

## AFA MEMBERSHIP 101

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# GUIDE I - AFA MEMBERSHIP 101

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## A. What is Membership?

The real bottom line and the reason you are reading this booklet is that MEMBERSHIP is the job you have in your chapter. But it's more than that. Membership is a word which means different things to different people as a brief look quickly shows us.



### **Membership is a feeling.**

Membership is first of all the state of being a member. Does this sound redundant and simple? Perhaps so, but, it's very basic to everything we do in membership. It has to do with belonging to a group and with wanting to be a part of something. It's about how people feel and whether they get what they're looking for from the group they've joined.

This is the part of membership that has to do with why you join and why you renew. It's different for almost everyone. Even your friends have different reasons. Ask them. Get to appreciate what **really** motivates the members of your chapter.

For some it's AFA's active support of the role aerospace power plays in maintaining national defense. For others it's the association's support for Air Force people. For still others it's AFA's educational outreach... or AIRFORCE Magazine... or insurance... or chapter membership. And so it goes. Write it down. Seriously, write it down because it's what you have to sell to the people you know in the place where you live.



### **Membership is motivating people to join.**

You need to know what motivates people because membership is motivating people to join. Membership means getting a person to give you some of their money to join your group. For some, just telling them that AFA exists is enough. But for most well, there's no other way to say it. You have to sell them. You have to work to help them develop a belief in the value and desirability of being an AFA member. In short, you have to somehow induce them to make a purchase of a year's membership. That, regardless of what you call it, is sales.



### **Membership is strength.**

Membership is also the total number of people who belong to that group. We talk about “The Membership” of the Chapter or of AFA as being a certain number. It is mathematical. This is the easiest part of membership to deal with because you can count it. People like to tell other people how large their group is. The larger the group, the more “clout” it has, locally and nationally.

Numbers also translate to money — to rebate and support payments to the chapter from national. This part is very satisfying. People like to keep track of it. The Treasurer gets to report it and to use it to help finance chapter programming.



### **Membership is what the Constitution says it is.**

Membership is a legal, constitutional status. In that sense, not everyone in AFA is a “member”. Some of those who belong are Patrons. Many people do not like to think about this difference — or deal with it. But it is real. Membership people have to realize it. And we also have to remember we have other different words we use to describe members — service, regular, charter, salute and cadet — and what each one means.



### **Membership is a chapter job.**

Finally, it all comes back to the fact that membership is the job you — or someone you know — now has in the chapter.

## **B. What Do I Have to Do as Chapter Membership Chairman?**

Basically you need to have knowledge and an action plan to keep membership growing — OR, and this is important, — where to go to find the answers. More specifically...

- ❖ Have the right membership materials and handbooks on hand.
- ❖ Know the mechanics, rules, definitions and procedures of the membership business.
- ❖ Set up a continuing membership program which will keep the chapter growing. This means maintain a constant momentum throughout the year and be ready to pass the programs on to your replacement, since the chapter operating year, usually October 1 through September 30 is not the same as the membership year. **The membership year runs from July 1 through June 30. (During the year of transition, 2000–2001, the year will run from March 31, 2000 through June 30, 2001.**

But every, single, active chapter member (or at least all of those on the Executive Council) should be helping you by acting as a membership person in promoting and selling people on what AFA is and showing them why they will want to join.

### **C. Where Do I Start?**

You can't organize what you don't know. Please — even if you're a long-time member or an experienced chapter official — take the time to review these points. You can never be too well informed about the organization and product you represent.



Know AFA! Ideally many people will want to join AFA once they understand what it stands for. But someone must be prepared to tell that story. You must be able to tell them what they will gain by joining — in terms that are meaningful to THEM, individually. AFA is not a personal benefits organization. But most prospects still want to see some value to them personally.

Your job is simply to help them find that value. It need not always be a tangible benefit. It may be a concern for defense and aerospace issues. It may be participation in a veterans' organization or a patriotic group. It may be a desire to associate within the Air Force family. It may be satisfying a feeling of obligation they have toward those who are serving in the armed forces. It may be for chapter activities. It may be for base-community relations. It may be for the magazine ... or the insurance ... or for any number of other things. But if the renewing member or potential member doesn't have a reason, you have to be able to provide it.



Learn how to get people interested! — How to talk AFA! — How to sell AFA! Remember the personal touch — the human voice and personal contact — is what impresses people. Passing out brochures is better than nothing, but it is simply not enough. Be prepared to TALK AFA. As we just mentioned, you know that reasons for joining vary widely. One person may do it just for the almanac issue of AIR FORCE Magazine and think the insurance and other benefits are useless. His or her neighbor may think just the opposite. You, as a real person — a friend — can help your prospect find enough value in AFA that they'll want to be a part of us.

Know the rules! You also need to know the mechanics of membership. We don't ask you to design the plane, but there are a few basics of keeping it flying that are needed. Who can be a member? What does it cost? How do I find out if I'm in your chapter? How do I change my chapter affiliation?

You get the idea. Now ask yourself, how many members are lost because the member or prospect becomes disenchanted when no one can explain these sorts of basics? How many members fail to renew because no one can read the chapter roster? How many Community Partners are lost because no one understands how the program works? AFA membership isn't complicated, but there are a few rules and the person who must know them is the membership chairperson.



Know your chapter programs! One of the most effective tools you have to promote AFA is the schedule of chapter events and programs you put on during the year. How many people might become interested or stay interested if they are personally invited to or involved in a truly effective program? And for those who rely exclusively on written invitations — consider how many of those you accept compared to a personal invitation by a friend or acquaintance?

Of course many people are adamant - they don't want to go to programs. That's O.K. Most organizations never see the vast majority of their members at an event. But many of them would be interested to know about the awards and scholarships that they — as chapter members — help to sponsor and how those benefit the Air Force or their community.



Know where to find the answers! No one can really know all of this stuff! That's true. But everyone can know where to find out. One of AFA's best sources for information is its website, [www.afa.org](http://www.afa.org). AFA also sends out a lot of publications — manuals, handbooks, brochures and newsletters. Just like any other set of instructions, each of them has something worth knowing. You don't have to memorize it, but you should have your own file — and you should read (or at least scan) each one once. But many of these never get to the membership chairperson. In that case, what can you do?

- 1) Realize that we send most of the information to the field through the person designated **BY YOUR CHAPTER** to receive chapter mail. Often it is the president. But you should know who it is for **YOUR** chapter. Then remind that person that you're there and interested in the membership materials.
- 2) Talk with your predecessor to see if you have all of the files. There may be copies of old brochures, membership handbooks or previous membership campaigns the chapter has run. Never reinvent the wheel when a suitable alternative is available. (And make sure your successor has a file to inherit.)
- 3) Ask for help. Call National Headquarters (1 -800-727-3337) and ask either Member Services or Membership for the specific publications or information you need. Don't lose a prospect because you're not prepared.



Build a Membership File! Keep anything that helps! Possible materials come from such a wide variety of sources, even within AFA, that it's impractical to republish all of them every year. But, by the simple expedient of starting your own file, you can build something which will work for **YOU** and **YOUR CHAPTER**. Some suggestions include the following:

- ❖ Field Operations Guidebook — THE source for details of chapter administration. Chapter 12 covers Membership.
- ❖ Chapter Operations Handbook — your basic “How-To” manual. Chapter 8 contains excellent basic suggestions for membership programs.
- ❖ Chapter Operational Planning Guide — a handy checklist to use in both planning and evaluating your organization and checking to see if you’ve covered all the details.
- ❖ The Community Partner Program Guidebook — the “how it works” for the Community Partner Program, including information on awards.
- ❖ The Membership Action Plan developed by the National Membership Committee.
- ❖ Newsline — the national operational update for field leaders often contains updates and notices you will need to know about.
- ❖ Website — [www.afa.org](http://www.afa.org)
- ❖ AFA Fact Sheet
- ❖ Membership Awards Fact Sheet
- ❖ Current Membership Brochure and Application
- ❖ Benefits Booklet and samples of the ones your target groups might be interested in
- ❖ Current copy of the AFA Constitution

And the following which you and your chapter should create.

- ❖ Chapter Fact Sheet — if one doesn’t exist, write it!
- ❖ Chapter Membership Plan — write one

... and anything else you can think of that might be helpful in your chapter situation.



Have a Plan! To bring everything together, as with everything else in chapter operations, you must have some kind of plan for membership acquisition (getting new members) and membership retention (keeping as many as you can of the ones you’ve already got). Again, depending on chapter size, location and the goals of your Executive Council, this can be a complex plan or a simple one. And again, whatever you choose is fine — so long as there is a plan.

- ❖ What kind of goals should you have? A good way to start is to find out what it takes to qualify for a national award. Check the most recent awards memo (or call headquarters.) Perhaps, though, your situation calls for something different — perhaps you need a “building” year before making a concerted push. Perhaps your local base is closing or shrinking and your chapter makeup is changing radically. Take that into account. But have an overall goal so that your membership plan can set measurable, achievable goals of its own.

Designing that plan means you have to know the mechanics of membership — gains, losses, acquisition, retention, affiliation and rosters.

# THE MECHANICS OF MEMBERSHIP

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Membership is a continuous task in any membership organization. That's because there will always be new people coming in and people leaving. That's true of every organization — not just AFA.

## **A. Why Do We Always Have To Get So Many New Members?**

It might help to think of the membership challenge as trying to keep a certain level in a barrel — but a barrel with a hole at the bottom. To just stay even you have to either close the hole to minimize loss or put some in the top to replace what leaks out.

Minimizing losses is another way of saying retention. Finding new members to replace losses is new member acquisition.

This all sounds simple. Just close down the leak — keep those people from leaving — and then all your new members will be part of your growth program. With membership solved, you're ready for your next challenge. Right?

In real life it's not a simple "either/or" decision. The people who try to close the leak down completely soon find it's just not possible. People move, people pass away and people just plain lose interest. And they must be replaced.

So just staying even in membership is not a static condition but a dynamic one. It's the actual net result of your retention and acquisition efforts. If you get 10 in the top and lose 10 out of the bottom, your membership total doesn't change in spite of the activity. Lose 20 out the bottom and you've got a net loss of 10.

## **B. How Many New Members Do I Need ... or Are Enough ... or ... ?**

Membership awards and chapter requirements are based on new members. So that number is one way to guide your thinking about how many new members you need.

Another way to understand new members, though, is to look at how acquisition and retention work together for an average chapter.

As the Membership Person for AFA's "National Average" Chapter, Number 001, I can make a few predictions about what will happen to my members.

<u>Type Member</u>	<u>Expected Renewal Rate</u>
Annual	85%
Three Year	85%
Patron	70%
“First Time” Member	40%
Salute	20%

I know that my number of Cadets will be largely dependent on the success of the Arnold Air Society recruiting program and my Chapter’s relations with the professor of Aerospace Science. If those programs stay about the same, my numbers will too.

I know that I have Life Members and Three Year Members not due for renewal this year. Putting it all together I see an overall rate of people who will stay with AFA.

<u>Type Members</u>	<u>Expected Persistency</u>
Everyone!	80%

Put another way, as the Membership Person, I know that I will lose 2 out of every 10 members I start the year with. So, if I want to break even, my task is to recruit new members to replace the ones I’m losing and that’s 2 new members for every 10 I have on the books at the beginning of the membership year... OR...

20	for every	100
200	for every	1,000

... (OR more than I really want to think about)...

... just to break even

... and, if your chapter is to get larger, you’ll want to add even more new members beyond your break even point.

### “But My Chapter is Not ‘Average’”

Of course you feel that way. So do a lot of other people, and truer words were never spoken. Each AFA chapter is unique. However, there are still things that are more or less true as you go around the country.

❖ Some chapters are near Air Force bases

They have more service members ... and Salute members.

Most Salute members are service members. Salute and service members renew at a lesser rate than regular members. So if you have more annual service members or Salute members, you have a greater opportunity to make increased retention work for you ...

... or to recruit more new members. The highest concentration of those most likely to join (or re-join) AFA is around bases — active duty, civilian employees of the DoD and retired.

❖ Some chapters are nowhere near a base.

Their membership is likely to be more stable. Their renewal rates should be above the national average, so they lose fewer but ...

... are faced with fewer good prospects for new members.

❖ Some chapters will find they have a large annual turnover.

❖ Some have a fairly steady membership activity all year round.

❖ Some have a seasonal fluctuation to take into account. This is particularly true for chapters which rely heavily on a base drive or Arnold Air Society cadets.

And the list of differences goes on .... No chapter is “average” so the challenge is to find out what YOUR chapter is like. Even if you think you know, go through the exercise. You might be surprised.

### **C. Where Do I Start?**

You have to start by figuring out the pattern of YOUR chapter membership. You need some basic information to do that. You need the names of the people in your chapter, the monthly changes to those names and the monthly and quarterly numerical totals.

National sends this information to the person designated in your chapter to receive chapter mail. Do you know who that is? If not, make sure you find out. Make sure the person who gave you the membership job makes these things available to you each month as he or she receives them.

## D. How Do I Know Who's In The Chapter?

Start by knowing who is already in the chapter, who has recently arrived, which memberships are due to expire and when members move away.

To learn this, find your most recent chapter membership roster. These are published by national in January (current as of December 31) and July (current as of June 30) of each year. Then find the membership update rosters. These are published each month.

Ideally, they work together roughly like a bank statement. Start with the full roster and make the changes indicated on each update roster. For example, add those coming in, subtract those leaving and make any other changes indicated.

❖ NOTE: The results will not always be exact. You will not always be able to “balance” your roster to the last member. That’s because there are some changes which the computer will not print on the chapter rosters, even though they’ve taken place. These changes should be on the next full chapter roster.

Your Field Operations Guidebook (Chapter 14) contains great “how to” instructions for using the rosters. You also get a cover memorandum with each one which tells you about any new information or changes you should look for.

Some chapters use the rosters to create their own, separate database. Some chapters use them directly. But more to the point, some chapters do not use them at all and cannot even find them. If this describes your situation — that’s a good place to start because you really can’t do the membership job properly otherwise.

Chapter Membership Rosters are available on the AFA Website through a controlled access code. Access will be granted to one individual per chapter upon request of the chapter president. An email point of contact for access to the rosters may be obtained in the ‘Field Leader’ area of the ‘Members Only’ section of the AFA site.

The rosters are the same as the hard copy described above in an electronic format that may be imported into your own programs for manipulation and printing. These rosters are updated on a monthly basis.

Affiliation: By Request, Automatic and with an Address Change.

Affiliation — automatic and otherwise — is an important part of the constant change that goes on in your membership. You have to know how it happens — and more importantly how it affects YOUR particular chapter. The rules are easy to talk about. You can look at the Field publications for a broader treatment, but we can briefly cover the high points.

The most important thing to remember is that the member may be affiliated with any chapter he or she wishes. They just have to tell us. They do that when they join by putting the chapter name/number on their application, or at any other time by calling or writing National.

If no specific request is made, members are affiliated automatically by the computers at National. This happens when they first join and whenever they change their address. The member's zip code is matched with a master list of zip codes assigned to chapters. (This assignment of zip codes to chapters has been determined by the state presidents.) If the member needs to be moved, the computer does that and sends a card that lets them know what we've done and gives them the choice of remaining in the chapter assigned, designating a new chapter, or requesting no affiliation with a chapter, thus making him a member at large. (Most people accept automatic assignment.)

America is a mobile society, especially the part that is in the Air Force and associated with the aerospace industry. Clearly some chapters will be affected more than others by automatic affiliation/reaffiliation — and in different ways. It's helpful to know the specific effect on your chapter so that you can include it in your membership plan.

## **E. What Do I Do With All Those Names?**

You need them for a lot of good reasons — to mail newsletters to, to invite to programs and so on, but you also need to turn the individual names into a membership total.

You'll want to know how the numbers cycle in your chapter over a twelve month period. You run a fiscal budget based on last year's performance and what you expect to do this year. You need a "last year's performance" for your membership "budget", too.

You get this information from the summary at the bottom of the semi-annual roster — which is broken down by category - and at the bottom of each interim roster (see why you need these things?) Now you should be able to see a month-by-month flow.

For example ....

The "National Average" Chapter, number 001, begins the Membership Year in July. We traditionally have gained a lot of new members during the Spring membership drives — usually in April and May. Even with all the new members, that is our worst time for renewals. Most of the spring activity is in service members and in patrons representing civilians employed by the Air Force.

Membership activity tends to fall off in the Summer while people are on vacation and continues downhill through the election of new officers and through the Convention until right around Christmas when the renewals pick back up to a little better than average.

The change in AFA leadership in the Fall, especially at the chapter level, apparently makes this a difficult time to do significant recruiting. Members slow down again until the end of March.

What's your pattern? You can be even more specific than this example. Figure it out. Write it down.

**F. So What Does All This Do For Me?**

It gets YOU ready to make your membership plan for the next year. Let's face it, good membership people have been doing this kind of thing more or less intuitively for a long time. If the chapter has had a pretty good membership record, then their intuition has proved adequate.

But, just as people who are in financial difficulty are advised to make a budget — a spending and income PLAN — we can absolutely state that a chapter can benefit from having a Membership “Budget” — a retention and acquisition PLAN. This PLAN, translated to dollars of support payments and new member rebates, should also be an essential part of the chapter's annual Financial Plan.

Now you have the raw materials to put your Membership Plan together. You'll want to consider all the parts of your existing membership and plan for acquiring new members as well.

# RETENTION - MAINTAIN YOUR MEMBERSHIP BASE

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The first question you need to answer is who needs to renew? Some members and patrons — your Life and your three year people not due for renewal this year — will continue. That number will stay (unless they move away) regardless of what you do.

The number of some other memberships — Cadets and Salutes — will depend on whether the activity in those units continues at about the same level as in the past. Check with your chapter program person and with the Professor of Aerospace Science, AFA liaison, etc.

The remaining members are those who are up for your retention efforts. They're easy to find — all annual members and those three year members or patrons with expires during the current calendar year are your main retention targets.

Now that you know the pattern and mix of your chapter membership and who will be up for renewal, you're ready to design programs and activities to improve retention. First you'll want to think about what National Headquarters already does to encourage expiring members to renew so you don't duplicate efforts. For example, we often hear people say "I'll send a letter." Good idea! But letters cost money to print and to mail. Only do it after you know how many letters National already sends them.

## **A. What Does National Do To Retain Members?**

National does a lot. Read this carefully, particularly if you are a Life Member, a three year member or one who pays promptly on the first notice. If you are any of those people, you don't see all of the notices your members receive. On the other hand the people who expire get — and ignore — all of them.

National contacts the expiring member directly through the mail up to six separate times with a letter from an AFA official and a notice asking them to renew. The first notice is sent about two months before the expire date. For example, the notice arrives in May for a July expire. (The expire date is always the last day of the month.)

If headquarters hasn't received a renewal by the first day of the expire month, July in this example, a second notice goes out ... and a third the next month, and so on until the series is complete.

The expire month is also the last issue of AIR FORCE Magazine the member will receive.

The chapters know all of this is going on by looking at the expire date on the semiannual roster and also by using the special list of those who have expired and will soon be dropped on the interim update roster.

The good news is that most AFA members do renew. When they do, the renewal runs for a full 12 or 36 month term from the month in which the check is processed. (Checks received after the 25th normally are processed the next month.) And the chapters know the renewal took place from that section of the same monthly interim update roster.

If those rosters don't sound familiar, turn back a page or so and review the section on how to know who's in your chapter.

## **B. How Can The Chapter Add to National's Retention Activities?**

In spite of the good response from the national effort, the chapter can have a real effect on renewals.

One way is to make sure your members know that you are an effective, well-run chapter that does good things. Programming, publicity, newsletters — all of these things tell even the members who do not like to come to meetings that they are a part of a successful proposition.

You may want to start by sending a welcome letter to new members of your chapter. If you do, be sure to mail to both newly recruited members and those who have come to you by automatic affiliation. Outline your chapter programs and invite the member to take part. Some will respond, although you should realize most will not. The point is, though, that this effort plus regular communication through your chapter newsletter helps establish a relationship with chapter members. That in turn makes the member more likely to renew, particularly if National's renewal mailings are supplemented by a chapter letter.

The other thing that chapters can do is to establish personal contact. This is the one big thing that National cannot do. It is important in several areas.

First, it is critical that AFA renew "first-time" members. If they say "yes" a second time the likelihood increases that they will remain with AFA.

Yet AFA's renewal rate for these members is about half that of our longer term members. There are many reasons these individuals don't renew, but only the members of the chapter are in a position to contact them personally and directly — hopefully well before they expire — to try to encourage them to renew.

Personal contact also enables the chapter to use the expired and expiring names listed on the roster as a prospect list, if you are organized and take advantage of it. Former members are people who, because they have said "yes" to AFA once, are far more likely to do so again. That's a fact which every successful membership organization recognizes — and uses! Just because they haven't answered the letters from National doesn't mean they'll say no to you.

Finally, only the chapter can renew Community Partner businesses and consequently the members and patrons designated by that program. For chapters with a strong Community Partner program, continuing the renewal effort regularly is imperative.

Some chapters divide up the list among the executive council for contact. Some use the phone. Others visit people at their place of business. Others use social contacts. Some create membership events. Still others, the ones who want to try to afford the postage costs, use letters in addition to those National already sends. Try several ideas.

Only you can evaluate what works. The real answer is what works best in the situation today in the place where you live. Base your decision on experience, cost and the knowledge of what National is already doing.

Even the most successful of retention programs will not renew 100% of the chapter's members. Don't expect that they will. That is why continued chapter strength — and growth — depend on new member acquisitions.

# NEW MEMBER ACQUISITION — THE KEY TO A STRONG, VIABLE CHAPTER

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Every chapter must have a new member acquisition program in order to simply survive. Every month your chapter will lose members due to expires, transfers out, cancellations and deaths. These must be replaced just to maintain chapter size and overall effectiveness in performing the AFA mission. Growth is the number of new members you can acquire over and above your replacement needs. Here, as with renewal, you need to be aware of what AFA National does so that you can plan your efforts accordingly.

## A. National Recruitment Activities

National Headquarters concentrates on the recruitment activities which it is best suited to do.

One example is the recruitment of new members through directly writing to prospects which come from lists of names obtained from commercial sources. Although every attempt is made to exclude existing members, occasionally some members receive an invitation to “join” if their name or address on the commercial list is slightly different from AFA’s data. Another is to buy advertising space, such as placing membership applications in selected issues of AIR FORCE Magazine (usually every two to three months).

National also continues to examine and test other membership recruitment and retention options, including the use of a variety of premium offers. However, there are recruitment activities which are better executed through the chapters.

## B. Chapter Recruitment Activities

Vital, growing chapters recruit. Chapters that do not recruit eventually lose energy and momentum. They stagnate. They wither. Then they die.

This is a plain and simple fact of life which has been proven time and time again — by AFA chapters and those in a myriad of other organizations.

Choose the kind of chapter yours will be. But just making a choice isn’t enough either. Chapters which recruit successfully also realize — up front — that “recruitment” is just a fancy way to say “sales”. Because, that’s what it is — sales, sales and more sales.

❖ Chapter recruitment IS finding people who might want to join and asking them in such a way that they will say yes. And the single, most successful recruiting tool is to create, update and maintain a prospect list of potential members.

- ❖ Chapter recruitment is NOT talking about chapter recruitment in a regional, state or chapter meeting. It is NOT having a member show up at someone else's meeting with "AFA" on their name tag. It is NOT an executive council meeting ... or chapter program... or a news article... or booth ... or videos ... or pretty brochures ... or posters... or benefits ... or....
- ❖ Chapter recruitment IS about devising a sales program. It is then about picking which of these things will provide the direction, focus, manpower and materials to make the sale happen. These devices support the idea of becoming an AFA member.

Properly done, your meeting or airshow booth or luncheon will provide the setting where you can bring people likely to want to join together so you can ask them to join — or perhaps just generate leads for your prospect list to use later — or ... and the possibilities are endless.

Part of sales is to remember that a prospect who says no this time may say yes the next or the next ... if you don't turn them off. Sure, we think they OUGHT TO WANT TO JOIN. But they don't. Or at least they don't right now.

And the most important part of sales is to CLOSE the sale. That means to be sure that you personally see the prospect fill out the application and sign the check (or put down their credit card number) and get the whole works in the mail. A promise is not a sale. It's just a promise. No matter how well you know your prospect-  
CLOSE THE SALE YOURSELF, NOW.

There is no better device to overcome that last objection than to just get them to put down their VISA or MasterCard number. How easy can a thing be, after all?

Also, each chapter most likely will find that its membership will include one or more major focus groups — the base, a major aerospace firm, a retirement area. Knowing who these groups are helps your chapter programming and your membership efforts. As you study your membership pattern, you may also find additional groups or areas which you haven't yet worked, or that you haven't exploited to their maximum potential.

### **C. Base Recruitment Activity**

“The Base and the Base Drive take care of my membership activity”

Nothing could be further from the truth. The on-base drive, as many of you have come to know it, is a thing of the past and now more than ever it is important for chapters to abandon a “let the Air Force do it” or “the Air Force owes us” philosophy.

AFA is a voluntary, civilian organization. You knew that, right? But how many times do we fall into the trap of taking the Air Force for granted and behaving as if they owe us something? We need to remember that Air Force people as individuals are not

obligated to join AFA, that AFA can solicit their membership only on a voluntary, off-duty basis and that Air Force organizations or commanders do not automatically owe AFA support.

Indeed, it is the other way around. It is the Association which seeks to help and support the Air Force and its people. If we do that well, commanders will want to support us and we will attract members as well.

A membership drive among active duty, Guard and Reserve personnel has traditionally been AFA's major, annual membership recruitment program. For many years the drive was initiated by National Headquarters and run largely by the Air Force. Some chapters near bases participated actively in the drive. Others did so to a lesser extent or not at all.

DoD Ethics Guidelines now limit the official participation of the Air Force and place the responsibility for initiating the drive squarely on AFA chapters. Details on how to conduct the drive can be found elsewhere in this book. For chapters with an active duty, Air National Guard or Reserve base nearby, experience has shown that the Spring (mid-April through the end of May) of each year is the best time to conduct recruitment activities because it interferes least with other Air Force activities and drives (Combined Federal Campaign, Air Force Assistance Fund).

Increasingly, chapters should consider community drives as well and National Headquarters will continue to prepare support and promotional materials for not only a drive among military people but also in the civilian community. It will publish detailed explanations of how chapters can best organize to conduct these drives. You can find these in a number of places.

AFA publications such as this one will describe the conduct of a membership drive as well as other recruitment activities. In addition you will see a series of announcements in "Newslines" and reminders in letters from various AFA National leaders. These are normally sent to the person designated by the chapter to receive chapter mail. Make sure you get copies as well.

**The bottom line is that if chapters near bases do not initiate a recruitment drive among the military population each year as part of their membership plan, AFA will see this vital segment of its membership dwindle in size.**

#### **D. When is the Best Time to Recruit?**

Even though few chapters take this approach, membership recruitment should be a year-round effort.

### Work Membership as a Year-Round Task

Year-round recruitment means year-round renewals. In short, whether it is retention or acquisition, membership is a year-round task.

How you do that is up to you and what works best where you are. Experience is a big factor. Your options range from the organized base and community drives to individual solicitations. To pick what works best you should consider such factors as chapter size, the demographics and size of your chapter service area, available volunteer support, base or industry support and so on. However, the biggest factor is how much time and effort YOU are prepared to put into it.

Membership can only be worked year-round when one, single person, is responsible. Some chapters have many people who share the work, but still there must be someone in charge.

### **E. Awards**

There are several membership awards given every year based on member recruitment and retention. The Jack Gross Award and the Storz Awards are based on new member recruitment. There are also two awards given to chapters based on the chapter's total number of Community Partner's. These are the Community Partner Gold Award and the Community Partner Achievement Award. These membership awards are something that every chapter and state should strive for. (More detailed information on the membership awards can be found in Section V, Samples and Other Good Stuff).