

# Leadership Development

## About this resource

This resource is meant to provide some principles, guidelines, and basic tools for effective leadership development. It will cover the following topics:

- ★ Why should we think about leadership development? Why is it important?
- ★ What are the guiding principles when it comes to developing leaders?
- ★ What are some key steps to leadership development?
- ★ What are specific tactics and systems that we can use?
- ★ What are one-to-ones and propositions and how can they be used for leadership development?
- ★ What is a ladder of engagement?
- ★ What is mentorship? What does it look like to be an organizer mentor?

This resource was compiled and adapted by Alyssa Lee <[alyssa@betterfutureproject.org](mailto:alyssa@betterfutureproject.org)> at Better Future Project/Divest Ed, with some language taken from The Student PIRGs Activist Toolkit, [Sierra Student Coalition](#), and National People's Action. It was last updated on [2018-03-16](#).

Any questions about this resource can be directed to Alyssa Lee at <[alyssa@betterfutureproject.org](mailto:alyssa@betterfutureproject.org)>.

## Why should we think about leadership development?

- To avoid burnout
- To accomplish more
- To build an organization/campaign
- To sustain organizational health and continuity
- To develop strategists, not just tacticians
- To retain people in our movement
- To create more agents of change in our communities
- To grow our people power
- To give people a sense of their own power

**The job of an organizer is to organize one's self out of the job — to make other people as experienced and skilled as you are.**

**If you are serious about leadership, then you are serious about leadership development.**

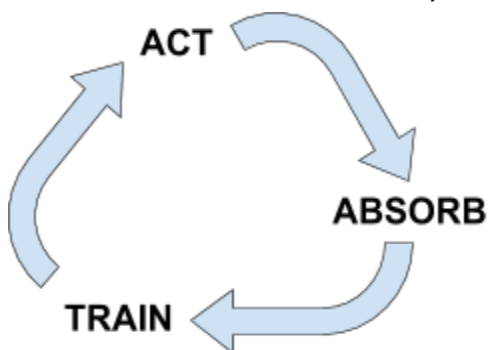
## Principles of Leadership Development

- **Everybody has leadership potential.** Anybody who supports the campaign might be interested in getting actively involved. Anybody who gets involved once has the potential to take on more.
- **People who care about these issues need to be motivated to act upon their concerns.** Most people don't know what they can do to make a difference or how their actions will help. You need to communicate that there are solutions as well as problems.
- **People need opportunities to take on more responsibility.** It is hard for a new member to know what next step to take. You need to develop a leadership ladder (“Ladder of Engagement”) for each person that will give them opportunities to continue to learn and grow.
- **People stay involved for three reasons: 1) they are learning something valuable, 2) they see that their efforts are making a difference, and/or 3) they are part of a meaningful community.** If you are not offering *at least* one of these at any point, you are not going to retain them.
- **People want to learn and they need to be challenged to do so.** Once somebody masters a basic task, they should be given something more difficult to tackle — either training other people to do the basic task or dealing with a more challenging situation.
- **People take on more responsibility because they feel needed.** If you need people to do more, you need to let them know that. If they are the person to do the job, they need to know that you’re counting on them. After each activity or event, you should be discussing their next activity.
- **People develop as leaders because somebody takes the time to give them meaningful feedback and to build their confidence.** Once a task has been completed, don’t just assign another. Talk about how it went, what could have gone better, which pieces went well, how they felt about the experience, etc.
- **People stay for the long term because they feel like a part of a community.** Develop a group culture that is fun, welcoming, inclusive, and that encourages people to get to know each other.
- **It takes active intention to develop leaders in a justice-oriented way.** It can be tempting to just let things happen and let those who are taking initiative (e.g. are most vocal, most available, most knowledgeable) become the leaders. But privilege and oppression make it such that those who are most inclined to take initiative tend to be white, financially well off, well-educated, and also often cis, straight, or men. If we don’t actively work to recognize and uplift people who need to be leaders, we risk recreating homogenous and privileged spaces that will not ultimately be able to achieve our goals of justice.

Keys to Leadership Development	Specific Tactics and Systems
<p><b>Plan ahead.</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Know who's graduating, who's studying abroad, who's on the verge of getting burnt out - these are people to talk to about stepping back, transitioning, and passing on knowledge.</li> <li>● Know who's been showing up, who's got skills, and who's sticking around - these are people to bring up the leadership ladder.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Write out <b>how many leaders</b> you currently have and how you define them.</li> <li>● Set <b>goals</b> for how many leaders you want to develop by the end of the month/semester/year.</li> <li>● Create a <b>tracking system</b> for everyone in your base - this can be a spreadsheet where you write their level of engagement (<i>see Ladder of Engagement</i>).</li> <li>● Plan a few <b>skills trainings</b> that your group needs and get them scheduled. This can include meeting</li> </ul>

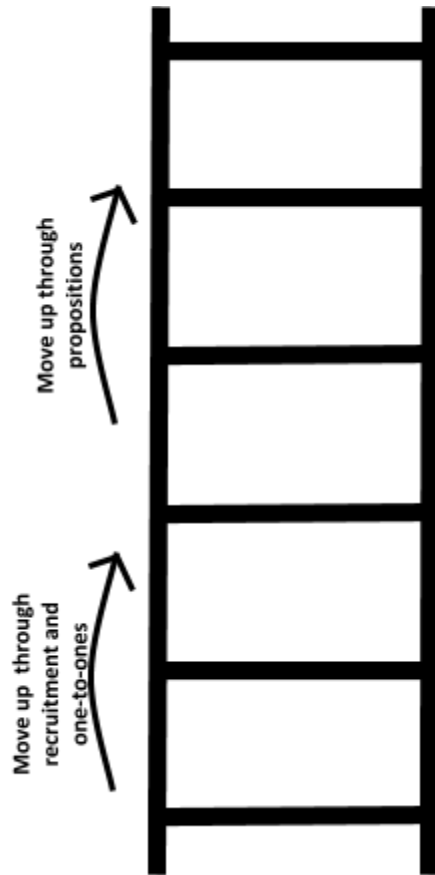
	<p>facilitation, making agendas, planning an event, booking rooms, etc.</p>
<p><b>Build personal connections.</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Phone is better than email, and face-to-face interactions are better than phone.</li> <li>• You have to develop mutual trust - too many leaders don't trust others enough to share responsibilities. The first step to trusting your members is getting to know them.</li> <li>• Follow-up quickly. Once you've made the connection, follow up quickly and get them involved.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Have <b>one-to-one meetings</b> with any new members who's been involved! (<a href="#">See here for more info on one-to-ones</a>)</li> <li>• Ask people what their <b>interests and goals</b> are.</li> <li>• Have one-on-one meetings to <b>check in</b> with leaders on their progress and to see if they need support.</li> <li>• Have <b>propositions</b> with people you identify as potentially being able to take on a larger role (<i>read on to learn more about propositions</i>).</li> <li>• Build a welcoming culture by instituting '<b>gratitudes</b>' at meetings to recognize people who took risks or got more involved, especially new members.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Build your organization and leadership through campaign actions.</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• We develop leaders through trainings and mentoring meetings, but also by taking risks in the public arena.</li> <li>• The best groups don't just meet - they are outside taking action.</li> <li>• People develop most quickly and deeply while doing, not by talking.</li> <li>• Remember the Act-Absorb-Train Cycle! (<i>see below</i>)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Create <b>working groups</b> so that multiple people can be involved in a project and take on tasks.</li> <li>• If your group has designated <b>roles</b>, write out what those responsibilities are.</li> <li>• Always break down projects into <b>specific discrete tasks</b> and make <b>targeted, individual asks</b> (rather than mass emails) to get them done.</li> <li>• Make it a practice to <b>debrief</b> every activity in either the full group, working groups, or one-to-one. Always check back in on the original goals, ask what support they need in the future, and leave on a positive note with gratitudes.</li> </ul>

Remember the Act-Absorb Train Cycle!



1. Every time you **act** is an opportunity to grow your base and bring in more people.
2. You need to **absorb** new people and this process of absorption can be planned by newer members.
3. You will then plan how to **train** both the new people who were absorbed AND the newer members on the skills they need to put on the next *action*.
4. The cycle continues!

## Developing Leaders on a Ladder of Engagement



### Organizing

- Bottom-liners
- Intention to take leadership
- Take on roles
- Attend meetings
- Have 1-1s
- Lead trainings

### Mobilizable

- Attend meetings
- Attend actions/events
- Take on temporary tasks
  - Volunteer for event
- Occasionally help with recruitment
- Other support
  - Take photos/video
  - Turn out other groups

### Expressed Support

- Sign petition
- Receive newsletter
- Follow on Social Media
- Vote on referendum

### Notes

- Each rung along the ladder should act as litmus tests to move them up.
- You should make sure there is a progression of rungs. Do you have rungs between 'Expressed Support' and 'Organizing' that you can offer? Do you have them consistently throughout the year through different projects and working groups?
- It is possible that someone may move the whole way in one day, but never throw someone straight to the top end.
- It takes one-to-ones, direct delegation, and propositions to move people up - people often can't move up on their own.
- Every time the A-A-T cycle restarts, you are moving people up the ladder.

### Tips

- Make leadership opportunities more accessible by breaking them down into component parts and making specific asks. This allows even a relatively new volunteer can take on responsibility.
- Give leaders a title, such as Tabling Captain, Volunteer Coordinator, Phonebank Chair. This can help make them feel more accountable and responsible.
- Proposition people into leadership positions that make sense for them, not just the roles that you need to fill.
- Give recognition and show appreciation. Recognize their achievements at meetings and in one-to-ones.
- Be respectful, friendly, but also professional. Make sure they know they are appreciated but also that the group has expectations of them to fulfill a role. Accountability is easier when this is understood from the beginning.
- Have skills trainings often, even in small ways. They don't all have to be full day-long trainings. They can just be spending the first 10 minutes of a meeting or the activity itself explaining how to do something (such as tabling).
- Make it a norm/routine to have debriefs at the end of every activity/action/event.



## One-to-Ones and Propositions

**What is a One-to-One:** A one-to-one is a deliberately scheduled meeting between you and another person. This person may be a prospective member, a new member, or an existing member that you just want to get to know better.

**What is a Proposition:** A proposition is a planned and intentional conversation that invites a person into a well-defined activity or role, based on some aspect of that person's self-interests, or stated passions, dreams, hopes, or struggles.

### Goals of One-to-Ones and Propositions

*This is in the context of Leadership Development. You can [read here for more info on one-to-ones](#) and ask Alyssa for more information on Propositions.*

#### Figure the person out.

- → motivations (social, environmental issue, credit, resume, friends doing it)
- → what they want to gain (skills, issue knowledge, issue impact, friends, accomplishment, exposure for their group)
- → what they bring (skills, issue expertise, contacts, recruitment ability, resources, energy)

#### Share your experiences and develop personal relationships.

- Share why you are involved, what is your vision, what are your values, what do you get out of the group.
- Let them get to know you and see that the campaign is made of people who are fun and committed.

#### Give the person a clear sense of the organization, issue, and overall campaign.

- Articulate the history and goals of the group any and successes
- Articulate the issue and the campaign - problem, solution, goals, strategies, tactics
- Answer any questions

#### Give the person a role in the campaign.

- Figure out what is appropriate for their skills and commitment. You can do this together with them.
- Get them plugged into different activities.
- Ask them to commit to leadership responsibilities.
- Often when people flake out on you, it's because they didn't understand a task well enough. It's worth your time to sit down and give the person a step-by-step description of the task at hand.
- Make sure to follow up with the person and offer help if they seem to be struggling or not accountable.

#### Give feedback and train them to be better organizers.

- Give specific feedback that helps develop your leaders' politics and/or skills.
- Ask them what training or support they need.

### **What is mentorship?**

- Identifying someone and doing a proposition
- Investing in a personal relationship
- Asking them their goals and interests
- Helping them make a plan and set commitments
- Having regular and intentional mentorship meetings
- Checking in, holding them accountable, and noticing their progress and how they're showing up
- Asking what support they need

### **A mentor ...**

- Recognizes leadership potential.
- Knows the big picture and plan.
- Builds relationships both one-on-one and in the full group.
- Has one-to-one mentorship meetings regularly.
- Identifies self-interests of others.
- Thinks of training and roles in the organization that meet those self-interests.
- Provides training.
- Proposes people to take specific roles and get trained.
- Agitates people about the stuff that gets in their way and to act more powerfully.

**“I have always thought that what is needed is the development of people who are interested not in being leaders as much as in developing leadership in others.”**

**– Ella Baker**

**Black civil rights organizer  
and the impetus for the 1960 formation of the  
Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC)**