

Group dynamics, goal setting, planning, delegation, accountability: All for results

The Group Leader role is pivotal for the success of our grassroots work. This is where “the rubber meets the road.” Group Leaders create, strengthen, and sustain the group through enrollment, inspiration, coaching, and ensuring that volunteer advocates are supported in taking on and completing needed work.

There are standard planning tasks to be accomplished — the challenge is to harness, guide, and channel the motivation and commitment of your group members and the group itself. This is no small task — especially without someone to rely on. Yet clarity regarding what needs to be done, by when and by whom, honors volunteer time and allows people to optimize the time they can contribute. This helps them experience their volunteer time as meaningful and well used.

How do you do this? The use of goal setting and planning, delegation, and action-oriented communication have proven effective. Really effective Group Leaders have strong skills in systematic goal setting and planning. They are also very effective at asking for participation, managing accountability, and bringing plans into reality.

A primary learning for Group Leaders is to share the work through delegation. Trying to do it all ensures burnout over time. A hallmark of a more effective or seasoned leader is to focus on sustaining the group in order to expand capacity. Ensuring that incoming members are oriented and trained and that all advocates have opportunities to learn new roles or contribute differently is key to keeping them engaged and, in turn, key to sustaining the group and expanding capacity. Goal setting with planning, delegation, and effective communication are critical skills for a Group Leader to achieve a vibrant group that collaborates and produces results. Understanding how groups shape and mature also helps a Group Leader serve the group.

Group dynamics

Each group is an entity unto itself — when it is formed, it is at its infancy and goes through a development phase. Often this phase can be challenging as members sort through who they are in the group, what matters to them, and whether the group will grow into something with a purpose and intent. Bruce Tuckman outlined four phases that each group will pass through: forming, storming, norming, and performing. Understanding these

natural phases and recognizing when they are occurring can inform and improve group leadership.

One key concept in a dynamic volunteer group is that each time that membership changes (i.e., when a member(s) joins or leaves), it is essentially a new group that will pass through the phases again. Strong, purpose-oriented, well-developed groups can often do so quickly. Group Leaders anticipate the possibility of the phases surfacing and help the group through each phase.

Goal setting with planning

RESULTS and its partners set and achieve ambitious and far-reaching goals. Once these big goals are assumed and strategically framed, they are systematically distributed amongst global and domestic regions according to the specific challenge and the needed results. As each advocate, each group, each region set and deliver on their goals, the results multiply and build.

The Group Leader is instrumental in this process by inviting and encouraging the team to strive for high performance; by engaging individual advocates and the group itself to set ambitious goals and to follow through; and by celebrating achievements. The Group Leader also ensures that the various tasks needed to achieve the goals are undertaken and that group members are prepared for success.

Your Regional Coordinator will work with the Group Leader team to set regional goals and to think through group contributions in light of the challenge, group maturity and size, and other factors. Your role as a Group Leader is to facilitate the engagement and commitment of your group to taking on a specific commitment and then to follow through to create the results.

Tools are continuously provided through the group support structure to track and document work that, along with other groups and regions, build to the large goals that have been undertaken.

Delegation and assuming accountability

In an employment situation, managers are responsible for assigning and monitoring work. Even with this kind of authority built in, what makes the biggest impact on results is when individuals assume full accountability for producing a result. In our volunteer environment, RESULTS advocates have already taken authority and chosen to join the group, a great demonstration of their commitment.

The skilled Group Leader will build on this commitment and leverage delegation skills in a way that invites and encourages advocates to assume accountability for specific tasks. It is both a delegation and a confirmation of agreement. The next section covers the communication aspect of this interaction.

First, a look at the basics of delegation:

1. Define and frame the task
 - clarify what the goal is and what outcomes are desired
 - identify whether this is an individual or team task
2. Make the delegation. To ensure your delegation will “take”, work through the elements of the task with the person taking them following the SMART criteria:
 - **S**pecific
 - **M**easurable
 - **A**greed
 - **R**ealistic
 - **T**imebound
3. Agree on next steps and milestones for review

Sources

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