Chapter II

Key Findings

This chapter highlights the most important findings from the 1998-2000 Study Circles Best Practices study.

This chapter presents key findings from the 1998-2000 Study Circles Best Practices study. This study had as its primary focus the community-wide model for organizing study circles. The study also included some attention to the dialogue sessions around which the model is built. People in communities who talked with Best Practices team members often first described their own study circle dialogue sessions before addressing topics related more to organization and implementation. These key findings follow the pattern of the interviews — they begin with dialogue and then move to consideration of specific features of the organizing model. This chapter addresses the developing frontier of linking dialogue with action, and describes some prevailing and alternative views about the linkage between study circles and action on institutional racism. The chapter concludes with the identification of additional issues.

In our lives, we look for those no-lose, win-win situations, and I think this is one of them.
--European American/white organizer in Alread

A. Programs *adopted* the study circle dialogue sessions as developed by SCRC.

To a remarkable degree, organizers in different places, using different approaches, organized and implemented study circles that delivered a consistent experience for participants. The similarities of study circle dialogue sessions across places, topics, and populations suggest that organizers in the 17 learning sites ***adopted*** study circle dialogue as a method for working on community change. Perhaps because study circles are new and distinctive, not just a variation of some other approach more familiar to them, organizers typically worked to create study circles "by the book." Rather than trying to be inventive, most organizers did their best to follow SCRC's instructions about how to construct and conduct the small groups.

One great thing about study circles is it does what it says it is going to do when people participate in it. We all promote it in the same language.
--African American/black organizer in New Castle County

Across the 17 learning sites — in communities of different sizes, with different issues and varying constraints — participants in the study circles reported experiences that sounded remarkably the same, and even used similar terms to describe those experiences. Both participants and organizers said study circles offered something to their communities they had never known about and never before tried. Some described study circles as the only place where everyone was welcome, where everyone's voice counted, and where no person or views had special privilege. In several places, people said study circles offered the only opportunity available in their communities for ordinary citizens of all races, ages, and backgrounds to begin work on

important community problems and possibilities that previously had seemed impossible to tackle. People expressed excitement about having a new tool that opened the door for interested citizens to talk and work together on such important issues.

The idea of dialogue causes people to be real.
--African American/black facilitator in New Castle County

When study circles worked well, as they most often did, they gave nearly every participant new connections, often accompanied by a deeper sense of commitment to the community itself. Some participants said they got useful new information and formed valuable new relationships; some also reported receiving a boost in courage to work for positive change. European American/white participants in successful study circles on race were particularly likely to say they had met and formed ties to African American/black participants and had become more active in challenging racist statements and behaviors after being in study circles. People who were involved in study circles on race, as well as those who participated in circles on many other topics, named dozens of ways study circles contributed to positive change in their communities.

When individual study circles did not work well, in most cases people across the learning sites reported that the time was too short, their groups too homogeneous, or their facilitators too inexperienced, talkative, or biased. Among some young men of color in larger communities, the sense that study circles did not work well stemmed not from what happened in the circles, but from a conviction that the tool was not appropriate for the type of community change they most valued — visible action to end institutional racism and its built-in power imbalances.

Even these participants, however, joined the great majority of participants, organizers, and facilitators from the 17 sites in considering the face-to-face, diverse, structured, facilitated dialogues to be useful as a means of promoting individual change and developing new relationships. Some other participants, as the study shows, viewed study circles as contributing to change in organizations, institutions, and communities as well.

Certain practices made a particular difference in a program's ability to produce effective study circle sessions. Significantly, each of these is an explicit part of the SCRC model, a fact that underscores the extent to which programs adopted SCRC guidelines.

Best practices for study circle dialogue sessions:

1. ***Start with SCRC guides***. All programs used the SCRC guides at least as a starting point. Many worked from the guides as written, and considered them a major reason why it was possible to produce study circles in their communities.

2. ***Use ground rules***. All programs used ground rules to help study circle participants know how to contribute appropriately. Most used the ground rules proposed in SCRC guides. Several organizers, facilitators and participants described the ground rules as one of the main reasons for the success of their small groups.

3. ***Recruit, train, and support excellent facilitators***. Participants reported that trained, skilled facilitators made a major positive difference in the effectiveness of study circles. Programs that invested significant effort in providing high-quality facilitator training were the least likely to report troubling levels of participant attrition as rounds proceeded.

4. ***Seek diversity in the circles and among facilitators***. Most programs worked hard to recruit participants and facilitators who represented their communities' diversity, particularly in terms of race, ethnicity, gender, age, or factors specific to that community. When the programs succeeded in making individual circles diverse, participants were likely to name diversity as a singularly important factor in their positive study circle experience.

One organizer described the community-wide model as "forgiving" — lots of things could go wrong in the planning and preparation, but the small group dialogue process had so much of its own power and logic that healthy, productive study circles would result from most planning efforts. In the next section, the theme of consistency in the dialogue experience yields to a focus on variety and adaptation of the organizing approaches programs used to produce successful "rounds" of study circles.

It's important to invest in the facilitator function. In Springfield we invested approximately $7,000 per round in training and support. We didn't have it the first round but have had it every round since, and it's made a lot of difference.

--African American/black organizer in Springfield

B. Programs used local knowledge to *adapt* the community-wide organizing model.

In contrast to the high degree of similarity in the small group conversations, the organizing approaches in the 17 learning sites demonstrated considerable variety. Organizers in each learning site treated the SCRC community-wide model as a set of suggestions or guidelines, and handled structure and implementation of their study circles in distinctive ways. Using local knowledge, the organizers ***adapted*** the model to their own goals, resources, and contexts.

From each program's very beginnings, initiators used local knowledge to begin organizing for study circles. For example, although most programs built a coalition, no two programs in the study constructed their coalitions in the same way. Each did what made sense in the local context. In fact, in order to get started, a small number of programs produced at least one community-wide round without constructing any coalition at all. With experience, however, those programs that settled into longer-term work tended to strengthen their coalitions and make them increasingly reflective of their communities' diversity.

This is a lay facilitation model . . . you can get too strung out on trying to perfect a very non-perfect process. That . . . shouldn't keep you from striving to improve, you know, but you can sweat the details and maybe get minimal returns.

--African American/black facilitator trainer in Springfield

Facilitator training provides another example of innovation on the community-wide model based on local knowledge. All programs in the 17 sites recruited and trained facilitators, but did so in many different ways. Training length and content varied significantly. Some programs made significant, focused efforts to attract facilitators from communities of color; others worked with those who volunteered, accepting the resulting racial and ethnic mix, or lack of it. Some programs recruited facilitators through advertisements in the media and lots of promotion in the community. Others recruited selectively, handpicking people likely to succeed. Still others recruited and trained all who were interested, and then carefully selected the people who would facilitate study circles and those who would carry out other tasks. It was hard to see substantial patterns in facilitator recruitment and training, with one exception. It seemed that, across time, programs that committed to a sustained study circle effort were likely to deepen their investments in facilitator development.

Though programs implemented the community-wide model in many different ways, the work to implement the model added its

own value to communities. In other words, the organizing approaches that people used to prepare for study circles had their own beneficial impact on communities, in addition to the benefits the dialogue sessions produced.

The first benefit of the model itself was an increase in connections among organizers. Collaborating and cooperating to produce complex, multisession, facilitated circles in multiple community locations typically drew together organizations not usually involved with each other. This connected many people together in new ways, and led to collaborations on other efforts in addition to study circles.

There's something about the dynamic that made it [the effort] keep going, and that's about the individuals, it's about the group dynamic that we got going . . . I think there is something about the nature of what we're doing that transfers into our determination to do it and the philosophy of the study circle concept.

--European American/white organizer in Aurora

Second, some of the best-documented changes occurred in the organizations most responsible for producing study circles, especially those principally responsible for producing study circles on race. Involvement with study circle coalitions led some organizations to change from a social service focus to an empowerment and social justice focus, caused some to use dialogue more frequently and intentionally as a way of accomplishing work, and increased the interest of people of color in serving as board members or volunteers.

The third benefit of the community-wide model was an increase in the sense of possibility in communities. In some places, people attributed this change to the scale of involvement. People said that seeing several hundred fellow citizens who were willing to spend several hours working on a community issue presented convincing evidence of public interest in community improvement.

In a few places, the sense of expanded possibility was even more fundamental. When well-attended rounds of study circles on race took place in a community widely perceived as denying that any racial issues or differences existed, some local participants reported that they had to rethink their presumptions about their community's resistance to change and acknowledge that change could occur.

Fourth, the scale of study circles produced in a community-wide context led to exponential increases in the opportunities for organizers and coalition members to strengthen their civic connections. With more people in study circles, more people in the community could connect around an important shared experience. People reported that increased connections came

There's got to be some faith in the process, and that if you believe in the work, if you believe that putting people together who are very different than one another can result in something constructive, then at some point you just have to let it fly.
--African American/black facilitator trainer in Springfield

through formal structures such as kick-off events, closing celebrations, and action forums, as well as through more informal occasions when study circle people crossed paths in the community outside the study circle sphere.

Overall, the community-wide nature of the programs added benefits that the dialogues alone would not have produced. In these Best Practices learning sites, study circles added value two ways: through dialogue and through the benefits of large-scale organizing.

Although the ways of carrying out the community-wide model varied greatly from program to program, some practices seemed to work well in many different situations. The practices that follow relate to several aspects of planning and implementing successful study circles: getting started; building a strong, diverse coalition; recruiting and training a diverse group of facilitators; and recruiting participants.

Best practices for community-wide organizing:

1. *Think through how the model will work locally*. Before beginning, successful organizers considered how study circles could bring beneficial change to their communities, paying special attention to what would work in their specific local contexts. Organizers tried to foresee the best fit between community interests and the study circle approach. Organizers compared the suggestions of the community-wide model with local conditions such as history, leadership structure, demographics, available resources, and funding, and then made adjustments to the model that made sense locally.

2. *Align strategies with the beliefs and values of study circles*. As organizers in each community made decisions about how to adapt elements of the community-wide model to their own community situations, they relied on a set of usually implicit beliefs and values that permeated each layer or aspect of study circles. Researchers identified these beliefs and values as strong features of many successful study circle programs:

- Optimism that community change is possible
- Confidence in conversation as the right starting point
- Commitment to collaboration and joint ownership of the effort
- Dedication to being welcoming and hospitable
- Allegiance to citizen sovereignty — the right and responsibility of citizens in a democracy to work for community improvement
- Commitment to the goals of equity and inclusion, particularly in terms of race, ethnicity, gender, and age
- Respect for people from all backgrounds and for the power of their ideas and efforts

3. *Build in diversity at all organizing stages*. In every learning site, organizers worked toward inclusion of people reflective of their communities' diversity. When the very first people who began working to build a study circle program reflected a mix in terms of race and ethnicity, all aspects of coalition building and recruitment of participants and facilitators benefitted. In short, the earlier the diversity manifested, the easier it was for organizers to make all aspects of their program solidly diverse. Most worked to make sure that the organizing coalition, facilitator corps, participants, and action efforts included these groups: (1) women and men from the community's different racial and ethnic populations, (2) young people, and, in some cases, (3) people reflecting other types of groups or divisions present in the community. Some organizers had more success than others in building meaningful diversity into each aspect of their program. Most programs in the learning sites worked on diversity fairly constantly.

I feel that if you don't stretch and really try to make the most of what you see are opportunities to advance your program, that gradually it loses its excitement for people in the community and for people that are involved.

--European American/white organizer in Aurora

4. *Include four types of leaders in a broad coalition*. Programs thrived when their diverse coalition included people who, taken together, offered these four types of leadership capacity to the program: vision, resources,

You can't just have a visionary and not somebody there that has the tools to make things happen. There needs to be a blend of expertise . . .
--European American/white organizer in Aurora

administrative savvy, and skills in promotion and marketing. Strong coalitions included well-known people and community leaders of all racial and ethnic backgrounds, all of whom knew how to make things happen. These leaders added credibility, persuaded their communities of affiliation to take study circles seriously, inspired skeptical people to participate, and helped locate necessary resources. In particular, the leaders' presence persuaded others to participate.

5. ***"Evolve" the coalition***. When program needs changed or evolved, strong coalitions changed to fit the new situation. Programs changed their coalitions in two circumstances: when things were stable and growth desirable, or when some key ingredient was missing, resulting in gaps in guidance and decision making.

6. ***Cultivate facilitators as precious resources***. Even beyond the essential investment in facilitator training, some programs cultivated a body of facilitators through steady support, peer learning opportunities, and offerings of advanced training. Some programs used facilitators as valued advisers in rewriting guides or helping in other ways to make the study circle process sound and coherent.

Even when you deal with professional facilitators that are volunteering their time, I think we need to spend quite a bit of time on training.
--European American/white organizer in Twin Cities

7. ***Train facilitators specifically for conducting race-related conversations***. Some programs that addressed some aspect of the topic of race prepared facilitators particularly for their work on this topic. This type of training is not yet widespread; it seemed linked to programs with more experience or with more explicit commitment to working toward ending institutional racism.

8. ***Recruit participants both broadly and specifically to create diverse study circles***. As noted in point 3 above, whether or not a program focused on a topic related to racial and other differences, nearly all programs worked hard to attract people into their study circles who reflected their communities' diversity. When the topic was related to race, organizers worked particularly hard at creating diverse circles. All programs used multiple strategies for recruiting. Most programs developed ways to make each individual circle as diverse as possible. Participants in

well-run, diverse circles reported particularly positive study circle experiences.

Programs that succeeded in recruitment obviously used local knowledge well. Adaptation across different learning sites meant the array of recruitment strategies varied from place to place as each program's organizers used known, proven strategies for getting the word out in their community. Adaptation of this type, based on local knowledge, affected all aspects of implementing the community-wide model in the learning sites. The extent of variation and adaptation became even greater when programs addressed the least-tested feature of the model — the linkage between dialogue and action.

C. Programs *experimented* with different approaches to linking dialogue with action.

It's a strange place to be where you know you want to make something happen, and you've got little connections but they're not strong enough.
--European American/white organizer in Hartford

From mid-1998 to mid-2000, as the Best Practices study took place, the most dynamic, fluid aspect of the community-wide model related to the phase of work that took place after the four to six small dialogue sessions concluded. The community-wide model has been built and rebuilt based on program experience, but in the domain of linking dialogue and action, the community experience is still quite limited. The model currently suggests several ways to link dialogue with action, including holding action forums and forming action councils or task forces. None of the features of the model related to action has yet had the benefit of thorough testing by programs. In fact, the level of adaptation that programs demonstrated with regard to generating and supporting action is so significant that it must be called ***experimentation***.

Though study circles and change seem powerfully linked, the early stage of experimentation with tools and approaches made it impossible to know exactly which approaches actually led to specific changes and why. It is certainly too early to identify best practices. In addition, the nature of the study did not make it possible to determine how widespread the changes based on study circles are, and how many people in communities have benefitted from them or know of them.

Individual change is sometimes the goal. Community change is sometimes the goal. It's lots of big tributaries that all join in a big river.
--European American/white organizer in Maine

Although it could not answer these important questions, this study affirmed that community-wide study circles made a worthwhile contribution to beneficial community change. Two aspects of study circles' contributions to community change drew widespread agreement with virtually no dissent:

- Study circles contributed to personal changes in knowledge, beliefs, and attitudes about public or community issues.

- Study circles served as an arena unlike any other in most communities, where anyone interested in some form of community improvement could form new relationships and make connections with people they would be unlikely to meet otherwise. Sometimes these connections and relationships bridged racial and other divides.

These are changes that the dialogue tool itself brought about. Moving past these changes to those that take place after study circle dialogue sessions, there was one additional area of strong agreement, though in this case, some participants held an opposing view:

- Study circles set the stage or created the climate for changes in institutions and communities.

So far, study circle programs have not developed a proven array of approaches for taking advantage of that opening and moving to action. A good deal of invention and innovation is under way, as many organizers well know. Participants, on the other hand, are largely unaware of the exploratory efforts and tend to see limited progress toward working out reliable ways to link dialogue with action. In general, participants want more linkages, and they want the linkages to be more explicit. A small number of practices are showing some promise in multiple settings, and warrant closer attention.

There's a window of opportunity . . . and if you lose that then people just kind of go back to their lives . . .
--Multiracial participant in Syracuse

Promising practices for linking dialogue with action

1. ***Decide how much action-oriented effort the program can sustain***. Some programs can support short-term efforts, and some can develop the resources to support action efforts over the long term. Some programs can help participants launch action efforts and then offer additional support to keep them going; other programs have just enough resources to help with the launch and no more. When organizers made a thoughtful assessment about how much support they could provide for action *before* implementing a study circle program, it clarified expectations and reduced disappointments and disagreements at the coalition level. If this type of assessment became a more standard practice, it would help programs clarify who or what they expect will change as a result of study circles, and what role both participants and the program might play in that change.

2. ***Make the program's capabilities to support action as explicit as possible for participants***. When programs knew what level of action they could support, and when they could communicate this in a consistent message to participants at several points during organizing and implementation, it gave participants a clearer sense of

We didn't have anything set in place. So we turned to partners to take over the action stuff. I thought I had made a connection, and [it] turned out to be a source of money but it hasn't taken over the people. It is challenging . . . you get organizing and getting people into the dialogues but then what are you doing about the action?
--European American/white organizer in New Castle County

If the city is going to go to the point of advertising, "Look, we're doing this good deed here and we want you people in the city to participate in this," my feeling is, "Okay, I hear you and I'm here and I want to participate, but I want to see some results."
--European American/white participant in Fayetteville

what their own investment might need to be. (Many programs simply could not reach this level of clarity without producing some rounds of study circles and learning more about participant interests and tendencies with regard to action.)

3. ***Develop and use written action guides***. Programs that developed written action guides had an opportunity to make clear statements to participants about what types of program support they could expect if they chose to undertake action. In addition, written action guides offer one way to capitalize on the opportunity that occurs at the end of each round of study circles when participants typically have a great deal of enthusiasm for taking part in change efforts.

4. ***Form community partnerships that support action as well as dialogue***. Programs that built successful partnerships with community organizations that had some resources found that they could produce more powerful action events, sustain support for action groups longer, and even find ways to pay staff to support and cultivate action work.

5. ***Develop an organizational structure that supports action as well as dialogue***. Some programs that made clear commitments to action began reshaping their structure so that action as well as dialogue could be supported. Some programs reshaped their coalitions, staffing, decision making, and implementation to cultivate action in addition to dialogue.

Not all the difficulties with action had to do with how to produce or sustain it. The next section describes several different points of view about what types of action are worth pursuing when the goal is to take action to end institutional racism.

D. Organizers and participants *lacked agreement* about whether and how to use study circles to take action on institutional racism.

Note: The researchers believe that the findings in this section apply to other institutional changes, in addition to racism. The framework of the study precluded testing that assumption, however.

When participants, organizers, facilitators, and coalition members considered the import and effectiveness of study circles as a tool that can move beyond the personal or interpersonal level to address institutional racism, significantly different points of view surfaced. There were still views that drew the support of a substantial number of people, but there were also strongly held alternative views that merit thoughtful consideration. Much of the researchers' understanding of these prevailing and alternate views came from exploratory focus groups with organizers and participants in Syracuse and Hartford, and interviews with organizers in Fayetteville about study circles and action on racism.

The differences in views are about what constitutes worthwhile action on institutional racism and whether study circles serve as one effective way to accomplish that action. Organizers and participants who met separately in the focus groups tended toward different points of view. Organizers were more likely than participants to report strongly positive views about the approach their programs had taken regarding study circles and action, including action to end institutional racism. A number of participants in the focus groups held negative views of study circles' appropriateness as a tool for addressing institutional racism. Virtually no organizers held this view.

Researchers also saw a moderately strong correlation between race and specific views on the linkage between study circle dialogue and action on institutional racism. People of color were more likely than European American/white people to express impatience and skepticism about the pace of change and the nature of change that study circles could generate and support to end institutional racism.

On a whole other level, how is it that the effectiveness or the outcomes of the Community Conversations on Race are being measured, recognizing that we're talking, in some instances, [about] attitudinal changes, in some instances behavioral changes, and how will we know whether this process has impacted people's lives and in what way? And what's the relationship with this process and economic development, which is one of the things that brought it here?

--European American/white organizer in Hartford

Researchers saw evidence of some other differences in point of view among other groups. Men were more likely than women to express reservations or concerns about study circles and action on institutional racism, and young adults were more likely than older adults to say that the actions linked with study circles in their communities fell short in some way.

In each of the examples that follow, the people who held the ***prevailing*** view were likely to share one or more of these identifying characteristics: organizer, European American/white, adult, female, or resident of a small or mid-sized community. Conversely, it was likely that people who held the ***alternative*** view could be identified by one or more of these characteristics: participant, younger adult, person of color, male, or resident of a larger city. The divisions were not absolute, but reflected tendencies, to which there were always exceptions.

- Many people said that the personal and interpersonal changes experienced in study circles served as a good starting point for action and change on racism. Alternatively, a smaller number of people said that institutional change should take precedence.

- Many people viewed changes in interpersonal relationships among people of different races as the basis for positive changes in larger systems and communities. Alternatively, a smaller number of people viewed such changes in relationships as primarily making European American/white people feel better, without adding any power to bring about institutional change.

- Many people reported that the experience of dialogue about race and racism in itself constituted change, and said they had taken an action by participating in study circles. Alternatively, a smaller number of people suggested that, although dialogue might be a platform for action in some cases, it hardly constituted a worthwhile action in itself.

At least I see a little movement instead of just walls that you couldn't penetrate before.
--Latina/Hispanic organizer in Syracuse

Overall, then, many people asserted that study circles could and did serve as the basis for action on institutional racism. The alternative view was that study circles were an inappropriate and ineffective platform for launching further work on this enormously challenging community problem.

In essence, what constitutes a valued action or change may depend on one's life experience or how much energy one has invested in study circles. Two people in the same community — or even the same circle — who had different experiences, backgrounds, and points of view were likely to assess the significance of study circle dialogue as a change mechanism quite differently.

These early findings about differences in point of view have implications for programs and organizers who are experimenting with different dialogue-to-action strategies.

The impact of study circles is coming, [but it] is slow. I don't believe it's going to be an explosion of harmony.

--African American/black organizer in Fayetteville

Implications of the different points of view about study circles as a tool for addressing institutional racism

1. ***It is important to investigate the differences in viewpoints directly and work to understand their bases***. Organizers will benefit from seeking to understand the different views about study circles and action on institutional racism that exist among citizens they hope to recruit as participants. Best Practices researchers saw little evidence that organizers in most programs knew about or understood the importance of the different views or frameworks regarding action that people undoubtedly brought to the study circle groups.

2. ***It is important to engage study circle participants in considering together their different views about how to address institutional racism***. In order to consider and choose among different approaches to addressing institutional racism, organizers may have to consider even more work than they currently produce. The work would involve engaging citizens in inquiry, deliberation, and dialogue in open, inclusive forums about the possibilities for action and change. This work would stand in marked contrast to the typical approach at present, which is to make implicit decisions about linking dialogue to action based on how the people in the community usually accomplish change.

   The program in Syracuse has begun experimenting with devoting some time and attention to holding dialogue about what constitutes appropriate action. The study

circle program in Syracuse and some programs in other learning sites are also experimenting with structures that would enable them to respond to recommendations study circle participants generate.

It's so fragile that I think we won't know whether study circles made any difference until we hit another [racial] issue . . . and see if we can work our way through it without it becoming as inflammatory and as polarizing as the last incident was.
--European American/white organizer in Fayetteville

Structures such as these may address part of the challenge of fostering open and direct consideration of different notions and viewpoints about linking study circle dialogue with action. The extent and intensity of different views recorded for this study suggest that programs that find ways to tackle this additional work may identify and remove barriers to building effective pathways from dialogue to action.

If the fledgling dialogue-to-action components of the community-wide model are the frontier, then discovering how to address different expectations about action and change in a way that honors difference is the frontier of the frontier. Like all frontiers, this one involves many unknowns, and even a sort of danger because of the many sources of difference and the likely difficulty in reconciling them. The availability of a proven tool — well-run, inclusive dialogue — may offer one way for programs to begin mapping this unknown terrain.

This area of dialogue and action seems more fluid and less fixed than other aspects of the community-wide model, but it is not the only arena in which challenging issues exist. The next section presents some additional issues — and accompanying questions — that merit close attention.

E. The Best Practices study *raised* several additional issues concerning the link between dialogue and action.

1. Scarce resources, participant interests, and program capacity exist together in a tense triangular relationship. Here are the elements of that tension:

   - Participants expressed strong interest in more support for their involvement in action after the dialogue sessions. In addition, given that participants had less information than organizers had about either opportunities for involvement with action or completed improvements, more investment in communication seems needed in most programs.

   - Many initial study circle success stories depended in large part on superhuman levels of organizer commitment that simply cannot be sustained indefinitely. Even in programs committed to the long haul, many organizers reported being stretched almost unbearably, with no ability to add new duties related to either action or communication with participants.

   - Many programs have found that ample, sustained resources such as funding for adequately paid staff are hard to develop for an effort that still has a fuzzy image tied heavily to talk. Yet increased resources are needed for those programs that want to keep their skilled organizers on board and in good health, and particularly for those that want to expand their action components and their communication with participants about action efforts.

   Questions: How do programs find a balance between the sometimes colliding interests of participants and organizers? Are additional resources the only answer to the problems? How do programs develop the additional resources they need? How do programs use volunteer energy appropriately? How do programs determine the

For me as an organizer, in the beginning I was so focused on getting everything up and going that thinking about action coming out of it was almost beyond my physical ability. We see that in organizers all the time. They can't do it. As we have evolved, as I personally have moved along with it, we have lots to learn. What does it take to make it action?

--European American/white coordinator in Maine

It's very hard to develop a multiyear strategic plan for this kind of thing. Part of the reason for that is that what you do later is so much premised on what happens during the process itself. So many possibilities have been created by each round of the circles that in a sense, what comes out of those circles . . . really defines what would be appropriate for a second or a third iteration of this thing. To try to predetermine that almost stifles the very idea of what it is that this is doing.

--European American/white organizer in Twin Cities

amount of resources they need, and whether the results will justify their investment?

2. In a related issue, programs are struggling to discover the right degree of permanency, given their communities and their contexts. In some places, people do not want their study circle program to become a permanent organization, either independent or under sponsorship, because study circles have a profile of fresh energy and the benefit of contrasting with the established, institutionalized ways of doing things. One organizer reported having a preference for study circles structured as an organism rather than an organization. On the other hand, some of the programs that have taken pride in their nature as a series of intensive, short-term campaigns accomplished the organizing work largely through the efforts of a single charismatic leader. When that leader chose not to continue in that role and people wanted to produce the next round of study circles, the key ingredient was missing.

   Questions: How do programs decide on and bring about the right relationship between their study circle effort and their communities' overall power and decision-making structures? What options are best for programs that want to remain flexible and campaignlike in structure? Should programs that are seeking to institutionalize try to maintain some of the energy and appeal of "outsider" change efforts? Can programs that have temporary structures tackle entrenched, institutional issues?

3. Study circle programs are launching change efforts in many shapes and sizes. Often the expectations about who is to change and who is to support change are murky, unstated, even unexamined.

   Questions: With regard to change efforts, how do programs determine the appropriate role for the program itself, for study circle participants, for the coalition members, and for community institutions and decision makers?

4. Citizens and institutions operate on different clocks in terms of the pace of change. In programs where the most obvious changes have largely occurred among

individuals, some people press for more institutional change. In programs that are developing a reputation for institutional change, some people are expecting change to occur faster than even willing institutions can typically respond. Organizers, in turn, are encouraging people to value all types of change, including personal change, which can seem very small.

Questions: How can citizens, participants, organizers, and coalition members deepen their understanding of institutional change, so they can make good judgments about when to have patience as beneficial change unfolds slowly, and when to press harder against institutions' resistance?

5. The change process seems to work differently in communities of different sizes. Obviously, larger communities have more change-oriented groups than smaller ones. Study circle programs in large and small communities may operate in radically different contexts in terms of the opportunities available for citizen engagement. The scale of a community may affect expectations of both organizers and participants in ways not yet discovered. The scale may also have an impact on what study circle programs can most reasonably expect to accomplish.

   Questions: How can organizers fit their programmatic decisions and strategies appropriately to the size of their communities?

6. As programs develop new expectations about change, facilitators may need new skills. Programs that address racism or other complex issues may need to provide special training for facilitators on these topics. Programs that create structures to move participants from dialogue into action may need their facilitators to guide groups through types of problem solving not addressed in the community-wide model.

   Questions: How do programs deal with the need to increase the skills of volunteer facilitators? How do programs attract and retain competent facilitators? How do programs develop and pay for high-quality facilitation development? Do programs need to consider some form

What we need to have is a real vision about what the study circles are supposed to accomplish. . . . I think it will be much more effective if the leadership had the vision that they communicate to their whole constituency . . .
--European American/white facilitator in Fayetteville

It's very frustrating because I feel like there's so many logistical details that need to be attended to. And then there's so much time that needs to be devoted to building the relationship to really kind of promoting and marketing, just really talking people through the ideas behind the project. That doesn't get close to like what kind of commitments we're going to get from people.
--European American/white organizer in Twin Cities

of facilitator compensation in return for expecting facilitators to commit more time to study circles?

7. Though it was addressed in detail above, this list must include the challenges that face programs that address race-related topics. Participants want clarity about what approach the program intends to take, and what the program expects with regard to action. Participants also want more assistance with taking action once their dialogue work generates energy and commitment to change. European American/white participants, African American/black participants, and participants from other ethnic groups — particularly Latino/Hispanic and Asian American — each seem to have somewhat different interests regarding dialogue and action. Participants' and organizers' views are often at variance, as are those of younger and older adults.

   Questions: What strategies and tools can programs develop and use to address the challenge of making wise choices in the complex arena of linking dialogue with action, particularly on race-related topics?

These issues seem enormous, yet programs are already experimenting with approaches to addressing them. Over time, and with sound observation and communication, it is reasonable to expect that programs will identify and refine workable, transferable strategies to address these issues. Those strategies then can gradually become part of the community-wide model. This pattern of experimentation and confirmation through repeated use and adaptation in a variety of community settings fits the approach to model development that SCRC has followed since its inception. Given the extent of unquestioned, valued results the existing model has yielded in the 17 learning sites so far, following a tested, proven course to improve the model makes ultimate good sense.

Chapter I

Chapter III

LINKS TO THE REST OF THIS DOCUMENT

Cover, Acknowledgments, and Table of Contents

Chapter I: Executive Summary

Chapter II: Key Findings

Chapter III: Background and Introduction to this Study

Chapter IV: Summary of Program Characteristics and Strategies

Chapter V: Creating a Broad-Based, Diverse Organizing Coalition

Chapter VI: Recruiting, Training, and Support a Diverse Group of Facilitators

Chapter VII: Recruiting Participants

Chapter VIII: Contributing to Change

Chapter IX: Linking Study Circles with Community Change Efforts

Chapter X: Assessing the Effectiveness of Study Circles as a Tool for Addressing Racism

Chapter XI: Understanding the Impact of the Study Circle Topic

Appendix A: About Best Practices Team Members

Appendix B: Methodology

Appendix C: Demographics

Appendix D: Information about Research and Interview Questions

Appendix E: Site Analysis Charts

Appendix F: Bibliography

Index