

How to Lead a Small Group

Many people often think of a leader as someone who sets the strategic vision and direction of their organization, raises money, interviews and hires new staff and sets the goals and objectives for committees and the organization. But a significant amount of a leader's time is also spent facilitating groups, i.e., partners, collaborators, key stakeholders, committees, board, and staff.

Many leaders spend a majority of time facilitating small groups. It is in these small settings that people learn the active role of listening, presenting and arguing ideas, defending values and accomplishing tasks. Understanding leadership in small groups is a very valuable tool in effectively managing and leading any organization.

Here are some tips that may help you become a better leader and facilitator of small groups.

1. Make sure everyone **agrees on the agenda**. Try to involve the group in the development of the agenda, and ask them if they have additional ideas for the meeting. Indicate which items require decisions and which items are for discussion only.
2. Create an atmosphere of **involvement and engagement**. Make sure you encourage people to ask questions and actively participate in the discussion.
3. **Summarize points and decisions** before moving onto the next agenda item. Make sure people are clear about what was decided by their discussions.
4. **Rotate leadership**. Give everyone in the group a chance to lead the group. In a small group, everyone is a leader with a different role. Try to rotate the chairperson of the group on a weekly or monthly basis so that each person gets an opportunity to develop their leadership skills.
5. **Conflict is not necessarily bad**. Conflict is inevitable with any group so don't discourage it. Make sure there is a climate that allows disagreement and conflict to surface in a constructive manner.
6. **Determine how decisions will be made**. Some groups will not act until there is consensus; others will make decisions by majority vote; others are just looking for discussion and then have the chairperson make the decisions. Regardless of which decision-making style you use, make sure the group is clear about how decisions will be made and who has the power and authority to make decisions.
7. **Create win-win situations**. This is especially true with new groups or with people who don't have much group work experience. Try to have the early items on the agenda less controversial so that the decisions reached demonstrate success. This will help build confidence that everyone in the group has the ability to work well together. This may also assist in engaging those with less experience or those people that are quiet and more reserved.

8. **Evaluate the meeting.** Ask the members: How did the meeting go? What was positive? What was negative? What would they recommend changing for future meetings?