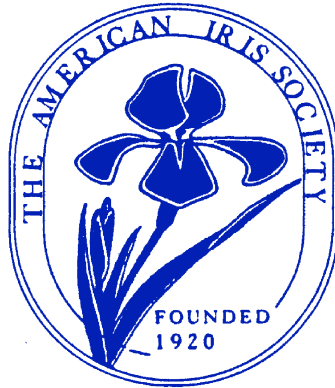


Spring | 2016



Marketing Handbook

The American Iris Society

The Marketing & PR Committee is happy to have produced this marketing tool for your local iris club, AIS Region, AIS Section or AIS Cooperating Society. Some of the ideas expressed here are common sense to all involved in non-profit groups, while others were newly developed for the iris world. These are ideas worth exploring for they have proven effective in different areas of the country and in different types of groups and activities.

We hope that after trying some of these ideas and making them your own, that you will share with us any outcome, either positive or negative, in order to allow us to complete or adjust this document for the benefit of everyone involved.

If you have any questions, comments, have more marketing ideas or would like to receive a PDF version of this document, please communicate with us via the email address provided below. We are here to help you in any way we can.

How can a local club grow its membership? First ask yourself, “Why did I join? If the conditions that met your answer still exist they should attract other members. Most people join iris societies for the following four reasons:

1. Information
2. Sources
3. Socialization
4. Pride

Information: This may be the key reason why many people come to their first iris society meeting. If visitors are presented with an informative, colorful program they may come back to another meeting.

Meetings:

- Schedule regular meetings. Make your calendar known so that people can schedule themselves to attend in advance.
- A rule of thumb is to schedule a good speaker or great program within **30 days** of an event, like a sale or a show where you might pick up new members. If you wait too long, the curiosity wanes. That first meeting is the club’s first impression; make it a good one.
- Hold most meetings in public places: libraries, garden centers, botanical gardens, community centers, nature centers, etc. Places that are already drawing plant people may get accidental members, and a new person may feel uneasy going to a private home.
- Garden meetings are a great way to enjoy the garden and to actually see irises in cultivation. Garden meetings can be used to describe iris culture; to explain plant parts; to give iris grooming lessons; to showcase SDB, BB, Japanese, Siberian or other iris species; to identify weeds; and to provide judge’s training.

Speakers:

- **Bring in outside speakers.** Fresh views from outside the club stimulate interest. Often knowledge of particular iris categories can be lacking in a local organization, and an expert on something new can offer new challenges and opportunities.
- **Utilize member expertise.** All iris culture is local. Everyone knows a given iris performs differently in different parts of the country. Your members are experts on performance in their garden. We come together as a club to share this expertise. We all learn from each other.

Partnerships:

- Partner with the local botanical garden to offer a course on growing irises or a workshop on dividing and planting.
- Create an informational booth at your local Regional or National Flower Show or Home & Garden Show. These are often provided either free or low-cost to non-profit plant societies. An iris club could gather scores of members at a strongly worked booth.

- Provide information on your society to local nurseries and garden supply stores. Most stores are happy to leave your information on the counter for pickup by customers.

Sources: Often people come to clubs looking for particular irises or types of irises.

Until the internet became available, joining societies was one of the best ways to discover places to buy iris; but don't sell the old ways short. The advice and council of local clubs means a lot to someone who has never before ordered from a supplier. Not only do people hope and expect that local club members will share knowledge and plants, they also appreciate great deals, like auctions and sales.

- **Prizes:** Encourage plant door prizes, swaps, and giveaways at meetings.
- **Group Orders:** Think about group orders on bulbs and other plants that one member might order a quantity at wholesale prices and split the order.
- **Plant Auctions:** Have an auction of purchased and donated plants. These can be both public and private (members only).
- **Sales:** Have an iris rhizome sale; it not only raises money, but brings people and irises together.
- **Iris Incentives:** Giving an iris with a club membership, or a couple of irises with an AIS membership, usually can get many people to join. If we provide something good for our members they will then continue to renew and be active. The new color *Basic Iris Culture* booklet is a \$5.00 value. Clubs can order a quantity and make a profit or use it as a perk of joining.

Socialization: Some gardeners tend to be shy. We may relate to plants easier than to people. Like walking a dog, carrying a plant for show and tell can break the ice. Most people develop relationships they treasure in clubs, but this happens with time. Although a great asset, the first response from people is usually, "I do not want to get involved." If we do things in a structured way the pressure is removed.

New Member Welcome:

- Ask an outgoing person in the club to be the official greeter and make sure that any new member is welcomed and introduced to another member.
- Find out something about the new member. How did he hear about the club? Does he grow irises already? What does he like about irises? If you learn the interests of the new member you may discover he or she has expertise in an area that could help the club. Emphasize how they could contribute their talents and information.

Community Outreach: Clubs should consider how they relate to their communities.

- Is anyone in the club involved with other garden clubs? Does anyone give talks on irises? Working with garden clubs is often helpful for clubs wanting to develop a Design portion of the annual Iris Show.
- Is there a beautification project in the city that could use our help? This is a great way to use excess iris rhizomes from our gardens and draw attention to iris culture.

- Do we interact with master gardener programs or university extension? We might have someone who could teach them about irises, or we may learn some things from them about controlling pests and disease.
- Could the club help a horticulture student at a nearby college with a partial or full scholarship?
- Farmers Markets are a great place to have a sale and educate at the same time.

Social Media: Using social media can not only help recruit more members, it gives you the opportunity to share information about their own iris gardens, to share pictures and growing tips, and to share announcements and upcoming events.

- If you are on Facebook, “Like” the AIS Facebook, The Iris Encyclopedia, and Join World of Irises, the Blog of The American Iris Society. The more friends there are the more friends there will be. Share what has been posted on your local club’s Facebook Page.
- Post announcements about upcoming events on your social media sites, such as Facebook and Twitter. Ask your friends to re-tweet or Like your post, thereby spreading your information to their networks. You may generate interest from iris newbies that you can help get started on their iris hobby.
- Start a Facebook Page for your local iris society. Let everyone know, and be sure to post photos, calendar items, chat about irises, and let everyone have an opportunity to share local growing information. Encourage posting of whose irises bloom first, new irises people have seen, culture tips, irises for trade, etc. This interchange encourages iris friendships beyond the monthly iris meetings.

Pride: Even though in excess it is one of the seven deadly sins, pride can add a great deal to clubs. We all like to show off our best efforts, individually and collectively.

Shows: Have at least one iris show each year. Some clubs have three to catch all the types of irises.

- Shows provide a venue to meet interested people. Always have invitations to join available or, better yet, take their membership then and there.
- Be sure to have a sign up list at the show or sale asking for contact information (e-mail/phone) to alert customers about the next iris event or next year’s sale.
- Post pictures of your show on the Show Calendar in the Iris Encyclopedia.
- Be sure you have a design class at your show and use the state of national garden club judges as part of the panel. You reach a whole different area of garden interest and may gain some members.

Garden Tours: We all like to show off our garden when it looks good, but the public seems to love seeing irises growing almost as much! Having an Iris Garden Tour is a great way to introduce the public to irises, and to inspire them to grow their own. Some Club members take orders during the tour, and dig and deliver the rhizomes at the Annual Sale, to increase Sale revenues. At the very least, the garden tours are a great way to let attendees know about the club and provide membership information in hopes of signing up new members.

Judges training: Learning and acknowledging expertise makes us feel good about our knowledge, and serves our Region and the AIS. Even if attendees do not become judges, they will learn a lot about what to look for in a well-grown iris, as well as learn what judges actually look for when judging an iris.

Awards: Honor your members with service awards, local garden awards, local show awards. Many members love competing for Queen of the Show. And there's nothing like a certificate to say, "Thank you."

Promotion: There are many ways to promote irises, your club, and the AIS at little to no cost.

- Newspapers: Can you afford an ad in a local newspaper for advertising an event? If not, check out some of the free offerings, particularly the Announcements and Calendar items, which are often free. If possible, contact the local newspaper for a story around bloom time. Pictures of iris gardens and stories on the local iris-growing community are interesting to readers. Contact the Living or Garden editors to inquire.
- Television: You may be able to book an iris club member as a guest on a local interview show, or garden program. Look at the public access channels for more opportunities. Be sure to submit garden pictures if the weather segment features local photography.
- Radio: Often radio stations appreciate an articulate spokesperson who can talk about local irises. And upcoming events are often welcome as a public service announcement, which stations must offer as part of their license agreements.
- Websites: If your local club or region has a website be sure to use it to announce events. Also, local newspapers often have an online version, and devote space to upcoming events and announcements.
- Posters: Most local businesses allow posters for events in their front windows. All you need to do is ask! Post on grocery bulletin boards and other free spaces around town.

HAVE FUN: Unless you own a nursery, relax. This is a hobby, an interest, a passion. It shouldn't be a chore. Meetings should be fun, not a time for arguments or hard feelings. If everyone participates then no one will be overworked or feel left out of the fun. Friends who garden are friends forever!



Some Helpful Online Sources of Information

- The American Iris Society
www.irises.org
- Iris Encyclopedia
www.wiki.irises.org
- AIS Facebook
www.facebook.com/theamericanirissociety
- World of Irises – the Blog of The American Iris Society
www.theamericanirissociety.blogspot.com
- Twitter
[@TweetAIS](https://twitter.com/TweetAIS)
- AIS Storefront Shopping Cart (order Basic Iris Culture)
http://irises.org/Member_Services/AIS_Storefront.html
- AIS Tool box (templates for iris show schedules, Design Class idea, etc.)
http://irises.org/Member_Services/AIS_Toolbox.html
- AIS Presentations (slide and digital)
http://irises.org/Member_Services/Presentations/AIS_Presentations.html
- YouTube (View How-to Design and Create Presentations, Use Programs)
<http://www.youtube.com>
- Lynda.com (Learn How-To Use Photoshop, Paypal, Twitter, Aperture, \$\$\$)
<http://www.lynda.com>
- UNCG (Univ. of N. Carolina – How to Sell at Farmer’s Markets)
http://greenleaf.uncg.edu/farmermarkets_farmers.html
- Apple’s APP Store (Download Photo Tools, Keynote, Pages for low fees)
<http://www.apple.com/mac/app-store/>

Retaining Members and Volunteers

Now that you have recruited new members, your work is not yet done! Members are a precious resource for your iris club, and retaining these members should be a high priority. How can your club keep your members motivated to stay in the club, to volunteer, and to renew their memberships year after year?

We all know that only a certain percentage of our affiliate members will actually volunteer to do some of the many tasks that we have to do. How do we turn members into volunteers and how do we keep the volunteers engaged? This turns out to be an age-old question that many non-profit organizations struggle with. The key seems to be engaging with members from the earliest opportunity, matching them with their interests, and keeping the experience fun and rewarding for each member and volunteer.

The following tips may help you in your member and volunteer retention and recruitment efforts. Make sure you check out the resources that follow the tips!

Welcome new members. It is often beneficial to appoint a Membership Chair who will reach out to new members and welcome them to the affiliate. **Perhaps your president can send a welcome letter.** If there is interest, **establish a “buddy” system** so that new members have someone they can call on to help them with iris culture and club activities.

Engage your members: Find out why the member joined and where their interests lie. Maybe at first they just want to learn more about irises from those with more experience. But later they might want to be more involved in club activities that coincide with their interests. Perhaps they want to set up or moderate the affiliate’s social media sites. Perhaps they want to hybridize—they could be connected to the hybridizers in the group. **Or the member could be asked to join any of a number of committees** that oversees publicity, sales, fundraising, newsletter, the show, etc. If someone wants to be an active part of the society, there is usually something they can do that matches their interest and expertise. **Consider appointing a volunteer coordinator** to help members find their niche and turn them into active volunteers.

Recognize and thank volunteers. When a volunteer does something outstanding for the affiliate, he or she should be acknowledged. The acknowledgement can come in the form of a mention in the newsletter or an announcement at the next meeting. Or it could be a hand-written thank-you note from the President. After an iris show, write thank you notes for all those that helped. Sometimes recognition could occur at an awards ceremony at the end of the year. Whatever form of appreciation you can give is usually much appreciated in return!

Reward your members. Make sure your members take something away when they join the local affiliate. Provide interesting programs and learning opportunities through guest speakers and workshops. Or explore more tangible benefits such as **providing discounts to members at the iris sale** and regional meetings, having **door prizes** at meetings and holding **local auctions and raffles.** **Consider purchasing guest irises and distributing**

them among members to grow and contribute increases to the sale. These programs and activities give members with minimal to advanced knowledge of irises the opportunity to learn more about irises, their history, and culture.

Delegate: Don't be afraid to delegate the club's duties, and to express the club's needs to the membership. Delegating increases productivity, secures cross-training of duties that may go undone otherwise; and provides new and old members an opportunity for engagement and a reason to stay. When someone is asked to take on a job or duty at the club, it triggers a feeling of appreciation and respect that is hard to ignore.

Set up a safe atmosphere where members feel appreciated: How? Include in your newsletter inspiring quotes about Appreciation, Benefits of Commitment to the club, Teamwork, etc. Ask the President or Program Chair to speak about the value of a friendly atmosphere; where there's much room to grow and learn; where "it's OK to make a mistake." Negativity within a club or group can have deteriorating effects on the club's new members, and it blocks the group from growing and producing events that are conducive to a feeling of belonging.

Conflict Resolution: Let's face it, we have all encountered individuals who are problematic or have an antisocial personality. Some groups have seen the worse of situations where one disturbing individual would make new members cringe and stop them from returning. Consider establishing conflict-resolution guidelines, so that they can be applied equally to many situations. Make sure several of your officers are trained to handle these situations as they arise. For help with conflict resolution issues, consult with your club's president or Region's representative (RVP), who will in turn have other sources of help and information if needed—such as the RVP Counselor or The Board of RVP Counselors.

Have fun! It is a proven fact that people gravitate toward groups that seem to be having fun. Make sure there are plenty of opportunities for having fun within your affiliate. Some ideas include allowing time for exchanging information and pictures of your irises, garden, or recent iris acquisitions during the meetings; providing occasional refreshments and a social hours to encourage members to get to know each other; arranging trips to see out-of-town iris gardens; setting up hands-on activities such as a painting class in an iris garden; or help members learn new skills like flower arranging. These fun opportunities give members the chance not only to take away fun memories, but the chance to know each other and to form bonds that last for years.

The following resources can help your affiliate develop robust, rewarding volunteer programs.

Top Ten Tips for Volunteer Management

https://charityvillage.com/Content.aspx?topic=Top_ten_tips_for_volunteer_management_and_retention#.VgLDr99Viko

Supervising and Supporting Volunteers

<http://knowhownonprofit.org/people/volunteers/keeping/supporting-volunteers>

Retention!

https://www.energizeinc.com/how_to_volunteer_management/retention

Motivation and Recognition

<http://www.idealists.org/info/VolunteerMgmt/Motivation>

Managing Volunteers: A Good Practice Guide

http://www.citizensinformationboard.ie/publications/voluntary_sector/managing_volunteers/

Non-Violent Communication

<https://www.cnvc.org/>

“The Third Side”: A Model for Conflict Intercession and Reduction (two links)

<http://www.beyondintractability.org/essay/thirdsiders>

<http://www.thirdside.org/>

Rewards Recognition and Retention (with links to UK awards not available in US)

<http://www.volunteering.org.uk/component/gpb/rewardrecognitionretention>