

Organizing an Engage Study Group

The Engage curriculum is best experienced by a group of 8-12 people interested in exploring the power of nonviolence for use in their own lives and in making a difference in the world. Assembling such a group often depends on well-organized planning, outreach, and follow-up. The following ideas are offered as suggestions for meeting this goal. Feel free to contact the Engage staff for additional consultation and support.

Forming an Organizing Committee

To organize an Engage study group, it is strongly recommended that an Organizing Committee of 3 or more people be formed.

Once the committee is established, its members should first discuss their own hopes for this process, as well as their own commitment of time and energy to it.

The committee should be clear about its goals. Is this study program being organized to introduce new ideas? Used as the basis of forming a long-term nonviolence group? Strengthening an existing group? Getting clear on objectives and expectations will help guide the rest of the organizing.

The committee should then develop an organizing plan (including a checklist and a timeline). This plan should include the following tasks.

Identifying Participants

While The Engage Study Program can be used with fewer or more participants, its exercises and process are ideally designed for groups of 8-12 people. To achieve this number, consider pre-registering 12-15 people, because one or more individuals often decides to drop out beforehand for a variety of reasons.

To meet this goal, plan to outreach to at least three or four times that number.

Consider who to outreach to as potential participants. Here are some basic approaches.

Outreaching to an already existing group

- * Do members of the committee belong to any existing groups? Would any of them be interested in going through the Engage program? Consider exploring this at the next meeting of one or more of these groups.

- * What are some of the other groups in the community? Make a list. Do committee members have any connections to them? Explore whether or not one or more of these groups are open to a presentation about the program.

- * It could be that an entire group would want to participate. Then again, some members of the group might be interested. If that is the case, they could be invited to join a group with people from several different settings.

Forming a new group

* This group can be formed from among friends, family-members, people at work, community groups, civic organizations, business organizations, political groups, religious congregations, groups working against violence, and peace and justice groups.

Setting the Time

Plan the Engage Study Program far enough in advance to successfully identify and pre-register participant. Decide the time and day of the week the program will be held. (Usually a weekday evening, 6:30 – 9 pm or 7:00 – 9:30 pm works best.) Decide whether you will meet once a week, once every two weeks, or once a month. (Ideally, groups meet once a week or once every two weeks. This allows time for people to reflect on the material between sessions, but not so much time that group continuity is lost.) You may decide to wait until participants are identified to ask them what dates and times work for them.

Setting the Location

Possible venues include homes, community centers, or congregational settings (synagogues, mosques, churches, etc.). Consider the following when choosing a space for the sessions:

- Atmosphere: Choose a place that offers an environment suitable for this study program;
- Convenience: Choose a place near public transportation;
- Size: Choose a room location that provides enough space to move around but not so much space that one loses the intimacy of the setting;
- Noise: Choose a space that will not be disturbed by outside noise; and
- Wall space: choose a space that has enough wall space to hang easel paper.

Deciding About Finances

The one fundamental expense of the Engage Study Program is the Engage Book, which each participant must purchase. The facilitators may decide that the rest of the program is free, or they may decide to charge a small amount of money (\$5.00-\$10.00) for refreshments, additional copying, etc.

In some cases, a fee may be charged to provide the facilitators with a stipend to cover the time she or he spends organizing and preparing the process. (For example, \$25.00 could be charged per participant.) If an individual or an organization decides to use this curriculum and program on an ongoing basis (for nonprofit purposes only), please contact Pace e Bene and consider donating a percentage of the fees to Pace e Bene for the continuance of our work. In any case, financial terms should be settled and advertised before the Study Program begins.

Publicity

The following are a number of ways to promote the Engage Study Program:

- Talking Points. Use and adapt the following Engage “talking points” for all printed materials and to talk with prospective participants. Engage Talking Points could include that Engage offers participants the opportunity to:
 - o Learn how to respond to violence
 - o Find ways to live a more just and peaceful life
 - o Deepen their relationship with themselves and others
 - o Experience the power of nonviolence
- Create a Flier. Effective outreach materials are critical to attract participants. A one-page flyer is ideal. Adapt the Engage sample flier for your publicity. (See sample flier - pdf)
- Send e-mail notices to friends, family, colleagues and affiliated organizations
- Send Postcard announcing this program to friends, family, colleagues and affiliated organizations
- Place ads in relevant publications (newsletters, etc.). (See sample ads)
- Attend local community events to pass out fliers.
- Send press releases announcing this event to local media and try to get on a local radio program to talk about the upcoming study program.

Engage Introductory Presentation

Some people may be reluctant to commit to a 12-week study program immediately. Consider organizing a one-hour Engage introductory presentation (with refreshments) to provide more information about the program.

This informational gathering could be held at one of the committee member’s home (or at another suitable location). The presentation could be designed for the communities noted above: friends, family-members, people at work, community groups, civic organizations, business organizations, religious congregations, etc. (See sample agenda)

Responding to Inquiries

When someone calls or e-mails more information, it is important to respond to them as soon as possible (preferably within one business day). This will instill confidence in the process. Follow up immediately by responding to any questions they have or needs for more information. Refer them to the Pace e Bene website.

Advance Registration

Pre-register people ahead of the start date of the study program – the earlier the better! For example, if the announcement of the study program is made two months before it begins, consider having a “pre-registration deadline” two to four weeks before it begins.

This will allow the facilitators to gauge whether the program will meet its required number of participants. (Setting this deadline, of course, does not preclude adding people after it has passed.) (kenpreston@paceebene.org)

After people have pre-registered, send them a confirmation by mail or e-mail.

Logistics

Identify any logistical requirements and develop a plan to meet them (transportation; refreshments; etc.). See each session for its material requirements.

Program Planning

Choose session facilitators (preferably two). Prepare for sessions. (For in-depth guidance on facilitation, see “Engage Study Program Facilitation Guidelines,” pp. 250-258.)

First Meeting

At the first meeting, make sure that co-facilitators are prepared ahead of time and welcome people as they arrive. It’s also important to provide refreshments so people feel welcome.

Engage

To Purchase the Engage Book: info@paceebene.org

We are excited to learn about what you are organizing, and we will be happy to share your news with our growing Engage network.

We are available for consultation and support at any point through the process. Contact us at info@paceebene.org.

Thank you!