

Developing a Selection and Notification Process

Selection Criteria

If you have more applicants than openings in the class, how will you choose among them? Decide on selection criteria and develop written guidelines before recruitment begins. Base the selection criteria on the overall program goals and participation criteria; for example, are more women or young people needed for local leadership in your community? County-wide programs may want to include people from as many towns as possible. Selection criteria may include the following:

- Balance of male and female participants
- A cross-section (in the total class) of the community regarding age, race, ethnic or cultural background, occupation and geography
- Concern for community well-being
- Some level of demonstrated leadership
- Interest in developing leadership ability
- Commitment to attend all sessions
- Commitment to become involved in building community and community development

Hand-Picked vs. Application Process

Some leadership programs prefer to select and invite the program participants, while others use an application process. The choice is yours.

If you decide to use an application process, develop an application form that will gather the information you need to make selection decisions. The application form can be part of the program's informational brochure or a separate piece. Link the items on the application form to the selection criteria that your leadership development program considers important. Remember—ask only for information that is needed!

Keep the application form as simple as possible. Many programs use a one-page application and ask that a resume and letters of recommendation be attached. Elaborate application forms may send messages of exclusivity or elitism that some potentially valuable participants may find offensive. Strive to develop a form that engages rather than intimidates people, especially if you are working for diversity in your program. For example, emerging

or potential leaders may not have a long list of honors, so do not leave a lot of space for answering this question. Many programs no longer ask for resumes—they found that applicants would “go for length” and duplicating long applications for the selection committee becomes expensive.

You may want to develop a scoring sheet for reviewers to use as a companion to the application form. The sheet should be based on the selection criteria and can help reviewers assess the application during the selection process.

Selection Process

The selection process is never easy, so keep it simple by avoiding unnecessary steps that do not help you make choices. Be aware that the selection process itself sends a strong message about your program. Lengthy review processes may send messages of exclusivity or elitism that some potentially valuable participants may find offensive.

Smaller communities often find they do well with a much less elaborate selection process. They work to reduce the perception of competitiveness and take advantage of the likelihood that most applicants will already be known by one or more members of the selection committee.

Selection Committee

It is recommended that you establish a selection committee of three to four persons. Many community leadership programs choose to keep the committee anonymous to prevent lobbying, while other programs believe that making the membership of the committee known will enhance its credibility and perceived objectivity. Sometimes selection committee members are recruited from other communities and do not know the applicants. The committee has the responsibility to select a representative class.

Some leadership programs allow the program director to determine the last three to five members of a class in an effort to help the diversity and dynamics of the group. This is especially helpful in small communities where the selection committee and the director may know potential participants.

Application Review and Ranking

Each applicant's form should be carefully reviewed using the established guidelines, including expectations such as commitment to regular attendance. A scoring sheet with point values may facilitate this step in the process. The selection committee should select the appropriate number of persons for the class and identify alternates to be called should a selected applicant decline the invitation to be in the leadership class. If there are only one or two more valid applications than slots, the selection committee might consider recommending that the class size be expanded to include them.

Should there be Interviews?

Communities large and small use interviews, although many programs feel they can make appropriate decisions without them. Some programs interview all applicants to make sure they understand the requirements and expectations of the program, and to emphasize that participants are expected to take ownership of the community and make it a better place to live. Interview questions usually relate to the applicant's commitment to participate in the program, motivation for applying, understanding of the program, and additional interest areas.

Notice of Selection, Non-Selection or Deferral

With the exception of a few programs that accept all applicants, every program will accept some applicants and must turn down others. It is important to use consideration and wisdom in this part of the process to facilitate good relations.

After applicants are selected, those who have been accepted should be notified and asked to confirm their participation (see the sample letter at the end of this section). The notification process should take place 6 to 8 weeks before the course begins so that selected participants will have enough lead time to clear their calendars.

Delay notifying those who were not accepted until you have confirmation from the original group because some of those accepted may decide not to participate and their slots then can be offered to others. Another option is to notify those not accepted that they are alternates in case of cancellation.

A carefully worded, thoughtful letter should be sent to those not selected (see the sample letter at the end of this section). A phone call is an additional courtesy—it can help you avoid misunderstandings and convey appreciation to the applicant, especially

in smaller communities where confidentiality about who applied and who was selected is virtually impossible to maintain. Some leadership programs ask those not accepted to defer their participation to the next time the class is held, and reserve a spot for them. Most programs encourage people to apply for the next leadership course. Be kind to applicants. Anyone interested enough to apply is an asset to the community.

If the applicant was nominated, some programs also write (or telephone) the applicant's nominator or sponsor to let them know whether their nominee is or is not selected. Nominators whose nominees are not selected without explanation may simply stop nominating.

Recruiting Participants

One major element of a leadership program's success is getting the right people to apply for and participate in the program based on the leadership needs of your community. Leadership programs are postponed more often because there are too few appropriate participants than because there is a lack of funding!

To a great extent, recruitment is a personal process. Most leadership program participants learn about the program from another person, not from the media or a brochure. According to a recent study by the National Association for Community Leadership, 75 percent of leadership program participants said that their decision to apply for the program was influenced by a person, such as a previous participant, a boss or supervisor, an organization president or a colleague/friend.

Some people are apprehensive about participating in a leadership program. Be prepared to address these concerns in your recruitment efforts. One concern potential participants often have is the time commitment. Some may question whether the program would be worthwhile, while some may be concerned that they will not measure up to the expectations of community leadership.

Recruitment begins informally when committee members discuss the program with others. The process continues with more formal recruitment efforts such as nominations, brochures and advertising. Recruitment efforts and materials should be inviting and accessible to the people you wish to attract. Recruitment should start several months before the leadership course begins so that potential participants have enough lead time to clear their calendars.

It is recommended that the selection committee follow these steps:

- Prepare a **preliminary** list of potential participants from among those they know. The more diverse the committee, the easier it is to reach potential applicants.
- Outline a **recruitment plan**. Include a time line and identify who will do what. Strategies can include the following:
 - Nomination process
 - Informational brochure
 - Word-of-mouth publicity
 - News media, news releases, advertising
 - Speakers Bureau—brief recruitment presentations and appeals to organizations, employers, etc.
 - Follow-up telephone calls
- Develop an **informational brochure** about the leadership program and the upcoming course. In addition to general information about the program and its purpose, be sure to include the following:
 - Expectations of participants
 - Selection criteria
 - Course content
 - Dates/times of the upcoming course sessions (so participants can check calendars for availability)
 - Fees
- Develop a **Nomination Letter** (see the sample letter at the end of this section) that can be personalized with the name of the potential participant and (optional) the name of the nominator. Send the personalized letters to the preliminary list of potential participants.
- Prepare a list of employers and organizations that might nominate potential participants. Include alumni clubs, schools and the spiritual community. Develop an **Invitation to Nominate Letter** (see the sample letter at the end of this section) to request nominations and send or hand deliver it to the list. Ask recipients to share the information with their employees or membership through newsletters, announcements, bulletins or other means. Offer to make a presentation to explain the leadership program and answer questions about it.
- Make **follow-up telephone calls** to potential participants and those contacted to suggest nominees. Most people participate in leadership programs because someone personally encouraged them to get involved.
- Disseminate information widely to ensure that all community members have the opportunity to apply.
- Set up a **Speakers Bureau** and arrange to speak and recruit at organization meetings, board meetings, employee meetings, etc.
- Prepare a **news release**.
- **Work with the media to publicize the program**. Involve the local news media in informing people in detail about the leadership program and its purpose. Contact them ahead of time to find out what information is needed, in what form, and in what time frame. Strategies could include
 - Local newspapers: articles; public service announcements; steering committee meeting with editorial board of the newspaper
 - Local radio: public service announcements; community talk show interviews; interview for local news
 - Television: public TV; public service announcements; community talk show interviews; news story
 - City or regional magazines
 - Newsletters: Chamber of Commerce; in-house newsletters available to steering committee and sponsors/supporters; alumni newsletters
 - Purchase an advertisement in the local media.
 - Contact organizations with member or employee newsletters or newspapers and submit the news release. Do this early as this type of communication may be less frequent (quarterly, bi-monthly, etc.).
 - Provide a personal response to all inquiries.

Checklist for Participant Recruitment, Selection and Notification

- Set guidelines for participant recruitment based on program goals and objectives (3 to 6 months before the target date for beginning the program).
- Form a Recruitment Committee.
- Identify a Selection Committee.
- Determine selection criteria and process.

- Determine opening and closing dates for application.
- Develop an application form and contractual agreement form.
- Develop a descriptive brochure.
- Develop letters for recruitment, nomination, acceptance and deferral.
- Print letterhead and brochure.
- Mail recruitment letters and make personal contacts (6 months before the program starts).
- Distribute recruitment information to media, businesses, organizations and other appropriate outlets.
- Review applications and select participants.

- Notify applicants of acceptance or deferral.
- Prepare list of participants.
- Ask appropriate officials (state legislators, county or municipal officials, employers, etc.) to write letters of congratulations to those accepted.

NOTE: Monitor the number, source and quality of applications being received and inform the Steering Committee of progress. A shortfall of applications will affect all other plans.