

Guidelines for Small Groups

by Alice Kellogg

It is easy to get lost in the crowd when you belong to something as large as a quilt guild. Belonging to a small group is a blessing. Strong friendships are made, and the participants learn more and at a faster pace. But how to start a small group and where to begin?

The first thing is to set a goal or purpose. It can be as simple as wanting to sew together, or as complex as a color study group where there is a teacher with lesson plans. If there is not a purpose to the group, then the members become bored and aimless, the group becomes stagnant and dies. Some examples of purpose are the above-mentioned, color study, round robins, appliqué, paper-piecing, followers of a certain method or teacher, art quilts, quilters from a certain part of town, crazy quilts, hand quilters, challenge quilts, place of business, fellow workers or church members and there are plenty more that have not come to mind.

The second consideration is limits. If the group plans to meet in someone's home, how many can the home comfortably hold? Maybe the members will take turns hosting the group and some of the homes are smaller than others. If you want to keep the group "open" then it might be wise to find a church or meeting room so that you can easily grow. There might be natural limits, *i.e.* a traditional quilter would not be happy in an art group. FOOD! Some quilters are nervous about food around their quilts. Does your group want to include lunch or dinner into their meeting time? Are husbands ever allowed? If the members know the limits and rules (and they may be made as the group progresses), then everyone is happier and more secure in the group and will help eliminate hurt feelings.

The next thing the group should consider is a time line. Will you be meeting in the evenings? mornings? half the day? once a month? every other week? There have been groups that met for six months and then disbanded after they met their goals or project. Some groups have been ongoing for years.

Projects! Even though the guild will have projects and programs, a small group setting is easier to plan and execute projects. Suppose everyone in the small group is fairly new to quilting and they need to build a stash. One of their simple projects could be a fat $\frac{1}{4}$ exchange. Suppose the purpose of the group is to meet with fellow "scrap" quilters. Then a fun project would be a 6-inch fabric trade. Maybe one of the group is leaving, the group may make friendship blocks to remember her fun times and her friendships she has made in the group. Some small groups have birthday celebrations. The point is that if there are projects or challenges in the group, the ladies stay interested and motivated.

The last consideration is leadership. When there is no leader, there is confusion and chaos. Someone has to be in charge! The responsibilities of the leader could be very limited or could be absolute, depending on the needs of the group. Leadership could change or members can take turns. Some groups are very happy keeping that same person in charge all the time. If the group is a "study group" the natural leader would be the instructor, but not always. It depends on the group, goals and needs of the group. In all cases, the leader needs to be flexible and tolerant.

These guidelines are just that, GUIDELINES. They are only suggestions to help you get started and reap the benefits of a small group. As the group grows and progresses, then new rules or rules that do not work can be modified. Hopefully, you will consider starting a small group and the guild is here to help you in any way we can.