



IS IT TIME FOR A CHAPTER TUNE-UP?

Are you wondering what happened to the once-vibrant organization you belong to? If so, please read and implement the ideas below. Let us know your ideas so we can share them with the entire organization. You are not alone – we are all one organization, helping and encouraging each other when we need it. Above all, we work together to create awareness about hearing loss and help those who want to learn to live well with hearing loss.

Signs the chapter may need a tune-up:

- Meeting attendance is low, declining or static.
- The same people serve as leaders year after year.
- There is little interaction, enthusiasm and participation during meetings.

Signs the chapter tune-up worked:

- There is turnover in leadership every few years.
- Members are involved on committees or in some other capacity.
- Membership is growing steadily and there are many inquiries about the organization.
- There is something educational and fun at every meeting.
- People generally feel pleased to attend meetings and feel they get something from the programs and the peer support.

A Common Concern

The single most common concern all chapters have is gaining and keeping new members and leaders. Engaging in outreach and publicity is the best way to increase membership. The most important committee to have, even if there are no others, is a Publicity/Outreach Committee or a Community Awareness Committee. Below are some strategies you might implement.

1. **Recruit all members to be part of a Community Awareness Committee or Publicity/Outreach Committee.** At every chapter meeting, have available for pick up on a display table:
 - **HLAA brochures** -- both for the national organization and for the chapter. You can also combine this information into one brochure by adding chapter information to the back panel of the national membership brochure. These are printed and ready for you to order from the [Materials section](#) on the HLAA website.

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- ***Hearing Loss Magazines and chapter newsletters*** –Ask members to take them along with a brochure to distribute at places near their homes, libraries, audiologist/hearing aid specialist practices, medical/professional offices; hospitals/clinics; community bulletin boards; houses of worship; retirement communities; schools, colleges and special education departments; recreation facilities; and to social and rehabilitation workers.
2. **Distribute meeting and/or special event announcements. Ask organizations that print community or service directories to include HLAA.** Send public service announcements to local radio and TV stations that announce free community events. (Write a simple press release and include the who, what, when and where, then include the mission of HLAA and a contact for more information.)
 3. **Prepare details about meetings for local papers and small community papers;** most such ads or articles are free to the organization and will be included as a community calendar item originally submitted via an online form. Many chapters have gotten members from feature stories about hearing loss and HLAA written by a member or by a paper’s editor as a human interest story or for a special event such as a nearby Walk4Hearing. (Use www.hearingloss.org, *Hearing Loss Magazine*, or HLAA *e-News* for factual or current topics for this purpose.)
 4. **Ask hearing health professionals (audiologists, hearing instrument specialists, otologists, otolaryngologists, speech-language therapists, etc.) to help.** Visit them in person and ask them the following questions. Will they refer patients to the chapter? Will they give patients packets of information the chapter provides? Will they keep HLAA information in their waiting areas? Will they be speakers at chapter meetings? Will they be a professional advisor for the chapter? Will they help with special events such as hearing screening and seminars? Chapter members can start with their own hearing health care provider and then visit others listed in the telephone book yellow pages.
 5. **Use the Internet.** Take advantage of publicizing the chapter and meetings on websites, list serves, Facebook, Twitter, and more. (HLAA has both a Facebook and Twitter pages as so many chapters.) As word spreads, the Internet can help chapters reach people in rural areas who need HLAA support.
 6. **HLAA Webinars.** Encourage people to attend the online [HLAA Webinars](#) – this can create interest in the local chapter when they realize there is a larger organization backing up the good work the chapter does in the local community.

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7. **Seize opportunities to participate in community health fairs, farmer's markets, and similar local events.** If those opportunities don't come to you, look for them and offer to participate. HLAA national will provide you with brochures and magazines to distribute for a small fee to cover shipping costs.
8. **Give professional memberships** to places where magazines are read such as community libraries, libraries in residential homes, doctor/clinic and dental offices, and schools. Contact the HLAA national office about how to do this. (Call the membership department at 301-657-2248 or write to Membership@hearingloss.org.)
9. **Public Speaking.** People who enjoy speaking can offer to give presentations about hearing loss and HLAA to community and civic organizations, retirement communities, schools, and other organizations. If members are willing but uncertain about public speaking, consider holding a training for presenters and/or creating an outline or PowerPoint document for them to use or suggest they show the DVD [Learn About Hearing Loss](#) or [Teamwork for Hearing Loss Awareness](#) available from HLAA. (Write to bookstore@hearingloss.org to order a copy or show each of them from the HLAA website www.hearingloss.org.)
10. **Special Events:** Conduct half-day or daylong seminars about hearing loss. Well publicized and held once or twice a year, this will attract new people. Ask hearing health professionals in the area to lead and perhaps even underwrite some of the expenses. A local restaurant may provide lunch for no cost or a reduced cost in return for publicity. If there is a state association that holds conferences, encourage members to attend. Find a way to fund a portion of the cost of transportation, carpooling, etc.
11. **Hearing Screening:** With the help of one or two audiologists and/or the local Lions Club, hold a day of well-publicized hearing screenings. May is Better Hearing and Speech Month, a good theme to build upon.
12. **Using a list of HLAA members in your area,** requested from the HLAA national office, call or email everyone who is not a chapter member at least once or twice a year and invite him or her to come to meetings. Tell them their family and friends are welcome, too. (Access the HLAA List Use Agreement on [www.hearingloss.org/Support/Leader Support/Publicity and Promotion](http://www.hearingloss.org/Support/LeaderSupport/PublicityandPromotion).)

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13. **Form an Outreach Committee.** Divide a list of all current or potential members in the area among the committee and ask each member to personally contact/meet a certain number of those who are not involved or members. Find out what their needs are, if they are interested in attending, need transportation, etc. Committee members can “sponsor” another existing or potential new member. The sponsor stays in touch with, befriends and helps the other person with their hearing loss, offering to take them to meetings if needed. The personal contact goes a long way in building relationships.
14. **Create a Buddy System:** Greet meeting newcomers and introduce them to a seasoned member who “lightly” interviews him or her, name, hearing loss issue, etc. The seasoned member introduces the new member to the group during the meeting sharing a little about the person. If the newcomer has something to add or a question, he or she will feel more comfortable doing it. If needed, encourage the “buddy” to remain in the role for that newcomer. Find out if they prefer a phone call or to use email.
15. **Contact newcomers** one or two days after a meeting to ask them how they liked the meeting. Call/email them again before the next meeting and urge them to come. If they miss the next meeting or two, contact them to ask them why they have not come or invite them to an upcoming meeting with a good program. *Be sure to gather e-mail addresses from all newcomers that have them.* Use these to periodically connect in a friendly way and to send items of interest based on what you have learned about them.

Remember that newcomers are concerned about their own hearing loss issues. They need basic information and support that may no longer interest the seasoned members. Consider holding a pre-meeting before the regular meeting now and then to answer those beginner questions and discuss those issues. Be sure they know how to use the available technology to they can understand what is being said in meetings. They may or may not choose to attend these sessions, but at least they won't feel that no one is interested in their personal issues.

16. **Consider having social gatherings** outside of regular meetings every few months. This can be a dinner out, a captioned movie or theater production, picnic, a game night, etc. This will especially appeal to young adult members. Members also may host a small group of four to six people at their homes for coffee, dessert, or dinner so they can get to know each other.

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17. **Periodically evaluate whether the chapter needs a tune-up.** How do members feel about the meeting location, day, and time? Should something be changed? Is there something they would like to have added to the meeting format itself? Having a stake in the meeting format helps members build loyalty to the chapter and may groom future leaders who emerge with new ideas. Are there particular topics they would like to learn more about? Can they recommend special presenters and special projects? Are they learning more about the work of the national organization and how it affects them at each meeting? Over time, new members will learn the importance of dealing with their own hearing loss as well as creating awareness in the community. Hopefully, over time, they will see the vital role that HLAA plays in their lives and in the lives of the other 48 million Americans with hearing loss.