Let’s get started.

The great Chinese philosopher Lao-tzu reminds us that the most important step on a journey is the first one. Launching your LeadershipPlenty® program requires answers to three questions:

- who do I need to help
- what information do I need
- when and where do we offer the program

The answers to these questions will vary community by community but they can generally be answered in the following ways.

Who do I need to help?

LeadershipPlenty® is about the "we" not the "me." You need to immediately set up a committee of interested community partners to begin the planning process to offer the program. Take lessons from the curriculum: Create a Community Partnership Roster (Module Six); Invite Potential Partners and Plan your First Meeting Well (Module Four); and leave the meeting with an action plan, assignments, and a communications strategy (Modules Seven and Nine).

Potential partners might be from an existing leadership group, the training managers at a local corporation or financial institution, nonprofit groups, a community foundation, or interested community leaders who know that leadership is the key to economic and community success. You need a large group at the table initially so that LeadershipPlenty® can be understood and embraced by as many people as possible. You need to make sure at your very first meeting that others understand that this is a community program and not your pet project. In order to make it happen for the community, you and your planning team are going to need lots of help and support. You will then need to move to a smaller steering committee for actual implementation and a partners committee to provide support, access to potential participants, etc.

What information do I need?

You and your team need to know who is already doing leadership training in the community and identify the constituencies that are not being reached. You need to know more about the community so that you and others can think as broadly as possible about recruitment and participants. For example, if your community has a number of citizens with diverse backgrounds, you might want to think early about language needs as well as outreach. If you are trying to reach a geographically wide area—a county or a region—you need to think about transportation requirements, convenient meeting places, etc.

When and where do we offer the program?

The nine modules that make up the training program, along with the practicum retreat, could be held on a series of Saturdays over the course of several months or a year. Some groups offer two or three modules at a time over a series of several long weekends. Other groups split the modules into two parts and offer the shorter sessions on weeknights until the entire series has been delivered. These are just a few ways that training sessions can be structured.

Training locations should be accessible to all participants. This means that consideration should be given in planning the program to public transportation options, parking availability, accommodations for participants with physical disabilities, general comfort, and safety. In addition to identifying an accessible physical location, it is important to select a location where people from all different backgrounds will feel comfortable. Think about identifying meeting facilities in the following types of locations:

- A community center or senior center
- A community college or neighborhood school
- Informal meeting rooms of religious organizations
- Public libraries
- Governmental administrative facilities such as the cooperative extension office
- A community or private foundation
- Civic associations and community service organizations such as the United Way or the Red Cross.