

## **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.