbook was created to provide resources for you and other chorus leaders in your efforts to keep members coming back year after year. We all know how important recruitment is to growing and maintaining your chorus, but we also believe that having a strong retention plan is equally (if not more) crucial for chorus health. If you can retain the members you have, you can focus less on the need to constantly grow and more on fostering your current chorus culture – leading to a more satisfactory chorus experience for everyone.

It's sometimes easy to overlook the importance of retention in the busyness of day-to-day chorus maintenance. Your members already joined, so they must like it here, right? You can never take your members for granted – like a gardener, you must constantly tend and care for your members for them to grow to their full potential. It costs more in time, resources, and money to attract new members than to keep your current ones. That's why it's so important to spend the time and effort on nurturing your current members. The more they stick around, the less "cost" you will incur to maintain your chorus numbers. We encourage you to check in with your chorus members each year and make sure your foundation is solid. We have found that many choruses who become too small to recharter had a gradual decline until the loss reached critical mass and their remaining members left all at once. Prevention is key to avoiding this situation! We urge you to invest the time and effort in creating a positive chorus environment so that members are happy and your chorus is healthy.

This retention playbook takes you through the lifecycle of chorus retention. First, you need to do a retention analysis to determine what your chorus is doing right, what you can improve upon, and how the average chorus member feels about their membership and choral experience. You can begin by analyzing your chorus culture and making sure it reflects the identity you want. After that, you can utilize surveys to see what your membership really thinks about their chorus experience. Looking at your current members' experiences (through satisfaction surveys) and at past members' experiences (through exit surveys) will be key for this analysis. You'll also want to do a retention rate analysis to determine how much membership recruitment you'll need to do throughout the year to maintain your current chorus numbers. After you've analyzed what your chorus is doing right and what you can improve upon, then you can determine what you can do to improve.

The first year of membership is so important in retaining those members into the future. We all want to make a great first impression! Here, we detail how you can create programs to help members learn about your chorus and feel comfortable. These ideas include creating an onboarding program, having a membership handbook, setting up a mentor program, and more. We'll walk you through what you might want to include with each program.

As chorus leaders, you are key to creating and promoting a positive chorus environment so that members want to attend rehearsals and participate in your chorus. We'll look at leadership's role in retention and how you might foster a positive chorus environment. We'll discuss how to promote a positive rehearsal environment for everyone.

Last but not least, we talk about retention activities that work with an emphasis on fun and camaraderie.

We hope this playbook will help your chorus create a plan of action with an eye towards member satisfaction and retention. Retention is a lifestyle, something you nurture at every rehearsal and every performance. We hope this playbook helps you as you work towards fostering a fun and inclusive chorus environment.

In harmony,

*Sweet Adelines International Membership Department*

# RETENTION ANALYSIS

## Analyzing Your Chorus Culture

Before your chorus can potentially change and grow, you must first understand your current chorus culture, also known as “the way things are now.” In many ways, culture is like personality. In a person, the personality is made up of the values, beliefs, interests, and habits that create a person’s behavior. Culture is made up of these attributes and behaviors but is shared by a group of people. While there are many definitions of organizational culture, most of them focus on similar points: collective experience, routine, beliefs, values, goals, and system. These are learned and re-learned, passed on to new members, and continue on as part of a chapter’s core identity. Define your chorus culture by answering four core questions:

- 1. Where are we now (our framework)?***
- 2. Who are we (our personality)?***
- 3. What do we believe in (our values)?***
- 4. Where are we going (our vision)?***

The answers to these basic questions are the fabric with which planners will weave the chapter’s vision, values, and purpose into the membership action plan. You may find that you need to change your chorus culture to provide a more satisfactory membership experience. That’s okay! Your chorus will always grow and change over time, and doing a chorus culture analysis allows you to see what direction you’re headed.



## Where are we now (our framework)?

*Ask your chorus the following to determine your chorus framework*

- At what level is the musical product we offer?
- How does our chapter function administratively?  
How you administer your chorus affects how your members experience and participate in the chorus.
- How does the director contribute to the chorus?  
Directors are often the focal point of the chorus; how they interact and direct the group influences how your group works.
- How is the health of the chapter?
- Do we want to grow? Why? If so, how much?



## Who are we (our personality)?

*Defining your chorus personality is important because it unifies your membership.*

A fun way to identify who your chorus is to have each member write down five adjectives that describe your chorus. To help identify your chorus personality, you can create a word cloud so that you can visually identify the values of your chorus.

[www.worditout.com/word-cloud/create](http://www.worditout.com/word-cloud/create).

Another option is to list positive adjectives that describe your chorus and have each member rate on a scale of 1 (lowest) to 5 (highest) and then identify the personality traits that were rated the highest.

Once clearly defined, your chorus's personality should be consistently expressed and portrayed in everything: costumes, repertoire, performance style, etc.





## What do we believe in (our values)?

*Shared values define how members want to interact with each other in the chorus, with potential members, and the community. Common values translate into expectations that prescribe behavior towards members.*

Example values may be: ambition, competency, equality, responsibility, accuracy, respect, dedication, diversity, improvement, enjoyment/fun, loyalty, teamwork, excellence, accountability, empowerment, quality, efficiency, dignity, collaboration, empathy, accomplishment, courage, wisdom, challenge, influence, learning, compassion, friendliness, generosity, dependability and flexibility.

Once you have identified your chorus values, take the top five to create your chorus's mission statement. Your chorus's mission statement describes why you exist. Knowing why you come together each week helps create goals and hone your focus. You want a mission statement grounded in your identified shared values.

## Where are we going (our vision)?

*Your vision statement is your desired end state. An effective vision statement conveys a conceptual image of the desired future for the chorus. It provides inspiration and challenge to all members towards an ideal of what the chorus can become. It should help to bridge the present framework (where you are today) with the core values (what you believe in), plus serve as an impetus for change. It should be brief enough to be memorable and complete enough to direct effort.*

To write your vision statement, focus on the basics of your mission statement and predict "where is the chorus going to be five years from now? What will we have accomplished?" Craft a vision that is achievable yet inspirational.

Your chorus mission and vision statement should complement each other. Commit to these statements. Communicate them to the chorus on a consistent basis. The more you talk about these statements, the easier they are to implement. Model personal behaviors, decision-making, contributions, and interpersonal interactions that reflect these statements.





## Soliciting Feedback

It's important to determine what your past and current members think of your chorus in order to know how you can improve your chorus culture. We recommend utilizing exit surveys and member satisfaction surveys to get a good idea of how your chorus is doing.

Remember – you don't know what to improve until you ask!

## Exit Surveys

It's inevitable that members will leave the chorus for one reason or another. Past members can help your chorus see why members leave and if there is anything you can do to improve or changes that need to be made. Depending on what questions you ask, you can discover ways to improve your chorus experience for everyone. The questions you ask should be customized to your chorus. Asking if competition needs to be a bigger focus for a chorus who competes at International every year may not be relevant. Also remember that negative feedback is a chance for growth and improvement, so be bold and ask the hard questions.

We recommend that you keep your exit surveys short, less than two minutes to complete, to get the most responses. It's also important to respect the confidentiality of all survey-takers. We recommend using Google Forms to create your exit survey, as it's free, customizable, and easy to use. Check out a sample exit survey here: <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/JVR3PWB>.

## Member Satisfaction Surveys

*Asking your current members about their current chorus experience might help you find areas to improve or areas to address before they become issues. We recommend you do member satisfaction surveys at least annually. Some questions you may ask can include:*

- How long have you been with [Chorus Name]
- How did you hear about us/why did you first join?
- Do you think the benefits you receive are worth the membership fees you pay?
- What have been some of your favorite moments from the past year?
- Are you planning on renewing your membership for the next year? If not, why?
- Is there anything you think the chorus could do better?
- Do you feel heard and valued as a chorus member?
- What do you think we could be doing more of/better to recruit new members?

Again, we recommend keeping these surveys short and guaranteeing anonymity for the best results.

## New Member Surveys

*When new members reach their 1-year anniversary, we recommend you reach out to see how their experience has been. You can then create a custom plan so that they feel welcomed and appreciated. Some questions you might ask can include:*

- What first attracted you to Sweet Adelines International? Options may include performance, friendship, education, community service, barbershop music, contest/competition, singing, etc.
- Is our rehearsal location convenient?
- Is our rehearsal time convenient?
- What is your ideal rehearsal length?
- Are our rehearsals well-managed and organized? If not, what can we do to improve?
- Rate your overall satisfaction with your chorus experience from 1-10.
- If you could make one change to the chorus, what would it be?
- Do you feel you were adequately informed about the financial, time, and member expectations of the chorus?
- Do you feel heard and respected by the leadership team?
- In your opinion, what is the best part of being a member of our chorus?
- Would you recommend the chorus to friends/family/colleagues looking for a singing opportunity? Why or why not?
- What types of activities/committees would you like to participate in during your second year of membership?
- What is your favorite chorus activity?
- What helped you acclimate into the chorus the most?
- What terms and expectations have been confusing to you? What questions did you have when you first joined?
- What circumstances might prevent you from continuing your membership in our chorus? (Select all that apply – lack of time, dissatisfaction, health reasons, family obligations, finances, work obligations, moving, other).

Put these survey results to work by developing an improvement plan where deficiencies or problems have been identified. Consider re-training leaders in problem areas. Consider discussing any issues or concerns with the new member's section leader, riser buddy, mentor, etc., and solicit their additional support and attention.

# ***THE ALL-IMPORTANT FIRST YEAR***

**It's important to nurture your new members by teaching them what your chorus is about and providing them opportunities to participate.**

We recommend providing a membership handbook as part of an onboarding program, as well as assigning a riser buddy. With this information, your new member can feel empowered and confident in their new role as a chorus member.

## Membership Handbook

Creating a Membership Handbook can be an effective way to make new members feel more comfortable and confident about being a part of your chorus. When you give them information up front, they are more likely to feel empowered instead of confused, as the answers to many of their questions will be right at their fingertips. Below is a suggested outline to help chorus leaders develop organizational information for new chorus members. While leaders should customize the material and add sections to meet specific needs, the key information every member should have about membership in Sweet Adelines International is in this outline. The information can also be used for continuing member education.

## Membership Handbook Outline

### People in Our Chapter

- Roster
- Telephone Tree
- Chapter Structure
- About Our Director

### Nuts and Bolts

- Financial Information
- Bylaws and Standing Rules
- Policies
- Job Descriptions
- Protocol
- Terminology
- Code of Conduct

### Sweet Adelines Family

- International Organization
- Regional Organization
- Regional Activities
- Chapter Activities

### Performance Readiness

- Current Sheet Music
- Learning Music
- Learning to Perform
- Costuming
- Makeup
- Chapter Shows
- Regional Conventions
- International Conventions

### Membership Information

- Membership Requirements
- Attendance Requirements
- Leave Request

***We highly recommend you customize this membership handbook to reflect your chorus's practices and to address commonly asked questions.***



## New Member Orientation – Onboarding Program

*Instituting an onboarding program can help new members feel accepted, comfortable, and instantly connected. We recommend creating a short onboarding program consisting of six to eight classes covering subjects many members have questions about or might find intimidating (hint: your new member surveys would be an excellent way to determine these subjects!). Classes should be short, no more than 15 minutes, and can be held before or after rehearsal. Membership coordinators are a logical choice to teach the class, but anyone could chair the program.*

## Suggested Class Schedule

### Class 1: Introduction and Class Outlines

Introduce each other, provide the new member handbook, and go over class expectations. Assign riser buddies and allow them to get to know each other.

### Class 2: Singing Together

Introduce the director, section leaders, and other music leadership. Discuss how to learn music, procedures and expectations.

### Class 3: Living and Working Together

Introduce the leadership team.

### Class 4: Sweet Adelines as a Foreign Language

Give an overview of the International organization and how your chorus functions as a part of it. Explain your region. Discuss organizational and barbershop terminology.

### Class 5: Let's Play Dress Up

Introduce and discuss costuming and makeup.

### Class 6: The Contest Experience

Discuss regional contest and how your chorus prepares for it, as well as how the actual day works.

### Class 7: Graduation

Here is an opportunity to have a fun "graduation" ceremony for your new members, such as presenting a diploma and singing a song of welcome to them.



## Mentor Program (Riser Buddies)

*Another successful retention program involves pairing mentors (existing members) with new members. This mentoring program addresses the challenges that new members may face. Mentors can also be one of the most important influences in shaping the development of a new member. However, the mere existence of mentors does not automatically guarantee that new members or the chorus will benefit. To thrive, a mentor program requires thorough planning, organization, clear goals and follow-through.*

*Start by selecting a Mentor Chair to oversee this important retention program. As chair, the main responsibilities are:*

- Recruit mentors and provide applications to members wishing to play a vital role in developing new members.
- Work with the Membership Committee in selecting mentors. Care should be taken to identify members who are capable of being involved and engaged in the mentor commitment.
- Make an effort to become acquainted with prospective members as they visit. Use this personal knowledge and work with the Membership Committee to appropriately match mentors with new members. Consider the personalities and backgrounds of the new members so that matching them to mentors may lead to close relationships between similar individuals.
- Introduce the matched members to one another at the appropriate time. (Usually following the audition and/or membership application process.)
- Hold scheduled meetings with mentors to discuss new member education and orientation as well as the responsibilities of a mentor and the expected progress of new members.
- Distribute frequent bulletins to mentors, highlighting specific information for them to disseminate to the new members.
- Work with mentors to organize social activities that develop friendships and close connections with the chorus.
- Conduct periodic reviews with each mentor about their involvement with, and evaluation of, their mentee(s). If a problem is identified with the relationship, or when there is a mentor who is not fulfilling their responsibility, discuss the situation with the mentor in private. If the situation can be remedied easily and put back on track, do so. If the mentor is unable or unwilling to fulfill the responsibilities, give them an honorable way out. Then, working with the new member, quickly find a new mentor to continue the relationship.

*The mentor should encourage and guide their new member through the first year of membership. The following are some actions that the mentor should fulfill:*

- Express genuine interest in supporting their new member by making a total commitment to ensuring that they reach their fullest potential.
- Be able to fully explain the chorus, region, and international organization. In addition, explain the history and mission of Sweet Adelines International and the chorus.
- Meet weekly, or more often, with the member to discuss chorus life, including the activities, rehearsals, music, events, etc. Build a strong relationship of trust and understanding necessary for a close friendship.
- Ensure their new member fulfills the requirements and expectations of membership.
- Celebrate their milestones and accomplishments.
- Offer musical assistance.
- Work closely with the Membership Committee and Mentor Chair in accomplishing the goals of the Mentor Program.

**Upon the new member's one-year anniversary, the chorus should recognize the mentor and new member in front of the chorus.** A smart retention tactic is to encourage the graduating new members to apply to become mentors soon after entering their second year of membership. Serving as a mentor offers an additional opportunity to make one more good friend and close contact in the chorus. This, in itself, is an excellent retention strategy. Further, becoming a mentor is an excellent stepping stone into further leadership positions.

## Mentor Application Example

**Name:**

**Joining Year:**

**Offices Held:**

**Committees:**

*Extracurricular Activities:*

- Have you been a Mentor before? (If yes, is are they still a member of the chorus?)
- What benefits can you bring to a new member and the chorus as a mentor?
- How many hours a week would you reasonably be able to devote to your new member?
- Have you met all of your financial obligations? Do you attend rehearsals regularly?

If applicable, list three prospective members (in rank order) who are presently going through auditions who you would like to have as a new member.

# ***LEADERSHIP'S ROLE IN RETENTION***

**Leadership is key to creating a culture of belonging in which everyone feels valued and included.**

Making sure your chorus leadership is strong, has a clear direction, and cultivates a respectful environment is key to retaining your chorus members. As leaders, you are responsible for creating an atmosphere each week that members want to return to.



## Cultivating A Culture of Belonging

*Everyone wants to belong. A huge part of why members return week after week to your chorus is to feel that sense of belonging. Small actions create huge ripples in making members feel worthwhile, important, appreciated, respected, safe, included, and productive. Below are some ways to cultivate these feelings.*

1. Ask the opinions of your members. Conversely, do not discount their opinion.
2. Find ways for members to be involved. There should always be a place for people who want to assist. The more involved a member feels, the more likely they are to stick around. Not everyone has the time, skills or desires to be on the chorus leadership team, but that doesn't mean they don't long to be involved or have skills that could greatly help the chorus!
3. Address members outside rehearsal. Members come for the music and stay for the friendship. Help cultivate those friendships by emphasizing these relationships outside of rehearsal.
4. Interact authentically with members one-on-one. Make your members feel valued as individuals. Compliment them and take interest in their life outside of Sweet Adelines.
5. Express gratitude. People like to feel appreciated, even for little things. Create a culture of gratitude within your chorus. Nothing is too small to express gratitude for.
6. Compliment the behavior you want to see more of.
7. Check in after an event has occurred. Not everything will run smoothly all the time. If there has been a bump in the road, make sure to see how the member is doing.
8. Follow through. If the director asks the chorus to rehearse a song, they should work on it at the next rehearsal. If a member sends you an email, you need to respond in a timely manner. If a member is not participating in a way they normally do, check in on them.
9. Avoid gossip. Leaders set an example. Gossip can only lead to hurt feelings.

As leaders, you can help create a positive chorus culture. Be aware that your actions and words hold weight.

## Member Recognition

*Members need recognition not only to feel rewarded for a job well done, but also to receive feedback that what they are doing is appreciated. Here are ideas on how to do this.*

1. Discover the talents and interests of the individual members and give them an opportunity to use them. For instance, someone may have a passion for graphic design, so have them create your next chorus flyer.
2. Give praise and recognition to members who have performed tasks, recruited members and volunteered for events or jobs.
3. Use a chorus newsletter not only for important chorus news but also for spotlighting members' accomplishments outside of the chorus.
4. Find ways to give more individual recognition in front of the chorus. Celebrate little things with special awards. Have a special recognition night during the year. Be creative and add numerous things to this list. When a rookie is qualified for her first chorus performance, give some type of award.
5. Make joining your chorus a celebration. An induction ceremony with a song of welcome is a great idea.
6. Make a "vision" bulletin board to be displayed at rehearsal. Suggestions of things to include might be a chorus photograph, goals for the future, a blurb about your director, and a spot for rotating information on highlights about members' lives.
7. Make singing to the community an annual event.
8. Keep former members informed of events to keep the door open for their return.
9. Shout-out members on your social media. Tag them and let the world know how wonderful your chorus thinks they are!
10. Offer multiple ways to get involved. Not every one of your members will want to serve on your board/leadership team. Show your appreciation for each member's time and skillset by offering a variety of opportunities. Giving members different ways to interact within your chorus helps them to find their place and increases the likelihood that they'll want to continue as a member in the future. It's important to show that you value your members who are more comfortable behind the scenes as much as you do your visible leaders.
11. Send personalized cards or thank you notes to members randomly throughout the year. Everyone loves a good piece of snail mail, and knowing that someone in the chorus took the time to write them a note and put it in the mail will make members feel so appreciated.

## Retention Best Practices

*Current members are a chorus's best asset. They are great chorus ambassadors when they are happy and fully engaged. The "care and feeding" of your current members by leadership is priority #1 for retention and growth. Members who feel valued and welcomed are more likely to maintain their membership, contribute to the chorus in multiple ways, and bring in friends as potential members of the chorus. ANY activity that contributes to members feeling personally valued and welcomed will support the objective of retention. Here are some ideas on how to cultivate retention practices.*

1. Members feel more connected to an organization they are contributing to (time, energy). Find a way in which each member can contribute to the chorus doing things they are good at and they like to do. Find ways to thank them for their contributions.
2. Remember that everyone is working toward their own musical growth journey. Their journey may be on a slower track than yours. Everyone's time availability, learning curve, background, family and environmental context is different. Respect where everyone is at. It is more effective to work toward a common vision and culture than it is to criticize progress that doesn't meet your own expectations.
3. Support new members in a planned way for at least the first two years. For example, implement a chorus onboarding program when members first join.
4. Have your director meet each guest individually and welcome them to the rehearsal.
5. Be understanding of the various pressures that affect people's lives. Treat all members as if they are hurting somewhere in their personal lives because they may be, although you may not be aware of the reason.
6. Avoid financial misunderstandings. Send periodic statements showing amounts members have paid and any credits due. Be sure the chorus's standing rules are explicit about how and when dues will be paid and what determines default.
7. Spread the wealth in training new people to take on chorus tasks. Involve lots of people to avoid burning out the members who always volunteer to carry the load.
8. Call absent members, letting them know they are missed without making them feel guilty.
9. Send cards and flowers to those who are ill, have had recent deaths in the family, or have something to celebrate such as a marriage, graduation, a new baby, or some other special occasion.
10. Relax your chorus's standing rules if it is determined they are too restrictive. Sometimes, you need to exercise discretion in following the rules. Conversely, everyone needs to be treated fairly.



## Code of Conduct

*Sharing and adhering to the Sweet Adelines Code of Conduct is a wonderful and simple way to keep members coming back week after week. At the end of the day, everyone wants to be treated with respect and kindness. Proactively implementing the Code of Conduct within your chorus standing rules is a great idea to create a chorus culture that prohibits bullying and encourages respect.*

*Members of Sweet Adelines International commit to...*

- Uphold and live by the Sweet Adelines International Mission Statement, Vision Statement, and Guiding Principles.
- Act with integrity and conduct themselves in a professional manner while representing their region, chorus, quartet, and/or Sweet Adelines International.
- Communicate in a manner that reflects the respect and harmony promoted in the organization's Guiding Principles.
- Treat fellow singers, guests, and those in the community with care, dignity, and respect.
- Be courteous and considerate of the opinions of other members, representatives, and staff.
- Resolve issues with fairness through listening and healthy communication in an atmosphere of respect, positivity, and possibility.
- Adhere to the rules and guidelines of Sweet Adelines International, including those defined in the Organization's Policies, Bylaws, Handbooks, Regional Handbooks, and Chapter Guide.






## Creating a Positive and Productive Rehearsal Environment

*Rehearsals are such an important element in creating a culture of positive growth and belongingness, both of which are huge factors in retention. It is during rehearsal when people feel engaged (or not), valued (or not), like their time was well spent (or not). Some people go to rehearsal, never actually speak with anyone, feel ignored, and leave rehearsal feeling as if they were invisible. We have an opportunity during rehearsal to make sure that never happens to anyone. It is a shared responsibility of the director, all chorus leaders, and the membership team to ensure every member feels their time was well spent and they made a contribution.*

## Rehearsal Best Practices

1. Communicate your plans ahead of time.
2. Have variety.
3. Make time for laughter.
4. Utilize and honor each member's talents.
5. Dedicate time at each rehearsal for the care and feeding of members.
6. Offer time for thanks and praise during business portions of rehearsal.
7. Mix things up!
  - a. Plan surprises
  - b. Change the schedule
  - c. Have different ways to approach the "same old stuff" – rehearse on the floor in a circle, sit in chairs with good posture, etc.
8. Have a comfortable rehearsal environment
  - a. Have a comfortable room temperature
  - b. Have a comfortable riser environment. Be mindful of crowding, stamina, etc.
  - c. Rehearsal and performance spaces should be a scent-free zone.
  - d. Make sure there are plenty of opportunities to hydrate throughout rehearsal.
9. Scheduling
  - a. Use high energy times well.
  - b. Watch the calendar. School vacations and holidays can be stressful times, for example.
  - c. Work towards a guilt-free environment.
  - d. Twenty minutes and it is usually time to move on.
10. Work on director skills
  - a. Long and short term plans
  - b. Good teaching skills
  - c. Understand different learning styles (i.e., visual, written)
  - d. Focus on each singer to assess their needs.
  - e. What gets rewarded gets repeated.
11. Process and Celebration
  - a. Short-term goals need applause and celebration.
  - b. Long-term goals require major rewards.

For further resources on structuring your chorus's rehearsals, including sample rehearsal schedules, rehearsal activity ideas, repertoire assistance, and more, check out the [Director Resource Toolkit](#). 

[www.sites.google.com/view/saidirectortoolkit](http://www.sites.google.com/view/saidirectortoolkit)