

A Model for Small Groups

at Scarborough Community Alliance Church



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Preamble

What is a model for Small Groups?

A model for Small Groups:

- Is designed to be a **picture** of what a Small Groups Church should look like;
- Reflects the **Small Groups Vision** already communicated in the video of our website and in the “Small Groups Church Vision” (see pages 2 - 3); and
- Contains **enough detail to guide** our thinking about small groups, but leaves enough room for **individual differences**.

This model includes

- **a definition of the common purpose** of small groups that all small groups at SCommAC are expected to fulfil;
- **a description of common small group characteristics** ranging from size and composition to leadership and training;
- **a statement about the basic activities** that all small groups are expected to engage in; and
- **a description of the common processes** for organization such as the creation of new small groups, the decision of materials used for study, and the disbanding of small groups.

How should this Model for Small Groups be used?

This Model provides guidelines that allow for:

- the creation of policies, covenants and other documents specific to small groups;
- the communication of expectations regarding how a small group at SCommAC should function; and
- the implementation of small group principles to allow for a healthy small groups structure, and thus for a healthy church.

Hence this Model may be used to understand how small groups at SCommAC are formed, and how such small groups operate. Further, this Model may be used to guide and to restore small groups at SCommAC to fulfil their original purposes, and to reduce ambiguity and historical drift.

**Scarborough Community Alliance Church
Small Groups Church
Vision Statement**

Vision Summary Statement:

*“The heartbeat of our church is found in our Small Groups
wherein we do life together in Christ”*

The Vision of SCommAC as a Small Groups Church is founded on Three Statements

Statement One:

*Our Small Groups Church is formed with SCommAC as our church (our foundation)
and “small groups” as the way we organize ourselves as believers (our Community)*

Description:

In essence, a Small Groups Church is about **being church**. It is a place where Christ is the center and because He is center, it is a place where we learn to pray, to love, to give, to learn from His Word, and to be missional. It is where our children find God, where we exercise the privilege of worship, and where we journey together in our walk of faith.

Implications:

A small group must consider itself to be founded on the principles that make SCommAC a community of believers. Such principles are found in SCommAC’s association with the C&MA, her constitution, her bylaws, her leadership, her distinctives and her ministries.

Statement Two:

*We live together as s where every person within our body
called Scarborough Community Alliance Church finds
discipleship, the deeper Spirit-filled life, and community in a small group*

Description:

As we lift Jesus in our place called Church, it is He who draws people from all places to worship Him. However, church is not just being; it is about living. God has called us to make disciples, to grow deeper in Him, and to be filled with the Spirit, and to do life together. Thus, we form ourselves as small groups, where every person within our body called church finds a place to call home. A church called “small group” within a church called “us”, doing life together, united in Spirit, committed to service, and committed to community.

Implications:

Our goal is that everyone who attends SCommAC on a regular basis is meaningfully involved in a small group. These small groups are focused on making disciples, growing the deeper life, being Spirit-filled, and being a family. We “do life together” by connecting with each other beyond the regular times of meeting, and nurture a sense of community and care within our small groups.

Statement Three:

*In our small groups, we do life together by meaningful connections with each other,
serve together within the ministries of the church
and reach out into our community together with the message of Christ*

Description:

At SCommAC, we form our small groups based on where people live, the life stage that people are at, and the natural connections that people have. Our small groups act as the life of our church serving the Lord together within the community of our church ministries. The small group acts as the hub of outreach to our friends, and the place of welcome to the guests among us. Working hand in hand with the ministries of the church, the small groups act as the lifeblood to everything that the church does. Together, we listen and study God's Word, set our vision for the future and spend our resources for the Kingdom of God.

Implications:

Our small groups are in a symbiotic relationship with the ministries of the church and in a developmental relationship within themselves. In other words, our small groups serve in our ministries, and the ministries serve the entire community of SCommAC and reaches out to the community around us. At the same time, each small group exercises outreach, welcome, bible study, and prayer, so that the small group and those within it may grow.

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What are the essential purposes of a small group?

Our small groups at SCommAC are living organisms. Sometimes, one is formed to meet the needs of singles; another is for moms who want to support each other in their journey; yet another is for younger adults finding a home after university. Such diversity is the very essence of an organism. However, all small groups at SCommAC must fulfill FOUR essential purposes as given below:

- i. **A small group must act to orient the members to the vision, themes and ministries of SCommAC.** For example, this may be done through talking about the work of the church during small group time, inviting ministry people to give occasional updates and introductions, using sermon materials, passing on announcements, and encouragement to join the membership of the church;
- ii. **A small group must study God's Word and pray together.** These are the foundational activities of the Deeper Life, and must be open to scrutiny by pastors and elders of the church to ensure spiritual soundness. This does not preclude getting together for social purposes, but the activities of bible study and prayer must be dominant in the aggregate of a small group's activities;
- iii. **A small group must create avenues for meaningful connection and accountability among its members.** This is foundational to the vision of "doing life together", and can include accountability relationships, social activities, and mutual care activities; and
- iv. **A small group must grow.** Since growth defines a living organism, every small group must have a purpose to grow in numbers and in spiritual depth. Sometimes, a small group may decide to close its membership; this is allowable for a season of no more than six months. A permanently or long-term closed group is not allowed because of the growth principle.

What are the characteristics of a small group?

At SCommAC, our small groups are like individuals. We are all different, and yet we are connected to each other as a family. Like a family, the similarities must exist as fundamental characteristics to the DNA of our church. These characteristics are outlined as follows:

- i. **A small group should comprise no more than 14 regularly and meaningfully attending members.** When the number of such members exceeds 14 for more than 6 consecutive meetings, a division into another group should be contemplated;
- ii. **A small group should comprise no more than 50% who are not yet Christians.** The composition of Christians may be changed by inviting more Christians into the group or by inviting those not yet Christians to join another group;
- iii. **A small group should always be willing to invite and welcome new members into its group;**
- iv. **A small group may choose its own basis of commonality, for example, gender, age-range, life-stage, or location.** However, care should be taken to act as graciously as we can towards each other so that small groups may not compete against each other, or draw members from each other;

- v. **A small group should not allow “group hopping” among its members, that is, where a person attends one group and then another due to personal whims.** Since this does not promote accountability and connection, small group leaders may confer to prevent group hopping; and
- vi. **Materials studied by the small groups may vary according to the need of the small group.** Where possible, small groups should be encouraged to follow the preaching schedule of SCommAC and the recommended study materials for the preaching schedule.

**How should a small group be formed?
What criteria should a small group fulfil before it is formed?**

Small groups form because the Spirit gives life and gathers people in community. However, the Spirit never operates in chaos but in order (1 Cor 14:33, 40), and thus small groups at SCommAC must obey certain principles in order to validate their formation.

- i. A small group may be formed only when at minimum 3 people and no less than 60% of its members attend SCommAC on a meaningful basis;
- ii. A small group must agree to the the Vision and Model of Small Groups at SCommAC; and
- iii. When a small group meets informally over a period of 6 months or over six meetings, whichever comes first, it must come under the care and accountability of the Small Groups Ministry.

What are the essential common activities of a small group at SCommAC?

Our small groups are generally given the freedom to choose activities that the group agrees to, with such activities ranging from social times to teaching times together. However, there are four essential activities that must be common to all small groups at SCommAC. These essential activities need not be practiced at every meeting, but must be foundational to the small group, and thus be done as much as possible:

- i. **The study of God's Word.** Though the small group is not simply a Bible study, it must study the Bible as one of its core activities. This includes using materials that point the group to the Bible, though ultimately, the Bible must be the primary text;
- ii. **The exercise of corporate prayer.** Prayer must be exercised during formal meetings, and as often as the group is able. Prayer must be taken as the activity that marks how we do small group at SCommAC;
- iii. **The connection with other small groups.** Every small group at SCommAC must make the effort of connecting with other small groups in the church. It is by this imperative that our body of small groups remains cohesive; and
- iv. **The caring of each other.** The small group must exhibit and practice care for one another beyond just the regular meetings. Such care expresses the vision of “doing life together” in a meaningful fashion.

What are the training requirements of leaders?

Leaders of small groups at SCommAC play a vital role in connecting the members of the group to each other and to the church. Depending on the structure of the group, the small group leader may be the primary leader of the study of God's Word or act in rotation with others. Beyond this, the small group looks to the leader for spiritual care and direction.

In this context, it is important that small group leaders receive ongoing training in four specific areas:

- i. How small groups work in general, and how they work at SCommAC in particular;
- ii. How to lead a Bible Study;
- iii. How to care for people within a small group; and
- iv. How to build new leaders within a small group. This relates to the multiplication of leadership indigenous to a small group, and thus better succession planning within the small group.

Training is an essential component of the success of a small group leader. Thus, all training for small group leaders and those being placed as leaders will be monitored closely by the Small Groups Ministry. The intention is to have all Small Group Leaders in SCommAC equipped accordingly.

How should a small group be organized internally?

Small groups at SCommAC are generally given the freedom to organize themselves internally as they see fit. The small group may set its own goals and determine its own themes. However, five essential areas of conformity in organization are required of every small group:

- i. That a person within the group be identified as the leader within 3 months of the group's founding. The role of the small group leader is to represent the small group, to provide spiritual guidance and care, and to assume responsibility for organizational details of the small group;
- ii. That the small group should identify a name for itself within 3 months of the group's founding;
- iii. That each member of the small group will agree to the Vision and Model of Small Groups at SCommAC;
- iv. That all small groups come under the authority of the Small Groups Ministry of SCommAC, and under the authority of the leadership of the church, including the adoption of the overall vision and themes of the church for each year; and
- v. That each small group should identify a minimum of one leader-in-training to create stability in the small group, and to provide leadership if the small group reaches the criteria for division ("birthing" or "splitting").

**What are the criteria and processes for dividing
a small group into other small groups?**

Dividing (sometimes called “splitting” or “birthing”) a small group may be emotionally difficult because of the thrust at SCommAC of creating a community that “does life together”. Several criteria and processes could be undertaken to mitigate any trauma that may be caused:

- i. **Communicate expectations early.** It should be kept in mind that expectations for the eventual division of a small group should be laid at the beginning of the process (see “Characteristics of a small group” for the criteria for division, which includes the size of the group as the determinant for division).
Criteria: That everyone in the small group understands the expectations laid out in the Model for Small Groups;
- ii. **Train leaders.** When succession planning or leadership training has been contemplated and exercised from the beginning of the small group, division becomes less traumatic (see “How should a small group be organized internally”).
Criteria: That stable leadership, preferably indigenous to the small group, be available for each group formed;
- iii. **Involve church leadership.** Division of small groups at SCommAC should not be done without consultation with the Small Group Ministries. Since group division is very much a “family” decision within the small group, Small Group Ministries acts in a consultative and supportive role to ensure that both the existing and the new groups are healthy and connected to the church.
Criteria: That Small Groups ministries be involved in a consultative and supportive role;
- iv. **Promise to connect.** Just as the difficulties associated with family members moving out of the home is mitigated by a promise to connect, so small groups that have been divided need to be provided opportunities to connect beyond the point of division. Part of the division process should include identifying two or three connection events (e.g., a summer retreat, Thanksgiving, Christmas, or even a “split-a-versary” event) over the next ONE year. Further, each small group is required to connect with other small groups in SCommAC to pre-empt possible feelings of alienation (see “What are the essential common activities of a small group at SCommAC”).
Criteria: That specific connection events among small groups are planned and agreed to by the groups, and that each group understands the necessity of connecting with other small groups in the church as a whole.

Note: The desire to stay connected may cause a small group to avoid division or to stay as a massive “fellowship” for an extended period of time. Such resistance to division should be addressed gently by the Small Groups Ministries, with the aim of encouraging healthy division.

What are the criteria and processes for disbanding a small group?

We must acknowledge that as small groups have a beginning, they also have an ending. Care has to be taken to understand the criteria for disbanding and the process behind a well planned disbanding:

- i. **Involve church leadership.** The moment a small group ceases to be, its remaining members come under the direct care of the Small Groups Ministry. Thus, the Small Groups Ministry must be involved in any contemplated move towards disbanding;
- ii. **Ensure good transition of members.** Thought must be given to the allocation of the remaining members of the small group. The names of stable members and adherent members of the small group should be provided to the Small Groups Ministry, including those who have left the small group within a 6 month period so that follow up could be carried out where necessary; and
- iii. **Exit diagnostic.** The Small Groups Ministry will report on the reasons for the small group's decision to disband to the Board of Elders and Pastoral staff to determine if further care and intervention is necessary. Leaders of the small group contemplating disbanding must participate in this report.

How should small group leadership selection and succession be determined?

In keeping with the vision of allowing Small Groups to “do life together”, it is preferable that the small group leader is indigenous to the small group. In the selection of small group leaders, the following should be observed:

- i. The small group leader must be an individual who is acknowledged as being mature in the faith (that is, not a new believer, or one that has not grown spiritually);
- ii. The leader must be a person who meaningfully attends SCommAC on a regular basis;
- iii. The leader must be trained or be willing to receive training for the leadership of a small group;
- iv. The leader must agree the Vision and Model of Small Groups at SCommAC;
- v. The leader must submit to the leadership of the Pastor, the Elders and the Small Group Ministry Team; and
- vi. Leaders-in-training should be identified as stated in “How should a small group be organized internally”. Leaders-in-training should be able to fulfil the same criteria as stated above (points i to v).

How should a small group relate to the ministries of the church?

Small groups are the way in which we organize ourselves into community, and the Ministries of the church are the ways in which we impact everyone within the church and in our larger community. With this in mind, three specific directives for how small groups should relate to the ministries of the church are as follows:

- i. **Be part of the church.** Our Vision of Small Groups states, “Our Small Groups Church is formed with SCommAC as our church (our foundation)”, that is, all small groups are under the authority of the leadership of the church, and is governed by the constitution, by-laws, doctrinal statement and distinctives of the church. Thus small groups should seek to be a part of the ministries organized by the church;
- ii. **Be active in service outside the Small Group.** Our Vision of Small Groups also states, “We serve together within the ministries of the church”, that is, members of the small group should contribute meaningfully to the various ministries of the church as the Lord gives them gifts. Thus members of the small group should be encouraged to participate in the ministries of the church in order to exercise their giftedness in the Spirit (1 Tim 4:14);
- iii. **Be aware of the greater needs.** Small groups should be ready to respond to the needs of ministries at SCommAC since these needs represent the needs of the greater whole. Thus, appeals by various ministries to the small group for involvement should be taken seriously.

How should the ministries of the church relate to the Small Group?

The ministries of the church serve the church as a whole in the advancement of the work of God. Thus ministries are designed to mobilize small groups to work together to achieve goals that each small group cannot achieve on its own. In this context, ministries should follow three guidelines for involving small groups:

- i. **Involvement rather than just recruitment.** Ministries should focus on involving small groups as a means of igniting passion, educating small group members regarding service, training people in ministry skills, and recruitment for help in various ministry areas;
- ii. **Involving whole groups rather than just individuals.** Ministries should take the approach of structuring service in a way that the small group as a whole may be involved. This may include involving some in the group in serving in specific skill areas, then mobilizing others in the small group in supportive roles;
- iii. **Creating presence rather than just transactional appearance.** Ministries should make it a point to make small groups aware of what is happening in a ministry rather than just showing up when a need arises.

What is the Small Groups leadership structure at SCommAC?

The structure of leadership for small groups should emphasize the Biblical role of the Servant Leader (John 13:14). As a family, the accessibility of each person within this model, and the love and care given to each person within the Small Groups structure of SCommAC must reflect the unity of the Body of Christ. This spirit of love and unity must define us.

This Model describes the roles of four layers of leadership, at the core of which is the small group (see Fig 1a: The Small Groups Structure at SCommAC):

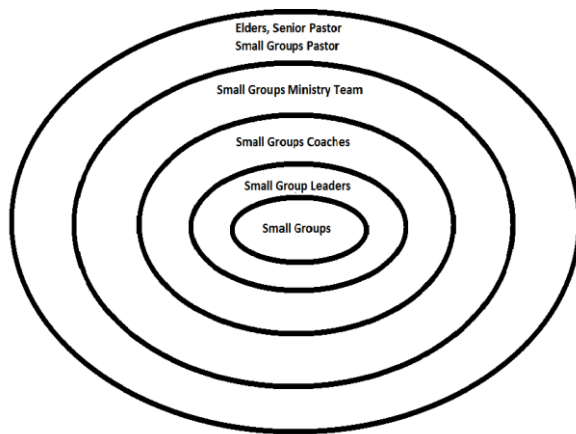


Fig 1a. The Small Groups Structure of SCommAC

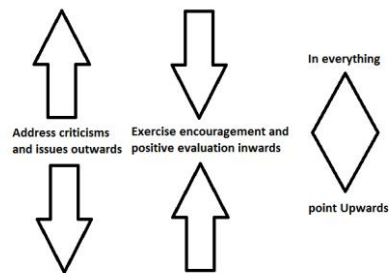


Fig 1b. The Issue Resolution Protocol at SCommAC

The Board of Elders and the Senior Pastor

- The Board of Elders and the Senior Pastor play the role of overseeing all small groups by prayer, counsel, vision casting and care;
- The elders, along with the Senior Pastor and the Small Groups Pastor, would appoint deacons to the Leadership Team to help in the process of decision making, prayer and care for small groups;
- In the absence of a Small Groups Pastor, the Board of Elders and Senior Pastor will assume the role of the Small Groups Pastor; and
- The Board of Elders and the Senior Pastor, along with the Small Groups Pastor will appoint the Small Groups Ministry Team.

The Small Groups Pastor

- The Small Groups Pastor ensures the integrity of the vision being cast (that is, that the vision is clear, workable, communicable, and demonstrable);
- The Small Groups Pastor oversees the Small Groups Ministry team and the Small Groups Coaches;
- The role of the Small Groups Pastor is
 - to join the Elders and the Senior Pastor in their role of overseeing by prayer, counsel, vision casting and care,
 - to appoint the Small Groups Ministry Team and the Small Groups Coaches; and
 - to spiritually care for the Small Groups Ministry Team, the Small Groups Coaches, the Small Group Leaders and all the members of the small groups, and to ensure that the Ministry, coaches and the small groups are spiritually healthy.

The Small Groups Ministry Team

- The Small Groups Ministry Team comprises the Deacon(s) or Coordinator(s) of Small Groups at SCommAC along with others they choose to appoint to the team;
- The role of the Small Groups Ministry Team is
 - to implement the vision set by the Pastor and the Elders in creative and pragmatic ways;
 - to appoint the Small Groups Coaches and arrange for the small groups under these coaches;
 - to recommend and implement training for small group leaders;
 - to communicate with Small Groups Coaches and Leaders, and report to the Board and to the Pastor on a regular basis in order to keep them apprised of what is happening in the small groups at a micro level; and
 - to monitor what happens in the small groups so that intervention could take place where necessary
- The Small Groups Ministry Team represents the Pastor and the Board to the small groups, and cares for the Small Groups Coaches;
- The Team will work with the Pastor in intervening when small groups are experiencing issues as discussed in the Model for Small Groups.

The Small Groups Coach

- The Small Groups Coach is a spiritually mature believer with giftings in teaching, care, encouragement, and hospitality, is experienced in the leading of a small group, and has been trained as a Small Group Leader;
- The Coach is also meaningfully a member of a small group and of SCommAC;
- The role of the Coach is:
 - to provide spiritual care for no less than two and no more than five small groups and their leaders by regular communication with Small Group Leaders;
 - to guide Small Group Leaders in the care for their group;
 - if necessary, to organize pre-studies and small group preparation for the Leaders;
 - to report to the Small Groups Ministry Team on a regular basis; and
 - to work with the Small Groups Pastor and the Small Groups Ministry Team to ensure the health of the small groups, including the intervention of problems within and between small groups
- Training for Small Groups Coaches will be arranged by the Small Groups Pastor and the Small Groups Ministry Team as the need arises.

The Small Group Leader

- The Small Group Leader is a person identified by the small group as taking the role of
 - representing the small group to Leadership and other small groups;
 - providing spiritual guidance and care to the small group; and
 - assuming responsibility for organizational details of the small group
- The Small Group Leader motivates members of the small group to connect with each other beyond the regular meetings;
- The Leader guards the integrity of the Small Groups Vision and Model within the small group;
- The Leader initiates the connection of the small group with other small groups at SCommAC, and connects the small group to the themes, vision and ministry of SCommAC as a whole;
- The Leader reports to the Small Groups Coach and, where necessary, looks to the Coach for care and guidance; and
- The Leader guides the small group in the practice of the essential activities of small groups (see the Model of Small Groups).

The Process for the Resolution of Issues

As a family, we can be certain that we will encounter issues that arise among us. The success with which we handle these issues is determined by the attitudes and the process that we take in resolution (see Figure 1b: The Issue Resolution Protocol at SCommAC).

A. Address Criticisms and Issues Outwards

i. Issues

- In view of the Small Groups Structure of SCommAC (Figure 1a), all issues must be referred to leadership in the outward layers. For example, issues within the small group should be brought to the Small Group Leader. And issues with the Small Group Leader should be brought to the Small Groups Coach.
- When issues are not resolved at one layer, the outward layers of leadership should be involved. For example, the Small Groups Coach would seek the input of the Small Group Ministries Team, and the Small Groups Ministries Team would seek the input of the Small Groups Pastor.
- It is preferable that issues are referred in progressive layers outwards, that is from small groups to Small Group Leaders, from Small Group Leaders to Small Groups Coaches, and so on. The built-in frequency of the reporting structure should provide everyone in the outer layers an opportunity to speak into the issues, if needed.

ii. Criticisms

- Criticisms may be divided into criticisms primarily against a system (e.g., "I don't like the way the small groups material was selected") and criticisms primarily against a person or persons (e.g., "I don't like the way my small group leader talked to my friend.")
- For criticisms directed primarily against a system, the protocol of referring the issue outwards should apply.
- For criticisms directed primarily against a person or persons, the person who is the subject of the criticism must be involved as the issue is referred outwards.
- Under no circumstances will gossip be tolerated. Gossip is defined as criticism that is spread among others without involving the person who is the subject of the criticism. Gossip is sinful and unbiblical, and serves to destroy unity in the Body of Christ (Proverbs 16:28; 20:19; 26:2; Romans 1:29; 2 Cor 12:20; 1 Tim 5:13). Where gossip is detected, it should be addressed immediately by any person within small groups at SCommAC. If it persists, the Small Groups Ministry Team and the Small Groups Pastor will intervene to cease gossip.

B. Exercise Encouragement and Positive Evaluation Inwards

We should make it a habit to be people of encouragement towards one another (Ephesians 4:29). As a protocol for practice, it is important for us to be intentional in encouraging each other so that those in leadership encourages those who are served by leadership, for example, the Elders would seek intentional ways to encourage the Small Groups Ministry Team, and the Ministry Team would seek intentional ways to encourage the Small Groups Coach, and so on.

In so doing, we create a culture of encouragement within our church, and thus fulfil the law of Jesus to love one another as He has loved us.

C. In Everything Point Upwards

No issue may be addressed or resolved unless we are called to aligning ourselves with God by prayer, relying on God's direction through His Word, and asking for His wisdom through His Spirit. It is the duty of every person within the small groups from the core to the outer circles to ensure that God is in the midst of the way we deal with our issues.