



SOUTH CAROLINA FAMILY AND COMMUNITY LEADERS
Affiliated with National Volunteer Outreach Network, Country Women's Council, U.S.A.,
Associated Country Women of the World and
in partnership with Clemson University Cooperative Extension Service
SCFCL website: <http://www.scfcl.com>

Leader Training Guide

INCREASING/RETAINING FCL MEMBERSHIP

- OBJECTIVE**
1. To explore ways to increase FCL club memberships
 2. To encourage ways to retain FCL membership

LESSON OVERVIEW/INTRODUCTION

Our FCL clubs are losing membership for several reasons--most of our members are elderly; increasingly there are more members who are unable to attend meetings because of illness or disability, many former members and leaders are deceased. FCL clubs used to count hundreds of members in South Carolina with several clubs in each of the 46 counties. Currently there are 496 members in 39 listed clubs from only 20 counties according to our state report from 2025. Not every club listed is currently active. For example, occasionally 1 or 2 members from the former York County club attend the one club in Chester County (which used to have 3 vibrant clubs) As of 2025, there are 14 members listed for the club in Chester County with 11 usually attending. The annual 2025 SCFCL report states that Barnwell, Charleston, Kershaw, Lexington, and Union Counties have listed from 3-5 new members and have 2-5 clubs among them: their membership averages 7-14 per club. Every club I spoke with at the annual meetings reported that their membership is decreasing and would like to explore ways to encourage more members to join. I undertook the Buff-Swicegood travel-study to try to discover how the Women's Institutes of England and Wales encourage new membership and some things they do to retain their members. The Women's Institutes (WI) are very like our FCL clubs, originating for the same reasons (to educate, encourage and socialize country women since the early 1900's) and they are conducting campaigns to improve the lives of women and enlarge their opportunities to serve their families, communities, and the world.

LESSON

LET'S BRAINSTORM THESE QUESTIONS

1. Who?
Who are the women most likely to join our FCL clubs?
2. What?
What can we offer to make their time invested in our club worthwhile?
3. Why?
Why would anyone want to join an FCL club?
4. When and where?
Does when and where we meet encourage new attendance while retaining current members?

5. How?

How can we bring in new members/retain members?

IDEAS to discuss and brainstorm in your own club

1. Traditionally, our clubs have been joined by women who do not have jobs outside their homes, whose children are in school or grown. So, they are women who have free time on their hands, who want to fill this time productively, join similar friends or make new acquaintances. Possibilities to add members include recruiting younger women, single women, and men. Many times, when new families move to an area, they are looking for ways to meet friends and get involved with local affairs. Looking at these sources, clubs could find not only new members, but new leaders as well. We can retain our members by giving everyone a responsible job in the club-everyone needs to be needed and to feel they are an important part of the organization. If they do not feel needed, they may as well stay at home and read the lesson. In the Women's Institutes, members take turns providing and serving the traditional tea and biscuits at the end of every meeting, then washing up--a very sociable time. Each Women's Institute may have from 30 to 50 members at their meetings and to keep everyone involved, have many committees to oversee various activities.

2. With so many skills, lessons, games, and information available online or through social media, we could offer actual hands-on and/or interactive activities/ discussions/ discoveries. We are real people doing real things. Discuss what topics might appeal to a wider variety of prospective members. Advertise club activities and successes that will catch some prospective members' eye. For example, look at our campaign to save the bees so that the world's food source will be there for everyone. This is important! Bring this project to the public; offer information, ask for help. While the Women's Institute's campaign to make dental health more available to all might not appeal to every woman, others might want to join the campaign to end the damage that microplastics cause in our world. We can bring to light all our topics. We will more likely retain our members, new and old, by involving them in a cause or project they feel is worthwhile to them. Everyone is limited in how much time they have, and how much energy they want to expend on projects, so we must offer a variety of important campaigns to our members. Every topic offered will not interest every member, of course. I have overheard many FCL members and WI members say that they do not come to meetings to make crafts or jam; they are not traditional homemakers. But they keep coming because they have made friends there and support these friends in their interests. When I asked the members of the Women's Institutes why they come to these meetings, the consistent answer was "friendship". One woman said that coming to her WI meeting was "a ray of sunshine!" which is saying a lot in the mostly cloudy country of England. Friends can always be found in FCL clubs, and they share many rays of sunshine in the sunny south!

Invite speakers; In our FCL clubs, members usually take turns teaching lessons prepared by Clemson University from topics members suggested. In contrast, the WI meetings feature invited speakers. In the first meeting I attended, I learned how valuable goat's milk can be from a former policeman who became a goat farmer to cure an illness, then became a successful businessman selling goat's milk products internationally. In another meeting, an engineer showed how she was redirecting an entire highway system to correct a deadly traffic pattern in their locale, and in the process relocating dangerous adders to a distant preserve and making a nature bridge to allow the wildlife to safely cross over the highways. While I do not live there, I found the process fascinating, and the members were extremely excited about the safer road system that affects them daily.

3. We offer friendly, open environments, introduce skills to learn, valuable information for life, fun to be had, and, usually, good food.
4. Study where and when your club meets and ask if it is convenient not only for your current members but is also good for prospective members. For example, could you attract working women if you met in the evenings? Do you need to offer both a daytime meeting and one at night or on Saturdays? Consider offering a zoom meeting online. The Women's Institute in England has day and night meetings and has instituted several zoom meetings successfully; we in America can even participate. Think of how we all adjusted during the first Covid epidemic. We learned that we can stay connected via phones and computers. The modern world is very tech savvy. We may need to learn more computer skills to create such online clubs. The WI also offers a "Learning Hub", which is a series of live or recorded courses, lessons, activities members can take online from Denman College" to provide WI members flexible access to education. These are free for members and for a small fee for non-members, they range from business to crafts, from exercise to art history; one can learn about AI in movies and travelogues around the world or "How British Cookbooks Shaped our Kitchens". Perhaps Clemson University could develop something like this for our FCL members.
5. The best invitation is the "One on one invitation" in your neighborhood, church, school, any place people meet, even when you see someone you know in line at the grocery store, advertise online and in newspapers about FCL open houses with special activities unique to each club's community, networking- share ideas other clubs have found successful, FCL booths at fairs, local celebrations, FCL floats in holiday parades, request individuals to share their talents with your club and ask them to join, or offer specialty sub-clubs. Some Women's Institutes offer, in addition to their monthly meetings, sub-clubs that meet on other days, like quilting, hiking, bread-making, scrabble and crossword, fitness, book reviews, morning breakfast gatherings, crafting, dancing, painting, bowling, etc.

SUGGESTED ACTIVITIES

Discuss ways to increase membership

Invite an outside speaker to help with Leadership skills

Discuss ways to advertise, plan special meetings, include PSA in newspapers, church bulletins and community newspapers, teleconference, have ZOOM meetings or go out to dinner for a meeting and be sure and discuss increase membership. Be Creative!

LESSON SUMMARY

After your brainstorming sessions, try the ideas that suit your club best. Do not get discouraged or give up. Our FCL clubs are worthwhile organizations. We do so much good for ourselves, our families, and our communities, even the entire world. Let others know what we do and can do with their support. Invite your friends, family and acquaintances to come and see us, come and help us, come and join us.

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