

THE GRAND LODGE OF TEXAS

Bring a Brother Back

Program Handbook

Planning Committee 2021

Seth Alston, PM, Hillcrest Lodge No. 1318 Eric Stuyvesant, PM, Garland Lodge No. 441

J.W. Irick, PM, Bridgeport Lodge No. 587 Kyle Wahlquist, PM, Hillcrest Lodge No. 1318

Sonny Juarez, PM, Fidelis Lodge No. 1127 Jeff Smith, PM, Keller Lodge No. 1084

Dr. Michael Perez, PM, North Houston Morning Lodge No. 1360

The Grand Lodge of Texas

Bring a Brother Back Program Handbook

The trustees of the Grand Lodge of Texas prioritize the participation of all Masons in their home lodges or in a lodge near their place of residence if they no longer reside within fifty (50) miles of their home lodge. This handbook is intended a resource for the efforts of lodges to gain the participation of their inactive members and to provide a place for visiting Masonic brethren to be active in a lodge. Inactive members are those Masons who have not participated in Masonic Lodge activities within the last twelve months. It will be distributed by the Grand Lodge of Texas directly to the lodges and the District Deputy Grand Masters (DDGMs).

We must recognize that what was successful in keeping members active in the olden days no longer works. We must examine how we do business today and what is necessary to move us to the level where our members want to be active and involved. We cannot expect members to be active if we only offer a business meeting once a month where we listen to the Secretary and hear Brothers argue about bills. We must be and offer more.

Background:

On average, 15 percent of Texas Masonic Lodge membership actively participate I their home lodges. Assuming that 35 percent of our membership is precluded from active participation by age, health, family obligations or employment considerations, that means 50 percent of our membership really have no good reason not to be active in a Masonic Lodge. As a fraternity, we must determine what is necessary to cause these card-carrying Masons to be active.

Masons have posited many reasons for this lack of participation. They point to the 15 percent rule that many civic organizations accept as the norm for participation of their membership in civic organizations. Some Masons assert that in our rush to increase total membership, many members were initiated who did not understand the obligations they were assuming or should not have been considered for membership in the first place. Some say that the lodge, as we know, does not address, or provide for the needs of younger Masons or fails to provide what we as Masons promised to all newly raised Master Masons. Whatever the reason, we should remember that our Brothers took an obligation to support their lodge. This does not mean in payment of dues only but to support it with their time and talent.

Many lodges have reached out to their inactive members with varying degrees of success. Their efforts have included telephone calls, emails and personal visits. As used in this booklet, inactive means those members who live within 50 miles of their home lodge and have not attended a lodge event of their home lodge of any kind in the last 12 months. Also to be considered are those Masons who live more than 50 miles from their home lodge and have not attended a lodge event of any lodge in the past 12 months or have not affiliated with a Masonic lodge near their new place of residence.

The Bring a Brother Back program was created to address these issues and seek solutions. This booklet provides lodges with a systematic method of reaching out to its inactive members. It also contains numerous alternatives a lodge may use in its efforts to bring members into active participation of the lodge's events.

METHOD OF IMPLEMENTATION. This booklet sets out certain steps for a lodge to take in its efforts to Bring Back a Brother. The steps and how large they are taken depends on your Lodge

and its specific situation. What might work in a small town might fail in an urban Lodge. There are no guaranteed results and success is dependent on the enthusiasm of the Lodge members.

We recommend, the lodge organize its efforts in accordance with the following steps:

Step One: Inventory Your Lodge. Define what your lodge is and does. How do your members visualize your lodge and see its purpose? How is your lodge perceived by members of your community? What are its values and what does it do for your members? What are the activities of the lodge? Who is responsible for degree work and candidate instruction? Who does the teaching?

Step Two: Inventory Your Grounds and Building. How do they appear? Are they functional? Are they in disrepair and nonfunctional? Are they attractive places for your members and their families to go for things other than meetings? Are they attractive places to the community? Are they safe and secure places for people?

Step Three: Inventory your inactive members. Determine who your inactive members are. What are their ages, occupations, dates of raising, last activities they attended? Where do they live? Who was the person who brought them to the lodge and who taught them the work?

Step Four: Survey your inactive members. Talk with each inactive member in person. Do not let a phone call or email be substituted for that contact. What was the last thing they did with the lodge? When did that occur? What did they like about the lodge? What did they dislike about the lodge? Why did they quit coming to lodge activities? What would they like to see the lodge do? What is of interest to them about the lodge?

Step Five: Introspection. Active members of the lodge meet outside of a stated meeting to review the findings of the inventories and survey. Members discuss what could be done to remedy issues raised by the surveys and inventories.

Step Six: Create a Plan of Action. Adopt a specific list of actions to be taken that are within the lodge's abilities and determine who will lead in carrying out these actions.

Step Seven: Implementation of the Plan. The Lodge members working together, led by the leaders, carry out the actions.

Step Eight: Retrospection. After the plan has been implemented, step back and in a meeting outside the stated meeting, discuss how the plan was carried out, its successes, its failures, and what plans are necessary in the future.

DETAILED RECOMMENDATIONS FOR EACH STEP.

Step One: Inventory Your Lodge.

Does your lodge have an updated, clear mission statement and vision statement, statements that all members support.? If you don't have a road map, it doesn't matter which road you take. These statements will answer the questions of who you are and what you are about.

How do you know how your lodge is perceived by your community? Is your lodge ever mentioned in local newspapers? Is there any attractive signage indicating your lodge's presence in the community?

Is there a brother in the lodge who is identified to be responsible for the scheduling and marketing of lodge events? Does this brother report on his progress at each stated meeting?

Is there a brother in the lodge who is identified to be responsible for the scheduling of degrees and assignment of instructors to candidates? Are the lodge instructors formally identified in lodge minutes? Do all the lodge instructors have current masonic certification?

Does your lodge participate actively in community events, such as parades and open houses?

Step Two: Inventory Your Grounds and Buildings.

Appoint a team to do a thorough walk around the lodge grounds and throughout the lodge building, making detailed notes of all items that require attention.

Make a list of all items requiring attention; determine if each item can be rectified by a member or if external help is needed (e.g. contractors).

Establish an estimate for the cost of each item requiring attention and estimate the time needed to make the improvement.

Determine if existing signage is adequate. Is the lodge building clearly identified by an external sign? Are their signs within the community indicating the presence of the Masonic Lodge? Are the signs in good condition and attractive?

Prioritize the list in two ways. For all the items that can be rectified by a lodge member, prioritize each item, and identify the lodge member to make the improvement. Make a list of all items that cannot be rectified by a lodge member and present that list (with cost estimates) to the membership for a vote of which projects can be funded in the current masonic year and which projects can be funded in future masonic years.

Step Three: Inventory Your Inactive Members.

The lodge Secretary will be the first and best source for determining who your

inactive members are. What are their ages, occupations, dates of raising, last activities they attended? Where do they live? Who was the person who brought them to the lodge and who taught them the work?

Document this information and use it to help with Step Four.

Step Four: Survey Your Inactive Members.

Appoint a team of lodge members. Divide the list of inactive members, produced by the work in Step Three among the team.

Have each team members contact either in person or telephonically each person on the inactive member list.

This contact should attempt to identify what the last thing they did with the lodge and when that occurred. Further, try to identify what the inactive members liked and disliked about the lodge? Why did they quit coming to lodge activities? Try to determine what it would take for them to return to lodge activities. Ask what would they like to see the lodge do and what is of interest to them about the lodge?

Step Five: Introspection.

A team of active officers and members of the lodge meet outside of a stated meeting to review and validate the findings of the surveys and inventories. This introspection should be open and honest. Each member present should be encouraged and supported in expressing his thoughts and suggestions. It should be a free-ranging discussion. The quote, "Some men see things as they are and ask why. I dream of things that never were and ask why not," This review can include not only the findings but can also include new issues and items the team agrees are important.

Members discuss and document actions that could be taken and strategies that could be implemented to remedy issues raised by the surveys and inventories.

Part of this introspection should be an honest assessment of lodge culture.

The team should review the number of family events held by the lodge each year either inside or outside the lodge. The research shows that the number of family events is a major factor in membership satisfaction.

Additionally, the team should review how often masonic education is provided by the lodge.

Masonic education is not only the ritual training provided by lodge instructors to candidates, but also includes lectures or talks prepared and delivered by lodge members or even members of other lodges concerning Masonic history, symbolism and other masonic topics of interest to the lodge members. Once again, current research reflects a current demand for more and better masonic education events provided by the lodge.

Likewise, the team could review the charitable activities of the lodge. Does the lodge conduct fundraiser each year for charity? Where is that money used for? Does the lodge award at least one scholarship each year? Should there be changes made to the charitable activities of the lodge? What does the lodge do to support its members emotionally and financially each year? How often and by whom are these inquiries made? Remember, we pledged to be Brothers, and these are our Brothers.

Can the lodge increase its activities within the community? Has the lodge explored blood drives, community clean-up events and participation in parades?

Does the lodge support the formal training of the wardens by sending them to the wardens' retreats/training established by the Grand Lodge of Texas? Likewise, does the lodge support attendance of lodge members at Grand Master conferences, Briscoe workshops or masonic

forums? Does the lodge and its members make use of the various Masonic documents placed on the GLOT website?

Does the lodge require the Junior Warden to provide a reading from the GLOT Lawbook during each stated meeting?

Does the lodge routinely take action to support and assist new members by assigning master masons to mentor new members and to assign them duties very early in their masonic journey so that new members will feel both valued and involved in lodge activities?

Some items the members should discuss include the following actions and strategies:

Partner with nearby Masonic Lodges to conduct joint events and increase the fraternity among Brothers.

Appoint a Masonic district-wide social media chairman to publicize and coordinate Masonic events throughout the district.

Conduct ongoing research to any college and university within a 20-mile radius to attract young men to our fraternity.

Reduction of the \$50 fee for returning Brothers.

Scheduling some morning, afternoon, and weekend lodge meetings.

Assignment of a lodge officer to serve as official greeter at the door for each lodge function.

Create a special Bring a Brother Back event at the lodge.

Create a lodge membership team to call each member of the lodge at least once every two months.

Speak in lodge about being careful of each other's feelings. Too many Brothers have felt unvalued and disrespected by a few toxic personalities and destructive statements that drove them away from active lodge participation. Some examples we have encountered include

critical discussions about religion and politics on lodge property, such as in the dining room. Although such discussion is prohibited in the actual lodge room, the damage to our Masonic community is already done when brothers engage in such discussions anywhere on lodge property. Brothers should feel safe in speaking up when they hear racist or sexist comments anywhere at the lodge.

Limit business meetings to not more than 45 minutes. Long, detailed discussions should be left to committees and the results of such discussions announced in lodge meeting.

Step Six: Create a Plan of Action.

After completing the introspection, the team should produce a detailed, written list of actions to be taken that are within the lodge's abilities. The list should address the:

- 1) Lodge's character and self-image and what should be done to better define and improve that self-image.
- 2) Lodge's community image, and what should be done to enhance that image.
- 3) Lodge's physical needs and updates.
- 4) Inactive membership and what steps will be taken to bring those members back.
- 5) Activities designed to increase the benefit of the lodge to members.
- 6) How activities will be planned in the future.

This list will identify the lodge member responsible for the completion of each action item as well as the estimated date of completion.

The lodge Plan of Action should be presented at a stated meeting and adopted by vote of the membership.

Step Seven: Implementation of the Plan.

In the end, while individual lodge members are responsible for specific portions of the action plan, it will be the Worshipful Master of the lodge who carries overall responsibility to ensure the written plan is implemented as approved by the lodge membership and within the timeframe allotted.

Step Eight: Retrospection.

No later than 12 months after the plan has been approved and implemented, the lodge team should step back and hold a follow-up meeting outside a stated meeting, The objective of this meeting is to discuss how the plan was carried out, its successes, its failures, and what to plan for the future.

This team should use the items in the lodge action plan to conduct this review and to document the outcomes of the plan. If there were any failures of the action plan, the team should document those and discuss how these failures can be turned into successes in the future.

Any good plan requires periodic review and modification. The lodge should not shrink from developing a new action plan for the following year, based on outcomes of the action plan for the current year. This is especially true for the lodge inventory of the building and grounds as these concerns are perennial and require constant inspection and review.

SUMMARY.

Since no one plan will fit all lodges, it is critical that each lodge develop a unique plan that fits that lodge. As one Texas brother has noted, “We must evolve or dissolve.”

As always, timely and effective communication is essential. Lodges needing assistance should turn for help to their lodge instructors, their District Deputy Grand Master,

the District Education and Communication Officer, District Instructor, and the following members of the resource team, who inspired this program. They are:

Seth Alston	<u>seth.alston@yahoo.com</u>	903-806-5975
J.W. Irick	<u>jwjirick@gmail.com</u>	940-368-2765
Sonny Juarez	<u>sonny4hrp@aol.com</u>	254-498-2094
Michael Perez	<u>drmichaelperez@yahoo.com</u>	630-270-8862
Kyle Wahlquist	<u>kyle.wahlquist@gmail.com</u>	214-412-5132
Jeff Smith	<u>jeff@proudtexan.net</u>	817-915-7555
Eric Stuyvesant	<u>ericdstuyvesant@gmail.com</u>	214-901-0223

Bring a Brother Back Checklist

The following checklist is designed with a timetable of twelve months. If you have gotten off to a late start, just start at the beginning of the list and catch up as quickly as possible. Use the boxes to the left of the items to check off tasks as you complete them. **This check list should be completed with input from your Lodge leadership team and all your active members.**

INVENTORY YOUR LODGE

- 1. On paper, define the culture of your Lodge. Grade the Masonic experience your Lodge offers its Membership based on education, philanthropy, community involvement and fellowship.
- 2. Talk to your community leaders and citizens. How is your Lodge perceived by the community?
- 3. In the last 5 years what activities has your Lodge provided for the membership? Past Master's recognition? Educational programs? Movie nights? Family nights out at a ball game? Masonic Service Awards?
- 4. Who is responsible for conferring degree work? candidate instruction? Identify them
- 5. How many members are proficient and certified in our work? Identify them
- 6. Do Members of your Lodge regularly attend forums and exams? Identify them.
- 7. When was the last time your Lodge received a Vanguard Award? Assign an active Brother the task of keeping track of the Vanguard qualifications, and documenting each one your Lodge completes
- 8. Define your Lodge with clear Mission and Vision Statements (examples can be found using Google or any other search engine). Write two for each. The first should define what your Lodge presently represents. The second, which will be amended multiple times, represents what your Lodge hopes to become.
- 9. Task a Brother or team of Brothers to be responsible with media communications and developing relationships with local media personalities. Use every facet available, both in Social and Traditional Media platforms
- 10. Adopt a strategy of having said Brother(s) report at future stated meetings about their progress.

INVENTORY YOUR GROUNDS AND BUILDING

- Lodge leadership should walk the Lodge grounds and throughout the Lodge building making a list of all things that requires attention.
- Develop a list, both of active and inactive members who have the practical expertise to tackle some of the identified problems.
- Is your Lodge signage adequate? How can it be improved?
- Make a list of all things that cannot be rectified through the talents of your own Lodge membership. Task a member or team of Masons to solicit estimates.
- Prioritize your estimates. What needs to be and can be handled now? What projects will be more viable to deal with in the future?
- Present a practical plan at a Stated Meeting for improvements and ask for Lodge approval.

INVENTORY YOUR INACTIVE MEMBERS

- Task the Lodge Secretary with printing out a copy of the Lodge membership complete with phone numbers and addresses. This can be done by accessing the Grandview System.
- Task the Lodge Secretary with printing out a copy of those members who have been suspended for non-payment of dues for the last 10 years.
- Lodge leadership should meet, in person or virtually, with the living Past Masters and active members of the Lodge to go through these two lists. What do we remember about these Masons? Who had a relationship with these men? Who is best suited to reconnect with these Brothers? Use the accompanying worksheet (Appendix A) to briefly document what we know about each Mason.
- Divide the inactive members into manageable contact lists and task Lodge leadership, active members, and Past Masters with contacting these lost and forgotten Brothers.

SURVEY YOUR INACTIVE MEMBERSHIP

- Face to face contact is best. Masonry has always been built through one on one interpersonal relationships. However, if circumstances continue to limit face to face contact, start with a phone call and see if you can schedule a Facetime, Alexa, or Facebook video call with each Brother.
- Explain to each Brother that 1. They are missed and 2. That the purpose of your call is help better understand the modern Masonic experience, their personal Masonic experience, so that Lodge leadership can adjust, amend, and make improvements where needed.
- Ask these questions and log their answers (Appendix B):
 1. What is your best memory of your Lodge?
 2. Why did you become a Mason?
 3. Was there something you disliked about the Lodge?
 4. Why did you quit attending Lodge activities?
 5. What would it take to get you back to Lodge?
 6. What interests you about Masonry?
 7. Would you be willing to help us develop and implement programs and activities that interest you?

INTROSPECTION

- Lodge Leadership and active members should meet, either in person or via a Zoom meeting to discuss the Survey of Inactive Members. The discussion must be open and honest. Task the Lodge Secretary with recording detailed and accurate minutes of this meeting.
- In comparing survey results is there an underlying theme that seems to prevent Members from returning to Lodge? Clarify and document.
- As a group, revisit your vision and mission statements developed in the first section of the workbook. Does your perception and expectation of the Lodge match the perception and expectation of your inactive members? Discuss and document where improvements can be made that benefit all members.
- Amend your vision and mission statements.
- Discuss openly and document the culture of your Lodge. Where can improvements be made? What are you doing well?
- Review the questions raised in the workbook regarding Masonic Education, philanthropy, community involvement and fellowship. As a group discuss and document how the Lodge can improve on each.
- Task the team members with continuing to maintain communication with the Brothers they reached out to. Be mindful that in that contact they team members became ambassadors for the Lodge, and a point of contact for our missing Brothers.

CREATE AN ACTION PLAN

- Review section 6 of the workbook and use the steps provided to create a list of actionable items.
- Identify each actionable item with a team member who will tackle the task.
- Present your action plan at a stated communication for discussion and adoption.

IMPLEMENTATION OF THE PLAN

- The Worshipful Master and Lodge Secretary should have a written document that outlines the following things:
 - A written and well-defined goal of Lodge Improvements and desired accomplishments for each month, each quarter, and the year.
 - A master task list that includes the contact info of which Brother was assigned a specific task.
 - A plan to keep Brothers focused on their tasks while still having FUN!
 - A simple way of tracking progress publicly that does not necessarily bog down a business meeting with more committee reports.

RETROSPECTION

- Do not be afraid to reflect often and adjust when needed.
- Make sure your members remain engaged and are enjoying the Lodge revitalization process.
- The Craftsmen are a voluntary work force – reward them with pizza, or a movie night at the Lodge, or some other fun event often.
- ENJOY YOUR MASOIC EXPERIENCE!