

# **Building Stronger Communities**

**Learning Circle**

**Feedback Guide**

**1999**

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**Prepared By  
Brenda J. Simpson & Associates**

## Introduction To The Learning Circle Feedback Guide

The Building Stronger Communities Feedback Guide has been developed to support Learning Circle members in their own process of critical reflection and learning. The following feedback guide is organized into three parts. Your Learning Circle can work through the guide independently, or request the assistance of a facilitator.

The Feedback Guide consists of three parts. **Part I: Reviewing Your Progress** should be used on a regular basis throughout your Learning Circle process. **Part II: Personal Feedback Survey** and **Part III: Learning About Community Building** should be used only at the end of your Learning Circle process.

### Part I: Reviewing Your Progress

Sometimes it's helpful to take a moment to think about how your group is working and what progress you are making on your agenda or topic. Talking about the things that make your work go smoothly, and the things that get in the way, will make you more aware of important skills that you are developing as you work together. This awareness can help you work out the wrinkles and improve the way you get things done.

As you move forward in your Learning Circle work, we suggest that you take 15 - 20 minutes at several key intervals (Beginning, Middle and End) to reflect on how your work is going.

- A. Beginning:** Sometime *after your first few meetings*, take a few minutes to discuss the questions in Part I.A of the Guide - **Early Stages Review**.
- B. Middle:** At about the mid point of your Learning Circle work, take a few minutes to discuss the questions in Part I.B of the Guide - **Mid Point Review**.
- C. End:** As you wrap up your Learning Circle activity, take a few minutes to review your results, successes and challenges by completing questions in Part I.C of the Guidebook - **Closing Reflection**.

**Part II: Personal Feedback**

**\* use only at the end**

Your personal experience as a Learning Circle member is important. The BSC Steering Committee would greatly appreciate feedback from individual Learning Circle members. Please encourage all members to take the time to complete an Individual Member Survey.

**Part III: Learning About Community Building**

**\* use only at the end**

The Building Stronger Communities Steering Committee is very interested in understanding how your Learning Circle experience might help make your community stronger. We encourage you to consider participating in a more indepth evaluation of your Learning Circle experience by working through Part IV of the Guidebook - **Rating Community Outcomes**. For this exercise you may wish to request assistance from a BSC facilitator or evaluation consultant. If you feel comfortable proceeding on your own with this rating exercise, please do so. Be sure to set aside enough time for discussion and try to capture some of your discussion in notes or on a flipchart.

**Thank You**

**Thank you** for helping all community members learn more about building stronger communities.

As your Learning Circle group starts to form it may be helpful to check a few things along the way. The following questions may help you to get your group off to a good start.

Do we have the people we hoped to have participate in our Learning Circle? If no, who else would we like to have here and what could we do to get them involved?

What is our Learning Circle doing to make group members feel supported and welcome?  
(eg. setting, transportation, child care, snacks, etc.)

The topic or agenda we have agreed to work on is . . . .

Have we checked to see what skills, experience and resources we have in our own group?

These are just some of the questions we might want to explore. Are there other things our group would like to discuss?

Sometimes it's helpful to take a moment to think about how your group is working and what progress you are making on your agenda or topic. Talking about the things that make your work go smoothly, and the things that get in the way, will make you more aware of important skills that you are developing as you work together. This awareness can help you work out the wrinkles and improve the way you get things done.

Our Learning Circle agenda or topic is ...

Does everyone seem clear about it?

Has our agenda changed over time?

What progress have we made so far?

What things are helping our group work well together?  
(if you're wondering what to look for, try the checklist on the next page)

Are there any things that seem to be holding us back or interfering with our work?

What have we learned so far?

How can we use what we've learned to make our next steps better?

## Building Stronger Communities Checklist for Assessment of Group Process

Which of these factors seem to be helping our work and which seem to be holding us back?

	<b>Things That Are Helping</b>	<b>Things That We Could Improve</b>
clear group agenda/topic/focus	_____	_____
openness of group members (willingness to speak and to listen)	_____	_____
active participation of all group members	_____	_____
meaningful roles for all group members	_____	_____
open to trying new ideas	_____	_____
leadership within the group	_____	_____
ability of group to make decisions and move forward	_____	_____
dealing with differences (conflict)	_____	_____
ability to find necessary resources	_____	_____
expertise/talents discovered within group	_____	_____
expertise/talents/resource discovered within the community	_____	_____
support from BSC	_____	_____

What other factors seem to be helping our work or holding us back?

What are the most important things that our Learning Circle has accomplished?

What have we learned?

How will we use what we have learned in our own community?

What would we do differently next time?

Please rate how your group felt about the support you received through your BSC contract.  
(eg. facilitator, resources, etc.)

Poor	Fair	Average	Good	Excellent
1	2	3	4	5

What other things could BSC have done to help your group?

## BSC Learning Circle Feedback Guide Part II - Individual Member Survey

1. What did you hope to get out of your Learning Circle experience?

2. How well were your expectations or hopes met?

9 my expectations were met

9 my experience was better than I expected

9 my expectations were not met

3. From your own point of view, please rate the following :

<b>What did you get out of your Learning Circle experience?</b>	Not At All 1	Very Little 2	Somewhat 3	Quite A Lot 4	Very Much 5
participated in Learning Circle activities					
participated in decision making within the Learning Circle					
learned new skills for working in groups or in community					
used some of the new skills I learned in my community or my work					
expanded my personal or professional network					
discovered new resources in the community that I can use in the future					
used some of the new resources I discovered					
had an opportunity to try out leadership skills in the Learning Circle					
feel more confident in taking a leadership role in my community					
am involved in a community project right now					
feel more connected with people in my community					



As we've talked and met with community groups, they have told us they would like to explore and discuss what community building means. This section will help you explore what community building means to your group. This booklet lists some things that could result from community building experiences like the Learning Circle.

Here are eight different ideas of what helps to build strong communities. Did any of these things happen in your Learning Circle? Please take a few minutes to rate each of the following ideas or themes.

<b><u>Capacity Building Themes</u></b>		<b>Important Theme</b>	<b>Not Important</b>
<b>1)</b>	<b>Participation (broad, diverse, inclusive)</b>	9	9
<b>2)</b>	<b>Shared Vision</b>	9	9
<b>3)</b>	<b>Building Relationships (Spirit of Community)</b>	9	9
<b>4)</b>	<b>Increased Leadership Skills</b>	9	9
<b>5)</b>	<b>Increased Knowledge and Skills</b>	9	9
<b>6)</b>	<b>Increased Networks</b>	9	9
<b>7)</b>	<b>Increased Resources (financial, expertise, volunteers, facilities, information)</b>	9	9
<b>8)</b>	<b>Increased Ability to Influence Change</b>	9	9

**Instructions For Use:**

- 1) First choose the themes that are most important to your Learning Circle. Choose at least three or more.
- 2) Read about what the themes might mean for Learning Circles.
- 3) Read and discuss the questions related to each theme. Note the key points brought up during your discussion.
- 4) As a group, how would you rate each theme (1-5)? A rating of 1 means that this theme was present in your Learning Circle "to a small extent", and a rating of 5 suggests "to a great extent".
- 5) Think about your ratings and discussion as a whole picture. What does it tell you about your community building experience?

## Participation

Participation refers to the ability to get people involved in their local community activities and issues. The community's ability to plan and take independent action is increased as the participation of community members expands, increasingly reflects the diversity of the community (eg. age, gender, occupation, culture, interests), and engages the skills/talents of community members (inclusion).

We hope that community building activities such as the Learning Circle process will lead to:

- ! **increased participation** of community members, including some people who have had little previous involvement in their community
- ! that the invitation to participate is extended to community members in a way that increases the diversity of the group and that group participants reflect some of the **diversity** of their community (eg. age, gender, occupation, culture and interests)
- ! that participants feel **included** as equals in group activities such as offering opinions and ideas, identifying interest areas, decision making, opportunities to be actively involved, and recognition/use of individual skills/talents/expertise

## Questions For Discussion

- ! How did your Learning Circle get its members?
- ! Who participated in your Learning Circle? Who dropped out? Why?
- ! Why did people join your Learning Circle? Did the Learning Circle live up to members' expectations?
- ! Were any of your Learning Circle members new to the community building experience?

## Participation Rating

To what extent did our Learning Circle get increased, diverse and inclusive participation?

To a small extent                      To some extent                      To a great extent

\_\_\_\_\_ 1                      2                      3                      4                      5 \_\_\_\_\_

**Comments:**                      **Why did you choose this rating?**

## Shared Vision

Shared vision refers to the feeling that you share a common interest or understanding with the rest of your group. Your commitment to this shared interest or vision makes you feel like you are a part of what's happening and creates a sense of responsibility to help the group or community move forward to achieve the common goal.

We hope that through the Learning Circle process, community participants will come to agreement on a clear focus for their work that reflects the interest of group members. In some cases the shared vision may result in future action designed to benefit the community as a whole (eg. initiating a project or event, raising funds to support a community activity, recruiting volunteer manpower to help achieve a community objective).

## Questions For Discussion

- ! Did your Learning Circle group agree on a shared vision, agenda or clear focus for their work?
- ! Did your reason for coming together change over time?
- ! Did all of your Learning Circle members help to get the work done?
- ! Did your Learning Circle achieve it's objectives or make progress on its agenda/issue?
- ! Did your work result in some community based action (external to the Learning Circle)? (eg. a community project or activity)

## Shared Vision Rating

To what extent did our Learning Circle accomplish a shared vision or shared agenda?

To a small extent

To some extent

To a great extent

1

2

3

4

5

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**Comments:**            **Why did you choose this rating?**

## Building Relationships

Community building activities such as the Learning Circle experience encourage community members to come together in a way that builds trust, strengthens relationships and creates a sense of caring among community members. Trust and caring at the organizational level can be increased through cooperation, collaboration and networking.

We hope that the Learning circle process will build personal relationships, increase the sense of connection among community members and create a sense of belonging. As community members connect with each other, the group is more empowered to take action within their community.

Joining with other people, communities or organizations to **work collectively** increases the ability to take action and to impact important social issues (e.g. youth crime/vandalism).

## Questions For Discussion

- ! Did your group members develop any new working relationships or increase their personal or professional network as a result of your Learning Circle?
- ! Do group members report a "sense of belonging" within your Learning Circle? Do participants feel they are a valued member of the group? Did this "sense of belonging" increase over time?
- ! Were group members encouraged to take active roles within the Learning Circle? Did these roles change over time?
- ! What things did the group do to make it easy for people to get involved and make people feel welcome?
- ! Which participants felt connected with the group (stayed involved) and which participants dropped out? Why?
- ! Did Learning Circles share information, learnings and resources with each other (e.g. other Learning Circles)?
- ! What new linkages, relationships or networks were formed that might be useful to future activity within your community?

## Relationship Building Rating

To what extent did relationship building happen in your Learning Circle?

To a small extent

To some extent

To a great extent

1

2

3

4

5

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**Comments:**            **Why did you choose this rating?**

## Increased Leadership

Community leadership involves taking initiative, bringing people together in a welcoming environment that helps to build relationships, recognizing skill/abilities in others and motivating people to contribute in a way that makes everyone feel they are part of the action.

We hope that the Learning Circle process will provide opportunities to practice and develop leadership skills. As an individual's confidence increases, they will be more likely to move into other leadership positions within their community.

## Questions For Discussion

- ! How are Learning Circle members showing leadership in your group?
- ! How many of your Learning Circle members had a chance to take on leadership roles?
- ! Did members of your Learning Circle share responsibility for getting the work done?  
(e.g. active participation in discussion and decision making, showing initiative, taking on tasks and following through)
- ! Do any of your group members feel more confident in taking leadership roles since their Learning Circle experience?
- ! Have any group members taken on new leadership positions in their community?

## Increased Leadership Rating

To what extent did your Learning Circle increase leadership skills?

To a small extent		To some extent		To a great extent
1	2	3	4	5

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**Comments:**            **Why did you choose this rating?**

## Increased Knowledge and Skills

The people who make up a community are the community's greatest resource. Therefore it is important for a community to recognize and develop knowledge and skills among its individual members. In particular, skills related to working with others (group process) and understanding the process of community development are thought to increase the community's ability to take independent, self directed, and self sustained decisions and action for the improvement of overall community well-being.

We hope that Learning Circle members will join together to share their talents and experience, learn from each other, and develop new knowledge, skills and expertise within their group and their community.

## Questions For Discussion

1. Did your Learning Circle members discover any new talents or skills within your group or within the community?
2. Did your Learning Circle members develop any new knowledge or skills (eg. through learning, training or practise)?
3. Were these new skills or information helpful to the group or to individual members in dealing with an issue or project in your community?
4. Did the development of new skills increase members' confidence in dealing with issues or projects?

## Increased Knowledge and Skills Rating

To what extent did your Learning Circle increase the knowledge and skills of individual members?

To a small extent                      To some extent                      To a great extent

\_\_\_\_\_ 1                      2                      3                      4                      5 \_\_\_\_\_

**Comments:**                      **Why did you choose this rating?**

## Increased Resources

Community building is based on the belief that communities have many untapped resources, which can be developed to positively affect community well being. Community resources include individual skills and abilities, leadership, money, volunteer, information and facilities. Developing or tapping into community resources should strengthen the community's ability to take action and to achieve it's goals.

We hope that the Learning Circle process will help community members to identify, access and develop resources within their group and within their community, thereby increasing the resources available to the community.

## Questions For Discussion

- ! Did your Learning Circle find and/or use any new resources within your community? (e.g. identification of resources within local community, use of external resources, move toward attracting additional financial or volunteer resources to the community)?
- ! Did any of your Learning Circle members become a resource to their own community or to other Learning Circles or other communities?
- ! How satisfied was your Learning Circle with the support and resources provided through Building Stronger Communities?

## Increased Resources Rating

To what extent did your Learning Circle increase resources available to the community?

To a small extent

To some extent

To a great extent

1

2

3

4

5

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**Comments:**            **Why did you choose this rating?**

## Increased Networks

One way of increasing the availability of resources to the community is by making connections with other groups, organizations or people. These connections and partnerships can form a network through which resources may be accessed or shared.

We hope that the Learning Circle process will expand individual and community networks, resulting in increased access to resources and/or increased resource sharing.

## Questions For Discussion

1. Did your Learning Circle share information, learnings and/or resources with other Learning Circles? (eg. post information or updates on a web site, invite other Learning Circle members to workshop, put someone in touch with an important resource or information, etc.)
2. What new connections or relationships were formed that could be useful to your community action on an issue or project in future?
3. Did you discover or link up with any helpful organizations or people (eg. professionals) in Calgary?

## Increased Networks Rating

To what extent did your Learning Circle increase its connections with other groups, organizations, networks within the community?

To a small extent

To some extent

To a great extent

1

2

3

4

5

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**Comments:**            **Why did you choose this rating?**

## Increased Ability to Influence Change

One indicator of a strong community is their collective ability to make progress on their goals, influence decisions or make changes for the benefit of the community.

We hope that with the increased skills and confidence developed as a result of Learning Circle involvement, participants will be able to make tangible progress on their community development goals.

## Questions For Discussion

1. What did your group hope to accomplish from your Learning Circle activity? Do members feel your group has made progress on its goals/agenda?
2. Do your group members feel more able (empowered) to make changes within their communities? What kinds of changes or activities do your Learning Circle members feel they might be able to influence in your community?
3. Were any of the skills/knowledge/resources gained in your Learning Circle applied in your community? What results?
4. Were there any instances in which formal structures (e.g. city planning dept.; funder) or powerful groups acknowledged your Learning Circle's action?

## Ability to Influence Change Rating

To what extent does our group feel like we are more prepared to take action in our community?

To a small extent

To some extent

To a great extent

1

2

3

4

5

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**Comments:**

**Why did you choose this rating?**

