



ACF Community Groups: Learning Together

When we collaborate, we generate group intelligence. This is 'bigger than the sum of our parts', and more surprising than anything we could come up with ourselves. New ideas emerge, get tested and refined. We become part of an intelligent dynamic system that's always adapting to challenges. The kind of rapid social learning that takes place in our campaign is our great strength.

We can make ourselves, our group, and our movement smarter by adopting habits of Action Learning.

Action Learning is the continuous process of consciously learning from one's own experience/action and that of others in order to improve future practice. The Action Learning Cycle (ALC) is a series of steps to draw learning from action (experience) through an analytical reflection. It helps us to learn from our experience to avoid repeating mistakes or inefficiency of our work and to continuously improve our work. ALC is an upward spiral that leads to greater group effectiveness.

Action

Review what actually happened (expected and unexpected). See how people involved feel about the experience.

Reflection

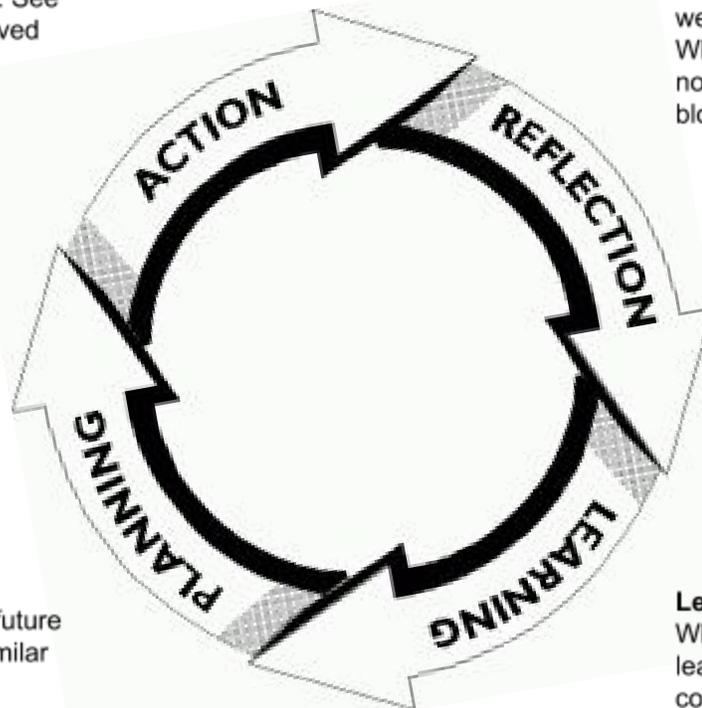
What worked/went well? What helped? What didn't work/went not well? What blocked?

Planning

What will we do differently in the future when meeting similar situations?

Learning

What lessons can be learned? What are our conclusions? What new insights, new things discovered?





To maximise learning we need to build in pauses after action so there is space to reflect on what has happened. This kind of pause can have many positive effects:

- giving group members a time to catch their breath, reducing burnout which can happen when we just rush from one thing to the next;
- allowing group members to really take on board success or lessons which can build morale and reduce feelings of futility (which can surface when we only focus on deficit and what needs to be done);
- establishing new practices and group norms based on shared experience and analysis; and
- educating and affirming group members so they feel more equipped to take future action.

Schedule time after an event or action for debrief and evaluation. This could be right after the event (mostly for 'what's on top' rather than detailed analysis) or at the group's next meeting. Some prompts for reflection and discussion (in addition to the questions in the diagram) include:

- How did you feel during and right after the event?
- What went well? What could we do differently next time?
- What do we know about participant's experience of this event? eg evaluation, feedback, word of mouth.
- What new things did we try at this event? How did they go?
- What were our goals for the event? Did we meet them?
- How does this fit in with our overall goals for the group/campaign?
- What are we learning about engaging new people?
- How did this event or action impact on different people/roles in the group?
- Was work and responsibility evenly distributed amongst the group? Or did one or two people do most of it?
- What have individuals learnt – or how have they grown – as a result of this event or group activity?
- What contributions or leadership can we affirm or celebrate?

Our ACF Community Groups are a place to learn together. We need to acknowledge that none of us have done this before! We all have our L Plates on. It's really OK to learn as we go.

Source: This tip sheet draws on Lock the Gate's 'Adopt action learning in your group' http://www.lockthegate.org.au/tips_to_get_active and Camlefa's 'Action-learning Cycle' www.camlefa.org/short_articles/Action_Learning_Cycle_Eng.pdf with additions from Holly Hammond, Plan to Win <http://plantowin.net.au/>