The Action Forum: Structuring the Action Forum to Meet Your Community’s Goals

Community-based dialogue-to-change initiatives rely on a mixture of community forums, small, facilitated dialogues and large group meetings. The large group meeting following a series of forums or dialogue circles, often called an Action Forum, is the time to consolidate ideas and experiences from a number of groups and make plans for follow-up action.

Effective Action Forums include a number of elements. The event can be modified to emphasize and support the program goals and the kinds of outcomes anticipated. Here are some tips:

**For initiatives focused on action at the individual level—changes in attitudes, behaviors and beliefs**
- Build in ample time for individual groups to report out on their experiences.
- Ask for individual testimonials.
- Invite participants to sign a personal pledge to adopt new kinds of behaviors.
- Celebrate!

**For initiatives focused on shared action or institutional change**
- Invite interested organizations to send representatives to the Forum.
- Provide time and space to showcase organizations and initiatives (include display tables and booths).
- Save time for leaders to “pitch” their work to the group.
- Recruit leaders and facilitators to convene and work with new action groups.
- Allow time for new action groups and new collaborating organizations to meet and start their work.
- Develop processes to keep track of action groups, and provide support when they need it.

**For initiatives focused on input to decision makers and policy outcomes**
- Working with the policy makers, develop protocols for recorders to collect meaningful, useable information from the circles.
- Set clear expectations. Describe the kind of input policy makers are looking for, and how the information from the dialogue circles will be collected and used.
- Set aside time for the circles to report major recommendations to policy makers. Allow time for questions and answers.
- Capture the information in a summary report, and plan wide distribution through media, web sites, public libraries and other venues.
Sample Action Forum Agenda

1. Snacks, social time, music or poetry, and time to read summaries from each circle posted around the room

2. Welcome and Introductions
   - Review agenda.
     - Talk about the forum/study circle effort in the community.
     - Thank facilitators and other key volunteers.

3. Reports from the Forums, Study Circles
   - Ask one person from each circle to make a brief report about action ideas from their group
     - Or, when the group is large (more than 60 people), post summaries from each group where everyone can see them. Invite a few people to report out on their group.

4. Overview of Community Assets
   - A person from the organizing group reviews key community assets. These assets will help the community move action ideas forward.

5. Moving to Action
   - The MC (Master of Ceremonies) identifies the main ideas from all the groups.
     - People sign up for an action group or task force.
     - Action groups meet and begin their work. (Ideally, a leader will have already been identified as part of identifying community assets.) They also set a date for their next meeting.

6. Closing remarks
   - Closing remarks. (Including how the action efforts will be tracked and tied to further organizing.)
     - Next steps. (Include plans for another round of circles, celebration, or check-in meeting.)
     - Thanks to all.