

FaithTalk Groups

Lesson 2: Starting a Pilot Group

1. Why start with one pilot group?

- Launching multiple FT groups before you have had the experience of starting one successful group (one which is evangelistic and multiplies itself) increases the risk of starting groups which are not evangelistic and which will not multiply.
- In other words, with one group it is easier to instill the missional “DNA” you want in the groups you start and develop a healthy pattern before multiplying more groups.
- You can make your mistakes and learn lessons with one group before starting more groups.
- In the beginning it is easier to train and coach one facilitator rather than multiple facilitators. As you gain experience you can multiply and coach new leaders.
- With one pilot group you will
 - Learn about your facilitator’s values and skills.
 - Learn about the congregation’s support for FT groups and adjustments you need to make in gaining support.

2. Pilot group members include:

- The facilitator
- A facilitator apprentice (We recommend you not start a group until you have an apprentice. However, this may not always be possible. If you start without an apprentice, you need to identify and train one as soon as possible).
- The group host. In the beginning, the facilitator and/or apprentice may need to serve as the host. You may also want to rotate the role of host among group members. Look for those with the gift of hospitality as potential hosts.
- Group members (3-15 including facilitator and apprentice). Always start a FT with new, unchurched or non-Christian people. Try to have unchurched Christians or non-Christians comprise the majority of your groups.

3. Characteristics of a pilot groups

- “Seeker-focused” priority. Again, FT groups need to be focused on non-Christians. “Seeker” is a broad, generic term referring to who have burning spiritual issues and questions for which they are seeking answers. They are open to varying degrees to discussion and, to varying degrees, responsive to Christian teaching and the gospel.
- Discussion oriented. Some FT groups may be “structured” around informal discussion related to the relevant issues of group members with little emphasis on Christian practices, e.g. prayer, singing, communion, etc. They may gradually add these practices to their format. Other FT groups may include Christian practices from the start. The format may vary, depending on the group members. Regardless of the degree to which Christian practices are included, the basic format should revolve around discussion – discussion of relevant issues, Christian living principles and Scripture. (Principles and practices for leading effective discussions will be covered in future lessons).

- Extension of personal evangelism. Every group member, not just the facilitator apprentice, should share in the group value of inviting new (non-Christian) people to participate in the group. New people can include those who group members interact within the context of their lives (works, school, neighborhood, etc.).

4. Pilot group values

- Community
 - Many people are looking for a safe place to belong and to experience a sense of significance and contribution. Work to develop a safe, stable context for discussing spiritual matters.
 - Seek to identify the “yearnings” of the people and community and develop an environment that is conducive to people expressing their concerns.
 - People like to be with other people who are like them; who share common concerns, needs and values. You will have the most success reaching, serving and discipling people who are most like you.
 - Keep in mind that many people have a general distrust of authority. So the role of the facilitator is to facilitate – to facilitate discussion, community and growth - not to direct or “take charge” of people’s lives – nor to act as a spiritual authority or Biblical expert who has all the answers. (Facilitator skills are discussed in a future lesson).
- Relationships
You may be wondering, “Where will I find un-churched Christians or non-Christians to invite to my group.” Here are some ideas to help:
 - Utilize the “FRANK” approach. Think about people you can invite who are
 - Friends
 - Relatives
 - Associates (people you work with; people you meet as you conduct personal business or run errands)
 - Neighbors
 - Kids (Parents of your children’s friends)
 - Friends of apprentices
 - Love people and build friendships as you live life, regardless of ‘results’.
- Adaptability
 - FT groups can be started within wide variety of contexts and meet a variety of needs. Consider these kinds of groups:
 - Neighborhood Groups
 - Workplace Groups
 - International Groups
 - Book Reading Groups
 - Parenting Groups
 - Sports Groups
 - Felt-Need Groups
 - Gen-X Groups
 - Economics, race, ethnicity

- Duration: Short-term group meetings, those which are conducted for 3 months, 6 months or 9 months are usually the most effective. Some people do not want to commit to a new group experience for a long period of time. However, some short-term groups may evolve into a long-term commitment. Whatever the timeframe of a group, it should maintain the values and practices of evangelism and multiplication.
- Connection
 - Invitations must be personal. The personal touch is essential. Invite people with whom you have a personal relationship or with whom you are developing a personal relationship.
 - “Designed for you!” If people see that the group purpose and context will be relevant to them they will be more prone to participate.
 - Go with the most responsive first. Remember the “person of peace” principle (Matthew 10:11-13). People who are most responsive to your friendship and service will probably be the most responsive to your invitation to join a group.

5. Multiplying a pilot group

- Plan from the beginning to multiply more groups from your pilot group. You need to be intentional about this throughout the life of your group. This is why you always need an apprentice. (Preparing and releasing apprentices will be addressed in future lessons).
- Allow at least one year before multiplying your first new group.
 - This allows time for you to prepare your apprentice to start a new group or facilitate the pilot group while you start another new group.
 - This allows time to ensure the group is evangelistic and will pass along “evangelism DNA” to the new group.
 - This allows time for you and your apprentice to grow as facilitators.
- Multiply one group at first: from one group to two.
 - It requires a lot of work to prepare and coach group facilitators. Starting multiple new groups will increase your work load as a facilitator trainer and coach.
 - This will also help ensure that the evangelistic value as well as the values, mission and vision for your church are transmitted to the new group.
- Don’t rush the process of multiplication. You want to instill healthy values and practices and this takes time.