

Semester Groups Vision and FAQ

Overall Groups Vision:

God designed us for community, and groups are the primary delivery system for the Find Freedom principle of the spiritual journey. By connecting in Groups, people can take steps towards freedom through experiencing authentic connection and life-changing relationships. Our dream is to have everyone connected in a Group who attends, and have Groups be an on-ramp to those who do not attend our church to connect people to Jesus and our church.

Vision of Semester Groups:

Through a semester system, Groups are kept at the forefront as a next step for every guest. Semesters provide an on-ramp and an off-ramp for group leaders and members. Semesters follow the regular rhythms of life (we find that a large number of Groups are taking some breaks at the times when there is a semester break) and give us a clear picture of the groups we offer our guest. Semesters are good for promotion, participants and leaders as outlined in the goals below.

Goals:

- Promotion** – Semesters allow intentional rhythms of communicating the value of Groups and building momentum around Group life. Three times a year the focus becomes "lead a group" and "join a group" including:
 - Weekend messaging (including talks from the weekend communicator, vision talks, life change stories).
 - Social Media
 - Allows for strategic timing of HUB events (see Group HUB Event Vision doc for specifics)
- Participants** – The beginning of a semester is an on-ramp that gives participants an entry point to a group; and when they join a group, they are stepping into something new. Without semesters, participants were most often joining something already established. The end of a semester gives participants an off ramp. A participant may want to try a new type of group or may need to take a semester off. These off ramps give them permission to take a break or try something new.
- Leaders** – Semesters provide leaders a finite time to lead. Each semester they are asked to ESPN (Encourage, add Scripture, Pray daily for group members, identify Next steps for group members). When they register their group and sign the leader agreement for the semester they are making a commitment to their group members for that amount of time. The semester also gives Group leaders an off ramp. If there is a season of life or a reason they need to take a break from leadership, the off ramp gives them 'permission' to do so.
- Care and Pastoring Group Leaders** – Semesters allow for care of group leaders. Each semester a group leader is given a coach who prays and cares for the group leader. The coach also communicates regularly with them throughout the semester.
- Accurate Picture of Groups** – At the beginning of each semester, we ask group leaders to register their groups. Asking groups to do this three times a year, leads to us having confidence in the group directory. Having confidence in the directory that we are sending our guest to leads to us being confident when we extend an invite.

FAQs:

When working with leaders, start with connection, share vision (the why) and goals every time, and then what and how. Below are some common questions that come up, but typically answers are best delivered in the context of relationship and connection:

What are the semesters?

There are 3 semesters each year – Jan – April (13 weeks), June-July (6 weeks), Sept – Dec (13 weeks).

Does the directory close during the semester?

The directory remains open until just a week or two before the semester ends. Throughout the semester Group leaders decide when and if their group appears in the directory. At the beginning of the semester, Groups have the ability to choose if they appear in the directory or not. As the semester goes on, a leader may choose to remove their Group from the directory. They can do this at any point during the semester.

What else does the rhythm of the semester provide?

As the semester starts to move into its second half, the semester rhythm provides natural timing to ask leaders to identify potential new leaders in their Group, register their Group if they will be leading next semester, and have new leaders start to prepare to lead Groups. In addition, it can be a time to reach out to past leaders who decided not to lead for the semester to see if they will lead again, insure they are still connected in a Group, and care for them if something is still preventing them from both.

Can Groups meet in between semesters?

Yes, Group leaders can choose to meet in between semesters; however, we would still ask them to register each semester to insure they are assigned a coach for the semester, and the directory is updated and accurate.

Can someone be a part of a Group that doesn't attend church or have a relationship with Jesus?

Yes, when Group leaders who passionate about the Group they're leading, our hope is they would want to invite others to join them! Inviting someone who doesn't attend church or doesn't have a relationship with Jesus can be an on-ramp to attending a weekend service and knowing God.

How does on-going training happen?

The leadership structure of Groups is the backbone of training and equipping as well as pastoring and caring for leaders. On-going training is happening throughout the semester by Coaches and HUB Leaders, along with campus vision and training sessions with all leaders in the Group structure. Fall 2018 we will launch a Group leader resource site that will be filled with a variety of equipping videos. However, nothing can replace the development and training that happens inside the coaching relationship.

When it's off semester, how do we offer the next step of Groups?

Semester rhythms match the rhythms of many of our attenders. For this reason, the times we're off semester is very often the times people are not looking to join a Group unless they are in crisis. For a crisis, CR is the Group that is the next step for them and it is available every Friday night. We also recommend having new believer Groups start twice throughout the semester, once at semester start and then another one halfway through the semester, to provide a more frequent next step for anyone who wants to answer the question of who Jesus is to them.

In addition, those Groups who are still open will appear on the directory throughout the semester, and can be a next step. It may be a good idea for campuses to target a few Group leaders who are willing to keep their Group open throughout the semester so that the campus has options for their guests throughout the semester.

What we can be most confident about is that the very best on-ramp into a Group is at the start of the semester. Guests can see the start date, Group leaders are inviting people, we're talking about it as a church and they are most likely joining something that is starting, rather than already established or already halfway through something.

Why don't we take attendance in between semesters?

Attendance in Groups is one of the key measurements of health for the Group, both for the individual as well as for the Group; however, this can be best captured 3X throughout the 13-week semesters, and 2X during the 6-week semester. It doesn't need to be captured weekly; however, some leaders like to take attendance weekly, while others don't like to take attendance at all, so our goal is to have an accurate picture 3X throughout the semester. Providing a weekly reminder is like keeping it on everyone's mind, and then 3X a semester is when Coaches will ask Group leaders to insure their rosters are updated. The goal is to have an overall picture of the key factors of health as it relates to attendance - how many people started in the Group, how many stayed with it or joined along the way, and then did all of those people finish with the Group.

Why do we do Group HUB events?

Group HUB events are meant to point people to the next step of Groups through a larger gathering. See the Group HUB Event vision doc for all the details.

What is the timing for registering a Group?

There's a window to register Groups for each semester. It lasts about 6-7 weeks. Registration opens before the semester launches and stays open a few weeks after launch. The goal is for Groups to start with the semester. The start of every semester is when we can confidently say this is the best time to join a Group (for some of the reasons listed earlier), it's the best way to serve our guests with a clear on-ramp, and have that on-ramp supported with promotion, communication and care all starting at that point as well.

What if someone wants to start a Group 4-6 weeks into the semester?

Group Registration closes about 3 weeks after the semester launches. If someone wants to start a group after the close of the registration date, they will be directed to the next semester. In preparation for the launch of their group they can complete GrowthTrack (if needed), complete Group Leader training (if needed), participate in an existing group to apprentice, and be part of Leadership Development that take place in their hub.

By participating in an existing group they will experience community and learn from their group leader. Waiting for the start of the next semester also gives them the opportunity to pray about who will be in their group, make invites and plan logistical details. Planning for their group and praying about their group ahead of time is in large part what sets their group up for success.

Having all groups launch at the semester start date supports the semester strategy. It also ensures that our groups are equipped and supported well. Looking ahead to the next semester also allows our Hub leaders to be strategic about the groups we have each semester.

Are there any specific exceptions to the semester rhythm?

There are 2 types of Groups that have exceptions, new believer Groups and freedom Groups. The goal for new believer Groups (Starting Point or JumpStart) is to have one kick off at the start of the semester and then another to begin halfway through the semester. Both are done by semester end, but by having staggered start times it provides an ongoing on-ramp for guests who want to answer the question of who Jesus is to them.

Groups in the freedom HUB, Celebrate Recovery specifically, continue to meet year-round due to the very specific needs they address and the nature of recovery. However, they do re-register with each semester to insure the Groups offered are updated and accurate on the directory.

How do we know we're winning in Groups?

We know we're winning in Groups when the number of Groups is growing, when the number of people involved in Groups is growing, and, as captured through the next steps survey, the people in Groups report they are experiencing life-change, freedom or moving one step on the spiritual journey.