

# Class Matters Workshops

## Why learn cross-class alliance building skills?



- Movements for social change are stronger when people from more classes are involved. But while we may have the best intentions of creating class-diverse groups, if we live a class-segregated life and recruit from our social networks, we'll end up with members with roughly the same level of education and income as our own.
- Class is the elephant under the carpet in many social change groups. When we do manage to create a diverse coalition, misunderstandings, different ways of doing things, and different amounts of money and clout often tear the group apart.
- Middle-class activists sometimes overlook the contributions that working-class and poor people make to organizations, and may repel interested people with their unaware classist attitudes.
- Our lack of shared vocabulary about class may leave a blank spot in our political analysis.

- Honest dialogue across class lines can be transformative. The first step is to tell our class stories and discuss the class dynamics we see. Class Matters workshops open up this unspoken issue to talk about class differences and how we can bridge them to build stronger movements for social change.

*Thanks to this workshop, I understand better why the union I work for acts the way it does and why I sometimes struggle with [it].*

*The workshop gave me insight into my relationship with my working class partner and ways I can more sensitively approach financial issues.*

*This should be mandatory for every non-profit organization.*

*—Middle-class union staff, Portland, OR*

*The concepts weren't abstract; they were very tangible and self-applicable. I feel energized to focus on coalition building.*

*—Working-class community activist,  
Asheville, NC*

BETSY LEONDAR-WRIGHT is author of the new book *Class Matters: Cross-Class Alliance Building for Middle-Class Activists* (New Society Publishers, 2005; [www.ClassMatters.org](http://www.ClassMatters.org)). She is the Communications Director at United for a Fair Economy and on the board of Class Action ([www.classism.org](http://www.classism.org)).



# What can you expect from a Class Matters workshop?

Interactive exercises based on real-life stories

Opportunities to practice cross-class bridging skills

Workshops two hours to two days long

## Topics can include:

- Making our organizations more class-multicultural
- Avoiding “The Top Ten Mistakes of Middle-Class Activists”
- Understanding organizational class cultures and the most common cross-class dynamics
- Mapping our class life stories and our organizations’ class environments
- Strengthening our one-on-one relationships across class differences
- Responding to verbal classism and communicating more respectfully



*“Experience-based wisdom”*

Class Matters workshops can be tailored to fit mixed-class groups or middle-class groups; labor unions, religious groups, student groups and non-profits.

*I took away a better analysis of how to incorporate class issues into coalitions I work with, and more sensitivity about why poverty class and working class folks may not buy in to middle-class organizations.*

*—Middle-class religious coalition staff, Seattle*

### Booking a Class Matters Workshop

To book a Class Matters workshop, e-mail [Betsy@ClassMatters.org](mailto:Betsy@ClassMatters.org) or call 781-648-0630.

The fee paid by a host organization includes a sliding scale honorarium and expenses. The honorarium slides all the way down to zero for low-budget grassroots groups. Participant fees can help defray the honorarium cost.

Please don't let money stop you from considering a Class Matters workshop.

*I was amazed at how experiential the learning became. It took me far deeper in awareness of strengths and weakness of my own class and others. Really great workshop!*

*—Wealthy advocate for fairer taxes, Portland, OR*

### Political change and cross-class bridge-building

Stereotypes of working-class people as more conservative—and of conservatives as lower income—hamper liberal political strategizing. Some college-educated progressives belittle views on religion and culture different than their own, writing off as hopelessly conservative or even as stupid millions of people who in fact share their views on many economic issues. Some liberals huddle with those of their same privileged class background, not developing their ability to communicate with working-class people.

To bridge this gap, college-educated progressives need to become more “class-multicultural.” That is, they need to learn to see through differences to find their blue-collar allies, to bond through humor and respectful talk, and to build strong coalitions that include organizations from all classes.

Class Matters workshops can create cross-class dialogue on bridging the red-blue divide within mixed coalitions—or can help middle-class liberal groups take the first steps out of political isolation.