

THE LEADERSHIPPLENTY EXPERIENCE IN ST. LOUIS

A LeadershipPlenty training was conducted in St. Louis from April through June, 2003, under the auspices of the American Planning Association. The St. Louis League of Women Voters and FOCUS St. Louis, a regional citizens' league, were co-sponsors. David Boyd and Nancy Ulman, both part of the American Planning Association team, shared facilitation duties. Each of them recruited an additional co-facilitator, for a total of a four-person faculty.

As will be detailed in the presentation, many of LeadershipPlenty guidelines were varied to meet our local situation. Due to David's time constraints, an accelerated schedule was provided. The training was delivered on seven consecutive Tuesday evenings from 6 to 9 p.m., with an additional three-hour introduction to study circles on a Saturday morning. No dinner was provided, although sodas, bottled water, and sweet and salty snacks were available.

Of the 38 applicants, a total of 30 were selected to participate. A simple one-page application form was utilized, asking applicants to describe why they wished to participate and encouraging them to append additional information about themselves. David and Nancy chose the participants through eliminating those who had participated in one of the very detailed and expensive FOCUS St. Louis leadership training classes, eliminating a few persons who were not articulate about why they wished to participate, and attempting to assure diversity. In the end, the racial balance in the class reflected the general populace of the region, and diversity in terms of employment sector was impressive. Ages ranged from approximately 25 to 55, and male enrollment was low, although 7 of the 8 male applicants were selected.

The facilitator team met each week, usually the day before the training, to review the previous weeks' evaluations and to discuss how to modify the curriculum to fit time constraints and decide which facilitators would lead each exercise.

The single greatest complaint was that some participants felt rushed, as did the facilitators occasionally. This group developed a culture that was very strong in self-disclosure and networking, to the point that facilitators sometimes observed networking instead of completing the exercises. The lack of a meal function to absorb some of the desire to get acquainted and share experiences probably contributed to this difficulty. Another possibility is that the participants had an elevated expectation of the amount of networking that would be involved, since developing camaraderie among the class is an objective of the more extensive leadership program for which FOCUS St. Louis is known. The group has held three meetings since the training was completed, so it may be that this particular group of people simply is very predisposed toward socializing and networking.

Additional printed resource materials were distributed to the group at times, but all exercises and activities were taken from the LeadershipPlenty manual. Most exercises were quite successful, unless insufficient time for debriefing and reinforcing concepts was available.

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