



Getting Ahead Session-by-Session Content and Process Description

These topics are covered in Getting Ahead in a Just-Gettin-By World in 10 sessions. Each session takes approximately two and a half hours.

Getting Ahead is a facilitated process where half of the learning is found in the content, and the other half in group discussions. For that reason, the time it takes to cover the material will vary.

Session 1: My Life Now

Content:

- The group sets up group rules.
- The group creates a “Mental Model of Poverty” as experienced in the community.
- The investigators examine their housing conditions.
- They calculate their personal affordable housing payment threshold and determine what percentage of their income goes to housing.
- The group discusses the federal poverty guidelines and the difference between minimum wages, living wages, and sustainable wages.
- The investigators determine their debt-to-income ratio and learn some of the rules of money.
- The investigators create a “Mental Model of My Life Now.”
- An investigation is done on time management in their own lives.

Process: The group discovers the difference between teaching and facilitating; they are seen as the experts on the topics and the conditions in their communities. They begin to learn from others. They begin to take accountability for learning and the success of the group-learning experience.

We have been asked, “Why do you start with investigations that are so difficult and painful?” We do this because it makes the learning experience relevant. It's possible because the difficult issues are raised by the investigators themselves. It's important in this first step to begin creating a discrepancy between what is and what can be: a future story. We've found that telling people what to do isn't effective. What is effective is to provide adults with the time and setting to examine information in the context of their own lives so that it is they who make the argument for change, and it is their goals and plans that others must support.

Session 2: Theory of Change

Content:

- The group discusses the difficulties and process of making personal changes.
- Investigators do a self-assessment of 15 stability indicators. The point is made that a more stable life makes change and growth possible.
- The facilitator describes the Getting Ahead theory of change that can help individuals living in survival mode and solving concrete problems to break out of the tyranny of the moment so they can get to abstract thinking and a future orientation.
- Investigators are introduced to the stages of change to help them sustain the eventual goals that they will develop.

Process: Metacognition and knowledge of a scarcity mindset can free people from reactive and sometimes self-defeating solutions. This module helps people take charge of their own thinking and future.

Sessions 3 and 4: Research on Causes of Poverty

Content:

- The group explores four clusters of research on the causes of economic instability.
- The investigators establish a strategy to avoid predatory schemes.
- The group learns how middle class stability was created in the U.S.
- The group investigates disparities in income and wealth.
- The group creates mental models of stability (middle class) and of old money (wealth).
- The group learns a systematic approach to overcome barriers to a stable life.

Process: In previous sessions, the investigations were grim; now, the group turns toward looking at the bigger picture and to identifying ways to stabilize their lives.

Session 5: Hidden Rules of Class

Content:

- The investigators learn the hidden rules of belonging and survival generated by living in unstable, stable, and very stable environments, e.g., the mental models of poverty, middle class, and wealth that were developed earlier.
- The investigators explore how the information can be applied. For example, in order to make achievements, an individual may have to give up or modify relationships for a time. This is one of several key topics that is sequenced and reinforced throughout the workbook.
- The group investigates the time-management matrix and identifies how individuals are using their time.

Process: These investigations give group members a chance to discuss and analyze information that helps them decode and succeed in the worlds of work, school, and the community.

Session 6: The Importance of Language

Content:

• Investigations are made into nine language concepts: language register; discourse patterns; code-switching; parent, child, and adult voices; story structures; language experience; mediation; language of negotiation; and the basics of negotiation.

Purpose: Having investigated community conditions, the causes of instability, the hidden rules of class and work, and now language, the investigators are forming ideas on how to build relationships of mutual respect across class lines.

Session 7: Eleven Resources

Content:

- The group learns a definition of poverty that gives investigators something they can do to stabilize their lives by building 11 resources. Social capital is given special notice.
- The group uses case studies to practice evaluating resources on a five-point scale.
- The investigators do a thorough self-assessment of their resources.
- Investigators begin to think about the level of their resources and how to build them.

Purpose: Instability (and poverty) is defined as the degree to which an individual, organization, or community does without resources. This information gives the investigators a way to get ahead: Stabilize your life and build resources.

Session 8: Community Assessment

Content:

- Starting in the seventh session, the groups began working in pairs to investigate nine aspects of their communities: economy, housing, financial, employment, predators, education, public services, health, and leadership.
- They report back to the whole group and create a report on the strengths and weaknesses they found.

Purpose: Investigators are preparing themselves to be problem solvers in the community.

Session 9: Building Resources

Content:

- The investigators use their knowledge of the community to identify many ways to build the 11 resources for a stable life.
- They have a choice between two planning approaches to do deep thinking about what it takes to build a resource.

Purpose: The investigators analyze the difference between resources that simply maintain them in an unstable environment (getting-by resources) and resources that can change their lives (getting-ahead resources). And they learn from everyone in the group.

Session 10: Personal and Community Plans

Content:

- Investigators create a personal SMART goal (specific, measurable, attainable, realistic, and time-specific) for the one or two resources they have chosen to build.
- They build a support system of current friends and relatives, as well as people from work and the community whom they have come to know during Getting Ahead.
- The investigators create a mental model titled "My Future Story" that is a visual representation of their SMART goal.

Process: During Getting Ahead, relationships deepen within the group and among the facilitators. Where there was once judgment, there is now understanding.