Have You Tried This?
Recommended recruiting tips for YMCA Adventure Guide programs.

From reading the *Leading the Way* manual or the Adventure Guide website, you already know how to recruit through school flyers and open houses, member invitations and word of mouth. Are you looking for non-traditional, creative, more surefire ways to attract attention to your program and get potential members to ask questions? We surveyed Y's looking for some of their more creative recruitment strategies and added a few of our own.

1. **Y's overwhelmingly report that word of mouth is their most effective means of recruiting new participants.** But how do you get members to talk about the program and recruit their friends and family? Provide incentives. Conduct a "member get a member" campaign where current members receive coupons for reduced fees for the program; campouts or materials and supplies; program materials like a nice compass or recruiter program patch; a new sweatshirt or a walking stick; or better yet, ask members what would be strong enough incentive to get them out there "pounding the pavement" looking for new recruits.
2. **Plan a "t-shirt day"** when, on the same day, everyone wears their Adventure Guide t-shirts to school to promote the program. It's intended to create a huge visual to other kids about the program, how many kids in their class or grade are involved (peer pressure) and to get parents talking in the school yard about the "matching" t-shirts and asking questions about Y-Adventure Guides. Prepping kids ahead of time is critical so they can talk about the program with their friends. Make sure you have volunteers with information about the program handy in the school yard when parents are dropping off and picking up kids.
3. **Create an e-mail newsletter** that goes to your current members around recruitment time. Share highlights from the last year and exciting elements of the upcoming year. Provide tips on parenting 5-9 year olds, or forming adult friendships and support networks (all of the benefits of this program). Encourage your members to forward this e-mail newsletter and an invitation to join to at least one family they know. Make recruitment easy on your busy families—forwarding a newsletter to a friend or family member is a bit easier than making a phone call or scheduling a time to talk. Try the same idea with kids. E-mail your "kid-friendly, kids-focused" newsletter to your young explorers and ask them to forward it to their friends with an invitation to talk to their parents about joining.
4. **Host a focus group of families** (with children 5-9) who have just joined the Y (provide an incentive or stipend for them to attend). Explain the program and ask them to help identify what messages, components or incentives within a marketing and recruitment campaign would entice them to join.
5. **Print and display lawn signs with the Adventure Guide Compass logo.** The Y, some schools and churches, and current members may be willing to display them. It does wonders for name recognition.

6. **Set up a table during family nights and other recruiting events**, and display tiki torches, tents, sleeping bags, fishing rods and so forth to make the program seem real. Make sure everyone gets a sticker (Sports Awards is our preferred vendor for stickers) and a compass (the YMCA Program Store is our preferred vendor for giveaway compasses).
7. **Make recruiting nights interactive and fun.** Create atmosphere: dress in adventure attire, carry a walking stick and display pictures of last year's program events. Send potential members on a scavenger hunt throughout the Y or school (using their new compasses); experience a mock campfire and ceremony. Set up last year's pinewood derby track with cars.
8. **Link program promotion to the findings in the Building Strong Families Study.** Parents from across the country were asked (in a study conducted by Y-USA and the Search Institute) to identify what would make parenting easier. Title your campaign, "We're listening." You might say: When asked what would make parenting easier, parents identified these elements.
    - People telling them they're doing a good job as a parent;
    - Talking with other parents about parenting issues;
    - Getting parenting advice from trusted professionals;
    - People they trust—including friends, neighbors and extended family—spending more positive time with their kids

    We are pleased to announce that our YMCA Adventure Guide Program is designed to meet these four needs and more.
9. **Set up Adventure Guide circles in your school-age care or after school programs.** Make Adventure Guides your primary parent-connection or parent-involvement program. Write the program into your program flyers, parent handbooks and orientation outline. Design the two programs so they seem like a natural fit; you wouldn't do after school without Adventure Guides.
10. **Create and recruit kinship circles where parents can develop support groups and kids feel an immediate connection.** For example, home schooling families, grandparents raising grandchildren, children with special needs, gay and lesbian parents, afternoon and night shift working parents, stay at home dads and so on.
11. **Focus on Moms in the recruiting process.** Although most participants are father-child teams, in many Y's it is the wives/moms that complete the registration paperwork. They connect with the mission of the program and then "persuade" dads to get involved after they have been registered. Recruit in aerobics classes and PTA meetings, and place your brochures/flyers/posters at stores and businesses that cater to women.
12. **Create a two-sided "business card" with bullet points about the program, logo and contact number, and very important Web site address.** This is easy to pass out at all kinds of events, it's easy for a person to pick up and carry in a pocket during an event and it can be carried by members to hand out as an impromptu opportunity occurs.