**Assimilation & Incorporation Process**

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**What is assimilation?** Assimilation is the process by which an organization welcomes, receives and incorporates members into its membership. Whether the process is managed or unintentional, effective or not, it describes how members begin and continue to fit into the committees, councils, project and network of the membership.

**What are the challenges of assimilation?** Why is it necessary to assimilate members in AgGateway? Think about some of the reasons why companies you know have joined AgGateway – and about why companies you know have left AgGateway. Among those reasons you might uncover some of the following challenges of assimilation.

**Challenge symptoms:**

* Inactivity – not involved in any of the projects, committees or councils; not attending conferences or CCP meetings
	+ Not interested in what we have to offer
	+ Not willing to share their concerns or needs
	+ Have difficulty relating to other members
* Dues payment – instead of paying on-time or before due, staff needs to follow up (not a priority for member)

**Recognizing the symptoms:**

* To recognize the above symptoms, we have to get to know the members
	+ How does the staff and the Membership & Communication Committee get to know the new members?
	+ Do we have a process to meet and greet all new members to make them feel welcome? Is it possible to do this?
	+ Is there any personal contact with the new member within the first month of new membership?
	+ Is there any mentoring available for new members
	+ Are those that have served in the past willing to mentor the new members to serve?
	+ Are the numbers of “in-active” members growing each year?
* Incorporation doesn’t happen automatically with membership. 75-80% of all people who become inactive do so within the first year of joining
* Assimilation and incorporation is an ongoing process. Sometimes long-term members drop out because of burn-out, conflict, or other issues

**Recommendation:**

* Incorporation of the new member begins when we/they make the first contact (maybe even before they become a member).
* The responsibility of incorporating the new member and building a relationship needs to start with the AgGateway organization (members and staff)
* The number of friendships/relationships made prior to membership is directly related to whether or not that person/company gets involved and stays involved after becoming a member.

**Things New Members Who Are “Connected:”**

1. Have developed a minimum of 5-7 friendships/relationships in the first 6 months
2. Attend at least one or more meetings of the councils, committees or projects within the first 6 months
3. Participates verbally within a council’s or committee meeting (either asking questions or are asked for their thoughts) within the first 6 months
4. Understands and identifies with the strategy and goals of AgGateway organization
5. Attends either the Annual meeting or CCP meeting within the first 6 months of membership, then at least one each year thereafter
6. Are looking at how their company can become more efficient through eBusiness
7. Willing to publicly share (when appropriate) what AgGateway is doing for the industry.
8. Shares and encourages their major trading partners to get involved with AgGateway.
9. Becomes a member or a committee within the first year and remains active on that committee.
10. Serves in an active role as a liaison, chair, vice-chair within the first 5 years of membership

**Who does assimilation? Everyone does assimilation!** In other words, everyone is involved in the connection of new members to the organization. Even if there is a specific committee or person responsible for the development, planning and implementation of an assimilation process, EVERYONE is involved! We are all to encourage, support and to help connect those who decide to be part of AgGateway.

**How do we assimilate/connect new members?**

1. Membership & Communication Committee (or task forces) to develop assimilation process plan that fits AgGateway’s needs.
2. After the planning is finished, there may be some new volunteers recruited.
3. Assure task force of support from & interaction with staff and leaders.
4. Task Force must be supported – as part of the strategic planning under the membership growth.

**How do we retain and keep current members “connected”?**

1. Membership & Communication Committee (or task force) to develop a “Keep Them Connected” (here we are referring to connected with AgGateway as well as eConnected) plan that fits AgGateway’s needs.
2. Assign “mentors” to the new members that can contact them regularly the first year.
3. Assure mentors have support from & interaction with staff and leaders.
4. Mentors must be supported – as part of the strategic planning under the membership growth.