

Membership opportunities

With more sport and recreation options than ever before, the choice as to where people spend their leisure time has never been greater. Recognising the busy lifestyles, family commitments and financial constraints on people, golf clubs need to be innovative in order to provide a range of membership options.

By reviewing membership trends and any specific age/gender groupings where membership is weak, clubs can explore options that will be attractive to these groups.

Consulting with current and previous members may be helpful to determine what golfers want for their membership fees and what may be attractive for members' family and friends. New members often have fresh ideas about the club as they see the club from a different perspective whilst they assimilate.

Overcoming potential barriers to membership

The following is a list of potential barriers to membership and suggested response considerations:

- The application process – can this be simplified?
- Entrance fees – does the golf club need to still charge an entrance fee? Can the fee be paid on a payment plan? Could this fee be lifted at certain times of the year? Could your club consider an entrance fee refund policy – a member concerned about committing a sizable amount to join a club may feel more comfortable making the decision to join if a club has a policy whereby it will refund the joining fee after six months if the new member decides that the club is not for them. Refund policies in many businesses provide comfort in the decision making process and may be rarely exercised by the customer.
- Annual payments – consider having a variety of fee structures and payment methods such as pay by instalments and provide methods to pay such as direct debit, BPAY, and credit card.
- Monthly payments – offer monthly payments by direct debit. To assist with any increase in administration requirements, there are services such as 'Pay as you Golf' which provide a service of collecting subscriptions instalments from members.
- Fee increase from junior / young to adult membership – build incentives for junior and young adult members to remain at the golf club into adult membership. This could include staggering entrance fees and reducing/removing transition fees.
- Playing and competition restrictions – ensure opportunities are available for all age groups and all categories of members to play and compete where possible.
- Offer support to new members – new members require support to feel welcome and supported within a new club environment.

Different types of membership packages

The following is a list of different types of membership that could be considered by your club:

- Introductory (Trial) membership – this reduces the financial barrier of committing to golf membership and gives the potential member an opportunity to get to know the club. An ‘introductory’ fee is charged for restricted playing rights and can include coaching clinics, vouchers for the driving range or shop and loan equipment. This type of membership allows the new golfer to reach a minimum playing standard and assess whether membership is right for them prior to committing long term.
- Cadet membership – to encourage young players into the game, golf clubs can offer an access to a ‘cadet program’. The new player can receive regular coaching clinics, opportunities to play in junior days with current junior members, play golf at times outside of the peak competition times, practice with other cadet members and submit scorecards for handicapping. The subscription may be a nominal fee. At the end of a nominated period, having met an agreed playing standard, a cadet can be offered the opportunity to join as a junior member.
- Low User membership – an annual fee that entitles a member to a certain number of rounds of golf during the year, whilst maintaining use of other nominated club facilities e.g. clubhouse.
- 9-Hole – this type of membership is appealing to those players who are reluctant to join a golf club due to time constraints. Members would have restricted playing rights (9-hole) whilst maintaining use of other nominated club facilities e.g. clubhouse.
- Student – for those members studying at university, this allows them to retain their links with the golf club at a reduced rate so that they can still play during holiday periods. Supporting golfers at this age is essential as they could be the adult members of the future.
- Green-Fee membership – pay a nominal annual fee, e.g. \$100 which entitles a member to continue to take part in club competitions but pay discounted ‘green fee’ for course access.
- Units of membership – some golf clubs allow golfers to buy quantities of membership units that equate to rounds of golf, coaching and use of facilities, rather than pay an annual fee. What the units buy may depend upon factors such as weekday or weekend use. This is ideal for those golfers that are unable to commit time to membership.
- Family/Couples’ membership – a discounted package could be available for families or couples e.g. children go free or the partner receives membership for half price. Specific family/couple activities can also be run as part of the package.
- Under 30’s membership – sliding scale fees for golfers under the age of 30. Full adult membership can then be offered at a slightly reduced rate for the first year.
- Absentee/Overseas – Whilst the member is away their rate of subscription is reduced e.g. to that of a non-playing member.

- Country/ Interstate – a category that recognises the distance the member lives and the fewer opportunities to play golf and incur a reduced fee.
- Buy 12 months and get 2 months free – An incentive to encourage golfers into membership, but could also be adapted for example, buy 12 months and receive 4 coaching lessons free.
- Group Membership – golfers from local organisations or businesses could be offered a discounted rate of membership for the first year if 5 or more employees join. Group coaching can be available to support the golfers in reaching a certain playing standard. The local organisation/business can benefit by having access to using the clubhouse facilities.

In deciding what membership categories to introduce, golf clubs should consult with their current members and past members to determine what is of interest and the impact it will have on the club.

It is a good idea to have a wide range of membership options in order to appeal to a wider group of potential members. Clubs should consider the impact on existing members with any new category or offer. New offers may provide an incentive for existing members to change category and this may be a good thing or it may be unwanted. By engraining existing members, their rationale for any changes can be better understood and new members will be viewed as vital to the club.