Appendix K
Helping action groups succeed

The most successful action groups address the following considerations:

Organizational or institutional oversight
To be successful, action groups need support and coordination, as well as a connection to the larger organizing group.

- A sub-group of the organizing group (sometimes called an Action Oversight Committee) takes responsibility for the “action phase” of the work.
- Sometimes, action groups connect with an institution in the community that is already working on this issue.

Leadership
Finding the right leader(s) for an action group is crucial. It is important to have decision makers, connections to partnering organizations, and someone with knowledge of the issue area. To be successful, action groups also need a skilled group-process facilitator who can help the group work together productively.

Example: Participants in a community-based dialogue-to-change program on racism and race relations identify the public schools as a place where racial tensions come out. An action group forms to address the school situation. It is co-led by an assistant superintendent, and a parent who is also a trained group-process facilitator.

Administrative support
Someone needs to be responsible for taking minutes, sending meeting reminders, and staying in touch with the organizers.

Example: A VISTA volunteer provides ongoing administrative support for three action groups formed after a large-scale community dialogue on youth development.

Staying in touch/telling the story
As the action phase gets under way, it is important to keep the community informed about progress, through press coverage, a web site, a newsletter, or other communications.

Example: A large dialogue-to-change program addressing school reform issues launches four action groups. Four months after the Action Forum, the organizers hold a community meeting to hear the plans and progress of each team. Funding partners and the local press are invited to the meeting. Volunteers from the dialogue circles create a community blog to report on the activity.

Resources
Finding resources—such as funding, access to decision makers, or institutional help—often makes the difference in the success of an action group. Steering group members can help with this.

Credibility
Action groups are more successful when their efforts are effective and seen as part of an authentic community effort.