

# Action Learning Sets

## 1. What is an Action Learning Set (ALS)?

Action Learning Sets are a powerful method for self-development and for individuals to learn from each other. The process involves working on real challenges, using the knowledge and support of a peer group combined with skilled questioning and listening to reflect, create new ideas and drive action.

Action Learning Sets have some similarities to group coaching sessions as they provide time and space for each participant to talk about their challenge or opportunity whilst other members of the group listen and offer questions to uncover new ways of thinking.

## 2. Benefits

Being part of an Action Learning Set offers you a space and a methodology:

- to find creative solutions to real commissioning and leadership challenges
- to think deeply and reflect on your commissioning / leadership skills and approaches
- to test beliefs, assumptions and new ideas in a safe and supportive environment
- to motivate action and practical implementation of new ways of thinking
- to develop questioning and active listening skills
- to build deep relationships with colleagues from the sector and widen your networks

## 3. Ground Rules

- Agree that all discussions will remain confidential
- Give everyone an equal amount of time to discuss their challenge
- We will try to give each person in a set an opportunity to present their leadership / commissioning challenge or explore their thinking about leadership, whilst being a **Presenter** (“being in a warm seat”), if time allows.
- When presenting:
  - give yourself permission to bring something that really matters to you to your ALS, and do not worry about how relevant this will be to anyone else in the group
  - be prepared to wonder and be comfortable with not-knowing, out loud
  - be open to being surprised
  - give yourself as much time in silence as you need
  - be ready to take some actions as a result of your exploration

- When you help others to find their solutions, whilst being an **Enabler**:
  - be utterly selfless, and be tuned into and driven by what the presenter is trying to get from whatever they have brought to the table
  - keep thinking “what questions is this person wanting to answer...?”
  - be fully present
  - be alert, neutral, listen openly
  - notice and give the Presenter as much time to be quiet as they seem to need
  - ask questions chosen from the list below
  - refrain from giving advice – open and powerful questions are the bedrock of ALS

#### 4. Questions for helping others in their Action Learning Set

- What are you trying to achieve?
- What would you like to have happen?
- Why is this situation important to you?
- What are your gut instincts telling you about this situation?
- What is the difference between how you see things now and how you would like them to be?
- How will things change if you are successful?
- Who might be willing to help you?
- What obstacles do you anticipate?
- What is challenging for you about this topic?
- What opportunities are there for you in the situation?
- What would success look like?
- What assumptions are you making?
- What have you learned from all this
- How do you know? Can you give an example?
- What is challenging for you about this issue?
- What is funniest about your situation?
- What practical realities and constraints do you have to work with?
- What do you have absolutely no control or influence over?
- What excites you? Why?
- What is important, what is urgent and what is the priority?
- What if...? What would happen if...?
- What have you tried? Why did/didn't it work?
- Who can you turn to for advice and support?
- How would they react...?
- How do you feel about...?
- What do you think about...?
- What are the pros and cons of your behaviour?
- What would happen if you did nothing?
- What is working well and worth you keeping the same?

- What are the effects of this on others?
- Is there another way of working?
- Think of someone you really admire, how would they deal with your situation?
- What skills do you need to develop to cope with this?
- How can you improve the situation?
- Who else have you involved in this issue? Why them?
- Who do you need to influence?
- What do you ideally want people who matter to you to be saying about this in a few months' time?
- What might you need to do differently?
- What skills do you need to develop to cope with this?
- What are you going to do next?
- What are your options for action now?
- Where could you get more information?
- Who else could you seek help from?
- What are you going to do for yourself before the next meeting?
- How can we help you to make progress?
- How can you best look after yourself over the coming period?
- How could any of us around this table help you?
- What would you love to be saying about this when we next meet together?
- What is the most radical thing you could do to get what you want?
- How can we help you to make progress?