

How do I choose participants for my leadership development program?

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This article outlines criteria to help you identify the right employees for a leadership development program.

Who should I select to join my leadership development program?

Selecting the right candidates for a leadership development program ensures your investment is directed toward individuals with the potential and motivation to grow into more effective leaders and managers. The right participants bring energy, commitment, and a willingness to apply new skills, which strengthens the overall impact of your program. Careful selection also helps build a strong leadership pipeline that aligns with your organization's future needs.

Here are some key criteria for selecting the right candidates for your leadership development program:

- **Performance** – Do they display consistently strong results in their current role, demonstrating reliability and competence?
- **Potential** – Do they show signs of growth capacity, such as adaptability, problem-solving, and the ability to influence others?
- **Readiness** – Are they at an appropriate stage in their career where increased leadership or managerial responsibilities are a logical next step?
- **Motivation** – Do they have a genuine interest in developing as a leader and commitment to applying new skills?
- **Cultural Fit** – Do they show strong alignment with the organization's values and leadership expectations?
- **Learning Agility** – Do they show a willingness to seek feedback, learn from experience, and adjust behavior?


Together, these criteria help identify participants who will not only benefit from the program, but also contribute to your organization's long-term leadership pipeline.

In addition to the selection criteria, there are multiple methods by which candidates for your program can be identified. The chart below can help you make an informed decision as to whom is best for your organization and goals.

Method	Best Fit Criteria	Pros	Cons	Best For
Nomination or Recommendation by Manager, Senior Leader or HR	<p>Your program is selective and/or aligns with your succession plan strategy</p> <p>You have good alignment between your managers and your organization's values</p> <p>Your managers are involved in spotting talent</p>	<p>Matches business needs and aligns with pipeline planning</p> <p>Creates prestige</p> <p>Managers support and build accountability for learning</p> <p>Participants aligned with performance needs</p>	<p>Risk of favoritism or bias in selection</p> <p>May overlook hidden talent, particularly remote or deskless workers</p> <p>Potential for inconsistent or variable quality of nominations</p> <p>Risk of increased dropouts</p>	<p>High-potential programs</p> <p>Executive tracks</p> <p>Mid-level leader programs</p> <p>Team-based leadership pipelines</p>
Self-Nomination / Open Enrollment	<p>Your organization values inclusivity and learner autonomy with broad access to development</p>	<p>Increases motivation and ownership</p> <p>Inclusive and transparent</p> <p>Promotes growth mindset</p> <p>Democratizes learning</p>	<p>Risk of poor fit</p> <p>Over-enrollment</p> <p>May reduce program prestige</p>	<p>Aspiring or Emerging leader programs</p> <p>Culture-building initiatives</p>

Summary:

- Nomination or Manager Recommendation → best for selective, pipeline-focused programs.
- Self-Nomination or Open Enrollment → best for inclusive, growth-mindset cultures.

Need a checklist for you or your managers to use? Download our [Candidate Selection Checklist.pdf](#) .
