

Chapter IX

Linking Study Circles with Community Change Efforts

This chapter addresses Research Question Five: What strategies, methods, or tactics do study circle organizers use to link study circles with change efforts in the community, and which are most effective? Specifically, how are programs linking to individual, collective, and institutional change initiatives on the issues of racism and race relations?

Main points in this chapter:

1. Organizers worked hard to develop a variety of tools and strategies for linking study circles with community change. So far, the efforts are experimental and greatly influenced by specific local conditions.
2. Sound local knowledge was organizers' prime resource in deciding how to link study circles with positive change.
3. Organizers in each community used local knowledge to create a pathway to change that was based on the small group dialogue portion of study circles. Researchers identified at least seven different pathways to change among the learning sites.
4. Organizational structure typically did not seem to influence programs' approaches to change, except that temporary coalitions were less likely than more permanent structures to create mechanisms to support long-term participant involvement in change.
5. The presence of paid staff, on the other hand, seemed to be linked to deeper program investment in supporting action and change.

The preceding chapter described some of the changes to which study circles contribute, particularly those that aimed at improving race relations and ending racism, and suggested some of the ways study circles bring about change in individuals, organizations, and communities. This chapter presents a description and initial analysis of several different approaches programs took to link study circles with action.

This is a report from a frontier. Study circle organizers are in the early stages of developing an array of approaches they can use to link dialogue to successful local action and positive change. Most organizers consider their efforts experimental.

Few people involved with study circles question that the dialogue portion of study circles — the small group conversations — supports change within and among the individual participants as they gain new knowledge and form new relationships. Among people familiar with study circles, however, questions abound about ways to cultivate the connection between study circles and positive community change.

Before describing further this early stage of organizers' unfolding understanding of how to connect study circles to appropriate action, it is important to note the context for that linkage. In each community, the commitment to change began when initiators decided that some aspect of their community would benefit from a study circle program. Typically, organizers launched their programs after assessing (almost always informally) and seeing a need for improvement in one or more of these aspects of community well-being:

- ▶ Equity in community, public, and civic life
- ▶ Policies and practices on particular issues, such as improving education, the well-being of young people, and preventing violence
- ▶ The extent and depth of citizens' engagement in public decision-making and public life

Whatever the interest in change, and whatever the nature of the assessment of what study circles might contribute, initiators in each community saw some need or opportunity and then saw study circles as a useful tool for making progress on that need or

I think this is something that is a tremendous gift to this community, that we've got this process here, and it in itself is going to evolve and change over time, too.

--European American/white organizer in Syracuse

Difficulties in understanding and describing precisely how study circles connect dialogue and action:

1. People used different terms and definitions related to action.
 2. It was easier for people to know and agree that study circle dialogue had taken place than that study circle action had taken place.
 3. People made different presumptions about the appropriate level of action they could expect from study circles.
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opportunity. Interest in positive change drove interest in study circles in each community.

This chapter describes approaches some organizers used to build intentional linkages between the dialogue and action aspects of study circles. The first section describes specific tools organizers used to link dialogue and positive community change. The second section describes seven different pathways to change that researchers identified among the learning sites, each of which is linked to specific tools for change. Here are the sections in the chapter:

- A. Specific tools to link study circle dialogue sessions with change efforts
- B. Across communities, a strong commitment to positive change, and different pathways to accomplish it

A. Specific tools to link study circle dialogue sessions with change efforts

Study circle programs have developed two types of tools that serve as bridges between the initial dialogue sessions and change or action efforts. The first type of tool initiates or launches action by cultivating long-term citizen commitment to and capacity for bringing about positive community change. These tools helped citizens develop skills, commitment, and knowledge, and they contributed to citizen effectiveness. The second type of tool included permanent structures that were intended to sustain study circle programs' action components indefinitely as ongoing features of community problem-solving. Communities developed and used both types of tools as medium- to long-range features of community improvement. The tools for initiating action rested on a presumption that more capable individual citizens and small ad hoc citizen groups would accelerate positive community change. The tools for sustaining action reflected beliefs in the power of people and visible organizations to influence action and positive change over time.

1. Organizers developed tools that initiated change efforts and built long-term citizen capacity.

These tools included strategies for adding to the knowledge, skills, or commitment citizens needed in order to work on community change. The main use of these initiating tools was to engage people in action for positive change after they completed the small group conversation phase of study circles. These tools had a provisional quality, given the early point in the learning cycle of study circle programs: they were somewhat improvised, they were experimental in most cases, and some were either created or used in an impromptu fashion, in response to an unanticipated opportunity or need.

a. Action measurements: Explicit benchmarks and markers of progress

Organizers in some study circle programs placed emphasis on collecting valid information as a basis for change. These organizers worked to get and publicize statistics and other measurements that would equip citizens to develop accurate strategies for community improvement.

- ▶ In Syracuse, organizers intended for their Benchmark Report to be the first in a series of regular, explicit assessments of a number of key areas of racial equity, including employment and income, educational attainment, board membership, entrepreneurship and services, and health, safety, and criminal justice.
- ▶ In Springfield, the new Race Relations Task Force was charged with the responsibility of producing an annual report on the status of race relations in Springfield and the extent to which progress or problems occurred during the reporting period.

b. Action guides: Specific written guidance on moving from dialogue to action

At least four communities produced some type of written guide intended to make it easier for people who participated in study circle dialogue sessions to continue investing effort in community change by taking additional action. Each guide offered something distinctive.

I think that's the beauty of the study circles, is that the action part now becomes the property of the people that are there.

*--Latino/Hispanic organizer
in Aurora*

We will continue to check ourselves on an annual basis through this task force to make sure that we are keeping the issue of race and race relations and diversity before the community, that it's being followed up on, and that there's a continual presence in our community that is seeking to promote and foster racial harmony.

*--African American/black
organizer in Springfield*

People want to get involved. . . . We don't have a written agenda for these people, we don't tell them that this is the outcome we are looking for; we give them the opportunity to get involved in what their choice is — action groups, other . . . we channel them.

*--Latina/Hispanic organizer
in New Castle County*

▶ New Castle County's Study Circle Action Guide begins with five guiding principles:

- Confronting racism is an ongoing process.
- Action naturally follows dialogue.
- Unfortunately, action, like dialogue, can be used to reinforce, rather than challenge, our prejudices.
- Action, like dialogue, is most effective when we see it primarily as a vehicle for working on ourselves.
- Reflection is essential in dialogue and action.

The guide then invites the reader to answer four preliminary questions that serve as a kind of personal inventory of interests and strengths:

- Do you want to act as an individual or with other study circle participants?
- Do you want to act through an existing organization or do something new?
- What skills or resources do you want to utilize?
- How much time can you realistically give to this effort?

The remainder of the guide offers these sections:

- Steps a person can take to get started through an existing organization
- Steps required to start something new
- Opportunities for working to address racism and inequity in a number of different ways through joining with organizations committed to specific missions; examples include "Help educate others about racism and race relations," "Increase your cultural sensitivity through volunteering with ethnic

festivals,” and “Develop one-on-one relationships through volunteering”

- A five-question planning worksheet that the program adapted from the Corporation for National Service; the worksheet guides an individual through steps needed to assess the value of a project idea

The Retired Senior and Volunteer Program of the State Office of Volunteerism in Delaware helped produce this guide. It is attractively presented and contains a number of inspiring, provocative quotes from sources ranging from Martin Luther King, Jr. to Wavy Gravy.

- ▶ The MetroHartford Community Conversations on Race Action Guide shares some similarities with the New Castle County guide and offers some different material, as well. After an introductory letter from Project Director Rosemary Talmadge and Associate Project Director Joyce Hamilton, the guide begins with five guiding principles that are similar to those in the New Castle County guide. As in the New Castle County guide, the MetroHartford guide then includes “how-to” steps for getting started through an existing organization or starting something new. Then the MetroHartford guide offers these sections:

- Information about the six action groups developed out of study circles in the Hartford area, and how to join them
- Information about how to become a facilitator
- A list of volunteer opportunities
- A list of resources — organizations that serve as advocates for equity and organizations such as the Study Circles Resource Center that help citizens become more effective in working on community issues
- The five-question planning worksheet adapted from the Corporation for National Service

When you participate in a study circle, one of the primary things that usually happens is folks don't want to let go and want to find a way to keep going.

--European American/white organizer in Hartford

- A suggested list of readings about race, ethnicity, and equity
 - Information about sponsors of the Community Conversations on Race, along with contact information for its staff
- ▶ The Spring 1999 Action Guide for the Community Wide Dialogue program in Syracuse begins with a list of staff and Advisory Board members and an introductory statement. Then it includes these sections:
- A list of “personal strategies for ending racism” — steps individuals can take in their personal/family lives and in the larger community, including their workplaces
 - A list of community groups working to end racism, including a significant amount of information about each group (mission, projects, training requirement, time commitment)
 - An index of 13 activities aimed at ending racism, listed under categories such as “Advocacy,” “Court Watch,” “Dialogue Participation,” and “Fair Housing Investigation;” each activity is indexed to one of the organizations listed in the previous section
 - A fill-in-the-blank “Personal Contract For Ending Racism”
 - Identification of the main sponsors of Community Wide Dialogue
- ▶ In Twin Cities, organizers used the Amherst Wilder Foundation website (www.wilder.org) to offer some assistance to study circle participants interested in taking action. The relevant parts of the website include these elements:
- A list of some of the community efforts already underway

- The text of a keynote speech from an action event
- A list of “48 Steps You Can Take to End Racism at Home, at Work, and in Your Community”
- A list of action ideas generated at an action forum in November, 1999, together with contact information for the generator of each idea

Because each of these four action guides is quite new, organizers have not yet had enough time to develop a great deal of experience with them or determine whether and how they advance positive change. Each represents a significant effort to respond to participants who want guidance about action opportunities and strategies after they have completed the small group conversation portion of study circles.

c. Action events: Before, during, after, or in addition to study circles

In some learning sites study circle organizers planned and carried out big events as ways to move action forward. Although they varied in their approach, organizers produced large, action-oriented events in order to accelerate positive change, typically by adding to the credibility, appeal, or accessibility either of study circles themselves or of work on a specific issue. These events took different forms and shapes, depending on their main purpose.

i. Kick-off events: Primary goal — Recruit participants and prepare them for action

Colorado Springs, Decatur, New Castle County, Aurora, and Woodridge were among the many programs that used a large, highly publicized, visible event to attract people to participate in study circles. While the main focus was on encouraging people to sign up to participate in circles, some organizers also took this opportunity to promote action. In some cases, organizers announced the date of the action forum at the kick-off event as the first stage in preparing participants for action.

Another thing that we are finding with the action forum is that people in the initial burst of excitement after completing a conversation, they're very motivated and energized and want to get involved, and then later on their schedules get busy, the attention focused to other things . . . either the ideas are too large, or they just don't have enough time . . . They have an interest, but they're just not as available as they were when they'd just completed the conversation.

--Jamaican American coordinator in Hartford

ii. Midstream events: Primary goal — Provide participants with a solid basis for action

Lima organizers held a midstream event during their first round of study circles on violence. The purpose was to provide information about what was already going on to prevent violence in the community. This was intended to help people prepare more knowledgeably for the action event that followed the end of the study circle sessions.

iii. Action forums: Primary goal — Help participants get started in taking action in the community

An action forum is an event that takes place after the conclusion of a round of study circles in many communities. Organizers in 13 of the learning sites held action forums after at least one round of study circles. The main purpose was to make it easy for people who had just completed study circles to take additional action to work for positive community change. Some action forums offered participants the opportunity to form new task forces or work groups. Some encouraged participants to join existing organizations or ad hoc groups sponsored either by the study circle program or by other community groups. Others encouraged participants to present their recommendations to policy-making bodies, such as city government or school boards.

Organizers continue to experiment with formats for action forums. Nearly all feature some form of report or recommendation from at least some of the individual study circle groups. If the number of groups in the recently completed round is very large, organizers may not request representatives from each group to speak at the action forum, in order to keep the program brief and not overwhelm those present. Some action forums have a speaker. Some include a kind of fair, where organizations and initiatives in the community set up tables and offer information about how people can become affiliated with them in order to carry out action steps.

Some of the forums have not lived up to organizer or participant expectations, and no organizers reported

having found the failproof formula for successful action forums. Producing successful action forums in large cities seemed particularly challenging, as did producing successful “repeat” forums after the first one went well. Even so, some organizers believe action forums hold potential for linking study circle dialogue work with action work in the community. Experimentation with format and content continues. Meanwhile, some evidence of the value of action forums has already begun to appear.

- ▶ An action group that began at the first Hartford action forum in late 1998 is now completing its intended project, a publication intended to encourage and inform nonprofit organizations about how to increase the number of people of color on their boards.
- ▶ In Springfield, representatives from individual study circles reported their circles’ recommendations to the mayor and others in government during the action forum that followed the first round of study circles. This resulted in a series of significant changes within government.

iv. Post-study circle events: Primary goal — Use study circles as a launchpad to engage citizens who are not taking part in positive community change efforts

In Section B3 below we describe in some detail a theatrical event in Twin Cities and a series of Diversity Day/Diversity Week events in Lima. These events grew out of study circles, engaged people who had not participated in study circles, and persuaded many of them to commit energy and effort toward the types of positive change that study circle participants identified as needed in the community.

Organizers working on large events such as these constructed programs that would appeal to people in the community because of their presentation of high-profile speakers or other forms of inspiration and entertainment. In order to create more crowd appeal, organizers concentrated on large, fundamental issues or questions that lay behind the topic of their study circles. Organizers

Organizers who are considering whether and how to use action forums in the future are considering questions such as these:

- Will the purpose be to launch new action groups, or to link people to existing community efforts, or both? What is the best way to do each?
 - What responsibility will the study circle program take for following up on change efforts?
 - After the first action forum, what needs to be done differently at succeeding forums?
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We have to be careful not to spawn too many things we can't sustain, and on the other hand, not to squash people's initiatives and energies.
--European American/white organizer in Hartford

of large post-study circle events also invested significant energy and effort in promotion and marketing so that the events would have credibility and magnetism for a significant number of people in the community. Organizers intended for the combination of an impressively large crowd and inspirational themes or speakers to persuade community members to become involved in creating positive community change. In some cases, organizers hoped the event would add non-study circle participants to community efforts on a specific issue. In other cases, organizers also hoped to attract more eventual study circle participants through these large-scale events.

d. Action councils and task forces: Focused efforts, typically short-term

A significant number of learning sites supported the formation of action councils (also known by other names, such as "action groups," "work groups," or "task forces"), typically launching them at the action forum following a round of study circles. Action councils reflected a sense that groups of study circle participants who had completed their dialogue sessions could be important change generators for the community. Action councils typically had these features:

- ▶ Action councils focused on opportunities or problems study circle participants identified either during their dialogue sessions or at the follow-up action forum. Because study circles typically addressed very large, long-term community issues, study circle participants often identified gaps — aspects of community life that had not yet been handled successfully by existing efforts — and organized action councils as a way of closing those gaps.
- ▶ Action councils typically engaged some people not previously engaged in active community problem solving.
- ▶ Action councils intended to influence and involve people and organizations outside the study circle sphere, sometimes through inventive coalitions of community "players" who had not previously collaborated.

Here are a few examples of action council efforts:

- ▶ In Decatur, the Roundtables prepared participants to serve on task forces as part of a major strategic planning initiative sponsored by local government.
- ▶ In Ft. Myers, action councils produced a number of community changes, including the formation of a multiracial community choir, the publication of a cookbook called *Lee County Cooking Together*, and the well-known development of the Dunbar Shopping Center. In addition, an action group has returned to the Dunbar community to hold monthly sessions with neighbors there to foster continued positive change.
- ▶ In Hartford, six action councils formed to address topics such as creating a day of programs and activities aimed at celebrating the different histories and cultures of groups in that region; increasing diversity on nonprofit boards; boosting voter participation by young people and the disenfranchised; and involving more young people in study circle conversations, particularly those about race.
- ▶ In Woodridge, participants at the action forum chose three top-priority interests and formed action councils based on them: socioeconomic bias, empathy, and education.

In programs that launched action councils, program organizers had to decide whether and how to provide ongoing support and assistance once the councils formed. This decision reflected the organizers' views about responsibility for following up on change efforts.

Some programs — typically those produced by a temporary coalition — made the action councils autonomous once they were formed. If the action councils were to be successful, they then needed to form their own leadership, define their purposes, arrange their own logistics, and form their own organizational strategies.

By early 2000 a few programs — typically those with full-time staff — had begun considering how to provide some backup and support for action councils. See Section A2 below for more

As organizers considered their options with regard to forming and sustaining action councils, they addressed questions such as these:

- What support should this study circle program offer to the action councils at the outset? For the long term?
 - What responsibility will this study circle program have for the success or failure of the action councils?
 - What structures and processes will this study circle program develop to communicate with these action councils?
 - How will participants who complete future study circles connect to these action councils?
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There was definitely a waning of interest after the action forum and after the first meeting of the task forces. . . . We felt like it was our role to send out the action agenda to entities and to keep people informed but not to really . . . continue to nurture the task forces.

--*European American/white organizer in Woodridge*

If somehow we would have a way of knowing what other groups were doing and how, at a given moment in time, our particular group might want to relate to what another is doing . . . sometimes more cohesion among the groups might be a good idea.

--*European American/white participant in Syracuse*

information about strategies and approaches aimed at permanent support for action.

This study did not include a significant number of communities with a significant amount of experience with action councils. Although programs in ten places had constructed action councils at some point, in several places the councils either quickly finished their work or dissolved fairly soon after forming. In early 2000 four programs in the 17 Best Practices learning sites had active action councils. Essentially, experience with forming and supporting successful action councils is in its infancy. Like action forums, action councils seem to be features of the community-wide study circle model that will benefit from more knowledge and experience as programs of many different sizes and types try them out and see what works and what does not.

e. Action moments: Timing as an ally for producing change

Organizers in some learning sites chose to use study circles as a way to address a particular situation that seemed ready for change. In the examples below, it is not always clear whether organizers planned in advance for study circles to serve as an action response to an impending crisis or opportunity. Some had a reasonable idea in advance, while in other cases, the timing for change unfolded after the study circle organizing and implementation were already underway.

- ▶ **Expectation in advance of study circles:** The key people organizing Oklahoma's *Balancing Justice* round saw the time as ripe for action and likely to yield positive change more quickly if study circles went well.
- ▶ **Hopes in advance of study circles:** In *Alread*, study circle organizers hoped that conversations between community people and policy makers at the school could bring about a beneficial settlement of differences that had endured for more than 20 years. After the first round of study circles, some of these hopes for positive improvements had been realized.
- ▶ **Optimism in advance of study circles:** In *Inglewood*, the Inglewood Unified School District Superintendent, Dr. McKinley Nash, saw study circles as an opportunity to engage parents more actively in school improvement.

When the study circles lived up to that expectation, the schools built on the increased engagement to involve parents in passing Measure K, a bond issue that brought significant funds to the school district. It is not clear whether Dr. Nash expected the important parental involvement in the Measure K campaign from the beginning, or whether he saw the opportunity for it once the first goal of increasing parent engagement with the schools became a reality.

- ▶ **Timing as an ally:** The much-cited example of restarting the planning for the Dunbar Shopping Center in Ft. Myers seems to be an example of study circles creating the right combination of people, opportunity, and timing to make something happen that was not specifically envisioned when the study circles were planned.

While it may seem odd to name timing as a tool for initiating change, it certainly was a force in the 17 learning sites. In those places where organizers either assessed that the time was right for study circles or knew how to capitalize on an opportunity that presented itself in midstream, beneficial change resulted. Perhaps the actual tool in use in these communities was the strategic sensibility of key organizers. Like most other action tools, this one appeared so few times in the Best Practices learning sites that we cannot do much more than identify it and suggest it merits considerable observation as programs and organizers gain experience with the action components of their work.

2. Some organizers developed tools aimed at sustaining study circle work on action.

The tools described in Section A1 above are aimed at initiating or launching action — organizers and study circle participants developed and used them to move toward action after the conclusion of the initial small group conversations in a round of study circles. These tools tended to be used in specific, short-term situations, sometimes in an impromptu, experimental way. Typically, these programs placed responsibility for following up on change efforts in the hands of study circle participants, either as individuals or as groups.

By contrast, this section presents several tools that organizers developed to sustain and support the action component of study

We're . . . constantly trying to redefine . . . reframe what action means here.

--European American/white coordinator in Hartford

We are operating as a catalyst at this point, to crank it up to a higher level, and encouraging folks to put their resources together.

--Jamaican American coordinator in Hartford

circles. With these strategies, the programs themselves assumed some of the responsibility for following up on change efforts initiated as a result of study circle dialogue sessions.

a. Tools for sustaining action

Programs that committed to supporting action efforts for the long term relied on at least one of three strategies. The researchers could see no constraints that would link these strategies with a particular organizational structure, though the number of examples is too small and the experience too embryonic to be sure about that assumption. It must be noted again, however, that these examples come from programs that have some paid staff.

- ▶ Permanent action generators: In Syracuse, organizers created a way to form action task forces on an as-needed basis as part of the permanent decision-making body (the Community Wide Dialogue Advisory Committee).
- ▶ Permanent action groups: In Ft. Myers, eight action councils began after the first round of study circles in 1997: Education; Strengthening Lee County Pulling Together (LCPT); Economic Development; Media; Special Events; Government; Research; and Community Awareness. A member of the LCPT Steering Committee serves as a liaison to each council.
- ▶ Permanent action staff: In Hartford, organizers added a full-time staff person in 1999 whose job is to provide guidance, encouragement, education, training, and support for the fledgling action efforts there. As of mid-2000, Joyce Hamilton is the only study circle staff person in the 17 learning sites whose full-time job involves assisting with action efforts.

b. The negligible impact of organizational structure

The researchers had presumed that organizational structure would influence programs' ways of structuring permanent change. This expectation was not borne out.

The Best Practices learning sites included programs with these basic organizational structures:

- ▶ Temporary coalitions, with or without paid staff
- ▶ Permanent coalitions, with or without paid staff
- ▶ Independent organizations with tax-exempt, nonprofit status (all had some paid staff)
- ▶ Programs embedded in larger organizations that consider study circles part of their mission (all had some paid staff)
- ▶ Appointed bodies constituted as part of governmental structures (these typically had some staff for whom study circle duties were added to an existing full-time workload)

In each case, organizers used local knowledge of what would work best when they decided on the organizational structure. Other than the obvious finding that intentionally short-term coalitions such as those in Colorado Springs and Woodridge were unlikely to build permanent structures to support action efforts, the fundamental form of the organizational structure itself did not seem to determine a particular approach to action.

By contrast, one factor that did make a difference was staffing. Those programs with some paid staff seemed more likely to have begun working toward long-term organizational support for action efforts than those without staff. Pointing to a next-stage issue, some staff people reported to the Best Practices team that they feared they lacked the time, resources, and stamina to provide effective support for change or action efforts in addition to their already demanding work to produce study circle dialogue sessions.

In summary, this section presented tools that organizers have developed and used experimentally in their efforts to make it easy for study circle participants to move from dialogue to action. The tools for initiating action, two of which are included explicitly in the community-wide model, are built on a presumption that participants themselves will take responsibility for following up study circles with useful community-based change activities. Some programs have also developed experimental tools for sustaining action across the long term. These tools place some of the responsibility for follow-up with the programs as well as the participants. Researchers were surprised to discover that organizational structure did not have a big impact on programs' approaches to linking dialogue with

We're giving an opportunity . . . to take an idea and anchor it in an existing organization or structure system [so] that even when this group disbanded when they completed the project, you have something that's sustainable . . .

--Jamaican American coordinator in Hartford

Toward Competent Communities: Best Practices for Producing Community-Wide Study Circles

I've been consciously moving at a fast pace, because I want to give them something to be hopeful about, but not raise their expectations unrealistically . . . and it's a delicate balance.

--Jamaican American coordinator in Hartford

I don't have the feeling that we're all working together at this point.

--African American/black participant in Fayetteville

change. The presence of paid staff, on the other hand, seemed to be a factor in programs' decisions to support long-term action efforts.

The next section describes seven pathways to change that the Best Practices team identified among the 17 learning sites. Each pathway required reliance on one or more of the tools of change described above.

As the Best Practices study drew to a close, organizers who were developing strategies for linking study circle dialogue with action faced questions such as these:

- What would be the right relationship between study circle participants and coalition members ?
 - How could coalition members learn about study circle participants' ideas and recommendations?
 - How could coalition members keep people in the community — particularly study circle participants — informed about work going on to produce action and change?
 - How could interested study circle participants move from dialogue into work with the coalition on specific action agendas?
 - How much staff resource would it take to make a difference in action resulting from study circles?
 - How could action staff be funded?
 - How could the work of action staff be responsive to successive rounds of study circles, which will have steadily increasing numbers of recommendations for action?
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B. Across communities, a strong commitment to positive change, and different pathways to accomplish it

In order to make decisions about how to link dialogue with change efforts, organizers in every site asked — either explicitly or implicitly — “How do we want our community to be different?” “Where does the power to change our community lie?” “What can we do to make a positive difference?” “What do we have to build on?”

Organizers in each learning site made a set of initial decisions about the best ways to bring about change in their particular communities, including decisions about topic, coalition membership, facilitators, and participant recruitment. Each of these early decisions then had an impact on organizers’ approaches to change.

The Best Practices researchers have analyzed these decision sets and developed an analytical framework that describes most of them. The researchers viewed the results of these decisions as reflecting an implicit “pathway to change.” These practical pathways reflect an analysis of five factors:

- ▶ How community change typically happens in a particular place
- ▶ Where the levers of change and power lie — the “locus of change”
- ▶ Who has to be involved in order to assure that progress would take place
- ▶ Who will take responsibility for following up on change initiatives once they are planned and set in motion
- ▶ What tools, mechanisms, and practices would be most useful

These seven pathways are presented as analytical constructs, not as practices. The pathways are suggestive rather than definitive. Every program in the Best Practices study is not included, and some are included in more than one pathway. The pathways are meant to serve as the first step in identifying the impact of

What we’ve sent out there are not only a whole team of facilitators but we’ve sent out a whole team of participants who now understand what listening is about and respect. So I hope we’ve had a little bit of a ripple in that respect.

--European American/white organizer in Maine

early-stage presumptions and decisions on program structure and results. With time and more extensive experience in more programs, the pathways could evolve into useful analytical categories that could serve as “templates” of conditions, practices, and results useful during the organizing stages of new programs.

The pathways are presented below, with examples of learning sites that developed and used them. The first three pathways reflect decisions to focus on citizens as the primary change implementers. The fourth is mixed, and the last two presume that organizations and institutions will be the primary implementers of change. Although two of the pathways as stated here deal explicitly with race, they could be applied to other topics, as well; the other five pathways already reflect application to multiple topics.

- 1. The critical mass pathway: “If we can generate a ‘critical mass’ of people who have completed study circles, their new understandings, new connections, and new commitments will make them want to behave in more active, positive ways in lots of community settings; over time this will result in community improvement.”**

In some learning sites, organizers believed that noteworthy change would occur after a significant number of people in a community or state had participated in study circles. This belief was based on the notion that participating in study circles changes people’s relationship to each other, to specific issues, and to public life. The presumption was that individuals in many places in a community or state would make different decisions or take actions as a result of the new knowledge, experience, skills, and commitment gained from participating in study circles. Organizers suggested that when all the individual actions or behaviors unfolded in the community over time, the result would be noteworthy change.

This pathway places the locus of change outside the study circle program. The responsibility for initiating and following up on new change efforts is diffused through the community. In a sense, ownership of change is dispersed. Though the study circle program may take steps to encourage and invite participants to become actively involved in change efforts, the

If we keep working with the neighborhood associations and the business sector where Allen Lima Leadership did a pilot with 80-100 people in it, if you can get into all these sectors and do study circles, you’ll have a core of people who are never going to go back.

--European American/white organizer in Lima

mode and intensity with which participants engage in these efforts is up to them.

Aurora, Lima, and the state of Maine are three sites that adopted this pathway, at least in part. In each place, organizers have worked steadily across several years to attract substantial numbers of participants to rounds or batches of study circles.

- ▶ In Lima, where the work on study circles began in 1992, over 4,000 “unduplicated” people had participated in study circles on race, violence, and youth issues by mid-1999. This constitutes nearly ten percent of Lima’s metro population (according to 1990 U.S. Census figures). In order to make study circles more accessible and broaden their appeal, rounds were offered in workplaces, schools, businesses, neighborhood associations, and the community at large. Study circle organizers in Lima presumed that if enough people in the community participated in study circles, the climate and context for change throughout the community would become significantly more receptive to progressive actions, including many that could not be foreseen by either organizers or participants themselves at the time of a specific study circle session. As noted elsewhere in this report, community changes attributed to study circles in Lima include new or rejuvenated social/human services, improved relationships among faith communities, significant changes in some community festivals and celebrations, and improved police-community relations.
- ▶ In Aurora, where community study circles began in 1995, more than 2,000 people in the community of around 100,000 had participated by the fall of 1999. The organizational sponsors of study circles — first the YWCA and now the present independent organization, Aurora Community Study Circles — concentrated on promoting small batches of study circles that launch at frequent intervals during the year rather than producing one or two large rounds annually. Organizers in Aurora drew a linkage between their intention to “grow” a substantial number of study circle participants and their reliance on this “continuous” approach. Community change in Aurora so far includes a significant move toward more equitable news coverage by the daily newspaper, cooperation among three chambers of commerce that

The main progress that you make is when you get this ten people and get them to think a little bit differently about something, and you get the next ten and the next ten and the next ten.

--European American/white participant in Hartford

I think there’s something that connects and builds and it just keeps going and I see that in myself, but I also see it in people that all of sudden experience the model. They come up afterwards and nine times out of ten they want to continue.

--European American/white organizer in Maine

Some of us in the office think what we should be doing is concentrating on high school and college students, the whole notion of teaching kids once again to be an active and committed community member.

--European American/white organizer in Maine

serve different racial and ethnic groups, and extensive work in school settings, particularly an alternative school.

I just believe that, if you're doing your job, you will see all kinds of things unfold. I think if somebody came in and did a study of the community and then went away and came back three years after study circles and did it again, they'd find a different cultural climate, and that's what I think we're looking for. (European American/white organizer in Aurora)

- ▶ In Maine, study circle organizers at the Maine Council of Churches and the independent organization they eventually created, The Roundtable Center, expected that participation by a critical mass of Maine citizens in study circles would bring about significant community and civic change. The four-year involvement with the Lilly Endowment particularly fit with the critical mass pathway because it offered the opportunity to engage young people in study circles in a significant way. Eventually 4,555 young people in several communities participated in study circles and 566 young people were trained and served as facilitators. During the more than three-year grant period, young people chose more than 20 different topics for study circles, which they then facilitated themselves. Special projects included working with young people in detention centers and with young immigrants, and collaborating with the Secretary of State's Office to offer study circles as a way to engage students in the 1996 election, rather than using only political debate. The Maine organizers who most strongly believed in the critical mass approach held out hope that this kind of early training will have a significant impact on civic life as these young people mature and become adult citizens of the state.

Organizers who have chosen the critical mass pathway tended to emphasize action events (Section A1c, page 227).

2. The informed citizen pathway: “If we develop a committed, informed body of citizens, they will bring about beneficial change.”

In contrast to reliance on leaders as a primary driving force for change, organizers in some sites placed as much or more emphasis on developing the skills of interested citizens. This pathway was built on the presumption that citizens can then be problem solvers both on their own and in alliance with leaders in the public and private sectors. Organizers in these sites expected citizens — typically in groups — to be the locus of change following study circles. Programs that took the informed citizen pathway differed in the extent to which they themselves took responsibility for following up on action and change that resulted from the circles.

- ▶ In Decatur, study circles served to launch a deeper and more long-term level of citizen engagement in planning and implementing significant community change. The evidence for the seriousness of this intention lay in the fact that the organizers structured a way for citizens to move from the action forum into longer-term work on action teams and on the city’s strategic planning team. Each of these teams was intentionally inclusive of people of color, a marked change for the community. While no formal, continuing study circle organization existed in Decatur once the Roundtables were complete, the main organizer of the Roundtables continued to play some role in encouraging and supporting the action teams that grew from them.
- ▶ In Inglewood, study circles on education strengthened ties between the schools and the community and sparked parent interest in major school improvements. Organizers sought to link the study circle conversations with action outside the circles through increasing participants’ knowledge about the schools and decreasing their fears of being involved with school issues. Organizers also sought to gather parents’ input on necessary school improvements. Once parents understood the schools’ interests and needs, and their own abilities to contribute, they were equipped for and interested in a direct action campaign to benefit the school district. A significant number of parents who had

I believe that’s the secret to the whole thing, is that if each individual will take upon himself to change, then change will come about, but it still is a slow process.

--African American/black organizer in Fayetteville

I think the impact on the community is going to be evolutionary and it's like dropping a pebble in a pond and having it spread out. It is giving individuals more confidence to speak about the issues.

--European American/white organizer in Twin Cities

participated in study circles took part in a campaign to pass a \$131 million bond measure for improvements in school facilities.

- ▶ In Alread, the 100 citizens who took part in study circles on education then became the locus of change. Both parents and other adults in the community reported that through participating in study circles, they developed a better understanding of what goes on in the school and the kinds of issues that teachers and administrators face. Through forming action committees and making recommendations, participants became part of the decision-making process for their school.
- ▶ In Hartford, New Castle County, and Syracuse, organizers produced written action guides that were intended to make it easy for study circle participants to understand and be interested in making the move from dialogue to action. These action guides were premised on the idea of committed individuals, working alone or in groups, as a significant force for change. (The action guides are described in more detail in Section A1b, page 223.) In each of these places, study circle organizers or staff assumed some responsibility for encouraging and supporting action efforts that grew out of study circle conversations. In a different approach to communicating with participants, organizers in Twin Cities have placed action information on the website of the Wilder Foundation, one of the major sponsors of study circles there.
- ▶ Similarly, action councils, action teams, or action task forces that formed at 11 of the learning sites stemmed from the premise that committed citizens would generate significant change. Most of the study circle programs that helped launch these action groups did not take long-term responsibility for following up on action or change efforts that grew out of study circles.

Tools that made a specific difference for organizers who chose the informed citizen pathway included action guides (Section A1b, page 223), action events (Section A1c, page 227), and action councils and task forces (Section A1d, page 230).

3. The highly visible event pathway: “If we use study circles as the launchpad, we can create highly visible community events that will offer the larger public an opportunity to participate in bringing about change.”

Organizers in some of the learning sites operated from a premise that significant action would occur in communities if more people became involved beyond those who participated in study circles. Organizers worked to create events that conveyed the central ideas and inspiration behind their communities’ study circle programs in ways that would appeal to people unlikely to find study circles themselves appealing. In some cases, the events served as recruitment opportunities for people who had not been drawn in by any other promotional approaches.

These events placed the locus of change in the aggregated individuals who participated in them. The events were intended to inspire and encourage significant numbers of individual citizens to enlarge their vision or change their actions in the direction of positive change.

Responsibility for following up on this type of change effort varied substantially. When study circle programs used events at least partly to stimulate study circle participation, organizers clearly took the primary follow-up responsibility — to deliver a solid study circle program. When programs used events to inspire and encourage changes in behavior, the responsibility for actions that grew out of the event rested with the individuals who were there.

- ▶ In Lima, Ohio, after several rounds of study circles on race had taken place among the congregations of faith communities, organizers decided to broaden the appeal and impact of study circles. Working with local leadership development groups and their allies in the religious community, organizers developed Diversity Day. Diversity Day grew into a week of activities punctuated by large, highly visible, celebratory events at the Civic Center, featuring noted speakers and writers such as Maya Angelou and Gregory Howard Williams as drawing cards. These large focal events at the Civic Center served as inspirational and symbolic occasions that promoted new behaviors with regard to race relations.

One Lima organizer said, “When we did things like the Maya Angelou event, we reached a lot more people than we did with study circles alone.” Large events also helped recruit people who had not been drawn to study circles in other ways. Organizers in Lima usually built in a brief introductory study circle experience at large, celebratory events. A European American/white organizer said, “When people tried out study circles for an hour, in a very easy version, they would come to us and say, ‘We didn’t know this is what you’ve been doing. Why didn’t you say so?’”

- ▶ In Twin Cities, a study circle idea turned into a theatrical event that organizers used to bring about significant change. The group that originated the idea was a fairly mixed suburban group that included members from the Chamber of Commerce, the Black History Committee, the Human Rights Commission, the school district, and more. These study circle participants decided that most of their friends, neighbors, or colleagues would probably not engage with the issues of housing, equity, and race through what they perceived as intellectual, abstract talk in a study circle. The group came up with a different strategy, proposing that what was needed was, as one European American/white organizer said, “some kind of way of dramatizing these issues in ways that citizens can relate to the issue in something like either a media production or a theater production.” The newly appointed director of the Metropolitan Interfaith Council on Affordable Housing (MICAH) took the idea to heart and involved Illusion Theater — described as “a theater group that is good at helping people see things that they otherwise wouldn’t be able to see” — in developing a play about affordable housing. Eventually the play was presented six or seven times, with audiences totaling more than 3,200 people. After the performances, audience members filled out individual commitment to action cards, indicating their interest in becoming more involved in the issue or sharing their new awareness and understanding of issues of affordable housing. The play also had the effect of energizing and persuading significant numbers of suburban church members to get involved with promoting legislation about inclusionary housing and funding for affordable housing. These measures succeeded in the state legislature.

The action tool most important for organizers choosing the highly visible event pathway was the construction of action events themselves (Section A1c, page 227).

4. The workplace pathway: “If we want to accelerate change on issues related to race, then we need to organize study circles in workplaces.”

In some learning sites organizers reasoned that because many people are at work every day, participation in study circles offered in the workplace was likely to be good. Workplaces offered the opportunity to create somewhat diverse study circles, and they were convenient for participants. Many workplaces also offered clear opportunities and problems for working on race. In some places, in fact, workplaces were the most diverse settings potential study circle participants were likely to inhabit, often significantly more diverse than the community at large in which the circles took place.

The presumed locus of change in this pathway is not entirely clear, and may vary within and among workplaces. This pathway could support change at the individual level and among clusters of individuals who decided to take action either in their workplace or in the larger community. Some of those changes could be institutional in nature, either by virtue of alignments participants formed or because powerful leaders who participated chose to make significant changes in the workplaces hosting the study circles and had the authority to bring about change through their own decisions.

The responsibility for following up on change efforts also is unclear. In theory, either the study circle organization, the workplace, or the individuals could take that responsibility. The early workplace study circle programs included in this study reflect a mix of these approaches.

- ▶ In New Castle County, organizers worked with the Delaware Department of Labor to hold study circles on race. By August of 1999, 433 people in the Department had participated. The success in the Department of Labor resulted in two new initiatives: a new round of study circles on gender in the Department of Labor, and an effort to start study circles on race in all state agencies.

So any way we can figure out to get the message out there, to get more people to buy into [and] realize how valuable and important it is, to take it back . . . you'll have more state employees involved in the process. It will take off from this point, I think it will really take off.

--African American/black supporter in New Castle County

I also think that if these things are going on in the workplace and we are going to have some positive effect around race and racial relations, it then is transformed into people's community at the home.

--African American/black supporter in New Castle County

I don't know who got that started, but once one big company makes it a priority then others want to fall in behind because they don't want to be left out; they don't want them to get all this wonderful media and publicity.

--European American/white facilitator in New Castle County

There is a core group of important people in the community who are continuing to work on and think about and talk about these issues, and as long as we have that we're in good shape.

--European American/white organizer in Fayetteville

- ▶ In Hartford, the majority of the study circles on race took place in workplaces. Workplaces were more diverse than the separate cities and towns that make up greater Hartford. Organizers believed that individuals, organizations, and the community as a whole would benefit from the built-in diversity in many workplaces.

Organizers choosing this pathway used action guides (Section A1b, page 223), action events including action forums (Section A1c, page 227), action councils and task forces (Section A1d, page 230), and some aspects of permanent structures such as ongoing action groups and action staff (Section A2a, page 234).

5. The leadership pathway: “If we involve powerful leaders, then community change will be a lot more likely to occur.”

Study circle programs in several places began with the premise that powerful, credible, visible leaders must be in the forefront of study circles in order for the program to have maximum impact in the community. Their approaches to involving and featuring these leaders in visible roles varied significantly, however. Similarly, expectations varied about the locus of change and responsibility for follow-up on change efforts. Four different sets of likely expectations are described as part of the examples below.

- ▶ In Fayetteville, the key study circle leaders included a highly placed city administrator, leaders of the Chamber of Commerce, and the leader of the local NAACP chapter. These leaders agreed that if they took a visible stand on the importance of reducing racism and improving race relations, their unusual alliance would draw attention and serve as the basis for engaging a significant number of citizens in the community. These leaders also agreed to involve other highly visible, powerful leaders in the community in a new entity — Fayetteville United — that had formed to work on race relations. It is likely that, before the round, organizers expected the locus of change to be institutions in Fayetteville, and perhaps the major sponsoring organizations, including the city's Human Relations Commission, which provided some staffing for the effort,

and Fayetteville United, the entity that provided overall guidance for study circles. After the first round, it appeared that organizers expected local government or the other sponsoring organizations, in particular the Human Relations Commission, to take responsibility for following up on any change initiatives that emerged from study circles. Fayetteville United itself has not taken direct responsibility for following up on recommendations from study circles, but rather has pursued related change efforts in the community.

- ▶ In Ft. Myers, key study circle initiators invited highly visible leaders who had credibility and connections to serve on the Steering Committee of Lee County Pulling Together. The Steering Committee, which later became the board, included people with traditional leadership roles, including the publisher of the local newspaper, one of the county commissioners, the minister of a large Unitarian church, the minister of a large African American/black church, a top administrator in the Florida university system, and a city attorney. In addition to their ability to bring legitimacy to the effort and move it forward, these powerful leaders infused the later action efforts with much-needed resources. Each of the eight action councils that formed following the first round of study circles had a liaison from the Steering Committee. The active involvement of Steering Committee members in the efforts of the action councils seems to have made it more likely that change would occur. As one example, when key community leaders became involved in efforts to restart the fledgling Dunbar Shopping Center project, their efforts seem to have contributed to its eventual success. Here, the locus of change and responsibility for follow-up appears to rest with the action councils, with significant assistance from the leaders who serve on the board. A key organizer said, "The structure is there, and people look to us to help them."
- ▶ In Hartford, corporate leadership for change through study circles reflected a community tradition of change efforts originating within the business community. In the case of study circles, the impetus for change came from highly placed, highly visible corporate leaders uniting with the Secretary of State and the national and local heads of social justice organizations to make the case for

I think there's a lot more goodwill among people than they even know what to do with. They need leadership; they need someone to show them *how*. . . . with the proper leadership and programs, you can tap into all of that goodwill and you can make things happen.

--European American/white facilitator in Fayetteville

What we have — in abundance and growing — is human capital. And we have created an incredible network of people who have so many skills and resources that if harnessed correctly, and mobilized well, could really benefit these neighborhoods and organizations directly . . .

--Jamaican American coordinator in Hartford

economic development that included people of color as well as European Americans/whites. Based on group interviews with participants and both group and individual interviews with organizers, it seemed that understandings about the expected locus of change are being worked out between the corporate leaders of the MetroHartford Millennium Project and the people involved in MetroHartford Community Conversations on Race. All seemed in agreement about using study circles as one part of a much broader change effort aimed at racial and economic justice. Researchers heard varying accounts of the corporate leaders' expectations of action groups that had formed at action forums. The organizers of the Conversations on Race seemed quite clear, however, that they expected change to emerge from the action groups. In addition, through the efforts of one of the Millennium Project's leaders, the organizers hired a full-time staff person who assists and supports the action groups so that their ideas and energy result in change. This reflects a decision that the study circle program will take a high level of responsibility for following up on change efforts originating in study circles.

- ▶ In North Little Rock, the leaders who made the difference were school leaders, including the superintendent, school board members, teachers, and parent volunteers. The face-to-face participation of these four types of leaders in both study circles and the action forum had an important impact on averting a threatened teachers' strike. The expected locus of control and responsibility for following up on change initiatives here appeared to rest with these leaders themselves. They invited suggestions and ideas from each other and from citizen participants, and then followed up by bringing recommendations from the study circles into the school board's decision-making process, which now includes three advisory groups.

Action tools that had particular relevance to organizers who chose the leadership pathway included creating action councils or task forces (Section A1d, page 230), using timing as an ally for producing change (Section A1e, page 232), and forming a permanent action staff (Section A2a, page 234).

6. The governance and policy pathway: “If we engage citizens in study circles on public issues, they will advocate before governing and policy-making bodies to make decisions that will cause change.”

Some learning sites worked from a premise that the main power to make a difference on a specific issue or community condition lay in governance structures and policy-making bodies. The programs in these sites encouraged citizens to learn and use strategies for influencing policy or governance decisions. These programs viewed governing or policy-making bodies as the locus of change on a given issue. Few programs have used this approach long enough or successfully enough to reveal much about how programs taking this pathway view their own or others’ responsibility for following up on change efforts. Some early indications suggested that programs typically viewed the decision-making bodies themselves as having some responsibility for follow-up. Additionally, however, some programs have begun examining their responsibilities to monitor policy changes and to share information about the changes with study circle participants and other citizens.

- ▶ When the League of Women Voters in Oklahoma began work on *Balancing Justice* — the statewide round of study circles on the functioning of the corrections systems — interest in the topic was at an all-time high. An article by Patricia Frazier and Matt Leighninger in the summer 1997 issue of *Focus on Study Circles*, an SCRC publication, notes the importance of the involvement of more than 1,000 people in the circles across the state, the participation of legislators, sheriffs, and judges, the quality of the conversations, and the visibility of the effort. All these factors together — plus excellent timing — added up to study circles playing some role in the passage of significant new corrections legislation in Oklahoma.

- ▶ In Twin Cities, some study circle participants took their newfound understanding of the issues into governance arenas by making presentations and explaining, from an informed point of view, how housing, equity, and race interweave to affect life in the Twin Cities area.

The whole idea is to create another level of opportunities that is not generated by the participants themselves, but identified by us, the partners, and the staff, you know, the administrative people for the project, so that we could . . . provide those opportunities for people to support.

--Jamaican American coordinator in Hartford

Organizers choosing the governance and policy pathway used the action measurement tool (Section A1a, page 223), the action councils or task forces tool (Section A1d, page 230) and the tool of using timing as an ally for producing change (Section A1e, page 232).

7. The multilevel pathway toward ending institutional racism: “If we want to end institutional racism, our program needs to support at least two levels of work: first, dialogue that engages participants directly in learning about institutional racism and what they can do about it, and second, a structure that links participants with our own experienced advocates, leaders, and decision makers who have a commitment to institutional change and some power to bring it about.”

For programs committed explicitly to ending institutional racism, early signs suggest organizers believed that at least two organizational tiers (in addition to the coalition or board itself) were necessary. The first tier was the familiar study circles themselves, the small group conversations. The second tier was a permanent organizational structure that had both “inside” and “outside” features.

The second tier could be a standing committee or commission that included community leaders with some authority and responsibility for institutional change, and that either included study circle “graduates” as members or frequently invited the study circle participants to recommend or participate in specific changes. The members of the second tier were inside the study circle organization by virtue of their service on the permanent body. They were outside of it as well because they had strong positions of leadership in some aspect of the community and could influence the directions of institutional change.

The locus of change in this pathway was specific: it remained linked to the study circle program or coalition. Responsibility for following up on change efforts also clearly rested with the study circle program. In fact, the two-tier organizational strategy was one way study circle programs built a structure directly and

specifically intended to take responsibility for action, change, and follow-up.

- ▶ The structure of the Syracuse program changed across time; presently it includes two tiers. The first tier involved the six small group sessions, held on a “rolling” basis. For the second tier, the Advisory Committee created action task forces to address specific instances of institutional racism that study circle participants identified. For example, one action group worked on creating a more equitable retail shopping experience for people of color at a mall. Another group worked on improving equity in mortgage lending.
- ▶ In Springfield, after the pilot round and an initial community round, the mayor appointed a Race Relations Task Force as a second-tier organization to both oversee the production of small group conversations and take the lead in carrying out recommendations emerging from the study circles.

Organizers choosing the multilevel pathway toward ending institutional racism used a wide variety of initiating and sustaining tools. They placed reliance on action measurements (Section A1a, page 223), used all of the various other tools that launch action, and also used the full array of tools that sustain action (Section A2a, page 234).

In conclusion, clearly each of these seven pathways to change built on the same foundation — the small group study circle dialogue sessions. Yet each used that foundation to build and plan a somewhat different pathway to bringing about change and action in communities. Each pathway followed a different perception of the appropriate locus of change, ranging from expectations that individuals would bring about changed communities by changing many individual behaviors to a belief that genuine change would depend on actions by organized, powerful institutions that became informed in new ways as a result of study circles.

The seven pathways were offered as analytical constructs that may serve as the basis for developing scenarios or “templates” that include a certain context, a set of decisions, and some resulting changes. Such templates could be useful to programs in the first stages of organizing.

This chapter has addressed the ways some study circle organizers in the 17 learning sites have built linkages between the dialogue or conversation portions of their programs and the action phase that begins when the round of study circles is complete. The tentative nature of findings in this chapter reflects the fact that ties to action have a very short history in these programs. The model for community-wide study circle programs is grounded in program experience and shaped by it.

Most programs in the study have been pioneering and experimenting with action approaches for less than three years. At this early stage, however, it is clear that programs in the 17 learning sites differed from each other in the ways they organized to bring about change. It is also clear that organizers in all the programs wrestle with the dialogue-change linkage and are experimenting to learn more about how to construct the linkage so that it is sound and productive. Finally, it is clear that the pace of experimentation and learning is too slow and information about unfolding changes too sketchy for some participants, who find the pace frustrating and want the link between dialogue and change to be much more explicit than it is at this point.

As Chapter VIII demonstrated, and as Chapter X will underscore, study circle organizers and participants attributed a great many positive community changes to study circles. Yet the understanding of the mechanisms for bringing about those changes in widely different communities and widely different circumstances is just beginning to emerge. Instead of providing a finished guide to best practices in this emerging arena, this chapter has reflected the first crucial stage of experimentation.



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