

GUIDELINES FOR WRITING LEADERSHIP LEARNING CONTRACTS

The leadership learning contract is a plan for achieving specific goals and learning objectives during your leadership experience. The leadership learning contract, like any planning tool, should specify desired objectives, methods for achieving those objectives and the methods for evaluating the extent to which the objectives have been achieved.

Examples of what the leadership learning contract can illustrate:

- Application from course work to the organizational setting
- Application from organizational setting to course work
- New competencies that will be acquired during the experience

Once the contract has been approved by the advisor, you should gain greater clarity about what you know and how you approach your responsibilities. Ideally that clarity leads to improved performance and new or revised learning objectives for future situations.

Process for Leadership Learning Contract Creation

1. Individual creates LLC and submits to advisor/senior organizational leadership
2. Advisor/senior organizational leadership reviews → feedback for contract changes including but not limited to: grammar, content, clarity of thought, measurability and relevance
3. Individual revises LLC and resubmits
4. Individual works toward goal attainment and reports progress made

Advisor and senior organizational leaders are encouraged to track and document the learning and skill development of individual as it occurs through: reports, reflections, updated LLCs and other mechanisms that may be created for specific use

The leadership learning contract should include the following components:

Goal(s)

The LLC should begin with a general statement of goals and answer such questions as: why this position was chosen; how position meets intended goals (career, personal or other); and how the individual will make a contribution to positive social change. The goal statement sets a tone and general direction for the LLC. No methods or evaluation statements are required for the goal statement.

As a reminder, goals should follow the SMART method:

Specific

Specific goals are more likely to be accomplished. When setting specific goals, you should be able to answer the six "W" questions:

- *Who: Identify people who will be involved
- *What: Define what you want to accomplish
- *Where: Establish a location

- *When: Set a timeframe in which to complete the task
- *Which: Identify requirements and constraints
- *Why: Know reasons, purpose or benefits of accomplishing the goal

Measurable

Establish concrete criteria for measuring progress toward the attainment of each goal you set. When you measure your progress, you stay on track, reach your target dates, and experience the exhilaration of achievement that spurs you on to continued effort required to reach your goal.

Achievable

Unreasonable goals that seem out of reach will be hard to commit to. A SMART goal should push you to work harder, but it should also be something that, with effort, you can reach. Goals that may have seemed far away and out of reach eventually move closer and become attainable, not because your goals shrink, but because you grow and expand to match them.

Relevant

A goal must represent an objective toward which you are both *willing* and *able* to work. You should create goals that are in-line with your mission statement or purpose. Relevant goals ensure that you are dedicating your effort towards goals that are focused on organizational (or personal) success.

Time-Oriented

Goals should be grounded within a time frame. Without a time frame tied to the goal there's no sense of urgency. Periodic evaluations of your progress will help keep you on track towards accomplishing the goal.

Learning Objectives

The contract should include a variety of learning objectives, which identify the specific knowledge, skills or self-awareness that a student plans to gain. The number of learning objectives is varied but should include a knowledge, skill, ability and behavior. Suggested sources for objectives include the following:

- Student Leader Learning Outcomes (<http://sllo.tamu.edu>). Provides tools for student leaders in student organizations, programs, or activities to help in the assessment and documentation of enhanced learning in relation to the students' leadership experiences.
- On-campus goals and self-assessments. These activities may have helped identify strengths and weaknesses relative to goals while on-campus. How can your position be used as an opportunity to build on strengths and to improve weaker areas?
- Opportunities offered by the student organization. What are the organizational responsibilities, and what competencies can be developed through performing them? Also, what can be observed in the organization: what is the organizational structure and leadership style? What are the leading issues this organization addresses, and how does this organization respond to them?

Learning Methods (Ways of Doing It)

Each learning objective should be accompanied by a plan that states the methods by which that objective will be pursued. If the objective is to acquire knowledge, the plan may include observation, consultation with other student staff, research or reading. If the objective is to develop a skill, the plan should specify the tasks to be performed, perhaps training to be attended, and feedback on one's performance. If the objective is to enhance self-awareness, self-observations might be recorded in a personal journal. These are only suggestions to help you get started; there may be other methods. One that should not be overlooked is that of referring to class notes, materials and texts from your courses.

Evaluation Statements

First, specific outcomes that would indicate the successful achievement of the learning objective should be stated. Second, it should be explained how the learning outcome will be demonstrated.

- **Outcomes (Show It):** You should try to think through how they will have changed by the end of the period and how the changes might demonstrate the successful accomplishment of your objectives.
 - **Knowledge** might be successfully achieved when you are able to successfully write a report or give a presentation.
 - **Skills** might be successfully developed when you are able to perform specific tasks to your satisfaction and with positive feedback from others involved.
 - **Self-awareness** could be seen to have increased through the ability to practice appropriate cultural habits. Again, these are only suggestions intended to help as you consider the possibilities.
- **Demonstration in Written Review (Prove It):** Assuming that you have seen for yourself the successful achievement of your learning objectives, how will you convey that learning or give evidence that this learning was achieved?
 - **Knowledge** may be demonstrated by identifying, explaining and analyzing the relevant issues or subjects.
 - **Skills** may be demonstrated by assessing personal strengths and weaknesses, using relevant feedback.
 - **Self-awareness** may be demonstrated by describing and analyzing personal changes experienced. Enclosing products created during the practicum is helpful when they are directly relevant and succinct.

Criteria for Evaluation of Learning Contracts

1. The goal statement: does it explain why the student has chosen the learning objectives and how it will contribute to his or her development?
2. The learning objectives, methods and evaluation of learning: do they follow the stated guidelines?

3. The scope of the learning contract: does the contract as a whole include a variety of challenging learning objectives?
4. Writing and presentation: is the contract clearly written and of professional quality?

Potential Topics

- Attitude
- Citizenship
- Communication
- Conflict Mediation
- Critical Thinking
- Dealing with Change
- Decision Making
- Delegation
- Diversity
- Effective Feedback
- Effective Meetings
- Ethical Leadership
- Facilitation Skills
- Financial Responsibility
- Goal Setting
- Initiative
- Membership Selection
- Mentoring/Empowering Others
- Positivity
- Problem Solving
- Project Management
- Public Speaking
- Responsibility
- Risk Management
- Self-Awareness/Self-Esteem
- Servant Leadership
- Social Justice
- Stress Management
- Study Skills
- Time Management
- Teams and Groups