

Chapter IV

Summary of Program Characteristics and Strategies

This chapter addresses the basics, providing an overview of the characteristics of the 17 learning sites that made up the “research field” for the study.

This chapter addresses the basics. It provides an overview of the “research field” the 17 learning sites, taken together, presented. It offers a profile of key characteristics of the decisions and approaches used in the 17 learning sites, organized by five sets of factors: background, organization, participation, facilitation, and action-change.

This chapter presents information in aggregate form. To learn more about particular factors in specific sites, see the site analysis charts in Appendix E.

A. Background factors

1. What topics did the study circles address?

- ▶ Eight programs used the Study Circles Resource Center (SCRC) guide that is now called Facing the Challenge of Racism and Race Relations. (Some of these communities addressed the topic of race early on, and used earlier versions of the guide, which had a different name.) Among the eight, at least two used a Spanish language translation on occasion. At least one systematically supplemented the SCRC guide with reading materials offered to participants at every session.
- ▶ One program added a session on economic development for its early rounds on race.
- ▶ One program built its guide on race from scratch.
- ▶ One program developed its own guide on the linkage between education, housing, and race; the guide has undergone several revisions.
- ▶ Three programs used the SCRC Education guide with some modifications developed by the **Calling the Roll** research project sponsored by the Southwest Educational Development Laboratory.
- ▶ One program used both the SCRC Busy Citizen’s Edition of the Education guide and the full SCRC Education guide, in English and Spanish.

11 programs
addressed race
in some way

Programs in 6 learning sites developed their own guides

At least 3 used a Spanish translation

- ▶ One program developed its own guide on the topic of character education.
- ▶ One program used the SCRC diversity guide, Toward a More Perfect Union in an Age of Diversity.
- ▶ Programs in one state used the SCRC guide on the corrections system, Balancing Justice.
- ▶ One program developed a guide on the condition of children for its first round.
- ▶ One program shifted to the SCRC guide on violence, Confronting Violence in Our Communities, after several rounds on race, and then later began using the youth guide, Youth Issues, Youth Voices.
- ▶ One program has begun using the SCRC Busy Citizen's Edition of the Youth Issues, Youth Voices guide in local schools; the program is focusing particularly on racial and ethnic tension.
- ▶ One program developed its own guide for building a community vision, built on the premise of engaging citizens in neighborhoods in planning and carrying out community improvements; the guide borrowed from SCRC materials.
- ▶ In one state, programs have held dozens of rounds of study circles using locally developed guides. The topics include education reform, abortion, environmental priorities, preventing substance abuse, local taxation questions, health, end-of-life issues, sex education, and more. Young people alone in this learning site have conducted study circles on more than 20 different topics.

2. What was the main reason people in the learning sites organized to produce study circles?

Organizers in most learning sites named one particular driving reason for undertaking study circles. In a few learning sites, however, different rounds of study circles grew out of different sets of interests, so the totals below will exceed 17.

- ▶ In 13 learning sites, concern over simmering local conflicts or local events led interested organizers to begin the work to create a study circle program.
- ▶ In two learning sites, a sense of crisis preceded the formation of the study circle program.
- ▶ In seven learning sites, encouragement from a regional, state, or national body contributed to the initiation of study circles.
- ▶ In six learning sites, a sense of having an opportunity to capitalize on an event, a funding source, or an opening in the possibilities for change led to the creation of a study circle program.

3. What are the missions or goals of the study circle programs in the 17 learning sites?

Programs in over half of the learning sites have explicitly stated mission or goal statements, while the others have implicit language used by leaders or printed informally in program documents. The key elements below draw on both the explicit and implicit statements. The mission and goal statements for each learning site typically include more than one key element. Here are the major key elements in the 17 mission and goal statements:

- ▶ To strengthen, build or heal the community, or bridge divisions in the community (four sites)
- ▶ To foster, sponsor, facilitate, or provide the opportunity for dialogue or conversation (eight sites); programs in two additional sites identified improved communication as an important goal
- ▶ To engage citizens or residents in developing plans and recommendations for projects, actions, and policy changes (six sites); in two additional learning sites the mission or goal statement includes improving citizen engagement in government decision making at the local or state level

Did programs use pilot rounds?



Yes (12)
 No (5)

- ▶ To ensure that participation in study circles is representative, broad, inclusive, or more diverse (three sites)
- ▶ To improve race relations or improve understanding and trust across racial and ethnic divides (six sites)
- ▶ To end or eliminate racism or foster racial justice (three sites); in addition, in one learning site the goal includes racial healing, and in another the goal includes “safe, meaningful exploration of issues of race”
- ▶ To make progress on a specific public issue:
 - Improve schools (four sites)
 - Improve the local economy (one site)
 - Restructure the statewide corrections system (one site)
 - Create a “metropolitan citizenship” (one site)

4. Did study circle programs in the learning sites use pilot study circle rounds?

- ▶ Yes, in 12 learning sites, pilot rounds took place for at least some aspect of the study circle work; of these, one program only held a pilot round to test study circles in the high school setting, not in the community.
- ▶ No, programs in five learning sites did not hold any sort of pilot round; one program did not hold pilot rounds for some new rounds and new topics.
- ▶ Programs in two learning sites used facilitator practice sessions as a way to get a little bit of experience with study circles.

5. How many rounds of study circles have taken place in the 17 learning sites?

- ▶ Instead of using large rounds of circles that occur within the same time frame once or twice a year, programs in

two of the learning sites use a “rolling” system of study circles — smaller numbers of circles begin at more frequent intervals across the year; the study circle program at a third learning site is moving to the “rolling” system after completing three rounds.

- ▶ In the state of Maine, so many rounds of study circles and “Reader Roundtables” have happened since 1991 that no one has kept a complete count; it is likely the number of rounds is at least 50.
- ▶ In the state of Oklahoma, two large rounds took place in 10 to 13 communities statewide.
- ▶ Across all the remaining 12 learning sites taken together, at least 34 defined rounds of study circles have taken place.

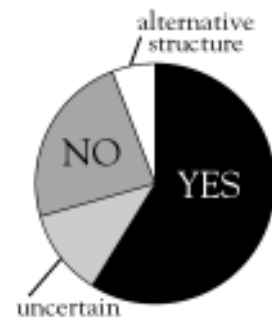
6. Are study circles an ongoing effort in the 17 learning sites?

- ▶ Yes, in ten learning sites, including the state of Maine.
- ▶ No, in four learning sites.
- ▶ The situation is unclear in two learning sites.
- ▶ In one learning site, no future study circles are planned, but the task force/follow-up work that grew out of the first round of study circles is alive and ongoing, as intended.



Programs in Maine have held at least 50 rounds of study circles since 1991

Are study circles an ongoing effort?



- Yes (10)
- No (4)
- Uncertain (2)
- Alternative structure (1)

B. Organization factors

1. How did the programs in the 17 learning sites structure their coalitions?

The study circle program in each learning site built a coalition structure that, in some ways, reflected the present community context and the aims of the program. As a result, though nearly every study circle program was grounded in a coalition of some kind, the nature of these coalition organizations varied considerably from site to site.

- ▶ In six learning sites, organizers based their programs on coalitions of organizational partners. A seventh program began using this model with its third round of study circles.
- ▶ Two programs created coalitions of individuals.
- ▶ Two programs established independent organizations with a board that guides the study circle work.
- ▶ In Maine and Oklahoma, the organizational structure varied by program, depending on the topic. In Oklahoma, League of Women Voters organizations in every participating community took initial responsibility for generating study circles in both rounds held in that state. In some communities the League organizations set up coalitions or steering committees, and in some places they left the organizing to an individual or small team. In Maine, some individual communities created coalitions for a particular round. There was also a statewide coalition with eight local steering committees for the environmental priorities project.
- ▶ In two learning sites, the study circle effort is one component — with its own semiautonomous decision-making structure — within an established “host organization.” Even with this similarity there are differences: in New Castle County, the host organization is the YWCA, and it has built a coalition of organizational partners. In Syracuse, the host organization is the InterReligious Council (IRC). A coalition of representatives of organizations is called the

Advisory Committee of the IRC and guides the study circle work there.

- ▶ In one learning site a coalition of representatives of organizations serves as the steering committee.
- ▶ In one learning site a single organization, the public school system, served as the organizational structure that fostered study circles.
- ▶ In one learning site local government provided the organizational home base for the effort for the first two rounds.

2. How many coalition/board members had direct experience with study circles?

- ▶ In at least 14 of the learning sites, all or most of the coalition members, steering committee members, or board members had taken part in study circles as participants, facilitators, or both; in learning sites with a multi-tier organizing structure (a steering committee plus sponsors or partners who were less directly involved), the amount of participation by the more distant partners is less extensive than with the core group.
- ▶ In one learning site some of the sponsors participated in study circles, and others did not.
- ▶ In Inglewood, where the school district was the sole sponsor, many school staff participated as facilitators and organizers, and the school superintendent was directly involved.
- ▶ In Maine, the extent of coalition or steering committee experience with study circles varies by topic, round, and community.

3. What was the race and gender of the people who initiated study circle programs in the 17 learning sites?

Through reading file materials and asking organizers about how study circles first came into consideration in each community, the

In at least 14 learning sites, all or most of the coalition members have participated in or facilitated study circles; in some communities, participation is a prerequisite for coalition membership

What was the race and gender of key initiators?



- African American/black women (1)
- African American/black men (6)
- European American/white women (12)
- European American/white men (14)

What was the race and gender of key decision makers?



- Men of color (5)
- Women of color (9)
- European American/white men (16)
- European American/white women (18)

team made judgments about who the key initiators were in each learning site. Several sites had multiple initiators.

- ▶ Fourteen of the initiators were European American/white men.
- ▶ Twelve were European American/white women.
- ▶ Six were African American/black men.
- ▶ One was an African American/black woman.

4. What was the race and gender of the key decision makers in the 17 learning sites?

In some learning sites the initiators also played key decision-making roles, and in others they did not. As a result, some people are included in the counts in both Question No. 3 and this question.

- ▶ Across the 17 sites, at least 18 of the key decision makers were European American/white women.
- ▶ At least 16 were European American/white men.
- ▶ Eight were African American/black women.
- ▶ Five were African American/black men.
- ▶ One was a Latina/Hispanic woman.

5. How diverse were the working groups of coalition members in the 17 learning sites?

The people included in the working group are those in the central decision-making body for a study circle program; in some places it is a board, in others a steering committee, and in others a task force or the whole coalition. The working group includes the key decision makers identified in Question No. 4.

The diversity addressed in this question is primarily derived from race and ethnic background. The age and income diversity in a community's study circles are typically not reflected in the diversity of its working group.

- ▶ Ten of the working groups reflected racial and ethnic diversity that was close or equal to that of the population; for three of these learning sites this level of diversity was new, following an initial period of being primarily reflective of the dominant European American/white population.
- ▶ The working groups in three of the learning sites reflected diversity that is greater than that of the population of their communities.
- ▶ In three learning sites, the diversity of the working group was less than that of the population of the community; this meant that the working group included a greater percentage of European Americans/whites than was found in the population in those communities.
- ▶ In three of the communities in Oklahoma involved in the first round on the corrections system, the working groups reflected the diversity of the larger community; in the other ten communities the working groups were less diverse than the communities.

6. How did the programs in the 17 learning sites carry out the work of organizing the effort?

For most learning sites, the answer to this question changed across time. In some places programs had paid staff during the life of a study circle organizing effort only. In others, the program accomplished one or more rounds with all volunteer workers, and then hired and paid staff for later rounds. The figures below reflect what the research team could determine of the staff situation at the time of our last visit to each of the 17 learning sites.

- ▶ In one learning site, volunteers carried out all aspects of the work; in another site, the study circle program relied on volunteers for two rounds before hiring a paid director. In Oklahoma, volunteers with the League of Women Voters carried out the work at the local level.
- ▶ Three study circle programs employed paid, temporary staff people, for the life of the project only.

In 3 learning sites, the study circle work is based in a dedicated, independent, nonprofit, tax-exempt organization [501(c)(3) status]

- ▶ Four programs employed paid, permanent staff people; these staff people typically held the position of program director.
- ▶ In eight learning sites, the people who carried out the staff work for study circle programs served as paid employees of a partner organization or a host organization or agency. In some cases, people were employed on an ongoing basis to devote their energies full-time to study circles. In other sites, people added study circle responsibilities to their other duties in the organization.
- ▶ In at least two of the learning sites, the programs paid for consultants for such services as designing conversation guides and training facilitators.
- ▶ In Maine, which has a lengthy history of study circle development and support, the situation with staff has changed a number of times. At one point staff were paid by the Maine Council of Churches; later staff began to bring in grants to support part of their work. Since The Roundtable Center became an independent organization in 1995, it has paid some staff and consultants at varying levels, depending on the amount of contracts and grants available.

7. What organizational structures served as the base for study circles?

- ▶ In three learning sites, the study circle work is based in a dedicated, independent, nonprofit, tax-exempt organization [501(c)(3) status].
- ▶ In six learning sites, study circles were treated organizationally as a short-term project that did not need a long-term organizational home base.
- ▶ In three learning sites, the study circle program was considered an important ongoing project of existing programs or agencies.
- ▶ In two learning sites, local government took responsibility for providing some support for some aspects of study circle work in those communities.

- ▶ In three learning sites, at least two different intact organizations shared responsibility for providing the organizational structure for study circles.
- ▶ In one learning site, one of the outgrowths of study circles was an organization that applied for and received 501(c)(3) status.

8. What sources of funding sustained study circle programs in the 17 learning sites?

- ▶ Five programs received funding or in-kind services from a single source; the rest have multiple sources of funding and in-kind goods and services.
- ▶ At least nine programs received grants from foundations and nonprofits, including, in some cases, the United Way.
- ▶ At least eight programs received in-kind services from local sources such as schools, local government, and nonprofit organizations.
- ▶ At least eight programs received funds directly from either local government or local school systems.
- ▶ At least six programs received some funding from corporations.
- ▶ At least six programs received funding from project partners.
- ▶ At least six programs received funding from individuals.
- ▶ At least two programs generated income by contracting for services with organizations interested in some aspect of study circles.
- ▶ At least three programs received funding from faith communities.
- ▶ At least one program has received funding from honorariums, cost-only registration and publication fees, and the operating endowment of one of the primary partner organizations.

In 3 learning sites, the study circle program was considered an important ongoing project of existing programs or agencies

12 programs have multiple sources of funding

In at least 7 of the learning sites, the major newspaper for the area offered significant coverage for study circles

- ▶ At least one program has hosted local fund-raising events.

9. What kinds of relationships did study circle programs in the 17 learning sites have with media in their communities?

In two of the learning sites this question is not answerable. Alread is a community of 400 people without local media. The extent of coverage and collaboration in Oklahoma communities varied significantly by community.

In every other learning site some collaboration took place between study circle programs and their local media. Typically, the cooperation and collaboration with newspapers was the most noteworthy.

- ▶ In at least seven of the learning sites, the major newspaper for the area offered significant coverage for study circles; in at least three learning sites, the newspapers also provided ad space and helped with promotion for study circles.
- ▶ In at least five learning sites, media, particularly newspapers, played a key role in the study circle program, often as a project partner.
- ▶ In one learning site, the local newspaper became supportive of the action phase of study circles after attending the action forum.
- ▶ In four learning sites, small, nonprofit, or neighborhood papers — including school media — contributed to publicity and coverage of study circles.
- ▶ At least five programs also developed good working relationships with commercial television, public television, commercial radio, public radio, or cable television.
- ▶ In one learning site, the relationship between the study circle program and local media is not known.



C. Participation factors

1. How many people have participated in study circles in the 17 learning sites?

Study circles in the 17 learning sites had attracted more than 28,000 participants by the time of the final visit to each place. There are two caveats, however. First, some communities gave us good estimates rather than actual counts, because the complexity of managing the study circles, coupled with volunteer staffing, had prevented close record keeping for all rounds. Second, these are not unduplicated numbers from every learning site, so the same person may be counted more than once for participating in more than one round.

2. To what extent did the racial and ethnic diversity among participants reflect that of the communities hosting the study circles?

The figures below reflect rough assessments based on information from coordinators:

- ▶ In six of the study circle programs, the racial and ethnic diversity of participants was similar to that in the community.
- ▶ In seven programs, the diversity in the study circles exceeded that in the community.
- ▶ In three programs, the diversity in the study circles was less than that in the community.

In Oklahoma, the extent of diversity among participants in study circles varied by community. In at least two communities in Oklahoma, about 50 percent of the participants were people of color, which exceeded the percentage of people of color in the community population. In a third community, there was also considerable diversity. The situation in the rest of the communities is not clear.

In three learning sites (Alread — where almost no people of color live; Maine — where people of color constitute less than 2 percent of the state population; Inglewood — where European Americans/whites constitute a small percentage of the

Study circles in the 17 learning sites had attracted more than 28,000 participants in by the time of the final visit to each place

population), the focus on creating diversity in groups depended more upon factors such as age, income, length of time in the community, job, and other factors.

3. To what extent did study circle organizers in the 17 learning sites use explicit strategies to make individual study circle groups as diverse as possible, and to what extent did they succeed?

- ▶ At least 13 of the 17 learning sites used explicit approaches to creating diverse individual study circle groups. Many had significant success; success was tempered in some programs by challenges with transportation and location, by the drop-off in participation either by people of color or European Americans/whites, and by the fundamental difficulties of recruitment. This category includes at least one community in Oklahoma where organizers used approaches to ensure diversity in each group; most of the other communities in Oklahoma did not use these diversity-building strategies for individual circles.
- ▶ In three learning sites, organizers did not make intentional mixing by racial and ethnic background a strategic feature of building individual study circles.
- ▶ In Maine, the situation varied by topic, round and community.

4. Where did study circles take place?

- ▶ For 15 study circle programs, study circle sessions have taken place in a wide array of locations in the community: firehouses, nonprofit organizations, libraries, religious organizations, community centers, youth centers, schools, government offices, and more.
- ▶ For the second round in Oklahoma — *Calling the Roll*, which addressed education — no groups were held in schools.
- ▶ Two programs had extensive study circles in workplaces.

- ▶ Two programs had all study circles at public school buildings.
- ▶ One program that organizes within other organizations held all study circle sessions in the offices of those organizations.
- ▶ In one program, all study circle sessions happened simultaneously in one location.
- ▶ In one program, people were asked at the kick-off to sign up for study circles in “a place not too familiar to you.”
- ▶ In one program, more “neutral” locations were used for round two, after discovering that the locations in the African American/black community or the European American/white community influenced participation.



D. Facilitator factors

1. How do study circle organizers recruit facilitators, and where do they look for good ones?

- ▶ Organizers in every learning site reported using multiple strategies to recruit facilitators; typically organizations used at least four different approaches for facilitator recruitment.
- ▶ The most common approach was to ask like-minded organizations in the community to nominate or supply facilitators; these included religious organizations, nonprofits, and community groups. In several places, organizers concentrated on organizations that would be most likely to identify people of color who would serve as facilitators.
- ▶ At least eight programs relied on recruitment by an individual as one strategy. The main responsibility for individual recruitment varied; in some programs it was assigned to the program director or coordinator, and in others the steering committee or partners such as the mayor contributed to the facilitator recruitment effort.
- ▶ In at least six learning sites, the board, working group, or steering committee members themselves either served as facilitators or took major facilitator recruitment responsibilities.
- ▶ In a small number of learning sites, programs used the following strategies:
 - Partner organizations (five sites)
 - Word of mouth (four sites)
 - Study circle participants (four sites)
 - Schools, including principals, community liaisons, teachers, and school social workers (four sites)
 - Students (three sites)

- Newspaper/radio announcements (three sites)
- Workplaces, especially those doing Total Quality Management or other practices likely to produce good facilitators (two sites)
- Trained professionals (two sites)
- Trained leadership groups (one site)
- Retired people (one site)

2. Did study circle programs in the 17 learning sites use cofacilitators?

- ▶ In eight learning sites, programs intentionally used cofacilitators in every possible case. Typically programs mixed these facilitator pairs by race, and sometimes by gender or other factors. For example, for New Castle County’s workplace study circles on race, organizers worked to create biracial teams of cofacilitators, one from the workplace and one from the community. For some of Lima’s youth study circles, organizers created paired, biracial teams of students with community volunteers or older students with younger students.
- ▶ In three learning sites, programs sometimes used cofacilitators, depending on availability and other factors.
- ▶ In two learning sites, the programs used a facilitator/recorder team.
- ▶ Four programs typically did not use cofacilitators.
- ▶ In one program which typically uses a single facilitator, beginning facilitators are occasionally paired with experienced ones to form a cofacilitator team.

3. How diverse was the facilitator pool compared to the diversity in the study circle community?

- ▶ In 15 of the learning sites, organizers succeeded in recruiting facilitators who were at least somewhat reflective of the community’s racial and ethnic diversity.

Did programs use cofacilitators?



- Yes (8)
- Sometimes (3)
- Used a facilitator/recorder team (2)
- No (4)

Organizers in 6 learning sites provided specific training intended to help facilitators learn how to facilitate dialogue on race, race relations, and racism

For some rounds, some programs also were able to reflect gender and age diversity in their facilitator pools.

- ▶ In two learning sites, the facilitator group was noticeably less diverse than the community at large.

4. How extensive was the investment in facilitator training in the 17 learning sites?

- ▶ In at least nine learning sites, facilitators went through a five- to six-hour training.
- ▶ Two programs used a shorter training — one was four hours long and one was two hours.
- ▶ In three learning sites, training extended to at least 1.5 days, though in some cases the hours were broken up across several different occasions.
- ▶ In one program, the extensive training began with 15 hours developed by the design team; the trainers offered lots of refresher sessions as well.
- ▶ In three learning sites, the length of the facilitator training is uncertain.

5. Did the facilitator training programs address race specifically in the 17 learning sites?

- ▶ In nine learning sites, the programs did not include specific training about race in the facilitator training curriculum, though in Fayetteville, for example, some of the facilitators already had background in addressing issues of race from other training they had completed.
- ▶ For the most part, Alread and most communities in Maine would not have an immediate application for facilitator training on race itself; in each case, however, organizations in these communities recognized a variety of other kinds of difference.
- ▶ Organizers in six learning sites provided specific training intended to help facilitators learn how to facilitate dialogue on race, race relations, and racism.

6. What kinds of support did organizers and trainers provide for facilitators during the course of study circle sessions?

- ▶ In 11 of the learning sites, programs provided some form of structured, ongoing learning and troubleshooting for facilitators during the weeks when study circle sessions were underway. In some places the facilitators had a scheduled debriefing session with a skilled person or with each other after every session. In some places staff or trainers made a specific effort to talk with each individual facilitator after each session or at certain intervals during the round. In one program, trainers structured specific additional training/mutual learning sessions for all facilitators twice during the round, with an additional evaluation session at the round's conclusion.
- ▶ In five learning sites, the organizers and trainers have not created anything formal for facilitator support; in at least three of those, the study circle facilitators have significant facilitation experience from other arenas. In one of these sites, organizers have held an informal debriefing and an informal midpoint meeting of facilitators during various rounds.
- ▶ In at least two learning sites, facilitators organized a regularly occurring peer learning session for themselves.
- ▶ In one site, organizers set up a free-net computer communication line for facilitators during the first round.
- ▶ The situation is unclear in one site.



E. Action-change factors

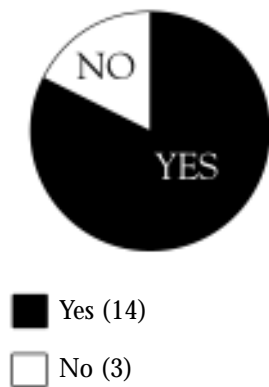
1. How did study circle programs in the 17 learning sites design, describe, and promote a relationship between dialogue and action?

- ▶ In nine learning sites, organizers intended and promoted an explicit link to action; in each of these sites, study circles were organized to encourage participants to take action themselves. In some places participants also developed recommendations and suggestions for policy-making bodies, institutions, and governments regarding change.
- ▶ In four learning sites, including Oklahoma for the *Balancing Justice* round, organizers drew explicit links between study circles and the development of recommendations to policy-making and government bodies; these sites concentrated less energy on encouraging study circle participants to take action themselves.
- ▶ In three learning sites, organizers promoted the dialogue and conversation aspects of study circles, and did not position the study circle programs themselves as action-generating organizations; in each case, however, organizers did develop approaches to encourage study circle “graduates” to participate in action and change activities sponsored by other organizations or groups in the communities.
- ▶ In Maine, most of the rounds of study circles concentrated on the conversation itself; in some rounds, however, the purpose was explicitly to make recommendations to government bodies or to schools, or to engage citizens in direct action following the completion of the circles.

2. Did programs in the 17 sites use action forums to promote study circle participants' involvement in action following the dialogue sessions?

- ▶ Although the experience with action forums is a bit uneven, programs in 14 learning sites used action forums at some point in their history.
 - In Lima, organizers developed the first prototype of an action forum following Lima's first round of study circles on *Confronting Violence in Our Communities* in 1995; Lima organizers have used action forums following some rounds since then.
 - While organizers in Syracuse held an action forum at the end of their first round on issues relating to children, their "rolling" approach to the rounds on race has led them to develop other kinds of large-scale community events.
 - In New Castle County and Hartford, both large metropolitan areas, the experience with action forums has been uneven, and organizers continue to develop new ideas and approaches.
- ▶ In three of the learning sites, study circle organizers have not held action forums.
- ▶ The first several years of study circles in Maine included few rounds that culminated in an action forum. More recently, however, action forums have become more common in Maine, though many took other approaches to ensure an immediate application to a public issue or policy. In particular, the 1999-2000 round in Portland, sponsored by the Community Asset Builders Coalition and aimed at engaging citizens in talking about how young people in Portland are faring, included a well-attended action forum.

Did programs use action forums?



3. Was action or change either an explicit goal or an expected and welcomed outcome?

- ▶ In 13 learning sites, including Oklahoma's *Balancing Justice* round, study circle organizers explicitly aimed for action or change.
- ▶ In five learning sites, including the *Calling the Roll* round in Oklahoma, organizers expected change and action to result from the experiences people would have in study circles, but did not organize them to promote specific pathways to that change.

4. What was the primary target for expected action and change — individuals, organizations, or communities and institutions?

- ▶ In 16 of the 17 learning sites, organizers intended for changes to take place in communities or in major institutions.
- ▶ Organizers in at least 15 learning sites intended for change to take place at the level of individual study circle participants.
- ▶ Organizers in at least 11 learning sites aimed for organizational changes, such as increased collaboration or more equitable workplace standards and practices.
- ▶ In 15 learning sites, organizers aimed for more than one level of change.
- ▶ In one learning site, organizers aimed primarily at community, institutional, and policy change.
- ▶ In one learning site, organizers aimed primarily at developing the critical mass of individuals who would experience change in the level of their active citizenship.
- ▶ In one learning site, organizers aimed at fostering a greater sense of regionalism.

5. What mechanisms did study circle organizers build to link dialogue to action, and how well have these mechanisms been sustained?

- ▶ In ten learning sites, the organizers engaged participants in developing action teams, action councils, or task forces. These action bodies encouraged participants to move further along the action spectrum following dialogue work. A few of these new groups faded away fairly quickly.
- ▶ In at least five learning sites, programs in early 2000 had strong, ongoing action groups, some of which began at action forums and some of which have evolved in other ways; the status and strength of action groups in two additional learning sites is unclear at this time.
- ▶ At least four programs have written action guides to assist study circle participants in moving successfully into action.
- ▶ The study circle program in Hartford has recently hired a full-time action coordinator; study circle staff in at least three other programs spend part of their time consistently fostering the action component of study circle work.
- ▶ The program in Twin Cities relies on its “action partners” — typically organizations — to take the most promising ideas for action and develop them into projects.
- ▶ In six learning sites, programs did not develop action teams, councils, or task forces.
- ▶ Maine has a great deal of complexity, and some study circle programs there have specifically created mechanisms to support action. For example, in the 1999-2000 round in Portland on youth assets — as well as in earlier rounds in South Portland on young people, substance abuse, and education — organizers developed structures to help participants move from talk to action. Similarly, earlier rounds aimed at advising or influencing governing bodies also featured intentional links between study circles and changes in governmental policies.

At least 4 programs have written action guides to assist study circle participants in moving successfully into action

At least 6
programs
published their
own ongoing
newsletter

6. How many of the study circle programs in the 17 learning sites communicate regularly in writing with study circle participants and allies?

- ▶ At least six programs published their own ongoing newsletter; in addition, Lee County Pulling Together in Ft. Myers has a weekly column in the Sunday News-Press, the major newspaper for Ft. Myers.
- ▶ At least three programs published newsletters while sessions were ongoing.
- ▶ One program has plans to develop a newsletter that will be published regularly.
- ▶ At least five programs communicated using other organizations' publications; in some cases the publication belonged to the host organization or a major partner.
- ▶ At least five programs send other periodic mailings to past participants announcing upcoming events or new rounds of study circles.
- ▶ At least two of the programs maintain a website; one program posts information about study circles on a partner's site.
- ▶ Three programs have not concentrated on written communication.

This chapter has presented a summary of the characteristics of the programs in the 17 learning sites during the time of the Best Practices study. Because of the length of the study, characteristics in nearly every site changed as programs continued their work from 1998-2000. Of course, the changes continue now that the report is complete.

This chapter, along with the site analysis charts (see Appendix E), must be treated as a kind of panoramic snapshot of the context in the learning sites during one 18-month period in their programs' development. The characteristics of the programs in the learning sites during the time of the Best Practices study served as the foundation for the researchers' investigation into

the programs' adoption and adaptation of the community-wide model at a particular growth stage in each learning site.



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