

Cohort Best Practices

What is a cohort and what can it do for me? A key feature of the Leadership Academy is the cohort -- an intentional learning community assigned to work together for the term of the Academy. The purpose, broadly speaking, of cohort groups is to encourage a dynamic, collaborative, and supportive learning environment to carry you through the program.

You will meet with your cohort at least once between each session. We hope that you will bond with your cohort, keep each other on track, learn from one another, act as sounding boards, and form the basis of a network that grows closer over the course of the Academy.

How to get the most out of your cohort: Like so much of life, your cohort will give you more, the more you put into it. Your cohort meetings are a chance to flex your leadership skills; they are a practice arena for what you are learning.

Cohorts serve three important purposes: (1) educational; (2) relationships; and (3) networking. Each cohort strikes a different balance among these purposes. Here is some general guidance from prior Fellows that may help you develop a practice that works for your cohort.

1: Set some ground rules:

- Affirm your commitment to the cohort process.
- Affirm your commitment to the Academy Rules of Engagement.
- Openly discuss your ideas on what balance to strike among the three purposes, and use what you decide to structure your cohort meetings.
- Openly discuss other “ground rules” – such as finding a day and time that works for everyone.
- Agree that meetings will be “face-to-face”: if/when possible, meet in person; otherwise, meet on video. (Teleconference calls are much less effective in promoting conversation.)

2: Allow time for relationships to develop:

- Make sure you spend time, especially at the beginning, getting to know one another.
- Recognize that you may have to be more vulnerable than you generally are in your professional life.
- Be mindful of being inclusive and supportive of one another during the cohort sessions.

3: Take the cohort time seriously – do the prep work (readings and reflections), and attend the meetings:

- Consider whether it would work best for your cohort to have a facilitator for each cohort meeting to make sure you achieve your goals for the meeting.
- Be flexible: If the cohort finds that it would be more useful to address another leadership issue during a session (i.e., an issue facing one member), the cohort can – and should – shift its focus.
- Consider having a group chat for quick check-ins between sessions using whatever tool is preferred (e-mail, text, WhatsApp, Slack, etc.).

4: Utilize resources provided by the Leadership Academy team (Robert and/or Ilene), as needed, to help your cohort maximize the experience.