

Quick Guide: How to Create a County-Based Leadership Program

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Leadership development equips people with the skills to function effectively, influence others, and achieve goals. The purpose of many community leadership programs is to increase the leadership skills of citizens, so they are better prepared to address issues and concerns within their communities. Creating a community-based leadership development program benefits individuals, organizations, businesses, and the community as a whole. Specific benefits of implementing a community-based leadership development program include:

- Increasing community involvement
- Making better decisions
- Building better teams
- Networking
- Increasing collaboration
- Nurturing future leaders
- Fostering local economic growth
- Improving quality of life

How do you create a community-based leadership program? Below is a seven-step guide to developing an effective leadership program.

Step 1: Establish an Advisory Group

An advisory group is a volunteer group formed to give advice and provide important program guidance and vital connections to public, private, and nongovernmental leaders.

7 Steps to Creating a Leadership Program

1. Establish an Advisory Group
2. Determine Program Type
3. Find Funding
4. Create Learning Objectives and Content
5. Recruit Participants
6. Deliver
7. Evaluate

Creating an effective advisory group requires more than an invitation to participate. You must establish how the advisory board will operate. Start by creating a written description that includes:

- Purpose and duration of the advisory group
- Responsibilities of members
- Meeting frequency
- Performance expectations
- Guidelines for membership
- Removal procedures

Seek community members to serve on the advisory board/group/council. Be sure to do your research, recruit for diversity, and keep in mind the end goal of developing a leadership development program. During the recruitment process, emphasize the benefits of serving on the board. Examples include:

- Networking
- Getting new perspectives and ideas
- Personal satisfaction of helping create a program

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- Prestige or resume building
- Helping develop new talent that contributes to the development of the community

Once members are selected, many organizations choose a chair of the advisory board/group/council to manage board/group/council operations.

Step 2: Determine Program Type

You should choose the best type of program to meet local needs. A program should align and amplify local strengths, opportunities, aspirations, and desired results. Should your program be a youth program, adult program, address a skills gap, or focus on specific issues/opportunities?

A good place to begin is to think about any specific leadership gaps that your community has or may soon face. Also, think about the community's short-term and long-term strategic goals. You may need to conduct a needs assessment, map out community needs, have conversations with relevant stakeholders and community members, look at secondary data, and listen to community input. Your leadership development program should be aligned to ensure the community has the right leadership in place to address issues and priorities now and in the future.

Essential Leadership Skills

- | | |
|---------------|----------------------|
| • Listening | • Enthusiasm |
| • Loyalty | • Accomplishment |
| • Respect | • Strategic thinking |
| • Reliability | • Support |
| • Initiative | • Honesty |
| • Passion | |

(Oragui, 2019)

Step 3: Find Funding

Identifying funding and other financial resources to support a program is an important component of creating a high-quality, professional leadership development program. An important first step is to develop a budget so you know what the program will cost.

There are various funding sources that may meet your funding needs. These include:

- Government
- Advisory board/group/council leadership and development committee
- Corporations and organizations sponsorship
- Annual fundraising drives
- Private foundation grants
- Events

- Participant registration fees/tuition
- Alumni support of future cohorts

Step 4: Create Learning Objectives and Content

Reflect on what leadership means to your community. What are the traits valued most in its leaders? Avoid using vague descriptors such as “go-getting” or “perceptive.” Research indicates that traits like integrity, fairness, and decisiveness often rise to the top of the list as the most important attributes for leaders to possess.

Conduct a needs assessment, asset-based mapping, and utilize the advisory group to determine relevant learning objectives and content for program.

Consider the following topics for your leadership program:

- Interpersonal relationships, listening skills, empathy
- Influence
- Managing change
- Conflict management
- Communication skills
- Self-awareness/Self-confidence
- Delegation and empowerment
- Building effective teams/Collaboration
- Motivation and engagement
- Community and issues awareness
- Strategic thinking/Problem-solving
- Adaptation of leadership styles to fit different contexts within the community
- Understanding, appreciation, and acceptance of leadership responsibility as a citizen

Depending on the audience, other topics to consider include:

- Grantsmanship
- Customer relations
- Community and economic development
- Policy and government
- Parliamentary procedure
- Public speaking

Step 5: Recruit Participants

There are several methods to effectively recruit participants into the leadership development program. Here are a few options:

- Align your program with community needs
- Leverage community-based assets and stakeholders
- Share your story
- Nomination (including self-nomination)
- Encourage word-of-mouth recruiting

- Use digital and social media marketing tools to promote your program
- Demonstrate the importance of program participation
- Get involved in the community
- Build connections with community leaders
- Network with employers

Best Practice Suggestions

- Allow the class participants to develop their program agendas and goals in collaboration with program staff to make the program more learner centered.
- Reduce the amount of content per program day to allow the participants more time for discussion, reflection, and to see the relevance of the concepts being taught.
- Incorporate a class project/capstone activity.
- Develop workshops, seminars, discussion groups, and other means of making leadership development a life-long learning process.
- Keep alumni actively involved in future classes.

(Earnest, 1996)

Step 6: Deliver

It is important to create the right mix of leadership training methods to deliver your content. Each leadership program requires a custom plan that fits with the program's unique learning needs. What is common to the best programs, though, is that they use diverse learning methods. Here are the learning methods used most often:

- Group learning
- Self-directed learning
- Experiential learning

The methods mentioned above can also be combined in different ways to maximize participant experience and learning. Also, as you think about how to deliver content, consider these sources:

- Internal expertise
- Subject matter experts
- Integrating virtual learning

Step 7: Evaluate

Before formally implementing a leadership development program, determine how you will measure its success and impact.

Level 1: Learner Reaction/Satisfaction

Most leadership program courses use survey or

questionnaires to assess learner satisfaction with the course material, facilitation methods, and learning environment.

- How well did the participants like the learning process?
- Do participants intend to use what they learned?
- Can the program structure, content, facilitation, materials, and learning environment be improved?

Level 2: Learning

Learning can be assessed by an end-of-course test, coupled with a pre-test, or a capstone activity.

- What did the participants learn?
- Are participants gaining knowledge and skills necessary to perform as desired by program developers?
- Do participants know how to apply what they learned?

Level 3: Application/Implementation

Evaluating the extent to which participants have applied their new knowledge and skills to their work is a crucial part of successful implementation.

- Are participants reporting new roles and taking on new leadership opportunities?
- Were there noticeable and measurable changes in the activity and performance of the participants when back in their workplace or community?
- Were the changes in performance, new levels of knowledge, and newly developed skills sustained?

Level 4: Results/Impact

The Results/Impact level of evaluation seeks to measure changes in community performance that have come about through participants applying their new learning.

- Which performance indicators are relevant to the leadership development program? What did you hope participants would achieve through participation in the leadership development program? How do you define success for the leadership development program?
- Key stakeholders should consider ways to assess pre-learning performance. In leadership programs, 360-degree feedback is often used for pre- and post-assessments of learning. In most cases it takes at least three months or more before the impact of program on community performance becomes evident.
- What are the tangible results of the learning pro-

cess? Are participants developing effective and sustainable initiatives, building community capacity, increasing economic opportunities, etc.?

Application and impact questions could be answered with a longitudinal study of participants that would include qualitative examples of specific impacts, leadership positions held, roles taken, organizations participants were involved in, and community projects completed. Applying these evaluation metrics will help you assess the effectiveness of your leadership training and create a better roadmap for future initiatives. (*Evaluating Leadership Development Programs, 2020*)

Conclusion

Strong leaders are essential for growth and success in a community. Taking strides to facilitate community-based leadership development programs can empower citizens to grow as individuals, improve workplaces, and ultimately help grow and strengthen the local community.

Sources

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