

Progress Report to AR21 on Economics and Governance Curriculum Project

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The Economics and Governance Curriculum is a multi-year collaboration led by the Highlander Research and Education Center www.highlandercenter.org, with support from fellows (partners) from eleven national and regional organizations. Together they are creating a 16+ module curriculum for community groups to assess community assets; analyze resources and capacity; identify decision-makers; develop new alliances, organizations and enterprises; and take action to address community needs through responsible and sustainable practices. The curriculum provides a structured process through which participants develop skills in research, analysis and collaboration, learn about their communities and about larger systems that affect their community, and identify action steps to make transitions in their organizations and enterprises. The process includes a range of approaches from individual to global ways of analyzing communities. The design of the curriculum promotes co-responsibility by building collective ways of working that enable groups of people to work together effectively.

The Economics and Governance Curriculum is more like a road trip with its various twists, turns, stops and detours along the way than a single destination trip with an exact route with predetermined stops. We are using a participatory process so that the curriculum will be a living project, sharing responsibility for collective learning and for building resources and capacity.

Highlander hosted a 'train the trainers' workshop in November 2015 for more than 20 invited community leaders and organizers. The workshop had multiple objectives:

- Train leaders from organizations across the southeastern US in facilitating the curriculum
- Engage workshop participants in assessing the process and content of curriculum modules
- Engage workshop participants in reflecting on their readiness to facilitate in their own communities and organizations
- Identify additions and revisions to the curriculum necessary before distribution
- Secure commitments (with time frame) from workshop participants to launch and lead a process using the curriculum in their communities and organizations
- Collect more examples, models and cases to use in modules and for the curriculum's virtual resource library

Workshop participants came from seven different states, ranged in age from 15 to mid-60s, and represented nine organizations including: one of the largest trade unions in the US representing health care workers; a rural center of community organizing for citizen development and government accountability; a regional network of young people creating safe, sustainable, engaging and inclusive communities throughout Appalachia and beyond; a solidarity economy community development network in a major city; an urban sustainable agriculture project; and an international network of educators aiding development of participatory civic, cultural and financial institutions.





Participatory evaluation is built into the curriculum. Based on the work of Dr. Charles Price (University of North Carolina), DLA (Documentation, Learning and Action) ensures continuous community learning. The DLA strategy uses four questions to support learning:

What did we do? What did we do well? What did we struggle with? How can we use what we have learned?

The DLA method leads participants to make connections between intentions and results, identify and address errors, and process information in ways that change what they already know. The curriculum and DLA support learning that is social, personal and historical.

Participants in the November 2015 workshop generated a wealth of suggestions and recommendations through reflections during and after the workshop. Extensive revisions are underway incorporating this feedback as well as refining and adding more resource materials for each module and case examples.

Workshop participants requested one-day and two-day versions of the curriculum as alternatives to the original three full days (or multiple shorter sessions) required for the entire curriculum. Both of these new versions and guides for facilitation and for evaluation are in development.



The one day-version is not a condensation of the entire curriculum. Instead, over the course of one day in six modules, it builds relationships among participants, investigates how people got to where they are historically, builds a shared understanding of systems of economics and governance, develops an analysis of one's community, explores potential solutions (what they might look like and what will be required), and helps the group consider how proceeding with the entire curriculum would be useful for their community. This version will be used by a partner organization in Jackson, Mississippi and other partner sites later in 2016.

In addition to the anticipated upcoming trial of the one-day version, the curriculum was introduced (with selected components) by STAY, a youth-led organization, in a session at the annual Appalachian Studies Association Conference in March 2016 at Shepherdstown University in West Virginia and selections also were presented in a workshop at the North American Social Solidarity Economy Forum in Detroit, Michigan in April 2016.



Youth-led workshop at Appalachian Studies Association Conference

March 2016

The experiences from these presentations and trials with partner organizations will be integrated into another iteration with additional refinements. We hope to bring together original contributors as well as adopters for reflection later in 2016 and anticipate that after this gathering the entire curriculum will be ready for public access.

In parallel with this progress and complementary to the curriculum, Highlander is working on the Beautiful Solutions book and website:

Beautiful Solutions is collecting stories to spotlight the most powerful strategies for creating the world we want. The focus is on visionary groups of people from around the globe who are driving the shift to a democratic, just and sustainable future — creating tools so that everyone can build solutions in their own communities.

Ayúdanos a crear el proyecto Soluciones Hermosas con cientos de personas alrededor del mundo. Soluciones Hermosas está recopilando historias para destacar las más poderosas estrategias para crear el mundo que queremos. Se enfoca en grupos visionarios de todo el mundo quienes están liderando este cambio a un futuro democrático, justo y sustentable- creando herramientas para que todos puedan construir soluciones en sus comunidades.

Currently, Beautiful Solutions is asking community leaders and activists from around the globe to share their favorite stories and big questions to be featured in the book Beautiful Solutions: Toolbox for the Future. Will you share your ideas? <http://bit.ly/beautifulsolutions>

Actualmente, Soluciones Hermosas está pidiéndoles a líderes comunitarios y miembros de movimientos de todo el mundo que compartan sus historias favoritas y grandes preguntas para que sean destacadas en el libro, Soluciones Hermosas: Una Caja de Herramientas para el Futuro. ¿Nos compartes tus ideas? <http://bit.ly/beautifulsolutions>