

STARTING A CAMERA CLUB

Organizing a camera/photography club offers a proven means for:

- Enhancing enjoyment from the pursuit of photography as an avocation
- Fostering good fellowship among enthusiasts with similar interests
- Providing photographic education for all skill levels
- Stimulating improvement through competition, exhibiting, and sharing
- Enjoying many advantages available to organized groups, but not to individuals

WHO CAN START A CLUB

Anyone who wishes to fulfill the above goals can be instrumental in organizing a club. While a single individual can be responsible for sparking a new club into existence, it is often better that the initial impetus comes from a group sharing similar interest. It will be helpful to include one or more sufficiently advanced photographers to plan and carry out instructions.

WHERE TO START

Before any club takes actual form, an organizing committee, headed by a chairperson, should hold meetings to discuss aims and intentions and how to achieve them. Careful planning at this preliminary stage will avert future difficulties. The size and location of the community, the proximity of other clubs and the potential of prospective members must all be considered. The committee should also fully realize its responsibilities before agreeing to serve.

SPECIALIZE OR GENERALIZE

There are clubs that specialize in studio work, others that just conduct field trips, some that only hold competitions, several clubs that meet only to have programs, and some that have been formed to enter PSA Interclub Competitions. Most clubs have a combination of activities, but this depends on the interests of the membership. Today there are clubs that only “meet” online, sharing their images and suggestions for improvement in a virtual club. This diversity of possibilities poses a question for an organizing committee: should the new club restrict itself to specific kinds of activity?

MEETING LOCATION

This usually is not a serious problem in the early days of a club. Meeting in members' homes, on a rotation basis, is quite satisfactory when the group is not too large. In fact, the camaraderie derived from such meetings lays a firm foundation for a growing club.

When growth demands a large meeting place, try locating quarters having little or no rental fee. Possibilities are schools, museums, YMCA, civic buildings, church community rooms, American Legion, Senior Centers, the bank where the club has a checking account, and other locations where similar clubs meet. Today to rent some community rooms the club may be required to show proof of a non-profit status for a low rental rate. Some organizations will require a club to show proof of liability (trip and fall) insurance to rent a room.

FREQUENCY OF MEETINGS

Clubs restricting their activities to one activity usually meet once a month, more active clubs twice a month. If a club engages in more than one medium (e.g., projected images and prints), separate meeting nights may be desirable for each one. In this case, it is wise to hold one

monthly meeting for the entire membership at which there will be special events of interest to all.

Decide what is the best time to begin your meetings and start them promptly. Try to transact much of the club business outside of club meetings. This allows more time for club programs. Many clubs find it advantageous to establish a Board of Directors, consisting of the officers and committee chairs who meet to handle business details.

Many clubs like to keep active the year around. Instead of remaining dormant during the summer months, they sometimes substitute field trips and friendly outings for the more formal meetings indoors. The majority of clubs prefer to begin their new year in the Fall, at which time a new slate of officers takes over the reins.

BYLAWS AND OFFICERS

Beware of too much legal verbiage, time-consuming paperwork and unnecessary protocol in the establishment and operation of your club. Try to act with a minimum of red tape and formality. Always remember the primary purpose of your club: PHOTOGRAPHY!

After the preliminary stage, elect a president, vice president, secretary, and treasurer. Some clubs combine the latter two offices. While these four positions are important, three other functions are also. They are the club's programs, exhibitions and contests, and membership Chairperson. These tasks can be handled by the officers of a new club until its growth demands the appointment of individual chairs. Other important positions include an editor for the club newsletter, chairs for publicity, reception, and other committees, as well as a PSA Club Representative when the club joins PSA.

SPREAD THE WORK

While a single individual may dominate a club's activities, avoid one-person control. Create sufficient positions so that no one needs to devote so much time to the job that the enjoyment of photography is compromised. Don't be afraid to train and appoint newer members to positions of importance. Fresh ideas and new energy will come from this quarter and will prevent your club from becoming stagnant. Rotate your administrators so that they will not become indispensable. The exceptions to this are often the positions of secretary and treasurer. They may serve in office for longer periods, provided an assistant is trained to function in unforeseen emergencies.

The ideal situation is one where every member has a club position to fill and thus plays a vital part in the operation of the organization.

CLUB DUES

Get your club off to a good start by starting its dues to cover adequately the anticipated operating cost and the building of a reserve fund for expansion purposes. It is impossible to suggest what dues should be, for each club must calculate its' own expenses. Twenty-five dollars a year does not seem exorbitant for clubs willing to offer their members more than average service.

Normally, dues are an insignificant portion of a members' yearly photographic expense. The cost of room rent will generally help determine what the dues will need to be.

PROGRAM MATERIAL

Programs are the life-blood of every camera club, and providing stimulating and educational programs is never a simple task. While the objective is to satisfy the majority, don't totally neglect the minority. Program material comes from many sources and varies in its availability in different localities. An industrious and imaginative program chairperson can often make much

from little. While PSA and manufacturers of photographic products provide excellent programs, local assistance should be sought. Contact professional photographers, camera stores, art teachers, museums, other near-by clubs, and of course, make use of your own talented members.

EXHIBITIONS AND CONTESTS

Competition between members is an important aspect of club life. Never lose sight of the fact that its importance lies not in garnering awards, trophies and honors, but in the incentive it creates for doing better work.

Most clubs stage periodic competitions, often monthly. Plan the rules so they are as equitable as possible. Give the less-experienced a chance to share in the limelight even if it means forming another competition level for their work. Be cautious of a member who continually monopolizes the honors. This member will destroy competition and interest in the contests, too.

Because camera clubs are truly educational organizations, members expect to be told why their images are not winners. Every effort should be made to offer constructive criticism. Competent judges are quite often available locally. Other PSA member clubs in your area will regularly provide this service to your club.

Your club should engage in all possible outside competition. If there is a council or association of camera clubs in your area, join it. If there are other clubs within a reasonable distance, make arrangements to hold Interclub contests. PSA also provides competitions for its member clubs in many divisions.

GROWING PAINS

To thrive and expand is a natural ambition. As your club grows, it should become more self-sufficient and better able to provide greater benefits for your members. However, many factors may limit club size beyond a certain point. Continually bear in mind that it is equally important to retain old members as it is to obtain new ones. A large turnover in membership means that you are not operating in an effective manner.

In seeking new members, try to obtain those who are willing to contribute something to your club. In return, the club must be willing and able to provide, to the best of its ability, what its members seek.