

Membership Program Design Template

The process of designing the first iteration of your membership program can feel overwhelming.

The Membership Puzzle Project has watched newsrooms spend months trying to come up with the perfect mix of benefits and pricing tiers. But while benefits can make the membership experience more enriching, they're not as important as knowing your potential members deeply and getting the membership value proposition right. This is what hooks potential members and tells them what they're opting into.

While we wish we could simply say “Give them X and Y and Z members will join,” there is no plug-and-play membership program, both because membership is still relatively new, and what works for one newsroom won't necessarily work for another. That's OK. Once you've got the value proposition and branding right and you've identified a few ways to add value to the membership experience – your benefits – the best thing you can do is launch your membership program and see how potential members respond. Getting this right will be an iterative process.

This worksheet will help you focus on the key decisions to make as you design your membership program so that you can get it out the door and see what members think. For more detailed information on any of these steps, head to “[Designing your membership program](#)” in the [Membership Guide](#).

This document was inspired by Becca Aaronson and Cindy Royal's “[A Journalist's Guide to Building News Products](#)” from ONA18. It remains just as relevant today!

Building the foundation

What do your audience members value about you?

Identify your membership value proposition [using the Strategyzer Ad-Lib template](#).

For more on identifying your value proposition, head to the [Membership Guide](#).

Describe your potential members.

What should your membership program do for your members?

This ties back to your membership value proposition. How will your membership program fulfill your potential members' motivations for joining?

You could put this in the form of a user story: "As a member of [your newsroom], I want [goal] so that [motivation]." Example: As a member of [newsroom], I want to get to know the reporters so that I can share my expertise and contribute to their journalism.

What does your membership program need to do for your organization?

You're likely launching a membership program in order to bring in revenue from your supporters. But what other organizational goals are associated with your membership

program? One potential example: Our membership program should increase our journalists' interaction with our audience members. Use the same format above.

Choosing benefits

The Membership Guide has a list of [commonly offered benefits](#).

Step 1:

Return to your [membership value proposition](#), specifically your member motivations and the “how it works” answers

Step 2:

Identify benefits that fit your membership value proposition

Step 3 (optional):

If you have more ideas for benefits than you can deliver and you're having trouble prioritizing, use an impact/effort matrix. Benefits that match member values strongly are high value. Benefits that require significant costs and/or staff time are high effort.

	LOW EFFORT	HIGH EFFORT
HIGH VALUE	<p>Highest priority</p> <p>Prioritize offering these benefits from the beginning</p>	<p>Medium priority</p> <p>Consider whether there are small changes you can make to lessen the effort required to offer these. If not, depending on your bandwidth, choose just one, or put them on your roadmap for later.</p>
LOW VALUE	<p>Lower priority</p> <p>Consider whether any small changes could make these more valuable to your potential members. If you don't see a way to make them higher value, take these off your list.</p>	<p>Lowest priority</p> <p>Take these off your list</p>

Step 4:

In the boxes below, answer the following questions for each benefit you choose:

1. Who is this element of the membership program for? Why would they want it?
2. What does this element of the membership program cost you in actual costs and staff time?

Step 5:

For each benefit, you should also identify how you will be able to tell if members value this benefit – in other words, whether it is worth continuing to offer it. This is likely a metric of some kind, such as open rates on a member-only newsletter. Include this in the boxes as well.

Benefit 1: _____

Benefit 2: _____

Benefit 3: _____

Benefit 4: _____

If you have more than four benefits, that's fine! Just add as many boxes as you need above.

Other details

Will you have tiers or a pay-what-you-can model?

For more on pricing strategy, head to [“How should we set prices for our membership program?”](#) in the [Membership Guide](#).

If you will have tiers or a single price, how much will you charge? What indicates this is the right price for your potential members?

What will you call your members? Will they understand your choice?

Calling them members is fine. Most people do that. However, the term “member” has a connotation in some languages and countries that could be problematic for a news organization. Use your best judgment about what makes sense for your community and the political and social context that applies to them.



Set S.M.A.R.T.I.E. goals for your membership program.

Use [The Management Center's S.M.A.R.T.I.E. Goals worksheet](#) to get started.

Goal 1

Goal 2

Goal 3

