

Keeping your Chapter in Tune with its Needs

As EAC Chapters grow and age, their needs change. At first everything is fresh and new. The whole world of embroidery is out there to conquer. As the years go by, things may change in several ways. The original members may wish to move into new techniques or more difficult pieces but incoming members may feel overwhelmed as they are still beginners, testing the waters. The needs of both extremes and all levels in between will need to be taken into consideration if your chapter is to thrive.

Also, as much as we hate to admit it, we all are aging, so eyesight or hearing may not be what it once was; transportation may have become a problem; stamina won't be that of a teenager. It is a good idea to re-assess the organization of your group occasionally. Ask yourself some questions.

Why did we join together in the beginning?

What are we getting out of being members?

Have our needs changed?

What are our current needs?

What can we change to better meet the current needs?

What benefits could be obtained from the group? Are we taking advantage of them?

What are our challenges? How can they be overcome?

After going through this exercise within your group it will be beneficial to lay out on paper a list of potential areas for growth and change. Then you should brainstorm for your options to arrive at a personalized solution for your group. **(Brainstorming is creating a list of ideas without any pre-judgement).**

Under the Microscope

You will need to look carefully at the composition of your group of members. No two chapters are alike. Are you mostly timid beginners or experienced stitchers? Is your group composed of members who are content to stitch on one project until it is finished and only work on one type of stitching technique? Or are they constantly trying new techniques and have many projects going at once? Is their priority socializing or learning new techniques? Is their stitching a major part of their life or a break from their hectic life?

If you find that you have all types of stitchers in your group you will need to reach some compromises in your program planning so that the needs of everyone will be met by the chapter. Often group projects can be adapted to different skill levels that might meet the needs of both beginner and expert. It may be possible to offer two projects on the same topic but geared to different skill levels. It is rare to have a project where everyone is anxious to participate. Make allowances for this and your group will run smoother. How about trying a Mentor program within your group? If Jane wants to learn Hardanger and Bernie is willing to help her they will get to know each other and both the teacher and student will gain.

Small groups within a chapter that are working on projects such as correspondence Courses or other special interests will serve to build excitement within the group as they show their accomplishments. The forest would be monotonous if all birds sang the same song.

Fed up with Fundraisers

A group may feel that fundraisers are an inevitable part of paying for their activities. However, it might be a good idea to explore the options if your group is tired of fund-raising. Work out a budget to see how much money your group will need to do the things they want to do. Perhaps an increase in Chapter dues, or an internal Auction Sale or a Potluck for which you charge admission would bring in the necessary funds? Possibly contact your Provincial Lottery Association or Department of Cultural Affairs and Development for information on possible ways to obtain funding for events, classes, shows or exhibits. Read the newsletters from other chapters to get fresh new ideas.

Problems Finding an Executive

No one was born knowing how to run a meeting. Some of us gained experience in 4-H or other groups through our lives to this point. And although there are some rules to Parliamentary Procedure (Don't watch footage from any political Parliaments to learn it!!) it is more important to arrive at a consensus of what your group wishes to do. They need to be informed about options and feel that they are important parts of the group decision-making process. You could use Surveys or Questionnaires and act on the results, or bring each issue before the group for decisions. A strong group is a democracy, not a one-person dictatorship.

Perhaps the most common response of a members being asked to take a position is "I don't know how!" To help overcome this problem, write up a description of each of the positions on the executive. Be honest and try to cover all aspects of the job in a straight-forward, non-flowery wording. This should take away the fear of the unknown and may bring some results.

Another response might be “I don’t have time!” To help with this one you will need to work out estimates of the time needed for each position. Would it be 1-2 hours per month? or 2 hours before each meeting? Possibly two people could share a position. Possibly the outgoing person could mentor the in-coming one for a couple of months.

The Nominating Committee has a huge role to play in getting a new executive. Very few people volunteer but a personal approach from a member of the Nominating committee usually yields results. A brain-storming session with people who know the other group members well can usually come up with suggestions for each position.

Business Meeting Blues

Sometimes Business Meetings are the downfall of a group. To keep a group viable, an exchange of information and some decision-making needs to take place. However, there are many ways of handling Business Meetings:

- Some groups have monthly Business meetings but keep the actual business part very short (20-30 minutes) so a program can be included on the same evening.
- Other groups reduce the number of Business meeting to every second month. They will be longer so there will only be time for a short program or Free Stitching.
- Other groups let the Executive Meetings attend to all of the Business of the chapter. Thus the membership meetings can be totally program meeting.

There are both good points and bad points to each of these options and every chapter will have their own unique circumstances. It is important that every member should feel part of the group and have access to the information that comes to the group, whether it is read out a meeting or distributed by newsletter or by other methods. If members wish, they should be able to take part in the decision-making processes. It is much easier to get volunteers for a show, for example, if members are involved in making some decisions on holding the event.

Time for a Tune-up

So is your chapter fulfilling its potential? Are the members happy with the way decisions are made? Do they feel that they are participating important members of the group? Is it time for some changes? Perhaps it is time to really look at what is happening in your chapter and to be sure it is still meeting the needs of the members. There is no magic wand to make things work but if the group works together honestly and openly, not letting fear of change get in the way, a lot can be accomplished and your chapter will be a stronger unit, enjoying their time together.