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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this guide is to help study circle leaders design a study circle course and develop the reading material for the discussions. Benefits for the participants and the sponsoring organization are discussed. Three issues in planning the study circle program are addressed: goals, participants, and time frame. Key characteristics of successful study circles are described. Suggestions for dividing the issue into sessions follow. The three different types of material necessary for each session in a study circle are described: the introduction, discussion questions, and the text. These optional materials also are considered: group exercises and small group activities, suggested readings, special assignments, audiovisual material, and leader's guide. Discussion of sources of materials covers where to find and how to create the reading material. It looks at writing original material, selecting articles from periodicals, adapting existing study circle material, and using a book. The guide concludes with a section on reviewing and piloting the course. Appendixes include descriptions of five study circle courses and a list of resources available from the Study Circles Resource Center. (YLB)

Guidelines for Developing Study Circle Course Material

STUDY CIRCLES RESOURCE CENTER

GUIDELINES

FOR DEVELOPING

STUDY CIRCLE

COURSE MATERIAL

Study Circles Resource Center

Route 169, PO Box 203
Pomfret, CT 06258
(203) 928-2616

THE STUDY CIRCLES RESOURCE CENTER

The goal of the Study Circles Resource Center (SCRC) is to make study circles a standard form of citizen education in the United States. By promoting the use of these short, democratic, participatory discussion courses on social and political issues, SCRC hopes to contribute to a more enlightened, involved citizenry capable of making decisions based on informed judgement.

The Study Circles Resource Center offers a range of services designed to foster the use of study circles and to encourage organizations and communities to create their own study circle programs. SCRC can provide information on existing study circle course material, assist in developing new reading material for study circles, and provide detailed guidelines for study circle organizers and leaders. A variety of written materials are available. Please contact us if we can be of assistance.

Contents

"Those who won our independence . . . believed that freedom to think as you will and to speak as you think are means indispensable to the discovery and spread of political truth; that without free speech and assembly discussion would be futile; that with them, discussion affords ordinarily adequate protection against the dissemination of noxious doctrine; that the greatest menace to freedom is an inert people; that public discussion is a political duty; and that this should be a fundamental principle of the American government."

Louis D. Brandeis
U.S. Supreme Court Justice
1927

1. Introduction

The purpose of this guide is to help you design a study circle course and develop the reading material for the discussions. This guide should be helpful whether you are developing a course to be used by 100 study circles in a large organization or leading a small local group that wants to do a single study circle. This guide is intended for a broad audience and will be used by experts in issue areas as well as by people who have an interest in an issue and have done some reading on their own.

The prospect of developing reading material for a study circle may seem daunting, but don't be intimidated! The primary function of the readings is to stimulate discussion. They need not be comprehensive, balanced, brilliant, beautifully designed or of professional caliber. While the readings are important, many other factors will determine whether study circles using your course are successful. The contributions of the participants and the skill of the leader, for example, are more important than the readings.

The reading material for a study circle can be your own writing, or it can consist of newspaper or magazine articles, a book, or sections from a report. A combination of these sources is common. Your decision about which source(s) to use should be based upon the time and energy you have. If you can invest a lot of time and want top-quality material, you may decide to write original material. If you want to spend an absolute minimum of time preparing material, you might choose a single book as the basis for your study circle. If you can commit a few days, you can rely upon articles from a variety of sources and write key items like the introduction and discussion questions.

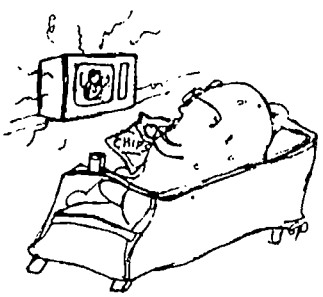
Before you begin, we suggest you contact the Study Circles Resource Center's Clearinghouse. The Clearinghouse can describe any existing study circle material on the issue of your interest and tell you where to acquire it. The Resource Center's staff can

provide advice on developing your material. Where there is potential for wide use, we may be able to directly assist in developing a course. If you are not familiar with the theory and practice of study circles, you will also want to read "An Introduction to Study Circles" and "Guidelines for Organizing and Leading a Study Circle."

As you use this guide, please bear in mind that there are many different types of study circles and many ways to develop study circle material. These guidelines should not be viewed as a detailed road map, but rather as an inexact description of the path that lies ahead of you, with snapshots of some of the landmarks, intersections, roadblocks, and potholes that you may encounter as you create your study circle.

2. Why Build a Study Circle for Your Organization or Small Group?

Every organization that deals with public affairs has a continuing need to educate and empower its members, and study circles are an effective way to accomplish these tasks. Most people become informed through passive media: television, radio, magazines, newspapers, and newsletters. But more reflection and an opportunity for dialogue are necessary in order to develop an informed position on complex issues. Concerned citizens feel the need to wrestle with difficult problems; they may also want to consider how they can help bring about positive change.



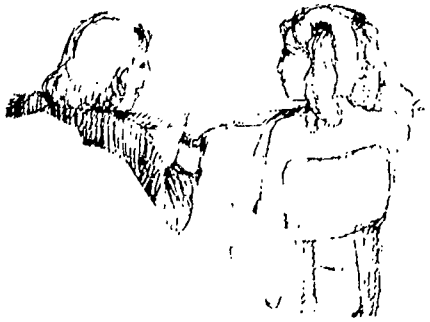
Through democratic, highly participatory, small-group discussions, study circles provide a format for doing all of the above. Because the agenda and the goals require the consent and involvement of the participants, study circles are different from most adult education programs. They engage, educate, and empower people, serving as a vehicle for more active participation in organizational and public affairs. A study circle program offers significant rewards for the individual participants and for the sponsoring organization as well.

Benefits for the Participants

The participants in a study circle gain knowledge, develop skills, and have a rewarding experience.

Study circles do more than convey a body of knowledge. They provide a forum for expression of deeply-held personal values about social issues and problems. Especially when you select reading material that presents a range of viewpoints, a study circle helps participants to understand the ideas and values of people who disagree with them. In the process, participants clarify their own values and may modify or refine their own views; instead of opinions, they emerge with informed judgements. With a better understanding of those who disagree with them, participants are likely to become more thoughtful advocates.

Participating in a study circle will help some people become more comfortable and more articulate when speaking to a group. They will be more effective speaking in meetings



or making presentations. Participation can be particularly rewarding for quiet or shy persons because the supportive atmosphere builds confidence.

One of the most rewarding aspects of a study circle is the personal connections that develop among members of the discussion group; some of these connections will continue to exist long after the program has ended.

Benefits for the Sponsoring Organization

If the members of an organization increase their knowledge and skills, the organization will certainly benefit. Whether the sponsor is a church, business, or public-interest organization, study circles should be looked upon as valuable training that can improve the participants' ability to advance an organization's interests.

Study circles are also beneficial for an organization's leaders. Discussions provide avenues for valuable feedback as participants offer suggestions, float proposals, and develop creative ideas.

Participants in a study circle will become more familiar with the sponsoring organization's program and its positions, and a study circle will usually increase participants' commitment to the organization's work. The cohesion that is built within a discussion group increases the potential for effective action by providing mutual support.

Following a study circle, the participants may become more active in the organization and may take more of a leadership role. This greater potential for leadership grows out of increased feelings of confidence, connection, and comfort. In Sweden, where study circles play an important role in society, many community and political leaders were involved in study circles before entering public life.

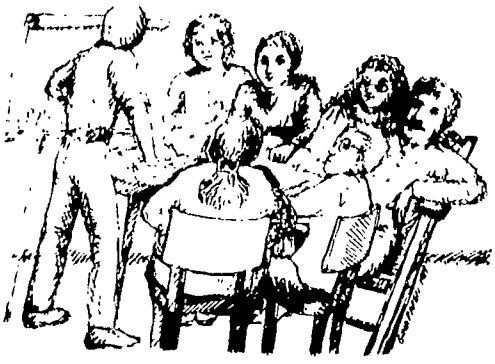
3. Planning Your Study Circle Program

Before you begin to design your course and select the reading material, you must be able to answer three questions:

1. What are your goals for the program; what do you want the participants to gain from the study circle?
2. Who will the participants be?
3. What is the time frame for the course? Will the material be used for a weekly or monthly series of discussions, or for an intensive one-day workshop or weekend conference?

First, goals: the nature of your goals will determine the format of your study circle course and the materials you select. Do you want to educate your members, improve their communication skills, revitalize your group, stimulate political activism, or refine and focus your organization's agenda? Do you want to use the study circle to train staff or members to deal with new problems or master new information? If you have several goals, list them in order of priority. One goal that is not appropriate for a study circle is persuading people that a particular policy or viewpoint is the correct one.

In deciding upon your goals, you should be aware of how the study circle will fit in with your organization's other programs, particularly educational ones. Try to secure the support of your organization's leaders from the beginning,



and consult with other members of your group about the study circle's goals.

Second, your study circle material will be more effective if it is tailored to the participants. What is their reading ability and their educational background, how much knowledge about the subject do they already have, how great is their interest? How involved are they with the issue? How busy are they? What particular perspective on the issue do they have? The answers to these questions will determine the difficulty and length of the readings, how challenging the discussion questions can be, the topics for the various sessions, whether or not you include certain articles, and how much the readings emphasize different points of view. For example, if most of the participants in your group are liberals, you should try to include some readings that express a conservative viewpoint.

Third, it helps if you know the time frame for the study circle so that you can divide your material into the same number of segments as the study circle will have sessions, and so that each segment fits into the available time. In an ideal situation, the study circle meets once a week for two to five weeks, with each session lasting about two hours. Each participant receives about an hour's worth of reading material in advance. In practice, it may not be possible to bring a group together so regularly. In some cases, the only option is an intensive study circle in which several sessions are held during a one-day conference or weekend retreat.

Both the content and format of your course will be influenced by the time frame for your study circle. Material that is used for five weekly two-hour discussions, for example, will be quite different from material that is designed for three one-and-a-half-hour discussions in a weekend. If the discussions are shorter, then the reading material and the questions need to be more sharply focused, since less ground can be covered. If your study circle is part of a one-day conference, you can hold three hour-long

discussions with 15-minute breaks in a single morning or afternoon. Such an intense program must cover fewer topics in each session and contain shorter readings, since participants will need to do all the readings at one time.

4. Key Characteristics of Effective Study Circle Material

Before you begin writing or selecting material for your study circle, it is important to know what has worked in the past. This section describes features of successful study circles.

Always keep in mind that success in a study circle is determined by the quality of the discussion. Whatever your particular goals for the program, they will not be achieved through the reading material alone; above all, the material is a catalyst, a trigger for discussion.

Each session in a study circle is a separate unit and must have a distinct focus. Some overlap between sessions is unavoidable, but participants are not likely to feel that discussing the same topics over and over again is a valuable use of their time. Each session must seem unique.

Separating your issue into distinct segments can be difficult. The topic for each session should be broad enough so that it is interesting to all of your group, but modest enough to digest in a one-and-a-half- or two-hour discussion. After all, one of the reasons for a series of discussions is to divide an overwhelming issue into manageable parts. A book that provides a good overview may give you ideas as to how to divide your issue.

Some tension in each session can provide a creative and constructive edge to the discussions. Creative tension is usually supplied by presenting opposing viewpoints or controversial ideas

in the reading material. Unpopular opinions and views opposed by the majority of the participants are especially valuable. Discussion questions are often used to focus on controversial points.

The reading material should be brief and as stimulating as possible. In most cases, an hour's worth of reading for each session is the maximum. Several shorter articles are preferable to one long one. Anecdotal, non-technical, spicy, humorous writing on social and political issues is hard to find, but it is easier reading than the more typical dry, analytical pieces. Personalize the material by including stories about people whose lives are being affected by the problems you are examining; encourage the users of your material to relate their own experiences.

Present a variety of choices or policy options in the readings. The idea is not to provide "the solution," but to encourage participants to arrive at their own conclusions. There is no need for the group to come to a consensus, nor is it necessary that each participant emerge with a firm position on the issues. If the participants have been stimulated to rethink their assumptions and to wrestle with the issues, the study circle has been a success.

The discussions should go deeper than the level of opinions, examining the values that underlie opinions. When people see each others' deeper reasons for believing what they do, they are likely to be more understanding and respectful of other views. A discussion of values is likely to have a deeper impact than one that takes place on the level of opinion.

5. Dividing Your Issue into Sessions

In deciding how to divide the issue into sessions, you must have a solid background in the issue. You should know what the major controversies are and be familiar with the public debate. You need not be an expert, but if you are not, you should talk to experts. Ask them how they would separate the issue into segments. You'll also want to talk to laypersons to see how they look at the issue; they may provide you with insights that experts overlook.

Your preliminary research and conversations should enable you to identify and explain the main policy approaches toward solving the problem. You should be familiar with the arguments in favor of and against each of these policies. Further, you should be able to go beneath the policy alternatives and understand the deeper values that are the bases for policy preferences.

From this point on, you should collaborate or consult with others in your organization. The decisions you will need to make about the focus and content of each of the sessions are not easy ones. Study circles deal with controversial and complex public issues; it would be remarkable for a single person to have the clarity, knowledge, and breadth of perspective that are necessary to grasp and present the range of choices that exist.

You may find Appendix A of this guide to be instructive. It describes five different study circle courses, showing how others have organized and divided complicated issues. Each of these study circles uses a different format to present an issue. One emphasizes policy choices and the values that lie beneath them; another presents alternative futures in U.S.-Soviet relations; a third uses the dialectic of opposing viewpoints; a fourth examines an organization's future; and the fifth presents the problem and possible solutions and then suggests ways in which participants

might help. The ways to organize and divide study circle material are limitless.

Before you divide your issue into segments, you must first decide on the number of sessions in your study circle course. You must consider both the logistics of when participants can meet (discussed earlier) and the nature of the issue you will be discussing. A minimum of two sessions is desirable because a series of meetings helps to create the fellowship that is an important part of a study circle. More than five sessions may be too many, unless the members of the group are unusually interested in the subject or the discussions take place in conjunction with a business meeting or some other regular event.

Once you have decided upon the number of sessions, determine the focus and purpose of each. As was discussed earlier, the scope of each discussion is critical. A session that tries to bite off too much may overwhelm the group, while one that is too narrow will leave some participants bored.

After you choose the topics for the sessions, an outline will help you clarify the main points and will show you whether your division of the issue is viable. An outline may save a great deal of time by showing whether you are trying to cram too much into a single session; it will also help in writing discussion questions later.

The final session deserves special attention, and in many study circles it is the highlight of the program. Some study circles report to policymakers; you can facilitate this by including a questionnaire that will convey the participants' views. You may want to encourage members of your study circle to communicate with leaders of your organization. If the group is action-oriented, the final session is the time to discuss what the participants can do to address some of the problems they have examined.

The last session is also the most appropriate time for an evaluation, although many study circles do a short evaluation at the end of each session. An evaluation gives participants an opportunity to think about the value of the program while providing helpful feedback to organizers and leaders. An evaluation also reflects the implicit contract between those who create a study circle and the participants: the creators care about what the participants have to say.

The first session is also special in that it introduces the issue to the participants and must explain the study circle format. In developing the reading material for the first and last sessions, it may be helpful to read the sections on beginning and ending in the Study Circle Resource Center's pamphlet, "Guidelines for Organizing and Leading a Study Circle."

6. The Contents of Each Session

Three types of reading material are necessary for each session in a study circle:

1. The introduction provides a framework for the discussion and introduces the main ideas.
2. Discussion questions highlight the most important points and guide the group to focus on those issues.
3. The articles, book, or original writing (here referred to as the text) present information, proposals, critiques, and different perspectives.

There are several types of optional material that you might incorporate into your study circle design, such as descriptions of group exercises or small-group activities, a list of suggested readings, write-ups of special assignments, audiovisual material, and a leader's guide.

This section describes these different kinds of material, beginning with the three most important types.

The Introduction

Not only does the introduction set the context for the discussion, it may be the only thing that some participants read. A good introduction should summarize the main points in the text and briefly explain ideas or proposals that are not described elsewhere. If the text does a good job of introducing the session's topic, then the introduction can be brief.

Discussion Questions

Discussion questions highlight the most important, most interesting, and most controversial ideas in each session. They also ensure that the topics most important for your group are covered. In a sense, the questions set the agenda for the discussion. Although they are short and might seem easy to write, constructing good questions requires a lot of thought. Even if discussion questions are provided with pre-packaged materials, you should prepare some questions specifically for the users of your study circle course.

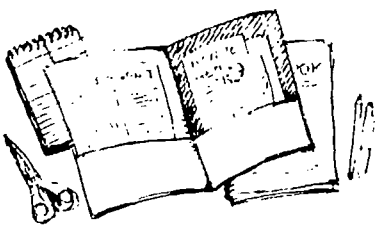
Most leaders are grateful for discussion questions and rely heavily upon them. In some study circles the questions may be given only to the leader as part of a leader's guide. However, participants will benefit from the opportunity for forethought that the questions offer. One solution is to provide the participants with a few of the most important questions and to give the leader additional questions.

The Text

The bulk of the reading material is the text, which presents the information that will be the substance for each discussion. The

text describes the problems that the study circle has been formed to wrestle with and presents the pros and cons of the various policy solutions. The readings should deal with the big picture and should not become stuck on technical and administrative issues.

The best text would be written specifically for your study circle, but this is usually a major undertaking: unless you are a good writer and an expert in the subject, you may be better off relying upon existing material. The next section, "Sources of Material," describes how you can select from or adapt existing writings for your own study circle.



While most text is usually analytical writing, the text can include political cartoons, charts, pictures, diagrams, videos, audiotapes, and other non-written or non-analytical forms of communication. Short stories, interviews, vignettes, and even poetry have been used in study circles.

Group Exercises and Small-Group Activities (optional)

A study circle can occasionally utilize activities other than group discussion; some groups will react positively to more active and varied types of participation. If you want group exercises and small-group activities to be a part of your study circle, you will need to describe them in the text or in a leader's guide.

One widely-used group exercise is brainstorming, in which participants call out their reactions or ideas without restraining or filtering their thoughts. Everything is written down and the group then considers any ideas that seem promising. A second exercise that has gained widespread use is "role playing." By acting out the

situations or predicaments of others, participants may experience some of their feelings and be surprised by what they do or say.

There are some good reasons for breaking a larger study circle into small groups for occasional activities. Smaller groups facilitate interaction and are often more creative and dynamic. The leader might ask the small groups to prepare comments on a reading or to develop some new ideas and then return to the larger group to present them. In those study circles in which the final session is oriented toward social action, small groups can develop concrete plans and begin to take responsibility for various aspects of the work.

Suggested Readings (optional)

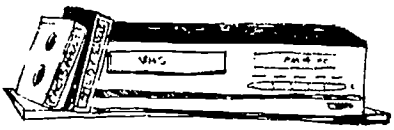
Only a small percentage of people in most groups will do suggested readings, so you should not spend a great deal of time selecting them or a great deal of money photocopying them. Including a suggested reading list may help you avoid the temptation to make the required reading material too long and can relieve some of the frustration that comes from having to cut out good material. Additional readings also provide participants with an easy way to continue to learn about the issue after the study circle is over.

Special Assignments (optional)

Some study circles may want participants to take on tasks other than reading. For example, if your study circle were about homelessness, you might ask participants to spend an evening volunteering at a shelter or to interview homeless people or those who work with the homeless. You might ask the group to do research on a local aspect of the issue, such as elected officials' positions. If you use special assignments, consider including a sheet with suggestions for whom to interview, what to ask, or how to go about the research.

Audiovisual Material (optional)

Videos can be very effective in study circles. Because they are compelling, and because many people find it easier to watch T.V. than to read, videos are an effective way to convey information. The two main obstacles with videos are cost and distribution. Because of this, a video is probably best viewed by the entire group during one of the sessions, unless it is a television program that can be watched or taped. However, a video should be used only as a discussion-starter; it is not desirable for a study circle to spend a lot of time watching a television screen.



Audiotapes are not as powerful as videos, but they can be listened to in one's car while commuting, an important advantage. The spoken word is powerful, conveying an intensity and feeling that is hard to impart in writing. Audiotapes, however, are not very effective in a group setting. Since audiotapes are easy to reproduce and mail, it might be possible to make several copies and to share them so that participants can listen to the tapes on their own time.

Leader's Guide (optional)

If your study circle includes a lot of exercises or special assignments, a guide for the leader will be more important. A leader's guide can range from a single page of extra discussion questions to a booklet of detailed instructions. You probably won't need one if your study circle course will be used by only a few groups, since you can talk with the leaders of those groups.

However, if many study circles will be using the material, it is probably necessary to provide some written guidance to leaders. The leader's guide might include key points that are not in the participants' material, background information, copies of suggested readings, and additional discussion questions, as well as ideas on group process and exercises.

The Study Circles Resource Center can supply two manuals that you may want to provide to organizers and leaders who are using your material. "Guidelines for Organizing and Leading a Study Circle" describes the role of these two key individuals in a study circle, and "An Introduction to Study Circles" explains the history, theory, and practice of study circles.

7. Sources of Material

The best source of material - original writing specifically for your study circle course - is also the most difficult to create. It is easier to use published articles or fact sheets, even easier to adapt already-prepared material, and easier still to use parts of a book. While published material may not be perfectly tailored to your group, it can still stimulate discussion.

In most cases, only a large organization that plans a major study circle program will be able to afford to write an original study circle course. However, we strongly encourage you to write some of your own discussion questions and to consider writing at least a short introduction for each session. These two additions will make existing material better fit the intended audience.

This section talks about where to find and how to create the reading material. It moves from the sources that require the most effort to those that require the least. As most of the reading material in a study circle is the text, this section focuses primarily on the text.

Writing Original Material

Writing original material is time-consuming and difficult, but the result is usually superior to material that is assembled from a variety of sources. It is hard to find existing written material that fits your outline, that shares your angle on the issue, and that is appropriate for the participants in your study circle. Original material will focus on the issues that are of major concern to the group, can take into account the participants' reading ability and background knowledge, and will reflect your views.

Once you have your outline and have consulted with a variety of people, the main challenge in writing text will be keeping it brief. Since previous sections of this guide have described the requirements for good study-circle writing, we will not repeat those standards here. If you plan to write your entire study circle from scratch, you may want to read a few study circle courses that consist of original material. The Study Circles Resource Center Clearinghouse can tell you where to acquire them.

Selecting Articles From Periodicals

Perhaps the best sources for borrowed study circle material are articles from newspapers, magazines, journals, and newsletters, or pamphlets, fact sheets, and press releases distributed by organizations. Using articles is much less time-consuming than writing text, and the result will usually be better-tailored to your group than a book. Articles can express a range

of views; because they are short and are written in diverse styles, they are often easier to read than excerpts from a book.

A large organization might assign a staff member or hire a consultant to compile the text from articles, but a volunteer who is knowledgeable about the issue can often find suitable material in a few days of research. Someone will need to write discussion questions and introductions for each session if articles are used.

If you decide to use articles, it will help if you have extensive files or can find others who do. If you can locate a "clipper and saver" - a person with good files who saves articles - you may find a gold mine of articles.

If you don't know a "clipper and saver," you may find help by contacting organizations that work on the issue. If not, you will need to go to the library and locate articles. Ask knowledgeable people for suggestions as to where to start looking.

A note of caution: if you plan to widely distribute your study circle course, you will need to obtain permission to reprint from the publishers of the articles. This takes time and may cost money. However, you won't have to worry about reprinting articles if they're used for only a few study circles.

Adapting Existing Study Circle Material

Contact the Study Circles Resource Center's Clearinghouse to find out what material exists on your subject. The Clearinghouse staff will tell you what is available and can provide you with a one-page description of each study circle course, including

information on how to obtain it. If we are aware of others who are working on a similar project, we will put you in touch with them.

Although pre-packaged materials may not be exactly what you want, you can adapt them to suit your group's needs. For example, you might want to drop some of the articles or cut some of the text, substitute your own introductions and questions, and add new material.

Using a Book

This is an easy way to create study circle material, especially for a small group without staff. It is often possible to find a current book or a special edition of a periodical that focuses on the issue you want to discuss. You can decide which chapters or sections to read, or you can ask the participants to come to the first meeting prepared to discuss which parts the group should read.

If you use a book for the text, you can probably do without a special introduction for each session. But you will want to come up with some discussion questions to make sure that the most important themes in the book are not overlooked.

8. Reviewing and Piloting the Course

After completing a draft of your study circle course, you should have a few people review it. If you have been working collaboratively or consulting with others all along, it is unlikely you would need to make major changes. If you have been working on your own, the review process will be much more important.

You might want to ask a couple of experts to review the material, as well as a couple of potential participants. The

potential users can give you a preliminary sense of which articles work and whether the level of the writing is appropriate.

A pilot program in which several study circles actually use the material is not essential, but it can be useful. The pilots should not be done until your material is close to its final version. If you are able to find different types of groups to pilot your course, you will obtain more varied feedback. Since a pilot program consumes time, energy, and money, you should actively solicit feedback from the leader and participants by including a detailed evaluation. You will also want to speak with the leader.

A pilot program adds a strong selling point for the course - if it's "battle proven," potential organizers and leaders of study circles will probably regard it more highly. If a pilot is done within an organization, it can generate enthusiasm and publicity for your study circle program, making it easier to recruit leaders and participants.

Appendix A:
Descriptions of Five Study Circle Courses

The five study circle courses described below are provided as models to help you create your own material. Each of these models is unique, reinforcing the point that there are many different possible formats for effective study circle material. Not all of these materials are designed explicitly for study circle use, although they are easily adapted for small-group discussion. If you are interested in acquiring any of these materials, the Study Circles Resource Center can assist you.

I. National Issues Forums
The Day Care Dilemma

The National Issues Forums (NIF) annually produces three issue books, along with starter video- and audiotapes, to be used as the basis for discussion in both large forums and small study circles. Topics are based on suggestions from the previous year's participants.

Each issue book focuses on several basic policy choices and the values underlying each of those choices. An introduction and a conclusion surround chapters that present the choices. *The Day Care Dilemma*, for example, outlines the following choices:

1. The Pro-Family Solution: What Parents Do Best
2. Social Investments: A Head Start for the Disadvantaged
3. A Public Commitment: Universal Day Care

Other issue books for 1989-1990 are *The Drug Crisis* and *The Environment At Risk*.

The issue books are designed for use in both large, single-session public forums and in smaller, sustained study circles. The study circles are usually led by trained leaders who take a lot of

initiative and devise remarkably different programs. The number of sessions ranges from two or three to six or more.

The general approach of most of the study circle leaders is to bring out personal views on the topic in the first session, and then to focus on understanding the choices in subsequent sessions. Once the participants understand the choices, the leader encourages free-wheeling discussion and consideration of local implications.

The study circle usually concludes with a search for common ground. Participants complete questionnaires before and after the program, and the results are reported to their local policymakers and then to national policymakers in the spring.

II. Center for Foreign Policy Development at Brown University
Choices for the 21st Century

U.S.-Soviet relations is the first of several foreign policy topics to be addressed by the *Choices for the 21st Century* program. The model of four "alternative futures" for U.S.-Soviet relations was developed through a joint research project with the Public Agenda Foundation. These alternative futures are:

1. "The U.S. Gains the Upper Hand": the U.S. achieves dominance over the Soviet Union.
2. "Eliminate the Nuclear Threat, Compete Otherwise": the superpowers significantly reduce the threat of nuclear war but remain rivals in other ways.
3. "Cooperative Problem Solving": the two sides work together on common concerns in order to reduce their mutual hostility.
4. "Defend Only North America": the U.S. ends its military commitments overseas and concentrates on problems at home.

This material is explicitly organized for study circles, which the Center refers to as discussion series. The first and last sessions are fixed, the first being an introduction to the alternatives and the last focusing on making choices. Balloting is part of both. Each of the middle sessions focuses on an issue of current interest. An individual study circle can choose to work through just a couple of the middle sessions or all of them. The topics covered in the 1990 program are:

Changes in the Soviet Union: What do they mean?
Arms Control Treaties: Do they make us safer?
Soviet Economic Reforms: Should the U.S. help?
Europe: Meeting ground of East and West?
The U.S. and the U.S.S.R. in the Third World: What next?

The core beliefs and values inherent in each of the futures are expected to remain valid into the next decade; however, they are recast each year to keep up with events. Discussion topics incorporated into the series are re-evaluated and revised annually.

III. Greenhaven Press Opposing Viewpoints Series
Drug Abuse

The Opposing Viewpoints books published by Greenhaven Press were not specifically designed for use by study circles, but they are very suitable for study circle material.

Each Opposing Viewpoints book breaks an issue down into several chapters containing about six essays of about five pages each, each essay written by an expert or a well-known individual. The *Drug Abuse* book, for example, consists of the following chapters:

1. How Should the War on Drugs Be Waged?
2. Are International Drug Campaigns Effective?

3. Should Drug Testing Be Used?
4. What Should Be Done About the Drug Problem in Sports?
5. How Should Drugs Be Legally Prescribed?

The essays in each chapter are usually paired to present diametrically opposite views. For example, the first chapter contains essays entitled "The War on Drugs Is Desperately Needed" and "The War on Drugs Is Hypocritical." Another pair in the first chapter is "Legalize Illegal Drugs" and "Do Not Legalize Illegal Drugs."

Each chapter contains a preface, a critical thinking activity, and a periodical bibliography. In addition, each volume has an overall introduction, a list of organizations to contact, a bibliography, and an index. The only missing ingredient is discussion questions.

The strength of the Opposing Viewpoints series is that a great variety of opinions are ably presented and the "critical thinking activities" help the reader to analyze the arguments. A complication is that discussion may tend to focus on the weaknesses and strengths of each writer's arguments rather than on the most important issues. Also, the books are oriented toward the individual rather than a group; readers are not explicitly encouraged to "work through" issues to seek common ground. However, a study circle leader should be able to frame questions and guide the discussion so that it focuses on the key points and locates common ground shared by participants.

IV. The International Union of Bricklayers and Allied Craftsmen
BAC Study Circle Program

This study circle course is notable not only for the quality of the material but also for the fact that it is a prime example of how a large organization can use study circles as a tool for educating and empowering its membership.

The program was developed by the International Union of Bricklayers and Allied Craftsmen (BAC) in order to reach three objectives:

1. to build member understanding of the union's Project 2000 Committee's recommendations;
2. to raise the morale and sense of pride and well-being of the members, their families, and retirees; and
3. to develop an effective communications mechanism.

Using the Swedish unions' success with study circles as a model, the BAC developed attractive, readable, well-illustrated issue booklets emphasizing the choices and trade-offs faced by the union. The five session topics are:

1. Where We Stand: Challenges to Our Jobs and Our Union
2. The Masonry Industry Today
3. The Broader Context
4. What We Can Do: Building a Stronger Industry
5. What We Can Do: Building a Stronger Union

Study circle leaders are trained and are provided with a handbook that includes background material, guidelines for organizing and leading a study circle, specific pointers and questions for each session, and extensive evaluation material.

Because the union saw this program as a model for all U.S. labor unions, great pains were taken to measure the effects of the pilot program which involved 270 union members in 27 study circles. The executive summary of the evaluation report, "Building Union Democracy: The BAC Study Circle Program," is available from the Study Circles Resource Center.

V. Topsfield Foundation
Choices: A Study Circle on Homelessness and Affordable Housing

This study circle, along with the Bricklayers', is more action-oriented than the others described in this appendix. A variety of viewpoints are expressed, but there is less concern about a balanced presentation. The discussions and readings are intended not only to educate about the housing crisis, but to raise the level of concern and stimulate participants to act.

The reading material for this study circle consists primarily of short published articles, mostly from newspapers and magazines. There are also some fact sheets and a chapter from a report. The introduction to each session and the discussion questions are original writing.

After consulting with others concerned about the issue, drafting an outline of session topics, and doing some preliminary article selection, Topsfield contracted with the National Low Income Housing Coalition for final article selection and writing of the introductory material and questions. The four session topics are:

1. The Housing Problem
2. Attitudes About Housing and Homelessness
3. Housing Policy
4. Housing Solutions

The final session not only examines a variety of programs that might help solve the problem, but also describes what participants can do: a section called "Options for Activists" presents a variety of ways to help and encourages discussion about doing so.

Appendix B:

Resources Available from the Study Circles Resource Center

The Study Circles Resource Center (SCRC) offers clearinghouse services for those in search of existing study circle course material, assistance with developing reading material for a study circle, training material for organizers and leaders, and a newsletter.

Pamphlets

"An Introduction to Study Circles." 20 pages.

"Guidelines for Organizing and Leading a Study Circle" covers the mechanics of starting and running a study circle. 32 pages.

"Guidelines for Developing Study Circle Course Material" speaks both to the individual developing material for a single study circle and to large organizations intending to use the material in many study circles. 32 pages. (Limited quantities are available, revised edition expected at the end of the year.)

Resource Briefs (single pages)

"What Is a Study Circle?"
"Leading a Study C..cle"
"Organizing a Study Circle"
"The Role of the Participant"
"Developing Study Circle Course Material"
"What Is the Study Circles Resource Center?"
"The Study Circles Resource Center Clearinghouse"

Connections (single pages describing people and programs)

Adult Religious Education
Youth Programs
Study Circle Researchers
Unions

Other Resources

Clearinghouse list of study circle programs
Annotated bibliography

Large quantities of the SCRC brochure are available for distribution.

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Study Circles Resource Center
Route 169 P.O. Box 203 Pomfret, Connecticut 06258
(203) 928-2616 FAX (203) 928-3713