



WHAT IS THE WORLD SOCIAL FORUM?

An Introduction to the Social Forum Process

Workshop Starter Kit

INTRODUCTION

This workshop intends to introduce participants from outside of Detroit to the history and context of the 2010 US Social Forum host city. The goal is to familiarize participants with Detroit so that they can have a more complete and principled engagement with the local host and draw connections between Detroit and their own city.

While this workshop outline highlights key points and possible activities for each proposed section, facilitators should decide for themselves where to spend the most time and attention, as it is unrealistic to expect to cover this material equally in a 2-hour workshop. Facilitators are encouraged to share any adapted workshop materials with us via www.buildthewheel.org

GOALS

1. Explain the history of the Social Forum in relation to the World Economic Forum
2. Deepen people's understanding about the history and the role of the Social Forum process
3. Talk about our organization's experiences at the 2007 U.S. Social Forum
4. Incite excitement about our organization's delegation to the 2010 Social Forum

MATERIALS NEEDED

- Apple Keynote / PowerPoint Presentation with Projector
- Principles of Social Forum (included below)



OUTLINE

CHECK-IN'S:

15 minutes

- Name? How are you doing?
- Which project are you a part of?

WHAT IS THE SOCIAL FORUM?

25 minutes

- Ask the group: Who has ever heard of the World Social Forum? Ask someone who responds to tell everyone else about what the World Social Forum is...
- Explain that today we're going to explore what the World Social Forum is and where it came out of. So you don't have to worry if you don't know anything about the Social Forum NOW, because you will by the end of this session.
- Begin showing the Keynote Presentation.
- The World SOCIAL Forum began as a challenge to the World ECONOMIC Forum.
- Ask the group: Who has ever heard of the World Economic Forum? Ask someone who responds to tell everyone else about what the World Social Forum is...
- Go to the second slide.
- The World Economic Forum was created in 1971 to give a space for hundreds of the world's richest businessmen and politicians to meet and make plans about how they can make more profit in the next year.
- 1971 was the time that global capitalism was in decline, and the world's ruling elite wanted to figure out how to save capitalism. The Civil Rights Movement in the United States was still pretty strong, and the national liberation movements in Latin America, Africa and Asia were all still pretty strong. The ruling elite were scared, and they created this space to come up with a plan.
- Ask the group what they think these people were creating a plan to do. Draw out the answers that the ruling elite were looking to make more money, grab more power and save the capitalist system.
- Then go to the third slide.
- Ask the group: Who here has ever been invited to the World Economic Forum?
- The World Economic Forum meets in the ski resort of Davos, Switzerland.
- Ask the group if this seems like it would be an easy place for poor people to get to.



- That's right. The World Economic Forum is really a place for the world's elite to come together, and they don't want the rest of us around. Each year, it costs about \$60 million to put on the World Economic Forum, and \$15 million of that goes to security. Also, up until 2001, the World Economic Forum's leadership body was all men— for the first 30 years, there were no women on the leadership body.
- Ask the group why that might be.
- By the end of the 1990s, it had been almost thirty years that the world's ruling elite were on the offensive, and people fighting for justice were on the defensive (with some exceptions). During that time, there was no opportunity for organizers and activists across the globe to meet and to make their own plans.
- Some resistance (in Philippines, Cuba, Zapatistas) but that resistance was largely isolated. Tide began to shift in 1999 when activists shut down the meeting of the WTO in Seattle. This success brought about a series of large mobilizations around the globe— in Genoa, in Washington, DC, in Hong Kong, etc.
- These mobilizations were very important, BUT they did not provide a space for reflection or for figuring out what we were fighting for. A lot of people started complaining that they felt like the movement was just one big mobilization after another in some distant city. In 2001, social movement leaders mostly from Brasil and Latin America created a space for organizers, activists and social movements to come together to reflect and plan. In January of 2001, they held the first World Social Forum in Porto Alegre, Brasil.
- The Social Forum has grown from 20,000 participants at the first one to 150,000 at the one in Venezuela.
- Explain what happens at the Social Forum.
- Distribute the U.S. Social Forum Schedule of Events, and Explain that each day will have its own focus— the first and last days will have marches, the second, third and fourth days will have a lot of workshops during the day and one plenary presentation in the evening.
- In addition to the planned workshops and discussions, there will be a lot of meetings that get pulled together there since it is such a unique time to have so many organizers and activists together in one place.

Ask the group if there are any questions about what the Social Forum is.

Explain that this will be the second national social forum to happen in the United States.

- From the beginning, activists around the world encouraged activists in the "belly of the beast" to pull together a Social Forum inside the United States since it is so often the government of this nation that is threatening the people of the world.



- The first one took place in Atlanta in 2007. Atlanta was chosen because it was the cradle of the Civil Rights Movement.
- If your organization sent a delegation to the USSF in Atlanta, briefly describe the experience. Ask a member who participated in that delegation to talk about her experiences.
- This year's U.S. Social Forum will be in Detroit— because of the City's long tradition of labor and community organizing as well as the innovative survival projects that have emerged after the collapse of industrial capitalism and the auto industry.

WHAT DOES OUR ORGANIZATION WANT TO GET OUT OF / CONTRIBUTE TO IT? **35 minutes**

Break the group into small groups. Ask people to reflect and to come up with five answers to the following question:

- What five goals should our organization try to accomplish by sending a delegation to the USSF? Why those goals?
- What five things can our organization contribute to the USSF? Why are those things useful to the movement?

Ask the groups to report-back to the large group

OUR DELEGATION TO THE USSF **20 minutes**

Review any logistics and arrangements related to getting your members to the US Social Forum

REVIEW THE SCHEDULE OF USSF PREP TRAININGS **5 minutes**

Explain the format of the trainings, where they will each be happening.

Pass out Schedule of Trainings.

CLOSING



PRINCIPLES OF THE SOCIAL FORUM

The committee of Brazilian organisations that conceived of and organised the first World Social Forum, held in Porto Alegre from January 25th to 30th, 2001, after evaluating the results of that Forum and the expectations it raised, consider it necessary and legitimate to draw up a Charter of Principles to guide the continued pursuit of that initiative. While the principles contained in this Charter - to be respected by all those, who wish to take part in the process and to organise new editions of the World Social Forum - are a consolidation of the decisions that presided over the holding of the Porto Alegre Forum and ensured its success, they extend the reach of those decisions and define orientations that flow from their logic.

1. The World Social Forum is an open meeting place for reflective thinking, democratic debate of ideas, formulation of proposals, free exchange of experiences and interlinking for effective action, by groups and movements of civil society that are opposed to neo-liberalism and to domination of the world by capital and any form of imperialism, and are committed to building a planetary society directed towards fruitful relationships among Mankind and between it and the Earth.
2. The World Social Forum at Porto Alegre was an event localised in time and place. From now on, in the certainty proclaimed at Porto Alegre that "Another World Is Possible", it becomes a permanent process of seeking and building alternatives, which cannot be reduced to the events supporting it.
3. The World Social Forum is a world process. All the meetings that are held as part of this process have an international dimension.
4. The alternatives proposed at the World Social Forum stand in opposition to a process of globalisation commanded by the large multinational corporations and by the governments and international institutions at the service of those corporations' interests, with the complicity of national governments. They are designed to ensure that globalisation in solidarity will prevail as a new stage in world history. This will respect universal human rights, and those of all citizens - men and women - of all nations and the environment and will rest on democratic international systems and institutions at the service of social justice, equality and the sovereignty of peoples.
5. The World Social Forum brings together and interlinks only organisations and movements of civil society from all the countries in the world, but intends neither to be a body representing world civil society.
6. The meetings of the World Social Forum do not deliberate on behalf of the World Social Forum as a body. No one, therefore, will be authorized, on behalf of any of the editions of the Forum, to express positions claiming to be those of all its participants. The participants in the Forum shall not be called on to take decisions as a body, whether by vote or acclamation, on declarations or proposals for action that would commit all, or the majority, of them and that propose to be taken as establishing positions of the Forum as a body. It thus does not constitute a locus of power to be disputed by the participants in its meetings, nor does it intend to constitute the only option for interrelation and action by the organisations and movements that participate in it.
7. Nonetheless, organisations or groups of organisations that participate in the Forum's meetings must be assured the right, during such meetings, to deliberate on declarations or actions they may decide on, whether singly or in coordination with other participants. The World Social Forum undertakes to circulate such decisions widely by the means at its disposal, without directing, hierarchizing, censoring or restricting them, but as deliberations of the organisations or groups of organisations that made the decisions.



8. The World Social Forum is a plural, diversified, non-confessional, non-governmental and non-party context that, in a decentralized fashion, interrelates organisations and movements engaged in concrete action at levels from the local to the international to build another world.
9. The World Social Forum will always be a forum open to pluralism and to the diversity of activities and ways of engaging of the organisations and movements that decide to participate in it, as well as the diversity of genders, ethnicities, cultures, generations and physical capacities, providing they abide by this Charter of Principles. Neither party representations nor military organisations shall participate in the Forum. Government leaders and members of legislatures who accept the commitments of this Charter may be invited to participate in a personal capacity.
10. The World Social Forum is opposed to all totalitarian and reductionist views of economy, development and history and to the use of violence as a means of social control by the State. It upholds respect for Human Rights, the practices of real democracy, participatory democracy, peaceful relations, in equality and solidarity, among people, ethnicities, genders and peoples, and condemns all forms of domination and all subjection of one person by another.
11. As a forum for debate the World Social Forum is a movement of ideas that prompts reflection, and the transparent circulation of the results of that reflection, on the mechanisms and instruments of domination by capital, on means and actions to resist and overcome that domination, and on the alternatives proposed to solve the problems of exclusion and social inequality that the process of capitalist globalisation with its racist, sexist and environmentally destructive dimensions is creating internationally and within countries.
12. As a framework for the exchange of experiences, the World Social Forum encourages understanding and mutual recognition amongst its participant organisations and movements, and places special value on the exchange among them, particularly on all that society is building to centre economic activity and political action on meeting the needs of people and respecting nature, in the present and for future generations.
13. As a context for interrelations, the World Social Forum seeks to strengthen and create new national and international links among organisations and movements of society, that, in both public and private life, will increase the capacity for non-violent social resistance to the process of dehumanisation the world is undergoing and to the violence used by the State, and reinforce the humanising measures being taken by the action of these movements and organisations.
14. The World Social Forum is a process that encourages its participant organisations and movements to situate their actions, from the local level to the national level and seeking active participation in international contexts, as issues of planetary citizenship, and to introduce onto the global agenda the change-inducing practices that they are experimenting in building a new world in solidarity.

Approved and adopted in São Paulo, on April 9, 2001, by the organisations that make up the World Social Forum Organizing Committee, approved with modifications by the World Social Forum International Council on June 10, 2001.