



What is START?

<http://www.startguide.org>

START is a study/action process that offers a way for a small group of people to systematically ask basic questions about the workings of our society and choose effective ways to bring about positive change: Study, Think, Act, Respond Together. START groups are the direct descendents of the popular Macro-Analysis Seminars that were developed in the early 1970s.

START groups educate and empower people to help our society more fully embody traditional American ideals of democracy, justice, freedom, responsibility, altruism, bold action, and peaceful cooperation. Moreover, the process of a START group encourages the development and practice of these same ideals as the participants work together.

How Does a START Group Work?

Briefly, a group of people (typically 8–12) agrees to meet regularly — normally once a week. Before each session, five of the participants read a few articles from the on-line reading list. At the meeting, they each briefly present what they have learned to the others, and then everyone discusses the issues raised. They also engage in a variety of exercises to develop ideas and plans for positive change.

The standard START course comprises 24 2 1/2 hour sessions. But every group is welcome to modify the format to accommodate the particular needs of its members. Much of the value of the START course comes from the participants taking control of the process and learning how to make decisions cooperatively that best meet the needs of the whole group.

How START is Different

Study groups that focus narrowly on societal problems can easily bog down in despair. Study groups that focus on theories of change rarely get to practical next steps. To avoid these problems, START looks at hard societal issues, change theories, and the many innovative solutions that have already proved possible. START also helps participants learn how to work effectively for positive change, enabling them to readily tackle tough problems.

Many study groups fail because they are conducted poorly, with unfocused discussions and a few dominant voices, and end up feeling like a waste of time. To avoid these problems, START has a particular group process designed to be democratic and encouraging of real sharing. This process also helps a group to focus its attention on and successfully grapple with the topic at hand.

For more information, go to: <http://www.startguide.org>

➤ **We hope that your START group will lead to effective action toward a better world!**

Why You Should Participate in a START Group

• Practice Citizenship

As citizens of a democracy it is our obligation to understand our society and ensure that it operates well — honestly, fairly, efficiently — and serves the common good. START encourages us to be good citizens and help move our society towards its ideals.

• See the Big Picture

Our individual and local problems are often caused by much larger-scale “macro” forces, such as political, economic, cultural and social structures and institutions. For example, the problem of poverty is connected to class, race, property ownership, inheritance and tax laws, education and healthcare policies, industrialization, and other factors. If we hope to overcome our problems, it is important for us to comprehend how these larger forces affect us. The START process helps us get to the roots.

• Be a Responsible U.S. Citizen

As a military and economic superpower, the United States wields massive influence on the rest of the world, and our culture has permeated the planet. It is important to understand how our country and our culture affect others. As citizens, we have an obligation to help our country promote honesty, justice, and the common good. The START course includes knowledge about the world and our role in it.

• Learn Cooperation Skills

To be effective in bringing about positive change, we must also learn to work cooperatively with other activists in groups of all types and sizes that embody the kind of society we are striving toward. START sessions are structured to encourage equal participation by employing techniques such as shared responsibilities, group-oriented facilitation, small-group discussion, and regular evaluation. This process helps maximize forward progress and minimize authoritarian, dominating, and self-centered tendencies that can be hard on a group.

• Learn Progressive Ways to Learn

START uses many progressive education techniques such as creating a supportive emotional environment for learning, helping people learn by explaining material to others, and testing theories by directly trying them out.

• Learn Change Skills

To be effective in bringing about positive change, we must each feel informed, skilled, and empowered enough to act. A START group engages participants in active learning directed toward immediate action for positive change.