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ABSTRACT

This discussion guide is designed to help people examine the state of work in their community, explore changes, and strategize about what they can do to forge creative solutions and improve the community's worklife. It is especially appropriate for use in a study circle setting. The discussion materials are arranged into four sessions: (1) the place of work in one's life; (2) global and national trends--how they are shaping the community's worklife; (3) strengthening the worklife of one's community--discussing alternative approaches; and (4) making a difference--what people can do to improve their community's worklife. Each session consists of some or all of these components: list of goals, introduction to the discussion, informative materials, questions for discussion, and activities. The following section provides ideas for organizing study circles; tips for study circle leaders; and guidelines for study circle participants. The resources section contains 44 books; 49 articles and reports; names, addresses, and descriptions of 13 private and 5 government organizations; and 4 work and community resources on the World Wide Web. (YLB)

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STATE OF THE UNION

Working in the USA:

Making a Living, Making a Difference

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Working in the USA:

Making a Living, Making a Difference

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Study Circles Resource Center (SCRC) is a project of the Topsfield Foundation, Inc., a nonprofit, nonpartisan foundation dedicated to advancing deliberative democracy and improving the quality of public life in the United States. SCRC carries out its mission by promoting the use of small-group, democratic, highly participatory discussions known as study circles.

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Table of Contents

Foreword 5

Making work "work better" for us — as individuals, in our communities, and in our country

What is a study circle?

Discussion Materials

Session 1 8

The place of work in our lives

Session 2 11

Global and national trends: How are they shaping our community's worklife?

Session 3 15

Strengthening the worklife of our community: Discussing alternative approaches

Session 4 20

Making a difference: What can we do to improve our community's worklife?

Using this Guide 31

Organizing study circles

Tips for study circle leaders

Guidelines for study circle participants

Resource Listings 40

"So, you want to continue on ..."

Books

Articles

Organizations

Work-oriented web sites

Foreword

Making work "work better" for us — as individuals, in our communities, and in our country

Work is a critical issue in all of our lives. It ensures our survival, our ability to pay the bills, our ability to save, and our ability to spend. It pays our taxes. It fills large parts of our days (and sometimes, nights). Some important jobs, such as parenting, are without pay. But, for jobs in the marketplace, pay scales and benefits are an important dimension of job satisfaction. So are working conditions.

Work is also part of our national history and consciousness. Throughout our history, the ways Americans earn a living have changed. In the early days of our country, most people worked the land. A century ago, the Industrial Revolution drew people away from the land to jobs in factories. In the second half of this century, large numbers of people have entered service professions, though many still work in manufacturing jobs. The work we do today — which is often driven by information — is different from the work we did only decades ago. And, as the "global village" becomes even more intimate, we expect that the work in the next century will involve even greater challenges *and* opportunities.

Today, work-related challenges are everywhere we look. Living wage. Meaningful work. Job security. Benefits. Technology. Demographic changes. Globalization. These important issues can touch — and have touched — people and communities at all levels of life throughout America. For many of us, they are large and complex issues that seem beyond our control. Often, we find it hard to know where and how to begin addressing them.

Almost all of us agree that we need to consider what is happening in the world around us, and that we need to have a say in shaping our work and our communities. In deliberate discussion, we can examine an array of issues, consider the impact of the changes we are facing, and begin to chart a course for the economic future of our communities. In all, the goal of this discussion guide is to help us examine the state of work in our community, to explore changes, and to strategize about what people can *do* to forge creative solutions and improve the community's worklife.

Study circles have shown that public dialogue can be a constructive, empowering approach to many challenging issues — including education, race relations, violence, and crime — that face communities. When organized collaboratively, and when a broad range of people take their places at the table, public dialogue can be a productive approach to work-related issues as well. This guide is designed to help people explore personal and community concerns about jobs, and to look at the ways our communities literally *work* in the world. By looking at ways that changes in the workplace are affecting our personal, professional, and community lives, people can join together to find ways to make work "work better" for all of us in a changing world.

What is a study circle?

The study circle is a simple process for small-group deliberation. There are just a few defining characteristics:

- A study circle is comprised of ten to fifteen people who meet regularly over a period of weeks or months to address a critical public issue in a democratic and collaborative way.
- A study circle is facilitated by a person who is there not to act as an expert on the issue, but to serve the group by keeping the discussion focused, helping the group consider a variety of views, and asking difficult questions.
- A study circle looks at an issue from many points of view. Study circle facilitators and discussion materials give everyone "a home in the conversation," and help the group explore areas of common ground.
- A study circle progresses from a session on personal experience ("how does the issue affect me?") to sessions providing a broader perspective ("what are others saying about the issue?") to a session on action ("what can we do about the issue here?").

What is a community-wide study circle program?

Study circles can take place within organizations, such as schools, unions, workplaces, or government agencies. They have their greatest reach and impact, however, when organizations across a community work together to create large-scale programs. These community-wide programs engage large numbers of citizens – in some cases thousands – in study circles on a public issue such as race relations, crime and violence, or education. Broad sponsoring coalitions create strong, diverse community participation. Participants in study circles have an opportunity to make an impact on an issue they care about.

How do community-wide study circle programs come into being?

Typically, a single organization such as a mayor's office, a school board, or a human relations commission spearheads and staffs the project. In most communities, an initiating organization takes the first step by approaching other key organizations to build a sponsoring coalition. Most community-wide programs have ten to thirty organizations as sponsors or endorsers. Grass-roots organizations such as churches, neighborhood associations, businesses, schools, and clubs often take part.

What are the outcomes of community-wide study circle programs?

By participating in study circles, citizens gain "ownership" of the issues, discover a connection between personal experiences and public policies, and gain a deeper understanding of their own and others' perspectives and concerns. They discover common ground and a greater desire and ability to work collaboratively to solve local problems – as individuals, as members of small groups, and as members of large organizations in the community. Community-wide study circle programs foster new connections among community members that lead to new levels of community action. They also create new connections between citizens and government, both at an institutional level and among parents and teachers, community members and social service providers, residents and police officers.

If you would like to know where community-wide study circles are happening, or where study circle coalitions are forming, please contact the Study Circles Resource Center.

Session 1

The place of work in our lives

The goals of this session are:

1. *to ask participants to think about their own work situation and how it's working for them*

2. *to give participants a way to hear other people's stories and to help them understand the kinds of work issues that are coming up in the community*

3. *to prepare participants to connect their own work experiences to the changes that are happening in society*

4. *to build trust among the participants in the discussion and a sense of shared experiences*

Introduction to the discussion

Work is a constant preoccupation in our lives. It often comes up in private conversation, especially when our work situation is in flux. We may be looking for new employment, preparing to move, redefining our job, or trying to deal with major changes in our work places. During times like these, many of us talk constantly about our work with friends, family, and advisors.

Talking about work is not only useful when *individuals* face change. It is also necessary to talk about work when our *communities* face change. Our towns, neighborhoods, districts, cities, and regions undergo many transitions – some beneficial, some painful. Yet, the changes that affect our communities are rarely the topic of public conversations.

In this session, we open this unusual window of opportunity to talk about work with some of the people who share our community. It makes sense to start where we are – with the work we do in our daily lives.

For many people in America, talking about work is like talking about the meaning of life. What we do for a living often defines who we are – our abilities, our interests, and our values. It determines how we live – our standard of living, our friendships, and what we can hope to achieve.

Dialogue about our worklife is a powerful way to connect with other people. It also gives us the chance to link our private experiences with public issues. Beginning with personal experiences and moving on to explore work as a public matter, dialogue can help us see ourselves as a part of the community's working landscape and as a piece of the national and global economies.

Questions for discussion

After you set ground rules for the discussion and introduce yourselves, move on to consider the questions below. There are more questions here than you will have time to address. Choose a few that you think will be most interesting to your group.

1. What do you do for work, either paid or unpaid? How much time do you spend "at work" each day?

2. How did you find your current job? What influenced your choice to take it? Would you make the same choice of work if you could do it all over again? Why?

3. Tell a story about one of the most satisfying work experiences you have had. Then, tell a story about a work experience you would never want to repeat.

4. In your current job, what are the greatest sources of reward? of worry? of frustration?

5. Do you feel your skills are being used at work? How could you use your skills to improve your performance? Identify things that prevent you from enjoying work and doing a quality job.

6. On a scale of 1-10, how important is work in your life? Why? Would the people who are closest to you — friends, family, partner — agree?

7. How does your work affect your self-image, your lifestyle, your relationships, your co-workers, your community, the world? Tell a story about a time when your work has had a great impact on your life or on your community.

8. How is work different for your generation? Do the different generations share the same work values? For example, do young people and senior citizens believe in the same "American Dream"? If not, what do you think has changed? Why?

9. If you're retired, how has retirement affected your self-image, your lifestyle, your relationships with others? Why? What are your goals for retirement?

Activities

1. People want many things out of their work. Divide into groups of two or three, and interview your partner(s). Look over the list below. Ask one another, "When you think about your current work situation, what three items are most on your mind? Why?" (If your concerns are not covered by this list, you may feel free to add to it.)
    - amount of on-the-job stress;
    - job security;
    - opportunities to learn new skills and to work independently;
    - recognition for work accomplishments and chances for promotion;
    - doing work that is important to you and society;
    - income, salary, or wages;
    - benefits, including health insurance and vacation time;
    - employer support for flextime, child care, or caring for aging parents;
    - time to do community volunteer work, or to get involved in political activities.

Bring all the groups together to share what you learned. How do your reactions to these questions compare? How similar or different are people's work experiences? Do any patterns emerge?

2. Discuss this basic question: What do you want out of work? Do you want a job near home? recognition? challenges? time off? adequate pay? something to be proud of? something else entirely?

   Next, what does the "perfect job" look like? What kinds of education and training would be needed for such a job? How long would you keep working at your "perfect job"? Would you go on to something else?

3. Consider this question together: Is your view of work shaped by something that is uniquely American, or would your approach be the same if you lived in another country — Argentina, France, Japan, Botswana, wherever? Why or why not? Does "being American" affect how you think about your job or your desire to work hard?

Session 2

Global and national trends: How are they shaping our community's worklife?

The goals of this session are:

1. *to give participants a chance to look at the working life of their community*

2. *to explore how work is (or isn't) changing because of developments in the national and global economy*

Introduction to the discussion

Many people say that we now live and work in a "new economy," which has profoundly changed the worklife of our nation. Often, people compare today's changes to the transition at the end of the 19th century from an agricultural base to manufacturing. That era was a turning point for our country. The Industrial Revolution changed forever the ways people worked, how they lived, and what they dreamed of being able to achieve. As we approach the 21st century, are we experiencing changes of the same magnitude?

We often hear people talk about the U.S. economy shifting from manufacturing to services. While manufacturing still forms the heart of many communities, manufacturing jobs now make up a smaller part of the whole economy than in earlier decades. Today, there are more and more jobs in the "information sector," and we are developing a much greater "service economy." In a service economy, providing services (rather than making things like cars or textiles) forms the backbone of the economy. For example, a wide range of people — from doctors and nurses to computer consultants — are service providers who have specialized knowledge and who earn a living by providing professional assistance to others.

Whether or not ours is truly a "new economy" is the subject of some debate. On one hand, some people think we are crossing uncharted territory and facing stresses that no other generations have felt. On the other hand, some economists argue that these so-called new trends aren't really "new." Instead, these experts emphasize the common elements in our economies across time, or they talk about similar eras in history. Still other economists take the middle ground. They agree that there are new elements in the economy, but they debate the extent of the changes.

No matter what position we support, many questions face us. As individuals and in our communities, what can we do to prepare for changes, and how can we "make our mark"? As we consider these and other questions, it makes sense to talk about national and global trends, to explore the ways in which the economy is (or isn't) changing, and to examine how these shifts are affecting our jobs, how we live, and the health of our communities.

The economy is not just something that happens to us. We are each a force in the economy — in the work we do, the choices we make when buying and selling, the ways we influence our workplaces, and in the work we do in our communities. In this section, we'll explore several important "forces and trends." While these are not the only considerations, they are frequently cited, and are a good place to start talking about ways to make a difference and strengthen the worklife of our communities. You are encouraged to add your own ideas. (In the next session, the discussion will focus on how you can be a force for positive change in your community.)

Questions for discussion:

There are more questions here than you will have time to address. Choose the questions that you think will be most interesting to your group, or consider meeting twice to cover the material in this session more thoroughly.

1. Where do you work — in manufacturing? in a job that provides a service? or in another area?
2. Where do the people in our community work? Who are the major employers? What percentage of the businesses are local? or national? or international? How does this affect your job security or the economic stability of our community?
3. What are the major changes that have happened in work in our community in the past ten years? the past twenty years? the past fifty years?
4. How do you think that the changing economy will affect you? your family? our community?
5. Take a moment to look over the section *Forces And Trends Which Affect Our Worklife*. Ask the group to consider the questions that follow that section.

Forces and Trends Which Affect Our Worklife

Below you will find background information about the new economy and highlights of some of the major economic, technological, demographic and political shifts of the late 20th century. These are not the only influences at play, but many people think they are at the root of the changes in the nature of work and American business.

1. Globalization of the economy

Today, we wear brand name clothes that are "Made in China." We drive Toyotas (made in Georgetown, Kentucky) filled with oil from the Middle East refined in the states. Russians eat at McDonald's and drink Coca Colas. Farmers in Africa communicate with each other using IBM computers, while Japanese eat sea urchins caught off the Maine coast. These are examples of "globalization" — a word that means that our local, regional and national economies are now connected worldwide and are global in scale. With the removal of trade barriers (for example, taxes on imports), advances in communications technology (phones, fax machines, and E-mail), and the integration of large financial systems (the Eurodollar, for example), businesses around the world can operate with less regard for national boundaries.

2. New technology and the decline of manufacturing jobs.

Major advances in technology have given rise to greater workplace efficiency and productivity. With increased automation, both the pace and volume of work have increased, but there are not as many manufacturing jobs for lower-skilled workers (for example, ATM machines mean we need fewer tellers). An offshoot of the "computer age" is the fast-growing information technology sector. The number of

service-related jobs is growing to support the "new information economy." New technologies, like faxes, computers, and cellular phones, have changed how we've worked, as well as where we work. Operating under a corporate umbrella, people can work independently – at home, in hotel rooms, in mobile offices.

Since 1991, it is estimated that the number of telecommuters (people working at home for large employers or themselves) has grown from 5 million to about 11 million. (Gartner Group, technology consultants in Santa Clara, CA)

3. Demographic changes in the workplace

Today in the American workplace, in addition to more women and minorities, there are more people who have remained on the job after retirement age. And the level of education is higher today than it used to be.

Education: In 1960, 41% of persons twenty five years of age and older had completed four or more years of high school. In 1995, that number had grown to 81.7%. Looking at higher education, in 1960, only 7.7% of persons twenty five years of age and older had completed four or more years of college. As of 1995, that number had more than tripled, growing to 23%.

Women in the workplace: Compared with a generation ago, the number of women who are working outside the home is growing. For example, in 1995, over 63% of married women with children under six were part of the labor force (up from 18% in 1960).

The American family depends increasingly on a woman's wage, and among married women, 48% provide at least half of the household income. (1995 survey by the Families and Work Institute)

Minorities in the workplace: In 1995, black and Hispanic workers accounted for more than a quarter of the work force, and that number is expected to grow to a third by the year 2005.

Unemployment rates for blacks and Hispanics are consistently higher than for whites, and income levels for minorities, across almost all levels of educational attainment, are still lower than for Whites. (Statistical Abstract of the United States, 1996, Tables 649 and 244).

Older workers: Fewer people are retiring at the age of sixty five. People are staying longer at their jobs than ever before or have taken part-time jobs without benefits. This raises retirement and tax issues, questions about the influence of older workers on the larger job market, and the quality of life for older Americans.

> *According to a study by Public Agenda, nearly 50% of people who are now at retirement age have less than $10,000 in savings — a figure that is woefully inadequate to supplement social security during retirement. This accounts in part for the pressure on older people to keep working.*

4. Changes in the Role of Government

If nothing else, contemporary politics is marked by a profound questioning of the proper role of government. Public confidence in government is low, and people are struggling to determine what the government should (and should not) do. When it comes to work, there has also been ample debate about the role of the federal government in addressing problems of poverty and joblessness. For example, looking at welfare policy, much of the control over the "safety net" has moved from the federal government to the states. In the nation's capitol, many argue that power should be "rolled back" to the states. The buzzword for this change is "devolution" — the shift of the power to shape programs and earmark expenditures from Washington, DC to state and local governments.

Questions about the "Forces and Trends"

a) Which of the major forces and trends do you think is affecting our community the most? Why do you think that?

b) Have you had an experience that shows the impact of one of these forces and trends? Tell a brief story about a force or trend that you think has affected you personally.

c) When you think about the larger trends ...

- how do you feel about the future of your own worklife? How secure do you feel in your job, if you are currently working?
- how confident do you feel about our community's ability to survive and thrive in a changing economic environment? Why?

To prepare for the next two sessions, think about these questions: What steps can your community take to respond to these forces? What role can you play?

Session 3

Strengthening the worklife of our community: Discussing alternative approaches

The goals of this session are:

1. *to help participants examine a range of views about how best to strengthen the community's economy*

2. *to encourage participants to consider the values and concerns that underlie those approaches, and what it might mean for the community to act on those approaches*

Introduction to the discussion

When we consider how to go about preparing for changes in the economy, many trade-offs become evident. We may agree on a general goal. For instance, we may all agree that we want to find ways to make the local economy stronger, or we may want to work to attract more businesses to the community. However, we often disagree about how best to achieve the goals we have decided to pursue.

Using the views described below, we can explore ways to strengthen the worklife of our community. Each viewpoint emphasizes something different. Some views may overlap. Encourage participants to add their own perspectives, then weigh the pros and cons of the different viewpoints. The questions which follow the viewpoints are designed to help us find ways to talk about and plan for the work-related challenges we face in our communities.

You may give participants a moment to read the views quietly, or you may ask volunteers to read the views aloud.

What should we do about work in our community?

VIEWPOINT 1

We should provide people with more training and education.

If the United States wants to be a strong competitor in a changing world economy, we must make education and training a priority. Graduates of high school, technical school, and college must have up-to-date, practical skills that they can put to use in the workplace. We must provide internships and apprenticeships, and ongoing career-training opportunities for people at all levels of the work force. Preparing people for work is also an effective way of teaching and reinforcing the "work ethic" that Americans are so proud of.

Of course, not everyone can (or should) do work that is highly technical. A good education also provides a strong background in the basics — reading, writing, and math. But we need to make sure that people can cope with computers and live with the technology that surrounds them. Students should be well rounded, so they are ready to compete for a wide range of jobs.

VIEWPOINT 2

We should work regionally.

We want to ensure the economic health of the community, and we want to compete in this new global market. To do that, we have to recognize that cities, suburbs and large rural areas are already interconnected. People will have to work together across city, town, and county lines to develop economic policies that will guarantee long-term success. The day of the isolated community is gone; the era of "regional collaboration" has arrived. For example, many new jobs are opening up in the suburbs, and good public transportation would give people who live in the cities a way to get to the places where the jobs are.

We can do this by building on the unique strengths of our community and by creating a local economy that is diversified and largely "home grown." Various kinds of businesses will be drawn to our community if we have an excellent quality of life in such areas as education, the arts, recreation, and public safety. We can also bring and keep businesses with favorable tax policies and work hard to educate a skilled work force.

VIEWPOINT 3

We need to support local entrepreneurs and create a climate where business can thrive.

Many people who work hard don't make enough money to survive. We need to do all that we can to support the working poor. We need to strengthen unions, lobby for an increase in the minimum wage, and try to improve our social services. We need to help people make the transition from welfare to work. That means creating new jobs, assisting people with job training, developing their job skills, and staffing day care facilities. Because too many people of color are lagging behind economically, we have to concentrate our efforts on finding ways to help them catch up.

VIEWPOINT 4

We should concentrate on helping people at the bottom of the economic ladder.

Many of the businesses that our community depends upon may have corporate headquarters elsewhere, but they can still lend great strength to our local economy and our community health. We should find ways to encourage good "corporate citizenship." Finally, with all the global changes that are taking place, it would be a mistake to put all of our eggs in one basket by relying too much on the health of one industry or corporation. Even during good times, we should think about how to diversify and strengthen the job base of our community for an uncertain future.

VIEWPOINT 5

We need stronger ties between the business sector and the community.

Looking at the Viewpoints: Questions for discussion

1. As a group, review the five viewpoints in this session. What is important to the people who hold these views? What are their goals?
2. What are the advantages of each viewpoint? What are the disadvantages?
3. Which of these viewpoints best suit your community? Why? What personal experiences and beliefs have shaped your views?
4. Are any views, or parts of the views, unacceptable to you? Why?
5. Are any views missing? What would you add to this line-up?
6. What are the common concerns in your group?

Activity:

A Look at Public Concerns about Work

When we talk about work, many specific issues arise which people rarely have a chance to explore. Six "concerns" are presented below for the group to consider. Ask group members to read aloud the two or three that are most important to them, and then discuss the questions that follow.

1. **CONCERN:** Many people are concerned about the ***environment***. Some worry about the impact of business and industry on local ecologies. Some want to control air and water pollution and regulate the management of hazardous materials. These concerns often seem to be in tension with an equally strong desire for jobs and economic development at the local level.

   QUESTIONS: How would you describe the environment in your area? If the surroundings are healthful, why is that so? If pollution is a problem where you live and work, what is the cause? What can you do about it? How can residents take their concerns about the environment to decision makers in the community? Is protecting the environment part of your community's strategy to improve the local economy?

2. **CONCERN:** Many people are thinking about ***immigration***. Some feel threatened by the impact of immigration on jobs, and this anxiety can lead to resentment over the use of public resources to support foreign-born citizens and even illegal aliens. Other people feel that immigration is a source of strength for our communities and our country, pointing out the contributions that immigrants make to the cultural life and the economy of our communities.

   QUESTIONS: Are people in your community concerned about immigration issues? What roles do recent immigrants play in your community? What kinds of jobs do they hold? Describe the typical public debate about immigration. What voices are strongest? What voices aren't heard in the debate? What have we learned in our conversations so far that would help our community talk about the issue in more constructive ways and begin to deal with it differently?

3. **CONCERN:** Many people express a deeply felt concern about ***welfare and work***. Some think that social welfare systems reward people for not working. Some object to the cost of this "social safety net." Those who feel an obligation to people who are experiencing hard times worry that welfare reform is stripping away much needed support. Other people's views fall somewhere in the middle.

   QUESTIONS: How do you feel about welfare and work? What values and personal experiences affect your beliefs about welfare? How is welfare handled in this state and community? Are there job-training programs? Is day care available? transportation? If we want to strengthen our community's worklife, what role does welfare play? What changes would you make?

4. **CONCERN:** Many people are concerned about a changing or declining ***"work ethic."*** This issue often creates tension between generations; some people think that workers are lazy and careless, while others worry that even hard work can no longer make the "American Dream" come true. And there are still those who believe the work ethic is as strong as it ever was.

   QUESTIONS: What basic values define your approach to work? How would you define a good work ethic – being on time, working double shifts or working late, a willingness to work hard, something else? Do you have a good work ethic? Where did you learn about the value of hard work? What role do employers play in fostering a strong work ethic? How can you tell if the people in your community have a strong work ethic?

5. **CONCERN:** Many people have questions about ***labor unions.*** What roles should unions play? For example, some people feel resentful of the power of labor unions (to hire and fire, to do a job or stop work on a job). Some think that professionals, such as teachers, should not be members of unions. Others feel that the unions are in decline; they want unions to do more to represent the interests of working people.

   QUESTIONS: Do unions play an important role in your community? Do you or someone you know belong to a union? What are the advantages and disadvantages of union membership? What are the best roles for unions to play where you live and work?

6. **CONCERN:** Many people are very concerned about the changes in the ***distribution of wealth.*** There is a widening gap between the "haves" and "have nots." Few Americans want to limit the amount of money an individual is allowed to earn in a year. On the other hand, many people are critical of the difference between executive salaries and what a worker can earn.

   QUESTIONS: Is a gap between the "haves" and "have nots" an issue in your community? What effects might (or does) a big gap in the distribution of wealth have on the community? on policy making? on strategies to improve our community's worklife and strengthen the economy?

Session 4

Making a difference: What can we do to improve our community's worklife?

The goals of this session are:

1. *for participants to explore concrete action steps that individuals, businesses, and community groups are using to address work issues*

2. *for participants to consider concrete next steps they can take — as individuals, within the workplace, and as a community*

Introduction to the discussion

Even as the economy is becoming more complicated and interconnected, people are finding ways to make a difference in the worklife of their communities.

People can take constructive action in many ways — as individuals, in families, in neighborhoods, in schools, in their workplaces, and in a myriad of community groups. This session presents ideas for community-building action steps at all of these levels. Along with the steps, it includes some brief examples from communities around the country.

The goal of this session is to consider the parts of our community's worklife we want to shape, take stock of our needs and resources, and begin to plan constructive action to strengthen our community's worklife.

Questions for discussion

1. What current efforts in our community are helping people and institutions respond to the changing work environment? Share stories or projects you know about. How can we build on the efforts that are already under way?

2. Take a brief time to look at the action steps that *individuals* can take. Then, each group member can briefly talk about one action (on this list or a new idea) that they think they would like to do as a result of these discussions, and why that is personally important.

3. Take a brief time to look at the possible action steps for the *workplace*. Which of these seems most practical? Are there other kinds of actions that you would add?

4. Take a brief time to look at the possible action steps for *community groups*. You might consider breaking the group into groups of four or five, to brainstorm, using these questions: What two or three ideas seem most practical and useful for our community? What resources are already in place that could help us take those steps? What else do we need to find out about? What other groups would you like to link up with? When the group as a whole reconvenes, have someone record the main action steps that have come out of the discussions.

What can we do as individuals?

All of us are part of our community's worklife and local economy, whatever our role. At different times of our lives, we may be paid workers, unpaid workers (whether through unemployment or through choosing not to be employed), students, retired people, consumers, taxpayers, investors, business owners, union members, or several of these at once.

The kinds of actions we decide to take as individuals will reflect our experiences, our values, and our ideas about what is most important to achieve in our community. Following are a few of the many specific ways that individuals can take constructive action to strengthen the worklife of the community. Use them to stimulate your discussion and your planning.

1. **Adapt your skills to deal with the forces and trends that are affecting the work in your community.** Think about the ways you can get training (or retraining), or ways to maintain your professional credentials to meet the changing conditions in the economy.

2. **Use the skills and knowledge you already have to alter your employment – for example, by moving from "employee" to independent contractor or consultant/worker.** Identify an unfilled need in your local community, and move into it.

3. **Share your own work experiences and creative ideas with the young people in your life.** Talk with your own kids or grandkids, or offer to speak at a "career day" at a high school in your community.

4. **Think creatively. Don't assume that seemingly outdated or unfashionable skills can no longer provide a living.** While computer literacy and technical skills have undoubtedly become more important in the job market, other skills are important as well. Social analyst Daniel Yankelovich envisions a new multi-track job system in the field of unmet human needs.

5. **Contact your local economic development commission, and see how you can get involved.** For example, you might offer insights from your particular experiences, do research on economic development strategies used in other communities, or talk with many different community members to learn from their perspectives.

6. **Get involved in the schools.** If there are parent advisory groups, contribute your ideas. Help the school think about ways to use curriculum and activities that prepare students for a changing economy.

7. **Mentor kids.** For example, volunteer to work at Boys Clubs and Girls Clubs and help them to think about what they would like to do for work. Help them work on their future aspirations in fun and creative ways.

8. **Advocate for lifelong learning.** Support or create adult education programs in your community that help update people's job skills and confidence in finding work that is meaningful and can support them.

9. **Support the kinds of businesses that are making the community a better place to live.** For example, support businesses run by retirees.

10. **Plan for your retirement.** Ask yourself how you will feel and what you will need to be comfortable not working. What do you need to know, or need to learn, to retire. Think about the things you would need to learn to grow personally.

What can we do in our workplaces to make a difference in the community?

1. Find ways to make business more competitive.

Example: The Russell Corporation in Alabama invested in worker training and updated technology. As a result, it expanded operations in the state last year. The company, employing 18,000 people, bought some plants that had closed and rehired unemployed workers.

2. Promote practices in the workplace that foster an adaptable, flexible work force.

Example: NUMMI (in Fremont, CA) is a joint venture between GM and Toyota that produces small cars and trucks in a plant that was once the least productive of all GM operations. Since forming the partnership, productivity at NUMMI doubled over that of the old plant, and grew to a rate that is 40% higher than that of other GM plants. Quality is superior, and the degree of worker satisfaction has much improved. What brought about these changes? The major factors cited include the following: a more formal role for the union in consulting about production and investments; providing more direct worker responsibility and control over jobs; providing training and information necessary for those new levels of responsibility; linking compensation to performance.

Example: Standard Equipment, a machine-tool manufacturer in Delta, MS, offers its employees a chance to upgrade their skills through classes at the local community college. One worker at the company, who runs a bore-mill machine, says the class taught him "new tricks, old tricks, shortcuts," and new technology. "In this area," he says, "it's hard to come by skilled labor, and the training initiative helps folks that don't have training get prepared."

3. Promote practices in the workplace that support and strengthen families.

Example: In Columbus, IN, Metro Plastics Technologies instituted a 30/40 plan in order to deal with high absenteeism, low productivity, and an insufficient number of employees to run the operations. It offered 40 hours of pay for 30 hours of work. Since July 1996, when the 30/40 plan took effect, the company has tracked impressive gains in productivity. Customer returns in the second half of the year dropped 72 percent from the first half. Internal costs for parts that need additional work have also steadily dropped, with a 79 percent reduction in November. Explaining these improvements, the company manager says, "I've got people working here because they want to be here, not just because they need a job. They're happier. You can see it on their faces."

Example: Xerox Corporation allows their employees to set their own hours, plan vacation schedules, and take care of personal needs. Managers expanded flexible work schedules to include all employees, not just those with care giving responsibilities. Absenteeism dropped 30 percent at the customer administration center, where it was first tried. Two other Xerox offices also reported higher revenues, greater productivity, and increased customer satisfaction.

Example: About 75 businesses around the country are housing schools at company sites for the children of their employees. Known as "satellite learning centers," they are administered by the local public schools. Classes are taught by public school teachers. Many are an extension of a company's day-care program. Most offer kindergarten through second or third grade, but some go as high as fifth grade. They offer the many conveniences because children are near their working parents. These have been instituted at the American Bankers Insurance Group in Dade County, FL, 3M in Minneapolis, and Hewlett-Packard in Santa Rosa, CA. In Des Moines, a group of 19 smaller companies established a joint venture. Companies credit these schools for falling employee absenteeism and lower turnover rates.

4. Create diverse, inclusive workplaces.

Example: The Connecticut Diversity Council is a group of large and small corporations. It advocates, supports, and intervenes on behalf of "best practices" in company diversity policies. The Hartford, Aetna, Fleet Financial Group, and American Express are among its members. They also encourage and support their members' search for activities and programs that improve diversity. Those practices include creation of multi-racial, multi-gender and multi-ethnic business teams; identification of behaviors and structures that may get in the way of inclusive practices within a business; opening up communications between all levels of a business operation (e.g. between higher managers and workers); changing decision making from the old classic hierarchy to team-driven models; advocating fair and equitable pay scales for all levels of a business, etc.

5. Close the gap between workers, management, and stockholders.

Example: In July 1994, employees of United Airlines acquired 55% of the company's stock, in exchange for reduced wages and benefits and other concessions. United's employees got increased job security, 25% of the seats on the board of directors, veto power over major company decisions and a say in daily operations. The company quickly gained a larger share of the market, increased productivity and profitability and increased employment. UA stock prices also have tripled since the buyout.

Example: The Saturn plant in Spring Hill, TN, a General Motors subsidiary, is set up and run in partnership with the workers through the United Auto Workers Union, largely through self-directed work-teams. This is a successful model of a labor-management collaboration, and is based on attracting and keeping customers loyal and committed. Proof is not yet in, but it seems to be on the road to success.

Example: The John Roberts Clothing Factory, in Kennebunkport, ME, was about to go out of business. A bank announced foreclosure, threatening the loss of 170 jobs, most of which were held by women doing piecework at low wages. Instead of becoming another statistic of decline, the workers at the plant, led by union officials, and with the backing of outside investors, bought and operated the plant themselves. Women whose previous experience had been as clothing stitchers joined with outside appraisers to study the company's financial records. They agreed to small pay cuts, gave up all holidays, and changed their pension plan. Only health benefits were left untouched. A $600,000 loan was secured from the National Cooperative Bank Development Corp. in Washington, DC. After a year, no workers have been laid off and the factory is making a small profit. As one of the workers said, "It's a nice feeling to be part of the process...of deciding what this company buys for machinery and to know the customers more intimately. They're our customers, and its a nicer feeling when the customers know that the coat that we put out is made by owners. It's almost like you're making it more personal."

6. Promote practices that encourage employees to become more active in the community.

Example: A growing number of companies are giving their employees time to become active in community and political causes. Sometimes, this means time away from the office. Other times, this means sponsoring community events, and contributing staff time (say, for a benefit at a restaurant). For others, this may mean setting aside time in the workplace; the Ohio Department of Human Services provides work time for study circle involvement, for example.

What can community organizations do to make a difference?

All kinds of organizations get involved in improving the worklife of the community — churches, synagogues, mosques, schools, neighborhood groups, unions, businesses, civic groups, colleges, city and county governments, the Chamber of Commerce, and others. Often, community groups band together to create joint efforts.

1. Provide worker education.

Example: In 1983, Asian Immigrant Women Advocates got started in Oakland, California, when three local women began a series of newsletters about worker rights and safety for Filipino, Chinese, Korean, and Vietnamese women. Through the newsletter network and associated English classes for immigrants, women came together and began sharing stories about their lives; they soon realized that many of them were enduring sweatshop working conditions. "Eighty percent of our members are garment workers making really low pay," says Stacy Kono, a staff member at the center. "Our mission is to help them advocate on their own for change [in the workplace]." To that end, the center now offers worker education classes and leadership development workshops.

2. Organize the community for economic development.

Example: Over the years, central Harlem's Abyssinian Baptist Church, one of the oldest churches in the nation, had seen its New York neighborhood deteriorate. Jobs, businesses and people fled, and fewer and fewer members of the congregation lived in the neighborhood. A 1987 meeting of concerned parishioners led to the founding of the Abyssinian Development Corporation. In the last few years, ADC has started economic revitalization projects — spearheading the establishment of The Central Harlem Local Development Corporation to provide technical assistance and loans to emerging entrepreneurs, launching a Neighborhood Franchise Project, and using federal assistance to redevelop Harlem's historic Renaissance Ballroom and Theater complex. ADC also initiated and manages a Head Start center, a youth employment program, an academy to teach social activism skills to youth and a Community Liaison Unit to help residents organize block associations and neighborhood watch programs. In 1994, ADC lead the drive to bring a Pathmark supermarket and its 200 jobs into central Harlem.

Example: South Bronx residents took their future into their own hands in 1977 when they banded together to prevent the demolition of a row of houses on the crescent-shaped Kelly Street. The group that was formed, called "Banana Kelly," is still owned and governed by local residents. It is now one of the largest and most successful Community Development Corporations in the country. With the slogan "Don't Move, Improve, " the group's activities recently included a paper-recycling project aimed at providing employment for local residents who are mainly Latino and African-American and mostly on welfare.

3. Create a career and job club.

Example: The Pacomia Urban Village is a grass-roots neighborhood organization in California's San Fernando Valley. Among the many activities operated by the village are a career and job club. The career club, which meets every Thursday, works with participants to find out what jobs they would best be suited for and how to get a foot in the door. Counselors from a local college coach participants and encourage them to earn college degrees. The job club works as a referral service, screening residents for employment. Most everyone involved in the village lives in the neighborhood and those who are helped by the village are obliged to give back by planting trees, providing day care for another family, or attending classes in English as a second language.

4. Help businesses become more competitive.

Example: Civic and business leaders in Cleveland recognized that it was essential to make existing firms more competitive. As a result, in 1984, Cleveland Tomorrow (a civic leadership organization) formed CAMP – Cleveland's Advanced Manufacturing Program. CAMP was formed with the goal of stemming the flow of manufacturing jobs from the region, and strengthening Cleve-land's existing manufacturing base. It does this by helping small and mid-size businesses sharpen their competitive edge. With the university community as its partner, CAMP has set up three research and development centers and a training facility. It can point to major successes in improving the competitiveness of Cleveland's industrial base, and has contributed to major work force development by the establishment of the Manufacturing Learning Center, where local college students receive hands-on training in advanced manufacturing techniques.

5. Lobby for a "living wage."

Example: BUILD (Baltimoreans United in Leadership Development), working with the American Federation of State, County, and Municipal Employees, convinced the city council to establish a "living wage" of $7.70 for employees working for city contractors.

6. Advocate for low-cost loans.

Example: PACT (People Acting for Community Together) in Miami and Dade County, Fla., persuaded the largest bank in the state to provide $35 million in low-cost loans for low-income people.

Example: MICAH (Milwaukee Interfaith Congregations Allied for Hope) has secured commitments of over $500 million in loans for mortgages, small businesses, and Community Development Corporations from lenders like Firstar, M&I, and Bank One.

7. Help train and place workers who have been laid off.

Example: Faced with the closing of the Levi-Strauss apparel plant on the south side of San Antonio, local churches and grass-roots community organizations formed Project QUEST in 1990 to train and place laid-off garment workers. Since its inception, QUEST has put 600 residents into new jobs.

Example: In 1967, a California priest started a program in his garage to help 15 migrant farm workers in his barrio get the skills they needed to secure good-paying jobs. Today, San Jose's Center for Employment Training (CET) is a national model duplicated in 43 centers in 14 states. The Center teaches educational and vocational skills simultaneously, and classes cover metal and electronic trades as well as computers and health care.

8. Mentor and support single parents.

Example: In a Maine housing development for female heads of households, Coastal Enterprises, Inc., volunteers from churches provide mentoring and support through a 'mother-to-mother' program.

9. Develop and use school curricula that will help students find jobs in a changing market.

Example: The city of Mobile, AL, has a partnership with the U.S. Department. of Labor and the U.S. Department of Education. The goal of the "School to Work" program is to train all students to graduate from high school and be prepared to go into the work force and get a job. (Federal legislation, The *School to Work Opportunities Act*, was enacted in May, 1994; it provides grants to states until 2001 for programs that integrate vocational and academic studies and provide

work experience.) Local employers and community leaders defined their needs, which provided the focus for three Mobile high schools — public safety, construction, and health care. The Chamber of Commerce representative said of the program: "Hospitals now don't have to go to other cities to meet their work force needs. Police careers have been encouraged and developed. Skilled workers are placed in all building trades for local construction businesses."

10. Combine economic development and job training opportunities.

Example: QUEST, Quality Employment Through Skills Training, is a community-based organization that was founded in San Antonio, NM, in 1992. It is designed to link participants to specific jobs pledged by area businesses. The program promises employers skilled workers, and participants receive one to two years of education and training at an area college geared to specific job requirements. After researching the local job market, QUEST identified 21 occupations in five emerging fields, including medical services, information systems, and manufacturing. The jobs offer good wages and health benefits. To date, total placements are 400 per year, and the operation is a good example of an effort that brings together the broad-based power of effective community organizing, the institutional support of local churches and higher education, the visibility and know-how of corporate leadership, and the resources of the public sector in a carefully focused, single, specific objective.

11. Plan for work in your region, not just your city or town.

Example: Asheville is a community that has built a regional community development strategy. This broad-based coalition in Western North Carolina is implementing a twenty-two county community development strategy based on the unique history of the region as a center for handmade crafts. The community is one of fourteen working with the Pew Partnership for Civic Change, which focuses attention on the civic capacity of smaller cities.

Example: Naugatuck Valley Project develops innovative responses to industrial abandonment and community decay in a large region of Connecticut. For over a decade the Naugatuck Valley Project has tried to hold on to jobs, to build community and to gain control over the Valley's economy. It has demonstrated how people in one locality can learn, change, and assert themselves in the process of organizing around specific problems.

12. Build on your assets to attract the kinds of work you need and want.

Example: Mountain View, AR, is a rural community that lost both its agricultural and its manufacturing (textile) base. It found its salvation by thinking creatively about what it had left. Taking a look at its resources, it concluded that the answer to revitalization resided in cultural tourism. It built a multimillion-dollar tourism industry on its arts, crafts, and music.

"The culture and history of our region is not going to move, so if you develop an infrastructure that is based on the literature and music and arts of the region, that's a foundation that is far firmer than garment factories," says William Ferris, director of the Center for the Study of Southern Culture at the University of Mississippi in Oxford. "Virtually every community will have something that could be developed," says Ferris.

13. Devise strategies that look at the interconnected issues of housing, jobs, and schools.

Example: The Neighborhood Economy Initiative (NEI) in Cleveland, Ohio is guided by the belief that successful regional work force and economic development begins at the neighborhood/community level. Cleveland's East Side, with a population of 114,000, is racially diverse, and has a manufacturing base of 275 firms, a substantial amount of affordable and available residential and commercial real estate, and numerous active community organizations that are open to collaboration. NEI, with $8 million in federal, city, private and philanthropic funds, is revitalizing the area by stimulating business development, creating jobs, and breathing new life into the residential housing market.

14. Assist the transition of people from welfare to work, through training, job placement, child care, and other forms of support.

Many states and cities are devising new welfare policies. Community-based efforts are also playing a role in an increasing number of places.

Example: In Indianapolis, IN, the Indianapolis Independence Initiative has operated since 1994. The city has experimented with performance-based contracting and competition in the delivery of community-based employment/training services. The heart of this approach is to create the tools that will serve as incentives for people to choose work over welfare. Performance contracts include some funds for agency capacity building. The system is intended to reduce costs, increase service quality, and shift services to neighborhoods.

Example: The Women's Opportunity and Resource Development (WORD), in Missoula, MT, works with women on public assistance. It provides assistance in job training, job placement, peer support and child care. Through its affiliate, WEDGo (Montana Western Region Economic Development Group), it provides community development loan funds in western Montana as well as training and technical assistance to businesses.

Example: New York City has a large-scale program of employing people on public assistance in cleanup details around the city. Parks, public buildings, and schools are among the work sites. A few states are considering following NYC's example by setting aside 10 percent or so of entry-level jobs in all state agencies for welfare recipients.

Example: Riverside County, CA, has a distinguished government-run job-search and placement program. It operates on the assumption that the primary need is quick experience in the private job market. As soon as individuals receive public assistance, they are taught basic job-hunting skills and sent out to find work.

Example: In some communities, churches create business centers so entrepreneurs can afford computers and other office machines.

Example: In some communities, single moms work fewer hours outside the home, and more hours for each other, offering child care and support.

Example: The Center for New Work, in Ann Arbor, MI, helps people find ways to meet their daily financial needs while strengthening the community at the same time. ("New Work" is a term coined by Frithjob Bergmann, a professor at the University of Michigan, which emphasizes work *for* the community.) For example, New Work knew of a single woman who had four children and was in need of inexpensive housing. The program put her in touch with a construction firm in Detroit who was willing to swap rent for her part-time participation in the building of an apartment house. With low rent, the pressure to find a high-paying job is lessened; she will have the option once the construction is completed to get another full-time job elsewhere, or work part-time and devote herself in new ways to her community, which is the hallmark of New Work.

15. Support career tracks that sustain individuals and the community.

Example: Three mornings a week a small group of retired men in Bedford, MA, meets to repair household items at the Men's Fix-It Shop operated by the Bedford Council on Aging. Residents bring broken VCRs, lamps, and other small appliances. The men donate their labor. Owners pay for parts, then make a contribution for the work. "It gives men an opportunity to come together around common interests, and to find new friends," says Carolyn Bottum, director of the aging council. "They also provide a very needed service."

Example: A community coalition in Asheville, NC, is organizing study circles on retirement issues that will help people consider the community implications of an aging population.

16. Plan to make good use of the growing population of retired people.

So, you want to continue on ...

Here are some ideas about ways you can stay involved.

1. Continue the study circles, and keep the dialogue going.

a) Talk with the organizers of the program you participated in. What help can you provide?

b) If facilitators are needed — and if you think you can do it — ask about being trained to serve in that capacity.

c) Get to work recruiting new people to participate in a second round of study circles on the same topic. Work hard to broaden the circle of people who take part in the study circles. Reach out to other organizations, form a coalition, and begin to mobilize a diverse group of participants.

d) If people are ready to tackle another issue, the Study Circles Resource Center can help you start community programs on youth issues, race relations, American diversity, education, and crime and violence. If your community faces unique issues, SCRC staff will guide you in developing study circle discussion materials that are specific to your local community. (Contact SCRC for more information.)

2. Get involved, and take action in the community.

a) Convene a meeting of people who have just gone through the study circles, and want to take action to make a difference in your community or workplace. If lots of people are interested, try dividing into groups, "Study Circle Task Forces," that address different concerns. (For example, one group may focus on clean-up projects while another works on youth mentoring or computer training, and another sets out to review and address welfare reform.)

b) Consider together whether you want to join an effort already underway, or if you want to start something new.

c) If you want to build on existing programs, contact the people who coordinate the programs that interest you, and see how your efforts might best be applied. Consider inviting a speaker to address your study circle. Or, as a group, make a site visit.

d) If you want to start something new, take some time as a group to think about what gaps there are in community services, programs, or other civic enterprises. As a group, try a brainstorming session — talking and writing down ideas as you go along. Then, review the list you came up with. Do any common themes emerge? If so, plan to focus your efforts on areas of consensus. If no common themes immediately surface, ask group members to rank their top concerns, and then discuss your options. As you work to narrow your list of alternatives, repeat this process until you have settled on an area to work on.

e) Keep study circle organizers posted about the work you do, so they can let others know about your successes and help navigate any rough spots.

f) Along the way, if you need support or in-kind assistance, contact the Study Circles Resource Center at (860) 928-2616.

Using This Guide

Organizing study circles

The goal of this guide is to help people organize productive, meaningful discussions about a topic that is important to all of us: work. These days, we often hear stories about how much people work, about struggles to balance work and family, or about how global trends are affecting the kind of work that is available. But we rarely have the chance to deliberate with one another about these things in ways that help us look for solutions.

Your challenge as a study circle organizer will be to show people the way to begin these conversations. If you are organizing within the community, you will need to find ways to include people from a wide variety of backgrounds and experiences. If you are organizing discussions within the workplace, you will be working to organize the conversations in a format that fits the needs of the organization and that is true to the democratic principles behind study circles. Either way, it will be important to show people that the study circles will be safe places where they can share their ideas, listen to others, and work together to make a difference on the issues that affect their lives.

As you think about strategies for using this guide, think about the issues that have brought you to this point. Why are you interested in this topic? Then think about what will work in your own situation. What will help people understand the importance of their participation in democratic dialogue about work? Can you find partners in your workplace or in the community? What kinds of outcomes might result from the discussions?

Here are a few ideas for getting started. Each organizing strategy creates opportunities for participants to expand their thinking about work-related issues, forge new networks and relationships, grapple with public issues in a democratic way, and build communities and workplaces in which people can take positive action, on many levels, to improve our worklife.

1. Organize study circles on a work- or jobs-related issue that is of general concern to the community. Think about ways to involve people from all sectors and groups.

The issue could be generated by a new opportunity, a rising challenge, or a recent crisis. (Contact SCRC for a copy of *Planning a Community-wide Study Circle Program: A Step-by-Step Guide.*)

Idea: To respond to a local plant closing or another significant event, organize community-wide study circles using this guide. Participants could be members of local churches, social service agencies, representatives from the Chamber of Commerce, elected public officials, and a broad range of everyday people, including those who lost their jobs.

Idea: To talk about strengthening the job base in your region, organize study circles on economic development issues, and use this guide as a springboard for community-level initiatives. Such a study circle program could examine short-term and long-term approaches. Discussion could be focused on local tax policy, education and training needs, infrastructure support, etc. This round of study circles could be sponsored by a collaborative working group of business and industry, labor unions, community colleges and schools, and elected officials. Individuals in the working group could recruit members of their own organizations, and extend invitations to a broad range of people. Finally, they could issue a general invitation to the public through the local media.[1]

2. Organize study circles in your workplace.

Organize them around a specific workplace issue or set of issues, and ask people to volunteer to participate.[2]

Idea: In study circles in the workplace, explore ways that the organization could be more effective in the larger community. What place does the company or business want to hold in a changing world? What sorts of action plans would help turn the ideas into reality? What can your company and your staff do to assist the civic renewal of your community? What part can you play in making your community a better place to live and work?

Idea: Often there are information gaps between employees who work for the same company, but at different levels. Use study circles as way to help workers understand each other's hopes, experiences, and concerns. Talking about their worklife and the changing world can help people build a sense of what they have in common — that their workplace is a community of sorts. And it can prepare people to work together to improve their work practices.

[1] SCRC may produce other study circle materials on jobs and economic development, but we cannot promise a date when they will be ready. If you are interested in revising this guide to focus on the needs of your community, SCRC offers free consultation to help you develop a guide that suits your needs. For example, the economic development commission in Pomfret, CT, worked with SCRC to design discussion materials to help residents plan for the town's future. In other places, plans are in the works to develop materials and organize statewide study circles on jobs.

[2] In a community context, study circles are a form of *political* deliberation — democratic discussions among equals that help participants have a say in shaping the conditions of their lives and their community. When organizing study circles in workplaces, be aware of the tension between the equality we have as members of a shared, public community ("citizens") and the hierarchical structure of most private workplaces. (For example, if your boss is in the room or if a subordinate is listening, you may feel less willing to share your thoughts openly.) Remember that people who participate in study circles are willing to do so, in part, because they want to make an impact on important issues. To create an environment that is conducive to democratic deliberation in the workplace, organizers and "the powers that be" must make a commitment both to consider the contributions of participants and to share their own reflections. Encourage openess on both sides, and be sensitive to the dynamics that result from mixing people from different levels and departments in the organization. Various strategies can be employed to help the process.

Idea: Employees who wish to explore different practices — more flextime, day care, transportation and parking arrangements, and the like — could start a series of study circles with management on how these changes might be made. Or employers could host a series of discussions at work to learn more about the needs and concerns of their employees. Discussions could range from ideas about improving working conditions to changing workplace practices, with the goal of making the workplace better.

> *Example:* The Ohio Department of Human Services sponsors study circles on diversity issues. Employees at all levels take part in these discussions which are scheduled so that everyone can take part. One of the goals is to consider diversity within the workplace, and to develop workable plans they can put into practice. Another goal is to consider diversity in the larger society and community, so that agency employees can deal more effectively with the diverse communities they serve.

Idea: Associations and labor unions could organize member discussions on "Responding to the Changing Nature of Work." The goal would be to discuss forces and trends that are presenting challenges to today's workers, and to explore ways the union and its members could effectively address those challenges. These discussions could lead to better understanding of the global economy, and could also be part of making union policies on skills training, union organizing, education programs, and other related issues.

> *Example:* The International Union of Bricklayers and Allied Craftsmen has been using study circles for member education for several years. Some of the issues they have explored include health care, retirement planning, drug abuse, sexual harassment, and discrimination.

Tips for Study Circle Leaders

A study circle leader does not need to be an expert (or even the most knowledgeable person in the group) on the topic being discussed, but should be the best prepared for the discussion. This means understanding the goals of the study circle, being familiar with the subject, thinking ahead of time about the directions in which the discussion might go, and preparing the discussion questions to aid the group in considering the subject. Solid preparation will enable you to give your full attention to group dynamics and to what individuals in the group are saying.

Stay neutral

The most important thing to remember is that, as a facilitator, you should not share your personal views or try to advance your agenda on the issue. You are there to serve the discussion, not to join it.

Set a relaxed and open tone

- Welcome everyone and create a friendly and relaxed atmosphere.
- Well-placed humor is usually appreciated.

Establish the purpose of the study circle and help the group establish ground rules

At the beginning of the study circle, remind everyone that the purpose of the study circle is to deliberate on the issue at hand in a democratic and collaborative way. Also remind them that your role as leader is to remain neutral, keep the discussion focused, and guide the conversation according to the ground rules.

Suggest a few basic ground rules, and ask participants to add their own ideas. Some basic ground rules include:

- All group members are encouraged to express and reflect on their honest opinions; all views should be respected.
- Though disagreement and conflict about ideas can be useful, disagreements should not be personalized. Put-downs, name-calling, labeling, or personal attacks will not be tolerated.
- If someone says something that offends another member of the group (even if inadvertently), people should feel free to explain how the comment affected them.
- It is important to hear from everyone. People who tend to talk a lot should make special efforts to allow others the opportunity to express their views.

Stay aware of and assist the group process

- Always use your "third eye." You are not only helping to keep the group focused on the content of the discussion, but you will be monitoring how well the participants are communicating with each other — who has spoken, who hasn't spoken, and whose points haven't yet received a fair hearing.
- Consider splitting up into smaller groups to examine a variety of viewpoints or to give people a chance to talk more easily about their personal connection to the issue.
- When wrestling with when to intervene, err on the side of non-intervention. Don't allow the group to make you the "answer person."
- Don't speak after each comment or answer every question; allow participants to respond directly to each other. The most effective leaders often say little, but are constantly thinking about how to move the group toward its goals.
- Occasionally give participants a chance to sum up the most important points that have come out in the discussion.
- Don't be afraid of silence! People sometimes need time to think before they respond. If silence feels awkward to you, try counting silently to ten before you ask the question again or rephrase it. This will give people time to collect their thoughts.
- Don't let anyone dominate; try to involve everyone.
- Remember: a study circle is not a debate but a group dialogue. If participants forget this, don't hesitate to ask the group to help re-establish the ground rules.
- Keep careful track of time!

Help the group grapple with various points of view

- Your role as facilitator requires that participants see you as neutral and fair, not favoring any one point of view.
- Use these written materials to help participants consider a wide range of views. Rely on the guide rather than presenting something as your idea. Referring to the text helps you maintain your neutrality. You might ask participants to consider a point of view that is under-represented in the discussion. Ask the group to think about the advantages and disadvantages of different ways of looking at an issue or solving a problem.
- Ask participants to think about the concerns and values that underlie their beliefs.

- Don't allow the group to focus on or be overly influenced by one particular personal experience or anecdote.
- Remain neutral about content and be cautious about expressing your own values.
- Help participants to identify "common ground," but don't try to force consensus.

Ask open-ended questions that don't lend themselves to easy answers

- What seems to be the key point here?
- What is the crux of your disagreement?
- Does anyone want to add to (or support, or challenge) that point?
- Could you give an example or describe a personal experience to illustrate that point?
- Could you help us understand the reasons behind your opinion?
- What experiences or beliefs might lead decent and thoughtful people to support that point of view?
- What do you think is really important to people who hold that opinion?
- What would be a strong case against what you just said?
- What do you find most persuasive about that point of view?
- What is it about that position that you just cannot live with?
- Are there any points on which most of us would agree?

Close the discussion with a summary, looking ahead to the next meeting, and evaluation

- Give participants a chance to talk about the most important thing they gained from the discussion. Or you may wish to ask participants to share any new ideas or thoughts they've had as a result of the discussion.
- If you will be meeting again, remind the group of the readings and subject for the next session.

- Thank everyone for their contributions!
- Provide some time for the group to evaluate the process in writing. A brief written evaluation allows participants the chance to comment on the process and give anonymous feedback to the facilitator. (You may want to administer a short questionnaire after each section, or you may wait until the group has gone through all four sessions.)
- Between sessions, talking about the study circle can be an effective way to assess the experience and prepare for the next session. Participants can have input into the process while it is still ongoing, and come to feel a greater sense of ownership. (Be sure to frame your questions carefully.)
- If the groups are meeting with the intention of having an impact on decision making, be sure to document the discussions. In some study circles, participants record common concerns and points of agreement and contention, as well as ideas for action steps.

Be aware of the dynamics of cross-cultural communication

Awareness of cross-cultural dynamics is always useful in a study circle setting.

- Sensitivity, empathy, and familiarity with people of different backgrounds are essential qualities for the facilitator.
- Even though some of the conversation inevitably revolves around differences, set a tone of unity in the group. While our differences may separate us on some matters, we have enough in common as human beings to allow us to talk together in a constructive way. Having co-moderators from different demographic groups can help establish unity. For example, the co-facilitators could be a man and a woman, a white person and a person of color, an adult and a young person, a manager and a clerical assistant.
- Help people to appreciate and respect their own and others' communication styles. People's cultural backgrounds affect the ways in which they communicate. For example, some cultures tend to be more outspoken and directive, while others are more reserved. Some cultures value listening more than speaking. In other cultures, taking a stand is of utmost importance. Help group members to realize there is no "right" way to communicate, and that understanding one another takes practice! Your leadership should demonstrate that each person has an important and unique contribution to make to the group.
- Don't let participants' awareness of cultural norms lead to stereotyping. Generalizations don't necessarily apply to individuals within a culture.
- Remind the group, if necessary, that no one can represent his or her entire culture. Each person's experiences, as an individual and as a member of a group, are unique and valid.

- Encourage group members to use their own experiences as they attempt to empathize with those who have been victims of discrimination — in the workplace or elsewhere. Many people who have been in a minority group have experiences that make this discussion a very personal issue. Others, particularly those who are usually in the majority, may not have thought as extensively about their own culture and its effects on their lives. To aid this, you may want to encourage people to think about times in their own lives when they have been treated unfairly. For those study circle participants who are currently at the receiving end of mistreatment, this could seem invalidating unless you explain that you are trying to build empathy and understanding among all members. Remind people that no one can know exactly what it feels like to be in anyone else's shoes.

- Encourage group members to talk about their own experiences and cultures rather than other people's. In this way, they will be less likely to make inaccurate generalizations about other cultures. Also, listening to others recount their own experiences breaks down stereotypes and broadens understanding.

Guidelines for Study Circle Participants

The goal of a study circle is not to learn a lot of facts; the goal is to deepen understanding and judgment, and to think about ways to make a difference on a community issue you care about. This can occur in a safe, focused discussion when people exchange views freely and consider a variety of views. The process — democratic discussion among equals — is as important as the content.

The following points are intended to help you make the most of your study circle experience.

- Make a good effort to attend all meetings. The comfort level and depth of conversation depend upon familiarity with other participants.
- Think together about what you want to get out of your conversation.
- Help keep the discussion on track. Make sure your remarks are relevant.
- Speak your mind freely, but don't monopolize the conversation.
- Listen carefully to others. Try to really understand what they are saying and respond to it, especially when their ideas are different from yours. Try to avoid building your own arguments in your head while others are talking. If you're afraid you'll forget to make a point, write it down.
- Be open to changing your mind. This will help you really listen to others' views.
- When disagreement occurs, don't personalize it. Do keep talking, and explore the disagreement. Search for the common concerns beneath the surface.
- Don't waste time arguing about points of fact. For the time being, you may need to agree to disagree and then move on. You might decide to check out the facts together before your next meeting.
- Value one another's experiences. Think about how your own experiences have contributed to your thinking.
- Help to develop one another's ideas. Listen carefully, and ask clarifying questions.

Resources

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45

Private Organizations:

AFL-CIO Organizing Institute
815 16th Street, NW
Washington, DC 20006
(800) 848-3021

Founded in 1989 by the AFL-CIO, the Organizing Institute works to promote union organizing as a vehicle for social and economic justice. Employees wishing to form a union in their workplace can call the Institute and be put in touch with an organizer in their area.

Alliance For National Renewal
National Civic League
1445 Market Street, Suite 300
Denver, CO 80202-1728
(303) 571-4343
http://www.ncl.org/anr

A network of more than 150 community-building organizations working to address the serious issues facing America and its communities. Founded in 1994, the Alliance is a unique resource that can quickly link you to some of the most important and innovative organizations working to revitalize our society. Also inquire about The Kitchen Table Newsletter, ANR's Community Resource Manual and booklets on special projects.

Center for Living Democracy
RR #1 Black Fox Road
Brattleboro, VT 05301
(802) 254-1234; fax (802) 254-1227
http://www.sover.net/~cld

The Center promotes the ideas, skills, and practices of democracy. Contact the Center to learn about its new American News Service which publishes and distributes articles covering America's search for solutions to community problems. Also, inquire about their interactive television series called Grassroots Journal, training workshops, guides and action tools available through the Learning Center, Learning Tools Catalog, and more.

Center for Neighborhood Technology
2125 W. North Avenue
Chicago, IL 60647
(773) 278-4800
http://www.cnt.org

The Center for Neighborhood Technology puts out a bi-monthly magazine, The Neighborhood Works, which covers community organizing and development in low and middle-income neighborhoods around issues of housing, energy, environment, economic and community development and transit. Each issue contains regular how-to features, addresses and phone numbers for resources, reviews of relevant books, and conference, grant, and publication listings. E-mail The Neighborhood Works at "tnwedit@cnt.org."

Civic Practices Network
Center for Human Resources
Brandeis University
60 Turner Street
Waltham MA 02154
(617) 736-4890; fax 617/736-3773
http://www.cpn.org

An online journal that brings together innovators and educators to share the tools, stories, and best practices of community empowerment and civic renewal. Contact CPN or log on to its website to learn about civic work taking place around the country — real life stories, practical tools, essays, studies, manuals, and more.

Organizations
continued

Employment and Training Council
The United States Conference of Mayors
1620 Eye Street, NW
Washington, DC 20006
(202) 293-7330

Works with employment and training professionals in cities to help them meet the challenges of dealing with economically disadvantaged individuals who are unemployed, underemployed, and who lack basic skills for economic self-sufficiency.

Local Initiatives Support Corporation
733 Third Avenue
New York, NY 10017
(212) 455-9800
(fax) 212-682-5929

An organization that nurtures Community Development Corporations (CDCs), and builds community development partnerships at the local and national level. LISC recently published a report called "Life in the City: A Status Report on the Revival of Urban Communities in America," in conjunction with the Center for National Policy.

National Congress for Community Economic Development (NCCED)
11 DuPont Circle, Suite 325
Washington, DC 20036
(202) 234-5009

The National Congress for Community Economic Development is a trade association founded in 1970 for groups that focus on economic revitalization of distressed communities. It is charged with promoting the revitalization of low- and moderate-income urban and rural communities and helping CDCs with research, training, and fund-raising. Currently, NCCED is creating a community development curriculum for ministers.

National Issues Forums
100 Commons Road
Dayton, OH 45459-2777
(800) 433-7834; fax (937) 439-9804
http://www.nifi.org/

NIF publishes issue booklets to aid balanced discussion on important social issues, such as immigration, poverty, the economy, education, etc. The material is geared for use in classroom debates, group discussions, individual reading, preparation of speeches and term papers, and community forums. Call NIF to inquire about the booklets and other publications and programs.

Neighborhood Reinvestment Corporation
1325 G Street, NW, Suite 800
Washington, DC 20005
(202) 876-2413
http://www.nw.org

A public, nonprofit corporation, the Neighborhood Reinvestment Corporation strives to revitalize distressed communities by mobilizing public, private, and community resources at the neighborhood level. The Corporation's mission is to create and support NeighborWorks, a national network of community-based partnerships, and to develop and implement strategies that contribute to NeighborWorks Communities.

Study Circles Resource Center
Box 203, Route 169
Pomfret, CT 06258
(860) 928-2616; fax (860) 928-3713
E-mail: scrc@neca.com

The Study Circles Resource Center (SCRC) helps communities use study circles — small, democratic, highly participatory discussions — to involve large numbers of citizens in public dialogue and problem solving on critical issues such as crime, race, education, and youth issues. SCRC staff members work with community leaders at every stage of creating a community-wide study circle program — helping organizers network between communities; working to develop strong coalitions within communities; advising on material development; and writing letters of support for funding proposals. SCRC also provides free discussion materials to organizers of carefully designed community-wide study circle programs. Please call for more information

9to5, National Association of Working Women
238 East Wisconsin Avenue, Suite 700
Milwaukee, WI 53203-2308
(414) 274-0925
E-mail: nat9to5@execpc.com
http://www.feminist.com/9to5.htm

The largest membership organization of working women in the country, 9to5 provides resources for working women and their families. Its Job Survival Hotline (1-800-522-0925) links trained counselors with women needing advice on issues including family leave and pay equity. 9to5 has done extensive research and issues reports in areas such as work force restructuring and part-time and temporary work. Their book, The Job/Family Challenge, a 9to5 Guide (1995) is available through John Wiley & Sons publishers.

Partners for Livable Communities
1429 21st Street, NW
Washington, DC 20036
(202) 887-5990

An international network of over 1,000 organizations, Partners for Livable Communities is committed to improving communities through economic development and social equity. Partners works to create realistic strategies and creative programs for its constituents through publications, networking, leadership training, and technical assistance.

Government Organizations:

Economic Development Administration
U.S. Department of Commerce
14th and Constitution Avenue, Room 7800B
Washington, DC 20230
(202) 482-5081

The EDA supports a variety of local economic development activities, in areas like defense conversions, revolving loan funds, facilities construction, and infrastructure development.

National Endowment for the Humanities
1100 Pennsylvania Avenue NW
Washington, DC 20506
Public Information Office (202) 606-8400 <info@neh.fed.us>
Division of Public Programs (202) 606-8267 <publicpgms@neh.fed.us>
NEH Main # 800-NEH-1121; TDD (202) 606-8282
http://www.neh.fed.us

The National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH) is an independent federal agency that supports research, education, preservation projects and public programs in the humanities. In addition to granting funds, NEH and its State Humanities Councils are valuable resources for information about programs, speakers, publications, exhibitions and more. Inquire about the bibliographies, conversation kits, resource guides, and radio programs. Ask about their conversation kit, The Nation that Works: Conversations on American Pluralism and Identity, a jointly-sponsored public discussion guide on work and values produced by the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH) and the American Library Association (ALA). This discussion series explores five themes on work in America, using readings from literature, social science and history.

U.S Chamber of Commerce Small Business Institute
1615 H Street, NW
Washington, DC 20062
(202) 659-6000

Launched in 1996, the U.S. Chamber of Commerce Small Business Institute provides a wide range of affordable and effective training tools and products developed exclusively for small and growing businesses. The Institute publishes the Small Business Financial Resource Guide, which is designed to direct small business owners to the types of financing they will need.

U.S. Cooperative Extension Service
U.S Department of Agriculture
14th and Independence Avenue, SW
Whitten Building
Washington, DC 20250
(202) 720-4423

CES is organized as a cooperative effort between the US Department of Agriculture, land-grant colleges, and county governments. Its county extension agents bring free information on agriculture and economic development to communities across the country.

U.S. Small Business Administration Small Business Institute
409 3rd Street, SW
Washington, DC 20416
(202) 205-6740

A cooperative venture between the U.S. Small Business Administration (SBA) and approximately 500 colleges and universities in the 50 states and several U.S. territories. Since the program's inception in 1972, SBI student management consultant teams have provided advice to correct problems and capitalize on opportunities of more than 152,000 small businesses. This consultation service is provided at no cost to the business that could not obtain similar assistance elsewhere.

More Work & Community Resources on the Web

http://www.cpn.org/sections/topics/work/

Among many practical resources for people doing community work, this "civic site" contains case studies and essays on community innovations. Be sure to check out the Work and Empowerment bulletin board.

http://www.unl.edu/kellogg/econdev.html

This is the WW Kellogg Collection of Rural Community Development Resources. It is an excellent resource for community development, strategic planning, entrepreneurial activity, and more.

http://www.entreworld.org/

At the Kaufman Foundation website for the Center for Entrepreneurial Leadership, you'll find a variety of resources for entrepreneurs — from advice on running your own business, to ways to support entrepreneurship.

http://www.ncl.org/anr/ced.htm

The Alliance for National Renewal's website on community economic development includes a number of community stories — including innovative rural development efforts, urban renewal projects, employment and training programs, and more.

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement (OERI)
Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC)

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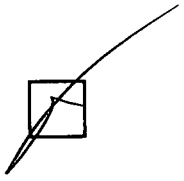

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