

## Statement of Purpose for Membership

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Why does AASLH have a membership program? It may seem a silly question because as an association, we assume that it should have members. Membership though, is an incredibly common way of establishing community in the United States and it's an integral part of such diverse organizations as American Medical Association, American Automobile Association, and American University Alumni Association—but in each of these examples, membership exists for different reasons. Certainly membership is important to AASLH because it is the greatest source of unrestricted revenue but as a non-profit organization, is that a sufficient reason? Everything we do should be related to our mission: “*AASLH provides leadership and support for its members who preserve and interpret state and local history in order to make the past more meaningful to all Americans.*” Membership also implies a reciprocal relationship: in return for joining, members receive something of value (otherwise, they would be called donors).

For AASLH, the purpose of membership is:

1. Participation: to identify, engage, and support the people and organizations that want to “preserve and interpret state and local history in order to make the past more meaningful to all Americans.” [AASLH mission]
2. Co-production: to easily pool, access, share, and disseminate the tools, skills, experiences, and funds needed to fulfill the AASLH mission.
3. Advocacy: to represent the interests of its members to elected officials, agencies, foundations, organizations, and other institutions at a state or national level.

If a membership activity or program fulfills all of these elements, it's a high priority. If a membership activity or program only fulfills one of these elements, we shouldn't pursue it.

Our membership program is based on a mutually beneficial relationship. Externally, AASLH and its members gain something of value from each other—it is not only to buy and sell a product or service, but also to obtain professional and non-tangible benefits. For example, AASLH maintains and builds its credibility by the reputation of its members, while a member builds and maintains his or her credibility through his or her association with AASLH. Internally, we share information through our core services and programs (e.g., *History News*, annual meeting, workshops). The success of one depends on the success of the other. To sustain and grow, AASLH needs to continually assess both the internal and external relationships of its membership program to ensure they are mutually satisfying. Membership, however, is not philanthropy for AASLH. Both are important parts of fundraising and should coordinate, however, they should be managed separately because they have different purposes.

### References:

- Hayes, Debi and Alix Slater. “From ‘Social Club’ to ‘Integrated Membership Scheme’: Developing Membership Schemes Strategically.” *International Journal of Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Marketing* 8, no. 1 (2003): 59-75.
- Gruen, Thomas, John Summers, and Frank Acito. “Relationship Marketing Activities, Commitment, and Membership Behaviors in Professional Associations.” *Journal of Marketing* 64, no. 3 (July 2000): 34-49.