



**Carers  
Australia  
VIC**

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## **GROUP MEMBERSHIP**

**SECTION FOUR  
CARER SUPPORT GROUP  
FACILITATOR GUIDE**

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## CONTENTS

Attracting members	1
Retaining members	3
Succession planning	4
Succession plan template	6

## ATTRACTING MEMBERS

In order to establish and attract members, answer the question: *Why would people want to join the group?*

Communicate the benefits of being a member, for example:

- support in understanding what to expect when caring for someone with dementia
- social outings with other carers
- tips and advice on navigating the NDIS
- sharing experiences with other Vietnamese carers
- hearing from regular speakers about Autism.

So potential members are clear about what to expect and what benefits they will gain include a *Group Purpose Statement* or *Terms of Reference* with clear, concise statements about key aspects of your carer support group, and include in all materials you send out.

### Examples of a Group Purpose Statement

"NDIS Carers Online is a closed Facebook group managed by Carers Victoria for families and carers of people transitioning to the NDIS. The goal is for the group to be a safe space to ask questions regarding the NDIS, share constructive ideas and work together respectfully."

"A monthly support and information evening for women between the ages of 45–60 who are caring for a spouse with early onset dementia."

Common ways of reaching people include:

- through friends or people you know
- writing an article for the local paper
- distributing flyers and posters
- radio announcements
- through social media
- through existing associations, for example Carers Victoria, Dementia Australia, Tandem, Little Dreamers, and
- register your group on the Carers Victoria carer support group directory by emailing [enquiries@carersvictoria.org.au](mailto:enquiries@carersvictoria.org.au)

Think about where your potential members might come from, or where they might generally look for information, try and find them, rather than them trying to find you.

For examples, advertise at:

- local health care clinics or hospital
- local council, service providers and cultural/community organisations
- existing associations or institutions e.g. kindergarten, primary school, senior citizens
- clubs, churches, or libraries.

It is a good idea for the facilitator to talk one-on-one with potential members before their first meeting to ensure:

- the group purpose meets their needs, expectations and interests
- they are a good fit for the group
- to get an understanding of any skills they might bring to the group
- they feel welcome.

Your group might want to keep growing or refresh itself so these approaches can work at all times.

To attract new members to an existing group, highlight achievements or activities of the group.

For example:

- Successfully lobbied the local council to include more disabled parking spaces in the main street.
- Fundraising drive at local supermarket raised funds to run a school holiday program.
- Group had a fantastic day out visiting the Dandenong Ranges for a walk, lunch and devonshire tea.
- Learnt a lot about the changes to respite under the NDIS from our latest speaker.

## RETAINING MEMBERS

People will maintain their membership if they feel valued, have a sense of belonging, feel connected and supported. The nature and mode of the group may change over time, but if members continue to feel engaged, their needs are being met and the purpose of the group remains relevant to their situation, they are most likely to remain members.

Some points to remember:

- ensure the group is run fairly and respectfully
- encourage members to be actively involved, perhaps by volunteering to take on a particular role
- encourage members to provide ideas and to take a lead on areas where they have a particular interest or skill
- look for skills in members and draw on them
- ensure the group delivers what it is set-up to deliver
- change up activities
- consult with members, it is not your role to make all the decisions
- support carers well being
- provide relevant information
- group members should talk more than the group facilitator
- find opportunities for group members for training or participating in conferences and seminars
- be a place for carers to bounce ideas off one another
- be a place for carers to encourage and support one another
- ensure the venue, time commitment and times suit the members of the group
- maintain consistent communication with group members.

Recognise individuals and group successes:

- say 'thank you' regularly
- give positive feedback based on your own observations
- celebrate successes in your carer support group
- organise a picnic, barbeque or other special outing
- publicise the benefits and effects the group has for others.

## SUCCESSION PLANNING

### Why have a succession plan?

Succession planning helps ensure a group is sustainable over the longer term. With a succession plan and active engagement of other members a group is more resilient to change, has the capacity to develop and grow, and has the agility to be able to carry out short-to-mid-term activities.

Having a succession plan ensures continuity and builds capacity of the group.

For your group to be sustainable you need to look ahead and envisage where it might be in five years time:

- Will you still have the energy, interest or time to be the lead of the group in five years time?
- What happens if you have an emergency and can't maintain your role?
- What if you unexpectedly have an opportunity to move or take on a job, or need to increase your caring role?
- Is there anyone in the group who can readily keep the group going?

Ideally you will have a group who share different tasks so that not every activity is dependent on one person. This will assist in the general running of the group and in succession planning as people will be used to being active participants in the running of the group. It also enables you and the group members to develop skills and importantly identify what skills people have and what might be lacking for a leadership role.

Succession planning requires careful consideration of questions like who will take over, what skills are needed, how long it will take, and what procedures or knowledge need to be passed on.

- Be proactive, not reactive.
- Make succession planning a priority.
- Leverage a systematic approach.
- Be clear and flexible about what you need.
- Give potential successors a broad education.

Be ready for another team member to take over as facilitator:

- Identify in the group who has the right skills to take over.
- Be clear on what the role entails.
- Set the right tone.
- Have a 'deputy' to whom you can pass on information over a designated period of time.

- Be open and communicate to the group when you are planning to step-down or leave.
- Prepare yourself to let go.
- Allow some time for a transition period or handover period.
- If possible, provide some training, mentoring or other support options to the incoming facilitator.

Rotate the role between members as an ongoing dynamic of the group. This rotation keeps people fresh, engaged and developing new skills. It also prepares the group for a full range of potential scenarios requiring succession:

- short-term absence (e.g. travel, holiday, illness)
- need for interim facilitator (e.g. extended holiday, extended illness, sudden resignation or unexpected unavailability)
- permanent replacement (e.g. planned resignation or planned unavailability).

Be available as far as possible, and if you want to, act as a sounding board or adviser when the new leader takes over.



### TIP

- Prepare the group
- Prepare yourself
- Prepare your successor

## Other references which might help

**Peer support networks: Recruiting additional members to keep the network fresh**

[www.carersvic.com.au/peerconnect-guide](http://www.carersvic.com.au/peerconnect-guide)



## SUCCESSION PLAN TEMPLATE

Having a succession plan ensures continuity and builds capacity of the carer support group.

Be systematic, be clear and be prepared.

There are two main steps in developing and initiating a succession plan: planning and handover.

Use the following template/s to help clarify for yourself, the group and a potential successor what is needed.

Download these templates at [www.carersvic.com.au/support-group-facilitators](http://www.carersvic.com.au/support-group-facilitators)





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