

Chapter VII

Recruiting Participants

This chapter addresses Research Question Three: What are the most promising practices for recruiting participants from all parts of the community? What strategies are most promising for recruiting for racial and ethnic diversity? What program elements besides recruitment strategies (such as the issue being considered, the up-front connection to change and action) are most important in recruiting for racial diversity?

Main points in this chapter:

1. Nearly all organizers explicitly planned and took multiple actions intended to create diversity among study circle groups; they experienced different degrees of success.
2. In order to recruit study circle participants who reflected the community's diversity, organizers relied on five main strategies:
 - ▶ Leadership: When leaders vouched for the value of study circles, members of their communities and groups responded.
 - ▶ Affiliation: When a group endorsed and promoted study circles, members were more likely to participate.
 - ▶ One-on-one: Individual invitation and persuasion worked best in many situations.
 - ▶ Media: Newspapers in particular drew wide community attention to study circles and heightened their credibility. Program-generated media (newsletters, brochures, videotapes, websites) also made a difference.
 - ▶ Careful administration: These decisions or actions contributed to participation: wise topic choice, careful database maintenance, good decisions about location and amenities, and use of languages in addition to English.
 - ▶ Events: Kick-off events in many communities attracted attention and added credibility, drawing more participants to study circles.

This chapter presents best practices organizers used to recruit study circle participants. The chapter is divided into six main sections, each of which highlights one aspect of an overall set of strategies. The main sections are:

- A. Building on the organizing coalition's existing affiliations
- B. Working to recruit participants from groups not affiliated with study circles
- C. Creating a high profile for study circles through media and events
- D. Keeping track of participants and maintaining good databases
- E. Adding appeal, reducing uncertainty, and removing barriers to participation
- F. Using multiple recruitment strategies

While all programs aimed at recruiting participants from all parts of the community, some also developed specific strategies for increasing participation by people of color in communities with a majority European American/white population. The following best practices highlight both general recruiting approaches and specific ways programs recruited for racial and ethnic diversity.

A. Building on the organizing coalition's existing affiliations

Study circle organizers turned to natural allies — both individuals and organizations — to recruit participants from all parts of the community. Following the Study Circles Resource Center (SCRC) community-wide model, most organizers looked first to members of their own well-built, diverse organizing coalition, which typically included partners in the community, for help with recruitment. The following sections present recruiting practices that focus on groups, organizations, or individuals that were part of the study circle effort and that recruited from among their own communities of affiliation.

There's no sense having study circles if it is not a diverse group.

--European American/white organizer in Lima

We really looked to the organizations to do it by word of mouth because we felt from the beginning that people weren't going to participate unless they had a personal invitation . . .

--European American/white organizer in Woodridge

1. Focus on groups that are part of the coalition.

- ▶ Twin Cities organizers relied heavily on the active efforts of their partner organizations and sponsors of study circles. Schools and churches in particular played a big part in recruitment efforts. Organizers developed model newsletter announcements, brochures, and invitations for participating sponsors to use.
- ▶ In Colorado Springs, Steering Committee members recognized that they needed to be thoughtful up front about how to reach out to different groups. As the effort developed, members of the Steering Committee recruited for racial and ethnic diversity from among the “participating organizations,” encouraging people who were part of their coalition to bring family and friends to the study circles. Denise Cohen, executive director of Community Conversations on Race (CCR), also sent a letter to the CCR participating organizations explaining the challenges of recruiting for diverse groups. She wrote that the conversations needed “significant additions of people of color, conservatives of all races, and low-income participants.” The letter appealed to organizations to help CCR expand the number of participants overall and engage more people of color; it also asked organizations to identify people who might be interested in participating or to let CCR know of mailing lists or speaking opportunities to help publicize the round.
- ▶ Fayetteville helped ensure diversity among participants by emphasizing diversity in the organizing coalition and by enlisting coalition members as one-on-one recruiters. For example, the Chamber of Commerce, a key partner, elicited excellent responses when it emphasized to its members how important improving race relations was to the community and urged them to consider who from their business should participate in study circles. David Jameson, the Chamber president, indicated that the wording of what he called a “compelling appeal” made it clear to members that the Chamber was a strong backer of this effort and needed members to respond accordingly. Fayetteville organizers also enlisted facilitators in recruiting participants one-on-one.

- ▶ In North Little Rock, organizers drew upon their partners in the effort to recruit participants for study circles on the topic of education. The Classroom Teachers Association recruited teachers. The PTA Council recruited parents. The Chamber of Commerce recruited business people.

2. Rely on leaders or other individuals who are part of the coalition.

As in their overall organizing effort and recruitment of facilitators, study circle programs relied heavily on the efforts of key individuals — within the organizing structure and within actively collaborating and cooperating organizations — to recruit participants. When the core decision-making group itself included members who reflected the community’s racial and ethnic diversity, these members took the main responsibility for recruiting people from their own diverse communities of affiliation. Additionally, in some programs the key organizers were highly visible leaders who had credibility in communities of color and who invested energy in recruiting from those communities. Organizers used several approaches to involving key leaders in recruiting for diverse study circles.

- ▶ Springfield organizers used key leadership team members’ strengths and connections to attract leaders of all races and ethnicities to study circles. An organizer described the overall participant recruitment effort for the first round this way:

We worked with people who had natural connections in those communities, and they promoted, and we had people doing one-on-one, put the brochure in their hand, watch them fill it out, take it back, and bring it in. (African American/black organizer in Springfield)

- ▶ Syracuse organizers encouraged Advisory Board members to recruit participants from their respective constituencies and communities. One person said:

They would go back to their business or their school — and it’s mostly been schools like Syracuse University and the community college — they go back to their place of work and say, “Let’s

They got great community leaders, and that dragged me in.

--European American/white participant in Ft. Myers

I'm confident that with the involvement of myself and other Hispanics that are involved with study circles, we'll be able to come up with some candidates that will be active participants in this whole process.

*--Latino/Hispanic organizer
in Aurora*

do a circle." So they would have the leaders of this program come out and talk to them about what goes into a circle and then put it together.
(European American/white facilitator in Syracuse)

- ▶ Brenda Anderson Bose provided leadership for study circles in Stillwater as part of the Oklahoma statewide effort. She worked with the local university to bring in a diverse mix of participants for the **Balancing Justice** round of study circles. For the second round, **Calling the Roll**, Brenda went out and knocked on doors to bring in diverse representation.

- ▶ Inglewood organizers involved teachers in recruiting parents. One principal enlisted the help of her teachers to contact at least five parents each.



B. Working to recruit participants from groups not affiliated with study circles

In addition to relying upon the organizations and individual leaders already connected to the study circle effort, some programs approached organizations that were not centrally involved in the coalition and made presentations or provided “samples” of the study circle experience to persuade leaders of those organizations to champion study circles. Some organizers also hired recruiters specifically to capitalize on their credibility and connections within communities of color.

1. Make appeals or offer “sample” experiences to leaders of organizations or community groups not yet involved with the coalition.

- ▶ Lima organizers enlisted the support of leaders from groups not yet involved in study circles and asked these leaders to encourage and recruit their groups’ members. The organizers recognized early on that one important feature of such defined groups is that the leaders often serve as excellent channels for communicating with group members. Lima organizers knew that if the leaders bought into the study circle concept, they would then serve as a strong force to inspire and encourage members to take part. As a result, Lima organizers put group leaders at the heart of many of their recruitment strategies. This understanding proved to be a critical piece in Lima’s study circle success.

The initial organizers held several orientation sessions to introduce the program and offer people a sample of the study circle experience. In addition, the mayor and others issued personal invitations, visited congregations, participated in services, and utilized other means of face-to-face contact to recruit faith communities. The organizers’ perseverance paid off when 35 congregations — 23 predominantly European American/white and 12 predominantly African American/black — participated in the first round on race.

Gradually the “base groups” participating in study circles grew beyond faith communities to include businesses, neighborhood associations, and schools. In order to

If we really want to get blacks involved, then we have to get some black leadership, some representation, because surely, the whole concept, or the whole ideal, is that, we’re just going through the motions again.

--African American/black participant in Woodridge

Our ability to get people into the conversations and to host them really seems to be dependent upon them believing that something will change as a result of them being in the conversation.

--European American/white coordinator in Hartford

recruit participants from these entities, study circle organizers again solicited the support of group leaders. As they had done with members of the clergy, organizers held an orientation session for Allen Lima Leadership (ALL) alumni in which they introduced study circles. ALL alumni then volunteered to launch study circles in businesses. This same scenario eventually played out with neighborhood associations, city government departments, and schools. Through the endorsement and buy-in from a diverse group of leaders, study circle organizers were able to recruit large numbers of relatively diverse participants throughout Lima.

- ▶ Organizers in Syracuse relied heavily on “sample circles” as a tool for introducing study circles to groups that had not been involved before.

2. Demonstrate to organizations how study circles fit with their mission or goals.

Organizers in some programs identified likely groups and organizations and tailored outreach toward them in order to recruit participants. Typically, the mission of the organization fit closely with the goals of study circles, and the organization offered some sort of constituency likely to respond with interest. In many of the learning sites, organizers specifically focused on connecting with groups, organizations, or constituencies that seemed likely to share a specific interest in equity, social justice, or building community. Many — but not all — of these organizations concentrated specifically on ending racism or improving race relations. Some focused on identified groups, such as young people.

- ▶ In New Castle County, organizers made presentations to different groups and shaped their message to highlight how the mission of study circles connected with each particular group’s own mission.
- ▶ North Little Rock organizers sent out flyers tailored to specific interest groups and constituent groups, such as the Boys and Girls Club. The organizers made a special attempt to recruit participants from all of the community’s African American/black churches.

- ▶ Decatur organizers involved members of the faith community in hosting, facilitating, and recruiting African American/black participants for the Roundtables.
- ▶ Hartford organizers engaged staff, faculty, and students from different racial and ethnic populations across the community's higher education campuses.
- ▶ Lima organizers recruited participants from defined groups that had a mission of working on community change or promoting unity among all people. The organizers' strategy for recruitment centered around presentations to defined groups of people — religious organizations, schools, businesses, and neighborhood associations. Their presentations included one or more of the following types of appeal:
 - An appeal to the group's purpose, which was related in some way to healing racial divisions
 - Encouragement and cajolery, or, "Everyone else is doing it, so you come along with us and do it too"
 - An offer of programming (four or five facilitated sessions) for groups that often need program ideas

The organizers then cultivated inventive arrangements among defined groups to yield new combinations for obtaining racial and ethnic diversity. For example, the pilot round began as an effort that paired one European American/white and one African American/black faith congregation.

- ▶ Maine organizers concentrated on youth engagement by working with staff who had youth development skills and by seeking as wide a range of venues for youth study circles as possible. For example, Nancy Ansheles worked to make sure that young people from Youth Build and the Maine Youth Center (a juvenile lockup facility) had opportunities to participate in study circles. In addition, she worked with the Institute for Practical Democracy in Portland, a program funded by the police department

A critical issue is to get lower income people to get involved. [The] drawback is that they are not available to do this work, not because they are not interested but just do not have the time. We are struggling to get them involved; they do have a voice and we want them to be involved.

--African American/black organizer in New Castle County

The challenge of establishing trust in minority communities was overcome by persistent contact and proceeding as if Lee County Pulling Together would be successful.

--European American/white organizer in Ft. Myers

There was a lot of things that enticed me to do it, but being invited was the first step, and then from there I really felt obligated to make a commitment to do it.

--African American/black participant in Woodridge

that focused on involving relatively recent youth immigrants in public life in Portland.

3. Hire persons with recruiting expertise.

- ▶ Decatur organizers enlisted and paid a person who knew the community well and could spend time doing one-on-one recruitment with people in communities that are typically underrepresented (African Americans/blacks, low-income participants, youth, and those who are not members of any defined community organization). The recruiter, an African American/black woman, had lived in Decatur for many years and was well known in the African American/black community. She answered questions about study circles and encouraged African Americans/blacks to participate in the process and to trust that dialogue would lead to actions. Many of those interviewed during the site visit complimented the recruiter for bringing vital energy to the work of recruiting a diverse group of study circle participants.

4. Recruit on a one-on-one basis.

- ▶ Two important features stand out from the story of participant recruitment in Springfield. First, the mayor herself, a European American/white woman, championed the study circle effort in a hands-on way and greatly increased the credibility and visibility of the effort. Second, Sandy Robinson, an African American/black man, was able to do some recruitment and promotion that a European American/white person could not have done and was able to recruit a significant number of people of color for the pilot round. After the pilot round, people who initially had reservations about study circles enthusiastically endorsed the process.

In summary, organizers used connections with a diverse mix of leaders and organizations as a main participant recruitment strategy. Organizers developed strategies that included building on leaders' connections to organized groups or to communities of affiliation and linking to groups with similar missions.



C. Creating a high profile for study circles through media and events

Study circles are a new form of community work and benefit from high visibility. Organizers cultivated strong relationships with print media, developed good internal media, and held kick-off events (which typically attracted media coverage) to draw community attention to study circles. The visibility helped boost recruitment not only because it made more potential participants aware of the study circle opportunity, but also because it helped make the point that many people find the study circle idea appealing. Articles in the newspaper, stories on television, a study circle program newsletter or video, and a big kick-off event all signified to people that a study circle program — typically a new and unknown community endeavor — merited consideration.

1. Work with media.

Study circle organizers used both external community media and their own internally generated newsletters, mailings, videos, and websites to promote study circles and attract participants.

a. External community media

Most study circle programs in the 17 learning sites built excellent relationships with local print media. Programs rarely found electronic media as interested or knowledgeable about how to cover study circles.

Major newspapers in at least six sites provided significant coverage of the circles. In some learning sites, newspapers went farther and served as an ally or project partner.

- ▶ In New Castle County, where kick-off events usually took place in conjunction with other major community events, The News Journal, a Wilmington newspaper, provided strong support for recruiting participants. Here are some examples:
 - The newspaper published a year-long series called the “Turning Point,” which marked the 30th anniversary of the National Guard occupation of Wilmington. The series began with a historical

If the publicity is not adequate, you're sunk.

--*European American/white organizer in Maine*

It's important in a one newspaper town like this that you have reinforcement from the editorial board for what people read, and that has been done very effectively.

--European American/white organizer in Syracuse

look at race relations in the city; in a later feature, it covered study circles as a means of enhancing race relations in the city.

- The paper provided other periodic coverage of study circles, and often made use of organizers' press releases to announce major events.
 - The paper provided major sponsorship for a study circle event that featured a talk by Cornel West.
 - The paper provided free advertising (one-quarter page) to recruit participants for study circles.
- ▶ For the third round of study circles in Hartford, organizers ran advertisements in the Hartford Courant. In addition, the paper featured study circles in a cover story in the "Commentary" section. The article contained personal stories from participants about what it had been like to be in a circle, including the ways that talk led to action. This story included information on how to register. Organizers learned that the ads attracted mostly European American/white participants, while the article seemed to attract more people of color.
- ▶ Study circles in Maine benefitted from the strong, eager partnership of the news media, particularly the Portland Press Herald/Maine Sunday Telegram, but also including public radio stations and the Maine Public Broadcasting Network. Beginning in 1994, with the leadership of editor Lou Ureneck, the paper teamed up with the Maine Council of Churches to sponsor Reader Roundtables on public issues. For each topic, for four Sundays in a row, the paper provided information and policy options in a pullout format. During the week, guided conversations took place in many Maine communities. By devising and sponsoring the Roundtables, the Portland Press Herald/Maine Sunday Telegram played a key role in establishing and sustaining the statewide study circle program in Maine through the rest of the 1990s.
- ▶ Organizers in Woodridge took out a three-quarter-page ad in their weekly community newspaper, the Woodridge Progress. The Progress also did a news story about study circles promoting their launch the day before the kick-off.

Both the Progress and Suburban Life, another local publication, published additional articles, including coverage of the action forum.

- ▶ Organizers in Colorado Springs generated a lot of media publicity about the conversations. Radio stations picked up the conversations and television stations kept the effort in front of the community. Support from the local newspaper, The Gazette, was also part of recruitment efforts.
- ▶ Organizers in Ft. Myers wrote a weekly column for the Sunday edition of the News-Press, the major newspaper in the city. Publisher Fritz Jacobi was a key organizer of study circles in Ft. Myers.
- ▶ In Aurora, The Beacon News assisted with recruitment in part by encouraging its employees to participate in study circles. In fact, after participating in a study circle himself, Mike Chapin, the managing editor, required all staff to participate in order to receive raises.

b. Internal media generated by programs

In addition to using external media, organizers typically generated quite a bit of media internally and worked with community media to promote study circles. The forms of media included newsletters, websites, and videos.

i. Newsletters and other print communication

- ▶ Organizers in some programs produced their own ongoing newsletters; examples include Aurora, Ft. Myers, and New Castle County.
- ▶ In some of the sites, organizers produced a newsletter during the time a round of circles took place; examples include Ahead, Lima, Maine, and Oklahoma.
- ▶ In some sites, organizers communicated regularly through placing information and stories in others' publications. In some cases the publication belonged to a host organization or a major partner. Colorado Springs organizers placed

We need to be smart.
We need to market
aggressively and we
need to strike while the
iron is hot.

*--European American/white
organizer in Maine*

We would start with the video because . . . part of the challenge is people have a hard time conceiving what you're talking about, so [if] they can see something tangible, then you can start the conversation.

--European American/white organizer in Twin Cities

reports on their Community Conversations on Race in the Freedom Watch newsletter published by Citizens Project. The Common Focus newsletter in Decatur regularly highlighted study circle work and action efforts. While study circles were underway in Oklahoma, the League of Women Voters used its newsletter to publish necessary information. In Syracuse, news about the Community Wide Dialogues appeared regularly in the monthly newsletter of the host organization, the InterReligious Council.

ii. Websites

- ▶ Programs in Decatur (www.decaturn-ga.com, in the "community" section) and Hartford (www.growthcouncil.com/ccr) maintain pages on host or partner organizations' websites.
- ▶ In Twin Cities, the website for the Wilder Foundation includes some information about community forums in St. Paul that are linked to the Education and Housing Equity Project efforts in Minneapolis.

iii. Videos

Organizers in some sites created videos to help promote study circles.

- ▶ In Lima, video played a big role in promotion. In 1993, a local cable station produced a video of the original pilot groups. This video proved to be key in recruiting some reluctant African American/black clergy to help launch study circles. They had initially felt that their churches served as safe places from racism and that study circles might intrude on that sense of sanctuary, but took a different view after seeing the video.

In 1994, Rift Fournier of SI Communications produced a documentary film about Lima and its efforts to improve race relations in the community, narrated by Lou Gossett, Jr. This video gained wide use outside Lima as organizers in many other

communities showed it to prospective organizers, facilitators, and participants to promote participation.

- ▶ Organizers in Aurora, Syracuse, and Twin Cities also produced videos locally that they used to describe study circles and promote participation.

iv. Other internally generated media

- ▶ Inglewood organizers recruited parents through a variety of communications from the school. Organizers put out many notices and advertisements for parent and community involvement.
- ▶ Organizers in Woodridge also relied on school media, through which they sent information about study circles home to parents. Several school principals targeted specific families and followed up with personal invitations for parents to participate in study circles.
- ▶ Organizers in New Castle County came up with the idea of using big, visible buttons. Those closely associated with the study circles wore these buttons at major events so that anyone with questions could approach them individually. The buttons, together with a study circle logo, created an inviting visibility.

2. Produce kick-off events.

In terms of visibility, kick-off events created attention and focus for study circle programs. The events also served to inspire broader participation, convince people that they would not be alone if they signed up for study circles, and educate people about both the purpose and nature of a study circle.

- ▶ New Castle County organizers, in partnership with coalition members, engaged participants by having big kick-off events. The major events were also linked to significant national observances such as the birthday of Martin Luther King, Jr., the YWCA Week without

I think the best moment was, really, being invited to be part of the group.

--African American/black participant in Woodridge

We had this *big* open house presentation to begin with. So everybody had the same baseline data to start off . . . everyone was pretty much on the same page in terms of information when you started.

--European American/white organizer in Maine

Violence, and the National Day of Commitment to End Hatred. In different years, the New Castle County events featured Maya Angelou, Cornel West, an interfaith clergy panel, and the Reverend Bernice King. At these events, organizers usually conducted a mock study circle to give the audience a flavor of what to expect.

- ▶ Aurora organizers also typically kicked off a round of study circles during the Week Without Violence each year. In 1999, the fall launch unfolded so that in the same week, the YWCA Week Without Violence, the Red Ribbon Week Task Force, and a Character Counts program all collaborated to draw attention to their programs. Aurora Community Study Circles launched a round and offered a dialogue experience during the Friday program that capped the week.
- ▶ Twin Cities organizers held kick-off events and information meetings for sponsors at major public institutions, involving notable, publicly visible community leaders, including people who had experienced participating in a study circle.
- ▶ The Syracuse Community Wide Dialogue created an innovative kick-off series to recruit participants and partners. A kick-off breakfast coupled with neighborhood-based meetings introduced study circles and recruited participants into the Community Wide Dialogues. At the breakfast, nationally renowned speakers and local leaders talked about the need for race dialogue in central New York. More than 550 people attended. Community leaders and organizations pledged their commitment to participate in the dialogue circles. Since the kick-off was in a central location and in the morning, organizers intentionally decided to hold neighborhood kick-offs on four different evenings during the same week, to give those who could not attend the breakfast a chance to hear about the Community Wide Dialogues. Organizers conducted one-hour sample dialogue circles for more than 225 people at these meetings.
- ▶ Organizers in Decatur uniquely used their kick-off event not only to attract participants but also to form diverse study circle groups. Key initiator Jon Abercrombie

arranged the kick-off so that people sat with their assigned study circle site (eight sites total, with more than one group at each). He had all the participants stand up, look around the room to see if there was a site that did not have their perspective represented, and if so, join that site. Jon then reassigned the participants according to the new mix.

This section presented many examples of ways study circle organizers generated visibility for study circles. Organizers in most communities used external media, particularly newspapers, and generated newsletters, videos, or other internal media as well. In several communities, organizers used kick-off events successfully to attract positive community attention and boost interest among diverse populations in study circles.



It seemed to become much more desirable to be a part of it than to not be a part of it. In other words, people seemed to start feeling that they would be left out if they didn't get in on that.

--European American/white organizer in Alread

D. Keeping track of participants and maintaining good databases

Organizers in the 17 learning sites developed and used a variety of monitoring and tracking systems, often aimed specifically at increasing diversity, to encourage participation. In several cases, experienced organizers said they learned the importance of good lists and good databases only after failing to develop them in early rounds. Organizers learned to build and maintain lists that included information about race, gender, age, and other factors reflecting community diversity as a tool necessary for setting and reaching specific targets for specific populations.

- ▶ In Aurora, where new rounds of study circles on race start several times a year, organizers kept a “prospect” list and worked from it steadily. They called people on the list and invited them personally each time a new round was beginning. They also had a system for keeping track of people who expressed interest in study circles but were not able to participate in sessions that were launching soon. A staff person described this approach:

I have a file that we call our “prospective people to participate” and . . . [we] will just simply sit down on the telephone quite often and just call people, tell them when we are starting a new session, how much we would like to have them involved. (European American/white organizer in Aurora)

- ▶ New Castle County organizers made a concerted effort to have racial and ethnic diversity in the study circles. They tracked program participants and learned that 35 to 40 percent of study circle participants were people of color. While they did not always know the racial and ethnic mix in individual groups, the organizers reported that they aimed for at least 30 percent people of color in each study circle.
- ▶ As people in Fayetteville began to sign up for the first round of circles, the Working Group there held brainstorming sessions aimed at identifying the gaps in diversity and devising strategies to fill those gaps. These organizers recognized that only continued attention to

figuring out who had not been reached would help assure that no group was overlooked. The strategies included reviewing lists of organizations committed to fostering equity and diversity to see if any Working Group member knew any of the members and would be willing to make personal contact with those people to gain access to other members. The Working Group members also relied on presentations to identified groups by key leaders and one-to-one recruitment of identified individuals.

- ▶ Organizers in Colorado Springs and Aurora used detailed registration forms to ensure diversity within the study circle groups. Aurora organizers reported that they asked for information about participants' racial or ethnic identity on the registration form and then worked with that information until they had formed a diverse group. In addition to asking about racial and ethnic identity, organizers in Colorado Springs asked participants about their political and social views in an attempt to create balance among the groups.
- ▶ In Syracuse, prospective participants fill out demographic sheets. Organizers then assign people to groups to ensure a balance of European Americans/whites and people of color. Although this has often led to a long waiting list of interested European American/white participants, organizers strive to eventually place all people within a diverse group.

Good databases helped study circle organizers succeed in recruiting participants. Databases that included accurate information about race, ethnicity, gender, and age served organizers well when they worked toward achieving specific levels of participation by specific groups of citizens.



What I found is that . . . the more information I gave them and answered everyone's questions, even those people who were willing to participate right away felt better, they felt like they knew what they were getting into.

--European American/white organizer in Hartford

There had to be either a person or persons or a powerful issue or both to have any strong likelihood of success in attracting people and in framing the issues in a way that was actually helpful to the community.

--European American/white organizer in Maine

E. Adding appeal, reducing uncertainty, and removing barriers to participation

In the 17 learning sites, organizers made decisions and carried out skillful actions that increased the potential for recruiting participants from all parts of the community. Organizers chose topics that held natural appeal for citizens in their own communities and found ways to increase knowledge and reduce uncertainty about study circles as a new, unproven community problem-solving approach. Organizers in many of the learning sites also learned, through experience, how to identify and remove barriers to participation.

1. Choose a topic that fits and attracts interest.

Organizers typically spent some time and involved a number of people in choosing the topic for their study circle program. In some cases, the topic almost chose itself because of events unfolding in the community. In other sites, organizers had time to work out the topic and the exact way to state it in order to take advantage of existing interest. Chapter XI deals extensively with the impact of topic choice on the success of study circles, particularly circles on the topic of race. The present section briefly points out the ways organizers considered the topic as part of their key decision making about recruitment.

- ▶ There was widespread awareness in Decatur that a lot of things were fracturing the community. Many citizens were open to participation in a conversation that held promise for changing the nature of things in Decatur. "Action" was a key concept. Study circle organizers shaped their sessions, called Decatur Roundtables, to meet the specific situation in Decatur, and consistently drew links between the Roundtables and action. They asserted that the Decatur Roundtables would provide the core of participants for the 1999 strategic plan for the city. Each action group formed at the final Roundtables session had "Action" as the first word in its title ("Action and the City Commission," "Action and the Neighborhoods," etc.).
- ▶ Alread organizers believed the topic of education would attract the interest of people from all segments of their small community in a way other topics would not. Alread has a small local school that people think is vulnerable to

consolidation in the name of efficiency, so any move to strengthen the school and support for the school had inherent appeal. In addition, the school was the focal point of old, divisive community decisions, and organizers believed all sides might be ready to find solutions and reconnect. The education topic invited the community to address these interests and concerns, and helped account for the fact that nearly one-fourth of Alread's roughly 400 citizens participated in the first round of study circles there.

- ▶ In Colorado Springs, organizers chose to talk directly about race because they believed the community both needed and wanted to have the conversations. After two rounds on race, organizers reported that while they succeeded in attracting European American/white and African American/black participants in significant numbers, they thought the topic of education might have had more appeal for potential Latino/Hispanic participants.
- ▶ In Woodridge, organizers asked themselves and others what topic would hold widest appeal. Community advisers, including a key African American/black community leader, suggested that the diversity topic would appeal to the greatest number of Woodridge citizens.

2. Offer a taste of the experience to reduce uncertainty.

Organizers used two different approaches to engage potential participants in trying a bit of the study circle experience so that they could understand better what study circles involved. The implied idea is that because study circles are unknown to most potential participants, barriers to participation are likely to include either fear of the unknown or lack of confidence that the approach is worth the time required. Pilot rounds involved a significant trial, while sample circles could take place in one relatively short meeting.

I just happened to see it in the paper, and I volunteered. So, I was not recruited; I wasn't invited, I wasn't solicited. I volunteered. I wanted to do it.

--African American/black participant in Woodridge

You give them a taste of what it's like to participate in a community circle and . . . that sells it, they can really see what it's doing . . .

--European American/white organizer in Twin Cities

a. Pilot rounds

Pilot rounds of study circles gave participants (as well as organizers, potential allies, and facilitators) an opportunity to try out the dialogue approach at some depth. In some cases, organizers structured pilot rounds as shorter versions of full study circles, while in other cases, a pilot round involved a full-blown facilitated experience of four or five sessions. At least ten learning sites used pilot rounds before some or all regular study circle rounds.

- ▶ In Lima, organizers conducted pilot rounds before a new topic was introduced or before a new group such as businesses or neighborhood associations participated. The pilots not only allowed organizers to make any necessary changes, but also energized participants and stirred community curiosity. Perhaps the most important pilot round was the very first, held between Zion Lutheran and St. Paul AME churches. As the number of participants in the pilot circles grew and as changes started to occur as a direct result of the interaction between the two congregations, word about the pilot's success spread throughout the community and began to attract attention to the study circle program. Subsequent pilot rounds had a similar effect of creating excitement and interest, through which organizers were able to recruit participants from all parts of the community.

b. Sample circles

Organizers in several of the learning sites helped potential participants understand the nature of study circles by leading people through a short sample of facilitated dialogue, typically using questions drawn from the first session of a study circle.

- ▶ In Syracuse, organizers used sample circles in a particularly systematic and strategic way to boost participation. Organizers have engaged more than 1,000 people in sample dialogues at a variety of settings — community centers, schools, colleges, and other community meeting places.
- ▶ In Twin Cities, the League of Human Rights Commission conducted a "circle sample." Many of the organizational partners in the Community Circle Collaborative also

conducted sample circles to recruit participants from among their members.

3. Use languages other than English.

In order to remove an important barrier to participation, organizers in some of the learning sites organized study circles in languages other than English.

- ▶ Organizers in Hartford and Aurora sponsored study circles in Spanish for Latino/Hispanic participants.
- ▶ In Inglewood, organizers used Spanish in some circles, with interpreters.
- ▶ In Twin Cities, organizers used an interpreter for study circles with members of the Hmong community.

4. Select a location that works.

In some of the learning sites, organizers recognized that unfamiliar locations and the need to go unusual distances created barriers to participation they wanted to avoid. They made and carried out logistical decisions that encouraged participation instead of inhibiting it. In other learning sites, organizers selected locations that held the most potential for creating diverse study circle groups.

- ▶ Decatur organizers held Roundtables in all parts of the community and encouraged people to attend a session outside of their immediate neighborhood. According to one organizer:

Really deliberate efforts were made to get people to be in another part of the city. People recognized the difficulty of having a real conversation with a white person about the place black people lived. (European American/white organizer in Decatur)

- ▶ In Ft. Myers, organizers experienced some difficulties in maintaining a racial balance among the groups in the first round because many European Americans/whites would not go into the African American/black community at night, and vice versa. Key organizer Ann Estlund

We're trying to write a version of a discussion guide that's simplified so that people of different cultures and languages with educational levels can more easily participate in circles project.

--European American/white organizer in Twin Cities

noted that where a study circle was held influenced who would attend. For the second round, organizers strategically picked more “neutral” locations such as schools and libraries in order to attract (and keep) participants.

- ▶ In Hartford, the majority of study circles have occurred in workplaces in both the private and public sector, as workplaces are among the most diverse places in the Hartford metropolitan region. There is more diversity in workplaces than in neighborhoods, for example. Holding study circles in workplaces has also eliminated some of the barriers to participation, such as the time commitment and transportation.
- ▶ In New Castle County, study circles have taken place in the Department of Labor and in the community. This enabled a large group of people to participate as part of their job requirements. Study circles in New Castle County have also taken place at schools among teachers.

5. Provide incentives.

Organizers in some learning sites offered incentives as a way to recruit participants. When they could, organizers offered food during study circles. When families could eat an evening meal at the study circle location, it reduced one barrier to participation. Organizers also strategized about ways to include hard-to-attract populations.

- ▶ Organizers in some Maine communities reported that food made a difference in recruiting and retaining participants.
- ▶ In Inglewood, the school-community liaisons arranged to provide both food and child care during the study circle sessions.
- ▶ In Alread, members of the core committee strategized about ways to make study circles appealing to high school students. They decided to offer extra credit to the students if they participated and wrote a one-page report. As a result, 23 of 32 eligible students participated.

In summary, savvy organizers learned ways to increase participation that had little to do with traditional forms of recruitment and promotion. This section described the ways organizers made study circles more appealing and less threatening to participants by such strategies as choosing a compelling topic, offering the circles in locations the participants found safe and inviting, using languages other than English when appropriate, and providing incentives. In addition, several programs found ways to give either potential participants or the initial organizers an experience of study circles to reduce uncertainty and build support.



I am beginning to appreciate, as I do the outreach to different communities, that it has to be modified for communities . . .

*--Jamaican American
coordinator in Hartford*

F. Using multiple recruitment strategies

Nearly all organizers developed multiple recruitment strategies. This was particularly true in Aurora, where organizers established and maintained high community visibility through media coverage, local fund-raisers, presentations, linkages with other community events, and the involvement of study circle “veterans.” Organizers worked constantly to keep study circle efforts in front of people and let them know about upcoming opportunities to participate. Here are some specific strategies that Aurora Community Study Circles (ACSC) used to recruit participants:

- ▶ **Contacts with people and organizations.** Aurora organizers began their study circle program with a strong set of connections to people and organizations. They have continued to use these contacts as key sources of ideas and energy for participant recruitment.
- ▶ **Newsletters and mailings.** ACSC sent mailings to participants and allies regularly. Describing one of these, an ACSC Administrator said:

Yesterday we did a mailing to everybody who’s participated. . . . I think we ended up with close to 800 letters that we sent out, which was our newsletter, our sign-up sheet for these fall sessions . . . we’re having a fund-raising barbeque coming up, so of course we had to advertise that as well, and then we put in a return for if they wish to send us any type of a contribution. (European American/white organizer in Aurora)

- ▶ **Presentations and speaking engagements.** Staff members and others made presentations on a relatively regular basis to the local Chamber of Commerce and its board, to the African American Chamber of Commerce, and to the Hispanic Chamber of Commerce.
- ▶ **Newspaper coverage.** The Beacon News covers study circles quite extensively. An ACSC file memo notes that by early 1999 organizers in Aurora had “tallied 267 mentions of study circles in The Beacon.”

- ▶ **Community-based fund raising.** Organizers held two events that combined a “pick up a barbeque dinner” with a chance to win a basket of Beanie Babies. Organizers planned and carried out two trips to see *The Wizard of Oz* in Chicago. They also conducted an annual giving campaign that included a large mailing. ACSC involved its board members relatively extensively in producing these fund-raisers, which raised the visibility of study circles.
- ▶ **Board member ambassador activities.** Board members also helped spread the word about study circles by participating in festivals and fairs. These included a health fair, Fourth of July events in Aurora, a Neighborhood Pride Week parade, and a booth at the Baha’i Festival of Cultures.
- ▶ **Annual gatherings of “veterans.”** ACSC sponsored annual meetings for people who had completed study circles. For the last couple of years these meetings have been in the form of a picnic. Events like the picnic were intended to help study circle “alumni” stay connected and encourage them to help recruit additional people to take part in study circles.

In conclusion, organizers in each of the 17 learning sites worked diligently to carry out the component of the SCRC community-wide model related to recruiting a broad-based group of participants who reflected the different groups within a community. The approaches varied widely, and the degree of success varied some as well. Of the four key types of leaders, the two types who made the most difference in effective participant recruitment were those with administrative savvy and those with promotional/marketing skills. When programs had ample leadership of these two types, recruitment was more likely to take place in dozens of different ways, using both news media and program-generated material, along with many presentations, appearances, and events. Databases were more likely to be in working condition. Programs were more likely to use and develop specific strategies to increase participation by people from often underrepresented groups. Perhaps most important, skilled administrative and promotional leadership typically seemed linked to successful, personal, one-on-one recruiting.



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