



MENSA[®]

Local Membership Officer Handbook

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(fourth edition)

The most current version of this handbook can be found at us.mensa.org/handbooks. Suggestions for changes and additions are always welcome. Please send them to Handbooks@us.mensa.org with a copy to LocalGroups@americanmensa.org.

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Introduction

The Local Membership Officer Handbook is intended to help you welcome members, provide creative events and fulfill essential services for your members. As a Local Membership Officer, you can have a major impact on your members in several important ways:

- By getting new members off to a great start with the Mensa experience;
- By planning an organizing events for your membership, especially those for new members;
- Through your suggestions to the Executive Committee (ExCom);
- By working with your local Proctor Coordinator, media relations volunteer, and others to make local events fun, exciting and inviting to all members, especially the new ones who haven't yet discovered the possibilities within Mensa!

Your role is vital: you are on the front line in meeting, greeting and involving new members. A number of resources are available to you, and the National Membership Officer (NMO) can provide help, advice and guidance. Your ExCom and Regional Vice Chair (RVC) are also good sources of ideas, problem resolution and support, and the National Office (NO) staff can help in many ways. Don't forget additional resources online, including the MO eList and Facebook group.

The difference between the NMO and the Membership Director are as follows: The Membership Director is a professional, paid staff member at the National Office. The NMO is an appointed officer who serves on a volunteer basis much the same way as do your local ExCom and the other appointed board members. The Membership Director and staff are responsible for membership-related issues, including admissions, prior evidence processing, Proctor communications, member benefits and services, processing change-of address requests, and providing answers to questions from Local Groups or individual members on member related issues. The NMO is responsible for various member-related issues, fostering programs designed to increase participation in Mensa and retention of our members. The Membership Director and NMO work together to serve the membership needs of Mensa on a national basis.

We will do everything we can to assist you in addressing the membership needs of your Local Group. It would be a good idea to discuss with your local ExCom/board what their expectations may be regarding what responsibilities or duties your job entails. These expectations differ based on the needs and history of each Local Group. Still, if you are taking on the task and have different ideas than have been included in the role in the past, feel free to suggest new things. Your job as Membership Officer is what you make of it!

Also keep in mind that many members may not ever be interested in attending any "live" events. Consider how you may present value to them outside of the usual meetings and events. Some members receive their value simply by being card-carrying members of Mensa and might even feel resentful at being pushed to attend events. Perhaps they just like reading the wit and wisdom in your local newsletter or the letters to the editor of the *Mensa Bulletin*. In any case, they are the majority of our members, so keep them in mind and realize you can be successful even without a majority of your members showing up for in-person events.

How to use this Handbook

Feel free to use or modify the examples and suggestions herein according to your needs. As groups and their needs change, so will the information in this document. We actively solicit ideas, suggestions and practices that have worked for you and your Local Group. Please share anything you have created or modified with the NMO.

Greeting New Members

Welcoming Contact

It is best practice to contact new members within a few weeks of receiving notification from the NO that a member has joined, reinstated, or moved into the area. Some groups also contact their prospects and candidates. There are many possible ways to initiate this communication, and they are discussed here in further detail. You can find information on these members through the month-end reports provided by the National Office. Your Local Secretary will designate you to receive this information.

By Postal Mail: Taking the time to hand write a personal note is preferred. Consider obtaining Mensa branded notecards (materials can be requested through the American Mensa website) and writing 3-5 sentences welcoming the new member. Include a business card or contact information should they want to reach out. Those who might be unable to write legibly can find a ghost writer or another member to assist. Sending a form letter isn't preferred. Invest the time in the beginning with new members and your chapter will yield higher returns in the future.

By Phone: Making a personal phone call can be used in several ways. If you aren't comfortable with phone calls, you can be brief and simply acknowledge the new member, confirm their contact information then send a note. Another consideration is to make a phone call a week or so after the personal note has been sent to confirm receipt and follow up with any questions.

By Email: Sending a personalized email is another option, and is best used in conjunction with other forms of contact. This can be a good way to provide an introduction and send links to the group's social media pages or timely information about upcoming events the new member may attend.

In Person at a Meeting or Event: Face to face interpersonal interaction generally takes precedence over all other forms of greetings. Social etiquette is an important factor when greeting new members. If this is an area of personal growth for your chapter, invest time in finding a guest speaker to come and present on interpersonal communication or people skills.

It takes a team - Make an effort to have every officer be part of the greeting team during meetings. This shouldn't be the sole responsibility of the membership officer and his/her team. Everyone should have a name badge or identifier including the new member. If a mentor is available, they can introduce the new member during the meeting and ease their comfort level. (More info on mentors in the next section.) If new members are recognized during meetings or events, ask them if they would like to introduce themselves or have someone else do it otherwise. The goal is to make the new member feel welcome and comfortable.

Less Preferred – text message, smartphone apps, social media etc.: While these can be great ways for continued engagement, more personal means are recommended for first contact.

Mentor Program: Mentors are a great way to connect new and experienced Mensa members, establishing a connection right off the bat. Consider starting a mentor program in your chapter. How do you find mentors? Reach out to your life members and ask them if they would be interested. Once the program has taken off, create a mentor chair position that can lead the efforts. Mentors can fill out a questionnaire and be matched with the new members appropriately. Use good judgment when identifying mentors as not all members might be suited for this role. A poor mentor selection or assignment could be detrimental to the new member experience.

Remember – make it personal: When inviting new members to special events or functions, consider making a personal phone call, acknowledging the person by name and inviting them to attend. It is always a good practice to take time and reach out to our new members. Also consider publishing their names in a new member section of the newsletter. Remember the Member. If you respect your members' time, there is a good chance they will give you their time in return.

New Member Events

Ideally, schedule an event at least quarterly that is geared towards welcoming new members. This can be a social event or part of the monthly meeting. Recognition is a critical part of the new member experience. Consider sending out invitations to the new members to invite them to the events. If Local Group funds make it possible, also obtain member pins, order a name badge or some other small gift that can be presented to the new member within the first 3 months of membership.

Purpose: The new member gathering brings together the newest members of a Local Group in a casual welcoming setting. The positive feelings generated during this initial get together will set the tone for future participation in the group.

Type of Event: Mixer, potluck, dinner, happy hour, picnic, etc. Gatherings where participants can mingle freely allow an opportunity to meet everyone and prevents participants from being stuck in isolated (end of a long table) or uncomfortable (argumentative, nonstop talker) situations. Face time is very important!

Frequency: Monthly, quarterly, yearly, depending on frequency of testing, group preferences and number of new members.

Set a date: 8-12 weeks in advance, give members time to reserve date, make arrangements, etc. This also gives you plenty of lead time to ensure that the event is published in your local newsletter.

Recruit volunteers: This includes hosts, set up/clean up, purchase/bring food. If this is a recurring event (monthly or quarterly) recruit a group of regular volunteers.

Budget/plan expenses: Estimate number of participants. Does the group provide funds for food or room rental? Will there be a per member charge? Will participants be expected to pay for their drinks and food?

Location: Reserve room, contact restaurant, arrange for member home.

Plan food: Finger food, apps, potluck, dinner, lunch, BBQ, pizza, etc. Consider vegetarians and gluten-free participants.

Miscellaneous / Other Best Practices:

- Provide name tags.
- Introductions and welcome-acknowledge each and every individual!
- Short presentation on group – overview of Mensa, how to get involved, key events.
- Ice breakers can be a great way to get things started and give people an opportunity to talk to one another (“people bingo” or “never have I ever”).
- Encourage mingling; lead by example making your way through the event.

RSVPs: Have a specific contact person for RSVPs and questions.

- Always include an RSVP, and one week prior to the event, contact all participants with a reminder. If you aren't hearing from people, send them a follow-up asking them if they have received the invitation.

Remember to invite members who will have a positive impact on the event!

- New members as close to joining as possible, all new members for the month, quarter, year; also consider recent test takers who have qualified but not yet joined.
- All members, local members. Depending on the size of group and area, you may want to invite all Local Group members to attend. Large groups and those over a large geographic area may have local area gatherings targeted towards a more specific geography, or others may invite all members.
- Existing members: A specific group of “New Member Welcome Committee” volunteers. It is OK and even encouraged to hand-pick local members to attend new member events. These should be welcoming members that can even be considered part of a “new member welcoming committee,” mentors, Local Group officers, etc.

- Places responsibility for welcoming new members on the group instead of one individual.
- Responsibilities can be divided according to member preference/skill: organizing, contacting, set up, clean up, hosting, etc.
- More new ideas may be generated by members of a group than one person.
- Create a positive experience for all members.
- Develop skills and provide more opportunities for smaller volunteer roles.

Promoting Your Group's Activities

Encouraging Attendance

It's natural for most people to be at least a little bit nervous in coming into a new situation, especially if they have inflated expectations ("Gosh, all these *really* smart people!"). It doesn't matter that these expectations may have little or no basis in reality; all that matters is that they are real to the new member.

In any case, there are those who need help over the hurdle of coming to their first Mensa event, and an incentive may help. There's no best way to go about this. Newbie door prizes may work for some, but it's likely that the effectiveness of incentives will vary widely among individuals. Some Local Groups have "My First Time" buttons for people attending a Mensa event for the first time. If you choose to do something, keep it simple and consider: What would (did) make you interested in coming to your first event?

In general, the most effective way to help "newbies" feel comfortable attending their first event among total strangers is to ensure that at least one person at the event is not a total stranger! If you're hosting the event, you can do this yourself; if you're not, you can encourage your event hosts to do the same thing. The proctor or testing coordinator might also be a good person to greet the newbie.

How do you do this? Reach out to new members and introduce yourself! Call (or text) new members and let them know when you're hosting your next event, or the next event you'll be attending. Ask them what kind of events they might be interested in. Let's say, for example, they show an interest in playing games. "I'm going to be at the games night at [location] on [date]," you can say. "The event starts at 4 p.m., but most people don't show up until around 4:30 or 5. Why don't you meet me outside the house at 4:30 p.m., and we'll walk in together? That way I can introduce you around to the other people there." Or, if the event is going to be at a restaurant, offer to meet outside the restaurant at a specific time. Tell the new member what you'll be wearing, or send a photograph of yourself, so he or she will recognize you and will have a "shepherd" to escort him or her into the event. (Even for the most outgoing and confident, it can be intimidating to walk into a restaurant and sit yourself down at a table full of strangers, no matter how welcoming!) Whenever you take this approach, a day or so before the event, call or text the member and remind him or her of your plans. When you have specific plans in place, the member is less likely to back out at the last minute.

This is one reason having a new-member meeting (dinner or event) can be so helpful. When you hold a regular new-member event, monthly or quarterly, new members are more likely to attend because they know that other new members will be there, and they won't be walking into a "clique" situation where everyone (except the new member) knows everyone else. Once you get the new members to show up, work on forging connections. Make sure that you recruit one or two outgoing and friendly veteran members, preferably those who attend many in-person events, to come to your new-member event. That way you can make personal connections between the new member and veteran members who are likely to be at upcoming events. Encourage the exchange of contact information, whether it's exchanging phone numbers or email addresses or "friending" each other on Facebook. The more people the new member feels like he or she knows in the group, and at an event, the more likely the new member is to be comfortable showing up.

Online Groups

Because the average age of new members hovers right around the late-20s, it's impossible to overstate how important it is for your group to promote events through online means. It's infinitely more likely that younger (newer) members will show up to events if they are invited electronically. In addition, many older members are also active online. And as we just mentioned, new members are more likely to attend events if they feel like they know people who will be at the events — and "knowing" event attendees can be as simple as having "met," interacted with, and conversed with in an online forum. Many new members become Facebook "friends" with group members before becoming real-life friends with them.

There are two online tools that have proven to be the most popular and successful mediums to date for promoting events, and each is discussed below. Other methods being utilized by groups include email lists, Google calendars, and interactive group websites.

- Meetup (meetup.com):** A great way to promote your events is Meetup. Meetup is an online tool that is specifically designed for organizing events, so it has a ton of features that Facebook events don't have. The only drawback to Meetup is cost; while Facebook is free, Meetup costs (as of November 2014) \$9.99 per month if you have fewer than 50 members (may be good for smaller groups), or \$14.99 per month for unlimited members. However, most groups can easily afford this, and the advantages of Meetup are many. (See comparison, below.) Paying for a Meetup organizer account allows you to administer up to three Meetup groups, which means you can have separate Meetup groups for different subsets of your membership, such as youth, members, or prospects. Your group can have a "public" Meetup where test sessions are published, so anyone can join and sign up for test sessions, and a "private" Meetup where only members may join, and event details are only available to members of the group.
- Facebook (facebook.com):** Facebook has two primary advantages over Meetup: (1) cost (it's entirely free) and (2) market share (as of January 2014, a Pew Internet Project survey found that 74% of online adults use social networking sites, and 71% of online adults use Facebook). However, Facebook's advantage over Meetup in market share is made almost irrelevant because Meetup allows you to log in to Meetup using your Facebook account, "piggybacking" off your Facebook login credentials. That is, to use Meetup, you must *either* create a Meetup account, or log in using your Facebook account. Online users will be very familiar with the "Log in using Facebook" button, since it appears on so many sites across the Internet.

Facebook vs. Meetup comparison: Below is a comparison of the costs, features, advantages, and disadvantages of the two ways to organize group events. The "winner" in each category is shaded. Please note that all of this information is correct as of November 2014, but is subject to change on either site. (* In some categories there are differences but there are advantages and disadvantages to each, so neither group is the "winner." They are marked with an asterisk: *.)

	FACEBOOK	MEETUP
Cost	FREE	\$9.99 - \$14.99 / month for up to 3 groups
Age	13+ [but groups may allow non-Mensan parents of Young Mensans to join as "proxies" for online tools]*	18+ [but groups may allow non-Mensan parents of Young Mensans to join as "proxies" for online tools]*
Member privacy	Does not allow "anonymous" accounts or pseudonyms*	Allows "anonymous" accounts or pseudonyms*
Mensan Use	75% of Mensans using FB	25% of Mensans currently on Meetup
Group privacy	Groups or events may be*: <u>Public</u> (anyone on or off Facebook) <u>Open invite</u> (all friends of guests and anyone they invite) <u>Guests and friends</u> (people invited by any host or guest) <u>Invite only</u> (people invited by a host)	Groups may be*: <u>Open</u> (anyone can join without approval; not recommended, for privacy reasons) <u>Closed</u> (an "organizer" or administrator must approve new members; the public can view event titles, dates, and times, but cannot see event descriptions and locations, or member information, profiles, or photos)
Recurring events	Does not allow recurring events, each occurrence requires a unique event to be created.	Allows recurring events. This is perfect for many Mensa events that happen at the same place and time each month. The event automatically "recurs," meaning a new event is created each month. The host is automatically RSVPed to the event, and other members can RSVP as well.
Event photos	Allows event photos (a photo that appears on the event page, such as a picture of a previous games night for an upcoming games night)	Allows photos to be uploaded only after an event, recapping the activity.

	FACEBOOK	MEETUP
Event calendar	Does not have a dedicated event calendar for your group	Has a dedicated event calendar for your group that can be viewed online or printed
Conversations	Allows for “threaded” conversations, with “likes” and “replies”*	Allows for “threaded” conversations, with “likes” and “replies”*
Messaging	Allows for private messaging between members*	Allows for private messaging between members*
RSVPs	Doesn’t allow for RSVPs with “+1s” (or +2 or +3, etc.); doesn’t allow for limiting the number of guests; doesn’t allow for limiting the RSVP window, i.e., cutting off RSVPs a few days before the event	Allows for RSVPs with “+1s” (or +2 or +3, etc.); allows for limiting the number of guests; allows for limiting the RSVP window, i.e., cutting off RSVPs a few days before the event
Waiting lists	Doesn’t have a waiting list feature	Has both a manual and automatic waiting-list feature for events with limited spaces
Charging for events	Doesn’t allow charging for events	Allows charging for events, both using Meetup’s integrated feature for processing credit card payments and listing price/collecting payment at the event
Mailing list	Doesn’t have a group mailing list—events can be announced to members of the Facebook group via FB messaging.	Has a group mailing list (can be turned off) allowing members to post to an email list that goes to all members
Event-related questions	Doesn’t allow for event-related direct questions to attendees.	Allows event hosts to “ask” questions that must be answered when RSVPing—for example, for a potluck, “What dish will you be bringing?” or, for a plated dinner, “Would you like the chicken or the vegetarian entree?”
Event reminders	Doesn’t have emailed event reminders	Has automatic emailed event reminders for upcoming events, new events, and events you’re planning to attend
Mobile app	Has some basic functionality within the Facebook app	Has a dedicated mobile app that allows users to find directions, post and reply to comments, etc. — and is much more user-friendly than the FB app
Notification controls	Allows you to turn on and turn off event invitation notifications, and that’s it	Allows you to choose to receive emailed notifications when a new event is announced; when changes to an event you’re going to are announced; when comments are posted on an event you’re going to; to confirm that you’ve RSVPed; when photos for your events are uploaded or commented on; and more. You can also choose the frequency with which you receive reminders: As they’re sent, at most once per day, or not at all.
Hosting	Allows multiple event hosts	Allows multiple event hosts
Member participation	Doesn’t allow members to submit “suggested” events	Allows members to submit “suggested” events for approval and publication by the organizer
Ease of account creation	Easy process; should take only a few minutes	Easy process; should take only a few minutes — AND allows you to use your existing Facebook account so that you don’t have to create a Meetup.com account at all if you don’t want to.

AML Website

Another indispensable tool for promoting events to members is the Member Tracking feature on the AML website. Log on to the website and visit us.mensa.org/lead/localgroupresources/member-tracking (you can also click on Lead > Local Group Resources > Member tracking; lick on “Go to the *advanced* interface.”) Here is where you can select subsets of your group and send them emails, in just a few clicks! Here are some examples of ways to promote different types of events:

Event: Knitting Group

1. In **Filter by Interest**, select **Arts & Crafts**.
2. If more than 20 members are selected, click **Show all**.
3. Click the **Send email** button at the bottom of the list.
4. Enter your mailing address, subject, and message (inviting them to the knitting group outing). It’s a good idea to make the first few words of your subject line the name of your local group, so people immediately recognize that this is a legitimate email. Example subject line: “Central Florida Mensa: invitation to knitting group.”
5. Click **Send**.

Event: Gen-X Dinner

1. In **Filter by generation**, select **Gen-X**.
2. Repeat Steps 2 through 5, above. Again, in the subject line, it’s a good idea to specifically identify the event: “Central Florida Mensa: Gen-X dinner this Saturday!”

Event: Marketing to a specific area

1. In **Filter by zip code**, enter one or more zip codes. To enter multiple zip codes, enter them separated by commas, *without* spaces: “32809,32812,34747”. This can be very useful for promoting an event in an underserved area of your local group, an area that doesn’t have a lot of events or a lot of active members.
2. Repeat Steps 2 through 5, above. In the subject line, make sure you point out that the event is nearby: “Central Florida Mensa: brunch being held in your area next Sunday!”
3. As you can see, the AML tool is very powerful, very flexible, and very useful in quickly and easily promoting your events in a specific and personal way. Reaching out to members in such a personal way — referencing specific interests or where the member lives — is much more effective than the “shotgun approach” of emailing everyone and anyone. When a member constantly receives invitations to events that are four or five hours away from where they live, it can make them feel that they’re not valued individually.

Calendar of Events

Despite all the talk so far about online participation and tools, the most important way to communicate with your members is your local newsletter, primarily because the printed newsletter is considered the official publication of your group. It’s important that the members of your group who aren’t online with Mensa — those who subscribe to your newsletter in print only — are not disenfranchised by events being planned exclusively online. A good suggestion is to require that in order to promote events online, they must first be timely submitted to the group newsletter so that they appear in print *and* online. Occasionally, a last-minute event can be planned on Meetup or Facebook, but generally, the online tools should be used as a tool to help plan, manage, and promote your events — *not* as a replacement for publishing them in print.

Here’s where you (or whoever is hosting the event) will be working with your newsletter editor, calendar editor, and/or programs editor, if your group has one or more of these positions filled by someone other than you. Make sure that you submit your events to the appropriate person far enough in advance that people can make plans.

When submitting an event for publication in the calendar, always have a contact person (with full name, phone, and email) for each activity, and encourage people to call, email, or text ahead (be sure to note whether the person hosting the event accepts text messages). It’s a good idea to have a full description for

each event with clear expectations and directions, if necessary. Make sure you note things like whether the venue, if it's someone's home, has pets (for the allergic) or lots of stairs (for the disabled).

Variety of Offerings

A common criticism of Mensa is that all the events seem to center around food. That's often true, but there's a valid reason for this: Food is a universal. Everyone eats. When you're trying to serve a group of Mensans who range in age from preschoolers to great-grandparents, there are few activities aside from eating that all can share in equally. However, that's not to say that you shouldn't strive for more varied offerings in your calendar. Especially if you have a number of people willing and able to host events, you should work toward offering many different types of activities so as to appeal to the greatest possible number of members.

This can include dinners, lunches, or brunches at restaurants; "active" events like mini-golf, bowling, trampolining, football, kickball, or even skydiving or trapeze lessons; fun events like outings to theme parks or go-kart tracks; crafty events like a knitting group, ceramics or painting, or chocolate-making; intellectual get-togethers like book clubs, research discussion groups, speaker presentations, museum outings or debate groups; or other fun events like going to the movies or concerts. Really, anything can be a Mensa get-together — as long as it's Mensans getting together, the conversation is bound to be interesting and unique!

Transportation Information

In locales where public transportation is available, consider, if practical, having events reasonably close to transportation venues. In other locales, offering a ride to their first function can help a new member say yes. Consider people who may have no personal transportation or who may wish to carpool, and provide a contact person as a nexus for this. In any case, provide clear, concise directions. It's always good to use both landmarks (trees, buildings, commercial signs, etc.) and coordinates (cross streets) in giving directions.

Additionally, strongly suggest that people use Internet maps too, notably Google Maps. Don't forget to remind people about new roads, subdivisions or temporary situations not indicated on the map that may render it inaccurate. If the New Members' Party is held in a brand-new house in a brand-new subdivision, the location may not yet exist on the map. Worse, in trying to find it, the mapping software may send you to a different location. One more thing: it's a good idea to ask another person who knows the route read the directions before they are printed to ensure accuracy and clarity; you want to preclude a kerfuffle in the event of a "silly" error that prevents people from arriving safely and on time.

Meetings in Public Venues

Meetings can take place in private homes or in public venues, anywhere really! While there are pros and cons for all venue types, groups are encouraged to host at least some of their new member events in public venues. Survey data of Mensa shows that only half of new members are comfortable attending events in a private home, while most are comfortable with events in public spaces.

Some groups regularly meet in public venues and overcome the awkward "Where the heck is the Mensa group?" experience in clever ways. For example, they include a note in the calendar description of the event that says, "Look for the yellow octopus on the table," or "There'll be a large owl poster on the door."

Make your event easy to find. Go to the door and look around to anticipate how and where a new member might become lost, then fix the potential problem. Alternatively, post a sign, ask a friendly member wearing a Mensa name badge to greet new members, tip off the restaurant host, etc.

New Member Orientation

When reaching out to new members, this is a great opportunity to orient them to Mensa.

Local Group (LG) Resources

Some LGs create a new member handbook which includes whatever they consider important, this can be any of the following, and should be adjusted to reflect your local group:

- Current officers and contacts
- Regular events
- Information about Regional Gatherings (RGs) and Annual Gatherings (AGs)
- List and explanations of/for Mensa abbreviations and phrases
- Expected behavioral norms
- LG bylaws
- List of important URLs
- List of local Special Interest Groups (SIGs)
- Blurb about Local, Regional, National distinctions

National Resources

- **Mensa Bulletin:** Explain when they can expect it, how they can make submissions, and about special issues containing more information about SIGs and National Officers.
- **us.mensa.org:** A quick overview of the American Mensa website may be helpful. New members will get a welcome kit from American Mensa when they join, but you may be reaching them ahead of that or you may be a nice reinforcement of the information they received. It can be helpful to explain to new members about their making data privacy decisions and clicking the appropriate buttons for their personal profile. Encourage new members to allow use of their email address, at least within Mensa. This makes it possible for them to receive electronic messages, newsletters, announcements, benefits, etc.
- **Special Interest Groups (SIGs):** Many members' primary, or only, participation in Mensa is through one or more SIGs, nationally registered groups established to form voluntary associations with other Mensans who share an interest. Given the great diversity of interests, and therefore of SIGs, it is likely that some SIG will be of interest to a member. To access a current list of national SIGs, log on to the AML website and visit <http://www.us.mensa.org/connect/sigs/sig-listing>. Some LGs have locally active groups that meet to share a special interest. It is a good idea to publicize them in your newsletter as, e.g., "Tiddlywink Teamsters" rather than the "Tiddlywink SIG," to distinguish it from being a national SIG. Consider checking on local or national special interest groups to see if they have a pulse before referring new members.

Debunking Myths about IQ Clubs

Mensans are not substantially different from most other people, and those ways they are different can be discovered on one's own, whether it's a finely honed sense of humor, playfulness, especially with language, or an inordinate curiosity in various matters. In any case, when presenting information to new members, candidates or prospects, or even the general public, be balanced and down-to-earth. When presenting information to new members, especially regarding their first Mensa meeting, light-heartedness and an upbeat attitude always work, and it's difficult to be too positive or too brief. Just be "natural," do your best to make people feel at ease, and you'll have done your job well.

Serving Remote Members

Characteristics of Remote Members

“Remote” members are those who feel that they are too far away from the population center(s) of a Local Group to participate in person at events, meetings, and activities. There is no magic mile indicator that makes a member remote, it is based on whether they feel that their geographical location is a detriment to their local group participation. A remote member could be someone who lives hundreds of miles from the nearest Mensa member, or someone who is separated from the population center of the Local Group by a large geographical element, like a lake or a mountain. A remote member may also be one who lives in a good-sized city that doesn’t happen to have any other current Mensa members living there.

It’s the feeling of remoteness that creates the issues associated with these members. They often feel disenfranchised by a lack of opportunities to connect in person with other Mensans, or by reading about other members having fun together. They may consider leaving the organization because they don’t feel they are getting the same amount of attention as members closer to the Local Group’s population center.

Why Remote Members Join Mensa

Remote members join for the same reason that many other members do. They want to be a part of an organization that celebrates intelligence. They want intellectual stimulation, camaraderie, improved career opportunities, or perhaps to meet a life partner. Many join while they live in a geographically dense location, but move to a more rural area. Some members believe that with 1 in 50 people qualifying for Mensa, there is a good chance that even though they live in a remote area, there will be many Mensa members living around them. Just because they live far away from a concentration of your members, and they do not attend events, do not assume that they are not socially inclined. They may just be waiting and wishing for the opportunity to meet local members in person.

Show Remote Members They Are Important

It’s important to make consistent contact with remote members, even more important than it is to keep in touch with members who live nearby but do not attend anything. While members who live close to events feel like they can choose to attend any time, remote members often feel that they do not have a choice.

When new members join your Local Group, contact them and let them know up front if any Mensa members live in their immediate area, even if it is just a couple. In addition, contact those other remote members and let them know that a new Mensa member is in their area. If there is an Area Coordinator or another active member that is close, encourage them to schedule an event to get those members to meet each other.

Contact them by phone or email periodically, even to just ask how they are all doing. Let them know that the Local Group is thinking about them. Ask them where they think the good marketing opportunities are in their town, and enlist them to help with marketing and testing in those areas. If you hear of a flood, tornado, fire or other disaster in those areas, reach out and make sure they are doing well. Appoint a committee to keep in touch with remote members.

Supporting Area Coordinators

One way to support a member base in the remote areas is to appoint an Area Coordinator. An Area Coordinator is a member who lives in an area that is difficult to cover with events by other active members and officers. An Area Coordinator should be the first to know if any new member or offers of membership happen in their area. Their name and contact information should be printed in your newsletter. If your local group is financially healthy, you may assign them a budget to hold events.

It’s important to also let your Area Coordinators know that your other local officers are supporting them, by periodic contact. Do not just assume that an Area Coordinator will be able to do everything in their area without help.

Scheduling Local Events to Encourage Remote Member Attendance

There are many remote members who would love to attend local events, but find it prohibitive by distance or time. Local events held on weeknights or late on weekends often discourage remote members who work or don't want to drive long distances late at night. In order to encourage event participation by people who have to drive long distances, schedule them on weekends, starting later in the day and ending early in the evening. While this is not practical for all events, it would be quite easy for a local group picnic or games day to be scheduled in this way. Also consider remote member travel time when scheduling business meetings.

Many times, remote members need to plan ahead to be able to travel and attend an event that may take an entire day out of their schedule. Be cognizant and respectful of their time, and schedule main events at least two months in advance.

Another obvious idea is to schedule events in their area, and encourage carpooling and local officer attendance. Even one event a year where several people travel to remote areas is often appreciated by the members who live there. Some local groups have a travelling SIG that schedules an event in a different remote area every month. Do not feel that one member alone needs to coordinate this kind of traveling event as it might also be difficult for any one person to travel around that much.

Ask your local active members and officers to consider scheduling local event in remote areas when they travel that direction on business or for pleasure. If you are passing through an area at mealtime, contact those local member and ask them to meet you – even if you don't have the lead time to schedule an official event.

Use the AML web page member search to find out the answers to the members' personal data questionnaire. This lists their general interests, so you can especially encourage them to events that match their interests.

Design Your Newsletter to Include Remote Members

If you have an Area Coordinator, encourage them to write a monthly column about events in that area. If they don't hold events every month, ask them to interview an area member, or feature local community events that may attract all members. Be sure to have your Area Coordinator's contact information in every issue.

For areas that do not have official coordinators, officers or members can take turns writing about various areas. If you do a travelling or remote event, be sure to write it up in your newsletter and print lots of photos.

Print a map of your local group's service area in the newsletter or put it on the website. Keep those outlying areas in the minds of all officers and non-remote members, and let the remote members know that they are always part of the group.

Engaging Remote Members Online

First and foremost, keep your website updated. It's easy to disenfranchise a remote member if their only regular contact outside of the monthly newsletter is out-of-date. Mention all areas, and show your full service area map. You'd like your remote members to see that if they suddenly have a reason to travel close to your geographic center, that they can check the calendar and attend an event if there is one. Let remote members know that if they do happen to be in town sometime, that you will help them schedule an event or round up local members at the last minute.

There are many venues where Mensa members congregate online. Currently, main services include the AML Forum (community.us.mensa.org), YahooGroups, Facebook, and Twitter. Help your remote members, especially new ones, find a Mensa home online to keep them involved on a regular basis. Visit these locations yourself, then recommend your favorites to your remote members.

On the AML web site, search for the member in the online member search and view their personal data questionnaire answers. With this information, you can skim the Special Interest Groups list and recommend online SIGs that fit with the remote member's interests.

Set up a Facebook page, online group, or another congregation venue online for your Local Group, send them a personal invitation, and help them introduce themselves to the group. If your group has a Facebook page, look the new member up in the Facebook directory and invite them directly.

What About Remote Members on the Boundaries of Other Groups?

If your remote member is near the boundary of another a group, show them how to look up the newsletters of that local group, as well as find their web page. If there is an Area Coordinator for the other group that is near them, contact that Area Coordinator to let them know about the new member. Also, let them know that they can preference into another local group if they are closer to an active area. Our primary purpose is service to the member, even if it means transferring a member out of our own local group.

Are There Other Ways to Get Remote Members Involved?

The best way to serve remote members is to market and test in that area, and help build a healthy member list in what was formerly a “remote” area. This can be done a number of ways outlined in the membership manual, but member retention in remote areas is the best way to start that core of growth.

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Resources

Example of New Member Welcome Letter (Typed/ Mailed Note)

Name,

Welcome to Mensa and to your local chapter, Piedmont Area Mensa (PAM). We are so happy to have you with us. Our full and diverse calendar offers many opportunities for you to get involved. Your Mensa membership will mean much more to you if you come to events and meet other Mensans. Piedmont Area Mensa is active and friendly. We encourage you to bring friends or family. You and your guests will be warmly welcomed at all our activities.

I am including a list of PAM's regularly occurring events with descriptions and typical attendance and also some basic Mensa facts and expressions. You'll want to save these for future reference.

In addition to numerous social activities, Piedmont Area Mensa participates in a scholarship program and we are sometimes involved in service projects. For some intellectual stimulation, there's a monthly speaker meeting, discussion group and a book club. You can test (or flaunt) your knowledge participating on a CultureQuest® team every April.

Each year, our group hosts a Regional Gathering (RG), which brings Mensans from all over the country. An RG is Mensa at its best! From intellectual programming to frivolity, there is something for everyone. The most recent gathering in Greenville drew 120 Mensans and guests from all around the country. The next Piedmont Area Mensa RG will be May 1-3 at the Drury Inn and Suites in Greenville. Our committee is hard at work and some have already registered for the event.

Many have described joining Mensa as a homecoming, one of life's best decisions. I hope this will be true for you. Our local website, www.piedmontareamensa, will tell more about your local group. You may learn more about American Mensa by visiting www.us.mensa.org.

We are looking forward to getting to know you.

Sincerely,

Mary Ann Cox
Piedmont Area Mensa Membership Officer
(email)
(phone number)

Example of Reinstating Member Welcome Letter (typed or emailed note)

Dear Name,

Welcome back to Mensa. We are happy to have you back in our local group. We hope you will be able to attend some events when you are in our area. You are welcome to bring family or friends. Piedmont Area Mensa is an active and friendly group with many opportunities to get involved.

I am attaching the latest issue of our newsletter, the PAMphlet. I am also sending you information about our regularly occurring events, our regional gathering, plus some other information about our group and Mensa in general.

You are invited every Wednesday to a Greenville restaurant for a purely social get-together known as the Bored Meeting. (By Wednesday many of us are bored and need the company of our friends.) About 20 Mensans, family, and friends usually show up. People come at various times, a few as early as 5:00 and others later in the evening. Greenville Bored Meetings begin with happy hour at the bar. At 6:30 some of us get a table and eat dinner. It's fine to come for drinks only, for dinner only, or for both. The conversations are always lively. Events also are held monthly in the Anderson, Greenwood and Spartanburg areas.

Please check out our monthly speaker meetings, which offer an interesting variety of programs. A discussion group meets monthly in our home. Occasionally, we go as a group to educational sites or meet to play games or to see a play or movie. We sponsor a scholarship program and have been involved in several local service projects. We had five teams participating in CultureQuest® this year, phenomenal for a group of our size. If you like trivia, you may want to play on a team next year.

Every year Piedmont Area Mensa hosts a regional gathering. The 2015 RG in Greenville drew 121 Mensans and friends from 15 all around the nation

To learn more about what's been going on, please visit our website, www.piedmontareamensa.org. If you have questions, please get in touch. We look forward seeing you.

Sincerely,

Mary Ann Cox, PAM Membership Officer
(phone)
(email)

Example1 of New Member Welcome Email

Name,

Hi, I'm Stephanie Link, Membership Officer of the local group. Congratulations on joining and welcome to Boston Area Mensa!

We have many activities and events planned for the local group. You should begin receiving The Beacon (our local newsletter) starting later this month. Each month in the newsletter you'll find a listing of activities as well as articles about what's going on in the group. I encourage you to also join our Meetup group, where you can find the most up to date information on events, contact event organizers, and RSVP/chat with other attendees. To join, go to www.meetup.com/BostonMensa.

I'm hosting quarterly "New Member Mingle" events around town, and would like to invite you to join our next one on (date and time). This quarter we'll be meeting at_____. Mensa is providing some snacks/appetizers for everyone to enjoy, and some of our current members will also be joining to welcome you to the group!

If you are on Facebook, you can connect with other members of the local group via our Facebook page, found here: www.facebook.com/groups/31657001771.

I'll try to call you in the next few days, to see if you have any questions or just want to chat. If you want to contact me, my e-mail is [\(email\)](#).

Hope to see you at an event soon.

Stephanie Link
Membership Officer, Boston Mensa

Example 2 of New Member Welcome Email

Dear Mensa Member,

Welcome to San Francisco Regional Mensa!

Whether you are renewing your membership, transferring or moving to our area, reinstating your membership, or joining for the first time, I want to make sure you feel at home here. The best information is on our website, www.sfmensa.org, and the national website, www.us.mensa.org.

Soon, you'll receive our local monthly newsletter, the Intelligencer, as well as the monthly national magazine, the Mensa Bulletin. The Intelligencer has a lot of good local information, as well as a calendar of events for the upcoming month. Many events occur on a regular, monthly basis, plus there is an annual weekend-long Regional Gathering. The Bulletin has a lot of interesting articles, and also lists a lot of national events, such as the Annual Gathering.

To view the most recent calendar of events from the Intelligencer, visit www.sfmensa.org/events/index.html. If you would prefer to receive the Intelligencer via email, sign up at www.sfmensa.org/SFRM-Intelligencer. Since the Intelligencer is printed about one month in advance, I encourage you to sign up for our online event announcement groups, so that you can get the latest event information right away for most of our events, including any last-minute updates or announcements of new events.

We also have two online discussion groups for those who would like to participate (or just lurk). Note that **all** of our online groups are **private** and are for current Mensa members only (all join requests for these groups will be verified against our list of current members), so there's no need to be concerned about outsiders having access to our postings and discussions.

Here are other ways to connect:

- **Announcements** (announcements and updates via email for most events): www.sfmensa.org/SFRM-News.
- **Meetup** (for up-to-date listings and updates for many events, plus the ability to RSVP): www.sfmensa.org/meetup
- **Facebook** (for some event listings and discussions): Sign up at www.sfmensa.org/facebook.
- **Main Discussion group** (lightly moderated topical discussion via email): www.sfmensa.org/SFRM-Discussion.

If you're interested in attending our events, it's best to join SFRM News and Meetup at the very least (see above for how to join), so as to get an up-to-date view of most of our local events. Not all events are listed on any one group, and some events are posted online only (especially if they are created after The Intelligencer gets printed). Note that you can sign up for our online groups with **any** valid email address.

I wish for you all the amazing experiences I have had in my years of Mensa membership, but it is up to you to make contact. There are opportunities for friendship, intellectual stimulation, fun, volunteering satisfaction and much more, if you pursue it. If you have any questions, please feel free to email me at (email).

Thanks again for joining our local chapter, and, once again, welcome to San Francisco Regional Mensa!

Barry Krasner
Membership Officer

Example of Mentor/Interest Match Survey

This information will be used in matching you with a mentor.

Name _____

Phone _____ **Email** _____

Best way to contact you _____

Do you speak a foreign language? ___ No ___ Yes: Language _____

What is your profession? _____

What were your favorite academic subjects in high school? _____

Favorites: Music style/Groups _____

Movies _____

Books _____

Sports _____

Hobbies/other interests _____

Personal and career goals _____

What do you hope to accomplish as a member? _____

Why did you decide to join? _____

When you think about communicating with your mentor, how do you envision the relationship?

___ More casual – we will contact each other when we want to talk, knowing that the other person will be available for me when needed.

___ More structured – we will schedule phone calls, e-mails, or personal meetings to ensure we keep up with one another.

___ Other: _____

___ I want to be matched with someone who has attended graduate school.

___ I want to be matched with someone who has a leadership position in Mensa.

Describe your personality or anything of interest about yourself in the space provided: