

# **Creating a Vibrant Hartford:**

## **Adult Learning as a**

## **Pathway to Change**

**Facilitator Guide**



# About This Project

In 2010, Hartford Public Library received a National Leadership Grant from the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS) to conduct a three-year Immigrant Civic Engagement Project. The purpose of the project is to develop replicable models that respond to the acute need nation-wide for greater immigrant civic integration.

The project employs two strategies, both designed to build social relationships and bridge social capital, considered in the field as essential to promoting immigrant civic integration.

One strategy, mobilizes the volunteer community. Longstanding residents are recruited and trained to volunteer as Cultural Navigators and work one-on-one with newly arrived immigrants to assist them to adjust to their new surroundings by accessing community services, developing an understanding of civic involvement and helping them achieve citizenship. The second strategy employs the Everyday Democracy dialogue-to-change process (or community dialogues) to bring the immigrants and receiving communities together to engage with one another and act on important community issues. By doing so, they will not only create positive community change, but also build lasting relationships with each other.

This Discussion Guide has been designed to assist and complement the first community dialogue in the project, focused on *Creating a Vibrant Hartford: Adult Learning as a Pathway to Change*. In April and May 2012, several groups including immigrants and others will engage in the dialogue process as described in this Discussion Guide. Their conversations will culminate in ideas for action. All dialogue participants will be invited to an Action Forum at which the action ideas will be reviewed and prioritized resulting in an action plan. Task forces will be formed and implementation will begin. Progress and results will be monitored and measured. Many relationships formed during the four-week community dialogue process will continue beyond the life of the project. The community dialogue will result in positive community change and greater civic engagement in Hartford.

With the Library as the catalyst, these integration models transcend the existing naturalization process in that it gives immigrants a sense of belonging within the broader community and facilitates their transition as active community participants and future civic-minded individuals.

To learn more about this project please contact project Managers, Richard Frieder, Community Development & Civic Engagement Director [rfrieder@hplct.org](mailto:rfrieder@hplct.org) (860) 695-6365 and Homa Naficy, Multicultural Services Director [naficy@hplct.org](mailto:naficy@hplct.org) (860) 695-6334.

**This project is funded in part by the Institute of Museum and Library Services, National Leadership Grant, designed to promote immigrant civic engagement.**



500 Main Street • Hartford, CT 06103  
[www.hplct.org](http://www.hplct.org)

# About Everyday Democracy

This discussion guide was developed and produced by Everyday Democracy (a project of The Paul J. Aicher Foundation) in collaboration with the Hartford Public Library, community volunteers, and city employees. Everyday Democracy helps people of different backgrounds and views think, talk, and work together to solve problems and create communities that work for everyone. We work with neighborhoods, cities and towns, regions and states, helping them pay attention to the connection between complex public issues and structural racism. We provide advice and training, and then use what we learn to benefit other communities. Our innovative tools and processes have proved to be effective in furthering the efforts of people who are organizing dialogue that leads to change where they live.

To learn more about Everyday Democracy please visit [www.everyday-democracy.org](http://www.everyday-democracy.org)

**Writers:**

Matthew Leighninger, Gloria Francesca Mengual, Sarah Eisele-Dyrli

**Translator:**

Valeriano Ramos, Jr.

**Contributors:**

**Hartford Public Library and IMLS Project Staff:**

Nancy Caddigan, IMLS Intercultural Liaison

Elaine Rosales Connolly, IMLS Project Aid

Richard Frieder, Community Development & Civic Engagement Director

Jennifer Kriksciun, IMLS Project Aid

Homa Naficy, Multicultural Services Director

**Hartford Residents:**

Giselle Jacobs

Tony Magno

Thomas Swarr

**City Of Hartford:**

Urania Petit - City of Hartford, Registrar of Voters

Mary Beth Russo - ELL facilitator at Hartford Board of Education

Trish Torruella - Acting Assistant Director, Youth Division of the Hartford Department of Families, Children, Youth & Recreation

**University of Connecticut School of Social Work:**

Intern Jamilah Tigner

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## INTRODUCTION

### Why should we meet to talk about adult learning in Hartford?

Hartford is a very complex and diverse city. But regardless of how long someone has lived here or where a person is from, one common value holds – people need ample opportunities to learn and to receive training and education that will prepare them for work and life. Quality adult learning is vital to the success of Hartford residents.

By bringing together a wide range of people, we can move toward the goal of providing quality adult learning opportunities for all Hartford residents. If we listen to each other and work together, we will have a better chance of finding solutions that help all Hartford residents do well in the worlds of school and work. This discussion guide will help us talk about and share with each other our vision of the kind of learning community we want.

### Holding Dialogue Circles to Create Change

We all need to become better informed. And people from every part of our community need to work together on this issue. We need dialogue among people from many backgrounds that is based on democratic values and gives everyone a voice. These sessions will create an environment where people can:

- Listen with respect, and learn from each other's lives, cultures, values, and traditions.
- Learn about the issues.
- Look at all sides of the issues and talk about common concerns.
- Come up with ways to bring about change in our community.
- Join forces with each other and with public officials.

This guide will help us talk about the kind of change our community needs. It is designed to help us:

- Understand how we are connected to each other.
- Create a vision of a better life for Hartford residents.
- Talk about some of the challenges we face as we work together to improve education and learning opportunities.
- Think about the effects of racism, and other barriers to quality education/adult learning, and what we can do about them.
- Develop plans for action and decide where to start.
- Work on action ideas with others.
- Build on what is already working.

#### Each Small-Group Dialogue...

- Is a diverse group of 8 to 12 people.
- Meets together for several, two-hour sessions.
- Sets its own ground rules and helps the facilitator keep things on track.
- Is led by a facilitator who does not take sides. He or she is not there to teach the group about the issue.
- Starts with personal stories, then helps the group look at a problem from many points of view. Next, the group explores solutions. Finally, make plans for action and change.

## **Where Can This Lead?**

In our talks, we will be creating a vision for change. During the last session, our group will decide on some key actions. Groups will be able to share their ideas at a large “action forum.” Those who want to stay involved will work with others to carry out these ideas.

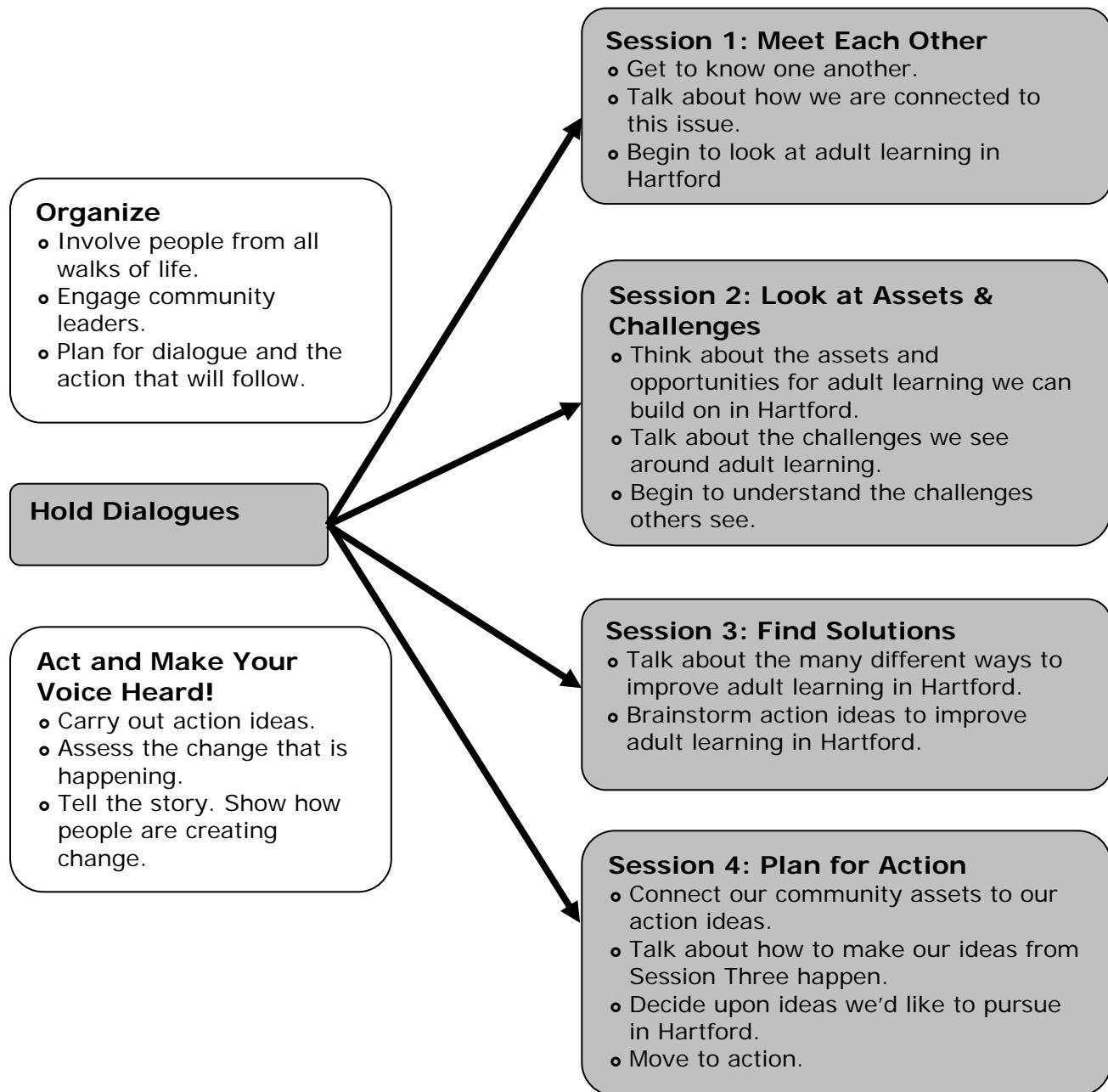
By taking part in this process, we can have a real impact on our neighbors, our families and ourselves. It will take all types of action and change to make the kind of difference we need.

We can focus on one or more kinds of change. For example, some of us might change our minds about what best meets our community’s adult learning needs. Others might work with community partners on specific issues related to adult learning.

Some may work on changes in public policy at the local, state, or national level. Some may try to change the way institutions work with immigrants, young adults, and families.

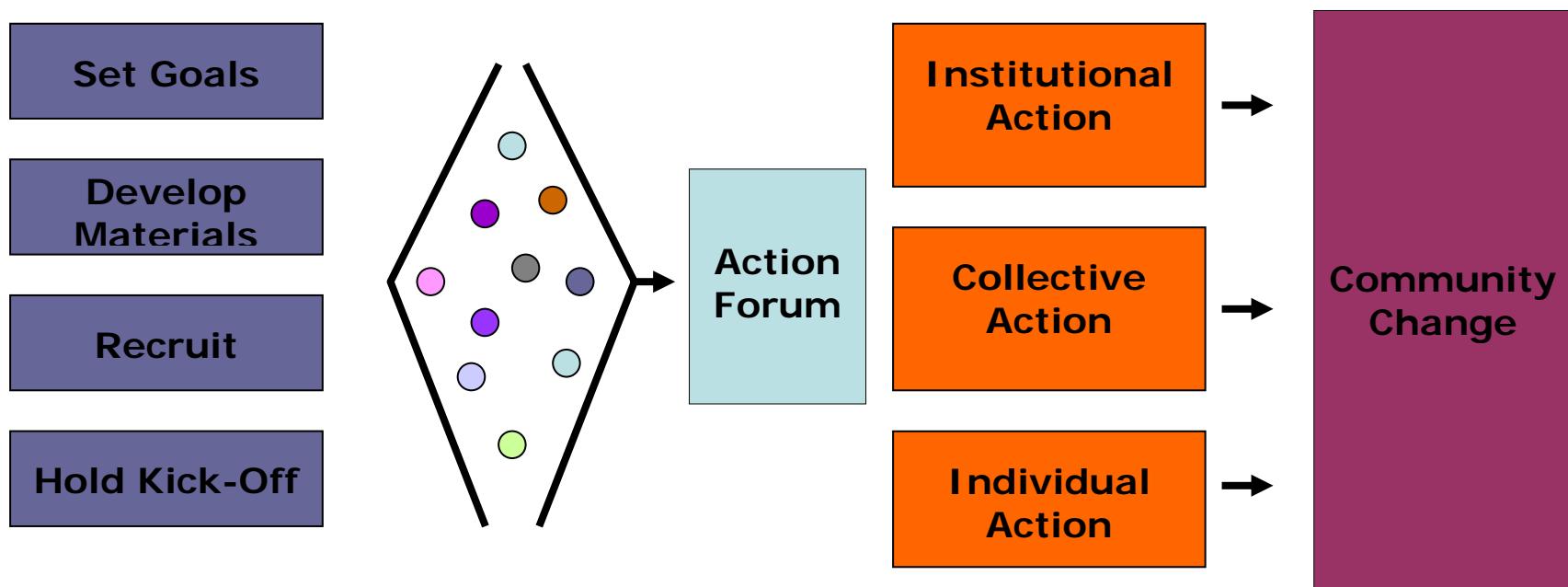


## OVERVIEW OF THE DIALOGUE-TO-CHANGE PROCESS



# Dialogue to Action & Change

## *Organizing Phase      Dialogue Phase      Action & Change Phase*





## SESSION 1

### *Getting to Know One Another, and Why We Care About Adult Learning*

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**This session will create an environment where people can:**

- Get to know one another.
- Talk about how we are connected to the issue of adult learning.
- Learn about the variety of experiences of people in our group.

#### **PART 1: Introduction and overview of process (*10 minutes*)**

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1. Give a summary of the introduction and an overview of the process.
2. Describe your role. (You are not here to be teachers, or to take sides. Your job is to help the group talk and work together so that every voice is heard.)
3. Most sessions take about two hours. If the group agrees, we can talk longer. There are many questions in each session. We do not have to cover every question.

#### **PART 2: Setting some guidelines for our discussion (*25 minutes*)**

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*Discuss the guidelines:*

- Do you agree with all of these guidelines?
- Do you feel uncomfortable with any of these guidelines?
- What would you add?
- Do you have any other questions?

#### **Discussion guidelines to consider**

- Listen to one another. Treat each other with respect.
- Each person gets a chance to talk.
- One person speaks at a time. Don't cut people off.
- Speak for yourself. But if you feel the need to speak for your group, let us know.
- It's OK to disagree. If you feel hurt or offended, say so and say why.
- Stick to the issue. No name-calling.
- If you talk about people who are not here, don't say their names.
- Some of what we talk about will be very personal. We will not tell these stories to other people unless we all say it is OK.
- Help the facilitator keep things on track.

### **PART 3: Making connections (60 minutes)**

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- Who are you? Introduce yourself to the group and say where you live.
- Why are you here? What made you decide to come?
- What do you hope this dialogue will lead to?
- What are your concerns about participating in this dialogue?
- How do you describe yourself racially, ethnically, or culturally? How does your background play out in your relationships with other residents of Hartford?
- When did you or your family come to Hartford? Why Hartford?
- What adult learning opportunities have you participated in? Are you in school? In college? In a training or adult education program of some kind? What are some other ways – other than in classrooms or formal educational programs – that you have learned about life and work?
- One definition of adult learning is: “Opportunities for adults to continue learning, in formal or informal, throughout their lives.” What does adult learning mean to you, and why is it important to you?

**Adult learning:** “Opportunities for adults to continue learning, in formal or informal settings, throughout their lives.”

### **PART 4: Closing (25 minutes)**

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- Was there anything about our discussion that especially appealed to you? Did anything surprise you?
- What common themes did you notice that kept occurring throughout our discussion?
- In the beginning you shared your hopes and concerns for the dialogue. What was this first session like for you?

#### **Facilitator tips in closing:**

- Collect phone numbers or email addresses to send reminders to participants about the next session.
- Thank people for coming and sharing.
- Remind people of the goal of the next session and encourage them to attend.

#### ***For the next session:***

Look ahead to the next session in the guide, and start thinking about some of the opportunities and challenges related to adult learning in Hartford.

## SESSION 2

### ***Adult Learning in Hartford – What are the Assets and Challenges?***

**This session will create an environment where people can:**

- Think about the assets and opportunities for adult learning we can build on in Hartford.
- Talk about the challenges we see around adult learning.
- Begin to understand the challenges others see.

#### **PART 1: Getting started (10 minutes)**

\*\*\*\*\*

1. Welcome everyone back, and review the goals for the session.
2. Review the ground rules with the group – are they still working? Are there any ground rules people would like to add or change?

#### **Facilitator tips**

##### **for PART 1:**

- If you think there are some important unresolved issues from the last session, consider opening the discussion to allow people to talk about them.
- As people offer new ideas for action, add them to the list of **Action Ideas**.

#### **PART 2: What adult learning assets do we have to build on in Hartford? (50 minutes)**

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We already have many adult learning assets in Hartford. But there may be gaps in opportunities as well. We will list and explore these assets in order to find these gaps.

##### **Asset 1 – Job training programs – and employers who value them**

There are a number of job training opportunities in Hartford. Some are operated by unions, government, nonprofit organizations, and others are operated by companies, and other kinds of organizations. Some of them focus specifically on a key skill, while others teach a range of basic job skills. Also essential is the demand for these skills – Hartford employers who hire graduates of these programs.

*Some examples:*

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Unions</li><li>• Capital Workforce Partners</li><li>• Northstar Center for Human Development</li></ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Military</li><li>• IBEST (at CREC)</li><li>• Vocational Training</li><li>• Department of Labor (CT Works)</li></ul> |
|--|---|

##### **Asset 2 – Adult education programs in literacy, financial literacy, English as a Second Language, and other key skills**

Without the basics, adults have a difficult time learning and coping in work and life. A number of programs help adults learn to read, manage their finances, learn English as a

second language, and gain other crucial skills. Some programs also help students get jobs by helping them produce résumés and understand how to do well in job interviews.

*Some examples:*

- ESL
- Urban League
- HART
- Co-Opportunity
- Our Piece of the Pie
- State Treasurer
- Hartford Public Library
- Catholic Charities
- Family Life Education

### **Asset 3 – Cultural backgrounds, job skills, and experiences brought by recent immigrants**

Recent immigrants bring significant learning assets when they arrive in Hartford. Many of them already have valuable job skills and experiences, having had a career in their home country. All immigrants bring a valuable asset in the form of their knowledge about other cultures and countries.

*Some examples:*

- University degrees
- Professional experience
- Cultural arts and music skills
- Business skills

### **Asset 4 – Informal networks and associations within ethnic and neighborhood groups**

Support networks are essential for helping people get the skills and connections they need to thrive. Many of these networks can be found within particular ethnic groups, as well as within recent immigrant communities, neighborhood associations, and social clubs. Some of them are formal associations, with regular meetings and official roles. Others are much more informal networks of people, often connected by family and neighborhood ties. There are also a number of key media outlets, such as newspapers, newsletters, and radio stations, that reach and inform particular segments of the community.

*Some examples:*

- Spanish American Merchants Association
- Community centers
- Soccer Clubs
- North End Agents
- Elks and VFW Clubs
- Caribbean Center for Education and Training

### **Asset 5 – Universities, community colleges, and other formal educational institutions**

Colleges and universities usually provide the most comprehensive opportunities for adult learning. Through alumni associations, which can be strong support networks, people help one another make connections and find jobs. Hartford has many institutions of higher education.

*Some examples:*

- Hartford Adult Education
- Capital Community College
- Capital Region Education Council
- University of Hartford

*Discussion questions:*

- Are there other assets we should add to this list?
- Think about each asset in turn – what are their strengths? What are the weaknesses that keep them from being fully effective?

### **PART 3: What challenges to adult learning do we face in Hartford? (50 minutes)**

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In addition to the assets, the system for adult learning in Hartford also has some challenges. Understanding them better can help us figure out what to do about them. Here are a number of views voiced by people in the community:

#### **View 1 – Many people just don't know about adult learning opportunities, or how they could be helpful**

For all kinds of reasons, many Hartford residents just don't know what adult learning programs have to offer. People who are recent immigrants, who haven't had a quality K-12 education, or who don't have good support networks are often not aware of the opportunities that exist. For people who don't speak English, language is another barrier. Others may not realize the extent to which education can enable them to realize their goals and aspirations.

#### **View 2 – There aren't enough slots available, especially for people who can't afford to pay**

Adult education programs in Hartford lack the capacity to meet the demand. Many people who are interested in training and education can't afford to pay for it, and there are not enough spaces available in free or low-cost programs.

#### **View 3 – There is not enough coordination and cooperation between different programs**

The 'system' of adult education in Hartford is made up of a piecemeal assortment of programs and activities. They are not driven by a common vision of what residents need to know and be able to do. Also, they don't necessarily train people for the jobs that actually exist in Hartford.

#### **View 4 – Stereotypes and divisions affect what opportunities are offered, and whether people want to take part**

Racism, as well as racial and gender stereotypes, play a big role in whether people are accepted for adult learning opportunities, and whether they are treated fairly within those opportunities. An unequal number of young people of color are advised to participate in adult education and job training programs rather than graduating from high school and going to college.

### **View 5 – Some Hartford employers aren't committed or connected to adult learning programs**

Some Hartford employers have a bias against hiring Hartford residents. Others either aren't committed to, or don't even know about, the various kinds of adult education and job training programs that are producing graduates they might hire.

### **View 6 – Adult education programs aren't welcoming – people don't feel like they belong**

Some adult education programs have a very traditional approach, where people sit in classrooms and listen to dry lectures. Students sometimes 'feel like numbers' rather than learners. For recent immigrants, the culture of adult education may feel even more foreign and unwelcoming. Older learners may feel uncomfortable participating in the same classes as young adults.

### **View 7 – Some people lack the attitudes necessary to take advantage of the opportunities**

Some residents simply don't have the discipline, work habits, and positive attitudes required to get the most out of adult learning. In the cultures of some recent immigrant groups, education is valued only as an activity for children, not for adults.

### **View 8 – Lack of transportation, child care, and other barriers prevent people from participating**

Even when adult learning opportunities are offered free of charge, people often can't participate because they lack transportation, child care, or other essential kinds of support.

*Discussion questions:*

- Which views are closest to your own? Why?
- Which views seem most important?
- Is there a viewpoint that's missing?
- Think about a view you don't agree with. Why might someone hold that view? Try to come up with reasons to support that view.

### **PART 4: Closing (10 minutes)**

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- Did anything surprise you about our discussion?
- What themes kept occurring throughout this discussion?
- Did any action ideas emerge during the discussion?

### ***For the Next Session***

Look ahead to the next session in the guide, and start thinking about ways to improve adult learning in Hartford.

#### **Facilitator tips**

- Thank people for coming and sharing.
- Ask them how it is going – can they think of ways to improve the discussion?
- Explain what your group will talk about next time.

## SESSION 3

### *What Are the Most Promising Ways to Improve Adult Learning in Hartford?*

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**This session will create an environment where people can:**

- Talk about the many different ways to improve adult learning in Hartford.
- Brainstorm action ideas to improve adult learning in Hartford.

#### **PART 1: Getting started (10 minutes)**

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1. Welcome everyone back, and review the goals for the session.
2. Reviews the ground rules with the group – are they still working? Are there any groundrules people would like to add or change?

#### **Facilitator tips**

- This session has two parts. Use the amount of time suggested for each as a guide. You don't have to cover every question in the session. Choose the ones that you think will work best for your group.
- Post the notes from other sessions where everyone can see them.
- Ask the recorder to list major themes from this session on large sheets of paper so everyone can see them. (Please see note-taking tips on page 37.)
- Save the notes so that you can refer to them in later sessions.

#### **Collect ideas for action**

- As people come up with ideas about how to increase opportunities for education and training, ask the recorder to add them to the list of **Action Ideas**. Group members may also mention things that the community is already doing to increase opportunities for education and training. List these under **Things We Are Already Doing**. Remind the group that they will use some of these notes when they talk about action ideas in Session 4.

## PART 2: How can we improve adult learning in Hartford? (50 minutes)

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The following list of approaches describes some ways to increase educational and adult learning opportunities in Hartford. They are intended to spark discussion.

*Use these questions to talk about these approaches:*

- Which approaches appeal to you and why? What doubts do you have? Concerns?
- What is already going on in our community that reflects these approaches?
- How would this approach help us address opportunities for adult learning in our community?
- Is there anything missing?

### **Approach 1 – Create more coordination between different adult learning opportunities, and between educators and employers**

We can maximize the resources available for adult learning by making sure that the different programs and activities build on one another. For example, people who participate in one program should be told about other opportunities. Meanwhile, educators and employers should work together more closely to make sure that the adult education programs are producing graduates with the right skills – and that companies will seriously consider hiring those graduates.

#### **Facilitator tips for PART 2:**

- Consider having volunteers read each approach out loud.
- The approaches help people look at the big picture, but they may also inspire people to suggest specific action ideas. Record new action ideas on the **Action Ideas** and **Things We Are Already Doing** sheets.

### **Approach 2 – Address policies and practices that determine access to adult learning opportunities based on stereotypes**

We should work with organizations that provide adult learning opportunities to make sure that the race, ethnicity, and gender of applicants are not determinates of needed adult learning opportunities. We should work to expose policies and practices of discrimination and racism and those that rely on stereotypes and biases, and come up with ways to eliminate inequitable outcomes for all applicants.

### **Approach 3 – Work more intensively with informal and formal networks within neighborhoods, ethnic groups, and recent immigrant communities**

Grassroots networks based on family, cultural, or ethnic ties can be extremely effective for supporting adult learners and helping them succeed in work and life. Administrators in charge of adult learning programs should work more closely with these associations, communities, and clubs to ensure that adult education opportunities are welcoming, well-known, and culturally appropriate for all kinds of people.

#### **Approach 4 – Make it easier for people who already have job skills to get accreditation**

Because many recent immigrants have had some sort of career in their home country, they may already have the skills and experience they need to be successful here. We should put a stronger emphasis on getting people the accreditation or licensing they need to use their skills.

#### **Approach 5 – Build the political will to achieve substantive changes, such as higher levels of funding**

By mobilizing people to advocate for adult learning, we can help convince decision-makers and other residents to value adult education and provide the necessary resources to make the system work. We should reach out to the people who may have the most at stake, especially recent immigrants and people with lower levels of income and education, and ensure that they have a seat at the table.

#### **Approach 6 – Overcome fundamental barriers such as lack of transportation and child care**

By meeting people's needs for transportation, child care, and other kinds of support, we can help them take advantage of adult education opportunities. In addition to establishing new supports and services, we can make it easier to find out about ones that already exist.

### **PART 3: Brainstorming action ideas (*50 minutes*)**

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Let's think about some of our ideas for action.

- What are some of the action ideas that have already come up in the sessions?
- What other kinds of action ideas seem exciting to you?
- Think about things that you can do on your own, with other small groups of people, as a community, or even with government.

#### **Facilitator tips for PART 3**

- Consider breaking into groups of 2-3 to help brainstorm more action ideas.
- Record all action ideas on newsprint. Use the speakers' words.
- Tell the group that they will decide which ideas are the best, during the next session.

## **PART 4: Closing (10 minutes)**

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- Are there ideas that you want to find out more about in preparation for the next session?
- Are there any other tasks or topics you think the group should cover in the next (last) session?

### ***For the Next Session:***

Think about these ideas. Look to see if some of these action ideas are already happening in Hartford or other places.

#### **Facilitator Tips In Closing**

- Thank people for coming and sharing.
- Remind your group that it is very important for everyone to attend every session.
- Briefly explain the goals of the next session.

## SESSION 4

### ***Moving to Action***

**This session will create an environment where people can:**

- Connect our community assets to our action ideas.
- Talk about how to make our ideas from Session Three happen.
- Decide upon ideas we'd like to pursue in Hartford.
- Move to action.

#### **PART 1: Narrow down the action ideas (35 minutes)**

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Narrow down action ideas. Discuss these questions to narrow down your list to 5-6 ideas.

- What five or six ideas seem most real and useful?
- Which ideas address the issues we really care about?
- Who would work with us on these ideas? Are they things we can really get done? Would they have long-term impact?
- Have these ideas worked before? What other communities are trying them?

#### **Facilitator tips for PART 1:**

- Some groups may get bogged down here. They may get stuck thinking about big change projects instead of things that can be done within the community.
- Remind people to focus on things they can do. This includes things they might do alone or with groups of people.

#### **Quadrant exercise - Optional (25 minutes)**

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1. On a flip chart or blackboard, draw a horizontal line and a vertical line, resulting in a cross with 4 quadrants (see the example on page 27).
2. Label the quadrants for prioritizing:
  - a. Feasibility: Label the top 2 quadrants above the horizontal line "Easy". Label the bottom 2 quadrants below the horizontal line "Hard."
  - b. Importance: Label the left-hand quadrant "Low" and the right-hand quadrant "High."
3. Refer to the list of action ideas, and ask the group to assign the easiest and the hardest ideas to the appropriate quadrant.
4. Suggest aiming for the easier to do/high priority action ideas first, since early, small successes motivate people to take the next, harder step.

## **PART 2: What are the assets we can build on? (25 minutes)**

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Look back at the notes from Session 2. Then look at the narrowed-down list of action ideas. What were some of the assets we listed that might help the action ideas we've prioritized?

What about some of our personal assets:

- What are some things you know a lot about?
- What groups do you belong to? How can they help?
- What other assets do we have — like land, buildings, space, tools, or even money?

Assets can be things or people. They are the things that people have, or things that people use to help themselves and each other. For example, you can use your car to drive someone who needs a ride, or to visit a sick person.

Some communities have a culture of taking care of one another. This is an asset, too. Assets can be handed down in families or from group to group.

## **PART 3: Working on one idea in particular - Optional (30 minutes)**

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Decide upon one or two ideas the group is excited about.

- What would it take to make this happen?
- What institutions, organizations, or government body do we need "buy-in" from to make this work?
- What would next steps be?
- What kind of support do we need to take these steps? Who else could we link up with?

## **PART 4: Getting ready for the action forum (15 minutes)**

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When the dialogues end, we will all meet at the action forum. We will share our ideas and sign up for action groups. We may want to write a report for public officials, leaders, the media, and others.

Have the group look at the sheet titled **A Sample Action Forum Agenda**. Explain what will go on at this meeting.

Have the group choose someone to speak for your group at the action forum.

## **PART 5: Wrapping up (15 minutes)**

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Thank you for taking part in this dialogue. You are making a difference in the community.  
Please discuss these questions:

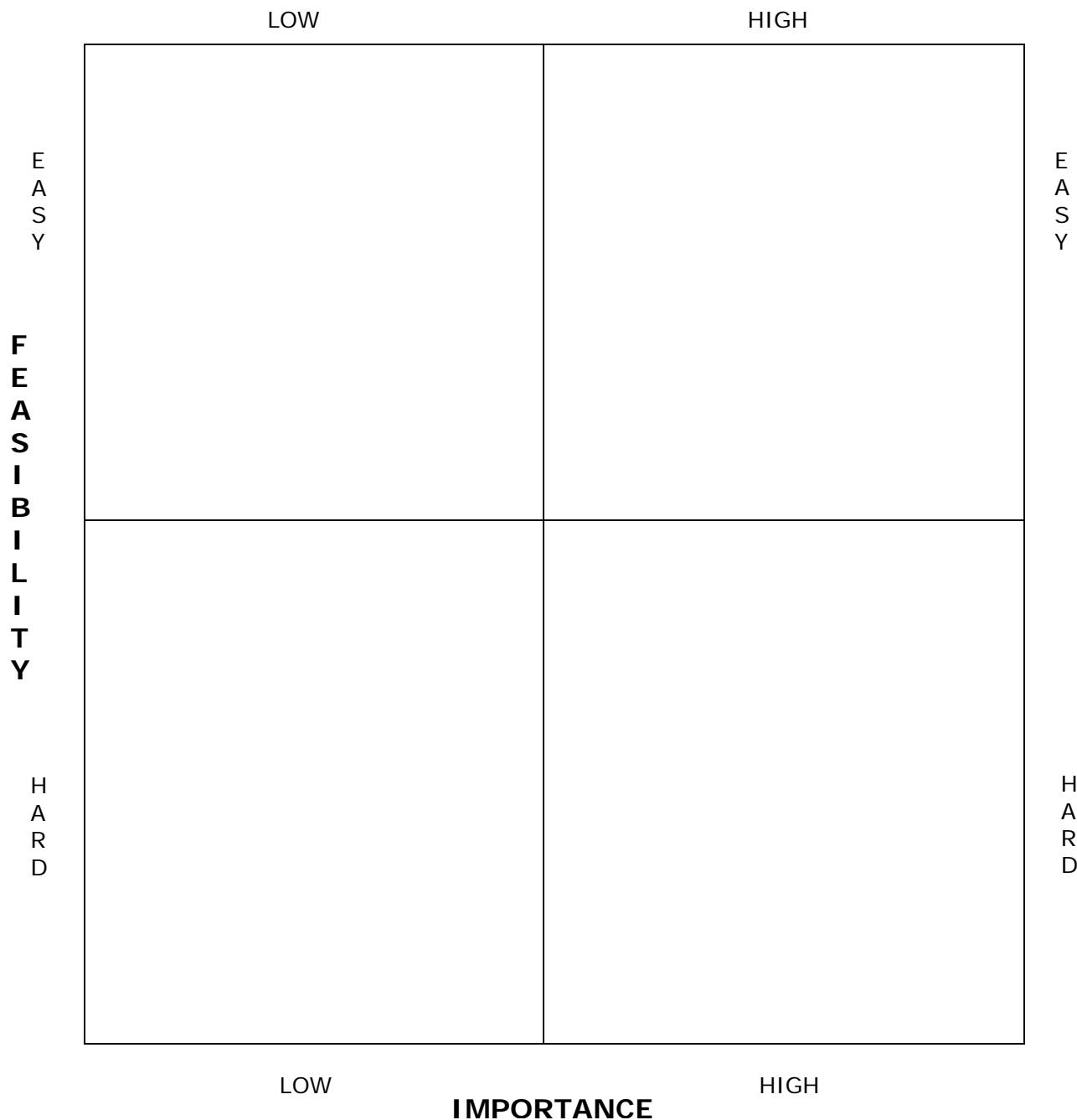
- What has surprised you?
- Has your thinking changed about these issues? If so, how?
- Is there anything you will do differently because of this dialogue?
- Do you feel more connected to different members in your community?

**Facilitator tips:**

- Thank people for coming to the dialogue and for working to make a difference in the community.
- Ask if anyone has questions about the action forum.
- If the date has been set, tell your group where and when the action forum will take place. Let them know how important it is for them to come!

***Thank you for working to improve adult learning in Hartford!***

## Prioritizing Action Ideas Participant Worksheet



## THE ACTION FORUM

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An action forum is a large meeting that takes place after all the dialogues are finished. Some action forums are open to the public; others include only those who were in the dialogue.

At this event, people pool their ideas, pick a few of the best ones, and make plans for action. Action teams form to move these ideas forward. There will be many ways for people to stay involved.

When programs last a long time, more and more people take many kinds of action. To learn more about moving to action, please visit Everyday Democracy's website at [www.everyday-democracy.org](http://www.everyday-democracy.org).

### A Sample Action Forum Agenda (Approximately 3 hours)

1. Snacks, social time, music or poetry, and time to read action ideas from each circle.  
(Post action lists from each circle where everyone can see them.)
2. Welcome and thanks
  - Review agenda.
  - Talk about the dialogue-to-change program.
  - Thank facilitators and other key people.
3. Reports from the dialogues
  - Ask one person from each dialogue to make a brief report about the group's action ideas.
  - Or, when the group is large (more than 60 people), post summaries from the dialogues for all to see. Invite people from a few dialogues to report out.
4. Overview of community assets
  - A person from the organizing group reviews key assets. These assets will help the community move action ideas forward.
5. Moving to action
  - The MC (Master of Ceremonies) states the main ideas from all the dialogues.
  - People sign up for an action team or task force.
  - Action teams meet and begin their work. They also set the date for their next meeting.
6. Closing remarks
  - Closing remarks (including how our efforts will be tracked and tied to the program in the future).
  - Next steps (including plans for another round of dialogues, celebration, or check-in meeting).
  - Thanks to all.

## TIPS FOR FACILITATORS

A facilitator does not need to be an expert on the topic being discussed. But you should prepare very carefully for the discussion. This means:

- Understand the goals of the dialogue.
- Be familiar with the subject.
- Before each session, spend time thinking about how it might go.
- Prepare questions to help the group explore the subject.

If you are well prepared, you can give your full attention to how the group is acting and interacting. And you can really listen to what each person is saying.

Here are a few more tips:

### **Stay neutral!**

The most important thing to remember is that the facilitator must not share personal views and stories. You must not push your own agenda! Your job is to help the group members have a rich conversation.

- Help people feel welcome and relaxed.
- Invite everyone to join the conversation.
- Well-timed humor is usually appreciated.

### **Explain the purpose of the dialogue and help the group set guidelines.**

The purpose of this dialogue is to talk about the well-being of the children in our community.

Start by reviewing the guidelines listed in Session 1. Then, invite participants to add their own ideas.

### **Help the group do its work.**

- Remember, your main job is to keep the group focused on the subject.
- Consider splitting up into smaller groups. This will give people more chances to talk.
- Enter the discussion only when necessary.
- Don't allow the group to turn to you for the answers.
- Resist the urge to speak after each comment or answer every question. Let participants respond directly to each other.
- Once in a while, ask participants to sum up important points.
- People sometimes need time to think before they respond. Don't be afraid of silence! Try counting silently to ten before you rephrase the question. This will give people time to collect their thoughts.
- Try to involve everyone; don't let anyone take over the conversation. Keep track of who has spoken, and who hasn't.
- Remember that a dialogue is not a debate. If participants forget this, ask the group to help enforce the discussion guidelines.
- Keep careful track of time!

### **Help the group look at different points of view.**

- This discussion guide presents a wide range of views. Look at the pros and cons of each viewpoint. Or, ask participants to consider a point of view that hasn't come up in the discussion.
- Ask participants to think about their own values and how they affect their opinions.
- Don't allow the group to get stuck on a personal experience or story.
- Help participants see the things they have in common.

### **Ask open-ended questions.**

- Open-ended questions can't be answered with a quick "yes" or "no." They push people to think about their beliefs. Open-ended questions also encourage people to look for connections between different ideas.

### **General questions**

- What seems to be the key point here?
- Do you agree with that? Why?
- What do other people think of this idea?
- What would be a strong case against what you just said?
- What experiences have you had with this?
- Help us understand the reasons behind your opinion.
- What do you think is really going on here? Why is that important?
- How might others see this issue?
- Do you think others in the group see this the way you do? Why?
- How does this make you feel?

### **Questions to use when there is disagreement**

- What do you think s/he is saying?
- What bothers you most about this?
- What is at the heart of the disagreement?
- How does this make you feel?
- What experiences or beliefs might lead a reasonable person to support that point of view?
- What do you think is really important to people who hold that opinion?
- What is blocking the discussion?
- What don't you agree with?
- What do you find most convincing about that point of view?
- What is it about that viewpoint that upsets you?
- Please say more about what you think.
- What makes this so hard?
- What have we missed that we need to talk about?

### **Questions to use when people are feeling discouraged**

- How does that make you feel?
- What gives you hope?
- Can the problems that you are talking about be solved in any way? How?

### **Closing questions**

- What are the key points of agreement and disagreement in today's session?
- What have you heard today that has made you think, or has touched you in some way?

**Close with a summary of the discussion. Allow time for evaluation, and set the stage for the next meeting.**

- Give participants a chance to talk about the most important thing they got out of the discussion and to share their new ideas.
- If you will be meeting again, remind the group of the readings and subject for the next session.
- At the end of the final session, allow time to fill out evaluation sheets. This gives participants a chance to comment on the process and give feedback to the facilitator.

## **WORKING WITH CULTURAL DIFFERENCES**

It's important for the facilitator to be familiar with a range of cultures. Effective facilitators are sensitive to and comfortable with cultural differences. If you have not spent time with people from different backgrounds, get involved in a community activity that helps you understand cross-cultural dynamics.

### **Helping multicultural groups function well**

- Ask participants to bring something to the circle that helps others learn about their culture.
- Ask people to tell the story of their name.
- Pay attention to cross-cultural dynamics in the group.
- Think about how your own culture and communication style is affecting the conversation. You may need to ask questions in a different way.
- Set a tone of unity. Help people see their similarities as well as their differences.
- Help people understand that there is no one "right way" to communicate.
- Talk together about different communication styles—like body language and personal space, and traditions of listening and speaking out.
- Avoid stereotyping. Cultural norms don't apply to all the individuals within a culture.
- Try to build empathy and understanding among group members, but remind them that no one can know exactly how it feels to be in someone else's shoes.
- Encourage group members to talk only about their own experiences and cultures. (No one can represent his or her entire culture.)
- Encourage people to think about times in their own lives when they have been treated unfairly or have experienced being "the other."
- Show respect for people who tell how they have been mistreated. Be careful not make light of the experiences. ("I can't believe that happened!")
- After a couple of sessions, ask participants how culture affects the way they feel about the exercises and ideas that come up in the discussion. After the group decides on action steps they can take, talk about the role of culture and race in developing and carrying out the actions.

## **Be aware of the ways that cultural differences show up when people from different cultures interact<sup>1</sup>**

### ***Communication styles***

- **Verbal communication**
  - There are differences in meaning (even in the same language) from one culture to another. For example: Shouting may mean a person is excited, not angry.
- **Non-verbal communication**
  - Facial expressions and body language vary from culture to culture; so does personal space and touching. (Seating arrangements matter!)
- **Expressing opinions and emotion**
  - Direct vs. indirect communication: In some cultures, people are encouraged to say what they think and “get to the point.”
  - In other cultures, it makes people uncomfortable to answer questions directly.
  - In some cultures, people are encouraged to be open and “honest” about expressing their emotions.
  - In other cultures, people may keep their feelings to themselves. Expressing great joy, sorrow, or anger may be considered inappropriate.

### ***Other cultural differences***

- **Attitudes toward conflict**
  - In some cultures, people deal with conflict directly and are encouraged to “speak up.”
  - In other cultures, face-to-face conflict is embarrassing or inappropriate, and people prefer to work things out quietly or behind the scenes (perhaps in writing or through a third party).
- **Approaches to completing tasks**
  - In some cultures, more value is placed on getting to work, first, and building relationships along the way.
  - Other cultures start by building relationships; then, people are ready to work together to complete the task.
- **Decision-making styles**
  - In some cultures, managers delegate responsibility for decision making to an assistant.
  - In some cultures, people value being able to make decisions themselves.
  - Sometimes, group decisions are made by majority rule.
  - Sometimes, groups make decisions by consensus.

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<sup>1</sup> Adapted from an essay, “Working on Common Cross-Cultural Communication Challenges,” by Marcelle E. DuPraw and Marya Axner in Toward a More Perfect Union in An Age of Diversity (Topsfield Foundation and Marci Reaven, 1997).

- **Approaches to “knowing”**
  - People in some cultures learn by measuring, and counting—quantifying things.
  - In other cultures, “knowing” comes from experience and intuitive reasoning.
- **Approaches to authority**
  - In some cultures, it is OK to question authority, as long as it’s done respectfully.
  - In other cultures, people in authority are not to be questioned or challenged, and it’s important to follow protocol and show proper respect.
- **Independence and Interdependence**
  - Some cultures value independence and individuality. People are encouraged to speak and stand up for themselves.
  - In other cultures, interdependence and group harmony come first. The needs of the group come before individual needs.

### **Working with Groups Where Literacy is a Concern**

- Begin with a simple explanation of how the dialogue will work, and tell participants the goal of each session. (Each time you meet, restate the goal of the session.)
- Limit your use of the flip chart.
- Assign someone to help participants fill out forms.
- Be prepared to read aloud to the group instead of asking participants to read.
- Make sure everyone understands. Once in a while, ask participants to sum up or review the conversation.
- Avoid using jargon or acronyms. When people look puzzled, ask: “What does that mean?”
- In between sessions, check with participants to make sure they know that what they say is very important to the group.
- Give people extra time to collect their thoughts before they talk. Remember, this may be the first time they have spoken in public, and/or in a different language.
- Consider putting people in small groups, but don’t separate people by language groups. (You may need more than one interpreter per dialogue.)

### **Working with Interpreters**

- Remind volunteer interpreters not to add their own opinions.
- Give interpreters written materials ahead of time, and go over the process with them.
- Make sure the interpreter feels comfortable letting the facilitator know if s/he needs more time.
- Speak in short sentences and keep ideas simple. (This gives the interpreter time to catch up.)
- Pay attention to the interpreter. Even if you don’t speak the language, you can probably tell if s/he is translating everything, or not.
- At the beginning of each session, ask the interpreters to review the guidelines.
- After every session, ask interpreters to translate notes that were posted on newsprint.

## NOTE-TAKING TIPS

Every small group dialogue needs someone to take notes. This person's job is to listen carefully, keep track of the big ideas that come up in the dialogue, and list them, in categories, on large sheets of paper so everyone can see them.

- If there are two facilitators for your group, they can take turns recording.
- If a volunteer takes notes, make sure it is not the same person each session. (The recorder is too busy to take part in the discussion.)
- Caution: People should talk to each other, not to the recorder.

### Note taking serves many purposes

- It helps group members stay on track and move the discussion along.
- It provides a way to capture the wisdom and common themes that develop in the discussion.
- Notes from all the dialogues in your program can be turned into a report that summarizes what you have done.

### How to do it

- Capture big ideas and themes, not every word.
- Try to use the same words as the speaker.
- Check with the group to make sure your notes are correct.
- Some groups organize their records this way:
  - Areas where we agree
  - Areas where we disagree
  - Areas that are mixed
  - Action ideas
  - Things we are already doing
- Write neatly so everyone can read the notes.
- Save the notes so that you can refer to them in later sessions.
- After each session, share the notes with the program organizers so they can follow your progress.