



Leadership development programs are a great way for associations to deliver value to member organizations, and to build a network of loyal leaders across their membership base. Some association executives mistakenly consider these programs to be too expensive; still others wonder about the measurable benefits. In this session, we explore how low-cost leadership development programs can deliver significant benefits to associations and their members. Use the following outline to consider whether such a program might be right for your organization.

Program Overview: Keeping it Simple

Imagine an ongoing conversation, with some structure and goals. Bring together a group of leaders - current and aspiring – from across your organization. Select a leader/facilitator. Establish a curriculum of leadership concepts and skills as well as projects that will make a difference for the association and for its member organizations.

Select a leader. Meet monthly, around a table, for 6-12 months. Encourage members to use the forum for problem-solving and networking beyond the curriculum. Recognize participation, and repeat the process with new participants, learning from your experience. You will soon have a corps of loyal members and capable leaders.

Set Clear Goals

This kind of program can deliver the following kinds of benefits:

1. Improve individual leadership capabilities
2. Promote participation in association/community leadership
3. Build effective working relationships – and deeper fellowship – among members.

Set goals that measure the impact of these programs, e.g., member retention or engagement, volunteerism and participation in association initiatives, etc. Require participants to set individual goals for their own participation, and assess progress toward those goals. If you ask member organizations to contribute, invite them to participate in goal setting, as well.

Select a Leader/Design a Curriculum

As with any initiative, somebody needs to “own” this program, or it won’t happen. Select someone able to energize the group, and bring out the knowledge sitting around the table. As for the curriculum, don’t worry – this can be as simple as a schedule of topics, activities, and resources (See the ELA Bibliography for resource ideas). Include a variety of tools and perspectives: one size does not fit all. Build in flexibility so participants can select topics of interest to them.

Program Meetings and Activities

Avoid the temptation to cram a program into a single evening or weekend retreat. Much of the impact of this experience comes from people learning from one another while practicing new skills over time. Meetings should be regularly scheduled, long enough to have some great conversations, and relaxed and inviting in tone. Food is good. Teach some skills or concepts, then lead the group members to respond, apply, and make these new ideas their own. Follow up with notes and a mid-month reminder to keep these ideas fresh and top-of-mind. Include a project that enables participants to “build something” that gives back to the association and for its members.