

Summary of Workshops and other Events at the USSF 2010
DRAFT: Prepared for USSF National Planning Committee meeting, October 8-10

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**with thanks to the more than 50 volunteers who helped do the research for this report!*

52 volunteers (most were students, some were researchers with extensive experience with the U.S. and World Social Forum process) attended and documented 165 discussions and activities at USSF workshop; 142 workshops (13.3% of all workshops), 10 plenaries, ceremonies/cultural events, 13 PMAs, and a planning meeting.

Table 1: Observation Coverage of Workshop Tracks

	% of All Workshops	% of Workshops Observed (#)	% of Workshops in Track Observed
Capitalism in Crisis	22.0%	23.0% (32)	14.0%
~Climate Justice	9.1%	15.0% (21)	22.0%
*Democracy and Governance	5.1%	3.0% (4)	7.4%
*Detroit and the Rust Belt	3.0%	2.1% (3)	10.3%
~Displacement, Migration...	6.1%	12.0% (17)	26.2%
Endless War	5.0%	4.0% (5)	9.4%
~Indigenous Sovereignty	1.5%	3.0% (4)	25.0%
~International Solidarity...	1.8%	3.0% (4)	21.1%
~Media Justice, Communications...	4.3%	6.3% (9)	20.0%
Organizing a Labor Movement...	3.0%	5.0% (7)	24.1%
*Strategies for Building Power...	11.1%	6.3% (9)	8.0%
*To the Left	23.5%	16.2% (23)	9.2%
To the Right	1.2%	1.4% (2)	15.4%
*Transformative Justice, Healing...	4.0%	1.4% (2)	5.0%
Total	~100%	~100%	~100%

*Indicates our sample is somewhat under-representative of this track

~ Indicates our sample somewhat over-representative of this track

About one third of all workshops held on the main days of the USSF, June 23, 24, and 25 were observed. Detroit Highlighted workshops, held on the opening and closing days of the USSF, are not well represented in this sample.¹ Thirteen of the roughly 50 People's Movement Assemblies (PMAs) are included. Seven categories of goals were drawn from the National Planning Committee's statement of its major objectives. Observers were asked to record the extent to which each event emphasized each of these goals. Table 2 displays the percentage of workshops devoting extensive or about half of their program to each goal.

¹ We have no observation records from the opening day of Detroit Highlighted (our training session was held during these workshops), and just two records from the closing day workshops.

Table 2: Goals Emphasized in USSF Events

Goal	Extensive emphasis	Some emphasis to 50% of time	Total
• Building local movement capacity	23.0%	30.2%	53.2%
• Building relationships/collaboration across groups and movements	27.9%	37.4%	65.3%
• Developing a common agenda for social transformation	36.1%	38.9%	75.0%
• Developing organizing skills and tools	18.7%	38.4%	57.1%
• Supporting movements in Detroit	6.2%	22.9%*	29.1%
• Creating space for movement convergence and strategizing	28.6%	37.1%	65.7%
• Fostering international solidarity	26.4%	43.2%	69.6%

*Figure excludes most "Detroit Highlighted" workshops.

- **75%** of events emphasized **developing common agendas**, suggesting that a good deal of work at the USSF is **devoted to political/ideological work**.
- Around **66%** of all events stressed **building alliances**.
- **Over 66%** devoted attention to **strengthening international solidarity**.

Aside from the Detroit Highlighted sessions, nearly 30% of events devoted some attention to supporting movements in Detroit suggesting that organizers' work to draw attention to the movements in the host city of the USSF was effective. 55% of all events made some reference to the current political moment or the current economic or ecological crisis. Preparations for the National People's Movement Assembly were at least mentioned at 17% of the events we observed.

Activities

Observers classified events according to their major objectives or activities. For instance, they indicated whether it discussed a particular issue, whether it sought to build alliances among diverse movements or groups, and whether it fostered political or ideological discussions/analyses. Roughly half of all events we observed focused on a particular issue (N=145). Fifteen percent stressed the formation of links among groups (N=42), and 12% stressed political or ideological themes (N=33).

Table 3: Activities Emphasized in USSF Workshops/Events

	Extensive emphasis	Little or some emphasis
Consciousness-Raising	55.8%	32.4%
Alternative Visions	28.9%	41.1%
Experience Sharing	54.1%	32.8%
International Connections	21.8%	29.0%
Joint Action	5.4%	16.6%
Local mobilization	6.9%	26.4%
Developing Strategies/Tactics	25.4%	40.5%
Plan Future Organizing	8.8%	21.5%
"New Politics"	21.3%	25.7%

Total observations: 204

Demographics

We obtained *very rough* estimates of who attended workshops based on observers' counts and guesses about age/race/ethnicity categories. Based on these admittedly rough estimates, we found that slightly more than half of workshop attendees were women (55%), around half were under 30 years of age (40.2%), and just over half were white (55%). Blacks made up 18% of all participants in workshops we observed, and Latinos were 17%. 5% of participants appeared to be Asian, 3% Indigenous, and 1.6% were of Middle Eastern descent. (Note: More work will explore how racial and age compositions varied by issue, etc.).

General Observations

Observers noted that the **“open space” provided at the USSF facilitated networking and collaboration** across various individuals and movements. They noted that the **educational and consciousness-raising** functions of workshops seemed very important for participants. While outcomes such as **movement alliances and agenda-setting** (networking, collaboration, issue education) were routinely witnessed by observers and noted as positive elements of the “open space,” they observed less work to plan concrete actions following the USSF.

The educational aspect of the workshops often left little time/space to focus on strategy and action. This may be a result of US organizers' relative lack of familiarity with the World Social Forums. It might also reflect the fragmentation and disconnect among US social movements, as well as the absence of a strong left/socialist political party that helps foster common movement identities, ideological consciousness, and frame policy debates in other national contexts. In short, the “open space” of the USSF has allowed information on issues and contacts to be exchanged extensively, while planning/strategizing over concrete actions and future plans often remains absent, at least outside the PMA process.

Observers recorded high levels of excitement and enthusiasm in many of the workshops, showing the importance of nurturing hope, solidarity and spiritual stamina within the wider movement. Culture and expressions of identity through drama, music and ceremony were an important part of the process to many participants; this points to the transformative potential of space that honors diverse cultural expressions and ceremonies as part of relationship building, and that such relationships can go beyond identification with particular social justice issues.

Many observers noted that workshops analyzed power dynamics and participants were engaged in critically deconstructing power relationships and suggesting transformative possibilities. There was acknowledgement of widespread systemic failure to meet needs of people and communities. In response, there also seemed to be tension between reforming and working within existing (failed) institutions and developing grassroots, parallel institutions to meet people's needs. Both of these strategies were present in observed discussions.

Observers noted that participants used the Forum process in different ways: some were very intentional in working to build coalitions while most also fostered networking and exchange of information and resources. One observer noted more networking of groups within movements, but less inter-movement coalition building or focus on wider strategy. Many workshops were self-reflective in their process and emphasized both process and outcome, stressing that the way people organize must not reinforce structural violence and inequality.

NOTE: ***Further work will be done to integrate more of the observation records into a summary. Input from NPC members is welcome as we hope to provide information that is useful for further organizing work. Please send input/ suggestions/ questions to Jackie Smith at jsmith40@nd.edu.*