



## THE KEY TO RETENTION IN SCOUTING

7 Simple methods to improve your  
membership retention COVID-19 edition



**SCOUTS**<sup>®</sup>  
Creating a Better World

ORGANISATIONAL DEVELOPMENT



**SCOUTS**<sup>®</sup>  
Creating a Better World

© World Scout Bureau Inc.  
FEBRUARY 2021

World Scout Bureau, Global Support Centre  
Kuala Lumpur

Suite 3, Level 17,  
Menara Sentral Vista, No 150  
Jalan Sultan Abdul Samad  
Brickfields, 50470  
Kuala Lumpur, MALAYSIA

Tel.: + 60 3 2276 9000  
Fax: + 60 3 2276 9089

[worldbureau@scout.org](mailto:worldbureau@scout.org)  
[scout.org](http://scout.org)

Reproduction is authorised to National Scout Organizations and Associations which are members of the World Organization of the Scout Movement. Credit for the source must be given.

# **THE KEY TO RETENTION IN SCOUTING**

7 Simple methods to improve your  
membership retention COVID-19 edition

# The key to retention in Scouting

**7 Simple methods to improve your membership retention  
COVID-19 edition**

<b>Why do your members leave Scouting?</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>7 Simple and effective methods to improve your membership retention</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>1. Don't forget the Scout Method</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>2. Give your members a good reason to join and a great one to stay</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>3. Design your introduction to support member retention</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>4. Motivated and trained volunteers deliver the best programme</b>	<b>12</b>
<b>5. Increase parent engagement</b>	<b>13</b>
<b>6. Communicate with your members and community</b>	<b>15</b>
<b>7. Improve membership progression</b>	<b>16</b>
<b>How the 7 Key Ingredients of Growth link with retention strategies</b>	<b>17</b>

---

*"A Scout is never taken by surprise; he knows exactly what to do when anything unexpected happens" - Lord Baden Powell*

---

The easiest way to grow is to make sure more of your existing members stay longer in the Movement. Without retention as a crucial part of your growth strategy, sustainable growth can be hard to achieve and even harder to maintain. Having a great and engaging youth program and sufficient motivated adults to support the programme helps ensure that young people receive the support and attention they need, which is key to increasing retention.

This guide is created to help you reflect on how to improve membership retention in your organisation. It is designed in such a way so that it can be used by the leadership of your organisation but also serve as a great tool for local leaders.

## Why do your members leave Scouting?

Before we dive in and explore the strategies to strengthen your membership retention, we must first understand why our members leave our Movement. This is a critical step in shaping our strategies, and National Scout Organisations (NSOs) are encouraged to invest in such a process. Providing an "exit survey" for members leaving your organisation, understanding membership duration and the moment when a member decides to leave the organisations, is very valuable information that you need before building your retention strategy.

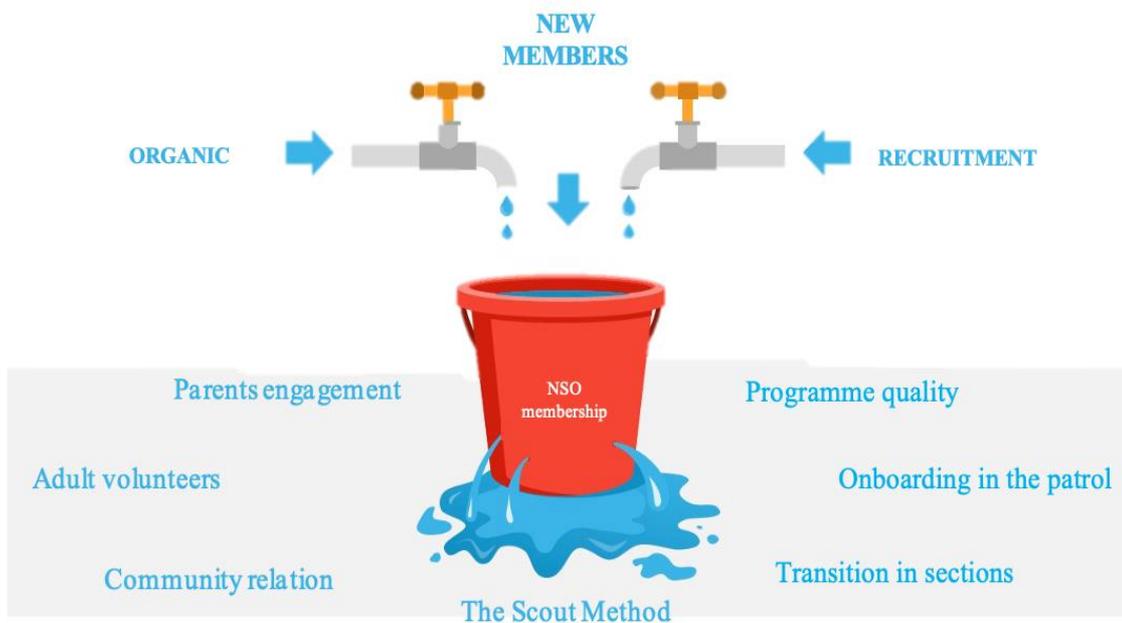
What we know from a number of research projects (including a WOSM survey involving 56 NSOs) is that several key factors for the departure of members from our Movement:

Key factors that affect membership retention:

- The Scout Program fails to meet needs of young people
- There are not enough leaders or leaders available are not trained/skilled to meet expectations
- Parents are not engaged and do not see the value of Scouting
- Scouting does not hold a good social profile with the wider community, or it fails to provide what it promises to
- Scouting is hard to access (financial costs, targeting certain parts of the population only)
- There is increased competition for young people's free time, and growing v options on how to spend it
- Transition processes are either missing or inadequate
- There is lack of good leadership in the governance level
- Concerns or negative reputation within the wider community around Safe from Harm situations

During this pandemic, keeping your members engaged is more challenging but also more important than ever before. Through the WOSM survey, organised in October 2020, we identified additional COVID specific factors that impact our member retention.

- COVID-19 specific factors that affect member retention:
- Lack of activities offered to young people
- Repetitive and monotonous online meetings are not interesting and engaging for young people
- The online programme is not meeting young people's expectations. Large competition in online programmes
- Leaders need to adjust how they engage youth members (training needs to be adjusted)
- Forgetting to address elements from the Scout Method
- Need to adapt our narrative to create realistic expectations for young people and their parents (building character, leadership)



## 7 Simple and effective methods to improve your membership retention!

### 1. Start from the Scout Method

The educational approach to Scouting is implemented through the Scout Method, an original educational system that fosters self-education, empowerment, and cooperative learning. As with any educational method, the Scout Method is the vehicle that brings young people closer to the learnings they are expected to acquire.

The Scout Method comprises eight interdependent elements forming a unified and integrated whole. These equally important elements working together as a cohesive system and their implementation, in a combined and balanced manner, adapted to each age range, is what makes Scouting unique.

In a time of pandemic, it's even more important to remind yourself of the importance of the Scout Method and rethink how we use it.

Scout Method Element	Relevance in the COVID-19 context
<p><b>Scout Law and Promise</b></p> <p><i>A personal voluntary commitment to a set of shared values, which is the foundation of everything a Scout does, and a Scout wants to be. The Promise and Law are central to the Scout Method.</i></p>	<p>The Scout Law and Promise are our moral compass in times of pandemic!</p> <p>You can use them as inspiration and motivation for our members. In the time of a pandemic, it's good to remind yourself of the duties we pledged and reflect on how we can do our best to support our family, friends and community.</p>
<p><b>Learning by doing</b></p> <p><i>The use of practical actions (real-life experiences) and reflection(s) to facilitate ongoing learning and development.</i></p>	<p>Each community can be at a different place in the course of the pandemic. Regardless of how we adjust and re-shape the way we deliver Scouting, learning by doing must remain the foundation of how we engage our members.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Online meetings should not be formal and super structured.</li> <li>• Don't tell members what to do. Let them try and set activities that will help them learn by trying.</li> <li>• Young people need space to explore and decide what they want to do.</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Make it fun (with a purpose)!</li> </ul>
<p><b>Personal progression</b></p> <p><i>A progressive learning journey focused on motivating and challenging an individual to continually develop, through a wide variety of learning opportunities.</i></p>	<p>The personal progression is key in engaging our members and supporting their development into fulfilled and active citizens.</p> <p>There are several aspects that we must keep facilitating in the time of pandemic.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Progression must go on! Individual plans and goals need to be adjusted to reflect reality.</li> <li>• Be flexible and adjust timelines and methods for young people to achieve challenges and Awards.</li> <li>• The pandemic can be a good time to acquire new skills and competences.</li> <li>• Recognition can take place online or in small ceremonies. It is important that it is not delayed and is personal, with presence of the patrol.</li> <li>• The pandemic will be over eventually, we must focus on the great things that are waiting on the horizon for our members. Plan exciting trips, activities and challenges, fundraise and set new adventurous goals.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Team system</b></p> <p><i>The use of small teams as a way to participate in collaborative learning, with the aim of developing effective teamwork, interpersonal skills, leadership as well as building a sense of responsibility and belonging.</i></p>	<p>The Team (Patrol) system is a very good method we can use to respond to challenges arising from the pandemic. It provides smaller groups, and with social distancing, can facilitate an environment for mutual support in the course of challenges.</p> <p>Regardless of limitations caused by restrictions, online or in person, the team system guarantees no one is left behind from the group.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Keep roles divided. Everyone must have a purpose. Innovate with new roles to make activities more fun and relevant.</li> <li>• Look after each other, discuss challenges and provide support for each member.</li> <li>• Online platforms (and games) offer collaborative adventures and challenges. Use them to keep patrols engaged and motivated.</li> <li>• Keep sense of belonging and purpose. Create activities that allow members to demonstrate their achievements (sharing them online for example) and that they are part of the patrol.</li> </ul>

<p><b>Adult Support</b></p> <p><i>Adults facilitating and supporting young people to create learning opportunities and through a culture of partnership to turn these opportunities into meaningful experiences.</i></p>	<p>Our adult volunteers are some of the most impacted by the pandemic. It is important to support them through these challenging times!</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Talk with your volunteers and provide support. Some of them lost their jobs or family members, some are struggling with their roles. Listen to and guide them so they can be the best version of themselves.</li> <li>• Adult recognition is more important than ever. Organise recognition for their outstanding service and celebrate them. Make it personal!</li> <li>• The pandemic is a great time for self-development, offering your leaders access to new training or organising something meaningful for them.</li> <li>• Adjust the leaders' training, help them acquire new skills relevant for the current environment.</li> <li>• Help adult volunteers to listen to young people, conduct surveys, invest in platforms that can support digital engagement of young people.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Symbolic Framework</b></p> <p><i>A unifying structure of themes and symbols to facilitate learning and development of a unique identity as a Scout.</i></p>	<p>Try to reflect what makes sense of belonging in your group and ask yourself, what activities in your local context can make members and volunteers proud that we are Scouts. The use of themes and symbols will also help young people's capacity for imagination, creativity and inventiveness, which can be powerful for motivation and engagement in the activities.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Online content that shows this belonging, for example banners, Scout uniform of social media, Scouts news.</li> <li>• Organise virtual campfires and Scout spirit ceremonies. Ask members to try to capture the environment and bring it to their homes.</li> <li>• Identify attractive and playful themes that can set the environment in which the activities are developed.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Nature</b></p>	<p>It is difficult to imagine Scouting without nature. Many Scout groups around the world including from large cities have successfully shaped their activities to use nature as a key aspect of their programme. Nature is much more than going outdoors, so it is very important to integrate</p>

<p><i>Learning opportunities in the outdoors which encourage a better understanding of and a relationship with the wider environment.</i></p>	<p>this element when planning your activities in times of pandemic.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Nature is the best learning environment but also the best place for social distancing! If the legislation in your community allows you to gather in small groups in a park, near a forest or even a small garden, you can organise many in person non physical contact activities.</li> <li>• If you can't get to nature, bring nature home. Organise activities that will bring the natural feeling at home. Plant flowers or vegetables, make a terrarium or try making a shelter in your garden!</li> <li>• Unpacking what is nature: The spiritual aspect of nature is larger than just going outdoors. Organise activity and ask your members what nature means for them. Talk about how we can facilitate the sense of that environment at home.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Community Involvement</b></p> <p><i>Active exploration and commitment to communities and the wider world, fostering greater appreciation and understanding between people.</i></p>	<p>You can still give back and contribute to the community during a time of COVID. Ask the question: How can you help your community?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Start thinking on a small scale, what members can do within the family at home.</li> <li>• Support from home can be a great way to involve and support your community. We have seen inspiring stories of Scouts contributing through producing masks, protection gear, making policies.</li> <li>• Rovers in many countries have stepped up as front liners in their communities, supporting ordering, the logistic operation and the distributions of goods in their community.</li> <li>• The WOSM Better World Framework offers great ideas on community involvement. You can take action and contribute to your community from your living room, garden or your neighbourhood.</li> </ul>



Best practice: Singapore Scouts

During 2020, restrictions on social gatherings in Singapore increased, culminating in a two month "Circuit Breaker" – a quasi-lockdown. Outdoor Scouting was impossible. Online Scout activities emerged organically where our Scouts had capacity. Given widespread disruption to everyday life, continuing Scouting brought comfort by evoking ordinary times.

We had faith in our adults and youth to apply the Scout Method in the virtual medium.

Beyond converting leadership camps for different age sections for virtual delivery, we avoided a prescriptive approach, but made resources available to Scouts for implementation at the patrol level. Thereafter, youth carried out Scouting on their own via social media, or virtual meeting software.

This decentralized approach to **adult support** emphasized the **team system**, as youth took charge of each other and continued their **personal progression** on their own initiative.

**Variations/Limitations:**

Online Scouting caused screen fatigue, in contrast with the restorative effect of experiencing **nature**.

Singapore was fortunate, as our government led the response to the pandemic. Scouts were not required to provide essential services or distribute vital supplies – we were not even allowed to. The best '**community involvement**' we could perform was to stay at home as per the spirit and letter of social distancing regulations.

## 2. Give your members a good reason to join and a great one to stay.

Our Youth Programme is at the core of what we do as Scouts. A quality programme provides an engaging, challenging and exciting Scouting experience. One which is regularly updated helps it to remain fresh and relevant. These are by far the biggest contributing factors to the attraction and retention of your members, and fundamental cornerstones of any successful retention strategy.

Here are strategies that can help you spice up your programme and make it interesting for your members:

- Ask your members what they want!
- Give responsibilities and engage them as much as possible.
- Package your programme in Adventure.
- Always organise progression and rewards.
- Make it fun!

COVID response suggestion:

Adapt your programme to keep engaging your members! Each country is dealing in different ways with the pandemic, but for Scouting there is one universal need – keep your members engaged and offer them an attractive and fun programme.

- Creating such a programme should be built to meet the needs of the young people, so you can start by reaching out to them and asking for their needs.
- Having the right platform and package to deliver the programme is important for engagement success. Be innovative on how you will engage with your members and how your programme will be different from all other activities they have at the moment.
- Changing the way, we do Scouting does not change our educational role – what we do should be recognised, and encourage members to keep going forward.

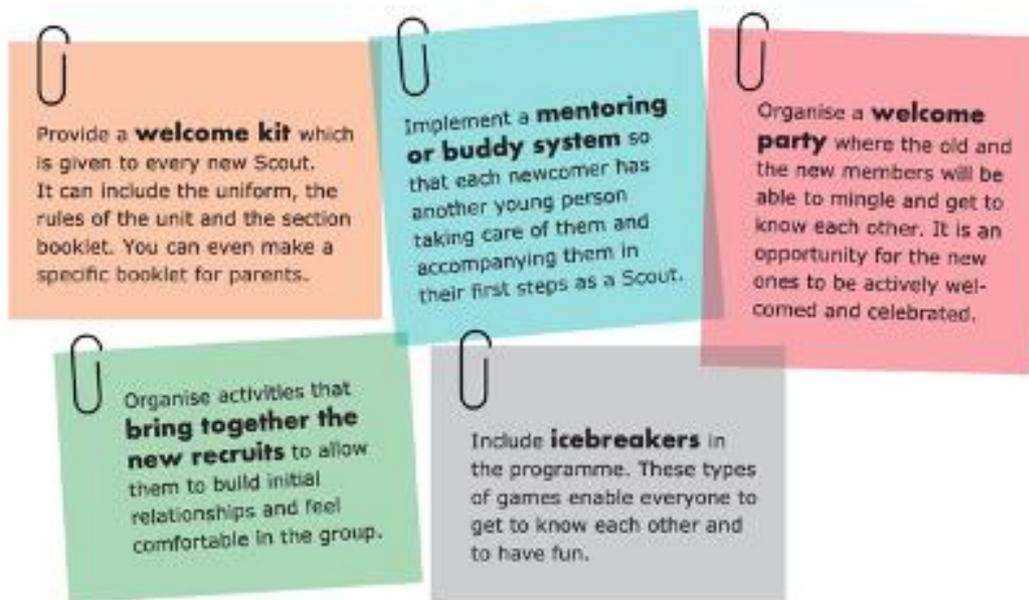
Best practices: Scouting Brazil

### 3. Design your introduction to Scouting to strengthen member retention

What is the number of new members that are not returning after the first two months? Poor welcoming and integration in the Scout patrol is linked to more than 50% membership drop out of new members in the first 6 months. Creating a welcoming environment and personal support is a great way to keep members happy. Fostering the feeling of being part of the pack from the very start makes our members develop friendships and connects and establishes a bond that keeps them longer in our movement.

The patrol system enables a great environment to organise good onboarding. Here are some ways that can help you create a great introduction:

- Give a role to each member in the patrol, that reflects the potential of each member
- Set a "buddy system" pairing members to have joint tasks
- Establish early rewards and glimpse of adventure
- Ask members what they like
- Create bonding opportunities among patrol members. Use team games that facilitate teamwork through fun
- Share in advance what is coming up in the next few weeks and have a distance big attraction (something in the near future to look forward to)
- Develop an annual calendar with adventures and activities
- Use the symbolic framework of Scouting to give to the member a feeling of belonging (official hand over of a neckerchief, pin, etc.)
- Ensure the member has access to information and basic material needed to feel good on the first meetings/weekends
- Make it personal!



COVID response idea:

Getting new members is possible in pandemic. It is important to recognise that now more than ever young people need the Scouting programme. This is an opportunity for our movement to offer our already established programme. Onboarding new members in times of pandemic is even more challenging if the physical contact is limited. But strategies can still be adapted. What can help is building the board [PG2] that will keep our members engaged.

Best practices: Scouting New Zealand

## 4. Motivated and trained volunteers deliver the best programme

The adult leadership is an important factor in whether young people choose to join and stay in Scouting. The skills and abilities of the leadership team are critical to the success of the Youth Programme. If leaders are not trained to create, develop or deliver qualitative, engaging and exciting Youth Programme activities that challenge, excite and motivate young people in their section, you will simply, and very quickly, lose members.

Here are ways that can help you to build a motivating environment for our leaders:

- Offering a challenging and stimulating experience to young people means the adult leaders need appropriate training and personal support, as well as the necessary means and tools to do so.
- Having an honest conversation with leaders on their time commitment and on what is expected from them will allow both sides to set a clear and shared agreement on the task and role.

Investing in growing the number of active leaders and providing them with the necessary training, resources, materials and support to deliver quality Scouting is probably the best investment you can make to accelerate and sustain growth in your NSO. The key to the retention of volunteers is motivation, and so not very different from retention of members. It is all about making sure you provide your volunteers with:

- Chance to match their competencies with the needs of your NSO
- The necessary training and support
- Timely information and clear expectations
- The necessary flexibility to combine their volunteer role with their job/studies and family life
- A meaningful volunteering opportunity where they feel they are making a difference
- Opportunities to develop their skills, knowledge and competencies, such as leadership, team work, etc.

- Recognition for their time, effort and commitment
- A fun volunteer environment and an opportunity to develop a social connection and network with other volunteers
- A safe working environment
- A mentor or coaching system allowing the volunteer to have a trusted person to share with and to receive advice from

COVID response inspiration:

*We should never move our eyes from Adults in Scouting Life cycle management. If you don't keep your volunteer team motivated during this time, it can lead to a decline in volunteer engagement. So the big question is, how do you keep your volunteer team engaged and motivated, as they wait for it to be safe enough for them to serve again?*

**Keep the vision alive.** *Most of your volunteers are serving because they want to be part of the vision and values you shared with them. Keep returning to these values and vision. Keep the "why" in front of them. How the vision is accomplished may shift and adjust in the days ahead, but the "why" will remain the same.*

**Communicate. Communicate. Communicate.** *Keep them in the loop. Don't expect your volunteers to shine in their tasks if you are keeping them in the dark during the week. Send out updates and need-to-knows. Leave space in your communication for Q&A.*

**Meet with them virtually.** *You can use apps like Zoom, Facebook live, Microsoft teams or Skype to communicate with them as a group. Meet with them virtually and share updates, encouragement, spend time together, casting vision and providing relevant and pertinent training.*

**Listen to them.** *As you meet with volunteers in person or virtually, give them space to express their thoughts, worries, ideas and insight:*

—What is driving your motivation up or down?

—How is the current situation affecting you and your family right now?

—How can I serve you and your family during this time of need?

**Support them in keeping up with their Scout units.** *Share with them tips and tricks on how to keep their young people involved, make sure they know how to connect with them and keep Scouting going.*

Best practices: The Scout Association

## 5. Increase Parents Engagement (in the younger sections)

Getting your members' parents onboard is a great way to strengthen membership retention.

Whilst many parents drop off and pick up their child from section meetings, few realise that Scouting is not just a section meeting – there is a whole list of other roles and opportunities offered. They also have a vested interest in keeping local Scouting strong.

Actively and consciously make time and specifically task adult leaders to talk to parents at the beginning or end of meetings every week, and try to find out:

- what they might like from a volunteering role,
- what they are able and willing to do,
- what their skills are,
- what their availability is,

When you know these things, you will be able to tailor a role to meet these expectations, which as a result will encourage them to become more involved in Scouting, be happier in their role and stay involved longer.

Best Practice from The Scout Association:

The [Parent's Guide to Scouting](#) resource can be used to provide parents with more information about Scouting and about how they can get involved. It can be a helpful conversation starter!

Involving parents in your camp or residential experience is proven to be the most successful method of recruiting parents. Check out the [Using Camps to Recruit Parents](#) guide for more information and support.

### **COVID response idea**

Parents are the most important stakeholders during the pandemic. They are impacted negatively and directly in many ways and need to make decisions on how to adapt to the new reality. This involves their time and time of their children.

Communicating and engaging them is very important. Talk with them, explain the new approach to the programme during the pandemic, offer them a new role (if they don't have one). Keeping them close to Scouting during this difficult period is the best way to keep your members. There are a few additional options that you can do to support:

- Offer free of charge activities and waive (or reduce) membership fees
- Share access to development opportunities
- Involve them in planning, fundraising and similar activities

## **6. Communicate with your members and your community**

Scouting is an integral part of the communities where it operates. The relations you will build with your community can define elements of the environment you want to create for your members. Here are several aspects that can support your membership retention:

- Engage in effective two-way communication with your community throughout the year
- Raise awareness about what is offered, how to access benefits, and share our goals and accomplishments
- Talk and communicate about matters that are important for your members
- Use social media platforms to educate, engage and create interactions amongst members and with your local community
- Be present in the important events of the community (physically if possible or online)
- Let members share their stories and benefits of Scouting (e.g., interviews, testimonials)

## 7. Improve your membership progression?

The progression between age sections, including the period just before and after the transition, is one of the most frequent points for youth members to quit Scouting. Helping members to enjoy a smooth transition where they feel empowered will reduce the likelihood of dropouts and support growth. Most importantly, it will also ensure that young people do not miss out on exciting new adventures and experiences coming up for them in their new section.

Here are several ideas on how to improve membership progression and transition:

- Offer a sneak-preview of the next age section and provide a great welcome.
- Create a 'moving on' award so that the young person can have a new challenge in the last few weeks of their current section.
- Organise a ceremony to move on to the next section. It should be unique to the individual group, because the ritual of taking part is important for the members and can create precious memories for the young people.
- Prepare in each section a moment to better understand the transition for younger and older members, where they have a personalised opportunity to ask questions and understand what the main changes are in their new section.
- When your members do make the transition to the next age section, it is often quite daunting. They go from being the oldest in the age section with the most experience, to being the youngest in the new section where they suddenly are ones with the least experience. Ensure to empower them through this transition, assign a buddy and create a welcoming environment.

When young people are at the older age of their current section, they may start to find that the programme offer is uninspiring or unexciting. For a young person, it can only be a matter of a few weeks for them to become impatient having to wait for a new challenge. This is when many young people leave Scouting. By providing a glimpse of what the next age section will offer in terms of new challenges, adventures and opportunities, you will motivate more young people to stay on and continue. This can be done by inviting a young person to attend meetings of the next age section in advance of the official transition. It will help them to get excited about what is coming up, and also ease the transition when they actually move.

### **COVID response inspiration**

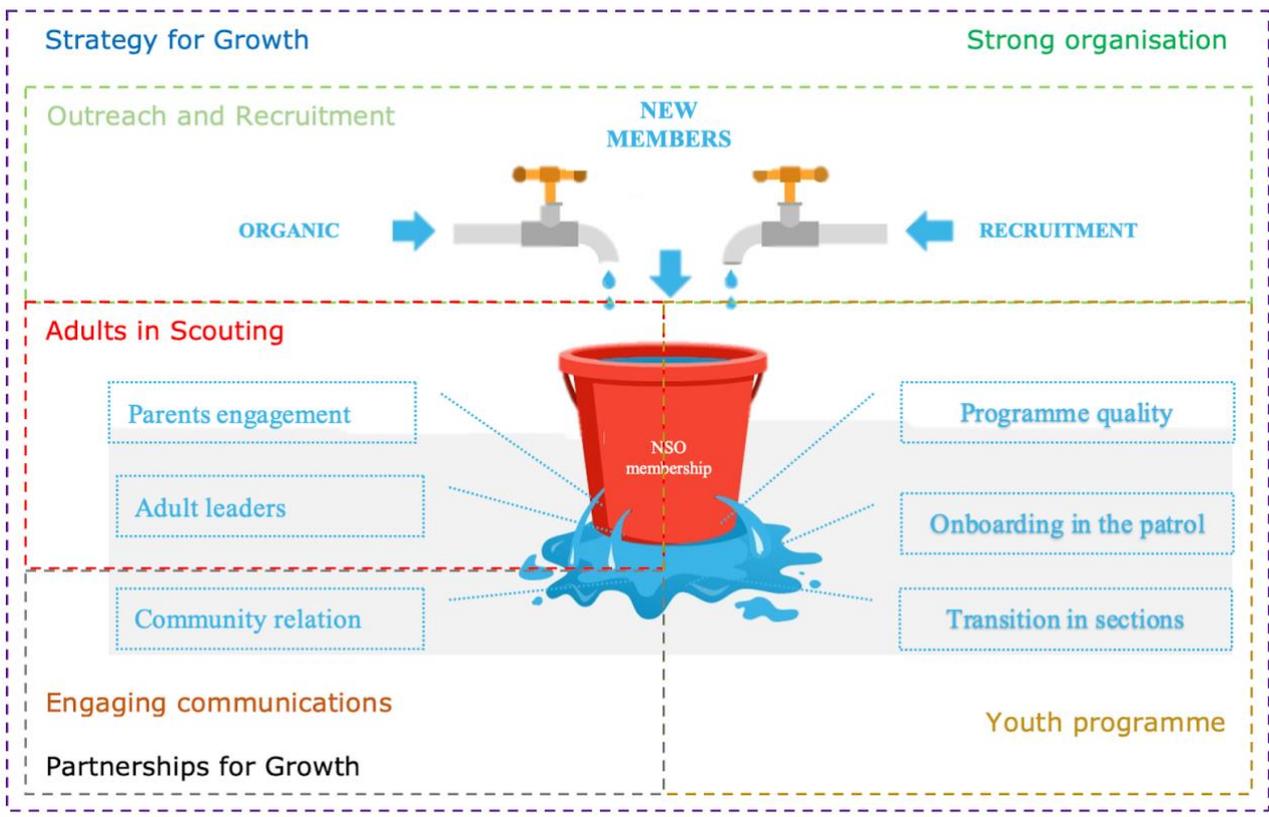
- Consider making your progression more visible and personal or build special editions during the pandemic.
- Organise adventure planning as a new chapter in their membership after the pandemic.

## **How the 7 Key ingredients of Growth are connected with retention strategies**

Successful and sustainable growth requires a strategic and holistic, organisation-wide approach. This approach can only be achieved by working to improve different dimensions of your organisation. It also calls for necessary long-term commitment and investment of resources across your organisation.

In order to ensure sustainable growth, it is important to focus both on providing new opportunities for young people to join our Movement; and equally, on making sure your existing members are supported and have the time of their lives.

Here is how the 7 Key Ingredients of growth encompass retention aspects:



Read more about the 7 Key Ingredients for Growth in the WOSM Growth Toolkit.



Each section of the toolkit covers a different aspect of growth and suggests a selection of activities which can be implemented by the NSO.

The all-encompassing nature of growth means that it will be important to tailor each element to the needs and reality of the NSO. Please consult the [Growth Service](#) for further resources and support.





**SCOUTS**<sup>®</sup>  
Creating a Better World

© World Scout Bureau Inc.  
FEBRUARY 2021

World Scout Bureau,  
Global Support Centre  
Kuala Lumpur

Suite 3, Level 17,  
Menara Sentral Vista, No 150  
Jalan Sultan Abdul Samad  
Brickfields, 50470  
Kuala Lumpur, MALAYSIA

Tel.: + 60 3 2276 9000  
Fax: + 60 3 2276 9089

[worldbureau@scout.org](mailto:worldbureau@scout.org)  
[scout.org](http://scout.org)