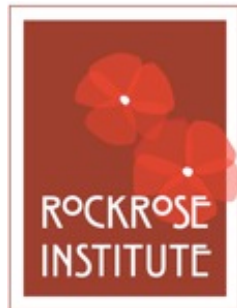


Facing Violence: Justice, Religion, and Conflict Resolution – World Forum 2007 Impact Report

Sponsored by:



August 2007

Study Completed by:
Advantage Performance Group



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Introduction

In 2007, the RockRose Institute sponsored Facing Violence: Justice, Religion and Conflict Resolution: World Forum 2007. In February, 500+ participants gathered in San Francisco for the Forum, coming from 27 countries, representing a wide range of professional backgrounds, with 20% of the participants under 25 years of age to folks in their 80s. The RockRose Institute decided to conduct an impact evaluation of the Forum to answer two primary questions:

1. What level of positive impact does the Forum experience have on participants at the personal, community, and/or organizational levels?
2. What improvements might be made to the Forum experience to achieve even greater levels of impact for future participants?

RockRose Institute contracted with Advantage Performance Group, an internationally known firm with definitive expertise in impact evaluation studies. This study was conducted during June and July 2007. The report that follows contains the verified Findings on impact, and Recommendations on whether to continue investments in experiences like the Forum, and what can be done to increase the impact for future Forum participants (if RockRose Institute decides to offer the Forum experience again or offer similar types of experiences).

This report is organized as follows:

- Introduction
- Background and Methodology
- Survey Results
- Key Findings
- Impact Profiles
- Recommendations
- Appendix

Background and Methodology

Evaluation Process

We, the Advantage Performance Group evaluators, applied our Success Case Evaluation MethodSM to conduct this study. The purpose of using this evaluation strategy was to discover those instances where the application of learnings from the Forum led to the achievement of one or more valuable outcomes. The goal of a Success Case Study is not solely to quantitatively assess and analyze the full impact of these initiatives, nor is it to draw inferences about the “average” participant impact. Instead, the Success Case methodology is more focused, efficient, and strategic. It determines first the extent to which the Forum participants can be found who appear to have leveraged their experience into important personal, social, and societal value. Then the study explores the most significant of these reported applications to analyze, describe and document them, and to determine those factors that seem to have facilitated or impeded worthwhile results.

Conversely, when participants are found who report little or no impact from their participation in the Forum, the Success Case method uncovers why that is so and what could be done to remedy that negative outcome.

The following approach was implemented in order to gather impact data, identify findings, and make recommendations.

Phase One: Survey of Participants

In order to create an impact survey that would assess the most positive impact the Forum experience might produce, the evaluators had a conversation with the Forum project leaders. During that conversation, the leaders defined the Forum participants’ specific behaviors and results it was intended to produce. Using those outcomes, an impact survey was drafted and validated (see the Appendix for a copy of the full survey with its resulting data). This electronic survey was then sent via email to approximately 450 Forum participants where email addresses were known. Highlights from the survey data follow in this report and full survey data is presented in the Appendix.

Phase Two: The Interviews

Interviews were conducted with selected participants to further explore and understand their survey responses. After the survey responses were received, we randomly selected twelve (12) respondents from among those who indicated that the Forum had helped them produce valuable outcomes. We randomly selected five (5) survey respondents on the low end of reported impact, from amongst those who indicated on their survey that they “found the Forum mostly reinforcing things I already knew and was doing.”

By randomly sampling 10% or more of the survey respondents in each of these categories of impact, we can be highly confident (at the 95% level of confidence or more) that what we discover from those we interview fully represents the impact experience of that group.



Each phone interview took 20 to 40 minutes to complete. These interviews yielded scenarios in which participants had applied their Forum experiences in a range of impactful ways. The most illustrative examples of these are included in the Impact Profiles section of this report. The lower impact interviewees also identified the hindrances that they faced in trying to apply their Forum experiences, thus diminishing the impact for them. These hindrances are identified in the Key Findings section of this report. The Recommendations section describes how those can be overcome.

The investigators then analyzed data from all interviews and surveys. The Key Findings and Recommendations sections of this report are based on this holistic analysis.

Survey Results

The survey results contain several significant items to highlight in this report. We report all survey data in the Appendix.

The survey was emailed to the Forum participants. Ninety-five (95) Forum participants completed the survey.

The survey respondent data that suggest positive impact are:

- Regarding overall the Forum impact, 41% of respondents indicated that, “I learned something new, I have used them in my life, and I am seeing worthwhile results.” Another 31% indicated that, “I learned something new, I have applied them in my life, and fully expect worthwhile results though none have been achieved yet.” The survey data suggests that as many as 72% of participants might be using their Forum learning with over half of them already seeing worthwhile results. *Evaluator’s Note: This is an unusually high number in that many studies of this type show the learning use rate at less than 40%, some as low as 10%.*
- 78% of survey respondents reported that they have “shared their Forum learning with others to broaden the impact.”
- 66% of survey respondents have “used something I learned from participating in the Forum’s Dialogue Groups.”
- 61% of survey respondents indicated that the Forum has enabled them to “take action to make positive things happen because I believe I can make a difference.”

The survey data that suggest factors limiting impact were:

- 84% of respondents indicated that they had either no expectations or only some idea of what they might learn from the Forum. Only 12% of respondents came to the Forum with specific objectives about what they expected to learn and how they would apply that learning.

Findings and Recommendations in this report are not based solely on the survey data. Survey data can contain a positive halo effect, or conversely, a negative bias regarding the behaviors and results that the Forum experience has produced. The interviews confirm whether the survey data accurately reflects the impact the Forum has produced – or conversely, has, in a false positive way, overstated the Forum impact.

Based on all interviews conducted, the evaluators can conclude that the survey data contains neither “false positive” information nor any negative bias towards the surveyed behaviors that RockRose was hoping to engender. The survey results are an accurate representation of the Forum’s impact.

Key Findings

This section describes the Key Findings, supported by survey and interview data, related to the impact of the Forum experience. In all cases, Key Findings are supported by multiple data sources (e.g., survey data, multiple interviewees, etc.).

1. The Forum has had and continues to have a positive impact for most participants.

Both survey and interview data support this Finding. Interviews with high impact Forum participants yielded a rich accounting of how they were using their Forum knowledge and skill to support and seek peaceful solutions to a range of personal, community, and societal conflict situations. Specifically, we heard participants describe their use of Forum learnings in these ways:

- A high school teacher using the structured dialogue approach to help 10th grade world history students figure out better ways to resolve personal conflict in their community.
- A business person helping her family-owned business reach a consensus on selling a portion of it – this situation had the potential for significant family conflict.
- A staff person in an abuse shelter for women using structured dialogue techniques to get women required to attend a group session to willingly join in healing conversations after an initial display of strong resistance to the process.
- A leader of a mediation organization using what he saw in the Forum to design learning experiences for his clients.
- A youth participant using what she learned to initiate conversations with young people of diverse ethnic backgrounds who had been taught for years to hate and distrust each other.
- A religious leader who used her Forum learnings to totally reshape her preaching on economic and social justice.
- Many Forum participants who described specific circumstances and settings where they shared their Forum experiences and made use of some tool or technique they had acquired.
- Participants described the Forum as helping to renew their hope and strengthen their belief that they can make a difference.

The evaluators realized early in this study that evidence of conflicts resolved and/or violence avoided may not exist, may never be known by the Forum participant, or, at best, may not be known for some time into the future. For instance, the secondary teacher who taught students how to talk through conflict versus getting out a gun may never know whether she saved any lives – in spite of the fact she may have saved many. The facilitator of group sessions in an abused women’s shelter may never know whether her structured conversation approach kept any women out of an abusive relationship in the future.

Yet, during this study, we did find Forum participants using what they learned and having immediate impact. For those in a personally conflicting situation, immediate Forum application did have significant and measurable impact. We can conclude that the Forum had an immediate impact for participants and will continue to have long-term impact for participants and their communities.

Quantifying the impact of the Forum in terms of dollars, lives saved, fewer lawsuits, etc. is also very difficult. If we try to cast it in economic terms, we know that violence comes at a huge cost to any community. If we simply try to cast the impact in a very personal way, we also know that violence and conflict in families and communities exacts a very large price in terms of personal health, family dynamics, community stability, economic stability, etc. If we try to cast the Forum impact in terms of our global community, we know the incredibly high price we all pay in economic, social, religious, and ethnic violence and conflict. What is the impact of the absence of violence and conflict in one life, one neighborhood, or one community? What is the value of saving one life of a young person violently gunned down in an ethnic, religious, or economic conflict? We are not going to try establishing those values. We are confident that most humans understand that the price is high. We believe that, even if it saves one life, one family, or one community from violence and conflict, the impact is great. We have found that the Forum has made that happen for most participants.

The Impact Profiles found later in this report demonstrate the concrete nature of this impact, both short and long-term. In summary, the evaluators believe that the World Forum 2007, and its sponsor, RockRose Institute, are to be highly commended for creating a very powerful, impactful Forum experience. It is clear that the Forum was very thoughtfully planned with proper attention paid to impacting the “heart and head” of participants. Conference planners can learn much from the approach taken by the Forum sponsor.

2. The greatest impact came from participants who are not “professional” mediators or do not make a living providing such services.

Professionals in the field of conflict resolution or mediation stated that, while the Forum was inspirational, they did not learn new methods or in depth skills applicable to their work. In contrast were those participants who attended the Forum seeking resources and a certain level of skill to aid in their work or vocation. These individuals placed high value on what they learned at the Forum especially their experience in small group sessions and were able to apply the methods and tools provided shortly after attending.

3. The Forum’s involvement of youth and its impact upon participants was significant.

Forum participants found the presence of committed young people from around the world to be both inspiring and motivational. They enjoyed their artistic presentations and found their contributions to the small group settings refreshing and energizing. In addition, seeing young people who were paying attention to the problems of violence and justice and working to make a difference fostered a greater sense of hope for many participants.

4. The “tone and spirit” created during the Forum was highly valued.

Interview data indicated that there was a high level of attention to detail portrayed in every aspect of the Forum from the discussion topics down to the type of music played. An underlying theme heard in most of the conversations was how the opening ceremony really played a big part in setting the tone and spirit for the Forum. It really impacted how people felt emotionally and their connection to one another.

5. Forum participants entered the experience with relatively low levels of expectations and anticipated applications for any learning they might acquire.

As 84% of respondents indicated they had either no expectations or only some idea of what they might expect from the Forum, and only 12% came to the Forum with specific objectives about what they expected to learn and how they would apply that learning. Clear participant expectations leads to additional impact. Articulating anticipated outcomes does not limit how participant might benefit from such an experience, but does provide them with a clear starting point. This and virtually all other similar evaluation studies consistently find greater application of learnings and achievement of measurable results when planned outcomes and, more importantly, participant expectations are created before the event takes place.

6. The variety of learning modes allowed maximum learning amongst a wide variety of participant learning styles.

Interviewees consistently mentioned how much they appreciated the extensive variety of learning processes employed in the Forum. They spoke about the value of large group presentations, exposure to the thinking of panelists, small group interaction, extensive use of sound and visuals, and the organizers’ willingness to allow some learning and presentations to happen spontaneously.

Learning styles in a group of over 500+ Forum participants will vary widely. The learning mediums employed during the Forum certainly allowed for maximum learning regardless of participants’ learning styles. This only added to the impact of the Forum for most participants.



Impact Profiles

As noted in the first Finding, the Forum experience has produced some excellent results for most participants. We list below some brief illustrations of highly successful Forum participants. Pseudonyms are used throughout to make the illustrations more personal, but to protect the anonymity promised in the study.

Impact Profile #1 – Susan

Susan has been a 10th grade high school Social Studies teacher for 10 years. She currently is teaching in a low-income and ethnically diverse school district in Illinois. Susan has a political background with interests in international travel, genocide and community reconciliation.

Susan talked about the Forum as having a significant and profound impact in all aspects of her life. She specifically noted the immediate application of using the conversation techniques in her high school classroom in allowing the students to move from debate to dialogue. Before, her students, who are quite verbal, would compete for the conversation time in class. Susan said, “By giving each of my students 2 or 3 minutes of their own conversation time, they really began to listen to one another. I was able to really teach and engage the students in their own learning process.”

Another area in which Susan applied her learnings was with her Study Group. She pushed them to apply the structured conversation techniques that were used at the Forum in their group discussions. Susan told how it was almost more difficult with adults to apply the process than with her high school students. They had to discipline themselves in using the techniques, which in turn created a different tone among the group and better listening to one another.

Finally, the Forum had a positive impact on Susan personally. It was a very personal and emotional experience for her. She felt very connected with everyone that she engaged in conversations with at the Forum. One of her highlights was meeting Mr. Wiesel. It was a very intimate and moving experience for her.

Overall, the Forum has had a substantial impact on Susan’s life. She has seen significant changes in herself, her classroom and her study group. Susan has taken up the practice of meditation every morning. She has seen a shift of learning in her classroom. Susan’s study group has become better listeners.



Impact Profile #2 – Jim

Jim is a consultant working with an Ethics think tank. Jim is also a Steward for World Café and is responsible for promoting The World Café in his geographic area. He resides in the United States.

Jim’s experience at the Forum was an inspirational one. In reflecting on the impact of the Forum he stated “the Forum was a catalytic event that has opened my awareness that I have been given a chance to pass on the World Café. The Forum was a wake up call that I can make a difference.” As a direct result of his Forum experience, he has been more proactive in “both large and small ways in promoting World Café.” In an example of a small change Jim stated, he now makes sure that he has descriptive materials/tools for those who inquire. Jim stated that he keeps 100 World Café CD’s in stock providing them to teachers and others involved in the community who are looking for ways to encourage dialogue and resolve conflicts.

In addition, Jim described two situations that gave him an opportunity to pass on what he learned and recommend methods that were used at the World Forum. The first occurred during his work with the Ethics think tank when he persuaded a school district to use the World Café process as part of their framework for dialogue. In the second situation, Jim recruited a retired teacher he had known for some time to become a “visual practitioner utilizing the graphic recorder” and provided resources that were helpful to her regarding that process.

Jim clearly credits the World Forum for inspiring and motivating him to help others who have an interest or need to encourage dialogue and resolve conflicts as part of their work or vocation. The opportunity to network with others engaged in similar pursuits was valuable to him. He also commented that he personally appreciated that the Forum was the “brainchild of four women” and that it brought a different lens to the subject.



Impact Profile #3 – Petra

As part of the Youth Dialogue Project, Petra came to the Forum to learn different dialogue methods for conflict resolution to apply to her own projects to foster peace and reconciliation between the Turks and Greeks in her native Cyprus.

Her primary take-away from the conference was the “positive energy from others who want to promote peace in our world, particularly [the realization that] so many people [are] involved in NGOs who want to make a difference.” This energy empowered her to continue her work in Cyprus to promote peace and conflict resolution. She has since organized Greek-Cypriots and Turk-Cypriots to share what she learned with others. The Forum also facilitated her creating good friendships with others from other countries, with whom she has stayed in touch.

Leaders from the three-day pre-Forum training session for her Youth Dialogue Project provided very useful tools to facilitate conflict resolution and more effective communications. She would have liked more time to practice methods. Petra also appreciated the experience of multiple positive communications between youths and adults.

Hearing about the Rwanda survivor’s experience was very moving for her, which has made her more sensitive to other struggles in the world.

Petra’s most empowering moment occurred on the last day when she wrote down her commitments and was given the ability to connect with others interested in this subject. It was very empowering to be able to speak out their commitments and their passions in front of others. “It was unforgettable for me to do it...I will always remember the people and their faces. Even though we live so far away, we are all connected and communicating with each other through our shared purpose.”

On the final day, Petra particularly liked the Native American spiritual activity of standing in a circle and hugging neighbors around the circle to say goodbye. “It was very emotional. It brought us closer without even talking.”

“I will always be thankful about this opportunity. It was a great experience, from both a learning perspective, as well as the people I’ve met.” Petra acknowledged the differences in backgrounds, age, etc., but appreciated the connections due to similarities in passion and focus.



Impact Profile #4 – Michelle

Michelle is a consultant working for a Global Leadership Group. Her organization is focused on providing coaching, education, and resources to enhance the development of female leaders across the globe. She is based in the US.

Michelle was interested in attending the Forum for two reasons: (1) it represented an opportunity to be exposed to something different; and (2) she is interested in “creating social change and making a better world.”

She stated the panels were “fantastic, from the variety of the panelists and depth of storytelling to the boldness by which it was presented.” She gained value from both the knowledge and the process by which it was presented. She understood the power of what she was learning by experiencing it and “watching how it worked me and the group.”

Michelle gained a great deal of value from her experience at the Forum and has implemented significant changes in her work. As a result of her experience, she states “she knows in a different way that people want to make a difference and now she is offering people a chance/invitation to step into it.” She gained both inspiration from the speakers’ call to action and empowerment that “yes, we can do this.”

Michelle gained specific dialogue/conflict resolution skills, which she has been able to implement in her work. Following her participation at the Forum, Michelle modified her approach at three subsequent programs involving her organization. The changes she made include: (1) creating a space where people can speak and express themselves; (2) changing the format of a recent event to a dialogue/conversational format because of the Forum; and (3) gaining the commitment from others to extend dialogue in their personal and professional communities.

Recommendations

The following recommendations address the factors which the evaluators found to be limiting or may be barriers to achieving even greater impact from the Forum and Forum-like initiatives. Implementing these recommendations will help achieve even greater results from the Forum-like experiences.

If the Forum were to be offered again (or a similar such experience), the evaluators would recommend the following actions:

1. Market communications need to clarify the Forum’s intended audience, who will benefit most from participation, and what the participant expect as “take aways.”

From the survey data, we found that 84% of participants had unclear expectations of what they could gain from their attendance at the Forum. In order to clarify participant’s expectations, it would be helpful if marketing materials clearly describe the intended audience for the event, the depth and specific structure of the learning events, what participants can expect to learn, and ideas of how they will be able to use their learning. If the Forum’s market communications did contain this information, it seems that for some reason it was not clear to the majority of people who chose to attend.

2. Create participant cost and scholarship structures that will encourage more grass roots, non-profit, community-based agencies to participate.

Several participants indicated that the cost of the Forum may have inhibited attendance. Scholarships, sliding scales, and other methods of discounting were suggested for individuals and groups such as youth programs, domestic violence workers, and other grass roots organizations.

3. Create Forum participant tracks that might allow for greater in-depth experiences for those already exposed to some or all of the Forum’s “basics.”

Developing a participant track for an individual attending the Forum will create a personalized and beneficial experience. While one attendee might not have had exposure to the World Café, another attendee has and would find greater benefit in attending a session with others that have. It might have been possible to offer more in depth skill and conflict resolution experiences for those who work in the field full time.

4. Continue leveraging the “serendipity” events and happenings that seem to capture the very best of what participants brought with them.

Many of those interviewed indicated they received great value not only from the Forum’s scheduled activities and presentations, but also from presentations by attendees and their interactions with other practitioners and professionals. In this manner, they were able to



leverage their Forum experiences by learning best practices from a broader array of colleagues. Many found these “serendipity” happenings the most inspirational portions of the Forum. Providing ample time and opportunity to interact and engage with fellow attendees for this purpose is highly recommended.



Appendix

The Forum Impact Survey and Complete Data

1. What were your expectations as you began this Forum experience? (Select one.)

I really had no specific expectations other than to participate and somehow gain from it
N = 42, 45%

I had some idea of what I might learn from it, but not much beyond that
N = 37, 39%

I was very clear about what new skills and knowledge I could gain
N = 4 or 4%

I had specific objectives not only for what I would learn but also how I would apply it in my life
N = 11, 12%

2. Rate below, using the scale provided, the extent to which you might have applied any learning from the Forum:

Possible Applications	Tried it, got positive results	Tried it but not sure of results yet	Have not tried it but plan to	Was already doing this	Will not be doing this
Implemented my Forum commitment(s)	N = 24 26%	N = 21 23%	N = 21 23%	N = 21 23%	N = 4 4%
Applied one or more of the elements of the Forum design in planning conferences, or seminars or making presentations	N = 26 29%	N = 18 20%	N = 24 27%	N = 13 15%	N = 8 9%
Entered difficult situations with more hope and confidence to create a positive outcome	N = 36 38%	N = 25 27%	N = 9 10%	N = 23 24%	N = 1 1%
Took action to make positive things happen because I believe I can make a difference	N = 40 43%	N = 18 20%	N = 7 8%	N = 26 28%	N = 1 1%
Applied something I learned from one of the Forum Plenary Sessions	N = 35 39%	N = 19 22%	N = 18 20%	N = 11 12%	N = 6 7%
Used something I learned from participating in the Forum's Dialogue Groups	N = 46 51%	N = 20 22%	N = 8 9%	N = 12 13%	N = 5 5%
Shared my Forum learnings with others to broaden the impact	N = 65 71%	N = 13 14%	N = 4 4%	N = 7 7%	N = 2 2%



3. Which statement below best characterizes your experience regarding the Forum? (Select one.)

I learned something new, have used it in my life, and am seeing worthwhile results

N = 39, 41%

I learned at least something new, have used it in my life, and fully expect worthwhile results though none have been achieved yet

N = 31, 33%

While I may have learned something new, I have not put it to use yet

N = 11, 12%

The Forum was mostly a reminder of what I already knew and was using

N = 14, 15%

The Forum did not cover anything new or useful

N = 0, 0%

4. Name _____ (Your name is needed only because our evaluation partner, Advantage Performance Group, may follow up with some respondents by telephone to better understand their experiences. Your responses will only be seen by Advantage Performance Group and will not be revealed to anyone at the RockRose Institute.)