

WELCOME!

CREATING WELCOMING PLACES WORKBOOK

How your group can:

- Increase its size and diversity
- Get everyone participating
- Keep members coming back

governments
parks • cities
neighborhoods •
workplaces • clubs •
schools • churches
• social services •
associations • cities
• civic • businesses

Community Activators

AUTHORS

Written by
Bruce Anderson and Dean Paton
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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Our thanks to Susan Oliver, Dan Sullivan, and Shelda Dolan who helped develop the Milestones concept on which this booklet is based. Several governmental organizations contributed resources for development of this booklet including Clark County Community Services; State of Washington, Aging and Disability Services; and Stanislaus County Department of Behavioral Health and Recovery.

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INTRODUCTION

Most groups, clubs, and organizations want to increase their membership. And why not? When those currently in the group believe in its work, purpose, or vision, it just seems natural to want others to participate—and just as natural to think that others would want the opportunity if they knew about the group.

On a larger scale, we live in a time when many groups are concerned about building community and finding ways to increase the diversity of groups and organizations. Several years ago, a group of citizens began to gather in the meeting room of a local library in Washington State to discuss ways to strengthen community engagement between citizens. Some of us were interested in how to expand the size of a group we were involved with, others were trying to figure out ways to keep group members enthused and returning to group meetings, and still others were trying to discover ways to increase the diversity of a group by including community members who were typically not invited or helped to feel welcome.

Although most of us initially thought of “welcoming” as the greeter at the front door of the church or the initial “hello” a person gets when they join a new group, we began to see that the idea includes a range of specific activities, beginning with the formation of the group’s purpose and continuing until the last member has departed. We call this whole experience *WELCOMING: The initial and ongoing capacity of a group or business to make those in their midst feel comfortable and valued.*

As we continued to meet, each of us searched for resources and help about how to increase the welcoming capacity of a group. We found information related to developing a marketing plan for a group and creating flashy brochures to draw in new members. We found books written about how to facilitate effective meetings and draw out participants who are hesitant to participate. One member brought in a manual produced by the U.S. Navy that included instructions about how to welcome new members to a Navy base. In short, we found information which talked all around the idea of welcoming, but found little information addressing the specific idea of helping a group increase its ability to invite and sustain new members in a way that focused on the members’ feelings of being welcome and valued over the full span of their participation in a group.

This booklet is designed to help any group assess its current welcoming capacity and make plans for improvement. When members feel welcome, and their individual skills are being utilized and appreciated, groups can sustain their membership and achieve their goals. We hope you find this booklet useful and related to whatever your interests are in creating and sustaining welcoming groups.

HOW TO USE THIS BOOKLET

WHO IS THIS BOOKLET FOR?

This booklet can be useful to any group of people who have a common purpose, a need to work together, and an interest in increasing one or more of the following group attributes: membership size, membership diversity, sustained commitment, or enthusiasm. Because it is intentionally laid out to appeal to a wide range of groups, it may be necessary to translate some of the general terms into your group's common language and operating practice.

HOW IS THIS BOOKLET ORGANIZED?

This booklet is organized around the premise that there are five distinct stages or “milestones” that determine a group's success in being welcoming. Each milestone requires group members to accomplish different activities, and each milestone is a building block to the next milestone. The booklet is divided into five sections—one for each milestone.

Each milestone section contains:

- **Introduction to the Milestone**, a page or two of information about why that milestone is important, what new members and the existing group want to accomplish in that milestone, and what typically can go wrong.
- **How Are We Doing?**, a quick self-assessment that is designed to reveal the group's strengths and weaknesses in that milestone.
- **Have You Tried These Things?**, a list of practical ideas designed for that milestone.
- **Plans for Change**, a worksheet designed to help you make a plan for becoming more welcoming within that milestone.

HOW DO GROUPS USUALLY USE THIS BOOKLET?

Most group interest begins with one or two members who get excited about the idea of being more welcoming. They may have read this booklet, and come to the next group meeting prepared to talk about why they are interested in welcoming, and how they think their group could benefit from taking time to utilize this workbook. If there is sufficient interest, the group makes a plan for committing time to complete the workbook and make a plan for change.

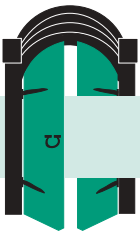
Because each milestone is distinct, and groups often have busy agendas, most groups choose to complete only one milestone per meeting, and then make a date for working on the next one.

To complete each milestone, have group members 1) read the information at the start of each milestone, 2) complete the quick assessment, 3) compare each other's rating scores and see what the common high and low scores are, 4) pick one or more of the low-rated items as an area to improve, 5) choose a solution(s), using your own ideas and the *Have You Tried These Things?* idea box, and 6) make a plan for implementing your ideas.

WHAT ELSE IS IMPORTANT TO KNOW?

There are several things that commonly come up while using this workbook:

1. Groups can always get better at a milestone. It's a good idea to pick a couple of small improvements rather than create a huge plan that group members will quickly lose interest in.
2. Part of the value of this booklet is that it can create an ongoing interest in welcoming. Plan on including welcoming on your agenda at planning retreats and regular meetings.
3. Each group will have significantly more work to do in some milestones than others. This is normal, and indicates the group already has an interest in being welcoming.
4. Don't forget to acknowledge the good work your group has already accomplished in each milestone.
5. It's often a good idea to have someone facilitate the discussion that results from completing the assessment, in order to be sure that everyone has the opportunity to tell their story and share their feelings. At times, old (or recent) examples of not feeling welcome will come to the surface. Listen carefully—significant clues to how your group can be more welcoming are usually contained within these stories.



MILESTONE ONE: Deciding to Be a Welcoming Group

PURPOSE OF THIS MILESTONE

The purpose of Milestone One is for the existing group to make a decision that it wants to be a welcoming group. Making this decision opens up the opportunity to discuss the group's current practices, acknowledge what is working well, and make plans for change.

INTRODUCTION

For most groups, there are trigger events that cause a discussion about membership. For some groups, it's the need for more help to accomplish their goals. Other times, it's the need for more money or other resources. Still other times, it might be a slow decline in membership that results in the group feeling like it has lost its energy and may even be in danger of disbanding. Whatever the initial cause of the conversation, the result most often is that the group makes a decision to try and locate more members.

Oftentimes, a group is successful in rounding up new members and getting them to the first meeting. After that, a slow decline begins again. Why is it that some groups have the opposite experience?—they are bursting with new members, people keep coming back, and you can feel the enthusiasm in the air? One explanation is that the group, through conscious effort or just plain luck, has established routines that make members feel valued, useful, and acknowledged.

Interestingly enough, we have heard of very few instances where a group has actually made a formal decision to be welcoming. It can feel like an awkward topic for discussion because it seems outside the scope of the group's primary activities. It can also involve strong feelings by bringing up memories in group members of times when they have not felt valued or included in the group. We believe it's a good idea to bring up the topic and have your group make a formal decision to be welcoming for three reasons. First, when you formally decide, there is a permission to bring up the topic and let group members know what's expected of them. Second, it's more likely you will pay more attention to welcoming if it's been decided by the whole group rather than left to a few members who are the usual "welcomers." Third, once a decision is made, you have a reason to periodically assess how well you're doing and make plans for improvement.

Successful groups don't just decide to get more members; they decide to be welcoming. We believe the most important thing your group can do to sustain its membership and maintain enthusiasm is to bring up the topic of welcoming, make a decision to be welcoming, and begin taking the small steps to continually improve. It's a step that most groups never take. Has yours?

WHAT DOES THE GROUP WANT FROM THIS MILESTONE?

For existing group members, it is important to actually take a vote rather than just assume everyone wants to be welcoming. This gives individual members the permission to come back to the group at a later time and bring up welcoming issues. It also provides the permission to include welcoming as a part of the group's goals and plans for improvement.

TYPICAL THINGS THAT "GO WRONG"

Many groups, perceiving that the topic is either too obvious or too "feeling" oriented, quickly move on to another topic after they see a few heads nodding and it looks like there is agreement to be welcoming. Rather than moving on, it's a good idea to ask a few people to talk about what welcoming means to them, and, if they are willing, to tell the story of what it was like for them to come to this group for the first time.

IMPORTANT TASKS IN THIS MILESTONE

Bring up the subject! After that, be sure to vote on it, and leave time for a few members to talk about welcoming and tell their story of coming to the group for the first time. Group improvements are rarely sustained unless a majority of the members are committed to the activities.

THE FIRST STEP:

Asking your group to discuss the idea of welcoming and make a commitment over time to continually improve.

HAVE YOU TRIED THESE THINGS?

- Set aside a time to discuss welcoming at a regular meeting.
- Designate a person to make a presentation to the Board of Directors.
- Discuss the difference between getting new members and welcoming.
- In small groups, ask members to tell a short story about a time when they felt unwelcome in a group. What specifically did the group do?
- In small groups, ask members to tell a short story about a time when they felt welcome in a group. What specifically did the group do?
- Discuss who the most welcoming people are in your group, and what they do.
- Encourage a group vote to move forward with being more welcoming.
- Discuss why you feel welcome or unwelcome in this group.
- Discuss the current things your group does that are welcoming.
- Add wording and action steps related to welcoming to your group's mission and strategic plan.
- Discuss current things your group does that may appear unwelcoming to new members.
- Discuss the advantages to increasing your membership.
- Discuss how your group might be perceived as welcoming and unwelcoming to other groups or individuals that you have contact with.
- Discuss the advantages to expanding and diversifying the kinds of members in your group.
- Discuss how it might be difficult for new members to feel like they are a part of your group.
- Discuss how members get acknowledgment after they have been a member for a while.

HOW ARE WE DOING?

INSTRUCTIONS: Please check the box for each statement that most accurately describes your group's current situation.

YES NO

- | | | | | | | |
|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|--|
| <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | 1. I would like to increase the size of our group. |
| <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | 2. I would like our group to be more welcoming to current members. |
| <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | 3. I would like our group to be more welcoming to new members. |
| <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | 4. Our group has made a decision to increase its membership. |
| <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | 5. Our group has discussed the specific reasons for increasing our membership. |
| <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | 6. Our group has discussed how increasing our membership will change the current group. |
| <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | 7. Our group has discussed the difference between 'deciding to increase our membership' and 'deciding to be welcoming.' |

WHAT CAN WE DO?

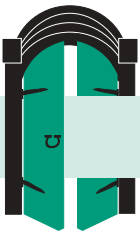
Instructions: Based on the above checklist and any other thoughts you have, list the tasks you believe your group could focus on to improve its welcoming capacity in Milestone One.

PLANS FOR CHANGE

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Discuss with group members the ideas they came up with on the bottom of the previous page.
2. Decide the specific tasks your group wants to do to improve its welcoming capacity in this Milestone.
3. For each improvement task, complete the boxes below.

WHAT WE WILL DO	STEPS TO COMPLETE THE TASK	WHO IS RESPONSIBLE	COMPLETION DATE



MILESTONE TWO: Identifying and Inviting New Members

PURPOSE OF THIS MILESTONE

The purpose of this milestone is to accurately identify the type of new member you want, and match the content and style of the invitation to that person.

INTRODUCTION

There are three parts to this second milestone. First, the group has to decide what qualities they are looking for in new members. Are you looking for anybody who is willing to join? Are you looking for members with certain skills or resources? Are you looking for individuals who laugh a lot or are serious thinkers? Will the group be best served by new members who have a certain set of beliefs or attitudes? Knowing what kinds of new members you are looking for is a fundamental step because it gives the group information about where to look for members and how to design promotional literature and invitations that will attract a certain type of person.

The second part to this milestone is deciding how to design the invitation. Depending on your group, and the type of new member you are seeking, different invitations will be more effective than others. For instance, some groups are looking for large numbers of new members who will help them with a time-limited project. Distributing leaflets or making public announcements may work best for this kind of new member. If the group is looking for new members who will move into the group easily and pitch right in, current members may want to consider verbal invitations to people they already know who are likely to enjoy the group's members and activities. Your group will have to match the type of invitation to the type of new member you are looking for.

The third part is deciding who will make the invitation. If the inviting will be done through public information systems such as radio, newspapers, television, or leafleting, it is important to include information that identifies a specific person who can be contacted for more information. This group member is chosen on the basis of their ability to be a warm, engaging, and careful listener. If the invitation will be done through networks of friends and relationships, then the person who is most familiar with the potential new member should make the invitation.

During the invitation, there are four essential tasks that should be accomplished. First, the tone and content of the

invitation must be warm and engaging. Second, the invitation must convey the specific reasons why your group desires that new member. New members want to feel like they are being chosen. Third, the invitation must clearly outline the range of possible benefits to joining your group. And fourth, the inviter must outline the reasons why he/she has maintained membership in the group. It's helpful if the inviter gives a range of reasons—those could include what they have learned from being a part of the group, friends they have made, side benefits, unexpected rewards, and any other benefit that will help the potential new member identify one or more interests they may have for joining.

WHAT DO POTENTIAL NEW MEMBERS AND THE GROUP WANT FROM THIS MILESTONE?

Potential new members are seeking enough information that they can make a sound decision about whether or not to attend their first meeting. They are looking for enough good reasons to make a commitment of time, and the assurance that their interests will be met. New members are also looking for validation that they will be needed and appreciated if they show up. The existing group members are hoping that the invitation process will result in new members showing up who match the current needs of the group.

TYPICAL THINGS THAT “GO WRONG”

Oftentimes, groups are in a membership crisis by the time they begin devising strategies to find new members. This feeling of pressure can result in overlooking the critical step of carefully identifying the characteristics you are looking for. Of course, skipping this step leads to a high level of dropout because potential members who are not a good fit for the group show up, recognize it's not the right group for them, and don't return.

Another frequent roadblock in this milestone is that the group's promotional materials do not accurately and enthusiastically describe the “heart” of the group. Why is it that current group members keep returning? What are the emotional rewards members get from continued commitment? Without this information, new members may perceive that you are just looking for more people to complete your group's chores.

Nothing beats a personal invitation! It is much more difficult to attract new members based on written material than it is

in a personal invitation. In addition to hearing and feeling the inviter's warmth and sincerity, the inviter is right there to answer any concerns or questions related to the invitation for the group's activities.

IMPORTANT TASKS IN THIS MILESTONE

The primary important tasks in this milestone are careful identification of qualities being sought in new members, matching the invitational style and method to the characteristics of the potential member, remembering to describe a range of benefits to joining, and accurately describing the "heart of the group."

All groups develop their own set of spoken and unspoken rules. Sometimes there are unspoken agreements about who the "right people" are to invite into a group. Although it can be a difficult conversation, bringing up the idea of how similar the current membership is will often spur existing members to recognize value in finding potential members who bring different skills, interests, and styles. Often a group's lack of enthusiasm will be directly tied to the lack of diversity of people, ideas, and motivations. Having a cross section of community in a group will increase the group's capacity to fulfill its mission and attract new members.

HAVE YOU TRIED THESE THINGS?

- Target organizations and neighborhoods that include members who are different from the general attributes of your current membership.
- Develop an easy guide/handout for your members to use to recruit new members.
- Ask people with diverse backgrounds to comment on the welcoming and inclusive nature of your marketing materials.
- Sometimes special accommodations are needed for some individuals to join and participate in an organization. Have you included this in your marketing materials?
- Has your group talked about questions and fears about individual accommodations?
- Develop accurate descriptions of the qualities we look for in members.
- Develop clear descriptions of what you expect from members.
- Hearing one's story from an organization can help a potential new member to consider your organization. In what ways can members' stories be shared through local neighborhood newspapers in letters to the editor, etc.
- Set a goal for a period of time of how many new members you desire, and what kinds of diversity you are working toward.
- Set up a speaker's bureau where your volunteers talk with local groups to market your organization's mission and welcoming policy.
- Schedule an "Invite a friend" potluck/picnic at a local park, or a "baseball" night, etc.
- Gather stories from group members about why they are part of the group. Use these stories.
- Identify the passion of the group.
- Discuss what groups are at "the fringes" of your community. Figure out methods to invite them into your group.
- Invite new members based on a specific gift/contribution they can bring.
- Identify who the best inviters are in your group. Support them in making invitations.

HOW ARE WE DOING?

INSTRUCTIONS: Please check the box for each statement that most accurately describes your group's current situation.

YES NO

- | | | | | | | |
|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|---|
| <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | 1. Our group has an easy time attracting new members. |
| <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | 2. We have identified successful steps for reaching potential members. |
| <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | 3. Our group attracts the kind of members I would like to see. |
| <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | 4. We have identified and agreed on the qualities we look for in potential members. |
| <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | 5. Our organization's written materials present our group as lively, interesting, capable, and having clear direction. |
| <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | 6. The makeup of our group is diverse (age, gender, occupation, ethnicity, etc.). |
| <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | 7. Prospective members know how they will benefit from joining our group. |
| <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | 8. Prospective members know what they will be expected to contribute. |
| <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | 9. We make effective use of publicity techniques to expand our membership |

WHAT CAN WE DO?

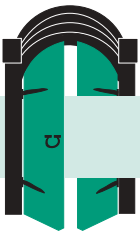
Instructions: Based on the above checklist and any other thoughts you have, list the tasks you believe your group could focus on to improve its welcoming capacity in Milestone Two.

PLANS FOR CHANGE

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Discuss with group members the ideas they came up with on the bottom of the previous page.
2. Decide the specific tasks your group wants to do to improve its welcoming capacity in this Milestone.
3. For each improvement task, complete the boxes below.

WHAT WE WILL DO	STEPS TO COMPLETE THE TASK	WHO IS RESPONSIBLE	COMPLETION DATE



MILESTONE THREE: First Visit for a New Member

PURPOSE OF THIS MILESTONE

The purpose of this milestone is to have both the new member and the existing group begin the process of determining whether each will get their needs met in the new relationship.

INTRODUCTION

This milestone is what most people define as “welcoming.” The new member approaches the meeting place, makes contact with existing members, and both sides begin to evaluate the relationship. First impressions, as they say, are important.

Most of us enter new groups with caution. For similar reasons, most groups also enter relationships with new members cautiously. The potential for misunderstanding and hurt feelings is highest when neither party knows the story of the other side. Politeness and civil conversation are the primary forms of engagement while each side is determining how to enter into a successful relationship. As each side begins to know the other side’s story, the protective shields we all use to guard us from harm begin to slowly move aside. Groups who are successful with “first visits” often have similar activities built into their routines.

First and most important is to designate a person to be the newcomer’s ally during this first visit. In this ally role, the group member will be responsible for meeting the person at the door, welcoming the person into the group, making informal introductions prior to the start of the meeting, and checking in frequently with the newcomer during the course of the first visit—to answer questions, ask if any help is needed, and generally attend to their comfort.

Second, a person in the group is designated to make an introduction of the new person to the whole group. This person may or may not be described in the previous paragraph. The introduction should have three main components: a statement reminding the group about how difficult it can be to enter a group of strangers, a short story that exhibits a strength in the newcomer that the group values, and finally, a personal statement by the introducer indicating why it is personally important that this new person be accepted and welcomed into the group.

Another frequent attribute of successful “first visit” groups is that they have pre-arranged routines which allow for the

newcomer and existing group members to begin to know each other’s story. This is often started during the initial introduction, and can be further accomplished by individual group members trading stories during breaks with the person, or the whole group spending a few minutes at the start of the meeting sharing brief related stories.

Fourth, someone is designated to follow up with the newcomer on the following day. The purpose of the check-in is to ask the person how they liked the meeting and the group, ask if there is anything the group can do to make the person more comfortable, and get a confirmation that they will be at the next meeting.

WHAT DO POTENTIAL NEW MEMBERS AND THE GROUP WANT FROM THIS MILESTONE?

Potential new members are looking for at least one group member to demonstrate a warm welcome, to be seen as being valuable to the group in at least one way, and to further gather information about the fit between his/her needs and the perceived needs of the group. The existing group is trying to determine if the person is going to fit in, how the person can help them, if the person is going to try and control the group, and if the person appreciates the hard work the group has accomplished so far.

TYPICAL THINGS THAT “GO WRONG”

Most organizations both assume they are welcoming and have informal methods to greet newcomers. This is often a recipe for disaster. Generally the new person is afforded a handshake, smile, or some other form of acknowledgment, followed by a simple introduction at the beginning of a meeting. By not using the first meeting as an opportunity for more involved “getting to know” on both sides, the process of getting comfortable is extended for everyone.

IMPORTANT TASKS IN THIS MILESTONE

There are four primary tasks, including assigning an ally to the newcomer for the first meeting, increasing the person’s status in the group by giving a powerful introduction, using specific activities to engage the newcomer and current members in learning each other’s story, and checking in with the person on the following day.

HAVE YOU TRIED THESE THINGS?

- Establish procedures for welcoming new members.
- Assign an ally to the newcomer on their first visit.
- Start meetings with food sharing or other opportunities for exchanging stories.
- Ask the person what they most want to get from the group.
- Ask the person prior to the first visit if they want any help related to the first visit.
- Stop during the meeting to clarify “jargon” words the newcomer might not understand.
- Leave a message on the newcomer’s phone welcoming them to the first meeting and reminding them of the time and location.
- Publicly thank the person for coming at the end of the meeting.
- Establish with the person that they can “test the waters” without feeling guilty if he/she chooses not to join.
- Have existing members tell the newcomer what they value most from the group.
- Have an existing member share the story of the group with the newcomer.
- Review the group’s ability to provide accommodations for new members such as daycare, wheelchair access, interpreting, and transportation.
- Focus on discovering the different skills of the person and identify ways they could contribute those gifts.
- Check up with the newcomer following their first visit.
- Include a powerful introduction of the newcomer at the start of the meeting.
- Existing members tell the story of the first time they visited the group.
- Person is presented with a symbolic token of appreciation for attending.
- Ask the person where he/she is comfortable sitting.

HOW ARE WE DOING?

INSTRUCTIONS: Please check the box for each statement that most accurately describes your group's current situation.

YES NO

- | | | | | | | |
|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|--|
| <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | 1. We have a clearly established procedure for welcoming new members. |
| <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | 2. Our procedure for greeting a new member involves more than a simple exchange of names. |
| <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | 3. Our meetings are free of jargon or insider language that could alienate new members. |
| <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | 4. We have a procedure we adhere to for following up after a new member's first attendance. |
| <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | 5. Our organization accommodates the unique needs of each member (transportation, interpreters, baby-sitting, etc.) |
| <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | 6. I remember feeling very welcome on my first visit to the group. |
| <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | 7. The physical set-up of our meeting place (including building, meeting room, and parking) makes it easy for anyone to attend. |

WHAT CAN WE DO?

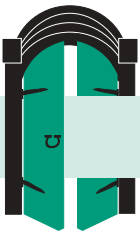
Instructions: Based on the above checklist and any other thoughts you have, list the tasks you believe your group could focus on to improve its welcoming capacity in Milestone Three.

PLANS FOR CHANGE

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Discuss with group members the ideas they came up with on the bottom of the previous page.
2. Decide the specific tasks your group wants to do to improve its welcoming capacity in this Milestone.
3. For each improvement task, complete the boxes below.

WHAT WE WILL DO	STEPS TO COMPLETE THE TASK	WHO IS RESPONSIBLE	COMPLETION DATE



MILESTONE FOUR: Why Members Keep Coming Back

PURPOSE OF THIS MILESTONE

The purpose of this milestone is to continue to deepen the commitment of both the newcomer and the existing group to be in relationship with each other.

INTRODUCTION

So, the newcomer has been to your group several times. Congratulations! The group has been successful at welcoming the person during the initial stages of his/her membership.

This fourth milestone, which spans the time between the first visit of the newcomer and his/her eventual exit, includes any action your group engages in that results in each member returning to the group, participating, and perhaps even drawing in new members. It requires intentional activities that are designed to deepen both new and old members' commitment to the group.

When individuals decide to join a group, it is usually for one or both of the following reasons: either the person is coming because they have an interest in the activities of the group, or they have an interest in being in a relationship with one or more group members. The goal of this milestone is to build on those initial reasons for joining by providing opportunities for each member to deepen both their relationships with other group members and their interest in the group's activities. Coupled with these two tasks is an important third piece: providing acknowledgment for the contributions of each member, new and old. When all three of these tasks are accomplished, it is likely you will have a membership that has wide participation in activities, stable membership, and high motivation to draw in new members.

It is difficult to overstate the need of each individual member to feel liked and wanted by the group. All of us have had the experience in our lives of feeling like we are unwelcome and not needed and, if we had the choice, would most likely choose not to experience those feelings again. It is up to the group to provide a necessary structure of routines which remind group members that each person is valued, wanted, and has a unique contribution that the group values. We have repeatedly seen that members of a group who do not feel welcome or valued will not reach out and welcome new members.

There is one solid and dependable link between individuals and the group in this milestone. Each member coming through the door brings a unique set of skills and gifts. By "skills" we mean the things that the person is "good at." By "gifts" we mean the capacities which a person feels deeply passionate about and committed to. Any group attempting to accomplish a task needs a wide range of skills and contributions. If the group can successfully match the gifts of members with the tasks the organization is working on, both sides will be rewarded.

It is often true that individuals are skilled at performing a particular task, but they either don't enjoy it or don't feel interested in doing it. In this milestone, it is essential for the group to be particularly aware of the individual gifts of members, and to spread the tasks out amongst the membership in a way that acknowledges those individual gifts. Group members may not respond well to requests to do tasks just because they are "good at it." But the individual is likely to respond enthusiastically to requests for help if the task is something that he/she feels passionate about and deeply tied to. For instance, a youth program has invited a female attorney to join its board of directors. The existing board is excited about the attorney's skills in helping them review their legal documents. But what if she has joined the organization because of a deep passion for working with youth and wants to contribute time working directly with young people? If the group continues to request "help" in the form of reviewing legal documents, and doesn't honor the deeper desire of the attorney, it is likely that the member will leave the group.

Most individuals have been a member of many different groups throughout the course of their life including families, schools, churches, clubs, friends, workplaces, and the many other situations where individuals gather. Thinking back to groups you have been a part of, why did you stay? Why did you leave? Your own experience in the groups you have been a part of will tell much of the story of what it takes for a group to continue to be welcoming after the newcomer's first visit.

WHAT DO INDIVIDUAL MEMBERS AND THE GROUP WANT FROM THIS MILESTONE?

The new member desires continued involvement in tasks which are meaningful to him/her, acknowledgment for those contributions, a growing feeling that other members

desire his/her presence, and a deepening of relationships with existing group members.

The existing group expects the member to demonstrate willingness to take on tasks and follow through to completion, dependable participation, and an acknowledgment of his/her satisfaction with being a member of the group.

TYPICAL THINGS THAT “GO WRONG”

Because most of us think of welcoming as the initial greeting or introduction, it is common for groups to not have any welcoming activities after that initial first visit. In a brief period of time, the newcomer is expected to shift from being a stranger to a regular member of the group. Unfortunately, most newcomers do not make the shift as quickly as groups expect them to—it often takes a period of time for the person to begin to feel safe, included, and valued by the group. This gap between the newcomer’s need for some time to feel comfortable and the existing group’s expectation that the person will “fit right in” is often the cause for the newcomer to begin to feel unwelcome and, as a result, stop attending the meetings.

If the group has not established clear agreements about why new members are needed and what will be expected of them, confusion can result in the new members’ mind

about what is expected of them and how they can best fit in. This may result in the newcomers feeling obligated to do things that they do not really want to do, or the group feeling dissatisfied with the newcomers’ involvement. Newcomers who feel burdened by unexpected obligations often find ways to quietly exit the group.

The regular routines of most groups include the acknowledgment, either spoken or unspoken, of the existence of subgroups within the group. These subgroups may be composed of the core leaders, group members who feel drawn to each other for social or personal reasons, members who feel like outsiders, or members who share a particular interest. To the newcomer, the effect of these subgroups can be to continue his/her feeling of being an outsider to the group.

IMPORTANT TASKS IN THIS MILESTONE

There are three primary tasks, including 1) locating the reason(s) for each member’s passion related to the group’s interest and finding ways for him/her to contribute related to that passion, 2) providing opportunity for pairs and small groups to complete tasks together to increase the likelihood of deeper relationships forming, and 3) acknowledgment of both large and small contributions of each member.

HAVE YOU TRIED THESE THINGS?

- Locate the reason(s) for each member’s passion related to the group’s interest. Find ways for him/her to contribute specifically related to that passion.
- Make expectations for involvement clear.
- Provide lots of opportunity for pairs and small groups to complete tasks together to increase the likelihood of deeper relationships forming.
- Attend to group members who seem to be on the edges at the breaks, or before/after meetings.
- Recent newcomers welcome first-time visitors.
- Acknowledge group members who have a gift for welcoming.
- Tell stories about each member’s experience with his/her first visit to this group.
- Spread tasks and authority over membership.
- Provide accommodations for members.
- Create opportunities for regular celebrations.
- Increase routines of sharing food together.
- Provide clear meeting purposes and generally stick to timeframes.
- Increase connection opportunity between older and younger-age group members
- Leaders are seen as careful listeners, fair, and willing to engage with disruptive group members.
- Invite stories from group members about how this group is useful to them.

HOW ARE WE DOING?

INSTRUCTIONS: Please check the box for each statement that most accurately describes your group's current situation.

YES NO

- | | | | | | | |
|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|--|
| <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | 1. Our membership has a clear and shared vision of its purpose. |
| <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | 2. Most of our group's members participate regularly in meaningful ways. |
| <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | 3. Our group's unspoken and unwritten rules are understood clearly by all of our members. |
| <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | 4. Members know some of the personal stories of others in the group. |
| <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | 5. There are numerous, ongoing, and regular ways for group members to deepen relationships with each other. |
| <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | 6. Our group has formalized ways of discovering the skills and gifts of each of our members. |
| <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | 7. Conflicts within our group are typically resolved successfully and in a short time. |
| <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | 8. It is encouraged and safe for all group members to say what they are thinking or feeling. |
| <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | 9. Routinely, we celebrate the accomplishments of our group as well as individual members. |
| <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | 10. Responsibility for determining the group's direction is spread in significant ways among the membership, and is not hoarded by a sub-group or clique. |

WHAT CAN WE DO?

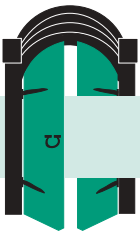
Instructions: Based on the above checklist and any other thoughts you have, list the tasks you believe your group could focus on to improve its welcoming capacity in Milestone Four.

PLANS FOR CHANGE

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Discuss with group members the ideas they came up with on the bottom of the previous page.
2. Decide the specific tasks your group wants to do to improve its welcoming capacity in this Milestone.
3. For each improvement task, complete the boxes below.

WHAT WE WILL DO	STEPS TO COMPLETE THE TASK	WHO IS RESPONSIBLE	COMPLETION DATE



MILESTONE FIVE: When a Member Leaves

PURPOSE OF THIS MILESTONE

The final milestone provides a clearly defined process that acknowledges and honors exiting members and allows the group to reformulate and proceed forward.

INTRODUCTION

Just as groups can expect new members over time, they can also expect to have members depart. Examples of reasons individuals say they leave groups include moving to a new town, too many commitments, the group doesn't meet his/her needs, a new job, personality conflicts with other group members, and waning interest in the activities of the group.

It may seem odd to consider an ending as a milestone for welcoming, but the importance of being welcoming at the end is critical to both the remaining members and the person who is leaving the group. If the person leaving is not satisfied with the exiting process, it is possible he/she will remember the experience with the group in a negative light and share that with other community members. When an exiting group member does not feel adequately acknowledged, he/she may interpret that as a statement of the group's lack of appreciation for his/her contributions, or, worse yet, that the group did not value the member. On the other side, if the group is not satisfied with the ending process, current group members will become uneasy and avoid their own exiting process, thereby increasing the odds that they, too, will not relate positive stories about the group.

The occasion of a member departing a group for the last time often causes group members to recall their experience of that member over the entire span of his/her membership. Because the ending is like a "summing up" of the story of the person's involvement—and may even be the last opportunity for regular communication—it is often true that emotions of group members become more intense. During the ending process, group members often crystallize specific moments that symbolize the exiting person's relationship with the group.

Because of the heightened emotion and the significance of the event, many groups either avoid endings or treat the event without a serious intent. Just as individuals are often prone to say "I'll see you later," when in fact they are well aware that they will probably never see the person again,

groups avoid the defining moment of the exit as a way of avoiding the feelings that come with it.

There are four essential ingredients to a complete ending for a group member. First, the group must acknowledge that they are a group and unify themselves. This first step is important, because it acknowledges that the group, in addition to individual members, is saying goodbye to the person. To accomplish this step, groups will often tell the story of the different shifts in membership over time, cite the group's desire to have a meaningful ending, read a statement, or sing a common song that signifies the unity of the group—any activity that reminds the group that they are a group. Second, the group acknowledges what it has received from the person, including the honoring of contributions to both relationships and tasks. During this step, it is common for the group to list the significant surface skills and deeper gifts the member has contributed, the relational contributions, and any other unique qualities that the group has noticed during the person's involvement with the group. Third, the exiting member is given the opportunity to declare what he/she has received from the group during membership. This may include things the person has learned, relationships which the person values, opportunities to give gifts and skills, and emotional support received. And fourth, the group establishes either a physical or procedural point in the ending process that signifies the "ending of the ending": the point at which the person has left the group. This last step is critical, because it gives permission to the exiting member, remaining individuals, and the group as a whole to reform and reshape in a way that acknowledges the change that has occurred.

Endings often include opposites: feelings of sadness and joy, moments of tension and relief, and times of seriousness and laughter. Just as life includes a blending of opposite experiences for all humans, endings provide a way for individuals and groups to capture the experience of being fully alive.

WHAT DO INDIVIDUAL MEMBERS AND THE GROUP WANT FROM THIS MILESTONE?

Individual members want acknowledgment for both the relationships and tasks they have been involved in during their membership. The group wants to clarify and acknowledge the contributions the person has made, and feel assured the person will speak well of the group after

exiting. Both sides typically desire a defining moment that signifies the person is officially no longer part of the group.

TYPICAL THINGS THAT “GO WRONG”

Because endings often bring out emotion, many groups do not fully engage in an ending process. There is a tendency for groups to have “dribble endings,” where there is no direct and clear process for a member to leave. Both sides feel unsatisfied, and the result is a decreased commitment from current group members. After all, if it doesn’t matter whether or not a member leaves, why should it matter if a member stays?

It is also common for group members to acknowledge the task contributions of the exiting member, and avoid acknowledgment of the relational and/or emotional contribution. For group members who have a deep emotional attachment to the group’s purpose and/or other members, this may seem like a shallow parting. Particularly for members who see themselves as the “heart of the group,” this type of ending will be unsatisfying.

For group members who are departing because of some form of disagreement or ill will between members, it is particularly important to acknowledge their contributions, acknowledge the discord, and be certain that the exiting member and the group do not sum up his/her membership experience only in the light of this conflicted situation. The facilitation of this type of ending may involve a high level of courage and skill on the leader’s part, but will be well worth it for both the exiting member and the group.

IMPORTANT TASKS IN THIS MILESTONE

The important tasks in this milestone include a unification and gathering of the group to witness the exiting process, the group stating and honoring the person’s contributions to relationships and tasks, the individual responding by acknowledging what they have received from the group during his/her membership, and a defining moment which signifies the ending is completed and the person is no longer a member of the group.

HAVE YOU TRIED THESE THINGS?

- Individual members expressing gratitude during public meetings.
- Specific portions of meetings designated for “ending” processes.
- Development of a ceremonial “ending gift” which all departing members receive.
- Exit interviews which clarify the positive and negative experiences of the exiting member.
- Designing an exiting process which is instituted as standard practice.
- Documenting forwarding addresses and updating contact information.
- Create a physical place which signifies the entry and exit for all members.
- If the member exits without notification, follow up to discover why.
- Provide food at all ending processes.
- Create an archive document which honors all departed members.
- If there is conflict, there is intent to work it out by a mediator prior to the exit, and not using the exit as a way out of facing the conflict.
- Being certain the person knows they are welcome to return at any time.
- Gift circle where simple, non-monetary gifts are traded – stories from the heart come out and there is increased meaning in the “goodbye.”
- Singing and other activities which unify the group and open hearts.
- Put exiting member’s feedback on the agenda for the next meeting.

HOW ARE WE DOING?

INSTRUCTIONS: Please check the box for each statement that most accurately describes your group's current situation.

YES NO

- | | | | | | | |
|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|--|
| <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | 1. Our group's rate of attrition is acceptable to me. |
| <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | 2. Our group has formalized, specific ways of honoring individuals who are leaving. |
| <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | 3. The participation requirements for our group are clearly spelled out. |
| <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | 4. Our group evenly enforces its participation requirements. |
| <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | 5. We have satisfactory and effective ways of helping a person to leave the group when, for whatever reason, he or she doesn't fit. |
| <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | 6. We know who is, and who is not, an active part of our group. |
| <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | 7. When a person leaves our group, we always solicit feedback about his/her experience with us. |

WHAT CAN WE DO?

Instructions: Based on the above checklist and any other thoughts you have, list the tasks you believe your group could focus on to improve its welcoming capacity in Milestone Five.

PLANS FOR CHANGE

INSTRUCTIONS:

1. Discuss with group members the ideas they came up with on the bottom of the previous page.
2. Decide the specific tasks your group wants to do to improve its welcoming capacity in this Milestone.
3. For each improvement task, complete the boxes below.

WHAT WE WILL DO	STEPS TO COMPLETE THE TASK	WHO IS RESPONSIBLE	COMPLETION DATE

