Managing Groups for Results

"THREE'S A CROWD" IS AN EXPRESSION that has probably crossed the minds not only of romantic couples annoyed by a "third wheel," but of anyone who has tried to accomplish something working in a group. Sometimes it just seems impossible to get a group to *do* anything.

Some people dominate meetings while others feel hesitant to speak. People representing groups that have traditionally not had "a seat at the table" may feel that their contributions are not being respected and valued. People who are accustomed to holding positions of power may also feel frustrated that their contributions are not adequately appreciated. Some individuals may want to take action as soon as possible and are frustrated with "just talking." Others may insist that more information is needed before a plan of action can be identified. Tempers flare and people have their feelings hurt. Group work comes to a standstill.

If it's so tough, the question remains, "Why work in groups?" The short answer is that we work in groups because the challenges facing communities are too complex for one person or one organization to solve alone. Developing and implementing long-term solutions demands the expertise and energies of many people, often from diverse backgrounds.

A long answer is that we work in groups because solving the problems in our communities demands that we learn to work together toward common objectives. Building relationships with people who are from different backgrounds and life experiences is the first step in addressing these complex issues. By getting to know people of different races and cultures and life experiences on a deeper level, we develop trust and new perspectives that enable us to work together on creative solutions to tough issues.

Meetings of diverse groups, such as this *LeadershipPlenty Training Program*, spearhead this type of relationship building for community change. Only by developing new relationships and perspectives as individuals can we move a community forward to improve opportunities for *all* of its residents. Module Three introduces techniques, such as the Listening Dyad, to help individuals and groups improve their ability to communicate and learn from others' experiences.

Finally, all groups experience conflict. This is a natural part of group work. Module Three explores the typical stages of group development—Forming, Storming, Norming, and Performing—and introduces how conflict is a normal part of creative problem solving.

Module Three is the first in the series of four *LeadershipPlenty* modules designed to equip participants to work together effectively as a group. Module Three raises awareness about the challenges of cross-cultural communication and introduces typical stages of group development. Module Four builds on this awareness of group dynamics by equipping participants with specific techniques to manage meetings and make group decisions. Module Five takes an in-depth look at conflict management, and Module Six broadens the context for these skills to apply them to developing partnerships with other organizations in the larger community.