

# **A Guide to Organizing a START Group**

**START: Study, Think, Act, Respond Together**

**www.startguide.org**

**August 2007**

---

**Note** that you can download and print a complete copy of this START Study Guide in Adobe Acrobat Reader format (pdf): <http://www.startguide.org/docs/STARTGuide.pdf>

---

# Table of Contents

1. Introduction .....	3
2. How to Conduct a Standard 24-Session START Course.....	7
A. Introduction .....	7
B. Preparing for a START Course .....	7
C. Democratic Group Process .....	9
D. Content Overview.....	11
E. Suggested Agendas .....	13
F. Descriptions of Agenda Items Common to Most Sessions .....	16
G. Descriptions of Agenda Items Specific to Particular Sessions .....	21
H. Descriptions of Exercises .....	24
3. Alternatives to a Standard START Course .....	35
4. Underlying Principles of START .....	40
5. Empowerment.....	43
6. How to Organize a START Group .....	45
7. Developing New Materials .....	47
8. Resources.....	50
9. START Stories.....	53

## Production Notes

The START Study Guide had its origins in the 1981 booklet *Organizing Macro-Analysis Seminars: Study & Action for a New Society*. This first edition was written from March 2005 to August 2007. The main people who worked on this edition were Randy Schutt in Cleveland, OH and Pamela Haines in Philadelphia, PA. Susan Helper offered editorial suggestions.

# A Guide to Organizing a START Group

**START: Study, Think, Act, Respond Together**

## 1. Introduction

### A. What is START?

START is a study/action process that offers a way for a small group of people to systematically ask basic questions about the workings of our society and choose effective ways to bring about positive change: Study, Think, Act, Respond Together. START groups are the direct descendants of the popular Macro-Analysis Seminars that were developed in the early 1970s.

START groups educate and empower people to help our society more fully embody traditional American ideals of democracy, justice, freedom, responsibility, altruism, bold action, and peaceful cooperation. Moreover, the process of a START group encourages the development and practice of these same ideals as the participants work together.

The basic processes of START were first developed by a group of people who were actively involved in the struggle for social justice in the United States. While working in the civil rights movement and the anti-Vietnam War movement, they had discovered that the social problems they encountered did not exist in isolation — they were profoundly interconnected and were part of a larger system of global injustice. Seeking to get to the roots of social and economic problems, they organized a variety of study groups. These led to the development of a particular kind of study group — a “Macro-Analysis Seminar” — to look at “the big picture.”

They prepared a study guide and reading list, and tens of thousands of people around the United States (and the world) subsequently conducted Macro-Analysis Seminars. Regrettably, this movement waned in the mid-1980s and, over time, the Macro-Analysis Seminar materials became outdated.

In 2005, a new group of people decided to revive the idea. We have revised the study guide (this document) and have developed a more extensive reading list of materials that are freely available on the Internet. While we continue to believe that it is vital to understand the big picture and reveal the systemic nature of problems (“macro-analysis”), in these hard times we need more focus on finding positive and effective solutions — so it seemed time for a new name.

START has had many contributors over the past four decades. What we present to you in this study guide and accompanying reading list is simply the most recent version of an on-going process of study and dialogue. We hope that you find its current manifestation useful. We also hope you will join us in this dialogue, and contribute whatever insights and suggestions you can to this process of study and action.

## B. How Does a START Group Work?

The rest of this guide answers this question in detail. Briefly, a group of people (typically 8–12) agrees to meet regularly — typically once a week for a few hours. Beforehand, several of the participants read a few articles (or listen to audio recordings or watch a video). At the meeting, they each briefly present what they have learned to the others, and then everyone discusses the issues raised. They also engage in a variety of exercises to develop ideas and plans for positive change.

START groups are similar to other study groups, but have some unique features. Study groups that focus narrowly on societal problems can easily bog down in despair. Study groups that focus on theories of change rarely get to practical next steps. To avoid these problems, START looks at hard societal issues, change theories, and the many innovative solutions that have already proved possible. START also helps participants learn how to work effectively for positive change, enabling them to readily tackle tough problems.

Many study groups fail because they are conducted poorly — with unfocused discussions and a few dominant voices — and end up feeling like a waste of time. To avoid these problems, START has a particular group process designed to be democratic and encouraging of real sharing. This process also helps a group to focus its attention on and successfully grapple with the topic at hand.. Since equalitarian, open, relationships are a part of our vision of a good society, it makes sense to develop these kinds of relationships with each other.

## C. Why a Study Course?

As citizens of a democracy, it is our obligation to understand our world and act to make it better. But the world is a mysterious place, and we are continually bombarded by confusing, misleading, and conflicting information. It is difficult to learn and understand what is going on, why events occur the way they do, and how we can effectively tackle social problems.

The current information environment is significantly different from the past. For almost all of history, getting information was extremely difficult. Before the invention of the printing press, very few people had access to any information beyond their own experience. However, with the emergence of books, then newspapers, telephones, radio, television, and now the worldwide Internet, this situation has changed dramatically.

With the current information glut, our main difficulty has become separating out honest, helpful information from the commercial advertisements, mindless blather, alluring enticements, misinformation, deceitful propaganda, and discouraging sleaze that inundate us every day. Our crucial need now is for information that is truthful, coherent, and useful in effectively solving real problems.

Take, for example, the issue of world hunger. The Green Revolution of the 1960s (chemicals, machinery, and hybrid seeds) was supposed to solve the problem of hunger. But proponents did not allow for the negative impact of powerful multinationals in poor countries, the social disruption of destroying subsistence agriculture, or the environmental problems associated with chemical dependence. More food is being produced and people in developed countries are eating better than ever before, but world hunger is still an enormous problem.

This example shows how knotty a problem can be and how disappointing conventional solutions often are. START helps a group of concerned people see beyond the “conventional wisdom” and quickly learn — from readings and each other — about the problems of our society and effective ways to bring about positive change.

## D. Analysis for Action

While focused on study, analysis, and discussion, the primary goal of a START group is to foster concrete action that will lead to a more just world society. Study groups sometimes snare people in what Martin Luther King, Jr. called the “paralysis of analysis” — forever studying the issues and continually putting off moving into action.

On the other hand, activists need time to reflect. To ensure his actions were on track, Gandhi regularly took time for analysis and reflection, a time known by some as “Gandhian Mondays.” START groups are one way for activists to spend their Gandhian Mondays together.

A number of change actions have come out of this process. A 1971 Macro-Analysis Seminar studying the problem of U.S. support of reactionary regimes abroad led to a very dramatic action in which groups of people in five different port cities used canoes and other small boats to block the loading of ships destined for the Pakistani Army. Pakistan at the time was attempting to subdue a nationalist revolt in the area that has since become Bangladesh, and its murderous course was being supported with U.S. arms. The blockade was honored by the longshore workers and led to changes in U.S. foreign policy.

An even larger and more far-reaching movement grew directly out of Macro-Analysis Seminars — the massive and effective safe energy (anti-nuclear power) movement of the 1970s and 80s.

We hope that your START group will also lead to effective action toward a better world.

## E. Goals

Every START group will be different, but here are some overall common goals you might expect to achieve.

### For the Individual:

- Each participant learns more about the world and how it actually works.
- Each participant is empowered as a citizen — encouraged and enabled to take responsibility for our society and work for positive change.
- Each participant gains skills in working cooperatively with others.

### For the Group:

- The group becomes a cohesive and empowered entity.
- The group supports individuals in their change efforts.
- The group chooses an action direction and works together toward achieving it.

## F. A Variety of Formats

### The Standard 24-Session START Course

The standard START course described here comprises 24 sessions. The first two introductory sessions are 3 hours long and the rest are 2 1/2 hours long. We have found this to be a good length to learn about the world and explore ideas about changing society.

Typically, groups meet once a week. This works well and helps the group maintain focus and momentum. A group focused more intensely on study, such as a college class, might meet twice a week. Other groups, with members who have many other commitments, might decide to meet less frequently. However, we recommend that you meet at least twice a month so that the group maintains cohesion and members do not lose track of ideas from earlier discussions.

While a group might wish to have shorter sessions, we recommend that you meet at least 2 1/2 hours. Anything less will make the group feel rushed and significantly reduce the quantity (and quality) of discussion possible, and/or will make doing exercises impractical. Indeed, if it is possible, we recommend extending the length to 3 hours since this enables the group to have more discussion, engage in longer exercises, and explore ideas in more depth.

For each session, we have located a brief article that we suggest everyone in the group read beforehand. This article provides an overview of the general topic for that session. For each session, we have also prepared five sets of readings (or video or audio recordings). Five members of your group should each choose one set to read beforehand and summarize for others at the meeting. The materials we have chosen are succinct — it should take a participant about 60–90 minutes to read (listen to/view) each one and then prepare a 5-minute report. Other participants, who only read the overview article, should only need to spend about 15 minutes to prepare.

### Other Possibilities

Chapter 3 describes a number of variations and alternatives to the standard 24-week START course.

Some groups do not have the time to attend a study group for 24 weeks or they must fit the process into a single college semester. In Section 3.A., we give some examples of a truncated format with just 12 sessions. Still, knowing how superficially the longer version deals with such a broad range of issues, we strongly urge groups to invest the time necessary for a full 24-session START course.

Your group may want to adjust or adapt the START format in other ways. We offer various suggestions on how you might change the reading materials and process in Sections 3.B., 3.C., 3.D., and 3.E.

At the conclusion of the START course, some groups may want to dig deeper into a particular topic. Where possible, we have provided the resources to enable you to set up a focused issue-oriented study group. We have also provided some suggestions on how you might conduct such a group in Section 3.F.

To introduce people to the concept and practice of the START process, you may want to organize a self-contained, one-evening study group in which participants read materials and discuss them all in a single three-hour session — a “Starter” START. We offer suggestions on how to do this in Section 3.G.

Individuals or groups may also want to develop materials on other issues for their own use and the use of others. We offer suggestions on how to do that in Chapter 7.

## G. How to Use this Study Guide

Chapter 2 provides details about how to conduct a Standard 24-Session START course. To understand the process, all participants in a START group should carefully read the first six sections of Chapter 2 (2.A, 2.B, 2.C, 2.D, 2.E, and 2.F), and skim Sections 2.G and 2.H. Participants may also want to read about alternative ways to structure a START course in Chapter 3, the underlying principles of START in Chapter 4, and a bit of theory about empowerment in Chap-

ter 5. Participants may also be excited and empowered by the stories in Chapter 9 about action taken by previous participants in START and the Macro-Analysis Seminars.

In preparation for facilitating a session, the prospective facilitator and assistant facilitator may want to re-read the first four sections of Chapter 2 and then should carefully read the suggested agenda for that session in Section 2.E. and the descriptions of the individual agenda items and exercises they might use in Sections 2.F, 2.G, and 2.H.

If your group is considering changing the course structure, in addition to Chapters 2 and 3, members of your group should probably read Chapter 4 to understand the principles that underlie the START process, why the standard 24-session is configured the way it is, and how modifications to the process might affect the participants' experience. If you are considering convening a START course, you should carefully read through Section 2.B. and Chapter 6. You may also want to conduct a "Starter" START session, as described in Section 3.G.

If you or your group is interested in developing new reading materials, Chapter 7 describes the criteria we used in preparing the current reading list.

If your START group doesn't hold together well or has interpersonal problems, Chapter 8 offers some additional resources on group process and community building.

Chapter 9 describes some of the ways that participants in START can work for change and have done so in the past as well as providing a short history of START and its predecessor, the Macro-Analysis Seminar.

---

**Note** that you can download and print a complete copy of this START Study Guide in Adobe Acrobat Reader format (pdf): <http://www.startguide.org/docs/STARTGuide.pdf>

---

## 2. How to Conduct a Standard 24-Session START Course

### A. Introduction

#### **A Guideline Only**

The chapter provides detailed instructions for **one** particular way to conduct a START course. Please use these as guidelines only, and continue to think creatively about your unique situation.

Before launching a new START course (or right at the beginning of the process), consider whether to modify the format, reorder the topics, and/or change the content to meet the needs of your group. Then throughout the process, be ready to alter the format and make other adjustments to address participants' suggestions and to respond to changing circumstances.

One simple mechanism for change is built into the process via the evaluation at the end of each session, so it is possible to start with this model and then to experiment with changes as you go along. But if, at any point, the process is not meeting your members' needs, you may want to conduct a special meeting to specifically address the course format or content and how the process can be revamped.

#### **Taking Charge**

Much of the value of the START course comes from the participants taking control of the process and learning how to make decisions together that best meet the needs of the group. Please support and encourage this process!

### B. Preparing for a START Course

#### **Convening a Group**

To recruit participants, talk with your friends, neighbors, work colleagues, congregation, or fellow members of organizations to which you belong. Give them a copy of the "Introduction to START" leaflet [<http://www.startguide.org/docs/STARTIntro.pdf>] and pass along the START web address. Because this is a time of terrorism, war, and economic difficulties, it is likely that many people will already recognize how important it is to learn about the world's workings and to act as responsible citizens.

For more ideas about bringing a group together and organizing a START course, please see Chapter 6.

#### **Group Size and Composition**

Generally, we have found the optimal size for a START group is about 10. With 10 participants, there are enough people to take on assignments without anyone being overly burdened. Furthermore, there is likely to be enough diversity to have good discussions. A group with fewer than 8 members places a much larger burden on each participant and can be challenging — especially if some people drop out over time. At the other end of the size range, it is very difficult to have a discussion in a large group. If there are more than 17 people who want to join the group, it is usually best to split into two completely independent groups.

Participants do not necessarily need to know each other beforehand. But the group usually works best if participants share some common interests or have some organizational connection.

Note that the START course is geared toward adults. Many high school students are also mature enough to engage with the concepts and ideas presented, but younger people typically are not.

#### **Requirements of Participants**

For a START group to work well, participants must make a sincere commitment to the process and to the other members of the group. In particular, each participant should agree to:

- Plan on attending all 24 sessions for the full time (3 hours for the first two sessions and 2 1/2 hours for the rest)
- Participate honestly in discussions and exercises
- Work with others cooperatively
- Take on an additional role periodically as a facilitator, timekeeper, etc.
- Read the overview article before every session (which should take approximately 15 minutes)
- Before 10–15 of the 24 sessions (the number depending on the size of the group) spend 60–90 minutes studying a reading set and preparing a report for presentation to the other participants

- Deliver good, succinct presentations to the group

Despite people's best intentions, other events in their lives may intrude, preventing them from fulfilling all of these commitments. Still, for the process to be educational and satisfying, members of the group should make a sincere effort, doing their best to make the group work well.

Strong personal bonds between members can help them make this commitment to each other. And if the course seems important ("With this information, we can have a big impact on the world"), feels productive, and stays interesting, challenging, inspiring, and fun, then members of the group will have a strong incentive to commit fully.

## Needed Resources

The following material resources are needed for a START course:

### Introductory Leaflets

Each participant should have a copy of the "Introduction to START" leaflet [<http://www.startguide.org/docs/STARTIntro.pdf>] so that she/he can be familiar with the suggested process.

### Web Access

Each participant should have access to a computer with connection to the Internet so she/he can read/view the materials on the START website. Before choosing an assignment that has audio or video recordings, a participant should be sure her/his computer has the necessary software to play the recording and a fast enough connection for timely download.

### A Meeting Place

A good meeting place:

- Is easy to find and travel to
- Is large enough to accommodate everyone easily
- Has enough chairs for everyone (unless the group has people who are willing and able to sit on the floor)
- Has moveable chairs that can be arranged in a rough circle so everyone can see each other
- Is private and quiet, so participants can speak freely and not be distracted
- Has a large easel (or a chair and a piece of fiberboard set up as an easel), blackboard, or a blank wall (free of pictures, light switches, and other obstructions) where the group can record notes on large pieces of paper ("wall charts")

Your own living room is often the best gathering place. Meeting rooms at a library, church, or labor hall may also be suitable. Restaurants, bars, and social clubs are usually too noisy or distracting. If you meet at participants' homes, you may want to rotate to a different home for each session so that no one person is burdened by hosting the group repeatedly.

### Recording Materials

These consist simply of large (i.e., 24" x 36" or larger) pieces of paper that can be used for wall charts and large crayons or felt marking pens (non-toxic water-based pens that do not soak through the paper are best). Wall charts play a central role for recording the decisions and thoughts of the group — brainstormed questions and ideas, lists of change goals and projects, important facts or issues raised in reports, and the tentative agenda for the next week.

Typically, these sheets are hung on a wall during each session with masking tape, are added to during each session, and serve as a memory bank for the group. Although a blackboard is more ecological and the group might want to use one at times, wall chart sheets have the big advantage of permanence. Typically, all the used wall chart sheets are kept throughout the course so they can be referred to later.

Wall chart paper can be scavenged from a friendly print shop or bought in newsprint pads from office or art supply shops. A START course usually needs less than 60 sheets. It is also sometimes possible to buy the almost-depleted rolls of paper from newspaper printers (rolls that still contain hundreds of feet of paper).

If the group has access to a computer and computer projector and has experience with these tools, it is possible to use these for recording instead of paper. This saves paper and has the advantage that all the notes can be emailed to each person at the end of the meeting. However, it may be difficult to draw boxes, lines, arrows, and other graphics to visually show the connections between items.

## The First Meeting

For the first meeting, the convener should arrange a meeting place, pick a time to meet, and ask prospective participants to attend. Be sure to bring wall chart paper and marking pens. If any of the participants are parents, offer to help arrange childcare.

At least at the first meeting, it is usually good to provide food and drinks to establish an inviting and homey atmosphere. As each person arrives, you should greet them enthusiastically and introduce them to others, mentioning something about each person so they all have topics about which they can begin to chat and inquire more about one another.

## C. Democratic Group Process

The group process skills learned in a START course are oftentimes as useful as the knowledge acquired from the content. Techniques of democratic group process have evolved over the years to help groups achieve equal participation and control by everyone — and to assure that groups are not dominated by a few individuals. Ways have also been developed to help overcome superficial manipulation of facts and lack of personal involvement with the subject matter so that we can better integrate our intellectual learning and reflection with our social practices. In addressing these needs, we have been heavily influenced by Paolo Freire's idea of conscientization as described in his book, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*.

Below are some specific group process techniques that incorporate these ideas. Since they are different from the familiar teacher-student methods, they may seem awkward and artificial at first. After a few sessions of consciously trying them, however, groups usually become more comfortable with them.

For more suggestions on group process, check out Berit Lakey's paper "Meeting Facilitation: The No-Magic Method" [ <http://trainingforchange.org/content/view/71/39> ] and Randy Schutt's papers on cooperative decision-making, especially "Notes on Consensus Decision-Making" [ <http://www.vernalproject.org/RPapers.shtml#CoopDecMaking> ].

### Seating Arrangement

To facilitate an egalitarian discussion, it is best for participants to arrange their chairs so that they sit in a rough semi-circle facing the wall chart. This ensures that participants can all see and hear each other and also that they are all facing forward towards their collective work as displayed on the wall chart.

### Individual Responsibilities

With no leader in charge of running the course, its success is the responsibility of all the participants and is largely determined by the amount of participants' collective input of time, energy, and concern. The more familiar each person is with the processes suggested in this study guide and the more responsibility is shared, the more the group will be able to function democratically.

Each participant should be prepared to do the following:

- Read through this study guide at the beginning and refer to it throughout the course.
- Be committed to reading a substantial amount of material (an average of about 50 pages — at 250 words/page) and giving a brief report on that reading to the group about every second session (though frequency depends on the size of the group). This commitment is central to participation in a START course.
- Take on the various group process roles described below on a rotating basis. [Also, perform these tasks whenever necessary even if not officially assigned that role.]
- Participate in group discussion without dominating or allowing others to dominate.

### Group Process Roles and Tasks

To help the group stay on track while preventing anyone from dominating the discussion or decision-making, it is helpful to have a few members of the group take on special roles:

#### Convener

As described above, the convener is the person(s) who gets the START group started. That person recruits participants, arranges for the group to get together for the first meeting, takes ultimate responsibility for arranging time and place of meetings, helps arrange childcare, and provides the wall chart materials (at least for the first meeting). She/he may also take responsibility for facilitating the first few meetings (or arranging for an experienced person to facilitate). She/he may also participate in between-session planning meetings to assist the facilitator and assistant facilitator in developing agendas for meetings.

#### Facilitator

The facilitator's task is to enable the smooth working of the group and help it achieve what it wants to achieve. The facilitator does not lead the group by telling it what to do, but serves the needs of the whole group and facilitates the process. The facilitator should:

- **Plan:** With the assistant facilitator, develop a meeting agenda based on the suggestions in this guide, the desires of the group, and feedback from the previous meeting's evaluation. Before the beginning of the meeting, write this agenda on a large wall chart and post it on the meeting room wall.
- **Initiate:** Get the meeting started on time.
- **Enforce Agreements:** At the beginning of the meeting, review the agenda with the group (including time limits for each item), change the agenda in response to concerns and suggestions from the group, get the group to mutually consent to the amended agenda, and then, throughout the meeting, keep the group to its agreed agenda. Suggest when it is appropriate to move on to the next agenda item (usually based on time limits for items which the group has set for

itself). If the group expresses a desire to change the agenda, help the group negotiate a new agreement, and then enforce this new agenda.

- **Guide:** Introduce each agenda item or prompt someone else to do this. Depending on the kind of agenda item, ask for reports, discussion, etc. Remind the group when they have strayed from the agenda, perhaps by asking if they want to return. Keep reports, discussion, and brainstorming sessions within agreed-upon time limits.

- **Encourage:** Help everyone share in the discussion. Be sensitive to reserved people being cut off or intimidated by more extroverted folks. Encourage those who have not participated much to speak more and encourage those who talk a lot to listen more and speak less.

Also, encourage and help the other members of the group who have taken on roles to do their jobs.

It is also helpful if the facilitator can:

- **Monitor:** Be sensitive to the feelings of the group members. Note expressions of emotion, particular types of questions that indicate uneasiness, and the general mood — which may indicate that some change in process is called for.

- **Reveal:** Try to get important but unspoken frustrations, needs, fears, expectations, etc. out in the open so they can be dealt with directly. These “hidden agendas” are often an important source of failure and frustration in groups.

- **Assist Discussions** by actively using the 4 Ss:

- **Summarize:** Periodically, summarize briefly what has been said including any apparent disagreements, and check with the group that your summary is accurate by saying something like “Is that right?” or “Have I summarized this accurately?” This reassures people that they have been heard and their ideas are still part of the discussion.

- **Sort:** Suggest ways to separate disparate ideas and to place together similar ideas. Point out agreements and disagreements.

- **Synthesize:** Suggest ways that solutions or ideas can be melded together.

- **Suggest Directions:** Focus the discussion by suggesting a particular direction or order: first talk about this, then that, then the other.

- **Mediate:** When thorough communication is critical or when people seem unable to hear each other, ask people to repeat in their own words what they heard, and then check whether that person felt it was an accurate re-statement of what they had said. If not, the person can rephrase the idea until everyone understands. Telling the person “I think I hear you saying...” will usually obtain the desired result of clarification, and it grates a lot less than “You’re not being clear,” or “I don’t know what you are saying.”

### **Assistant Facilitator**

The assistant facilitator helps the facilitator tend to group process by:

- Meeting (or talking by phone) with the facilitator beforehand to plan the meeting agenda.

- Monitoring how the meeting is going and making suggestions for change when appropriate.

- Taking over facilitation if the facilitator is unable to perform this task (because of illness, absence, or being overwhelmed during the meeting) or when the facilitator is carrying out another role such as presenting a report on a set of readings.

- Taking over another task (such as keeping track of time or recording) when the person designated to do that task is carrying out another role, such as presenting a report.

- If the group breaks into two subgroups for discussion, facilitating one of the groups.

### **Recorder**

The recorder writes notes on the wall chart whenever it is useful to the group. This may include recording changes made to the agenda, important facts or ideas mentioned in reports, brainstormed ideas for action, ideas proposed in the evaluation section, etc.

Note that despite the best efforts of the recorder, it is sometimes difficult to recognize important ideas that should be recorded as they come up. So sometimes it is useful to have a separate piece of paper posted to the side that anyone can record thoughts on as she/he feels the need.

### **Timekeeper**

The timekeeper helps the group move through the agenda by announcing when the agreed-upon time for each item has passed. It is often helpful for the timekeeper to give people a minute or two of warning, particularly during reports, so that they can use their remaining time well. The timekeeper should be seen as a reminder, not a dictator. When time has run out, the facilitator should help the group decide whether to allocate more time to the current agenda item or move on to the next one.

### **Vibes Watcher**

The vibes watcher is especially sensitive to the dynamics of group process, the emotional climate in the room, and outside distractions (noise, room temperature, and so on). She/he monitors body language, facial expressions, side

conversations, and other signs to notice upsets, boredom, etc. If the group process gets off track, she/he points this out and suggests a remedy: perhaps a break, group stretching, a game, a moment of silence, encouragement for participants to say positive things about each other, adjustment of the thermostat, opening or closing the windows, etc.

The vibes watcher should be sensitive to overt or subtle putdowns. It is crucial for the functioning of the group that everyone feels safe and supported. Learning and enjoyment usually stop dead when people feel insulted.

If the tone becomes offensive, the vibes watcher should intervene, preferably right at the moment, reminding the group that such a tone doesn't foster learning or group building. The vibes watcher must use discretion to decide what level and kind of intervention is needed depending on the circumstances and the people involved.

Note that criticism of another person's **ideas** is not a putdown. The whole point of a study group is to investigate and challenge ideas to determine if they make sense and can solve problems. Wrangling with ideas should be vigorously encouraged. However, the way that ideas are challenged is critical — some ways are humiliating and make people feel stupid and ashamed while other ways are enlightening and make people feel smarter and empowered. It is best if you can set up a situation in which people feel they are working together to honestly and seriously explore ideas — and their ramifications and consequences — rather than having an adversary situation in which perspectives (and, by implication, those that hold them) are attacked or ridiculed. When people disagree, gentle questioning is best. And sometimes people just have to realize and accept that they disagree — and then move on.

## **Roles Rotation**

So that everyone can experience these various roles and learn how to do them well, and so that the responsibility for assisting the group is shared, it is best to have a different person take on each role at each session. To expedite signing up for roles, we recommend a simple way to do this: at every session, have one new person volunteer to be the Vibes Watcher for the next meeting. At the following meeting that person becomes the Timekeeper, then at the next meeting becomes the Recorder, then Assistant Facilitator, and finally Facilitator. This gives each person the chance to get a feel for what it is like to have some special concern for group process before taking on more responsibility (and attempting the more difficult tasks). At the first meeting, of course, various people will need to sign up for all five roles for both the first and second sessions.

You can download and print a form

[ <http://www.startguide.org/docs/STARTRolesChart.pdf> or <http://www.startguide.org/docs/STARTRolesChart.xls> ] to help people sign up for these roles and remember what they have agreed to do over the course of the 24 weeks. Note that since there are 24 sessions, if your group has 10 participants, each person will eventually need to write her/his name on two separate rows on this list and four people will need to sign up on three rows. Also note that during every session, half of the 10 participants will have a specific role. If your group has fewer participants, then each participant will need to take on a correspondingly larger share of responsibility.

## **Personal Bonding**

It is important to conduct meetings in an efficient, business-like manner so the time spent will feel worthwhile. But it is also important to encourage the human side of participants — personal interaction and bonding. Jokes, songs, and games can liven up a deadly serious group. Allocating some time to express support for a member who has experienced a hurt or loss allows caring to blossom. Potluck meals before some meetings or arranging group outings at other times (hikes, movies, restaurant meals, parties, etc.) can help the members of the group get to know each other and grow to like and care about one another.

Encourage these kinds of activities and it will make your study sessions go better and be more enjoyable. It will also encourage people to bond and uphold their commitments to one another.

## **D. Content Overview**

The suggested START course format has 24 sessions divided into eight segments. Note that we use Roman numerals to label the eight segments and Arabic numerals for each of the 24 sessions. The next section (2.E.) has suggested agendas for each segment.

### **I. Introduction to START**

We have discovered that it is important — particularly for groups whose members do not know each other well — to spend some time at the beginning of the START course sharing basic assumptions, goals, visions for a better society, and personal expectations of the START course. This is also a time for the group to deal with logistical details — setting the meeting time and place, deciding on format and topic variations, arranging childcare, etc.

**Session****Number Topic**

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| 1 | Introduction to START and Personal Introductions to Other Participants |
| 2 | Exploration of START   |

**II. Another World is Possible**

There are many real life examples from around the world that offer a positive vision of the kind of society we might be working toward. Commencing our journey by learning about these examples can be very enlightening — and heartening.

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| 3 | Another World is Possible — A Few Positive Examples |
|---|---|

**III.–VI. Understanding Problems and Identifying Solutions**

The next four segments provide basic information about the social and economic difficulties we currently face — emphasizing the inter-relationships among problems, their basic causes, and possible solutions. Each topic includes readings that provide a historical overview, describe contemporary issues, offer various proposed solutions, and cite hopeful (and successful) examples of positive change.

**III. Meeting Basic Human Needs — Physical Systems**

- |   |                                  |
|---|----------------------------------|
| 4 | Air, Water, Land, and Food       |
| 5 | Industrialization and Energy Use |
| 6 | Environment and Sustainability   |

**IV. Meeting Basic Human Needs — Economic Systems**

- |   |                                 |
|---|---------------------------------|
| 7 | Economic Systems                |
| 8 | Meeting Basic Needs in the U.S. |
| 9 | Global Economics                |

**V. Providing Safety**

- |    |                        |
|----|------------------------|
| 10 | International Security |
| 11 | Personal Safety        |

**VI. Living Together**

- |    |   |
|----|---|
| 12 | Governance                                  |
| 13 | Ways We Are Divided                         |
| 14 | Community                                   |
| 15 | Communicating Information and Values        |
| 16 | Exercises AND/OR Planning a Change Activity |

**VII. Strategies for Positive Change**

Once participants have a basic analysis of the problems we face and a handle on possible solutions, this segment offers a variety of approaches to bring about positive societal change — how to get from our present situation to our desired vision. It also includes ideas about empowering ourselves and others.

- |    |                                      |
|----|--------------------------------------|
| 17 | Earlier Movements for Change         |
| 18 | Later Movements for Change           |
| 19 | Personal and Cultural Transformation |
| 20 | Building Alternatives                |
| 21 | Challenging Existing Structures      |
| 22 | Theories and Strategies              |

**VIII. Next Steps**

This segment provides tools and suggestions to help move a START group from study to concrete change work.

- |    |   |
|----|---|
| 23 | Exercises AND/OR Planning a Change Activity |
| 24 | Next Steps                                  |

Because it can be confusing to keep track of all these separate topics, sessions, and the recommended collections of reading sets, we have prepared an overview table that can be accessed on the web

[ <http://www.startguide.org/STARTOverview.html> ] or downloaded

[ <http://www.startguide.org/docs/STARTOverview.pdf> ]. You can also download a version of this table in Microsoft Word format so that you can modify it to reflect the details of your own START course

[ <http://www.startguide.org/docs/STARTOverview.doc> ] and distribute it to the participants in your START group.

## E. Suggested Agendas

Below are suggested agendas for each of the eight kinds of sessions. Each agenda item is preceded by the time (in minutes) we suggest be devoted to it. The individual agenda items and exercises are described in more detail in the next three sections (2.F, 2.G, and 2.H). Remember, these are only suggestions. Please use your own judgment about what is most appropriate for your START group.

### Session 1: Introduction

The standard 24-week START course begins with two introductory sessions. The experience of previous groups has been that this time at the beginning builds a foundation for a smoothly functioning process throughout the course. The purposes of these two sessions include:

- Getting to know the other members of the group
- Building group trust
- Deciding on the mechanics of the START course such as the meeting time, place, etc.
- Deciding on the basic structure of the START course — topics and order
- Sharing expectations for the START group and hopes for what might come out of it
- Exploring personal values
- Beginning to think about the society we live in, how it affects us, and how we would like to see it changed

Because of the many important things to cover in the first two sessions, we suggest making these sessions slightly longer (3 hours) than the rest of the sessions (2 1/2 hours).

#### Time Item

- |    |   |
|----|---|
| 5  | Excitement Sharing  |
| 10 | Presentation/Decision — Agenda Review, sign up for special roles (facilitator, etc.) for this session |
| 40 | Personal Introductions  |
| 20 | Presentation and Questions — Introduction to START  |
| 10 | Break   |
| 10 | Brainstorm and Discussion — Expectations and Hopes for the START Course                               |
| 10 | Brainstorm — Characteristics of a Good Society (see Section 2.H)                                      |
| 15 | Discussion/Decision — Business and Logistics (assignment for next time: read the START study guide)   |
| 10 | Decision — sign up for special roles for the next session   |
| 35 | Exercise — from the Personal Reflection set of exercises (see Section 2.H)                            |
| 5  | Decision — plan next meeting  |
| 10 | Evaluation  |

---

3 hours

### Session 2: Getting Started

#### Time Item

- |    |   |
|----|---|
| 10 | Excitement Sharing  |
| 5  | Presentation/Decision — Agenda Review   |
| 15 | Discussion and Questions — About the START Study Guide  |
| 25 | Discussion/Decision — Business and Logistics (choose roles and reading sets for next time; also, choose the topics and order for your START course) |
| 50 | Exercise — from the Personal Reflection set of exercises  |
| 10 | Break   |
| 50 | Exercise — from the Understanding Change set  |
| 5  | Decision — plan next meeting  |
| 10 | Evaluation  |

---

3 hours

## Session 3: Another World is Possible — A Few Positive Examples

**Time Item**

- 10 Excitement Sharing
- 5 Presentation/Decision — Agenda Review
- 10 Discussion/Decision — Business and Logistics
- 60 Presentations and Discussion — reports on readings + discussion of readings and discussion questions  
(5 reports x 5-minute report + 5-minute discussion following each report + 10-minute discussion at end)
- 10 Break
- 40 Exercise — from the Visions of a Good Society set
- 5 Decision — plan next meeting
- 10 Evaluation

---

2 hours 30 minutes

## Sessions 4–15: Understanding Problems and Identifying Solutions

**Time Item**

- 10 Excitement Sharing
- 5 Presentation/Decision — Agenda Review
- 10 Discussion/Decision — Business and Logistics
- 60 Presentations and Discussion — reports on readings + discussion of readings and discussion questions  
(5 x 5+5 minutes each + 10-minute discussion at end)
- 10 Break
- 35 Exercise — from the Connecting Problems to Social Change Solutions set OR the Visions of a Good Society set
- 5 Decision — plan next meeting
- 5 Brainstorm — questions about the next topic
- 10 Evaluation

---

2 hours 30 minutes

## Session 16: Exercises AND/OR Planning a Change Activity

We suggest the last session in this segment be devoted to exercises and/or planning a change activity (or if your group has moved along in a leisurely fashion, to catching up on readings).

You should choose exercises based on the needs and desires of the group (see Section 2.H for suggested exercises). You may, for example, want to undertake a longer and more extensive version of one of the exercises in the Connecting Problems to Social Change Solutions set. Or, now that you have explored many of the problems of the world, you might want to try another exercise from the Visions of a Good Society set. If group morale needs boosting, you might want to choose an exercise from the Empowerment set. Or, if your group is eager to explore change strategies, you might choose an exercise from the Strategy Analysis set.

By planning and carrying out a simple change activity, you may immediately be able to use some of the ideas your group has just learned in this segment of the course and stimulate questions about strategy that can be explored in the next segment.

Time	Item
10	Excitement Sharing
5	Presentation/Decision — Agenda Review
10	Discussion/Decision — Business and Logistics
50	Exercise — from the Connecting Problems to Social Change Solutions set OR the Visions of a Good Society set OR the Empowerment set OR the Strategy Analysis set
10	Break
45	Discussion/Decision — Plan a Change Action
5	Decision — plan next meeting
5	Brainstorm — questions about the next topic
10	Evaluation

---

2 hours 30 minutes

## Sessions 17–22: Strategies for Positive Change

Time	Item
10	Excitement Sharing
5	Presentation/Decision — Agenda Review
10	Discussion/Decision — Business and Logistics
60	Presentations and Discussion — reports on readings + discussion of readings and discussion questions (5 x 5+5 minutes each + 10-minute discussion at end)
10	Break
35	Exercise — from the Empowerment set OR the Strategy Analysis set
5	Decision — plan next meeting
5	Brainstorm — questions about the next topic
10	Evaluation

---

2 hours 30 minutes

## Session 23: Exercises AND/OR Planning a Change Activity

We suggest Session 23 be devoted to exercises and/or planning a change activity.

Time	Item
10	Excitement Sharing
5	Presentation/Decision — Agenda Review
10	Discussion/Decision — Business and Logistics
50	Exercise — from the Empowerment set OR the Strategy Analysis set
10	Break
50	Exercise — from the Empowerment set OR the Strategy Analysis set
5	Decision — plan next meeting
10	Evaluation

---

2 hours 30 minutes

## Session 24: Next Steps

**Time Item**

- 10 Excitement Sharing
- 5 Presentation/Decision — Agenda Review
- 5 Discussion/Decision — Business and Logistics
- 40 Exercise — from the Next Steps set
- 20 Presentations — reports on Proposals for Action (3 x 5 minutes each)
- 10 Break
- 45 General Discussion — what to do next
- 5 Decision — plan next meeting (if there will be one)
- 10 Evaluation

---

2 hours 30 minutes

## F. Descriptions of Agenda Items Common to Most Sessions

This section describes general topics and activities that are likely to appear on the agenda of most of your meetings.

### Agenda Review

Near the beginning of every session, the facilitator should present the proposed agenda for the meeting. The agenda can then be reviewed and changed if necessary to accommodate new ideas or different priorities. The agenda should be recorded on a wall chart in view of the whole group so that everybody can be clear about what they have jointly decided to do. Each item on the agenda should generally include four things: (1) the amount of time allocated to it, (2) what kind of item it is (presentation, discussion, decision, exercise, etc.), (3) its subject matter, and (4) who will present or facilitate it.

### Time Limits

We suggest that every item on the agenda be assigned a time limit. During agenda review, the group can adjust these limits so that the total length of the meeting is acceptable to everyone. If it is necessary to adjust the agenda as the meeting progresses, make sure that the meeting end-time is kept the same or that the group explicitly consents to extending the meeting length.

It is usually frustrating — and essentially anti-democratic — when a group is lax about sticking to the time it has allocated to various portions of the agenda. In particular, if earlier items run long, then items at the end may be inadvertently truncated. The agenda can, of course, be changed at any time, but this should only be done with the consent of the group and in consideration of other agenda items.

There are tendencies in every group to go beyond the time limits, especially when the subject is of great interest. This often happens when people are giving reports. The time limits we suggest are based on the experience of seeking a balance between providing enough time for substantive reports but not so much that people lose interest. We suggest 5 minutes to report on the usual 50 pages of reading. Of course, there may well be particular reports of sufficient interest to the group that it makes a conscious decision to suspend the “rules” and extend the time. Just do this with due deliberation and consent.

### Excitement Sharing

This is a good tool for starting each meeting on an “upbeat” note. Sometimes it can be used to draw the group together if people are still milling around and saying hello.

To start excitement sharing, the facilitator asks “What is something good that has happened in your life since we last met?” People then have the opportunity to share an event, accomplishment, insight, or experience that was a “plus” during the week. Each story should be brief and concise and responses by others should be very limited. If every story shared is very brief, then everyone may be able to say something, but time limitations will probably restrict the number of people who share a story to just a few.

Excitement sharing has several benefits: it starts the meeting on a positive note, it develops a more personal tone among the participants, and it is enjoyable (and thus may encourage people to arrive on time).

Some groups begin their meetings with a check-in in which everyone speaks briefly about their state of mind. This lets everyone have a chance to speak early in the meeting, allows people to share a bit of their lives, and allows them to express and then let go of whatever thoughts might be bothering them. However, a check-in of this sort in a group of 10

typically takes at least a half hour and it may introduce heavy emotional feelings that bog the group down. For these reasons, we recommend you do excitement sharing instead.

To build group trust and understanding, it can be useful to periodically (perhaps every fourth or fifth session) allocate a longer time for excitement sharing (perhaps 20 minutes) to allow more people to tell an exciting story.

## **Business and Logistics**

The business and logistical items that need to be addressed will depend on the nature of your group. Here are some typical items to discuss and decide:

### **At the Beginning of the START course**

- The length of the course (number of sessions)
- The topics to be covered and in what order they should be addressed
- The length, start time, and meeting place of each session
- Childcare

### **At Each Session**

- Planning the next session (general topic, specific agenda, questions to consider/discuss, exercises)
- Choosing people to perform various roles at the next session (facilitator, assistant facilitator, recorder, time-keeper, vibes watcher) — if you use the roles form [ <http://www.startguide.org/docs/STARTRolesChart.pdf> or <http://www.startguide.org/docs/STARTRolesChart.xls> ], then you just need to choose a new Vibes Watcher and remind everyone else of the roles they are shifting into
- Choosing people to prepare reports for the next session and having them choose particular sets of readings

Business items can easily expand to fill (or exceed) the allotted time, so they should be dealt with efficiently so that other items are not neglected. If it appears that business will take significantly longer than the allotted time and it is possible to do so, postpone the discussion and ask a small group to meet outside the group and come up with a specific proposal on the items in question for presentation at the next meeting

In particular, rather than taking time at a meeting to develop specific plans and a detailed agenda for the next meeting, the facilitator, assistant facilitator, and other interested participants should probably meet separately (or talk on the phone or communicate via email). Planning straightforward meetings should not take much time, but planning more complex meetings (a new exercise, direction, or undertaking) might require an hour or two.

## **Brainstorming**

Brainstorming is a process for generating/gathering a large number of creative ideas or questions on a given subject from a group in a relatively short period of time. In brainstorming, the group picks a topic or question and then opens the floor for people to toss out ideas. Participants are encouraged to contribute ideas (saying a very brief phrase is best) no matter how wild or impractical they may seem. Each idea is quickly recorded (by just a few words) on a wall chart in front of the group. There is no discussion and no evaluation of the ideas during this part of the exercise.

Once a lengthy list of ideas has been collected, the group may then go back and sift out the proposals that seem the most promising. A good brainstorming session rarely needs to go longer than 10 minutes and often can be done in 2–5 minutes. In groups larger than six it is sometimes helpful to ensure broad participation by limiting each person to one or two brainstormed ideas until everyone else has contributed at least one.

Brainstorming can be used for a variety of situations. It can be used near the beginning of meetings to develop questions for the session's discussion (for example, "What questions do we have about today's topic — taxes?") or at the end to develop questions for the next session. It is a good way to generate action proposals for a project idea (for example, "What can we do to double the recycling rate in our town?").

## **Presentation (General)**

In a presentation, one person speaks while others listen. You should decide beforehand whether it is acceptable for people to interrupt the presenter with questions or whether questions should be reserved until the end of the presentation.

For more ideas about specific presentations, see the detailed suggestions below and in Section 2.G.

## **Discussion (General)**

In a typical discussion, various people speak — some at length, others more briefly. Sometimes people will ask questions or try to synthesize others' ideas. Sometimes the discussion is stimulating and enjoyable. However, if talkative people end up dominating the discussion, it is rarely as enlightening or fun.

To ensure that discussions are more egalitarian and productive, the facilitator should limit long-winded speakers and encourage those who are usually quiet. If that is not sufficient, these techniques can also be used:

### **Go Around the Circle**

Have each person talk in turn around the circle. It may help to pass an object of some sort (a "talking stick") from person to person to ensure that others do not jump in before their turn.

### **Three Pebbles**

Give each person three pebbles or other tokens. Each time someone speaks they must put a pebble into the center of the circle. When a person's pebbles are gone, they cannot speak again until everyone else has used up their pebbles.

### **Think and Listen**

This technique is very helpful in giving each person a safe space to sort out and communicate her/his thinking.

In a "think and listen" session one person is given a set amount of time to share her/his thoughts while the others listen attentively. It is particularly important that the listeners do just that — and not comment on the thinking, interject personal experiences, initiate discussion, or even ask questions. This helps establish an atmosphere of safety where people can feel free to share things that may be too personal, tentative, seemingly unimportant, or otherwise scary to come out in regular discussion.

Speakers should be encouraged to "think out loud" and need not be apologetic if their comments are not organized in precise categories and steps. However, time limits should be strictly observed. It is usually helpful to inform the speaker when she/he has one more minute remaining so that she/he can wind up her/his thoughts.

If time is limited (or to make the situation safer), the group can split into small groups of 3 or 4 or even "think and listen pairs" (one person speaks while one other person listens, then switch roles). At the end, each group or pair can, if it is useful, bring important points back to the whole group.

### **Small Group Discussion**

Sometimes it is useful to break into small groups of 3 or 4 people for discussion. Quiet people may feel intimidated unless they are in a small group. Also, putting all the talkative people in one small group is a way to allow everyone else to have a chance to speak in other small groups.

Sometimes people feel more comfortable discussing certain topics in small groups that are determined in one of these two ways: (1) break into small groups of close friends or (2) break into groups according to sex, class, race, age, newcomers, etc. Other times, in order to facilitate discussion and to increase learning about differences, it helps to break into groups in which people do not know each other, in which they are dissimilar, or in which they actively disagree.

## **Presentation and Discussion of Reports on Readings**

### **Reports on Readings**

A major part of most START sessions is the presentation and discussion of readings on various topics. At each session, typically 5 people will give verbal reports on the set of special readings they have read. Participants in the course usually learn the most from hearing reports and from discussing them with the other participants. The better the reports are, the more everyone will gain.

Before presenting reports, the group may want to generate or review discussion questions concerning the topic of the day. The group can then be attentive to possible answers in the information presented during that session. These questions may have originated in the discussion questions that accompany the readings, been brainstormed by the group, or arisen in prior discussions.

### **How to Give a Report**

- Put some time into preparing your report. This is helpful not only to make a clearer presentation to others but also to consolidate the learning that you have done.

- While five minutes is a very short time for a rambling discourse, a well-organized report can say a great deal in this time — think of the impact of a good 30-second TV commercial.

- It is easy to get frustrated by the prospect of condensing 50 pages of information into a five minute report and the temptation is often to talk twice as fast as usual in order to get everything in. Don't — people can't digest information that quickly.

- Start by reminding people of the report topic and, perhaps, briefly naming the titles and authors of the materials.

- Instead of trying to summarize everything, pick out the two or three most important points or insights that you got from the readings and explain them.

- If you find one of the discussion questions particularly compelling, focus on it and the ways the readings answer it.

- Alternatively, criticize the reading. Are important points backed up by reliable data? Were the ideas and inferences of the authors logical?

- If appropriate, prepare visual aids to go along with the report. Statistics, for instance, are often easier to see than to hear.

- Do not get trapped by paralysis of analysis. As you begin the reading, think about what problems are being identified, what solutions are being suggested, and what the implications are for personal change and social action. You may want to spend some time in your report on the latter — what new goals and/or projects might change groups adopt

according to the reading? If it is useful (and not disruptive), the recorder might write these ideas on permanent wall chart sheets as reports are given and during group discussion.

The facilitator should be sure to keep the reports to the agreed-upon time. This will encourage people to select the best ideas from the readings rather than trying to completely describe them, and ensures there will be adequate time for full group discussion of the issues.

### How to Discuss

There are varying ways of making report presentations and discussing them. We recommend this procedure, which has worked well for other groups:

Discuss each report immediately after it is given. You might allocate 5 minutes to each report, followed by 5 minutes for discussion of that report, plus 10 minutes at the very end for general discussion about all the reports.

In this mode, the “report and discussion” part of the agenda, therefore, is basically a long discussion in which every 10 minutes there is 5 minutes of input in the form of a report on that general subject matter. This format brings in factual information from five different sources (reading reports) and provides a space for active group participation.

Having prepared reports that are interspersed through the discussion and strictly governed by time limits helps people to focus and keep from getting sidetracked too much, and it adds a sense of accomplishment and progress to the meeting. The 5 minutes for reports and 5 for discussion are suggested times; each group will want to work out for itself what feels most comfortable depending on time constraints and amounts of information to be covered. Our experience is, however, that whatever time limits are decided upon, people should be disciplined in keeping to them.

If your session length — the total length of your meetings — can be extended to 3 hours, then this allows more time for presentations and discussion — perhaps 6 minutes for each report and 9 minutes for discussion after each report. This probably will enable you to have much better discussions and allow more learning. We recommend this if it is possible.

There are also several different ways for deciding what order to hear the reports. You can follow the order as listed in the reading list. Alternatively, you can just see who wants to present next. Sometimes there will be somebody who feels that her/his report follows logically after another one.

**Note:** If report presentations or the discussion regularly feels rushed or runs over time, or if participants find the readings too demanding (and don't read what they have agreed to), you might reduce the number of report presentations to just 4 (or even 3) each session. Participants may learn less, but they might enjoy the meetings more (and actually learn more). You could still ask 5 people to read a set of readings, but just ask 3 or 4 of them to give presentations. Or, you may want to reduce the total number of reading sets that your group reads overall.

It is best to be relaxed about what is included in your START course. Please realize that there are always vast amounts of information that you will not be able to read, consider, or discuss. Do the best you can with the resources you have and within the time that you have allocated. Leave participants wanting more, not overwhelmed with too much. You can always set up another START course (or some other process) to learn more at a later time.

### Decision

Many decisions, especially those involving the agenda, can be made quickly and easily by the facilitator (or someone else) simply suggesting a plan and then everyone else nodding their agreement. More difficult decisions may require more discussion and synthesis of various options. For one useful method, see Randy Schutt's “The AD Method of Decision-Making” [ <http://www.vernalproject.org/Papers/ADMethod-14W.pdf> ].

### Exercise (General)

There are many kinds of learning exercises. Some exercises, such as working together in a group to develop a proposal, simply allow people to learn in a different way than the typical lecture/discussion mode. Experiential exercises, especially roleplays (in which people take on various roles and act them out in a particular situation), give people a chance to try out new ideas or practice specific skills. See the descriptions in Section 2.H for specific exercises that you might use in each segment (though they may be appropriate at any time depending on your group — please rely on your own judgment).

In choosing an exercise, think about your group and what ideas or skills the members most need to learn. Choose exercises that use the strengths of the group — for example, a group of writers might find it easiest to do exercises that largely rely on individual writing. Or choose exercises that push the group to do things they are **not** good at — for example, pushing a group of writers to play roles in a dramatic enactment of a proposed group action. Modify exercises to address current situations, to fit the interests and needs of the group, and to fit the time you have allocated.

## **Break**

A good break is an essential part of any meeting. A 10-minute break gives people a chance to stretch, get something to drink, or informally say hello to others and talk about what is going on in their lives. But it is often hard to limit the length of breaks, so the group must be careful about monitoring itself. To draw everyone back into the group, it is sometimes useful for the facilitator to suggest singing a song or playing a simple game.

If people tend to wander off during breaks and not return on time, you may want to replace breaks with a short, lively group activity such as a song or game.

## **Games**

Besides being fun and distracting, games can help a group relax and release the tension that comes from learning about our harsh world. Games can also encourage playfulness and cooperation when people are faced with difficult decisions. Remember not to be too serious while playing games: enjoy yourself and be silly!

Here are a few simple cooperative games:

### **Circle Pass**

Everyone stands in a circle. One person passes a ball to the person to their left and that person then passes it on to the next person, on around the circle. Before the first ball returns, the person might pass a second ball around and maybe a third in the other direction. As the balls go around, each person might juggle it a bit, balance it on their nose, and bat it off their elbow. The balls might be invisible. Other things might be passed: a silly word, an odd sound, a comical facial expression, a skewed stance, or a funny walk.

### **Assembly Line**

Everyone stands in a circle. One person begins by taking an invisible object from one side, manipulating it in some way and passing it to the next person who does the same. Doing their best to create a wacky assembly line, people might lift the object, lower it, flip it, rotate it, plane it, or drill it in their best mechanical fashion.

### **Monster Machine**

Machines have many parts that move in a variety of directions. Create a large, strange machine by each person rhythmically acting out one of those moving parts with their arms, legs, or bodies and in conjunction with others.

### **Mwaaa**

Everyone stands in a circle facing each other, holds hands, and bends over. Then, together, they all raise their hands up and make an ever-louder “mwaaa” sound as they rise. When they have risen to an upright position, they may jump in the air a little bit. Wow!

This is a quick way to get people moving and making noise — perfect for a group in which people don’t know each other well and are feeling uncertain. Generally, the sillier the leader, the more relaxed everyone else will be. But be careful if some people might have bad backs.

### **Back Massage**

Everyone stands in a circle, then turns to the right and gives a shoulder and back massage to the person in front of her/him. Also try this while sitting on the floor or on chairs. This is a good tool for encouraging people to trust one another, help one another, and accept help from others.

### **Car Wash**

Everyone stands in a line facing the same direction. The person in the back then crawls between the legs of each person. As she/he passes through, each person gives her/him a head, shoulder, and back massage. When the person reaches the front of the line, she/he joins the line while those in back start to crawl.

### **Touch Blue**

Everyone stands in a circle. One person calls out “touch blue” and everyone then finds a blue piece of clothing on someone else and touches it with her/his hand. Besides colored clothing, some things to try touching: elbow, hair, fingertip, shoe, nose, breath. Participants should be careful not to touch others in inappropriate ways.

### **Ha Ha**

Everyone lies on the floor with her/his head on the belly of someone else (as much as that is possible). Then everyone chants together “Ha Ha.” It shouldn’t take long before you all erupt in laughter.

### **Jellyroll**

Everyone stands in a circle and holds hands. One person lets go of the hand on her/his left and then turns clockwise and winds the whole group up around her/himself. Once assembled into a tight jellyroll, the person in the middle might crawl out between people’s feet pulling everyone else along behind, often making quite a mess.

### Knots

Everyone stands in a circle, with eyes closed, places her/his hands into the center, and grasps another person's hand with each hand. Then everyone opens their eyes and tries to sort out the knot they have created by having people climb over and under each other's arms until they are all standing in an unbroken circle (though some people may be facing outward). Remember to follow your arm and cooperate with others.

With more than 5 people, you often end up with two or more interlocking circles or with an undoable knot. Sometimes cheating may be called for to untangle the knot.

Try doing the whole exercise with eyes closed.

### Conga Dance

Everyone stands in a circle, then turns to the right, and puts their hands on either side of the waist of the person in front. One person lets go of the person in front and begins to lead the group around, walking or dancing from place to place. Everyone follows the motions of the person in front as that person extends her/his foot to the side, ducks her/his head, leans to one side, hops on one foot, jumps up and down, crawls, etc. Everyone might also make warbling or popping noises. (This is good practice for joining a charismatic cult!)

### Lap Sit

Everyone stands very close to one another in a circle. Everyone turns to the right and then sits down in the lap of the person behind her/him. Ask everyone to massage the person in front. If you are successful in actually doing this without falling down and laughing, begin walking (while still sitting), left foot first, then right. That should ensure that you all fall down.

**An Instructive Variation:** For any of these games, appoint someone to be in charge: this person stands on the outside and tells everyone how they should move — and people should only move as they are commanded. Wow, is that difficult! It is also a good demonstration of why dictators are dependent on the people they command and how a little civil disobedience can undermine an autocratic regime.

### Evaluation

At the end of every meeting, it is important to have an evaluation in which positive and exciting things that happened at the meeting can be mentioned and affirmed. Also, an evaluation allows participants to identify those things that they did not particularly like, why they did not like them, and how those things might be done better in the future. Usually the main focus is on the process — how people interacted, how the ground rules held up, whether people felt insulted or encouraged, how people performed their special roles, whether the presentations and discussion were useful, and so on — but you may also want to evaluate the agenda, the reading materials, and the meeting room environment.

One particularly effective way we have found to evaluate meetings is for the group to brainstorm these three items:

- What was good about the meeting? (+)
- What was bad about the meeting? (-)
- How could the meeting be improved? (^)

The recorder can draw a plus sign, minus sign, and up arrow as the headers of three columns across the top of a sheet of paper and then list the brainstormed items under the appropriate header. We usually brainstorm all three questions simultaneously, thus letting people say whatever comments, praise, criticism, or better ideas they have — and then if it is not clear, the facilitator and recorder can help figure out which column it belongs under. But if it works better for your group, you can brainstorm each question sequentially.

After brainstorming, the group then very briefly discusses and selects the most promising improvements for use in later meetings. In the interest of time, the details of these changes should usually not be worked out by the whole group at this time. Instead, the facilitator and assistant facilitator for the next meeting should refine them in their planning meeting/phone call.

## G. Descriptions of Agenda Items Specific to Particular Sessions

This section describes more specialized topics and activities that are likely to appear only on the agenda of particular meetings.

### Personal Introductions

We encourage those groups in which participants have never before met to devote extensive time to introductions — enough time that people feel safe and comfortable with each other. Even groups in which members already know each other should spend some time getting to know each other better. This encourages cooperation and makes the process go easier and faster later on.

No matter what introductory process is used, each person's comments should be fairly brief and each person should be given approximately equal time to share with the group. This basic principle of equality is important to keep in mind throughout the START course.

Here are some suggestions for things that might be shared:

- Your name
- Where you live
- What work you do or your main interests
- Where you grew up
- A language other than English you speak or read
- Your favorite food prepared by your parents or grandparents
- The origin of your last name
- How you heard about START
- Why you are interested in START
- What spurred your concern with societal change
- One way that you have been oppressed or exploited
- One way that you have been privileged compared to others
- What effect your economic/social/cultural background has had on your political viewpoint
- One significant consciousness-raising experience in your life
- A time when you acted really well (or saw someone else act really well) in a difficult or conflictive situation
- One thing you have done well in changing society, and one thing you would like to be able to do better
- One thing you would like to be doing in social action; what is preventing you from doing it; what you might do to overcome those barriers

So that people can answer adequately, choose only three or four of these items for people to answer in the initial meeting and maybe a few more at a later meeting.

Generally, it is not a good idea to ask people simply to tell what change work they have done since that often produces a situation where a few people in the group talk at length about their experience while others say little or nothing and feel inadequate because they have had less experience.

Here are two ways you might structure the introductions:

### **Go Around the Circle**

Traditionally, people sit in a circle and each person introduces her/himself in turn around the circle. This has the advantage of allowing everyone to speak for her/himself and to take the time they need, and for everyone else to hear what they have to say. However, it has several disadvantages: people may talk too long, those who are comfortable speaking about themselves in groups may talk much longer than those who do not, and some people may boast while others minimize their accomplishments.

If you anticipate encountering these difficulties, you can either limit each person to a set time, or use the following process:

### **Introduce Another**

Break into pairs of people (each person chooses the person sitting next to her/him or someone she/he does not know well). For 2–3 minutes one person in each pair introduces her/himself to the other (and the other listens and, perhaps, takes brief notes). Then the timekeeper calls time and the other person introduces her/himself for 2–3 minutes. The group reconvenes and each person, in turn, introduces her/his partner to the group as a whole.

The content of what people say to each other in the pairs may range over many themes, so individuals should not be expected to be able to remember everything to re-tell to the group. Indeed, this is an advantage since almost no one can talk about another person for an excessively long time. This process also is usually much safer for those who do not like to talk about themselves or those who have trouble talking in front of a group. For especially taciturn people, their partner can attentively ask questions and draw them out.

### **Presentation and Questions — Introduction to START**

The person convening the group may want to take 5 or 10 minutes to give some background information about START. This should include defining what START is, providing some historical background, briefly explaining the content and process, describing its relationship to social action, and perhaps telling an inspiring story. The introduction to this study guide provides most of this information. After the presentation, you might allot a few minutes for answering essential questions, but do not let this go on too long (more than 10 minutes) — the best way to understand START is just to do it.

The convener should briefly outline what is required of participants (see the list in Section 2.B) so everyone has a realistic idea of what they are getting into.

Also, depending on the group, the convener may want to introduce explicit ground rules for behavior. For some groups, agreeing by consensus to ground rules will make the group feel safer since it will be clear that obnoxious behavior will not be tolerated. But for others, establishing group rules at the first meeting will introduce the worry that others in the group might be problematic. In this case, it is better to wait and discuss ground rules only if problems arise. At the first meeting, you want to establish a hopeful, upbeat atmosphere and suggest that things will probably go well, not focus on potential problems.

Some possible ground rules:

- Everyone will treat the other members of the group well and respect their ideas, perspectives, and cultural practices
- Everyone will explore ideas together, investigating and challenging ideas to see if they make sense and effectively solve problems, but will do so thoughtfully and in a way respectful of others
- Everyone will be prepared to enforce this agreement if necessary, intervening if somebody is out of line, and stopping inappropriate behavior.

## **Brainstorm and Discussion — Expectations and Hopes for the START Course**

A quick brainstorm — with ideas recorded so the group can refer to it later — is a good way of checking out whether people's expectations are realistic and whether the group is meeting them. Either a brainstorm or a "think and listen" session might be focused by asking people to tell the group (1) ways in which they see themselves using what they will learn from the START course, or (2) a major hope or goal they have for the course. If people have unrealistic or contradictory expectations, this should be made clear and resolved at this time.

## **Discussion and Questions — About the START Study Guide**

The creation of a democratic process — in which everyone participates equally and takes equal responsibility for the success of the group — requires that everyone in the group read and be familiar with this study guide. Ideally this should be done before the first meeting. If this is not possible, time for reading and discussing the study guide should be built into the introductory sessions in such a way as to permit any clarification or group decision-making needed before the group moves into the analysis sessions of the START course.

Reading Sets Collection A, typically used in Session 2, specifically calls for everyone to carefully read all of Chapter 1 and Sections A–F of Chapter 2 of this study guide, to skim Sections 2.G and 2.H, and to look over the other chapters.

## **Presentation of Reports — Relating the Readings to Societal Change**

When presenting reports on social problems, there is a tendency to focus on the problems rather than on solving them. Here is one way to ensure at least part of each presentation focuses on solving problems:

Every time a report is given, the last minute might be devoted to its change implications: new goals, criticism of old goals and present efforts, or specific projects the group could do. If the allotted time period is about up and the presenter hasn't focused on change implications, the facilitator might remind that person to do so, or suggest that an extra minute be taken at the end for that specific purpose.

## **Plan a Change Action**

Planning and carrying out a change activity can make the ideas discussed in your study sessions seem less abstract. You can actually try out some of the change ideas you have generated and see how they work. The action may raise questions that you can then study and discuss in later START sessions.

Although many of the change actions that we know about are big affairs (such as boycotts, mass marches, starting alternative institutions, etc.), there are many important, smaller activities that a group can do without too much time and effort. Your group might want to do some kind of mini-action once a month. Here are some suggestions:

- Hold a vigil
- Write a leaflet on a chosen issue and pass it out at some appropriate place
- Do a listening project: set up a table with a sign at a street fair or public event, canvass door-to-door, or approach passersby on a busy street — and ask them about a hot-button issue, listen attentively, and record their main thoughts
- Help a local change group by joining their demonstration, handing out their leaflets, or working in their office
- Meet with a Congressmember or other decision-maker about an issue and suggest a solution to a societal problem

## **Proposals for Action**

At the last meeting, to stimulate discussion about what you might do next, we suggest that three people present three different proposals describing what your group might do. These could be culled from action ideas generated throughout the course. After these presentations, you might brainstorm additional ideas, discuss them all, and sift through them for the idea that most appeals to your group.

Here are some proposals that you might choose or adapt to your specific situation:

### **1. Develop and Launch an Action Campaign**

Your group would choose a particular social problem, find a positive solution, and launch a campaign to implement your solution. Your work might focus first on researching and studying the problem, possible solutions, and various strategies for change, using the skills you have learned from the START course. Or, if you think you already know these, then your work might focus on implementing your preferred solution (and/or challenging those who stand in the way).

### **2. Work With an Existing Organization to Bring about Change**

Your group would choose an existing organization that is currently doing effective positive work. A committed and skilled START group willing to work hard would be a valuable addition to any campaign for change. You might use the skills you have learned in the START course to examine and analyze the principles and program of the group, to assist the organization develop a visionary goal, a strategy for change, or an action campaign, or to help the group with its internal process.

### **3. Work to Inform Your Community about an Important Issue**

Your group would choose an issue, research the existing problems and possible positive alternatives, and then inform people in your community by setting up speaking engagements, arranging to speak on radio and TV shows, writing and distributing leaflets door-to-door or at community events, setting up a website, writing and performing a skit that illuminates the situation, etc.

### **4. Start or Support an Alternative Institution**

Your group would develop or support an alternative institution such as a food co-op, a childcare co-op, a land trust, a community radio station, a local currency (like Ithaca Hours), etc.

### **5. Launch Two New START Courses**

Your group would help arrange and convene two more START groups in your area as a way of rousing, educating, and empowering more people and getting them involved in working for positive change. You might approach organizations with which you are involved, friends, neighbors, or work colleagues. To appeal to a specific audience such as high school students, an oppressed minority group, or a particular occupational group, you might need to modify the format or content. To help get the new START groups off the ground, one or more people from your group might attend and possibly facilitate the first few meetings.

### **6. Develop an Issue-Specific Study Group**

Your group would develop the outline and materials necessary to conduct a study group similar to the START course but focused on a specific issue that you think would appeal to many people. Once completed, you would publish it on the web, publicize it, and encourage others to use it. To test the materials, your group may want to actually convene such a study group. See Section 3.F for some ideas on how to go about developing an issue-oriented study group.

### **7. Provide Auxiliary Support to Existing Change-Oriented Organizations**

Your group would decide to provide some kind of ancillary support to existing organizations: education and training; personal counseling or coaching; fundraising (organizing benefit concerts or dinners, raffles, etc); or material support for staffmembers (babysitting, transportation, meal preparation). This kind of auxiliary support, though seldom honored or valued, can be extremely helpful in enabling small, poorly funded organizations to be powerful and effective.

### **8. Morph into an On-Going Support Group**

Your group would change into a support group, helping each of the members of the group to focus on and do better whatever change work they choose to do individually.

**Note:** Often it is difficult to get everyone in a START group to agree on a single focus for action. Rather than spending a lot of energy trying to push your whole START group in a single direction, if your group cannot agree, instead encourage each participant to pursue whatever action ideas interest her/him (possibly in an organization with which they already work) and to work with others from the START group (or elsewhere) who share that interest.

## **H. Descriptions of Exercises**

Exercises are grouped in this section into seven distinct sets for use in different parts of the START course. But use your own judgment to decide which exercises will best meet the needs of your group for any particular session.

For more good exercises, see the Training for Change site:

[ <http://trainingforchange.org/index.php?option=content&task=section&id=4&Itemid=39> ].

## Personal Reflection

### What is Most Important?

This is a good exercise that several groups have used to help participants define what aspects of life are most important to them. It involves listing in three categories:

- Things (values, freedoms, possessions, etc.) we would give up under no circumstances
- Things we would give up for a better society
- Things we would be willing to share

It might be good to announce this exercise the week before so that people can think through their own ideas ahead of time. Then, during the meeting, the whole group (or perhaps two or three smaller groups) can combine their ideas and list them on a wall chart.

### Personal Action for Positive Change

This exercise, applying the ideas of appreciative inquiry, focuses on the ways we have already acted well for positive change and how we might do more in the future. It tends to bring out and encourage the best side of each person.

For this exercise, the group should break into pairs. One person in each group interviews the other, using the six questions below, for 10 minutes, and then they switch roles for another 10 minutes. It may be useful for the interviewer to write down the answers and give them to the interviewee for future reference. At the end, depending on the group's interest, a few people might report back some of the most striking stories or you might brainstorm the important factors people mentioned that enabled them to act well.

1. Think of a time when you did the right thing for yourself or for someone else — in the face of hatred, oppression, injustice, indifference or inertia — when you acted upon your conscience. This might be a monumental act affecting society or a simple act in your family, community, school, or workplace. Describe that experience.
2. What were the circumstances that led up to the event?
3. What made it possible for you to boldly act upon your conscience, to respond with love?
4. How did you feel?
5. What would it be like to act like this now, in situations facing you, your community, and your nation today?
6. What is one thing you can do that will honor and build upon the courageous story you told today?

### Removing Barriers to Action

Often it is much easier to take a stand than to act on it. This exercise is designed to help identify and remove barriers to action.

Instruct each person: Write at the top of a piece of paper an action you know is right but are having difficulty taking. Then draw a line lengthwise down the middle of the paper. On the right-hand side, list all the perceived or real barriers, both within and outside yourself, which seem to be keeping you from acting. On the left-hand side of the paper, list steps you could take which might help reduce or remove each of the barriers. Finally, on the back of the paper, develop a plan of action for actually removing the barriers — what are 3 or 4 things you could actually do and when would you do them?

This exercise may be done individually or in small groups with each of the group members taking turns being the focus of attention and receiving support or helpful suggestions from other group members.

### Getting Started

Many of us have grandiose plans that we find difficult to put into action. This exercise encourages people to move toward action as well as to ask the question, "Am I really doing what I want to do with my life?"

Instruct each person: Prepare a sheet of paper with three columns headed "What I want to do," "Date," "First steps." Then list up to five things you want to do and assign realistic dates to each task. Next, list the first steps to be taken in getting started.

Once everyone has finished, divide into small groups and give each person some time as a focus person. The focus person discusses what she/he hopes to do and how she/he intends to get started. Other group members give feedback and additional suggestions for getting started.

### Other Ideas

The previous two exercises are adapted from the book *Values Clarification: A Handbook of Practical Strategies for Teachers and Students* by Simon, Howe, and Kirshenbaum (updated in 1991). This book contains many other exercises that interested groups could adapt for use in the START course.

## Understanding Change

### Social Problem-to-Causes Web Chart

The group starts by writing an issue of concern in the center of a large wall chart (several taped together are often useful), such as "heavy U.S. reliance on the automobile" or "the inadequacy of health care in our town." Group members

then suggest what they feel are important causes of the problem. As group members suggest various items, these items are written on the chart around the central concern and connecting lines are drawn from each item to the central problem. When the group is satisfied that major direct causes have been identified, they then concentrate on what they feel are the principal causes of those major direct causes, which in turn are causing the central problem. As numerous second, third, and perhaps even fourth-level causes are added, the diagram assumes the appearance of a web. The entire procedure can take from half an hour to an hour.

This visual process enables a group to trace the root causes or effects of any specific concrete social condition. It quite literally results in a “big picture,” locating the issue of concern in the center of a web of forces directly related to it. It facilitates a group analysis of a problem and — by identifying some “handles” on the problem — can also be of considerable value in helping the group plan a strategy.

**Note:** It is very important to make the central issue on which you concentrate a very concrete one; if it is too vague you will soon become lost in questions of what various terms “really” mean.

### **Social Problem-to-Consequences Web Chart**

This exercise is the same as the one above except that instead of listing important **causes** of a problem, you list important **consequences** of a problem. This is a good way to trace the ripple effects of a bad situation.

### **Personal Oppression-to-Macro Forces Web Chart**

Most of us feel oppressed by certain elements in the society around us, but often we are not clear about the connections between our personal feelings of oppression and societal forces. This exercise is designed to help make these connections clearer.

1. Participants begin by thinking for 3–5 minutes about what aspects of their lives really hurt. These may vary widely: racism, homophobia, oppression of a job or housework, traffic jams, poor healthcare, the hurt at seeing people killed far away. Each person picks the three most important hurts/oppressions to report to the group, and these are listed on a wall chart.

2. The group then selects one specific item that everyone can identify with at least to some extent. This, too, should be done quickly, recognizing that it probably will not be possible to select something that everyone will feel strongly about.

3. The item chosen is then recorded in the middle of a large wall chart, and the group proceeds to construct a web chart (as described above) of the causes of these hurts/oppressions.

4. Several ways of bringing this exercise to a useful finish have been tried:

- When the web chart is complete, group members list items toward the edge of the web that are most important to them. The group selects from that list an item that might be changed by positive social action, and then each person says what she/he wishes could be true about that situation. The group then selects one of the wishes and carries out the “Social Problem-Solution-Action Brainstorm” exercise described below.

- The group brainstorms and discusses various action projects that would challenge the causes of the central oppression.

- The group brainstorms questions for further research and analysis.

Since the overall process takes at least an hour, it is unlikely that more than one theme can be followed through in a single meeting of a group.

### **Personal Liberation-to-Macro Forces Web Chart**

This exercise, like the one above, uses the web chart but focuses on personal liberations, as follows:

1. Group members think briefly about conditions they personally would like to have in a good society, e.g., close connections with neighbors, good mass transit, working for income no more than three days a week, etc.

2. Each person then shares these with the group, and the group brainstorms additional personal liberations for a few minutes. All items mentioned are listed on a wall chart.

3. After one item has been chosen to pursue further, people build a web chart around it by thinking about what would be needed to bring this liberation to exist in society, and then, in the next ring of items, what would be needed for those conditions to exist. The outside ring eventually will consist of large-scale social forces necessary for the emergence of the original personal liberation in the center.

4. If the exercise is done for several personal liberations (perhaps by subgroups working simultaneously), all the macro forces for all the web charts can be put on a wall chart entitled “visionary macro forces.”

## Visions of a Good Society

### Vision Gallery

This is an effective technique for helping people think of positive, achievable aspects of a good society.

Divide the group into small groups of 3–5 people each. For 10–15 minutes, have each person write down major features of a really good society that she/he would like to see, assuming there were no constraints of money, political power, etc.

Note that this individual thinking can be done from several different perspectives, and it is generally best if all members of the subgroup agree on what perspective they would like to adopt, such as:

- A description of a major function in such a society, e.g., healthcare, education, transportation
- A description of the kind of community one would like to live in
- What kind of work people would do, and where they would live
- A description of “a day in my life” in a good society

When these descriptions are completed, have each person share his or her ideas with the rest of the small group. Then have the group combine the best points of all its ideas and record them on a wall chart. This may take the form of a picture, a graph, or a list of items. When the small groups are finished, have them come back together and hang their papers side by side on a wall in a gallery of visions of a new society. Have spokespersons for each small group explain the main points of their vision.

This procedure can take from 45 minutes to 1 1/2 hours depending on the group’s wishes.

### Variations

- What might this community look like ten years from now, ideally?
- What would a day in my life look like in this community? In an ideal society?
- What kind of factory would I like to work in?
- What would the U.S. look like?

### Vision Scenario Writing

Instruct participants to write a description answering the question, “What will a good society/ world/ town/ personal life look like in 10 years if the most optimistic changes occur (though kept within realistic bounds)?” The scenario might be written as if it is a newspaper story ten years hence describing conditions as they would exist then compared to now. Then have each person read their description to the group.

Since these descriptions can take a long time to write, they can also be done at home before the session.

### Brainstorm Characteristics of a Good Society

Hang wall charts with five columns marked “Economic,” “Political,” “Social,” “Personal,” and “Other.” Then have the group successively brainstorm characteristics of a good society for each of the topics.

Once the brainstorming is finished, if there is time and the group wishes to, the facilitator can focus on each item in turn and ask whether the whole group agrees it is a characteristic of a good society. For those items for which there is not agreement, people with opposing views might briefly tell their reasons.

### Think and Listen about Visions

For 5 minutes in silence have each person think of aspects of a good society that are important to her/him. Then have each person, in turn, take 3 minutes to tell her/his key vision ideas to the whole group. A recorder might list the ideas on a wall chart.

## Connecting Problems to Social Change Solutions

If groups do not act to help resolve the problems they learn about, they often suffer from feelings of powerlessness and become frustrated and inactive. Here are some exercises that help identify feasible action solutions. Even though the action ideas generated in these exercises are usually not acted on immediately, conceiving of them is still a valuable step since it reminds participants of all the things that **could** be done and encourages them to consider acting.

### Social Problem-Solution-Action Brainstorm

We suggest that this exercise be used frequently in the Understanding Problems and Identifying Solutions segment. This exercise helps groups to rapidly gather and make sense of information by listing the problems discussed, possible solutions to them, and specific actions people can take to help achieve the solutions. Focusing on actions helps prevent people from becoming depressed and bogged down in too much disheartening analysis.

1. The recorder makes three columns on wall charts and heads them “problems,” “solutions or visions” and “actions.”

2. For 2 minutes the group brainstorms the problems that were discussed in that session and the recorder rapidly writes them in the “problems” column of the wall chart. Continue for another minute if the group is going strong and wants more time.

3. For 2 minutes the group brainstorms solutions to the problems listed in the first column and the recorder rapidly writes the solutions in the second column. Continue for another minute if needed.

4. For 2 minutes the group brainstorms projects that groups could adopt and lifestyle changes individuals might take to achieve the solutions in column two. Continue for another minute if needed.

5. How to do a specific project. The facilitator asks the group to quickly choose one of the projects or lifestyle changes that were brainstormed. The facilitator then asks, "How could we achieve that?" and the group brainstorms its answers while the recorder writes them on a new wall chart. The list should consist only of positive ideas without criticisms. When the group feels that the list is long enough, the facilitator again asks the group to pick an item from this newly brainstormed list and repeats the question, "How could we accomplish this?" This cycle of selecting a project idea and brainstorming how it could be accomplished is repeated 3 or 4 times until the projects and lifestyle changes become specific, clear, and achievable.

This whole procedure usually takes from 30 to 45 minutes, but can, if necessary, be shortened to 20 minutes.

### **Social Problem-Solution-Project Chronicle**

Before the first report is presented in a session, the recorder makes 3 columns on the wall chart, headed "problems," "solutions" and "projects." Then, as each report is given, and during discussion, the recorder extracts any problems, solutions, or projects mentioned, and writes them in the appropriate column. This helps focus the discussion more on change, helps the group produce more useful and practical ideas, and is a good memory device. All the past "action" wall charts can be brought out and hung up each week.

### **Social Problem-to-Causes Web Chart**

See the description above.

### **Social Problem-to-Consequences Web Chart**

See the description above.

### **Critical Analysis of Our Existing Programs and Lifestyles**

Make a list (either individually or by brainstorming as a group) of destructive things we each do and/or that we know others do related to the topic area. Discuss how we could change our own lifestyles or dialog with others about theirs.

### **Paired Roleplay — Challenging Someone to Change**

1. Ask everyone to stand in two parallel lines and pair off. Point out that this is a one-on-one roleplay — even though there are many other people in the room, everyone should pretend they and their partner are the only ones there; ignore everyone else.

2. Present a scenario to the people in one of the lines: "Pretend that someone you know (the person you are paired with) has made choices that contribute to a social, economic, or environmental problem. You'll need to choose a particular choice that the person has made. For example, pretend the person has just purchased a car with poor gas mileage or the person has purchased a product made by people oppressed by poor working conditions and low pay." Let people take a minute to consider what problem the person's behavior is contributing to and to get into their roles. The people in the other line — those who will be confronted — should prepare themselves to play along with the confronter and offer excuses and resist criticism, become belligerent and difficult, or eagerly accept criticism — depending on their preference and how the interaction develops.

3. Then have people begin the roleplay: The change agent approaches the other person, engages that person in conversation, and invites her/him to change.

4. After a minute or two, ask everyone to stop ("Freeze!") and notice their body language. Then gather into a circle and ask questions like: "What was effective?" "What might you have done differently to have it work better?" "How did it feel to confront someone?" "What did it feel like to be challenged?" Let a number of people answer, but do not go on too long.

5. Then have everyone in one line shift to the left one space (with the person at the end wrapping around to the other end of the line) so that everyone has a new partner. Then switch the roles so that the people in the other line will be the "confronters." Have them choose a different problem and behavior, get into their new roles, then play again, and debrief.

The point of this roleplay is to learn how to confront someone in a way that is useful — that will lead people to change their behavior in a positive way and not just get defensive and angry. The debriefing period is essential to explore and learn from each other what works, what does not, and why.

### **Empowerment**

Personal empowerment is crucial to bringing about positive change. Sometimes just sharing our thinking, sharing inspiring success stories, or even sharing our frustrations empowers us. It is also useful for us to practice again and again finding solutions to problems and acting on them.

See Chapter 5 for more discussion about the need for empowerment.

## Sharing Thinking

Often just a simple “think and listen” process — taking time in a group for each person to think about an issue and then sharing that thinking — can generate a wealth of insights, information, and exciting new ideas. It seems a particularly good way of applying our own experience to larger issues and making new connections between them.

1. A particular problem or issue is chosen which everyone focuses on. People in the group spend time thinking by themselves with pen and paper (this time can be taken either before or during the meeting). Alternatively divide into “think and listen pairs” — one person thinks aloud for a designated amount of time while the other listens silently, maybe taking notes for the person who is thinking, then reverse roles. The attention of another person can stimulate new thinking, and the process can help people to organize and articulate the important points before sharing them with the group. Not having any feedback from the listener is important in creating a safe environment just for thinking.

2. After the designated amount of time, people return to the group prepared to share their thinking. The available time is divided equally between each of the participants. Each individual shares her/his thinking with the group leaving a short time at the end for clarifying questions.

3. After hearing from everyone, the group spends some time discussing what has been presented. Finding common threads in people’s sharing and isolating important factors helps to incorporate the personal thinking into group thinking.

Suggested topics:

- **Childhood factors that shape us.** Realizing that people’s values and their understanding of their role in society are greatly influenced by experiences that they had while growing up, exploring some of this past can help illuminate the present situation. Some questions that might be useful to think about are: When you were young, who did you feel superior to? Who did you feel inferior to? What were you expected to do or be when you grew up? How did you react to those expectations? Where did your motivation for changing society come from?

- **Factors that help and hinder change.** The purpose of this exercise is to isolate factors that help people to take action, and factors that hold them back. During the thinking time, each person thinks of times or situations in which they were able to take action, make changes, or feel in control of a difficult situation (standing up to somebody, challenging authority, changing jobs, getting a group to do something, making a stand, altering lifestyle, etc.), and think of the factors which enabled them to take that action. The process can be repeated with people thinking about the times when it was hard to take action and the factors involved in that. With a list of the variety of factors that help and hinder in making changes, the group can begin to get a broader perspective on the most basic things that we need in order to make any kind of change.

- **Strategy sharing.** Having everyone in the group write their own strategy for large-scale change really encourages people to do some broad thinking. This tool can help people to look carefully at what they are doing and how it fits in with their strategy for change. A helpful way of thinking about this is to project into the future: “Assume that in thirty years we are living in the kind of society that we would like to see. What were the steps that were necessary to bring that about?” (or choose a shorter time span and a more limited goal). Enough thinking is required for this that preparation is probably best done before the meeting.

## Sharing Success Stories

Looking at the experience of people who have successfully managed to bring about changes can be an encouragement to thinking about taking action. Gene Sharp’s *Politics of Nonviolent Action* (1973) is full of success stories. Personal experiences of successful action are also very good to share.

## Brainstorming Reasons Why It’s All Hopeless

The purpose of this exercise is to air the feelings of hopelessness that often keep people from taking action and to recognize the existence of those feelings and deal with them openly instead of thinking they should not be there or pretending they are not. The group starts by brainstorming all the reasons why it feels hopeless (either a specific situation or societal change in general), then picks one or more of those reasons and brainstorms specific things that can be done to overcome that sense of hopelessness.

During and following the first brainstorm, it may be helpful for the group to let out a loud, exaggerated sigh of hopelessness and wail and moan a bit together about how difficult it all is. This can sometimes lead to shared laughter and tension release. After coming up with ways to overcome hopelessness, it may be helpful for the group to let out a collective whoop of delight and feel the strength that comes from working together to overcome problems.

## Group Problem-Solving

Choose some practical problem to solve — either a situation an individual is facing or a local issue that someone feels should be addressed. Start by having the person clearly state the problem — including a few sentences of history and any solutions that have already been tried. Then the group brainstorms various possible solutions. One good way to bring out really creative possibilities is to phrase them in terms of “goal-wishes” — “I wish that...” “How could we...?” After about five minutes, the person who introduced the problem should pick one of those ideas (or combine several) to

consider further. She/he should say three positive things about the proposed solution and then say one aspect that needs more thought. The group then brainstorms on that aspect and the process is repeated until the time is up (about a half hour is good) and/or the person has a clear idea of possible next steps in working toward a solution. Note that this style of problem solving relies on quickness, unfettered creativity, enthusiasm, and building on positive ideas. Work to foster these traits.

### **Individual Problem-Solving**

This is an exercise to help people think in an organized and concrete way about developing a strategy for acting on a particular issue by considering what the present situation is, what the desired one would be, what things stand in the way of that happening, and what steps can be taken to overcome those blocks. The format outlined below can help people organize that information. The issue can range from personal goals (where my life is now and where I would like it to be in a year) to strategies for a change campaign in which someone is involved. A good way to use this exercise in a group is to introduce it, then have each person work individually for about half an hour, then gather together, either in small groups or as a whole, to share insights.

Present Situation ~~~	Forces Keeping Me in Present <-----	Blocks # # #	Forces Moving Me toward Goal ----->	Desired Situation ***

People who would be affected by change:	Specific steps to take to overcome blocks:

### **Strategy Analysis**

#### **Force Field Analysis**

This tool is very useful in helping a group organize information about an up-coming decision or dilemma in such a way as to clarify possible solutions and their implications. If the group knows it would prefer a particular solution, force field analysis can help to specify the obstacles which must be overcome and, combined with other tools, to suggest how much and what kind of effort may be required to overcome them.

A frequent use of the tool is to help a group answer the question, "Should we carry out this possible campaign or not?" Or, in other words, "Is the campaign likely to be successful?" Assuming that the group has a working definition of what success means to it, it proceeds with the analysis by asking, "What are the forces and factors which will contribute to the failure of this project, and what forces will contribute to its success?" This results in two lists of forces, one positive and one negative. The beginning of such lists might look like this:

<b>Should We Carry Out this Campaign or Not?</b>	
<b>Forces Contributing to Its Success (+)</b>	<b>Forces Contributing to Its Failure (-)</b>
1. The issue is of real concern to people in a wide spectrum of local groups.	1. The police department is extremely repressive and paranoid.
2. We have good contacts with sympathetic people in the media.	2. Local action groups aren't accustomed to really working with one another.

Looking at the two lists on a blackboard or wall chart, the group judges their relative weight on a mental seesaw to determine which set of forces is heavier. This involves not merely noting which list is longer, but generally deciding which set of factors the group feels carries the most total force. If the negatives outweigh the positives, the group tries to weaken or remove some of the negatives and to add more positive factors. For example, "We could hold a weekend training session, which would be planned and participated in by all local action groups that would be involved, to determine how well we all can really work together." Trying to change the overall balance may require an interim period of information gathering before a final decision is reached. If the seesaw can be tipped in favor of the success of the project, the group is ready to proceed.

Much of the value of the force field analysis comes from the shared thinking about the factors to be put on the lists. The two lists, when completed and placed side-by-side, offer a holistic perspective to an extent not often enough produced by a group considering a change campaign. This process can be used for many other purposes, of course, such as deciding whether or not to publish a pamphlet, start a food co-op, or take a new member into a community.

### **Impact Analysis**

This exercise is useful in helping a group figure out what it is trying to accomplish and whether a particular change action will accomplish it.

1. Begin by having someone describe a proposed public action — such as a demonstration, a lobbying visit to a legislator, or a nonviolent blockade of a harmful company — and provide enough detail so that everyone understands what would be involved.

2. Then the group quickly brainstorms a list of the individuals and groups that might be affected by the proposed action either directly or indirectly — such as the planners of the action, the participants in the action, the targeted decision-makers, other authorities, government or company employees, company owners or shareholders, voters, the police, sympathetic and unsympathetic bystanders, TV viewers watching coverage (sympathetic, neutral, and hostile), children who hear about the action, and potential movement recruits (people who hear about the action later and might be moved to participate in the next planned change action).

3. Then, for each of these individuals and groups, briefly brainstorm ways they are likely to be affected, both positively and negatively. Are they likely to be enlightened, persuaded, encouraged, inspired, outraged, challenged, pressured, or coerced? Will they likely feel eager and excited, empowered and strong, resentful and disaffected, fearful and angry? Will they be more or less likely to refuse to support harmful behavior, change their behavior in positive ways, or work for positive change — immediately or in the future? Will the action make them more or less supportive of the change group that carried out the action?

4. Next, look at all the brainstormed lists and discuss the overall impact. Will the action accomplish the group's goals? Will the action reveal societal secrets and make clear the ugly reality? Will it clearly present a positive alternative? Are there ways to change the action to make it more effective in accomplishing the goals and less likely to fail? Is there another activity that would be better able to achieve the goals?

Often, after considering the impact on various parties, the group will have a better understanding of what its real goals are. It may be useful for the group to codify this understanding by brainstorming an explicit list of the desired way the action will affect each group.

### **Strengths and Weaknesses**

This exercise is useful in helping a group find an effective strategy to bring about a specific positive change.

1. Begin by identifying the main individuals or groups that stand in the way of the desired change.

2. Then, for each entity, brainstorm that entity's strengths and weaknesses in all the relevant realms: military, political, economic, social, ethical, geographic, and demographic. Is that entity powerful and does it "hold the high ground" or is it vulnerable and weak? Is it smart, educated, and well trained or ignorant, clumsy, and stupid? Is it cohesive or scattered? Does it have a lot of allies or is it isolated? Is it confident and secure or is it uncertain or ashamed?

3. Next, identify the main individuals or groups that are working to implement positive change. Then, for each entity, again brainstorm its strengths and weaknesses.

4. Now, compare the two, especially looking for matches between the change group's strengths and the opponents' weaknesses — often a fruitful area in which to base a change campaign. But also notice other possibilities, like opponent strengths that might be decreased. For example, the opponents might be generally considered very ethical, but if their true, unethical behavior were revealed, they would lose their authority, opening the way for positive change.

5. Finally, choose one match of strengths and weaknesses for the changers and the opponents and consider how a campaign might be constructed that would pit these against each other. How would that campaign likely play out? Would it be an effective campaign for positive change?

### **Spectrogram of Actions**

This exercise allows a group to explore how various activities might bring about effective nonviolent social change.

1. The exercise facilitator chooses 8 or 10 of the items in the list below.

2. She/he reads the question below and fills in the first chosen item at the end.

3. Everyone else then arranges themselves in the room in a location that indicates how violent or nonviolent they think the action is and how effective or ineffective. One wall of the room represents "The action is violent" and the opposite wall represents "it is nonviolent"; a third wall represents "The action is effective" and the opposite wall is "It is not effective". Like a giant XY chart, their location indicates how violent and effective each person thinks the action is. For example, if someone thinks the action is very violent and very ineffective, she/he would stand in the corner closest to those two walls.

4. After everyone is in place, the facilitator then asks participants who are standing at various points in the room to explain why they chose to stand where they did — why do they feel the action is violent and effective, nonviolent and effective, violent and ineffective, or nonviolent and ineffective (or why are they standing in the middle)? If no one is standing near one of the walls (for example, no one thinks the action is effective), the facilitator might explain why someone might stand there. For example, for the question "Do nothing" someone might stand near the wall indicating the action is effective with the idea that if they don't know anything useful to do, it would be more effective to do nothing than to do something counterproductive.

#### **Question:**

"In order to stop oppression, exploitation, or war, is it violent or nonviolent and is it effective or not effective to \_\_\_?"

- Do nothing
- Work in a soup kitchen feeding the poor
- Research an issue, write a leaflet that describes what's wrong and what should be done instead, then copy the leaflet and hand it to 500 people in your community
- Write a letter to the editor of the local paper calling for change
- Conduct a vigil in a visible public place; hold signs
- Organize a rally of 500 people; have speeches calling for change
- Organize a march of 500 people; hold signs and chant
- Meet with a decision-maker and attempt to persuade her/him that she/he should make a different decision (such as vote for an alternative)
- Organize 500 people to write a letter to a decision-maker urging her/him to make a different decision
- Throw a pie in the face of a decision-maker and denounce her/him
- Burn an effigy of a decision-maker and denounce her/him
- Boycott a product of a company that you think is oppressive
- Organize a blockade of 100 people at the gate of a company that you believe does something immoral by sitting down and linking arms with others
- Organize a blockade of 5 people at the gate of a company that you believe does something immoral by locking yourselves to a gate
- Destroy something that you believe is immoral (such as a nuclear missile) and then go to prison for what you have done ("Plowshares" action)
- Destroy something that you believe is immoral (such as a nuclear missile or a ski resort built in a virgin forest) at night and run away without being caught (sabotage)
- Refuse to pay taxes until a change is made
- Block traffic in a city as a way of calling for an alternative policy

In doing this exercise, people may all end up in one corner of the room. If so, then ask or suggest what might motivate someone to stand in the opposite corner. The point of this exercise is to explore effective nonviolent action, not to demonstrate groupthink! These are difficult questions and “it depends on what kind of chants” or “it depends what the leaflet says” is often a good answer, which then lets you discuss what kind of chants and leaflets would be most effective and most nonviolent and why.

To further stimulate discussion as you go along, perhaps also ask these questions and have one or two people answer:

- “What particular aspect of this action makes it violent?”
- “Does this action encourage people to be bold and active or meek and passive?”
- “Is this action empowering or alienating?”
- “What would make this action more effective?”
- “What is this action effective in accomplishing (what does it achieve)?”

It takes 20 minutes minimum to do this exercise and taking 30 or 40 minutes is usually better. For the first few examples, you probably want to spend some time really exploring why everyone is standing where they are and why someone might stand somewhere else, but with the later items, you can go a little faster. For some items you might not ask any questions at all — just let everyone move to where they think they ought to be, notice where everyone else is, and then move on to the next item.

The point, of course, is for people to really think about what effective nonviolent action is, why it works, why other things don’t work, who the audience for the action is, how the action affects them, etc. The context is usually crucial for deciding.

### **Strategy Contest**

After selecting a well-defined change goal, e.g., “converting Honeywell Corporation to socially valuable production in 10 years,” the group splits into two groups, one of which plays the role of nonviolent direct action advocates while the other plays the role of people who advocate always working within established structures to bring about change. Each team is given a separate working place and approximately half an hour in which to produce a program for attaining this change goal. The programs should specify what they expect to have accomplished at the end of year one, year two, etc. At the end of the time period, both groups come back together and share their strategies with each other. This sometimes develops into an informal debate and sheds light on the often-unnoticed interdependence of such groups.

Depending on the strong voices in your community, you might want to substitute other specific group strategies to roleplay instead of these two such as: advocates of moral suasion and self-suffering, advocates of education and rational discussion, advocates of electoral politics, or advocates of sabotage.

### **Debate**

Develop a list of contrary goals or directions for social action and debate them. For example, you could debate economic growth versus de-development, capitalism versus socialism, free trade versus fair trade, increasing U.S. foreign aid versus stopping it, pushing for universal healthcare versus incrementally extending healthcare to more groups, or universal versus a selective approach to alleviating American poverty.

### **Next Steps**

It is extremely important for groups to spend at least one session at the end of their START course considering their next steps. The following exercises can help.

### **Vision-Action Crystal Ball**

This exercise helps groups to relate their future visions of society to the development of social actions today.

1. Individually or in small groups predict how the world, nation, and/or your own life might look ten years from now if present trends continue.

2. Share these briefly with the whole group.

3. Individually or in small groups write a description of your vision of the world, nation, local community, or your personal life ten years from now if maximum success for positive change happens (be very optimistic but not impossibly unrealistic). It might be written as if it is a newspaper article at that time describing conditions.

4. Then write a scenario of events that led up to the good society. What caused the changes? Be as specific as possible. Emphasis here should be on the causes that brought about the good society, not so much of a description of the good society itself. Try to make it believable.

5. What role did groups you are involved with play? What did you do? What did you do in the first year (i.e., the next year from today)? (This exercise can also be used for specific issues and shorter time periods such as the energy crisis over the next 5 years or U.S. support of dictatorships over the next 3 years.)

### **Personal Sharing**

In small groups of 2 or 3 people each, individuals share their hopes, plans, and goals for their own social change activities in the next 12 months. Do you hope the people in this START course continue as a group? If so, what do you hope the group does next? If you would like to spend more time on social change, what barriers are in your way? What are some ways you might overcome these barriers? Small groups then report to the whole group.

### **Next Steps for the Group**

While individuals are reporting their personal goals to the whole group (during the personal sharing exercise above), the recorder writes these on a wall chart. On another chart the recorder writes individuals' ideas of what the group as a whole might do. After individuals give their reports, the group focuses on the future of the START group.

Even if the group chooses not to become an action group, it might decide to stay together to support individuals' actions in other groups they belong to or to provide a forum for ongoing analysis of current events and individuals' actions. Ideally the group should stay together either until it makes plans for action or until individuals feel clear about their personal directions.

## 3. Alternatives to a Standard START Course

The previous chapter on how to conduct a START course should not be seen as a confining set of rules and regulations but as a description of one way that seems to work well. It is a structure that you can use, adapting it and building on it to fit your own needs.

Below are some of the many possible variations and alternatives that you may want to use in your particular START course.

### A. 12-Session START Course

If your group is unable or unwilling to attend 24 sessions, you might set up a shorter START course. Here are two examples of 12-session START courses. The first touches on all eight major topic groups; the second emphasizes the history of change movements and strategies for action.

#### Example 1

Session <u>Number</u>	<u>Topic</u>
	<b>I. Introduction to START</b>
1	Introduction to START and Personal Introductions to Other Participants
	<b>II. Another World is Possible</b>
2	Another World is Possible — A Few Positive Examples
	<b>III. Meeting Basic Human Needs — Physical Systems</b>
3	Air, Water, Land, and Food
4	Industrialization and Energy Use
5	Environment and Sustainability
	<b>IV. Meeting Basic Human Needs — Economic Systems</b>
6	Meeting Basic Human Needs in the U.S.
7	Global Economics
	<b>V. Providing Safety</b>
8	Personal Safety
	<b>VI. Living Together</b>
9	Ways We Are Divided
10	Communicating Information and Values
	<b>VII. Strategies for Positive Change</b>
11	Challenging Existing Structures
	<b>VIII. Next Steps</b>
12	Next Steps

## Example 2

<u>Session Number</u>	<u>Topic</u>
-----------------------	--------------

### I. Introduction to START

- 1 Introduction to START and Personal Introductions to Other Participants

### II. Another World is Possible

- 2 Another World is Possible — A Few Positive Examples

### VI. Living Together

- 3 Communicating Information and Values
- 4 Exercises AND/OR Planning a Change Activity

### VII. Strategies for Positive Change

- 5 Earlier Movements for Change
- 6 Later Movements for Change
- 7 Personal and Cultural Transformation
- 8 Building Alternatives
- 9 Challenging Existing Structures
- 10 Theories and Strategies

### VIII. Next Steps

- 11 Exercises AND/OR Planning a Change Activity
- 12 Next Steps

Clearly, these truncated versions leave out many valuable topics. But it is better to have a short course with good attendance — that is exciting, energizing, and leaves people wanting more — than a longer course that suffers from poor attendance and low energy. A course of the latter type is likely to be disappointing for the participants and discourage their future change activity.

## B. Everyone Reads the Same Materials

In the standard START course, participants read different articles (except for one brief summary article for each session) and their report presentations to the larger group are short and not comprehensive. This has the advantage that a wide variety of topics, materials, and perspectives can be covered in a relatively short amount of time, but it has the disadvantage that participants may learn widely different things depending on the particular articles they read.

Another way to conduct a START course is to have everybody read the same materials — a book or set of readings. This ensures that everyone has a common foundation of knowledge, which may help focus discussions and facilitate movement toward a specific change activity. Particularly if the group is interested in a particular problem area, solution, or change strategy, it may work better for everyone to read the same materials and discuss them thoroughly.

Though you are all reading the same materials, you can still have one person take responsibility for reporting on each chapter or set of readings and then use the same process as described in Chapter 2 for reports and discussion. Or you may want to have several people report back on each chapter or set of readings and in that way hear multiple perspectives on each reading.

## C. Specific Focus First

A group already engaged in, or just beginning, a common project, may prefer to begin with readings directly related to that project. Care should be taken to select readings that cover a variety of points of view and put the issue in the context of the big picture.

Likewise, a group could begin with a special interest focus such as sexism, criminal justice, healthcare, or poverty. After a few sessions devoted to this special interest, the group could then proceed with the standard START course as outlined in this study guide and discover how that problem is connected with others and fits into a larger analysis.

## D. Change the Content

We have tried to provide pithy, well-written readings that cover a broad range of material and offer a variety of points of view. We feel these materials are informative, instructive, and provide a good introduction to essential topics.

However, they may not address the particular needs of your group. For your group you may want to substitute different materials such as the following:

- Readings that better address the particular concerns or interests of the group or share a particular perspective.
- Recent newspaper, magazine, or web articles that provide more current information.
- Literature from local groups, particularly if it relates a local problem to larger phenomena and calls for specific action.
- Brochures for change organizations in which members of the group have interest.

If your group wants to read most of the materials in the standard START course, but also wants to read information about a specific topic, it is probably best for you to conduct a regular START course and then after it is over, follow it with a specific issue-oriented course as described in Section 3.F. Otherwise, if you just keep adding material, your group may get bogged down in the middle and never reach the end.

Alternatively, you may want to substitute readings in the standard START course with readings about a specific topic so that the total length of the course remains the same.

For example, you might skip two of the sessions in the Understanding Problems and Identifying Solutions segment and instead substitute a topic that especially interests your group. Homework for each of these two sessions might consist of locating five appropriate sets of readings, reading them, and then preparing a report presentation.

## E. Change the Process

For a group to keep functioning in an egalitarian and efficient way, some aspects of the process are vital: sharing leadership, equalizing participation, and having everyone understand and be comfortable with the process. But once you have gotten a feel for the basic processes, there are lots of opportunities for modification and creativity — good and new process ideas are emerging all the time. Groups in the past have tried typing up and duplicating their reports for distribution, having potluck dinners before START meetings, spending Saturdays playing and getting to know each other, scrapping facilitation and time-keeping for a session to see how it feels, having individuals choose the time limits for their own reports, and dividing up into small groups of 3 or 4 for discussion about change.

An example of a valuable experiment in changed process is the procedure used by a group in Kalamazoo, Michigan. In the time normally reserved for reports and discussion they substituted an open discussion focused on a question that they chose the previous week. They chose questions that were general enough so that most of the readings for that session were relevant to it. If, at the end of the discussion time, one or more persons felt that they had not had a chance to contribute from their reading, then they would give a short report.

Note that this style worked in the Kalamazoo group because the members' self-discipline allowed equal participation. In groups where a few people often dominate discussion, the standard format would likely work better.

## F. Issue-Oriented Course

### Introduction

An issue-oriented course gives a group an opportunity to focus in more depth on a specific subject using START perspective and group process tools. An issue-oriented course can be used to study a particular issue, to prepare for change efforts in that issue area, or to provide background information to an existing change organization that is developing a change campaign.

Before conducting an issue-oriented course, it may be best for a group to conduct a regular START course first. Here are some advantages to doing it this way:

- A regular START course gives a group a common background of thinking in analysis, vision, and strategy.
- It provides grounding in the big picture of social problems so that the specific issue can be seen in a broader context.
- It helps people avoid being trapped by short-sighted or narrow, tunnel-vision solutions.
- It provides experience in functioning together that can make the group more democratic, its meetings more efficient and enjoyable, and the actions that grow out of the START course more effective.

There will be some situations, however, perhaps with action groups that are already functioning and operating under time pressure, in which it makes sense to start out immediately with an issue-oriented course. But it is particularly important for these groups to begin with some readings that provide a big picture perspective before focusing on their own issue.

### Choosing a Subject

There are infinite possibilities for study topics — any report in the regular START course could be expanded into months of study. But there is no need to be arbitrary. Below are several questions to ask in choosing an issue:

- Is the issue something that is important to the people involved? Is it an issue that people are facing directly in your area? Is it something that a change movement can be organized around?
- Is it an issue your group would want to tackle and push for positive changes — would they engage in more than just a theoretical exercise?
- Will the information learned in the START course be applicable to peoples' daily lives?

If you are still having trouble choosing, pick several likely issues, construct web charts or force field analyses (see Section 2.H for details) to relate them to the rest of society and brainstorm questions for research. This might help illuminate the potential or drawbacks of different issues.

## **Setting Up the Course Format**

As you set up your course, be sure to include the essential aspects of START that are built into the process — wide participation in information giving, egalitarian group process, inclusion of vision, strategy, and action thinking as well as analysis.

Below is an example of a list of sessions for a 9-session course. This model provides a basic framework that you can adapt and modify:

### **Introduction**

- 1 Introduction to the Course — personal introductions; choosing the subject
- 2 Building a Base — learning about the other participants (exercises on personal oppressions, personal sharing of goals, etc.); choosing readings to provide broad perspective and analysis of the issue

### **Analysis of Problems**

- 3 Issue Analysis — reports and discussion of readings on the issue
- 4 Issue Analysis — reports and discussion of readings on the issue
- 5 Issue Analysis — reports and discussion of readings on the issue

### **Visions of Positive Alternatives**

- 6 Issue Solutions — reports and discussion on visions of positive alternatives
- 7 Issue Solutions — reports and discussion on visions of positive alternatives

### **Strategy and Action for Positive Change**

- 8 Strategy and Action — strategy games; how to build a campaign
- 9 Strategy and Action — strategy games; how to build a campaign

Consider starting a campaign around the issue as you are studying it. Getting involved in change activity raises many vital questions to study, while studying suggests different approaches to change.

## **G. A “Starter” START**

A “starter” START is a one-session demonstration intended to introduce people to the START content and process.

### **Agenda**

An agenda for a 3-hour “starter” START session might look like this:

#### **Time Item**

- |    |   |
|----|---|
| 10 | Personal Introductions (if the group members do not already know each other)  |
| 5  | Excitement Sharing  |
| 5  | Presentation/Decision — Agenda Review   |
| 15 | Presentation — Introduction to START (presented by the meeting convener)  |
| 5  | Distribute copies of short articles   |
| 20 | Individual Reading — participants read the articles   |
| 45 | Presentations and Discussion — reports on readings (4 x 5+5 minutes each + 5-minute discussion of readings and discussion questions at end) |
| 10 | Break   |
| 40 | Exercise — Connecting Problems to Social Change Solutions   |
| 15 | Discussion — Questions and discussion about the 24-Week START course and whether the group should undertake one                             |
| 10 | Evaluation  |

## Process

It has been our experience that groups conducting a “starter” START often do not have an opportunity before the session to read articles, so reading time is included in the session. But most of the other agenda items can be conducted in exactly the same way as in a regular START course.

In keeping with the idea of START, reading materials should address an issue in the context of the broader situation. Reading materials can be distributed so that each person reads a different article (although there is time for only four people to make report presentations). However, we have found it more effective to use just four or five articles, so that each article is read by at least two people — one person presents a report on the reading and others who have read the same article then add to it. Be sure to keep to time limits on the reports and urge people to report on the points in the articles which were important to them rather than trying to summarize the article.

Since the purpose of a “starter” START is to demonstrate the process, this should be stated clearly. The focus should be on illuminating the process (and much less on addressing the content) so special attention should be paid to equal participation, time limits, and explaining the purpose of each agenda item.

## H. Self-Study

The materials gathered here can, of course, be used for self-study. But much of the value of START comes from discussing ideas with other folks, engaging in various kinds of exercises with others, and considering how to work with other people to bring about positive change. The idea of tackling a big problem with the support of many other people is much less daunting than pondering how to do it by yourself. If at all possible, study, discuss, and reflect together with at least one other person.

## 4. Underlying Principles of START

The START course is constructed upon several important principles. By making these explicit, we hope you will better understand what part the various procedures and techniques play in implementing the guiding principles, and avoid making changes that could leave your group seriously disoriented or damage its morale.

With an understanding of these principles, it should be easier to:

- Agree that a certain principle is good and innovate new ways to apply it,
- Lay aside a principle, develop an alternative principle, and develop practical ways of implementing it, or
- Incorporate additional new principles and find ways of implementing them.

Also, while we are pleased that an extremely diverse range of individuals and groups have found some particular dimension of START to be useful (such as the group process suggestions or the study-to-action procedures), we hope that a familiarity with these underlying principles will enable users of the study guide to decide for themselves whether what they are doing is really a START course or whether it is different enough to be better described as something else.

These principles are very much open to change and expansion. The entire START process is always experimental, changing in response to the cumulative experience of thousands of groups. An example of change is the increasingly apparent importance, in a world that seems more and more depressing, of START groups encouraging a positive, hopeful, mutually self-affirming, and trusting attitude among participants.

Here, then, are seventeen principles which, to date, have been important in defining START. Following each principle are the reasons it is considered important and a description of the procedures useful in implementing it.

### A. Foundation

1. **Combine analysis, vision, and strategy — all oriented toward positive action.** This is the essence of START: to work with other people to analyze what is wrong with our society, develop a vision of a better society, and figure out effective strategies for moving from here to there.

### B. Group Process

2. **Maintain participatory democracy** in all the activities of the group. This is important because:

- Participatory democracy is a crucial part of our vision of a better society, and we will best achieve that by practicing it now at every opportunity.
- The evidence of many START groups, especially when contrasted with standard high school and college learning situations, is that people learn faster and more effectively — and are more likely to move on to applications of their learning — when they are in charge of the learning situation.

Participatory democracy is maintained primarily through procedures that encourage:

- Equal participation in the course
- Equal sharing within the group of the power and information necessary for decision-making

Equal participation is aided by:

- Everyone's access to and familiarity with the START study guide (this document)
- Regular rotation of the role of facilitator and other roles
- An agenda which is visible to everyone, which is reviewed each meeting, and which is open to changes suggested by any participant

Procedures encouraging equal participation include:

- The reports format in which each person has the opportunity to contribute information
- Agenda items like excitement sharing which include everyone
- Agenda items in which the person speaking is not to be interrupted, including report giving, brainstorming, and "think and listen" exercises
- Exercises that raise the consciousness of people who tend to speak too frequently

3. **Create a safe environment** for thinking and expressing unconventional perspectives. Procedures that help create a safe environment include:

- Ground rules for behavior agreed to by consensus
- A vibes-watcher who looks out for disrespectful behavior and is committed to intervening

- A facilitator who guides the group toward productive discussion and exploration and away from useless ranting and disrespectful behavior

**4. Build group trust and understanding.** If group members come to trust and appreciate each other more and more as the course goes on, then:

- The course will be a more enjoyable experience
- The group will come to mean more to each participant
- More effective learning will occur because people will feel trustful enough of the group to share ideas they are not really sure about
- Participants are more likely to develop social action plans that will really be meaningful and implementable
- The quality of meetings will improve because everyone will really care about giving good reports, being an alert facilitator, timekeeper, etc.

Procedures which encourage this deepening level of trust include:

- The personal reflection exercises and other structured sharing in the introductory sessions of the course
- Excitement sharing — and occasional extended excitement sharing
- Potluck meals together and other socializing

**5. Develop an empowering learning/teaching experience** that encourages people's reliance on and respect for their ability both to think clearly and to successfully tackle problems — rather than concluding that only the "experts" or powerholders know enough or have enough power to act on these issues. This principle breaks down into two more specific ones:

**5.A. Each group knows best what its own unique needs are.** Repeatedly, throughout the study guide, options are presented for alternative ways to deal with a specific topic, situation, need, etc. Each group should assess its own needs, and then determine how best to meet them in the context of the overall course structure.

**5.B. Each group needs to do things that build a solid, authentic sense of achievement.** Procedures important in producing this sense of achievement include:

- Attention to suggested time limits. If the reports are finished on time, there will be time in the session to relate new information to possibilities for change, and the session will finish on time, creating an ongoing sense of momentum and achievement.

- Sensitivity in judging how much time is worth allotting to completely open-ended discussion. Participants in many START courses have found it frustrating and unproductive to discuss at length points for which documenting information is not at hand. Similarly, it can be very unsatisfying to get off on tangents and not end up where you wanted to be.

- Being careful to allow significant amounts of time for relating information to change. This may seem unimportant if action ideas generated are not acted on immediately, but is, in fact, valuable for three reasons:

- Generating ideas for change activities and reviewing them periodically reminds the group of all the things that could be done. This is an important counter-balance to the depressing nature of much of the information the reports bring to light.

- Group members will often spread these ideas to their family members, friends, and other groups they are involved in. The more people who consider these ideas, the more likely that they will try to carry them out.

- Generating ideas encourages participants to consider actually carrying out one or more of these ideas, either during the START course or afterwards.

See Chapter 5 for more discussion about empowerment.

**6. Do enjoyable, energizing things** to help keep group morale and energy level high. Precisely because START groups have a very serious purpose, participants need energy from many sources:

- The attainment and appreciation of solid achievement described above
- The combination of excitement sharing, singing, stretches, and active games, which can be inserted at low-energy points in a session. These raise the energy level for more creative work, release tension, and help people to start implementing now aspects of a society in which people enjoy each other through work and play.

**7. Regularly carry out effective evaluations.** This principle is placed at the end of the group process section because in some ways it encompasses all the previous principles. An evaluation that is both frank and honest, and at the same time sensitive and supportive of participants, is a crucial mechanism for sharing everyone's assessment of how well things are going in all the previous areas and making use of the collective wisdom of the group to make improvements for the future. It is the major opportunity to implement the process of molding the course structure to meet the group's particular needs, and to strengthen group trust and increase energy by reflecting on things that went well.

## C. Readings

### 8. Include readings that are positive, visionary, and empowering.

**9. Include readings that address the roots of problems** — ones that raise fundamental questions about what is really necessary to solve problems, and go beyond commonly suggested remedies that leave strong vested interests and staid cultural norms unchallenged. This is important because:

- This fundamental change perspective is one which is usually not well known. We are all constantly presented with the perspective that the problems we face are not really problems at all; when they are finally acknowledged as important, we are usually presented only with arguments for limited reform.
- The case for fundamental change is a sound one with which change activists should be familiar.

**10. Include readings that advocate strategic change efforts that utilize methods consistent with progressive values** of honesty, democracy, freedom, liberty, morality, tolerance, compassion, cooperation, rationality, fairness, and nonviolence. This perspective is essential if we truly hope to create a good society.

**11. Include readings that reveal that change efforts by ordinary people can be effective** and bring about momentous and vital change, exposing the myth that positive change is impossible or can only be carried out by members of the power elite.

**12. Include readings that present a variety of perspectives.** Most of the readings advocate a progressive perspective. However, to allow a critical examination of a variety of outlooks, clear and understandable alternative perspectives are also included.

**13. Include readings that expose the connections between ostensibly different topics** since the complexity of life is often obscured by segmentation into narrow categories.

## D. Exercises

**14. Include exercises that reveal that we are all affected by the problems studied**, not altruistic social reformers working on someone else's problems. When participants in a START group understand this, and look upon their action as the opportunity to improve the quality of their own lives, they have more strength to draw on in the struggle.

**15. Include readings and exercises that provide practical change skills** such as researching a social problem, developing an alternative vision, developing a strategy for positive change, designing a specific change campaign, empowering oneself, providing support and encouragement to other activists, making personal lifestyle changes, organizing a change group, and facilitating a meeting.

## E. Action

**16. Reveal that a small group of people can undertake meaningful and successful social action** that will move toward resolving an important problem. The best way to learn this lesson is for the participants in a START group to actually engage in a successful activity. Second best is to learn about the successful efforts of other, similar groups through readings about historical campaigns, especially recent efforts by ordinary people.

**17. Show the many ways that a small group of people can work for change.** Change activists often get stuck in a rut believing there is only one way to bring about significant change. Many readings and exercises are oriented toward presenting a variety of options and developing practical skills for carrying them out.

# 5. Empowerment

## A. Introduction

Faced with the harsh realities of the world, there is a danger that participants in a START group can come away feeling more knowledgeable, but frustrated, inadequate, hopeless, and less powerful than when they began. It is critical that attention be put to building participants' sense of their own power.

## B. The Problem

Our society provides little support, encouragement, or training for us to serve as active, empowered citizens. We are not taught the skills required to understand social problems — much less to investigate and analyze these problems, research ways to resolve them, formulate possible solutions, or cooperate and struggle with others to choose and implement a good solution. We are not told we have the right to challenge the status quo, to make important decisions, or to control our society. Instead, we are encouraged to "fit in" and "go with the flow" down the path chosen by authorities. We are encouraged to be powerless. Also, the enormity of the changes needed at a broad societal level, and the complexity of interrelated problems, makes it difficult for any single person to feel able to unravel and understand them, much less feel powerful enough to bring about significant change.

Our power over our own lives and our sense of our own worth are diminished in other ways by the political and economic system. A profit-oriented and expansive market economy encourages the creation of artificial needs for goods that distort our values and obstruct our ability to recognize and meet real human needs. Advertising drums home the message that we are not good enough as we are. Our sense of isolation and alienation is fostered by the atmosphere of competition and divisiveness in which no one can be trusted, one person can gain success or privilege only at the expense of another, and a feeling of self-worth is acquired only by having somebody else to look down on.

## C. The Reality

Although these many reasons to feel isolated and powerless are compelling, the reality is that we are not powerless. The power of nearly any system comes ultimately from people's willingness to put up with it — to recognize its authority, obey its laws, respect its expertise, and subordinate their own opinions, preferences, and priorities to what they are told are the needs of the larger group. This willingness to relinquish power can be developed and maintained in many ways — by threat of force, by an absence of visible alternatives, by the myth that participation in decision-making presently exists, and by the idea that only the experts can know what to do.

All of these ways of maintaining unfair power, wealth, and privilege are undermined when people begin to discover that they can take charge of their lives — that they can love and be loved for who they are, that they know what they really need, and that they are smart and capable of understanding, making good decisions, taking responsibility, and following through with action. Since our system is not good at meeting real human needs, any loving and rational person naturally strives to bring about positive change and, when empowered, will work to do so. Hence, reclaiming our own power and our own humanity, whenever and wherever we can, and helping others to do the same, is basic to any other change work that we do.

Whether it is in changing our lifestyle, helping a meeting to function democratically, starting a farmers' market, or organizing a campaign against a big-box store — all are important to make a next step possible. Any step, no matter how small, that helps us develop a mindset to act on situations instead of just reacting to them, significantly increases our ability to participate in and organize efforts to bring about change on a larger scale. Through that sense of empowerment we can begin to relearn and — if necessary — invent the tools for developing the self-reliance and the support that are needed in the struggle to transform society.

## D. START Empowering

The most fundamental way of taking power is to integrate what we learn into our own life experience and understand how we fit into the big picture. START includes these ten empowering elements — consider how to consciously use them to counter feelings of powerlessness.

### 1. Controlling Our Learning Process

START enables and encourages participants to take charge of their learning process — altering it to address their own needs and desires — and offers specific information and tools to do this.

## **2. Educating Ourselves**

The START course offers information about social problems and effective solutions to those problems, and a structure that allows participants to feel more knowledgeable and expert in tackling them.

## **3. Understanding Power**

The START course provides information about the nature of power in society and how the power of nearly any system comes ultimately from people's willingness to put up with it.

## **4. Building Community**

START offers information on how to build a cooperative community and gives participants many opportunities to learn and practice the necessary skills with the other members of their START group, providing an immediate demonstration of essential components of a better society.

## **5. Personal Transformation**

START offers specific information about how individuals can alter their own lifestyles as one step toward transforming society.

## **6. Taking Action**

Working with their START group, participants can learn and practice the skills necessary to bring about societal change and feel the strength and support that comes from doing it together.

## **7. Focusing on Positive Directions**

START offers information about identifying and implementing effective solutions and provides numerous examples of successful efforts to bring about positive change.

## **8. Celebrating Success**

Understanding the obstacles that stand in the way of taking action against societal evils, START also encourages participants to fully appreciate their efforts — their good thinking, their hard work, and even their smallest successes — and build on that experience to do even better.

## **9. Choosing Issues that Touch Us**

START assumes that the most lasting change comes in areas where we have not only a sound intellectual analysis but also where the change really makes a difference to us. START encourages participants to focus on a local issue that affects them directly or one whose nature somehow touches their hearts.

## **10. Maintaining Realistic Expectations and Pace**

The START course encourages participants to live well and work at a pace sustainable over the long haul, since building a better society takes strength and time.

# **E. Tools**

A variety of exercises for fostering empowerment are described in Section 2.H.

# 6. How to Organize a START Group

This chapter is for people who are interested in starting a START group and want to know how to actually set one up.

## A. Understanding the Value of START

The first step is to become familiar with the basic ideas of START so that you can explain them to other people. This study guide provides a good overview — read it thoroughly.

Also, here is a list of some notable reasons for participating in a START group:

- **Practice Citizenship**

As citizens of a democracy it is our obligation to understand our society and ensure that it operates well — honestly, fairly, efficiently — and serves the common good. START encourages us to be good citizens and help move our society towards its ideals.

- **See the Big Picture**

Our individual and local problems are often caused by much larger-scale “macro” forces, such as political, economic, cultural and social structures and institutions. For example, the problem of poverty is connected to class, race, property ownership, inheritance and tax laws, education and healthcare policies, industrialization, and other factors. If we hope to overcome our problems, it is important for us to comprehend how these larger forces affect us. The START process helps us get to the roots.

- **Be a Responsible U.S. Citizen**

As a military and economic superpower, the United States wields massive influence on the rest of the world, and our culture has permeated the planet. It is important to understand how our country and our culture affect others. As citizens, we have an obligation to help our country promote honesty, justice, and the common good. The START course includes knowledge about the world and our role in it.

- **Learn Cooperation Skills**

To be effective in bringing about positive change, we must also learn to work cooperatively with other activists in groups of all types and sizes that embody the kind of society we are striving toward. START sessions are structured to encourage equal participation by employing techniques such as shared responsibilities, group-oriented facilitation, small-group discussion, and regular evaluation. This process helps maximize forward progress and minimize authoritarian, dominating, and self-centered tendencies that can be hard on a group.

- **Learn Progressive Ways to Learn**

START uses many progressive education techniques such as creating a supportive emotional environment for learning, helping people learn by explaining material to others, and testing theories by directly trying them out.

- **Learn Change Skills**

To be effective in bringing about positive change, we must each feel informed, skilled, and empowered enough to act. A START group engages participants in active learning directed toward immediate action for positive change.

Note that this information — along with a simple description of START — is available on a handout you can download [ <http://www.startguide.org/docs/STARTIntro.pdf> ], print, and distribute to others.

## B. Reaching Out and Bringing People Together

If you are already in a group concerned with changing society in some way — such as a peace, environmental, or religious group, a personal liberation group, or a community action project — try to interest the members of the group in conducting a START course. Stress the ways in which a START course could be relevant and helpful: to give them a broader perspective; to help them decide exactly what they want to do and/or how to go about it; to overcome problems of feeling isolated, ineffective, or insignificant; and/or to help them develop their own analysis of society and their part in it.

If the group is reluctant to commit the time necessary for a START course, you might try building up interest gradually by using some of the process ideas suggested in this study guide in your regular meetings. The democratic group process ideas are easily applied to many situations and can do much to relieve frustration and increase effectiveness. Also, many of the exercises can be helpful in developing and clarifying program ideas while building a “big picture” perspective.

If you are not in such a group, or if your group is too small or not interested, you will have to find enough people yourself. There are numerous ways of doing this:

- Approach people in local groups, such as religious congregations, women's and men's support groups, peace groups, environmental groups, and groups concerned with community issues like housing, childcare, education, etc.
- Write to your local newspaper or your congregation or community paper, explaining what a START group is and asking anyone interested to get in touch with you. A local radio station might also be willing to help.
- Leaflet and/or put up posters in community centers, grocery stores, coffee shops, local schools, churches, libraries and other likely places that have bulletin boards.
- Talk to your friends and other people you know: at work, in your neighborhood, those you meet socially, and anyone else you come across who might be interested.
- Set up a demonstration "starter" START to acquaint people with the idea and attract interest (see Section 3.G.).

By the time you have tried some or all of these ideas, you are likely to have discovered enough interest to get started. A START group works best with eight to twelve participants, though six or seven is sufficient if people attend regularly. It is usually best to aim for ten to fourteen people at the beginning and expect a few dropouts. If the group is much larger than that you should consider dividing into two groups to give everybody a greater opportunity for participation.

For more ideas on gathering a group, check out Utne Reader's "The Salon-Keeper's Companion": [[http://utne.completeis.com/cgi-bin/udt/im.display.printable?client.id=utne\\_web\\_specials&story.id=2977](http://utne.completeis.com/cgi-bin/udt/im.display.printable?client.id=utne_web_specials&story.id=2977)] and their guidelines for Let's Talk America: [<http://www.letstalkamerica.org/hostresources.htm>].

## C. Practical Details

### Recruitment

September is perhaps the best time to start a START group since this is when people often make yearlong time commitments. Since people often go away for the summer, the optimal time to recruit people for a September start is either late the previous May or the first week in September. January is another good starting time. Keep in mind that many peace organizations, women's groups, and religious groups plan their programs six months to a year in advance.

### Preparation for the First Meeting

Arrange a time, date, and place for the first meeting. It really helps the sessions to go well if you can meet somewhere congenial, where people can feel relaxed, and with facilities for hot drinks during the break. If possible, it is helpful to have someone who is familiar with the START process in attendance to facilitate the first several meetings and help the group overcome the initial strangeness of the process and/or to break out of bad meeting habits. This person might be someone who has been in a START group before. Though useful, this is not essential, and if no such person is available, just read carefully through this study guide about ideas for the initial meetings of a START course and do it yourself.

### Establishing Common Expectations

Everyone should be clear in advance about the commitments involved in conducting a START course: regular attendance for the duration (irregular attendance can be an even more serious problem for group morale than dropping out); extra reading and preparation time between meetings when presenting a report; and shared leadership responsibilities. It is particularly important for everyone to come to the first several meetings since latecomers will find it difficult to become properly integrated into the group.

You should also consider carefully the advantages and drawbacks of different length courses and make a conscious decision about how long yours will last. A START course with fewer sessions, if conscientiously carried out by all participants, can give a fairly clear global and local perspective on current political, environmental, and economic problems and can help you consider engaging in action for change. Obviously, a 24-week START course provides more time to hear more different viewpoints, more time to think through your own perspective, and more time to develop personal trust and loving concern in your group. The additional time and closeness will likely increase your ability to work out a meaningful change program and to consider and begin implementing ways to change your own life.

## D. Encouragement

Organizing a START group takes time, planning, and persistence. You will undoubtedly run into snags, hassles, and frustrations. But don't be discouraged — a good START course is worth the time and effort. You can do it!

## 7. Developing New Materials

The START course materials have been selected to provide an overview of social, cultural, economic, environmental, and political problems in society and of various ways of bringing about positive change that are consistent with traditional values of honesty, democracy, freedom, liberty, morality, tolerance, compassion, cooperation, rationality, fairness, and nonviolence. These materials also conform to the many principles enumerated in Chapter 4.

Moreover, we have chosen materials that are easily accessible and freely available on the Internet. We have tried to choose materials that are timeless (so they do not become quickly outdated) and located on stable websites (so they do not disappear after a time). Of course, despite our efforts, many of these materials will grow outdated, become less relevant, or disappear from the web. Moreover, other new, important topics and issues will arise over time.

Consequently, the reading list must be continually updated and changed. If you are interested, we would greatly appreciate your help in locating new materials, in replacing or supplementing the ones we currently have, or in developing completely new areas. In particular, at the end of a standard START course, your group might choose to locate new materials for the course or to find materials specific to a particular topic that your group and others may want to pursue. If you live in a country other than the United States, you might want to find materials that are more relevant to your country and region.

Please send us your suggestions for new readings. We place readings that we are considering for inclusion on the Possible Readings pages: [ <http://www.startguide.org/poss/r00.html> ]

Below are the criteria we have used in choosing materials and the format that we have used to present the materials. Please consider using these as guidelines for your efforts.

### A. Criteria for Choosing START Reading Materials

**Note:** In this chapter we have chosen to use the terms “reading materials” and “articles” since most of the items are likely to be written materials. But the list might also include suitable audio or video recordings of various sorts. Be sure that any recordings are easily accessible using the (possibly older) computers that participants may have and the slow Internet connections they may use.

#### General Characteristics

To be valuable in educating participants and helping them to bring about positive change, the materials should have these characteristics:

- Overall, convey a big-picture analysis of important issue areas
- Generally promote values consistent with the Golden Rule (i.e., honesty, openness, democracy, cooperation, justice, and nonviolence)
- Generally, promote change strategies that are consistent with a vision of a society based on these values, that is, strategies that rely on honest education, rational persuasion, inclusive democracy, and nonviolent action (rather than propaganda, manipulation, bullying, or exclusion)
- Contain articles that can succinctly and effectively convey critical information so that participants can quickly and easily learn a great deal
- Present a variety of perspectives — including at least one progressive perspective plus a well-argued mainstream or conservative perspective, so participants are challenged to evaluate differing ideas
- Present sensible solutions to problems (not just convey how bad things are)
- In particular, present solutions that get to the roots of problems, not palliatives or limited reforms

#### Organization

The standard START course as a whole provides an overview of the big picture, and the readings are divided into major topic groups (such as **Meeting Basic Human Needs — Physical Systems**) that address particular aspects of this overall topic. These major topic groups are divided into more specific topics (such as **Environment and Sustainability**). Each set of readings for a particular session (meeting) addresses one aspect of that specific topic (such as **Global Warming**).

Each set of readings should address one facet of a topic, so that report presentations and group discussion at that session can thoroughly probe that topic from many sides. And each individual set should have a single theme or perspective so that the person presenting it to the group has some chance of summarizing it in a short report.

Also, at least one reading in each session (and usually, several) should provide each of these:

- A broad, historical, sweeping understanding of the situation

- Information and analysis of a specific situation (a typical or exemplary example)
- A possible solution or way forward

For each session, there should also be a single short summary article that everyone in the group reads — enabling everyone to have some basic common understanding of the topic. This article should take the average reader no more than 15 minutes to read.

## Reading Sets

Each set of readings should take the average person about 60–90 minutes to read (50 pages at 250 words/page) and have the following additional characteristics:

- Coherent — addresses one topic or one particular aspect of a topic
- Varied — addresses the topic or aspect from several angles
- Diverse — includes perspectives from a wide variety of sources, especially those traditionally ignored (such as from women, minority groups, young people, people in Third World nations, farmers, etc.)

A set of readings might consist of just a single article or chapter of a book, but a set of readings written by different authors is more likely to address different aspects of the topic and do so from a variety of perspectives.

## Articles

Good articles (or resources) are:

- Topical — address the core essence of an issue
- Timely — not out of date
- Significant — address an important issue or topic or offer a valuable perspective
- Informative/enlightening/instructive — provide useful information in a digestible form
- Well-written — written in simple, forthright, understandable language with a minimum of jargon
- Succinct — readable (or viewable/hearable) in less than half an hour — articles should generally be no more than 25 pages long — and 2–3 pages is much better
- Information dense — convey a great deal of information in a few words, charts, or diagrams so that participants can quickly and efficiently grasp essential concepts
- Factual — grounded in reality and reported accurately (ideally including citations of authoritative references)
- Secure — reside on a stable website so that the information is accessible for many years (see Section 7.C for a list of some potential sites)
- Free — reside on a website that can be accessed without charge

## Additional Resources

Any good readings beyond those that can be included in reading sets can be listed as Additional Resources, making them available for those who are especially interested in further pursuing a particular topic. Participants might also decide to use a supplementary reading as a substitute for a regular reading if it provides a unique perspective or is more accessible.

## Study Questions

Each collection of reading sets should have a few study questions that can spur group discussion and stimulate creative thinking about the issues raised.

Study questions should challenge participants to:

- Think about issues from a variety of perspectives
- Compare various sources of information and evaluate their validity and value
- Understand why people holding various perspectives (progressives, liberals, centrists, conservatives, etc.) hold the perspectives they do — the values and assumptions that support their perspectives
- Think of creative solutions to problems
- Consider how society might be different and/or how they might bring about positive change

## B. How to Format START Readings

For every reading there should be a link to a stable website where it can be accessed. The listing for each article should include the article's title and enough bibliographic information to determine who wrote it, when it was published, and its approximate length — number of pages (at 250 words/page) or viewing/listening minutes for audio and video files. Each listing should also include a one-sentence description so prospective readers have a sense of what it is about. For examples of format, see the START reading list [ <http://www.startguide.org/read/r00.html> ].

## C. Sources for Readings

To give a flavor of the many good sites that regularly post articles suitable for a START course, here are a few:

- Yes! Magazine: <http://www.yesmagazine.org>
- The Nation: <http://www.thenation.com>
- Dollars & Sense: <http://www.dollarsandsense.org>
- Z Magazine: <http://www.zmag.org>
- In These Times: <http://www.inthesetimes.com>
- Mother Jones: <http://www.motherjones.com>
- The American Prospect: <http://www.prospect.org>
- Common Dreams: <http://www.CommonDreams.org>
- Working for Change: <http://www.WorkingForChange.org>
- Tom Paine: <http://www.TomPaine.org>
- AlterNet: <http://alternet.org>
- Truth Out: <http://www.TruthOut.org>
- Wikipedia: <http://en.wikipedia.org> — note that these pages are constantly updated and modified
- New York Times: <http://www.nytimes.com>
- Washington Post: <http://www.washingtonpost.com>
- Los Angeles Times: <http://www.latimes.com>
- Nonviolence.org: <http://www.nonviolence.org>
- Global Issues: <http://www.globalissues.org>
- Third World Traveler: <http://www.thirdworldtraveler.com>

For more, see the hundreds of newspapers, news services, periodicals, radio shows, TV shows, and opinion columnists listed on the Common Dreams home page:

<http://www.CommonDreams.org>

Newspaper opinion columns are sometimes a good resource since they are succinct and often explore a unique political perspective. Book reviews are another good resource since they also are usually succinct and summarize the essence of a book.

- New York Review of Books: <http://www.nybooks.com>

The websites of many change organizations offer articles or leaflets that explore an important topic. For example, Peace Action lists several well-researched factsheets here:

<http://www.peace-action.org/pub/publications.html>

And United for a Fair Economy has a number of research reports here:  
<http://www.faireconomy.org/research/index.html>

Here is a list of several hundred organizations working for positive change, organized according to issue:

- Organizations Working for Positive Change: <http://www.startguide.org/orgs/orgs00.html>

## D. Criteria for Choosing Experiential Exercises

Experiential exercises should have these characteristics:

- Engaging — designed to encourage direct, active participation and engender a profound connection to new ideas
- Educational — designed to convey information, challenge assumptions, or rehearse useful practices
- Easily carried out — with explicit instructions that would make them usable by people who are previously unfamiliar with the particular exercise or even with exercises in general
- Broadly usable by all kinds of people and groups (or with enough variations to cover many kinds of groups)

## 8. Resources

This chapter offers some additional resources about how to work with other people in a group and foster a strong community.

### A. Community Building

Many groups have the potential to do good work but are limited because the members of the group do not know each other very well or the group is not cohesive enough to function well. Spending some time developing a sense of community may, therefore, constitute very vital and basic change work.

#### Ideas and Tools

- Spend more time on the kinds of activities suggested for the introductory sessions of a START course.
- Share perspectives on such things as one's childhood memories, reactions to injustice, feelings of oppression, the origin of your motivation for societal change, etc. It is best to pose the topic with a very specific question such as: What is your most vivid childhood memory involving oppression of yourself or someone else? A good format to use is the "think and listen."
- Share your visions of community — what would you ideally like?
- Do other things together — co-operative games during meeting breaks; potluck suppers beforehand; outings; celebrations with singing, dancing, and sharing things you have created; shopping? childcare? others? (you might want to brainstorm the possibilities). These activities will expand the levels on which you interact with and know each other.
- Rotate meetings among different people's houses to get more of a feel for what each other's lives are like.
- Spend time regularly appreciating each other. For example, each person might tell the group something they particularly like about the person sitting on their left. Most of us find this awkward to do because it is embarrassing and because we are so conditioned to look for faults in ourselves and everybody else. As a result, lots of things we really like about people go unsaid and everybody's sense of confidence and self-worth is needlessly diminished. It's exciting to see the dynamic reversed when people begin building on the positive.
- When conflicts arise in the group, approach them as a challenge and an opportunity for growth — "Oh boy, we get to practice our conflict resolution skills and learn to struggle more effectively with people we love."
- Do group problem solving. For example, each week tackle a practical problem that is hindering a member of your group. Apply your accumulated wisdom by using an empowerment exercise.
- Take some time at the end of each meeting for each person to share her/his personal goals for the coming week. Then at the beginning of the next meeting, have each person report back on how she/he is doing in accomplishing those goals.
- Think of things you would like to be able to do personally, but can't for lack of support — see if others can help.
- Do a self-estimation exercise. This is a way of getting thoughtful feedback on the relationship between individuals and the group. It works best in on-going groups where the trust level is already fairly high. Each person takes some time to tell what they see as their strengths in that group and ways in which they would like to grow. Others then have the opportunity to respond, using the same format. Careful phrasing of the second part ("A way that I would wish for you to grow...") is particularly important if people are to really hear criticism. It is also helpful to allow some quiet time at the beginning of each self-estimation so that people can think out what they want to say.

#### Resources

*Resource Manual for al Living Revolution*, Virginia Coover, et al., New Society Publishers, Reprint edition, 1985. 330 pages of resources and tools for trainers/ organizers in nonviolent change. Good sections on community building, values clarification, and conflict resolution.

Building Social Change Communities, Training/Action Affinity Group, New Society Publishers. Sections on forming communities, meeting facilitation, consensus decision-making, creative conflict resolution, networks and more!

*A Manual on Nonviolence and Children*, Stephanie Judson, et al., Library Company of Philadelphia, Reissue edition, 1984. Includes a full section called "For the Fun of It: Selected Cooperative Games for Children and Adults" of great use. Also good thinking about how people learn in group situations.

*Values Clarification*, Sidney B. Simon, et al., Warner Books; Revised edition, 1995. A lot of specific exercises to help individuals and groups understand where their basic values lie.

*Clearness: Process for Supporting Individuals and Groups in Decision Making*, Peter Woodrow, New Society Publishers, 1984. Helps break down individual isolation in making important decisions about one's life, work, family, community.

*A Manual for Group Facilitators*, Brian Auvine et al., by Wis.) Center for Conflict Resolution, Fellowship for International Community; 4th Rep edition, 2003. Helps individuals think well about groups and communities they are starting, training, aiding.

*Leadership for Change*, Lakey & Kokopeli, New Society Publishers. Feminist view of leadership helps people think about specific task and morale leadership functions, which must be performed in any group for it to succeed.

## B. Group Process

Learning about group process is important for a group that is having trouble functioning effectively, wants to develop further its members' skills in group process, or wants to think about how to apply what its members know about groups to other groups of which they are a part. Some common problems are: interrupting; people not listening when others are talking but rather thinking of what they want to say next; no space between comments so that people don't have time to think and have to compete to get a word in edgewise; unequal participation (some people — often men in this culture — talking a lot and others hardly saying anything); authoritarian facilitation; lethargy; unfocused discussion. Probably every group faces some of these problems at one time or another. What is important is to realize that they do not have to be allowed to continue and that there are things that can be done to deal with them and improve the overall functioning of the group.

### Ideas and Tools

1. Sometimes the exact problem in a group is not clear and the first task is to identify the problem(s). One possible way to go about this is to:

- Have each person share 1) ways in which they feel good about the group, 2) problems they see, and if possible, 3) suggestions for improvement. List them in three columns on a big sheet of newsprint. Be as specific as possible about where the problems lie.
- Brainstorm additional possible solutions and list them on column 3.
- Examine the possible solutions and decide which ones to implement. Make specific plans for when and how to do it and who will take responsibility.

(This is not unlike the Social Problem-Solution-Action Brainstorm suggested for relating the START course readings to social change action.)

A good general principle to keep in mind in dealing with group process problems — and lots of other problems too — is to build on the positive things about the group. (That's why in the process described above we suggest that each person start by saying good things.) There are two reasons for this:

• Our society tends to look at things negatively, to be quick to criticize and hesitant to praise, and if we are going to build a more positive society, we need to begin now to recognize, state, and reinforce positive things. We're not accustomed to looking for these things and stating them, so it may feel awkward at first, but it can rapidly become a natural and joyous way of responding to the world around us.

• It works! A session that is focused on negatives quickly becomes depressing and discouraging, and leaves people feeling helpless about finding solutions. It may also give a false picture of the situation, making it look totally bad when, in reality, there are many positives that can be built on and specific areas that need improvement. Beginning with good things helps to put the problems that exist in their proper perspective within the overall functioning of the group and to build a positive tone where people will feel empowered to find solutions to the problems. (A good discipline in discussion in general might be always to say something positive about an idea before criticizing it.)

A group which continues to have difficulty after trying to work out their problems may want to have an outside observer attend one or more meetings to give the group feedback and participate in a problem solving session. A "group process expert" is not necessary. Any thoughtful and observant person with a fresh perspective and some knowledge of how groups function can be immensely helpful.

Regular, full use of the evaluation process can help in dealing with problems before they become major, and in checking on changes a group has agreed on to see if they are having the desired result.

2. Here are some more specific suggestions for dealing with some of the above-mentioned problems:

• Listening exercises can help people focus on what has just been said. Before responding to a person, you echo back what you heard that person say; e.g., "I heard you say that..." You do not go on to make your own point until the previous speaker is satisfied that she/he has been accurately heard.

• Unequal participation is often blamed on the people in a group who are quiet when often, in fact, the problem is that a few people are talking so often and long that there is no space for those who are less aggressive or quick thinking. An effective method of raising consciousness about how often people speak is to give everyone an equal number of

matches (or whatever) and have people throw one into the center of the room each time they speak. When a person runs out of matches, she/he can no longer talk. If length of talking is a problem, try having people light the match as they start talking. When they can no longer hold it, time is up! Exercises like this seem awkward, and some are not meant to be used on a long-term basis, but they can be very helpful for raising awareness about participation in the group.

- Another method which can be used on many occasions for equalizing participation and eliminating the problem of people thinking of what they want to say next instead of listening is to take a minute or two for everyone to collect their thoughts on the subject, then go around the room, giving each person an equal amount of time to share their thinking. If people really don't have anything to contribute, they should be given the option of passing. But time and again those who have been defined as not having much to say have valuable contributions to make if they do not have to compete to get a word in edgewise.

- A method which has been useful during brainstorming when a few people seem to be dominating is to have those who are contributing a lot to the brainstorm wait 10 seconds after the last speaker while people who are contributing less wait 5 seconds. This method does not work as well in a general discussion since it often becomes very draggy, but trying to be conscious of slowing down the pace of a discussion can be helpful in providing people space to speak and cutting down on interrupting.

3. Groups may want to use roleplays to examine the problems they are having. Doing the roleplay first portraying the problem that exists, and then re-running it one or more times incorporating possible solutions can be helpful. However, it is essential that it not make an example of particular people whose functioning in the group may be presenting problems. Roleplays can also be a good way of practicing and sharpening new skills, and of thinking about how to use group skills in other settings.

## **Resources**

*Resource Manual for a Living Revolution*, Virginia Coover, et al., New Society Publishers, Reprint edition, 1985. 330 pages of resources and tools for trainers/ organizers in nonviolent social change. Has a very useful section on group dynamics.

*Dynamics of Groups at Work*, Herbert Thelan, University of Chicago Press, 1954. The first half is a case study of a group of people in group process training. The second half is an analysis of issues of group dynamics with suggestions of what people can do to help.

## **C. Personal Growth**

There are a variety of training approaches that can help people overcome their personal limitations and grow. Below are four methods that are consistent with START principles and that activists have found useful.

### **Assertiveness Training**

Teaches people how to clearly express themselves to others, how to persistently pursue their goals when confronted with opposition, and how to appropriately stand up for themselves when faced with conflict or criticism. A very large number of books and training classes are available.

“Assertiveness Training” <http://www.counseling.mtu.edu/Assertiveness.htm>

“Assertiveness Training” <http://www.uvm.edu/~uvmeap/stress8.html>

“How to be Assertively Feminine”

[http://www.selfesteem4women.com/\\_lib/eZine/articles/article\\_2.php?ad=55a](http://www.selfesteem4women.com/_lib/eZine/articles/article_2.php?ad=55a)

### **Leadership Effectiveness Training (LET)**

Teaches tools for effectively listening to and working with others including Active Listening, No-Lose Conflict Resolution, and I-Messages.

Leadership Effectiveness Training: <http://www.gordontraining.com>

### **Nonviolent Communication**

Teaches techniques of compassionate communication.

Nonviolent Communication: <http://www.cnvc.org>

### **Re-Evaluation Counseling (RC)**

Re-evaluation Counseling (also known as co-counseling) is a non-professional, peer counseling technique based on the assumption that all human beings are naturally creative, intelligent, zestful, loving, and powerful, and that the only thing which prevents us from acting this way all the time is the accumulation of distressing experiences which have happened to us. Human beings are equipped with methods for healing distress (laughing and crying, for example) but those healing processes are often blocked. Re-evaluation Counseling is essentially a tool for recovering these methods of healing through listening partnerships, and reclaiming the love, creativity, and power that is our birthright.

Re-Evaluation Counseling: <http://www.rc.org>

## 9. START Stories

START's predecessor, the Macro-Analysis Seminars, have a remarkable and inspiring history of fostering progressive change. The 1975 Macro-Analysis study guide yields a wealth of information about the early growth of this movement.

### A. The Macro-Analysis Movement

#### Early History

The Macro-Analysis movement can be traced back to a 1969 seminar held for change activists in Philadelphia. The focus was economics and social change, and the group read a different book for each of fifteen weeks. As seminars for Philadelphia activists continued, the issues expanded and an emphasis on democratic process and group dynamics increased. In 1971-72 there were eight seminars in the Philadelphia area.

With the publication in August of 1972 of the first edition of the study guide (*On Organizing Macro-Analysis Seminars*), new people were able to organize and facilitate groups on their own. Writing the guide helped people in Philadelphia improve their seminars by pooling the best readings and group processes. It also helped make the seminars more democratic; all participants who read the guide had an equal level of knowledge of various group procedures and techniques.

Macro seminars began appearing across the country. There were 35 seminars in 1973 and 65 in 1974. Many other groups used the guide for its group process suggestions and reading references. Over six thousand copies of the first Macro-Analysis study guide were sold.

The seminars were used by a variety of groups in social change and academic settings:

- Local affiliates of national organizations, such as the American Friends Service Committee and Women's International League for Peace and Freedom
- Local church social action groups
- Ad hoc groups of friends who wanted to do the seminar together
- College campuses, such as Stanford University; the University of Oxford, England; the University of Michigan at Ann Arbor; Oberlin College; Colgate University; Earlham College, and Western Michigan University at Kalamazoo

The Macro-Analysis movement was a part of the Movement for a New Society (MNS), a network of small groups across the United States dedicated to nonviolent societal change. Many MNS groups originated with a Macro-Analysis Seminar.

The Philadelphia Macro-Analysis Collective was at the heart of the movement. They met weekly, using many of the same process techniques that were used in the seminars. Members wrote and revised the study guide, reprinted and mailed out articles, spoke to interested groups, helped groups start seminars, supported those already involved, convened several seminars per year in the Philadelphia area, directed interested individuals to others in their area who were already involved, and put out a newsletter.

In some places, local Macro-Analysis collectives were organized, which helped to start new seminars locally. The spreading of the Macro-Analysis movement was especially timely during that consciousness-raising period in which many Americans were undergoing major re-thinking of what their country was and should be. In 1974, a British study guide was written and published in London.

While some seminars organized demonstrations or full-fledged campaigns, the major change activities of others did not occur within the group itself, but by participants influencing other people and organizations to which they belonged.

#### Macro-Analysis at the University

Because both the process and the content of macro-analysis challenged prevailing norms, the seminars were not always an easy fit at traditional educational institutions. Macro-analysis might succeed in changing the student-teacher relationship, but the idea of needing an "expert" was a much more difficult mindset to overcome. Also, students often had a problem thinking in terms of action because of their short-term commitment to the class and often to the community in which they lived.

Different forms of macro-analysis were developed for the differing needs of students and professors. Students initiated many seminars through "experimental colleges" and "free universities" while others were conducted with the professor as convener and with required papers. When seminars were offered for credit, some participants found that the grading process conflicted with the macro-analysis emphasis on equality. They preferred a non-graded or pass/fail system and liked self-evaluation and grading even more.

Some university groups used the process while incorporating their own readings. Others used the readings in a normal classroom situation. One professor restructured his seminar to include a section on diagnosis of societal problems, including the participants' relationship to the problem (for instance, their class and social backgrounds). This helped participants get a clearer understanding of the differences that arose between people in the group. Another seminar was held by a mixed group of students, professors, and townspeople. This brought some good sharing between "town" and "gown" as well as a broader perspective on social change issues.

## B. START and Social Action

### The Need for Action

A START group is not an end in itself, but a means for people to take action — to take charge of their own lives and to help bring about a more just, democratic, and safe world.

Virtually every gain in human decency, justice, and democracy has been won through the efforts of regular people. As Margaret Mead said: "Never doubt that a small, group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has."

### Some Examples of Follow-Up Activities by Participants in Earlier Groups

1. One of the early Macro-Analysis seminars started the campaign that prevented American ports from shipping materials to support Pakistan in its war against Bangladesh in 1971. (See the book *Blockade!* by Richard K. Taylor, Orbis Books, 1977.)

2. Many seminar participants were involved in de-fusing the crisis at Wounded Knee in 1974. When three members of the Philadelphia Macro-Analysis Collective worked with the National Council of Churches to establish a nonviolent intervention force between the AIM Indians and the government forces then threatening an Attica-prison-like attack, they counted about a dozen of the 50 people in the intervention force who were then involved in Macro-Analysis seminars.

3. Many participants started new seminars for other people and groups — in Washington, D. C.; New York City; Grand Rapids and Ann Arbor, Mich.; Pittsburgh; and Eugene, Oregon.

4. A Palo Alto, California group, with help from the American Friends Service Committee, wrote a manual on simple living entitled, *Taking Charge*. This book helped people relate worldwide political, economic, and environmental conditions to their own consumptive lifestyle, and helped them reduce their consumption to more equitable levels.

5. A group in Butte, Montana facilitated the organization of a food co-op with more than 100 families. Out of that effort grew a film forum that showed political films.

6. A group in Berea, Kentucky got the local city council to endorse a statewide bottle return bill, and sponsored local Sun Day celebrations featuring displays on alternatives to nuclear energy.

7. A group in Salt Lake City, Utah began a successful "guerilla gardening" project on the parking strips along the roads owned by the city, and significantly raised people's consciousness about how multinational corporations control their food supplies.

8. Many people changed their lifestyles and eating habits, quit oppressive jobs, and switched to working more intensely for change because of their participation in Macro seminars.

9. Macro-Analysis seminar participants helped shape the safe energy (anti-nuclear power) movement with their heavy involvement in key early demonstrations in Portland, Oregon in 1974 and in Seabrook, New Hampshire in 1977. The safe energy movement was able to slow or stop the construction of many nuclear power plants and ensured that no new plants were ordered, essentially halting the industry in the United States.

People in this movement then went on to work against nuclear weapons and to prevent U.S. military intervention in Central America during the 1980s. Many of these people still continue to work in the fair trade, economic justice, environmental, and peace movements.

### Recent Examples of Follow-Up Activities by Participants in START Groups

For stories about the change work that recent START groups have done, see the growing list at:

<http://www.startguide.org/com/com00.html>