

**LaGuardia Community College**  
**Study Circles Community Program**

**Religion and Public Life**

**Facilitator's Guide for Public Dialogue and Problem Solving**

Note to facilitators: we have tried to edit this guide so that facilitator tips are easily identifiable – they are noted in parentheses. There are also some suggestions for the content of newsprint – in boxes. Remember that the probes and questions are for guidance purposes only – you do not need to use them and you certainly do not need to use them all.

We would still appreciate feedback on this guide, since we are hoping, long term, to publish it. Please contact Rosemary Talmadge in the President's Office of LaGuardia Community College or send an email to Nancy Thomas at [democracy.project@aol.com](mailto:democracy.project@aol.com). Thanks!

A brief note on the optional exercises: in Session Two, there is the option of dividing the room in half and asking participants to move around based on their answers to questions (the Where Do We Stand exercise) *or* reviewing with participants specific viewpoints for them to discuss. Please consider whether the room for the conversations is large enough to do the first exercise. You may be able to move to a larger room for the 60 minutes you need for that part of Session Two.

## Session One

Note to facilitators: In this session, you will need:

- ❑ Newsprint and easels (optional), markers and tape
- ❑ Name tents or badges
- ❑ Paper for note taking

Before the session, you should:

- ❑ Write out the agenda on newsprint and post it in a visible place in the room

### Agenda for Session One

Welcome and Brief Introductions  
Overview of the Study Circles Process  
Explanation of Goals for Session One  
Icebreaker  
Establish Ground Rules  
Discussion  
Debrief and Adjourn

- ❑ Write out the goals for the four sessions

(These are shorter versions of the goal statements)

This is a typical Study Circles progression:

#### Goals for Session One

To get to know each other better  
To establish ground rules for our conversations  
To share our personal histories and perspectives

#### Goals for Session Two

To explore the nature and scope of the issues  
To explore and start to resolve any language or terminology concerns

#### Goals for Session Three

To discuss the local and national communities and to measure them against a vision for the ideal local and national communities

#### Goals for Session Four

To discuss action, particularly what others can do, what we as a group can do, and what each of us as individuals can do

- ❑ Have ready a short statement on study circles in general

The Study Circles Resource Center is the primary project of the Paul J. Aicher Foundation, a national, nonpartisan, nonprofit organization that helps communities and groups develop their own capacity to solve problems by bringing together people in dialogue across divides of race, income, age, faith, and political viewpoints. Study Circles works with neighborhoods, cities and towns, regions, and states. For more information, see [www.studycircles.org](http://www.studycircles.org).

- Have ready a short statement on the LaGuardia CC project.

**LaGuardia's Difficult Dialogues on Religious Diversity project is designed to:**

- 1) help faculty staff, students and members of the community learn more about our religiously diverse community
- 2) strengthen our ability to discuss and explore religious differences on campus and in the community
- 3) identify actions we can take to make the College, our community and the nation a place where people of all faith perspectives and beliefs are welcome and respected

**I. Welcome and review session goals and context (20 minutes)**

- a. Circle around and briefly name names (explain that we will spend more time getting to know each other in a bit)
- b. Give a brief explanation of Study Circles and a study circles process, using an outline/flipchart that review the goals of the four sessions
- c. **Goals for Session One: Personal stories and experiences often shape our expectations, ideas, beliefs, choices, and behavior. In this session, we will get to know each other a bit better and will share perspectives on religion in your community, be it your family community, your neighborhood, and even the nation and globe. This session lays the foundation for the rest of our sessions. It will set the tone for open, thoughtful discussion. Our goals are:**
  - To get to know each other better
  - To establish ground rules for our conversations
  - To share our personal histories and perspectives
- d. Review the agenda with the group

(Facilitator Tip: Be sure to tell the group that there will be no official breaks – participants should get up and stretch when needed.)

**e. Review facilitator(s) role**

Facilitators do not participate in the conversation. They keep it going. They help the group establish ground rules. They help the group consider many perspectives. They help the group talk productively and respectfully. They do not solve *all* group problems – the hope is that you as participants will do that for the most part. Many groups start out by directing the conversation to the facilitators – that's pretty natural – but within a very short time, the hope is that you will talk to each other, not to the facilitator(s).

## II. Icebreaker: (10 minutes)

Put the group in concentric circles (a circle inside of a circle) facing each other in pairs. Explain that the facilitators will ask a question and each partner will answer for 30 seconds and then switch. After each question, the outside circle moves to the left.

### Questions:

- How long have you lived in the area? Why did you choose it?
- What is the origin of your first or last name or something special about your name?
- What is one of your favorite hobbies or pastimes? Why?
- Why are you here? What do you hope to learn from this process?

### Report Out:

- Did you learn anything in this short conversation that you found particularly interesting?
- You talked to each other about what you hope to learn from this process. What did you say to each other?
- Why does this subject matter to you personally?

## III. Ground Rules (10-15 minutes)

Ask, has anyone had any experience with ground rules?

Briefly explain what ground rules are and why we use them: We need to agree on how we might make the conversation easier and how to encourage trust and honesty. The group needs to agree on a set of ground rules before we move forward. These can be changed each session, as needed.

Brainstorm OR list ground rules

(Facilitator Tip) Be sure to give clear instructions on brainstorming. Brainstorming is an exercise where the group takes a few minutes to generate as many ideas as possible. It is a way to help the group come up with lots of ideas. Instruct them to be creative. All ideas are OK. Don't discuss or defend ideas at this time. Do build others' ideas. Don't "wait your turn." Just offer an idea.

### Sample Ground Rules

Listen

Treat each other with respect

Seek first to understand, and then be understood

One person speaks at a time, share the air

Speak for yourself, not others

If you feel offended, say "ouch" and explain why

Be honest: it's ok to disagree

Turn off cell phones

Be on time

Commit to all sessions

Respect confidentiality: What is said here, stays here, unless the group decides otherwise

#### IV. Discussion (60 minutes)

(Facilitator Tip) A word on language: As you move through these and other questions, you might want to maintain a list on newsprint or on your own paper of words that might cause misunderstanding or need a definition or explanation. They may include: religion, faith, spirituality, fundamentalism, evangelicals, public sphere, First Amendment protections, secular, sectarian, agnostic, atheist, non-denominational... Keep a running list of these and other terms that are used. You may need the list for a “homework” assignment (optional) at the close.

Some probes:

- Did you grow up with a particular religion, faith, belief, or value system that guided the way you lived? Can you tell us about it?
- All/most of you just discussed your childhood experiences. Can you give an example of how those experiences affect your beliefs or choices today?
- What is your earliest memory that people practice different religions or no religion?
- What do you wish people knew about your spiritual life?
- How have your personal beliefs evolved and what caused them to change?
- What do you have or value about your religion or spiritual traditions or choices that you want other people to know?
- What stereotypes or expressions of religious prejudice have you heard from family members, friends, co-workers, and others? Please give examples.
- Have you ever been the victim of religious prejudice or witnessed religious prejudice?
- How do these issues affect you personally?
- Let’s talk about fear. Are there things about the choices people make regarding religion, faith, and spirituality that make you fearful?

#### V. Wrap-up

- What have you heard or learned today that surprised you?
- (Optional for large groups) Turn to your neighbor and discuss the following:
  - What did you hear that you related to?
  - What things do you disagree with?
  - What themes keep coming up in the discussions?
  - Report out
- (Plus/Delta exercise) What worked well today? What would you like to see done differently?

**VI. For next time**

We will be discussing the scope of the issues and working to get an understanding of what is at stake. Please take some time to consider between now and then what your primary concerns are and what are the most important ones for us to discuss.

**(Optional) Assignment:** Review the list of terms and ask, are there anymore that you can anticipate coming up in our conversations?

Take the list of terms home. Think about them. Jot down your own definition or, if you are so inclined, the dictionary definition. Come next time prepared to create a quick glossary of terms so that when we use a particular term, we understand its meaning.

**THANK YOU!**

## Session Two

Note to facilitators: For this session, you will need:

- ❑ Easels (optional), paper, and markers
- ❑ Newsprint/wall hangings from the first session
- ❑ Wide masking tape
- ❑ The glossary from the first session (if applicable), with definitions
- ❑ Extra name tents or tags

### I. Welcome, Check In, and Session Goals (10-15 minutes)

(Facilitator Tip) Make sure everyone has visible name tent or tag

- Circle around and ask people to say their names again
- Check-in
  - Any reflections on our last session?
  - Has anyone experienced or read anything in the past week/two weeks that is relevant to our conversations?
  - Do we need to edit the ground rules?

#### ○ Review Goals:

Our goal for today is to get a better understanding of what is happening regarding religion and public life? What is at stake? Is there a problem and, if so, what is it? Our challenge is to narrow the issues and then to dive in and talk about them. We will not be talking about social changes that might be needed or our vision for the “ideal” religiously pluralistic world – that will be in the last two sessions. For today, our task is to get a sense of the breadth and depth of the issues.

### II. Definitions (10 minutes) – (if applicable)

Ask the group to take another look at the glossary.

- Does anyone have any questions?
- Does anyone want to propose a different definition for anything?
- Are there terms that might cause people to feel excluded or offended?
- Can we agree that, when there are problems caused by the choice of terms, that we will stop, talk about it, and find another term that works?
- Can we agree that, if someone misuses a term (for example, “Evangelical” and “fundamental” and “orthodox”) that we will gently point that out?

(Facilitators Tip) The point is that language matters, and it can also stop conversations before they even start. We don’t want that to happen here.

(Facilitators Tip) From here, you as facilitator have two options. You can do the *Where Do You Stand* exercise OR you can skip it and discuss the *Viewpoints* below. Both choices should take about 60 minutes. You should be familiar with the *Viewpoints* even if you choose the first exercise. In deciding which choice to make, consider whether everyone in the group is physically mobile and your physical space restrictions.

### III. “Where Do You Stand?” Exercise (60 minutes)

The goal of this exercise is to help participants see the complexity of the topic. It is also designed to help the group identify and group themes so that the rest of the conversation will be more manageable.

Explain this exercise to the participants, including goals and process. Tell them that they will discuss some of their choices as the exercise goes along.

Tape a line down the middle of the room. Post a sign on one end of the room that reads, “strongly agree” and another that reads, “strongly disagree.”

Read the statements below one at a time. Tell the participants to move to a space on the floor that reflects their level of agreement or disagreement to the statement. Those who “strongly agree” should move nearest to that sign. Participants may also stand somewhere in the middle. The centerline signifies complete neutrality or complete uncertainty.

Once participants have selected a position, ask everyone to pause and look around and observe where others are standing. Invite some discussion after each statement. Ask people at opposite ends to discuss their choices. Bring people in the middle into the discussion.

Refer to the posted definitions as needed.

#### Statements:

- I know a lot about two or more of the world religions, their tenets, principles, and foundations.
- I know a lot about my own faith or practices, their tenets, principles, and foundations.
- I talk about religion, faith, and spirituality with a high level of comfort.
- Most of my close friends are people who share my beliefs or faith perspective.
- I am uncomfortable with people who doubt the existence of God.
- I am often in a minority because of my beliefs or religion.
- You can develop moral values even if you are not part of a faith community.
- I feel that people make assumptions about me because of my religious or spiritual beliefs or choices.
- Religion has been the cause of much hatred and violence in the world.
- We have to keep religion out of the government and public life – politicians, judges, teachers, and others who have a public role need to “check their religious beliefs at the door.”

#### Debrief

- What did you think as you moved around in response to these questions?
- Did anything surprise?
- Were there themes that became apparent as you moved around? (record on flip chart paper)
- What issues emerged that we need to discuss in more detail?
- Think back to the earlier discussion: what themes have emerged so far?

#### IV. Viewpoints Discussion (60 minutes)

(Facilitator Tip) You won't have time to do both Where Do We Stand, with discussion, and the Viewpoints below.

(Facilitator Tip) Keep a parking lot so that people to encourage people to talk about one theme at a time.

(Facilitator Tip) Ask for volunteers to read each Viewpoint out loud to the group.

Take a look at these Viewpoints. These are just perspectives for discussion. Consider which come closest to your own thinking and where you may not agree. Is there a view point missing?

##### Viewpoint 1: Lack of Knowledge or Understanding

Most American's don't know enough about religion. We lack information about our own faith or beliefs, much less the faiths and beliefs of others. Our schools have dropped religion from the curriculum and are not preparing students to live in communities with a lot of religious diversity. We cannot rely on world religions or the faith communities to teach comparative religion or to educate for interfaith understanding. The media show religion in negative stereotypes of extremists. We need to strengthen our capacity to understand religious difference and better prepare students to live and work in a religiously diverse world.

Some probes to consider:

- Do you agree that Americans do not know enough about religion?
- What are some reasons for limited knowledge or understanding?
- Is interfaith understanding the responsibility of parents, schools, or faith-based organizations?

##### Viewpoint 2: Growing Intolerance

Americans are increasingly less tolerant of the religious views of others. There has been a rise in anti-Semitic, anti-Muslim, and anti-Arab sentiment in this country, and a backlash against Christians and Jews in other parts of the world. Some religious leaders in this country as well actively promote religious intolerance. Some of our political leaders exploit religion for political ends. Intolerance is increasingly aimed at people who are not affiliated with a faith community, the suggestion being that they lack morals.

Some probes to consider:

- Do you agree that Americans are growing less tolerant, and that it is a problem that is not limited to the United States?
- How important is tolerance? Is tolerance enough, or should the standard be something different?
- Whose job is it to "teach tolerance?"
- How do you teach tolerance without chilling free speech or discounting personal views?
- Are all religious views acceptable?

### Viewpoint 3: Religion in Politics and Public Life

One of the basic principles in American democracy has been that people can practice their faith without government interference *and* that the government will not privilege one religion over another. Some believe that politicians should set aside their religious views and that religion has no place as a foundation for laws and public policy. They worry that the basic principle of “separation of church and state” is weakening. Others believe it is unrealistic to require politicians to ignore their faith, and they welcome more faith-based morality in government. They feel that the nation became less moral as it became more secular. Both sides continue to disagree over whether displays and activities supporting a particular faith should be allowed in public property such as schools, courthouses, and town squares.

Some probes to consider:

- Does free speech include free religious speech in government?
- Do you feel that society increasingly lacks morality and that faith-based values are better foundations for American public policy decisions?
- Should politicians consider religious perspectives when making laws about gay marriage, abortion, and stem cell research?
- Is the decision to make Christmas a national holiday appropriate?
- Is there a difference between a politician expressing his or her personal values and expressing his or her faith-based values?
- Is it the government’s job to regulate morality?

### Viewpoint 4: We just don’t know how to talk about it

We don’t have enough experience talking with others about their religious beliefs or moral values. The American standard, “Don’t talk about religion” is still part of the prevailing culture. Public discussions are increasingly uncivil and polarized, and disagreement and dissent are ignored or, worse, viewed as “unpatriotic.” We need to learn how to talk to each other in ways that are civil, candid, respectful, productive, and open to new perspectives. We need to learn how to listen and understand each other. We need to agree on ways to treat each other, despite our religious differences.

Some probes to consider:

- Will candid and respectful talk make a difference?
- Is the problem religion or a decline in basic manners and civility?
- How do we respond to someone who suggests that he or she is simply too “enlightened” to take religion and faith seriously?

### Viewpoint 5: Religion is a source of violence and oppression; religion is a source of comfort and social change for the better.

Many believe that religion is a destructive force in American life. People engage in unspeakable acts – war, terrorism, murder, ethnic cleansing, and violent oppression of women – in the name of religion. People have been persecuted and discriminated against for thousands of years for their religious beliefs, despite nondiscrimination laws and interventions. World religions are not doing enough to stop the violence

done in the name of religion. Others believe that faith and spirituality are critical to a good life and a harmonious and just society. They point to the social value of American religions, and the spiritual dimension to important social changes such as civil rights. They believe that a nation of citizens who are strong in their faith, any faith, are more civic minded, responsible, caring, and inclined to do “good” for their communities and society.

Some probes to consider:

- Do you believe that, overall, religion is a positive or negative force in American public life?
- How do we bring out the best in religion, faith and spirituality?
- Who is responsible for stopping violence and oppression in the name of religion?

#### V. Wrap-up

- What have you heard or learned today that surprised you?
- (Plus/Delta exercise) What worked well today? What would you like to see done differently?

#### VI. For Next Time

We are going to consider approaches to change – what concerns us most and how that might change. As you think about this, consider what people are already doing to make some changes. Who is involved? What can the education community do? The faith-based community do? The government? Social services and nonprofit organizations?

We are also going to consider what an “ideal” world looks like, one where the issues we discussed today are no longer a concern.

**THANK YOU!**

## Session Three

Note to facilitators: For this session, you will need:

- ❑ Newsprint that reflects the themes discussed so far
- ❑ Markers, newsprint, easels (optional)
- ❑ A handout, “the report card” for every person (see below)
- ❑ Prepared pages on which to record the “grades” for the report cards
- ❑ A newsprint that has the “grades” written out and what they mean, A-F

### I. Welcome and check-in (10 minutes)

- Would anyone like to share their reflections on our last session?
- Has anyone experienced or read anything in the past week/two weeks that is relevant to our conversations?
- Do we need to change the ground rules?

### II. Today’s Goals

This session is about communities: our local community and the national and even global community. Today, we are going to discuss what is already “going on out there” and whether something needs to be done locally and nationally regarding the issues we discussed last time.

### III. Envisioning the ideal relationship between religion and public life (5 minutes)

We will start by imagining the ideal community, the ideal society, and the ideal relationship between religion and public life.

Consider the following phrase: “Ten years from now, I hope that my community will be \_\_\_\_\_ and the United States will be \_\_\_\_\_.”

(Facilitator Tip) People in all of the pilot groups handled this question without a prompt, but if someone in the group isn’t sure where to begin, you might offer one example from the list below:

- Tolerant
- Safe for all faiths
- Religiously diverse
- Knowledgeable
- A model for religious diversity
- Secular in its public spaces and work
- Able to govern from a faith-based perspective

Some probes:

- What words did you select? Why? (Record lists in two columns on flip chart. One for “community vision” and “one national vision”)
- How do you feel about the terms others selected?

We could go ahead and make a statement about this, but instead, can we agree that these list include the basic elements of our group vision?

#### IV. Report Cards (60 minutes) – Pass out one at a time.

We are now going to discuss the kinds of things that might be needed in order for us to achieve this vision of the ideal community and nation. Let's start with our community. Here is a "report card" for our community. Please assign a letter grade to each category, A, B, C, D, and F ("A" meaning "Perfect!" and "F" meaning "We are making no progress and things are pretty bad.").

**Climate:** In our community, there are no tensions based on religious beliefs, faith perspective, or spirituality... \_\_\_\_\_(grade).

**Interpersonal relationships:** In our community, people generally know how to solve problems and engage in conversations, even when they disagree strongly with each other ... \_\_\_\_\_(grade).

**Education:** In our community, students learn about different religions in school ... \_\_\_\_\_(grade).

**The faith-based leaders:** In our community, the faith-based leaders are good role models in terms of teaching tolerance and working together to teach children and make our community better... \_\_\_\_\_(grade).

**Family:** In our community, families are doing a good job of teaching children to be tolerant, curious about people different from themselves, respectful, and welcoming ... \_\_\_\_\_(grade).

**Social Services:** In our community, people of all faiths receive the support and services they need without religiously-based preferences ... \_\_\_\_\_(grade).

**Neighborhoods:** In our community, people can practice their faith freely and they have opportunities to mix with others of a different faith perspective ... \_\_\_\_\_(grade).

**Employment:** In our community, people of different faiths have equal opportunity for a good job, regardless of their faith perspective. ... \_\_\_\_\_(grade).

Some probes to consider:

- Look at the grades. Where do we agree? Where do we disagree?
- How did you decide what grade to give?
- Do you see any current successes?
- Are there one or two challenges you thing should be addressed immediately?

Now let's complete a similar report card for the national and even international community. Same instructions.

**Climate:** Our nation faces no tensions as a result of religious preferences at home and abroad... \_\_\_\_\_(grade).

**Interpersonal relationships:** Our politicians, civic leaders, and international partners experience no tension stemming from faith perspectives... \_\_\_\_\_ (grade).

**Faith-based policy making and initiatives:** The intersection between religion and public life is at an appropriate level right now. ... \_\_\_\_\_ (grade).

**The public square:** How we manage religion in public spaces (our schools, public parks, libraries, and other public gathering places) is ideal: ... \_\_\_\_\_(grade).

**Demographics of political leaders:** The demographic makeup of our national leaders is reflective of the religious diversity of the nation: ... \_\_\_\_\_(grade).

**International affairs:** International relations are managed in ways that are appropriate given the religious diversity in the world. ... \_\_\_\_\_(grade).

**Policy Decisions:** Religion plays an appropriate role when it comes to public policy making ... \_\_\_\_\_(grade).

**Elections:** Religion plays the appropriate role during elections ... \_\_\_\_\_(grade).

**First Amendment protections:** The government is respectful of the First Amendment in that it does not advance a particular religion nor does it prevent any Americans from practicing their own faith. \_\_\_\_\_(grade).

**Federal Aid:** Citizens have equal access to social services, regardless of their faith ... \_\_\_\_\_(grade).

**Laws:** The anti-discrimination laws are fairly written and applied across faith perspectives ... \_\_\_\_\_(grade).

Some probes to consider:

- Look at the grades. Do we agree? Do we disagree?
- How did you decide what grade to give?
- Do you see any current successes?
- Are there one or two challenges you think should be addressed immediately?

#### V. Pulling it Together (20 minutes)

Where should we focus our energies? We've talked about how our community is doing and how we are doing nationally and internationally.

### Brainstorming Exercise

Where should we focus our energies?

Ask everyone to shout out ideas, keep it to about 2-3 minutes. Look for:

- Intergroup relations
- Interfaith leadership
- Stricter enforcement of “separation of church and state”
- Education
- Laws
- Self-motivation, self-improvement
- Neighborhood or small community efforts
- International relations

### Debrief

- Is there anything that we need to study or research before we can move on (look for volunteers to pursue things that need more attention)?
- Are there areas of agreement?
- Disagreement?
- What good things are already happening?
- What else will help us make progress, both locally and nationally?

#### VI. Wrap-up

- What have you heard or learned today that surprised you?
- (Plus/Delta exercise) What worked well today? What would you like to see done differently?

#### VII. For Next Time

Think about the study circle so far. What are the main issues? What, so far, are some ideas for making progress?

Think about what action should be taken. Consider:

- What can others (national political leaders, faith leaders, parents, schools) do?
- What can we, as a group, do?
- What can I, as an individual, do?

Here are some examples to get you started:

- Write a letter to the editor of the local paper
- Host an interfaith even or dialogue for the community
- Get to know someone from a different faith perspective
- Work with schools to update their policies and curriculum
- Work to pass a law about religious profiling
- Write to your political leaders at the time of presidential elections

**THANK YOU!**

## Session Four

### (Facilitator Preparation)

- ❑ Synthesize and post the themes and viewpoints from session two onto one or two pieces of newsprint
- ❑ Synthesize and post the visions and “report card” concerns from session three onto one or two pieces of newsprint
- ❑ Prepare several pieces of newsprint to say “Action Ideas” at the top. One should say “Action Ideas: Our Own” and one should say, “Action Ideas: With Groups,” and the third, “Action Ideas, With Government”
- ❑ Prepare newsprint entitled, “What We’ve Got Going for Us” at the top (e.g., people, places, organizations)
- ❑ Bring enough copies of the evaluation form

#### I. Welcome, check-in, and goals review

- Any reflections on our last session?
- Has anyone experienced or read anything in the past week/two weeks that is relevant to our conversations?
- Do we need to edit the ground rules?

### Today’s Goals

Talking about religion can be difficult. Just settling on some “safe” terminology or bringing up religious differences is a challenge. Talking through these issues in a study circle is a good step. Working together to make changes in the way we operate on a personal, community, national, and global level is even better. We are going to use this last session to talk about what we can do: what we as individuals can do, what we as a group can do, and what others can do.

Today’s goals are:

- To revisit the vision we set for our community and nation and to tweak it as needed
- To decide collectively on some action ideas

#### II. Action Ideas

##### (Option 1) Brainstorm

Your homework assignment was to consider action. Let’s take a few minutes to list your ideas. Remember, this is a brainstorm, so all ideas are OK. We won’t discuss or defend them just yet.

Be as specific as you can. Don’t restate last week’s conversation (e.g., change the curriculum in schools – instead say, “Form a committee to examine the curriculum in our local schools.”)

Facilitator should try to list the ideas on the appropriate sheet (our own, groups, government).

(Option 2) Small group exercise  
Divide into groups of two or three

Each group should look at the vision statement and the issues and report card themes

Discuss, “What steps should be taken to address these issues?” and “What needs to be done to achieve the vision we have created?”

Narrow your ideas to two or three for each category (individual, collective, others)

Report out

Note: there is NO limit to the “What can I as an individual do?” list

### III. Brainstorm Assets

Now we are going to brainstorm “what we’ve got going for us.” These can be people, places, organizations, or something else. We’ll use the same technique – shout out your ideas, no discussion at this point.

Every community has strengths and assets. There might be an amazing community organizer or a national leader in something or a committed population in general. It might be a physical space – a community center or a symbolic location. It might also be national – a leader in Congress on a particular issue or access to political structures.

Question: What makes this community a better place? What is already being done? Identify good things that are happening already.

### V. Setting Priorities (for the group and government ideas only)

Look at these lists. Are there any ideas that can be combined? (Ask, does anyone object to combining these two ideas?)

Review the lists from sessions two and three.

Take a minute to narrow these lists in your own mind to three choices.

Have them put dots or check marks next to their first three choices.

Can we eliminate those ideas that have no checks? (Ask, “Does anyone want to make a strong case for keeping this on the list?”)

Discussion:

- Which ideas best address the issues and concerns we have been discussing?
- Which ideas are likely to have a long-term impact?
- Which ideas are the most practical or “doable?”

If the list is still too long, then repeat the process with a different color marker or dots

Aim for TWO ideas on each list (individual, collective, others)

Discuss the ideas that have been generated. Ask who might be interested in following up on one or more of these ideas.

Discuss the concluding action forum on May 10<sup>th</sup> from 6:00 – 8:30 at LaGuardia. It is a chance to meet everyone who has been involved in the four week circles in the community on campus. Each group will be asked to share what it learned. Ask for volunteers to report out. (Someone is available to help them prepare their summary.)

#### VI. Conclusion

- Take a few minutes to reflect on these sessions – any thoughts, concerns, or frustrations?
- What have you heard in these sessions that made you stop and think?
- What parts of this study circle process did you find most valuable?
- Did the process over all meet your expectations?
- From the “I will...” list, are there things that someone else said that you too will probably do?
- 

[OPTIONAL: create an email group, create a mailing list, plan to meet again, hand out stamped envelopes addressed to the facilitators and ask participants to share their reflections on month from now]

#### EVALUATIONS

THANK YOU!