



Best Practices for Creating an Inclusive Membership & Recruitment Experience for Students with Intellectual Disabilities

If your College Panhellenic community is considering partnering with a non-degree-seeking program on your campus to offer membership to students with intellectual disabilities, we encourage you to review this resource. The National Panhellenic Conference (NPC) consulted three campuses that have been doing this work for the past few years to learn more about what best practices they would suggest and those can be found below.



Define the Status (Matriculation)

NPC Unanimous Agreement III. (The Panhellenic Compact) states, "To be eligible to participate in Panhellenic recruitment and pledge an NPC sorority as a collegiate member, a woman must... be an undergraduate regularly matriculated according to the definition of matriculation established by that institution". As such, you will first want to find out if students are considered regularly matriculated.

You may need to consult with the registrar's office, the admissions office, or the program itself. If they are not, opportunities are narrowed to special status membership or alumnae membership, which does not allow for the same opportunities. Members should be given all opportunities to have as equitable an experience as possible and be treated like other members.

Build Relationships with Campus Partners

Campuses that worked with the non-degree-seeking program (for example, the [Auburn Eagles program](#) or [Tennessee FUTURES program](#)) found great success. Start a partnership with the campus program before exploring ways to offer membership. What kind of students are admitted to the program? What kind of support may they be looking for?



You should also create expectations together. The program may have specific expectations for members that are outside the purview of the fraternity/sorority life office, the Panhellenic and the chapters. It is important to be on the same page about those differences. For example, these programs may have restrictions for their students on what activities they can participate in (e.g., events with alcohol). Chapters should be aware of this, and should that expectation be violated, the program will need to address it, not the chapter – as it is an institution guideline, not a Panhellenic or member organization guideline.



As students also have varying levels of independence, it is helpful to work with these partners to best meet member's needs. Clear and strong communication with the program to make sure everyone is on the same page is necessary. As a campus-based professional or College Panhellenic officer, you will not have all the answers but partnership with the program helps.

Create Accommodations During Recruitment

Some students will have different levels of independence and comfortability in large spaces such as recruitment - and that is okay. Some campuses made participation in round one optional in the first year of the program to reduce overstimulation, had members enter differently into the facilities, or provided more rest time. You should also take into consideration reducing overstimulation overall because when accessibility is the standard, we all succeed.

Build Relationships with Inter/National Organizations and NPC

Work with inter/national organizations to understand the policies for membership. Some organizations may mandate that a student is degree-seeking and a full-time student in order to be initiated, but others might not. Coach your chapter leaders to work with their inter/national organization to determine if they can offer membership. When doing so, the inter/national organization may be able to connect the chapter with other chapters to learn more about inclusive practices they have adapted.

Continuous Education and Development for Chapters

Campuses that found a lot of success cited continuous education for chapters (e.g., Disability Etiquette Training) and the establishment of Panhellenic officers (some had the DEI chair work with chapters and the program) or chapter officers to serve as mentors to each member to ensure they felt welcomed in the chapter.



Ensure Efforts are Student Driven

Campuses that found success shared that the best experiences came when chapter members and students participating in these programs were well-intentioned and focused on creating a non-tokenized and meaningful member experience. There must be buy-in from the students in the programs and ideally - coming from the community members (chapter officers/members/College Panhellenic officers). If it is coming from the campus administration, it likely will not be as impactful. Lastly, make sure you are doing it for the right reason and not just to do it. The intention should be to share sisterhood with as many women on campus as possible - not to further tokenize and marginalize a group of people.



NPC is always happy to work with your campus to explain the benefits of sorority membership, work with inter/national organizations and more. Reach out to your NPC area advisor or Panhellenic support staff member in the NPC office as needed. Thank you to Auburn University, Clemson University and the University of Tennessee-Knoxville College Panhellenics for lending your program expertise and knowledge to this resource!