

Leadership and Leadership Development in Put People First! PA

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Why is leadership critical for an organization like Put People First! PA?

Put People First! PA is an organization of regular people who are struggling to meet our fundamental needs--such as housing, healthcare, education, and healthy food. These needs are our basic human rights, things everyone needs to live a life with dignity. We're coming together through Put People First! PA to secure our human rights, build community, develop our voice, and build power. Throughout U.S. history it's been just such organizations, and the social movements they've created and been part of, which have enabled the people most affected by problems in their communities and society at large to lead the way in resolving them. In order for an organization like Put People First! PA to play such a role we need strong leaders who come from the communities most affected by problems in our society in all our diversity.

In our fight to realize everybody's human rights in our state, we will come up against powerful economic and political forces that benefit from maintaining the status quo. For example, there are those who profit from treating healthcare as a way to make profit, instead of as a human right and public good. They use their money to influence elected officials and keep a real discussion of universal healthcare out of the public debate. They play on divide and conquer tactics, such as racism or scapegoating immigrants, to keep people divided. They also rely on a culture of individualism, isolation, and political disengagement to keep us from coming together and securing our rights. Additionally, the fact that we're committed to being politically independent from big foundations and philanthropists (whose money often comes with strings attached), and the size and diversity of our state, mean that we have to develop a high level of leadership at the local level all across Pennsylvania – we can't rely on hiring a bunch of full-time staff organizers. The reality that we face requires that we develop many leaders who can overcome these challenges and build a powerful movement for our human rights. For an organization like Put People First! PA, leaders are the foundation that enables a broad and growing membership base.

What does it mean to be a leader in Put People First! PA?

PPF-PA leaders are *clear, competent, committed* and *connected*. Our *clarity*, through training, study and reflection, enables us to make correct assessments of problems and put forth solutions. Our *competence* in thinking strategically and tactically, planning and carrying our campaigns, and organizing our communities enables us to unite people so that we can work together towards a common end. Our *commitment* to the human dignity of all and to a just society motivates our actions and sustains our engagement and contribution to the cause. Our deep *connection* to communities that are struggling to meet their needs ensures the development and success of our organizing and movement building. It enables us to identify problems that are most pressing and to understand and represent the needs and demands of our base.

Put People First! PA leaders understand the relationship of a particular campaign to broader movement building. We understand and know how to apply our organization's human rights

organizing approach to secure both our immediate and long-term goals. Put People First! PA leaders assess and solve problems, put forward analysis, vision and strategy, drive and bottom line processes, take initiative and make things happen. Most importantly, Put People First! PA leaders are committed to constantly developing both other leaders and ourselves through our work together.

How do we develop leaders in Put People First! PA?

On the political education and leadership development team, our approach to leadership, leadership development and organizing in general comes out of our collective experience in Put People First! PA as well as the other organizing experiences we bring to this effort. We see Put People First! PA as in the process of developing a new model of organizing that isn't overly reliant on lots of full time paid staff people but rather depends on member leaders who take on major responsibility and initiative in building our statewide organization. Such an approach requires us to prioritize leadership development and to make it clear to everyone in Put People First! PA that leadership development is a part of what all members do in the organization.

We all have the ability to be leaders, but actually playing a leadership role takes systematic attention and training. In Put People First! PA we've observed that leaders develop through a combination of four practices. First, by participating in policy campaigns for human rights we get to act in a focused, sustained and coordinated way with other members, see firsthand how social change happens and develop a sense of the power of our collective action. We call this practice *political activity*. Second, by participating in systematic political education and organizing training we have a chance to reflect upon and study the lessons from our own campaign activity as well as the lessons of other social movements, to study the economics and politics of the social problems we are taking on, and to learn the organizing skills and techniques we'll need to know in order to be effective leaders. We call this practice *political education*. Third, by taking on responsibility for a set of tasks or an area of work, we learn how to solve problems and overcome challenges, how to think about our own and others' development, and how to be accountable for a project and to a group of people. We call this practice *political responsibility*. Finally, by working collectively with others, including in planning, sharing information, making decisions, carrying out work plans and evaluating our work, we develop deep relationships, confidence in ourselves and others, commitment to the cause and a sense of real ownership of the organization. We call this practice *political collectivity*.

We're building a leadership development path along which our leaders progress in assuming new responsibilities and developing our capacities to carry out these responsibilities. It's important to us that in this process we think about and mentor each other and that we get the training and support we need to grow into and carry out our evolving leadership roles.

This is all a work in progress and we're all learning a lot as we do this work together. What has helped you to develop as the leader that you are? What have you seen develop leaders in Put People First! PA? What can you do to develop leaders in Put People First! PA?