# CU Thrive Leadership Circles

## How to be a Great Facilitator

CU Anschutz

Centers for Health, Work & Environment
colorado school of public health

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Section 1

# Welcome and Facilitator Role

Thank You for Serving as a CU Thrive Leadership Circles Facilitator.

The success of Leadership Circles depends less on expert teaching and more on creating an environment where leaders can reflect, learn from one another, and openly discuss the realities of leadership. The purpose of the in-person sessions is to create opportunities for reflection, peer learning, discussion, and connection.

Section 1

# Your Role as a Facilitator

You are first and foremost a participant in the program. Like the other members of your group, you will complete the monthly learning activities, apply the leadership practices in your day-to-day work, and share your own experiences and reflections. In addition, you will serve as the group's convener and discussion facilitator. Regardless of title or position, facilitators participate as peers and are not expected to serve as content experts, instructors, or evaluators. Sharing your own experiences, successes, mistakes, and challenges can help create a culture of openness and trust within the group.

## Your primary responsibilities are to:

- Coordinate meeting logistics and communication.
- Create a welcoming and inclusive environment.
- Encourage participation from all group members.
- Guide discussion using the provided prompts.
- Help the group stay focused on reflection, learning, and practical application.
- Foster a culture of respect, confidentiality, and curiosity.

Your role is not to provide the "right" answers. Instead, your goal is to help create an environment where colleagues feel comfortable sharing experiences, learning from one another, and exploring practical applications of the leadership concepts.

# Administrative Links

**Website:**

http://cuthriveleader.org

**Login & Navigation:**

Participants will receive an email from no-reply@netlify.com inviting them to join the learning website.

1. Open the email and click **Set up my access.**
2. Create a password.
3. To log in in the future, use:
   - **Username**: Your email address
   - **Password**: The password you created

Once logged in, participants can navigate the course using the tabs at the top of the page.

# Who to Contact for Help

## Program Logistic Support

**Amy Schamberg, EdS**
Research Assistant
Centers for Health, Work & Environment
Colorado School of Public Health

Amy.Schamberg@cuanschutz.edu

## Program Research Leads

**Natalie Schwatka, PhD MS**
Associate Professor
Master in Worker Health, Safety & Well-being Program Director
Certificate in Total Worker Health Program Director
Centers for Health, Work & Environment
Colorado School of Public Health

Natalie.Schwatka@cuanschutz.edu

**Lotte Dyrbye MD MPHE**
Senior Associate Dean for Faculty Well-being
Professor
Chief Wellbeing Officer
School of Medicine

Executive Director, CU THRIVE: Center for Workplace Well-being Research & SOM Office of Well-being

Liselotte.Dyrbye@cuanschutz.edu

Section 2

# Creating Psychological Safety

The most meaningful discussions occur when participants feel comfortable being authentic about real leadership challenges.

Facilitators support psychological safety by:

- Demonstrating curiosity rather than judgment
- Encouraging diverse perspectives
- Respecting differing viewpoints
- Maintaining confidentiality
- Creating space for all voices
- Modeling openness and humility

Leadership Circles are intended to be confidential spaces for reflection and learning.
Participants should feel comfortable discussing challenges, questions, successes, and lessons learned.

We encourage the principle: Learning may leave the room; attribution does not.

Participants should avoid sharing identifiable details about colleagues, learners, staff members, or sensitive organizational matters outside the group.

Section 3

# Tips for Being an Effective Small-Group Facilitator

### Set the Tone

- Establish a welcoming, inclusive environment from the start. Clarify goals, expectations, and norms.
- Frame the space as peer-to-peer from the start. A simple line like, "In this room, we're all just leaders working through the same challenges," sets that expectation before hierarchy has a chance to shape the room.
- Use language that is inclusive, expansive, and neutral.
- Reinforce that confidentiality is expected so participants can speak honestly.

### Establish Confidentiality

- Open with a clear, spoken expectation. At the start of the session, state plainly that what's shared in the room stays in the room — participants can take away insights and ideas, but not attributable stories or specifics about who said what.
- Ask the group to nod or verbally affirm agreement before moving on; this small ritual signals that confidentiality is a shared norm, not just a rule handed down.
- Model it yourself, immediately. If you reference anything from a past session or another group, do so without names or identifying details — showing, not just telling, what discretion looks like.

### Create Space for Discussion

- Ask thoughtful, open-ended questions rather than giving answers.
- Encourage participants to respond to one another, not just to you.
- Allow silence—give people time to think.

### Promote Equitable Participation

- Invite quieter voices without putting them on the spot. “Would anyone who hasn’t spoken yet like to add something?”
- Gently limit those who over-talk by summarizing and redirecting.
- Use round-robins, pair-shares, or structured prompts when needed.

Section 3

# Tips for Being an Effective Small-Group Facilitator (con't)

### Listen Actively

- Demonstrate attentive listening—reflect, paraphrase, validate.
- Notice verbal and non-verbal cues; adjust pace or energy accordingly.
- Acknowledge emotions and experiences without judgment.
- Summarize periodically to reinforce shared understanding.
- Ask open-ended questions.

### Keep the Group on Track

- Start and end on time.
- Refocus the conversation when it drifts by returning to goals or key questions.
- Summarize periodically to reinforce shared understanding.

### Foster Connection & Collaboration

- Encourage participants to build on each other's insights.
- Highlight common themes, shared challenges, and collective wins.
- Normalize differing opinions and help the group find forward momentum.

### Handle Challenges Gracefully

- Address conflict with curiosity: "Say more about that…"
- De-escalate tension by validating perspectives and returning to shared purpose.
- If misinformation arises, correct gently and respectfully.

### Be Flexible

- Adapt your plan based on group dynamics and engagement level.
- Shift between whole-group, pair, or small-team activities as needed.
- Embrace emergent questions or insights—they often add richness.

### Close with Intention

- Summarize key takeaways and points of agreement.
- Invite final reflections or commitments to action.
- End on an appreciative, encouraging note.

# Tips for Being an Effective Small-Group Facilitator (con't)

## Troubleshooting

Even experienced facilitators encounter moments that require flexibility and reassurance. The guidance below is designed to support you in responding thoughtfully while maintaining a safe and constructive group environment.

| If this happens.... | You might try... |
|---|---|
| Low Attendance or Engagement | • Check in individually to understand barriers and adjust meeting time or format if needed.<br>• Normalize quiet participation—engagement can look like listening, not just speaking.<br>• Use a simple, low-stakes prompt to re-open conversation rather than pushing for depth. |
| Challenging Group Dynamics | • Revisit shared agreements and model curiosity and respect in your responses.<br>• Gently balance airtime by inviting quieter voices and redirecting dominant ones.<br>• Name patterns neutrally if needed ("Let's pause and hear another perspective."). |
| Time Management Problems | • Set clear time expectations at the start and give gentle time reminders.<br>• Use a phone timer for each agenda section. Ask for a volunteer "time keeper".<br>• Use the open discussion portion to park topics that need more time. |

*TROUBLESHOOTING CONTINUES ON NEXT PAGE*

## A Participant Dominates the Discussion

- Redirect with warmth, not correction. Use a bridging phrase like, "I want to make sure we hear a few other perspectives before we go deeper here — what's coming up for others?"
- Use structure to naturally limit airtime. Shift to a round-robin, a quick pair-share, or a "one thought each" go-around.
- Follow up privately if the pattern continues, framed as appreciation for their engagement plus a request for help making space for others.

## No One Completed the Leadership Practices

- Name it lightly as useful data, not a failure. A quick, low-stakes acknowledgment like, "Looks like the leadership practices didn't quite fit into everyone's week — totally understandable, let's work with what we've got," keeps things collegial and signals flexibility.
- Recap and bridge forward. Briefly summarize the key points from the readings and share your own takeaways from the practices. Then open the floor with a question that invites possibility: "Where do you already see this showing up in the way you lead?" or "What part of this feels most useful to try this week?"

## Hierarchy Appears to Affect Participation

- Use structure to distribute voices. Techniques like round-robins, small pair-shares before large-group discussion, or writing thoughts down first (then sharing) give quieter or more junior-feeling participants a lower-stakes way in — without requiring them to speak up unprompted in front of someone senior.we've got," keeps things collegial and signals flexibility.
- Actively invite, without putting anyone on the spot. If you notice senior voices dominating, gently widen the circle: "I'd love to hear from someone we haven't heard from yet" — framed as genuine curiosity about a fresh perspective, not as a correction to those who've spoken.What part of this feels most useful to try this week?"

*TROUBLESHOOTING  CONTINUES ON NEXT PAGE*

## Sensitive topics

- Acknowledge with empathy and thank the participant for sharing their experience. (“Thank you for trusting the group with that. I’m really sorry that happened.”)
- Hold space and allow for silence, giving participants time to process difficult emotions and thoughts. (“I want to acknowledge the impact of what you’re describing.”)
- Slow the conversation down and refocus on listening rather than fixing or debating.
- Offer to follow up individually or suggest taking a brief pause if needed.

## Conflict

- Acknowledge the tension and validate feelings. (“I’m noticing strong reactions, and I hear this is important to you.”)
- Using active listening, reflect back what you hear to ensure understanding.
- Reinforce shared agreements and the purpose of the Circle.
- Interrupt and redirect. (“Let’s pause for a moment and return to listening with curiosity rather than responding or persuading.”)
- Encourage participants to use "I" statements (e.g., "I feel..." Rather than “You..”) to reduce defensiveness.

Section 4

# Logistics & Procedures

As the primary point of contact for your group, you'll handle the practical details for each session, with the research team available to support you as needed (contact information is on page 4). Let's walk through some important logistical information.

Section 4

# Logistics and Procedures

## Scheduling Guidance

- Facilitators coordinate with their group to determine when to meet, based on shared availability and group preferences. Meetings should take place in the second half of the month to provide time for lessons and leadership practice.
- To gather availability, facilitators may use tools such as When2Meet, Doodle, or Outlook's Scheduling Poll to identify meeting times that work best for the group.
- We recommend scheduling the first three meetings early on, though some groups may prefer to schedule all six upfront.
- Groups may choose to meet over coffee or meals at a venue of their choice. The Common Good restaurant inside The Benson Hotel is a convenient nearby option. Wherever you meet, please plan ahead and make a reservation when possible.
- Please keep track of attendance at each meeting — a simple sign-in sheet that you photograph with your phone works fine.

## Meal Reimbursement

One meal per participant per month may be reimbursed during the six-month program period. Groups may meet at a location of their choosing.

The faculty member paying for the meal may use either:

- A university procurement card (P-Card), or
- A personal credit card

**Required Documentation**

Please retain:

- Itemized receipt
- List of attendees & agenda (discussion prompt)
- Business purpose statement: "*CU Thrive Leadership Circles peer group meeting*"

*MEAL REIMBURSEMENT CONTINUES ON NEXT PAGE*

# Logistics and Procedures

## Meal Reimbursement continued

**Procedure:**

1. Group leader pays for the meal (p-card or personal credit card)
2. Submit the following to the group leader's department:
    a. Full list of faculty attendees (no guests/spouses)
    b. Discussion agenda or topic
    c. Itemized receipt
3. Department creates Concur report
    a. Use speedtype: AEF CU THRIVE COMMEN GRP PILOT 63506627
    b. Report title format: THRIVECIRCLE[LastName FirstInitial]
4. Department reimburses lead faculty in accordance with guidelines.

**Fiscal Guidelines**

- Limit gatherings to only consented participants assigned to your group.
- Meetings may include coffee or meals; venues are chosen by the group.
- Reimbursement limit is $125/meal
- Alcohol is not reimbursable.
- Maximum allowable tip: 20%.
- Non-meal activities (e.g., bowling) must be paid personally by participants.
- Maximum: 6 reimbursed meetings per 6 months