

# Chapter VI

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## Recruiting, Training, and Supporting a Diverse Group of Facilitators

**T**his chapter addresses Research Question Two: What are the most effective practices for recruiting a diverse group of facilitators? What are the most effective practices for training and supporting facilitators so that they can do their work effectively?

# **M**ain points in this chapter:

1. Diversity in the facilitator pool mattered a great deal, particularly when a community was racially and ethnically diverse.
2. Programs that set specific targets with regard to diversity typically met them; no program that expressed a commitment to developing a diverse group of facilitators left the diversity to emerge as a chance result of general recruitment.
3. Programs and facilitators appeared to be experimenting to determine the appropriate length and content of training. Even those programs that sponsored two days of training still seemed able to recruit interested facilitators.
4. In addition to training, supportive structures and activities contributed to the quality of facilitation. Of these, the most often used were establishing cofacilitator teams and setting up coaching opportunities for facilitators to access as a round unfolded.

Recruiting and maintaining a solid, diverse pool of skilled facilitators for study circles was a major focus in most of the learning sites and, for many programs, one of the key factors in their success. This chapter presents best practices related to recruiting, training, and supporting facilitators in order to attain the highest quality possible. The chapter is organized into the following sections:

- A. Strategies for specifically recruiting a diverse group of facilitators
- B. Other strategies for recruiting potential facilitators
- C. Techniques for providing quality facilitator training
- D. Mechanisms for developing supportive and evaluative structures to strengthen facilitation

### **A. Strategies for specifically recruiting a diverse group of facilitators**

The following section presents the ways communities targeted their recruitment efforts to ensure that the pool of facilitators reflected the diversity of the community.

#### **1. Set goals for diversity.**

Recruitment for diversity improved when organizers understood the importance of having a diverse facilitator pool, made an explicit commitment to attain facilitator diversity, and then monitored the results of their efforts.

- ▶ In Decatur, organizers set specific goals related to the number and makeup of the facilitator pool, with an initial goal of recruiting no less than one-third facilitators of color.
- ▶ In Hartford, organizers maintained a database containing information on the approximately 250 people who have attended facilitator training, about half of whom have facilitated sessions. The database allows organizers to keep track of the diversity within the total pool, which includes an increasing number of African American/black

We have to look more and more for diversity of facilitators as well, and to make sure that the facilitators are engaged in thinking about some of those larger issues and setting a context for the conversation.

*--European American/white organizer in Twin Cities*

and Latino/Hispanic facilitators, and more women than men.

- ▶ During the planning process in Oklahoma, organizers identified strategies and approaches for recruiting a diverse group of facilitators. Each member of the coalition set specific goals for the number of facilitators he or she would recruit.

## **2. Rely on coalition members to recruit for diversity.**

A diverse organizing coalition offered positive conditions for recruiting diverse facilitators by serving as an example and an indication of the overall effort's commitment to diversity. Its members, by their own diversity, provided direct personal connections to a base of facilitator candidates that also embodied the community's diversity. A number of communities used that diverse base very effectively.

- ▶ In Decatur, organizers explicitly requested that coalition members, who themselves formed a diverse group, recruit facilitators from groups reflecting or committed to diversity in the community. The organizers tapped organizations such as the YMCA and local churches, seeking facilitators. As a result, the facilitator pool in Decatur included some church leaders and some people who were leaders in their professional work.
- ▶ Fayetteville's success at recruiting a corps of facilitators that reflected the diversity in the community grew organically out of the diversity of the organizing coalition. Many facilitators came from the membership and workforce of organizations and associations represented in the coalition, and heard about the opportunity from colleagues or supervisors.
- ▶ In Lima, because the religious organizations that led the effort explicitly included both African Americans/blacks and European Americans/whites, and because people recruited the people they knew, the organizers succeeded in recruiting facilitators of both races.

- ▶ In Colorado Springs, organizers made a concerted effort to recruit capable facilitators from the diverse groups represented in the coalition, often relying on personal recruitment efforts by Steering Committee members. Organizers succeeded in having fairly good diversity in the facilitator pool; approximately 40 percent of the facilitators were people of color (primarily African Americans/blacks, but not exclusively).

### **3. Recruit from organizations with diverse members or a diversity-oriented mission.**

Several organizers also relied on the strategy of looking directly to those organizations and entities within the community that were themselves diverse or that included a commitment to diversity in their mission and had the potential to contribute to the facilitator pool.

- ▶ In Decatur, organizers recruited facilitators from a wide range of diverse organizations in the community and from areas surrounding the community as necessary. Initially the pool of facilitators did not include enough African Americans/blacks, so the organizers recruited facilitators outside of Decatur.
- ▶ In Hartford, the majority of study circles have occurred in workplaces with a diverse workforce. Often human resources directors or human relations directors served as site coordinators for the workplace sessions; organizers noted that fairly often people of color held those positions and were well-positioned to recruit other people of color within the workforce to serve as facilitators for the sessions.
- ▶ In Springfield, Mayor Karen Hasara sent a letter of invitation to nearly 300 organizations that might have an interest in human relations, race relations, and community relations, asking them to get involved in study circles by contributing one or more of their members to serve as facilitators. Because there was significant diversity in the organizations that responded to Mayor Hasara's letter, the initial facilitators were themselves quite diverse.

I drew my initial pool of facilitators from the organizations and groups that we contacted right in the very beginning. We had a diverse pool there, and they kind of self-selected themselves into our pilots, and in order for our pilots to be set up and operate correctly, there had to have been that diversity there.

*--African American/black organizer in Springfield*

- ▶ Some of the communities participating in the statewide effort in Oklahoma recruited facilitators from organizations with racially mixed memberships in their communities.

#### **4. Recruit from study circle participants.**

Study circle sessions themselves, because they are typically structured to reflect the diversity within the community, served as another source for facilitators. Exposure to the study circle model and experience often gave participants a base for moving into the facilitator role.

- ▶ In Hartford, organizers recruited facilitators from the pool of people who had gone through study circles. As a result, they had a facilitator pool that was a mix of European Americans/whites and people of color.
- ▶ In Lima, after the pilot round on race, organizers drew upon participants as a source for new facilitators. This established a pattern in Lima: organizers “plucked” participants from pilot rounds or actual rounds to become trained facilitators for the next round(s). This pattern continued once study circles expanded to include the business and school communities, in addition to religious organizations.
- ▶ Organizers in Aurora also “plucked” participants from study circles to become trained as facilitators.
- ▶ In Springfield, participants in the pilot round and first round, 30 percent of whom were people of color, also later served as facilitators.

#### **5. Use multiple forms of appeal and promotion.**

Some communities relied on multiple strategies to ensure diversity within the facilitator pool as well as for their overall recruitment efforts.

- ▶ Decatur organizers utilized a variety of recruitment processes including word of mouth, newspaper articles, and distribution of flyers through organizations such as the YMCA, United Way, and faith communities.

Face-to-face contact and telephone calls worked best for recruiting African Americans/blacks who were not members of any of the organizations tapped for participation. For example, Mayor Elizabeth Wilson talked with a professor at Columbia Seminary and convinced him to get the word out. Both the professor and his wife served as facilitators. These activities, and the early involvement of leaders from a broad base of organizations in the community, attracted a large number of African American/black facilitators.

- ▶ To get their first batch of facilitators, organizers in Ft. Myers ran articles in the newspaper describing the effort and asking people to nominate themselves or others. The organizers made a special effort to recruit African American/black facilitators through personal contacts and recommendations from African American/black members of the Steering Committee and Working Council. Approximately 20 percent of the Ft. Myers facilitators were African American/black.

In summary, all of the approaches to recruiting specifically for diversity share one feature: organizers acted purposefully. Some organizers or coalitions even set specific goals about the number or percent of facilitators they intended to recruit from each racial, ethnic, or other group that constituted a significant portion of the community's population. All of these specific approaches reflect organizers' commitment to go to sources most likely to include a diverse group of people and their intention not to leave facilitator diversity to chance.



## **B. Other strategies for recruiting potential facilitators**

This section presents the range of effective practices that organizers employed in their general recruitment efforts to secure sufficient numbers of facilitators for study circles.

### **1. Recruit from organizations that have members with expertise.**

In many learning sites, organizers first looked for organizations that might have staff or members already skilled in facilitation, facilitator training, or closely related forms of group process. Organizers sought to both build on existing capacity and ensure quality facilitation.

- ▶ In North Little Rock, organizers identified and took advantage of pools of existing talent. Kathy Morledge, supervisor of middle school education, handled facilitator recruitment and training. She brought to this effort both her own extensive facilitation experience and her ties to a network of people who had received facilitator training. One organizer said: “Kathy knew the teachers who had some base and could pick it up quickly. They did it because she asked.” Kathy said she looked for people with facilitation experience, beginning with those who had been through the Arkansas Leadership Academy, a statewide effort that relies heavily on Wal-Mart’s corporate trainers and training model. Among other activities, the Academy trains people as facilitators and coaches for the leadership teams in school districts. As a result of Kathy’s experience and connections, organizers were able to train people in the study circle model fairly quickly and had a high level of confidence that facilitators would conduct the sessions appropriately.
- ▶ In Colorado Springs, organizers recruited some facilitators from universities in the community. The organizers specifically sought out instructors of multicultural courses.
- ▶ New Castle County organizers recruited professionals with facilitation experience, including those who do human relations work for a living.

- ▶ The study circle Working Group in Fayetteville began its facilitator recruitment efforts by looking at organizations that were doing Total Quality Management, expecting those workplaces would have trained facilitators. Organizers identified three people to serve as facilitators and to help with facilitator training, two from Cape Fear Valley Health Care and one private consultant with expertise in diversity issues. The organizers then looked to other organizations that had people with some facilitator experience, including Ft. Bragg (a military base), Cape Fear Valley Health Care, Fayetteville city government, and North Carolina Natural Gas. The officer in charge of the Equal Employment Opportunity (EEO) office at Ft. Bragg sent out a notice requesting participation from EEO staff. The Working Group took full advantage of the large and diverse cadre of trained personnel at the two armed forces bases in the community.
- ▶ Twin Cities organizers recruited facilitators through existing facilitator organizations/networks. For the initial rounds, they recruited volunteers from many sectors of the community: human rights mediators, special education mediators, members of the Minnesota Churches Anti-Racism facilitation and training teams, and active civic leaders who had facilitation experience. For later rounds, organizers formed a strong partnership with Minnesota Facilitators' Network and the Society for Professionals in Dispute Resolution (SPIDR). Barbara Blackstone, a mediator with the Minnesota Office of Mediation and a member of SPIDR, took leadership for recruiting and training facilitators. The organizers decided to recruit experienced facilitators to help ensure that participants had a positive experience in the dialogues.

### 2. Use personal contact.

This basic strategy relies on the power of personal connection. Effective use of connections underlies quite a few of the other recruitment strategies as well.

- ▶ In Ft. Myers, members of the board reviewed lists of possible facilitator contacts and brainstormed about

The other success is when we know a good facilitator and we have a sense of what really constitutes good facilitation. People who have a grace about them, not just they sit there rigidly neutral but that there's a sense that these are people that are going to protect the community and pull it together . . . the community around the table at that moment.

*--European American/white organizer in Maine*

names to add to the lists. Ann Estlund and other volunteers then followed up with personal contact.

- ▶ By all accounts, Program Director Mary Jane Hollis is the primary person responsible for recruiting facilitators in Aurora. It was clear that Mary Jane is oriented toward encouraging and developing the skills and capacity she sees in other people. At least two people described Mary Jane's approach to them as including an observation that they had some likely talent for facilitation. One said:

I'd gone to a study circle and Mary Jane was the facilitator and Mary Jane had called me and asked me if I would be interested in facilitating because she said she saw something in me that she thought would be very good. . . . Had I not gotten a personal invitation or somebody had not asked me, I probably would not even have thought of it. (European American/white facilitator in Aurora)

Many other facilitators agreed that the personal invitation made the difference in their decision to become trained as facilitators.

- ▶ Organizers in Syracuse developed one-on-one relationships with community organizations and their leaders to help recruit facilitators. One person said:

I know that we've worked very hard to do that and we have gotten materials out to a wide spectrum of people, and a lot of it's been personal one-on-one going to people and asking people if you will recruit for us or to get them themselves. We do have a good multicultural cross section of people in the community that we draw from. My last couple of trainings have been about 50/50 [people of color and people with European heritage]. (European American/white organizer in Syracuse)

### 3. Recruit and train young people.

In at least three learning sites, organizers invested time and resources in recruiting and training young people to serve as study circle facilitators. These young facilitators went on to work with study circle groups composed of their peers.

- ▶ Organizers in Maine have invested a significant amount of time in training young people to serve as facilitators. For the Lilly Endowment youth study circles, 566 young people received training as facilitators and ran the study circle groups. Since the time of the Lilly project, even more young people in Maine have been trained as facilitators.
- ▶ In Lima, organizers have recruited student facilitators from a variety of sources: high school freshmen at Elida High School; students in the S.U.C.C.E.S.S. program, a service-learning class at Elida; and members of the Allen Lima Leadership Youth program. For the pilot round on *Youth Issues/Youth Voices*, organizers paired experienced adults with high school students to serve as facilitators. In later rounds, an experienced adult facilitator worked with a pair of high school facilitators, one first-year student and one student from the upper grades.
- ▶ New Castle County organizers have recruited facilitators from area schools by identifying student leaders. One Latina/Hispanic organizer spoke with excitement about the virtue of training students as study circle facilitators: "With young people it has been amazing, very powerful. Training young facilitators has been miraculous, unbelievable, very big impact at Du Pont High School."

These general recruitment strategies rely on time-honored approaches to getting things done in communities: go to people and organizations that already know how to get things done, and make the appeals to participate personal. These strategies apply to both recruiting specifically for diversity and recruiting more generally. The recruitment of young people serves as a relatively new approach to facilitation and has widespread potential.

I think I've seen a lot of progress in young people who haven't been able to be successful in school and other areas, and they learn this model and they . . . I mean these are not the football stars or the presidents of the council, these are just ordinary kids. I would teach all of them, and they would come out and shine and have this skill that was amazing to their teachers and to all of us, and be able to lead discussions with their peers around a variety of issues.

*--European American/white coordinator in Maine*



I think the practice session gave confidence because you were asking people to take on a leadership role in something they'd never done before . . .

*--European American/white organizer in Alread*

## C. Techniques for providing quality facilitator training

Providing quality facilitator training that is tailored specifically to the study circle topic and the skill level of those being trained sent the message that facilitators constituted an integral part of an important effort. Effective communities devoted significant energy to initial training and then monitored, evaluated, and modified the training they provided.

- ▶ Many of the facilitators in Alread spoke of the training session and the opportunity for the practice session as keys to equipping them to facilitate study circles.
- ▶ In Aurora, organizers concentrated particularly on training facilitators to maintain neutrality and manage conflict. All facilitators, even those who brought some other facilitation experience to the study circle arena, received some form of training before they began facilitating study circles.

We have had a type of facilitator training for anyone who's facilitated, but for example, [in some cases] we had an informal kind of thing, just sort of like what we did tonight when we talked about our understanding of the process, some of the concepts underlying it, "What would you suggest in this or this or this kind of situation?" because the group was small. There were like six people to begin with. Then we had another one where about 13 people came together. And I'll never forget, I asked [someone] if she would come to a training, and she wasn't able to come to that one and so we had a one-on-one in my office. So we've done it in lots of different ways. Last year was really our first kind of all-day formal [training]. (European American/white organizer in Aurora)

- ▶ In Ft. Myers, roughly 100 people volunteered to serve as facilitators over the course of the first two rounds. Many of these volunteers had received prior training in facilitation through their jobs. Organizers provided them with a day and a half of facilitator training, with the first

group trained by Dottie Nassar, who had been part of the study circle effort in Lima.

- ▶ Ohio State University/Lima — in particular its Continuing Education Program — assumed responsibility for training Lima facilitators, providing the “know-how” and experience. Ohio State University/Lima provided frequent training for facilitators, both new and old, so that a “core group” developed.
- ▶ In Twin Cities, organizers offered specific training in study circle content and process, even for experienced facilitators. Facilitator training typically occupied at least one, typically two, full evening or weekend training workshops. In addition, facilitators could choose to take part in special trainings on institutional racism and cross-cultural communication. The first evening usually involved an introduction to study circles and included some hands-on experience. The next day was an all-day training on issues of race and racism. The facilitators chose this format because it gave them a concentrated amount of time to dig into the issues. Referring to the specific focus on race and racism, one of the trainers said:

I think it was very helpful particularly in this area where the issues of racism are not in many people’s daily lives. Or they aren’t aware, they may be there but they don’t see them and they don’t characterize them that way. We had facilitators actually lead the Friday evening training . . . and then the facilitators would do some feedback also. (European American/white facilitator trainer in Twin Cities)

The main trainer noted that Twin Cities facilitator training had evolved over the years. In feedback on the training offered during the first year, the facilitators noted that the trainers had been more focused on the content, leaving the expectations of the facilitators unclear. Even though the organizers had chosen this strategy because they knew they would be working with experienced facilitators, the facilitators who had completed the training called for more focus on learning to facilitate processes specific to study circles.

My suggestion would be that there should be a curriculum for facilitators, that facilitators should carry a certain amount of information and knowledge into their role as facilitators, because what basically they’re asking is for people from diverse backgrounds to facilitate a process that oftentimes is very painful.

*—Hispanic/Latino organizer  
in Aurora*

People were coming to the sessions with a lot of questions, with a lot of baggage, and they were emotionally charged. And part of your responsibility as a facilitator was to allow that emotion to get on the table in the form of a viewpoint, without anybody attacking it — and some of it was worth attacking — and work it to some sort of meaningful conclusion. And so, by charging up the facilitators with this question, we [trainers] had hoped to have them focus on this critical issue of race and also apply these more comparable facilitation skills.

*--African American/black  
facilitator trainer in  
Springfield*

- ▶ In Springfield, many of the facilitators for the first round had two sources of learning about good facilitation: they had participated in a regional training, and they had been in a pilot study circle facilitated by a highly skilled person. Although Sandy Robinson and his key advisors believed that the SCRC training and the example of the facilitators in the pilot groups sustained facilitators in the first round, they feared that the training and knowledge would not hold if a second generation of facilitators were drawn from the first round of study circles.

Since the second round took place more than a year after the first, Sandy decided to invest in skilled facilitator development. He contracted with a racially mixed group of four committed, skilled facilitator trainers to train people in the essentials of facilitation and to prepare them for facilitating conversations on race relations and diversity. The organizers and facilitator trainers worked to find a balance between the trainees' time demands and their need for practice and skills. Organizers asked facilitators in Springfield to invest as many as ten hours outside study circles in learning to be good facilitators. This included training before and during the round, as well as a summary/debriefing after the round ended.

The facilitator trainers built a segment into their three-hour training that required the fledgling facilitators to practice facilitation on a race-based topic. The trainers organized two 30-minute conversations. They built the first conversation around the question "How have you been harmed by racism?" and the second conversation around the question "How have you benefitted by racism?" While some participants objected and resisted this section of the workshop because they felt it was intended just to "stir them up," the facilitator trainers felt confident that this experience would stand the facilitators in good stead in their study circles.

- ▶ Syracuse organizers designed a training that was specific to the goals of the program and combined a focus on group process and facilitation skills with a hands-on/experiential approach. The training now consists of starting a group, dealing with group process situations, and exposing trainees to the different sessions of the dialogues. Because of the nature of the guide that

organizers in Syracuse have developed, when facilitator trainees work their way through the sessions they will be facilitating, they gain experience in talking about and facilitating conversation about race, racism, and related topics. One person described the whole training experience this way:

So we do a lot of exercises, we teach people a lot about group process skills and how to set ground rules, which we feel is a very critical part of doing this. We teach people how to handle situations in the group, like the quiet member or the more talkative member, basic facilitation things. . . . and then we teach the actual sessions, and we talk about why the sessions are structured the way they are and how one session builds upon the other. You start with who we are and then you move into a little bit more about institutional racism and then you move on to the whole notion of white privilege and the notion of allies and then on to individual action and community action. So they build upon each other and we talk about all of that. (European American/white organizer in Syracuse)

In summary, most programs in the Best Practices learning sites invested significant energy in training facilitators. Every program included some type of training that assisted facilitators in understanding the goal of study circles and the type of facilitation that was likely to help achieve that goal. Many programs trained facilitators using the specific guide for that round, either one developed locally or one developed by SCRC. Most emphasized neutrality. At least five programs included a specific focus on how to facilitate conversations on race and racism. Most trained facilitators even if the facilitators were already experienced in other arenas.



Other things that were pretty important about the training were actually looking at and talking about what do we mean by these different topics we'd be discussing, stereotypes, institutional racism, being able to look at them and pick them apart.

*--African American/black facilitator in Syracuse*

Cofacilitation is the way to go, and that ought to be stressed somewhere in this whole process. It puts some balance there, and helps people survive and do a good job in terms of the process.

*--African American/black facilitator trainer in Springfield*

We definitely had some circumstances where we had some doubts about somebody's ability to be neutral. But the training team is so good that they matched those people with a really strong person. Those turned out to be some of our best facilitation teams.

*--African American/black organizer in Springfield*

## **D. Mechanisms for developing supportive and evaluative structures to strengthen facilitation**

Organizers in some communities developed supportive and evaluative structures beyond training to increase the likelihood that facilitators would do their work well. This section describes two elements that improved study circle facilitation: having cofacilitators and providing quality control. In addition, it illustrates several other activities that provided support and encouragement for facilitators throughout the process.

### **1. Arrange for cofacilitators.**

Organizers in some programs used a pair of facilitators for every study circle session. In some cases this stemmed from a commitment to racial diversity: organizers wanted study circles in which both European American/white participants and participants of color saw someone facilitating who was likely to make them comfortable and who could work to build a sense of safety quickly. Many organizers also sought to model diversity through the cofacilitators. Some programs aimed for a male-female mix when possible, for similar reasons. In some of these same programs, as well as in others that did not aim for facilitator pairs that were mixed by race or gender, cofacilitation was aimed at improving quality for participants: one facilitator might be more experienced than the other; one facilitator might be having an "off" day, and the other facilitator might be able to manage with no negative impact on the group. Finally, some programs used cofacilitation, on occasion, as a form of apprenticeship training for new facilitators.

- ▶ In Springfield, the facilitation team and organizers emphasized that their approach to study circles requires cofacilitators. In the pilot rounds, two of the circles had cofacilitators and two of them had single facilitators. All who were involved believed that the cofacilitator option offered significant advantages. The organizers attempted to have cofacilitators for every circle in round one, and had a lot of success, although a few circles still had solo facilitators because of time constraints or other last-minute problems. In the second round, however, every study circle had two carefully matched facilitators.

- ▶ In New Castle County the organizers use a cofacilitation model when possible. One organizer noted that when they used two facilitators, the “comfort level was raised.”
- ▶ In Colorado Springs, Lima, and Syracuse, organizers made sure that two people of different races cofacilitated each group.
- ▶ In Twin Cities, organizers and facilitator trainers typically matched a community volunteer with a professional facilitator as cofacilitators. Organizers helped coordinate facilitator assignments based on availability and preferences communicated by facilitators and by the facilitation needs and interests expressed by the study circle sponsors.
- ▶ In Aurora, organizers sometimes placed new facilitators with more experienced ones to boost skills before the new facilitator “soloed.”

## 2. Plan and implement quality control.

Organizers in programs that have experience with several rounds of study circles often discovered that they occasionally needed to take corrective action to improve facilitation in a struggling group. Organizers described situations in which undertrained or overly enthusiastic facilitators used dialogue sessions to tell their own stories or offer their own views, a departure from the study circle model of facilitator neutrality. The two examples below present alternatives for working on quality control.

- ▶ In Aurora, organizers described situations that required Program Director Mary Jane Hollis to intervene directly, either to coach a facilitator who was not serving the group well or, on occasion, to talk about group concerns with the facilitator and help the facilitator choose to withdraw.

Mary Jane Hollis said her approach to a facilitation problem begins with describing and listening. She said she tells the facilitator she has some concerns and then describes what she has seen or heard. She follows by asking, at each step, whether the facilitator believes the

I felt great strength in having a partner to be able to sound things out with the other person and have another pair of eyes to observe what’s going on.

--*European American/white facilitator trainer in Springfield*

We have an evaluation form for the facilitators. The first person who gets to read that is the facilitator. If the facilitators are told they talk too much, they get the message first.

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

I think that the neutrality piece . . . to me I would talk about it more as balance. I don't think you go in these things trying to be neutral. I wouldn't be here if I were neutral on the issue of race relations. I do respect that I have a role to facilitate and I think that we try to tell these facilitators, "You have a responsibility to facilitate but that doesn't mean you divorce yourself from your own story or your own personal experience as it relates to race."

*--African American/black facilitator trainer in Springfield*

concern is valid. Typically, Mary Jane said, the facilitator is aware of the problem and wants to correct it, either by adopting more skillful practices or by withdrawing as a facilitator. In such situations, Mary Jane encourages the facilitator to take on a different role, usually that of a participant.

- ▶ Syracuse organizers developed a "quality control plan" for facilitators based on a prefacilitation/posttraining facilitator assessment. As the prospective facilitators went through the training, trainers evaluated them on whether or not they possessed the skills necessary to proceed to the actual study circle facilitation. One person described the process this way:

We have an evaluation process that those of us as trainers use, and so each of our trainees are evaluated on a 1-2-3 scale — 1 meaning, "This person is ready, I feel comfortable sending them out right now;" 2 meaning, "They probably could do it, but they need a strong cofacilitator;" and 3 is, "Do not send this person out, get them in a group or put them on a committee, but they're not a facilitator."

We've got a whole checklist: Can they listen, can they set the ground rules in the group? They've practiced all of this during the training so we've had a chance to observe them to see whether they're able to do it or not. If they can't do it — and we've had a few people that it's been hard. They want to go out and do it and it's clear they can't listen to people. They want to go out and tell their story, and yell at people. (European American/white organizer in Syracuse)

When a trainee is not evaluated positively to proceed to facilitation, the program codirector is responsible for meeting with him or her. Typically the program codirector suggests alternative ways for the person to assist with producing study circles.

### 3. Provide ongoing supportive activities.

Organizers used a range of strategies to keep facilitators connected to each other and the overall effort, and to provide the support, encouragement, and learning opportunities that this challenging work requires.

- ▶ Aurora organizers provided regular, steady support as facilitators prepared for and moved through study circles. The trainer or an experienced facilitator called new facilitators after the first session or at the midpoint to see how things were going and to offer suggestions and advice. The organizers also tried to have the program director appear at the first and last session of the study circles, or come to one of the other sessions, to offer support and get a sense of how the group and the facilitator were doing.

Organizers also worked during the training and after it to foster mutual support relationships among the facilitator corps so that facilitators felt comfortable calling on each other. Organizers made sure that as soon as facilitators met they had each other's contact information.

- ▶ As a follow-up to training in Colorado Springs, organizers provided a support team of trainers whom facilitators could call to discuss any problems they were experiencing. Organizers assigned facilitators to a member of a team of professional trainers made up of volunteers from a variety of sources. The Center for Creative Leadership, a well-known organization in the community, provided several professional trainers. Jose Barrera, another member of the professional trainers' team, was also a member of the Steering Committee and an instructor in the Ethnic Minority Studies Program at Colorado University/Colorado Springs. Facilitators reportedly talked openly with their trainers and with individuals on the Steering Committee about their experiences in their groups.
- ▶ In Twin Cities, organizers held an informal debriefing of facilitators following the 1998 circles and an informal midpoint meeting of facilitators during the 1999 sessions. Organizers also created a free-net computer

communication system for facilitators to use among themselves during the first round, but this proved unsuccessful.

- ▶ Organizers in New Castle County paid careful attention to providing active support for the facilitators in two ways. First, they provided extensive “behind-the-scenes” support. Second, organizers developed a facilitators’ group that met biweekly. In each session, facilitators shared stories of what was going on in their groups and how the work was affecting them personally. Organizers reported that this was an effective and powerful way to sustain the facilitators’ work.
- ▶ In Hartford, project staff and trainers provided ongoing technical assistance to facilitators. They often held both informal and formal discussions with facilitators to talk about challenges and successes.
- ▶ Springfield organizers spread the facilitator training and support across the time of the study circles, and held a scheduled wrap-up, evaluation, and debriefing after the last sessions concluded. Facilitators who participated in the training had also committed to two two-hour facilitator support sessions on Saturdays as the study circles moved forward. In addition to these facilitator support sessions, each facilitator expected to hear from a trainer at least once before each of the support sessions.
- ▶ Syracuse organizers developed a support system for facilitators that involved team building between cofacilitators as well as support from program staff and trainers. Organizers developed this response to a perceived need for facilitators to process their own experiences in a way that did not impose on the study circle group. One support person described it this way:

I receive calls from people [facilitators] who say, “Wow, this really hit me where I live and I didn’t know what to do with this.” We give them a chance to talk through the sorts of things that have come up for them. (European American/white organizer in Syracuse)

#### **4. Involve facilitators in design and organizational tasks.**

One way organizers helped to ensure continued participation and feelings of ownership of the process was through expanding facilitators' roles in the overall organizing effort, including improving facilitator training.

##### **a. Enlist facilitators' help with overall process and design.**

- ▶ Organizers in Decatur involved facilitators in the selection of materials and in facilitator training early in the process. Facilitators and site coordinators also used the feedback from the evaluations at the end of each session to inform the organizers about suggested improvements for the next study circle session.
- ▶ In Hartford, the organizers made an effort to involve facilitators in the action efforts of the study circles. During the course of the first round of study circles, organizers held a brown bag lunch/meeting for facilitators at the state capitol. The meeting had several purposes: to find out what people were talking about in the study circles (good stories), to talk about challenges/surprises and how to handle them, to get advice for the next round, to inform facilitators about evaluation, and to enlist help for the action forum.
- ▶ In Syracuse, organizers asked facilitators to keep journals of the weekly sessions containing participants' recommendations for the community and information about what was coming out of the groups. Organizers sought to use the journals to assess the overall impact of the program. Organizers reported that while it has been difficult for them to obtain the journals from facilitators, they plan to continue the activity.

##### **b. Encourage facilitators to help improve facilitator training.**

- ▶ Twin Cities organizers encouraged facilitators to play different and significant roles in other aspects of the effort, including curriculum design and training. Some

facilitators became more involved in providing revisions to the discussion guide. One person said:

I think it's important to recognize the facilitators have a lot more to contribute to this than just moderating the individual conversations. They are able to come back, and they did this in this case, to help make the discussion guide more user-friendly, to think through the kinds of questions that would elicit participation. So they were actually able to play a role and help to think through some modifications for the discussion guide that would get a fuller conversation. They also, because they went to the circles, have some valuable feedback to give about what we'd do differently in the next round of circles than what happened the first round last spring. So there are definitely some roles that facilitators have played, not just moderator. They're advisors too.  
(European American/white organizer in Twin Cities)

- ▶ In Syracuse, organizers created open feedback processes between trainers and facilitators to enhance training. Trainers have been thoughtful in what to include in the training as well as responsive in what to remove if it did not work effectively.

Through all these supportive and evaluative activities, organizers continued to provide facilitators with opportunities to improve their skills. In addition, in some cases, organizers and facilitators worked to expand the facilitators' roles beyond the study circle sessions and into design or process improvement.

In conclusion, it is important to note that organizers in each learning site addressed facilitator recruitment, training, coaching and support in some way. They responded to the SCRC community-wide model with a wide variety of approaches and with varying degrees of investment. Most programs in communities with significant racial or ethnic diversity took some specific steps to recruit a diverse group of facilitators for their circles. Programs also tapped like-minded groups and personal contacts to increase the number of capable facilitators they recruited.

In general, though some organizers expressed concern about not expecting facilitators to commit too much time to training, those programs with the most extensive training requirements reported no particular problems related to training length. The training programs of greatest length typically included training on race, racism, and facilitating conversations on those topics.

Beyond training, programs created other structures and activities to improve facilitation. The most widely used was cofacilitation, considered important both for racial, ethnic, and gender balance and for increased quality. The value of facilitators to study circles did not stop with sessions themselves in some communities, but extended to work on improving the overall program design. In addition, in some cases, the value of a new cadre of skilled facilitators has extended beyond the study circle program itself. In at least one learning site, the study circle program has become a community resource by supplying facilitators for different events or organizations. In another learning site, professional facilitators have discovered a new commitment to their community as a result of their involvement in study circles.



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