

Leadership and Succession Planning

Introduction

Any group or organisation requires leadership – including Parkinson's NSW Support Groups, no matter what their size nor how informal they may be.

Good leadership involves influencing others to work towards a common goal, no matter how challenging or modest that goal may be.

Good leadership of a Support Group also involves having a succession plan in place.

This means that when the time comes to hand the leadership role onto another, it can be done smoothly – without conflict or disruption of the operations of your Group.

What makes a good Support Group leader?

A good Support Group leader has:

- Confidence
- Empathy
- Listening skills
- Willingness to consult others
- Willingness to delegate
- A clear vision of where the Group wants and needs to go

Section 3.6 of the new *Support Group Guidelines* describes how each Support Group is now required to prepare an Annual Support Group Plan to run from 1 July to 30 June.

Anyone elected as a Support Group Leader must have the ability to lead this planning process, encouraging and providing opportunities for all Support Group participants to contribute to the Plan's development.

It is therefore very important for a leader not to be chosen on the basis of age, gender or social popularity – but instead on their ability to influence, respect and inspire confidence in others.

A copy of the Support Group Guidelines document is included in the Appendix section of this Support Group Manual.

Delegation is another important skill for a Leader to have.

Leadership does not mean doing all the work yourself, especially when Sections 3.1 and 3.2 of the *Support Group Guidelines* specify the need for one or two Deputy Leaders and other members of a Leadership Team if required.

Delegation is assigning authority to another person to carry out specific responsibilities, while keeping the Group Leader informed of progress and any issues that may arise.

Delegation shares responsibilities, builds teamwork, encourages participation in Group activities, and reduces the direct workload of the Support Group Leader.

Responsibilities of the Support Group Leader and Leadership Team

An elected or appointed Support Group Leader is responsible for the good governance of the Support Group. The Leader will:

- Act as the Support Group's representative and spokesperson
- Be the person through whom the Support Group reports to the Board

Support Group Leadership Teams will:

- Hold regular, appropriately conducted Support Group meetings
- Obtain and keep up to date contact details for all Support Group participants
- Comply with the *Parkinson's NSW Support Group Guidelines*
- Ensure all Support Group participants agree to the Support Group Charter, and retain a copy of each signed agreement
- Ensure all Support Group records are properly kept and stored
- Ensure the Support Group is financially sustainable
- Maintain proper written records of the business and decisions of the Support Group Leadership Team
- Provide copies of all meeting minutes to the Board of Parkinson's NSW in a timely manner
- Ensure all Parkinson's NSW policies and procedures are properly followed

Communications within your Support Group, and between your Group and Parkinson's NSW, are important leadership responsibilities.

Publications, advisory emails and general information sent to your Group by Parkinson's must be shared with all members – information must not be withheld or filtered.

Your Group email account must be checked regularly and all information passed on as required by Parkinson's NSW.

See also the *Parkinson's NSW Privacy Policy* in the Appendix section of this *Manual* for more information about privacy and confidentiality when using email.

Succession Planning

Succession planning is the process for identifying and developing future Support Group Leaders. These people are potential replacements for existing Leaders when they no longer wish or are able to stand for re-election to the role.

Succession planning is important for maintaining the longevity of your Group so it can continue supporting current and future participants living with Parkinson's in your community.

Having a clear succession plan in place also boosts morale, encourages engagement and helps to attract and retain participants in your Group.

The key steps in succession planning are:

1. Be proactive. Don't wait until the last minute to identify a pool of possible successors for the Group Leader role.

Even if you don't think you will need a replacement in the near future, it is important to have a safety net in place by getting a head start on identifying other potential Leaders.

2. Keep an open mind and don't look for 'another you'. Just because you have been successful with your skills and personality, it does not mean that the next in line should mimic your approach.

In fact, as Groups evolve, they may need different leadership styles at each stage of their development. Take this into account when considering successors – maybe look for a variety of different skills and approaches so you have the various possibilities covered when it comes time to step down.

3. Start sharing your vision, skills and knowledge before the transition phase begins. Doing so will ensure a smooth hand-over rather than a last-minute scramble.

One way of developing potential future leaders and sharing your vision at the same time, is to start routinely delegating tasks and roles to them. Delegation will help them to develop confidence, knowledge and skills that will pay off for your Group in the future.

4. Provide feedback and encouragement to potential future leaders in front of other Group members. It is a morale booster for all concerned and communicates that you have the best interests of the Group at heart – regardless of what the future holds.

5. Do trial runs of your succession plan before the time comes to actually hand over. Need a rest, going on holidays or being admitted to hospital? Then delegate the Support Group Leader role to one of your future leaders while you are away.

This delegation shows other participants in your Group that you have confidence in that person and you are acting in their best interests by providing them with alternative leadership while you are away.

For assistance with Support Group Leadership succession planning, contact:

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Other important information about Support Group leadership is included in Section 3 of the *Parkinson's NSW Support Group Guidelines* in the Appendix section of this *Manual*.