

## Workshop Three

### LEARNING ABOUT OUR OURSELVES AND OUR COMMUNITY

#### Objective

- To understand the impact of individual/family background on participant's perceptions of and involvement in community.

#### Outcomes

- Participants will explore some of the ways in which their values, attitudes and beliefs are affected by their roots.
- Participants will explore individual backgrounds and identify some of the ways in which they impact our understanding of communities.
- Participants will explore the group's diversity and begin to build greater cross-cultural understanding.

#### Before You Begin

##### ***Exploring Ethnic, Cultural and Religious Identities: Some Background and Guidelines***

*The process of exploring a group's ethnic, cultural and religious identities can provide some important insights into the group with whom you will be working—and can help group members gain sensitivity and understanding of one another's perspectives. At the same time, because issues of ethnicity, race and religion are highly politicized within our culture, their exploration must be approached with sensitivity and respect. How each of us chooses to identify is a very personal process, and will often be quite distinctive among individuals of seemingly similar backgrounds and races. Thus, for example, blacks may identify as Black, African-American, Kenyan, West Indian, etc, while individuals whose ancestors come from "Latin" countries may identify as Latino, Hispanic, Chicano, Colombian, Puerto Rican, etc. Many whites in our culture may see themselves as "Americans," though most will also have ethnic and religious identities, e.g., Italian-American, Irish Catholic, etc., which are important to understanding how they define themselves. It is critical that facilitators understand that there is no right and wrong in the self-identity process and provide an environment that supports listening, reflection and learning.*

#### I. Welcome and Review of Workshop Two Homework Assignments

*(20 minutes)*

Welcome all the group members and check in to see how group is feeling. Ask group members to share some of their experiences conducting one-on-one interviews with their friends. What were some of the things that they learned that surprised them? What parts of conducting one-on-ones felt comfortable for them? What was harder? Ask for questions and go over concerns, modeling if necessary. Note that conducting interviews with community members will get

It is important that facilitators explore the issues that arose for the participants when they attempted to do the one-on-ones. It is possible that some of the participants will indicate that the homework went fine without any glitches when, in fact, they struggled with it. It is also possible that some participants did the homework but were unable to really engage their partners in the exercises and thus failed to surface any new information during the one-on-ones. For some of the participants, these problems can be expected.

easier as they have more practice and that as they become more comfortable with the process, the individuals who they are interviewing will also become more comfortable.



**POINTER** – The following questions may be useful for assessing how well the homework assignment went for participants:

- 1) How did the exercise go with your friends?
- 2) Did your friends learn anything new about you that surprised them?
- 3) Do you learn anything new about them that surprised you?
- 4) What aspects of the one-on-ones were comfortable?
- 5) What aspects seemed harder?
- 6) Are there any questions about the one-on-one process that need clarifying? You may want to role play part of a one-on-one to clarify areas of confusion.

The important points to discuss with the participants are:

- 1) Struggling with this aspect of the training is natural.
- 2) Participants will get better at doing this type of activity as they practice.
- 3) Any resistance that participants might have can and will likely be overcome as the training proceeds.

## II. Agenda Review (5 minutes)

Review the agenda and talk about some of the goals of the workshop. Explain to participants that each of us brings a distinctive individual and family background to our involvement in communities, and that understanding our “roots” is often useful to better understanding our perceptions and feelings about our communities. Remind people that during the activities in this session, participants should feel free to share at the level that is comfortable for them, and that group members always have a right to pass if they choose not to participate in an activity.

As you are introducing the material for this session, be aware that some participants may be uncomfortable with the idea of sharing their background or their “roots.” Participants need to know that the purpose of this particular session is to sensitize them to the fact that communities are comprised of people representing many different cultures and backgrounds. As participants engage in neighborhoods to address problems they identify, they will inevitably come in contact with people from cultures different than their own. Recognizing the contributions that all people can make to a community-building effort lies at the heart of the FTG strategy.

These exercises allow for a gradual introduction and exploration of the issues of diversity. Be sure to point out that participants should engage in the exercises at a their own comfort level. The exercises were developed and chosen to allow discussion of important issues without requiring that people go “too deep” into their backgrounds. Remember, as the facilitator, you can assist the process by modeling disclosure about yourself and your background. This will support the trust building between you and the groups and set an example of how to proceed. If you sense that some individuals are uncomfortable, encourage them to stay with the process and to listen and contribute as they feel comfortable.

### III. Audience Participation Survey

(10 minutes)

Tell the group that you are going to take a brief survey to get a sense of the group. Ask people to stand when appropriate.

Say the following:

- 1) *Please stand if you were born in a country other than the United States.*  
(Take a quick poll around the room of those standing to determine some of the places that they were born.)
- 2) *Please stand if you were born in a state other than \_\_\_\_\_ (the state in which the training is taking place).*  
(Again, quickly allow those standing to share the states in which they were born.)
- 3) *Please stand if your great-grandparents were born in a country other than the United States.*  
(Poll for the countries of origins of participants' ancestors).
- 4) *Please stand if you were raised in a primarily rural community.*
- 5) *Please stand if you were raised in a primarily urban community.*

Thank the group for their participation.



**POINTER** – This “warm-up” exercise is straightforward and allows participants to get a feel for the diversity in the room. Be sure to point out any interesting trends that may have emerged as people stood up, such as, “A lot of folks from out of state,” or “Looks like most of you were born and raised here.”

### IV. Exploring Our Roots

(30 minutes)

Use the “Birthday Line” technique to begin the process of creating small groups. Ask people to line up according to the month and day that they were born without talking. After they have done so, count them off into groups of five and have them sit down in small groups.

**POINTER** – The “Birthday Line” is a simple method for mixing up a group that allows participants to devise innovative ways to communicate with one another without speaking. When using this technique, let people know that they can communicate non-verbally (i.e., signal each other with their hands, etc.). Avoid giving too much instruction. Part of the fun of this activity is allowing people to figure out how to accomplish the requested task without talking.



Review the procedures for a microlab with the group, and then have each group conduct a microlab using the following guidelines:

- 1) *Identify yourself to your group. What do you consider your ethnic, cultural, racial, religious background? (Stress that there is no wrong way to do this.)*
- 2) *Tell your group briefly about the family that you grew up in—family size, birth order, close-knit or not, extended family or not.*
- 3) *Share one aspect of your roots that you feel very proud of.*
- 4) *Share one aspect of your roots that you don't like so much.*

**POINTER** – It is helpful to write the directions for a microlab on a chart tablet and on hand-outs (see Handouts #1 and #2) so that the group can refer back to the directions during the exercise.



#### The Microlab Format

In a microlab, small groups participate in a structured sharing activity. Each group is asked to respond to a series of questions or to follow a set of directions. All group members should have an opportunity to share before any crosstalk among individuals takes place. Thus, the microlab focuses on strengthening participants' active listening skills. Only after all participants have shared should group members begin to engage in a conversation about what was shared.

**BREAK**  
15 minutes

## V. Sharing Our Internalized Values, Attitudes and Behavior Patterns

(40 minutes)

Point out to the group that one of the things that we often don't realize is how much our values, attitudes and behaviors are affected by the families and communities in which we grew up. Note that the group is going to participate in an exercise that explores the impact of our background on these patterns. Have group members pair up with someone in the room with whom they have not yet had an opportunity to talk.

Once the group is in pairs, ask them to imagine that they are the person who parented them, and that the following situation occurred in their household. Have each person try to say, in the words that they would have heard from their parent or caretaker, what their reaction would have been to each of the following situations:

- *You sit down to dinner and do not like any of the food that is being served. You ask for something else to eat.*
- *Your mother has just refused to let you spend Saturday night at your friend's house. Everyone else in your class is going to be there and you let your mother know how unfair you think she is being.*

This exercise moves from small-group format to pairs. In pairing up, the level of discussion shifts to a more intimate format—one-on-one. Through this exercise, participants see how different backgrounds affect everyday events. Some of these scenarios will have more of an emotional charge for some participants than others. For example, bringing home a boyfriend or girlfriend of a different religion or racial background could have been a major life event for one or more participants. Advise people to be supportive of their partners and not to judge the content or emotional level of the responses.

- *You've gotten into an argument with a teacher over a grade on a paper. The teacher sends a note home requesting a meeting.*
- *You have a really good job offer and decide that you don't really need to finish high school.*
- *You bring home a boyfriend or girlfriend of a different religion or racial background.*

## VI. Discussion of Values and Attitudes Activity

(15 minutes)

Have members of the group share some of the things they talked about in their pairs. Try to identify the range of values and attitudes that exists within the group. Point out that some of these differences are subtle and often do not surface until people begin to interact with each other.

Ask group members if their responses to their children would be the same/different as those of their parents. Why? What has changed? What things remain the same? What is responsible for the changes in their approaches?

Sharing the conversations that occurred in the pairs is important to creating an environment that supports talking about differences. It also reinforces the notion that groups are very heterogeneous. Encourage people to share their feelings and thoughts about the exercise and what they heard from their partner. It is also important for you to listen for common themes or subtle issues embedded in the discussion. For example, this exercise may be the first time that some participants disclose personal information in a larger group. It may also be one of the first opportunities that some participants have had to talk to individuals from different backgrounds in an open and non-threatening environment. Note and acknowledge these themes if you see them and emphasize their significance.

## VII. Reflections on the Communities of Our Youth

(45 minutes)

Ask the group members to remain in the same small groups in which they have been working. Note that individuals' ethnic, cultural and religious backgrounds often have an impact on how they relate to and live their communities. Point out that when doing community development work, it is helpful to reflect on and understand some of the impact of the spoken and unspoken rules that have shaped our early community experiences.

Continue to use a microlab format to explore some of these themes. Use the questions below to guide the micro-lab.

- Describe the community in which you grew up and your family's relationships in that community. Did your family participate in community activities and organizations? If so, what kinds?

This exercise also uses the microlab format. This time, however, the structured questions move to the level of community experiences. Note that the training and exercises often move from individual to community. This shift in perspective parallels the broadened perspective that is one of the training's key objectives. For example, often we blame the individual drinker for all alcohol problems and fail to recognize the powerful influence of the environment. Advertising, the cheap high-potency alcoholic beverages available in low-income communities and aggressive targeted marketing help shape drinking behavior and resulting problems. This training begins to create opportunities for participants to make this paradigm shift. These kinds of exercises facilitate the transition. By encouraging the discussion to focus on community dynamics, the training's focus moves from the individual to the environment and its influence on the individual.

- Who were the groups that lived in your community? How did your family define who was the same/who was different from you? How were community insiders/outsideers defined?
- What were the rules (spoken or unspoken) that you learned about how you were supposed to interact with the people who were different than you?

After each statement is discussed by the group, process the discussion with the larger group to get a sense of what people are talking about. Guide the conversation, if necessary, so that people begin focusing on the nature of the dynamics of the community in which they grew up, particularly on some of the key inter-group relations issues.

## VIII. Closing Activity: A Wish for Our Children

(10 minutes)

Have group participants share around the following sentence:

*The one thing from my "roots" that I would like to pass on to my children is.....*

This closing exercise is quick but important, for it serves to affirm the background of each participant and reconnects them to positive aspects of their past. In doing so, it seeks to close the workshop with a positive focus.

## IX. Workshop Three Homework

Tell participants that as a follow-up to this workshop, they will have another opportunity to practice conducting one on one interviews. This time, however, they should conduct interviews with individuals who come from a distinctive ethnic, cultural or religious background than their own, preferably people who live within their own community. (This does not mean that they cannot interview other people who are of their own race—as long as they come from a distinctive ethnic, cultural or religious background—for example, African Americans and blacks from the islands or from Africa come from distinctive cultural backgrounds, as do many different Hispanic, Irish, Italian and other ethnic groups.) When doing these one on one's, participants should try and listen for the ways in which the person's background has impacted their experience of the community. After conducting the interviews, participants should write up their impressions using the homework worksheet.

The homework continues the one-on-one practice and the focus on people from distinctive ethnic, cultural or religious backgrounds. The homework has a number of different goals:

- 1) To continue the practice of one-on-ones.
- 2) To practice active listening.
- 3) To explore how a person's background affects their community experience.
- 4) To continue to expose participants to the broad range of people they are likely to encounter as they do community work.

### If Your Community Action Group Is Already Up and Running

As noted after Workshop Two, continue conducting issue-specific one-on-ones with training participants, making sure that they reach out to a diverse ethnic, cultural and religious population as they seek to better understand the issue as it plays itself out in your community. Consider including microlab activities that might help residents to see how diverse ethnic groups might perceive a particular issue within your community differently. For example, if your community action group is working on improving resident-police relationships in order to increase trust, think about adding some questions that unearth attitudes, values and beliefs regarding the police that were experienced during individuals' lives. Understanding these variations will lead to crafting strategies that reflect the needs of the diverse population living the community.

# WORKSHOP THREE

# Handouts

## Notes

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## Workshop Three – Handout #1

### *Microlab One Discussion Guide*

- 1) Identify yourself to your group. What do you consider your ethnic, cultural, racial and religious background?
- 2) Share briefly about the family that you grew up in—family size, number of children, birth order, extended or not, close-knit or not. Include special things that you remember about your family.
- 3) Share one aspect of your roots that you feel very proud of.
- 4) Share one aspect of your roots that you don't like so much.

## Notes

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## Workshop Three – Handout #2

### *Microlab Two Discussion Guide*

- 1) Describe the community that you grew up in and your family's relationships in that community. Did your family participate in community activities and organizations? What kinds?
- 2) Describe the groups that lived in your community. How did your family define who was the same/different from you? How were community insiders/outsideers defined?
- 3) What were the rules (spoken or unspoken) that you learned about how you were supposed to interact with the people who were different than you?

## Notes

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# Workshop Three – Homework Assignment

## *Instruction Sheet for Doing One-on-one Interviews with Individuals from Different Cultures*

The goal of this assignment is similar to that of engaging in one-on-one interviews with friends—except that now you should meet and talk with people that you identify as being from different cultures. You may choose to interview someone from a different ethnicity or race, or a person with a different sexual identity, religion or country of origin than yourself. What is important is that you make the distinction.

For this homework assignment, please interview two people. One of the people you interview may be an acquaintance. However, at least one person should be someone you do not know. The interviews should last for at least 20 minutes. As in your previous interviews, the goal of this exercise is for you to establish a deeper understanding of the key issues and concerns that these individuals have regarding the communities in which they live or work.

Please follow the three interview steps associated with one-on-one interviews. However, in this case you may not want to close the interview by asking the interviewee if he/she would like to receive information about the project as it proceeds—unless you want to maintain the relationship for purposes of the project. Depending on the future prospect of a continued relationship, you may or may not wish to disclose that the assignment is associated with the training you are engaged in. Seeking out differences between your community and the community in which your interviewee lives or works is important information to extract from the interviews.

Please answer the following questions after you have completed each interview:

- 1) What was the nature of your relationship with the person you interviewed *before* you started?

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- 2) What are the ethnic, cultural and religious backgrounds of the persons that you chose to interview?

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3) How were these interviews similar to/different from those you did with your friends?

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4) To what do you attribute the differences?

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5) In general, how well did the interview go?

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6) What difficulties, if any, did you have moving through each of the three stages of the interview?

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7) What did you learn that you didn't already know?

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8) Was the interview comfortable? Why?

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9) What other observations do you have about this process?

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