

Vision members and membership

Status: making a decision

Dear General Assembly,

Before you is the vision on members and membership. The previous board had the ambition to write more visions on various topics within ASVA. One of these is the vision on members and membership.

The question is how ASVA wants to attract more members in the future and how we can actively involve them within the organization. Additionally, we seek insight into the current membership base of ASVA.

While this document does not propose anything highly controversial, it is still desired that the General Assembly approves it. This document serves as a guide for the current and future boards, making it easier for the General Assembly to oversee the board's policies in the future.

Best regards,
On behalf of B79,

Lily George

Vision members and membership

Preface

Due to ASVA's organizational structure, it is heavily reliant on its members. The fundamental focus of the organization has been a longstanding debate—whether it should prioritize growth in the number of members or in the level of engagement among members.

This vision provides an elaboration on how ASVA aims to position itself in relation to its members and member associations. The significance of both members and engaged members is justified, and distinctions are made between various levels of member engagement. Methods to increase membership numbers are highlighted, and special attention is given to the unique position of member associations.

The purpose of this vision is to offer long-term guidelines for setting goals related to members and membership. In recent years, there has been varying policies and goals in this area with each board and policy year. Within this vision, a set of concrete goals is established that can be adhered to at all times.

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Goals of 'Membership vision'

As a union, ASVA's success is dependent upon its members. Members make the union strong and resilient. Together, united, a meaningful impact can be achieved. This vision has been developed to provide a comprehensive understanding of ASVA's members and their membership trends. Based on this vision, goals can be formulated regarding membership in the coming years. The central objective outlined by this vision is to expand ASVA's influence by recruiting and retaining more (engaged) members.

To begin with, members are not an end in themselves but are viewed as a means to an end. With more members, ASVA becomes stronger, enabling stronger advocacy. Therefore, the central tenet of this vision is to enlarge and fortify the support base to strengthen the organization and its impact. Unions are mass organizations, and a substantial number of active members is therefore the essence of a union.

Secondly, it is crucial to not only strive for more members but also for more *engaged* members. Both a larger and more engaged support base offer various advantages for ASVA. More members increase the possibility of recruiting more engaged members, and, simultaneously, more engaged members can help raise awareness of ASVA, thereby boosting membership numbers.

Thirdly, this is the opportune moment to focus on members (growth). Politics is vibrant: there are more organized protests than ever, and new movements are emerging. Activism is making a comeback. ASVA provides the perfect space for students to voice their opinions and for activism to flourish. As a union, ASVA is a political organization without a specific political ideology. In its role as a student union, ASVA advocates for the rights of Amsterdam students. Members assist ASVA in this endeavor, and ASVA, in turn, supports its members. ASVA can and should remain the pulsating heart of student activism.

Methods of membership vision

The image of ASVA

In the upcoming years, ASVA must focus on defining what it wants to portray. ASVA is a professional organization with a substantial budget and numerous staff members. However, to sustain itself, ASVA needs to become more appealing to Amsterdam students. While other organizations are familiar with ASVA and often collaborate willingly, the average student finds it challenging to connect with ASVA. Given the constantly changing student population, promotion is a crucial concept that requires considerable attention.

Methods to grow in membership

ASVA needs to expand its membership, as the number has been decreasing for several years. This trend was evident in almost all unions until recently. However, since 2021, the FNV has seen a growth in membership, and ASVA aims to follow this trend.

ASVA membership should become essential for students in Amsterdam. To achieve this, ASVA should focus on sharing its successes, services, and job opportunities. It must be clear to the student population why ASVA is necessary and what they gain from being a part of it. In the coming years, extra attention should be directed towards this goal, with organizational staff and support staff serving as a good starting point. The union advocates for the interests of the student population broadly, but occasionally, specific subgroups may also be advocated for.

Moreover, ASVA should be more discerning in collaborating with external parties. In the past, ASVA has often participated in activities or even taken the lead, yet people still didn't know who or what ASVA was afterward. Therefore, a more stringent evaluation is

needed regarding ASVA's participation and the parties with which it collaborates. To receive assistance from ASVA, organizations must acknowledge and promote ASVA as a supporting force or main organizer.

Methods to grow in engaged membership

In addition to expanding in membership, it is crucial to increase the number of engaged members. Currently, ASVA relies predominantly on its 25 employees, former staff, and past board members. Additionally, there is a small volunteer network, but there are not many others deeply involved with ASVA. This number needs to increase.

ASVA, therefore, must focus on building stronger connections with its members. This can be achieved by organizing numerous events. It is essential to be creative and actively engage with students. ASVA is physically present on campuses, hosts parties, and participates in events organized by other associations and organizations. While it is crucial for ASVA not to become solely an event organizer, this can be an effective way to introduce people to ASVA in an approachable manner.

Moreover, developing a plan to offer more benefits to engaged members than non-engaged members is possible. Engaged members could have more access to ASVA's services or be exclusively invited to certain events. This could be achieved by keeping substantive events – where ASVA can clearly convey its identity and principles – open to all, while restricting access to specific social events to members only. ASVA could also approach former employees and volunteers still studying if additional manpower is needed in Amsterdam.

Levels of membership

But; why should students become members of ASVA? ASVA caters to members who join for perks such as a bike, as well as those who want to be active and engaged members. To clarify this, a distinction can be made between different levels of membership. The goal of this differentiation is to encourage as many people as possible to reach the highest levels, thereby creating a strong, well-connected student community within ASVA.

Over the next few years, ASVA should focus on building a strong community of ASVA members.

The different levels of membership are:

- 1) Unknowns: Unfamiliar with ASVA.
- 2) Interested: Aware of ASVA but, for various reasons, are not (yet) members.
- 3) People who join for a bike: Often know ASVA only for the bike.
- 4) People who join for broader services: Already have some knowledge of ASVA, often utilizing our legal aid services.
- 5) People who join for the union ideal: View ASVA as a union.
- 6) Volunteers: Work with us as volunteers, with varying degrees of involvement and a relatively high turnover rate.
- 7) Active partners: Students or others who support ASVA from another organization.
- 8) Employees: Highly involved with ASVA, dedicating 5+ hours per week, partly paid.
- 9) Board members: Work 40 hours per week for ASVA.
- 10) Alumni: Individuals who were actively involved with ASVA and remain connected to varying degrees.

Additionally, there are also professional partners, other study/student association board members, the participation councils, etc.

In motivating people to become members and actively participate in the union, better methods need to be explored to tap into this motivation. We consider several points crucial:

- Train volunteers, employees, and boards in actively motivating people
- Examine how other organizations encourage people to become active.
- Highlight ASVA's professionalism, its benefits, and its achievements.
- Include a section on areas of interest in the registration form and try to cater to these interests.
- Emphasize more frequently at protests and events that individuals can become (actively) involved as members.
- Standardize surveys, petitions, and events towards becoming a member. For example, routinely include a button saying 'become a member

Obtaining information about our members

To work more efficiently it is important to gather more information about our members, as far as GDPR legislation allows.

Firstly, it is useful to know which faculty people are studying at, allowing for a broader perspective on where our members come from and enabling more faculty-specific initiatives. Especially given the decentralized nature of both the UvA and HvA, this may result in a more productive approach.

Secondly, it is beneficial to ensure that the administration is better organized. There are suspicions that a portion of ASVA's members may have already graduated. While this is not necessarily a problem, as they are no longer our target audience, graduated members should have different rights and responsibilities than those still studying.

Thirdly, members can be more specifically targeted by understanding their interests. The best time to inquire about this is at the time of registration.

Fourthly, it is essential to have an understanding of the types of members already present. Currently, members can be categorized into three groups:

- Members who want to be actively involved and already know what ASVA is
- Members who want to be actively involved but are unsure how.
- Members who consciously sign up only for the bike sale.

It is crucial for ASVA to focus as much as possible on groups 1 and 2 and involve them in the union. Most efforts will likely be directed towards the second group. It should be possible in the membership system to indicate which group you belong to at the time of registration. Subsequently, it is the responsibility of the service/community organizer staff member to reach out to those who want to be actively involved.

Approaching new members

Actively approaching potential members at our events

Currently, from the various substantive pillars of ASVA, numerous valuable substantive events are organized throughout the year. To enhance the number of ASVA members and consequently strengthen its impact and support base, it is desirable for the teams organizing each event to also develop an action plan on how to engage the attendees and connect them to ASVA. This could involve having a sign-up desk or delivering a brief introduction at the beginning about what ASVA represents.

Service pillar & Activist pillar

Artikel 2: Doel en middelen

1. De vereniging heeft ten doel het behartigen van de belangen en ondersteunen van studenten in Amsterdam en omstreken in de ruimste zin van het woord.
2. Zij tracht dit doel te bereiken door:
 - a. het vertegenwoordigen van studenten in het algemeen en de leden van de vereniging in het bijzonder in en ten opzichte van organen van hoger onderwijsinstellingen in Amsterdam en omstreken, in (commissies van) landelijke organisaties die studenten vertegenwoordigen, bij gemeenteorganen en het Rijk en in andere organisaties en organen, daar waar het doel van de vereniging gediend kan worden;
 - b. het verstrekken van diensten aan studenten;
 - c. het ondersteunen van studenteninitiatieven en een actief studentenleven;
 - d. alle andere wettige middelen, die aan het doel bevorderlijk kunnen zijn.
3. De vereniging kan ten behoeve van de leden rechten bedingen en te hunnen laste verplichtingen aangaan.

Figure 1: Statutes article 2 in Dutch

First and foremost, it is important to consider the purpose of ASVA, as outlined in its statutes. ASVA is the representative of students in general and the members of the association in particular in the context of the UvA and HvA.

Therefore, it is crucial that ASVA reflects the diverse Amsterdam student population and continues to do so. Looking at the characteristics of individual ASVA members, we observe a split between those who primarily join for the services, such as bike sales and lease-service. These members register mainly for convenience but are generally minimally involved in ASVA's objectives and internal organization. On the other hand, there is a small group that joins ASVA because of its activist union character. This group is more engaged with ASVA and often actively participates in other political or activist organizations.

It is important for ASVA to represent and actively engage both groups in the future. The best strategy for this is to stimulate the less engaged group. In other words, there should be a focus on attracting large numbers of new members through our services. The larger ASVA is in absolute membership numbers, the more seriously it will be taken by educational institutions. However, ASVA needs to be mindful of the potential to become confined to an activist niche, which could pose a risk to the breadth of its support base.

Additionally, a second strategy is to increase the number of active members from existing members. There is much to be gained for ASVA in this regard, and it will enhance ASVA's organizational strength. Currently, and persistently, it is challenging for ASVA to acquire new staff and volunteers.

ASVA also organizes events. At present, these events are not explicitly organized with the (sub)goal of increasing the number of members. One way to incorporate this goal into the events is to provide each organizational staff member with instructions on how to approach this for their events. Team Achterban can play a guiding role in this.

It is important that ASVA broadens its focus: ASVA should encourage both groups to join and not just one or the other.

Maintaining strong ties with activist groups in Amsterdam is also important. ASVA can mean a lot to them, and vice versa. Moreover, this broadens ASVA's support base. ASVA can play a central role in coordinating between these various groups.

Internationals

A growing portion of our support base consists of international students, as a result of the policies of educational institutions. Unfortunately, these same institutions and the entire city often struggle to accommodate the influx of so many international students, leading to a myriad of challenges for them. It is an opportunity, and indeed a responsibility, for ASVA to assist international students as effectively as possible.

ASVA does not pit international students against Dutch students but rather looks at areas where their problems overlap. All students face challenges related to the housing crisis, unfair lease agreements, or illegal renting. Additionally, where interests align, ASVA dedicates specific attention to the issues faced by international students. This can involve providing honest information to international students about life in Amsterdam and representing their voice in discussions with key stakeholders, such as the municipality.

Therefore, it is crucial for international students to find a place within ASVA.

Establishing a dedicated space within ASVA where international students can actively participate, such as a working group or committee, could be a solution. ASVA ensures that accessibility is maximized by making information available in two languages as much as possible

Member associations

In addition to individual members, ASVA also has member associations. At the time of writing, there are approximately 130 associations that are members of ASVA. While that is quite a substantial number, it does not encompass all the student organizations that exist in Amsterdam. Similar to individual members, the goal with member associations is to increase the number of associations and strengthen the engagement of these associations.

More member associations

Similar to individual students, the primary means of recruiting more member associations is through promotion. For member associations, certain services, especially the Academy and lending services, are more appealing than for individual students. By better promoting these services, associations seem willing to become members of ASVA. The benefits often outweigh the costs of membership, and it is valuable to receive invitations to events and access services such as legal assistance. Within the service portfolio, it is therefore crucial to continue developing services specifically for associations, such as a statutory service.

A significant area with potential for improvement is associations at HBO institutions (HvA, AHK, etc.). Currently, ASVA has limited influence in this regard, and there is room for more and better engagement.

More engagement

At present, the member associations of ASVA are not highly involved in the organization. Despite having voting rights at the General Assembly (ALV), in practice, only a few associations attend. This is unfortunate, as the input from member associations is valuable to ASVA. Therefore, it is essential to involve the associations more in the coming years. Emphasizing the benefits for associations to be engaged with ASVA is crucial. ASVA facilitates knowledge exchange and provides an excellent networking opportunity for different boards.

One way to involve member associations more with ASVA could be to better promote events. ASVA regularly organizes events for specific target groups, such as study associations. By prominently and extensively promoting these events at the beginning of the year, more associations might participate.

It could also be considered to introduce sanctions over time for associations that are less involved with ASVA. This approach has yielded mixed results in organizations like the AKvV. However, it could also lead to withdrawals, so finding a balance is crucial, and the implementation should not be overly strict.

Relationship members - member associations

Finally, attention could also be directed towards recruiting members through other members. Engaged members at ASVA could be encouraged to ensure that, for example, their study or student association also becomes a member of ASVA. Simultaneously, we can promote ASVA to the members of member associations through means such as a newsletter. Paid promotion can also be considered in this regard. Strengthening the connection with existing members is crucial in this effort.