

# NEW JERSEY SELF-HELP GROUP CLEARINGHOUSE

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375 East McFarlan St., Dover, NJ 07801 \* 1-800-367-6274 or 973-989-1122 \* [www.njgroups.org](http://www.njgroups.org)

## GETTING MEMBERS INVOLVED

In a mutual aid self-help group, ideally each member should be involved in the running of the group. However, getting members involved can prove to be a hard task. The key to getting people involved and helping out in the group is summed up in one word: “ownership.” The more that members feel the group is truly their own, the more likely they are to invest their time and efforts in helping their group survive and prosper. Provide low threat situations that make it easy for new or shy members to speak up—and listen to what they are saying. Look for non-verbal signals (facial expressions, eye contact, etc) that members give you and be responsive to what you see. There is a lot more going on non-verbally among people than words alone will tell you.

Ask members personally on a one-to-one basis in private if they would like to serve in a specific job. Let them know why you think that they would be good at the job, and that you will be available to help them or answer any question(s) that they might encounter.

Nurture new potential volunteers. Give members with limited experiences and low self-confidence something relatively simple to do at first, pair them up with another person to share the job, or include them in a small group effort with friendly and experienced members.

Use people’s first names, and mingle and talk with members as they work. Let them know you know they’re there and tell them you missed them when they’re absent.

Be generous with positive suggestions and complements. Acknowledge people publicly for a task completed (at meetings, in newsletter, on website, with certificate of appreciation, etc).

Involve members in setting organizational goals, choosing projects, and discussing issues. Use small groups whenever possible to do this.

Divide projects and committee work into as many manageable parts as possible before asking for volunteers. Encourage people to seek new experiences rather than do the same thing repeatedly.

Get a sense of what members are seeking from the group by spending informal time with them. Help them find things to do that match their interests. Consider circulating a skills/contact sheet where members can list any individual skills or interests that they might have. Tap into this list when necessary.

Involve members in the business of the organization. This will strengthen their sense of “ownership” of the group.

Encourage cooperation and teamwork. Reward positive interactions and mutual support among the members as they work together.

Be informal and personable. Get your hands dirty occasionally without getting too deeply involved in details that might limit your perspective of the “big picture.”