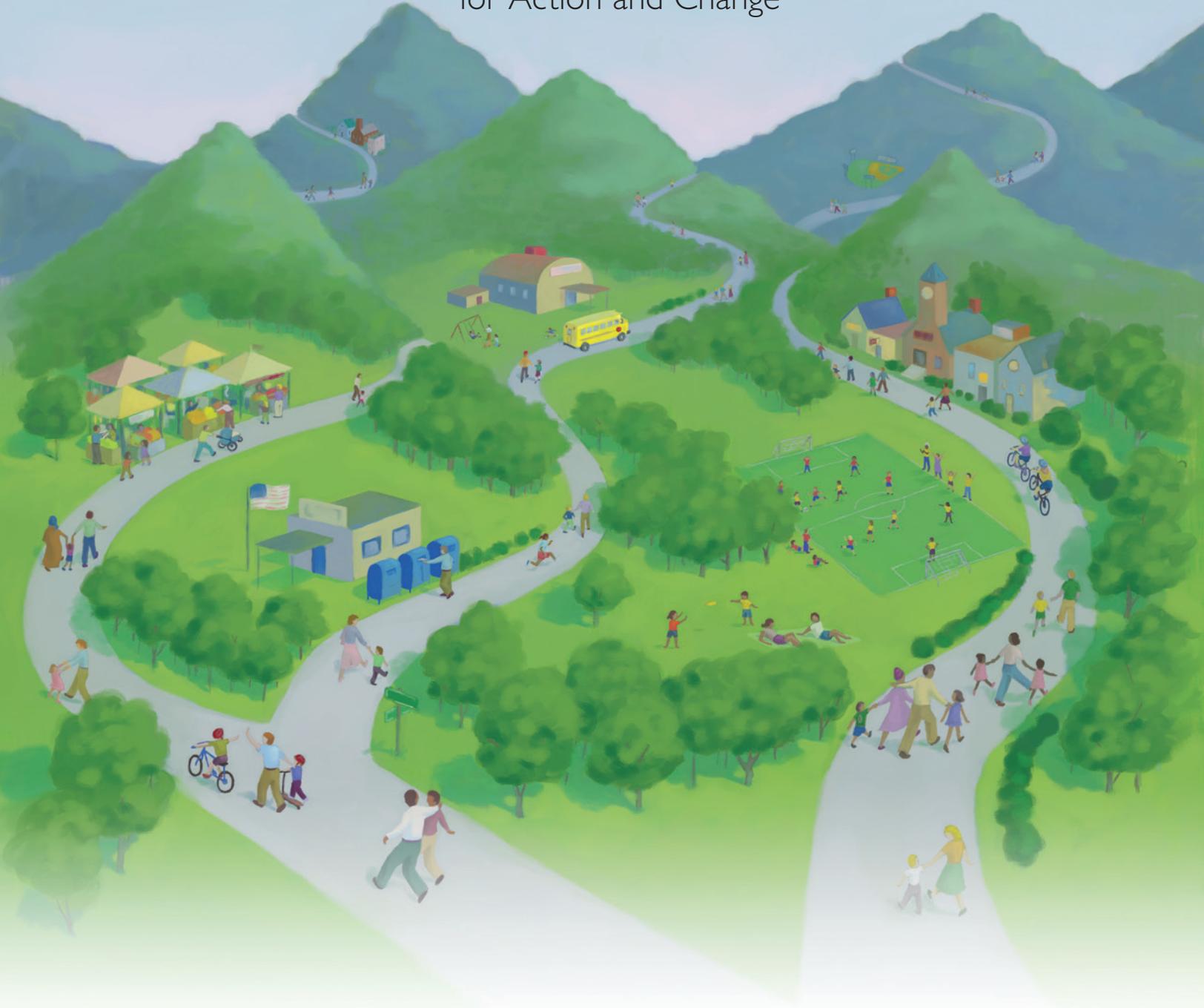


# BUILDING PROSPERITY FOR ALL

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A Regional Meeting  
for Action and Change



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A guide for public dialogue and action

## RESOURCES

### What is Included in This Handbook?

- Organizing Tips
- Regional Meeting Agenda
- Handouts and Resources

## RESOURCES

### Getting Our Help

If you have questions, we hope you will call us. We also hope you will let us know how you are using this guide in your community.

**Everyday Democracy:**  
1.860.928.2616 or [info@everyday-democracy.org](mailto:info@everyday-democracy.org).

## ABOUT THIS GUIDE

***Building Prosperity for All*** is for people in rural communities and small towns who are working to move from poverty to prosperity. This resource was designed to benefit communities that participated in dialogue-to-change programs using the guide, *Thriving Communities: Working Together to Move From Poverty to Prosperity for All*. However, no prior experience with *Thriving Communities* is necessary to get involved.

***Building Prosperity for All*** includes three guides that will help you:

- celebrate the progress you have made;
- talk about the challenges you are facing;
- learn what other communities are doing;
- and, work together to create plans to move to action.

**This guide, *A Regional Meeting for Action and Change***, is an agenda for communities that want to reach out to neighboring communities and regional or statewide groups to identify ways to work together to continue to make progress on moving from poverty to prosperity.

***Community Conversations for Action and Change: Organizer and Moderator Guide***, provides advice for organizing the conversations, and a guide for the event host and small-group dialogue facilitators to use throughout the discussion sessions. Download the guide.

***Community Conversations for Action and Change: Participant's Guide***, is a series of handouts for dialogue participants to use throughout the community conversations. Download the English or Spanish guide.

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## INTRODUCTION

We all want to live in communities where we have a chance to thrive. Every community has assets that can help people succeed. And all communities face challenges. People often mention poverty when they talk about what holds their community back. When some of us live in poverty, our whole community is affected.

In fact, the strength of our nation and the health of our democracy are tied to this idea: All people must have opportunities to create a better life for themselves, for their families, and for their communities.

When we come together to find ways to help our community thrive, we can also find ways to change the systems that create poverty and other inequities. This is hard work and it takes time, but we know of many places where changes are beginning to take place.

Four ideas are at the heart of the progress that is being made.

- *Everyone is entitled to a dignified life.*
- *Everyone in the community should have access to opportunities that can help them thrive.*

- *Everyone in the community should have a voice about how to create a better life for all. This includes people from all backgrounds, experiences, and education levels.*
- *People and organizations can make a real difference when they are united by a common goal to make the community work for everyone. They can help each other, and they can change long-standing systems (such as education and health care) that are intended to work well for all, but sometimes keep some people down.*

Over time, we can create positive, lasting changes by drawing on the **people, places, policies, and things** in our communities that make us strong. We can tap into the skills of all members of the community. We can make the most of our natural resources. We can turn to community institutions for support and, if necessary, we can change their policies and practices.

We hope this guide will help the people in your community find ways to work together to create a place where everyone can thrive.

### Thinking About Poverty and Prosperity

Concepts like poverty and prosperity can mean different things to different people. For some people, poverty means not having enough money. But there are other ways to define poverty:

- Not having a chance to find work.
- Not having a good education.
- Being cut off from your culture or faith community.
- Not having a strong network of friends and family.

Poverty can also mean that some people don't have a chance to thrive because policies have been put into place that keeps them from reaching their full potential.

Prosperity can also mean many different things. It can mean having a good job, a house, enough money to make ends meet, plus a little extra to set aside. Prosperity can mean living in a place with laws and policies that give everyone a fair chance to succeed. Prosperity can also mean having many friends or being in a position to give to others. It can mean having a strong cultural heritage, feeling content with your life, living in a beautiful landscape, or living in a place where people help each other.



## ORGANIZING TIPS FOR A REGIONAL MEETING

It takes careful planning to organize a gathering that effectively connects efforts in local communities with regional and state-wide initiatives.

The **MOST IMPORTANT** thing you can do is to **bring together a diverse group of people**. This is the key to creating a productive meeting. Find ways to involve all kinds of people. Invite people of different ages, backgrounds, and racial, ethnic, and cultural groups. Include people who look at the issue from different points of view. Schedule the meeting at a time and location that is as convenient as possible for everyone. Provide transportation and childcare, if needed.

*These tips will help you get started.*

### 1. Build a strong, diverse steering group to organize the meeting.

- Assemble a steering group that mirrors the kinds of people you will invite to participate in the meeting. A committed group of 10-to-12 people works best.
- Make sure steering group members include trusted leaders, key policymakers, and elected officials.
- Invite people who work at local, regional, and state levels.
- Include young people.

*The steering group will help plan the rest of the steps listed below.*

### 2. Take care of logistics.

- Choose a site that people from the whole region can get to easily. Community centers, senior centers, and libraries are places where many people feel at ease.
- Decide on a meeting time that works for all kinds of leaders in your community.
- Find ways to make participation as easy as possible. Consider providing childcare, refreshments, and transportation.
- Decide if you will ask people to sign up for the event, ahead of time.

### 3. Develop a communications plan.

- Develop a short, written statement that clearly communicates the purpose and details of the meeting.
- Make a list of regional and statewide organizations that are working on related issues. (Think about which organizations are the keys to a successful meeting.)
- Create a simple, attractive flier to get the word out. Be sure to include information about childcare, refreshments, and transportation.
- Start a Facebook page where you can post meeting details.
- Write a press release for regional and local papers.
- Make personal invitations (for example, an email, phone call, text message or in-person visit).

## RESOURCES

### For More Organizing Advice...

For detailed advice about how to organize a successful dialogue-to-change program, please see both *Organizing Rural & Reservation Communities for Dialogue and Change* or *Organizing Community Wide Dialogue for Action and Change*. You can download a free copy of these guides at [www.everyday-democracy.org](http://www.everyday-democracy.org), or call Everyday Democracy at 1.860.928.2616.



## RESOURCES

### For More About Training Facilitators...

For detailed training advice and agendas, call Everyday Democracy at 1.860.928.2616, or download a free copy of *A Guide for Training Public Dialogue Facilitators* at [www.everyday-democracy.org](http://www.everyday-democracy.org)

### Tips for Creating Diverse Groups

The outcomes will be better if participants are in diverse discussion groups. Diverse groups lead to more interesting dialogues, and better action ideas. Each small group should include men and women, people with different perspectives, people of different ages, and people from all of the area's racial, ethnic, and economic backgrounds.

- Make a timeline for communications tasks. Include dates for submitting press releases and newspaper or community calendar entries.
- Decide how you will follow up after the meeting. Will you collect contact information from participants so you can continue to keep them informed?

#### 4. Recruit panelists, a host, and facilitators.

*The Building Prosperity for All Regional Meeting* features both large- and small-group discussions, and a panel.

- Recruit an experienced person to serve as the host for the meeting. This individual should be good at leading a large group of people through a variety of activities. Look for someone who is a good listener and who likes to work with all kinds of people.
- Assemble a panel of four or five experts to provide information on current efforts to reduce poverty and build prosperity in the region. The panel should represent diverse interests and views. Panelists could include an elected official, a director of a nonprofit organization, a state employee, and a leader of a regional network of organizations.
- Recruit a diverse group of facilitators to help with small-group discussions. Facilitators should reflect the region's racial, ethnic, religious, political, and socio-economic diversity. Provide detailed instructions for the facilitators.

#### 5. Recruit participants.

- Reach out to people from all walks of life, income levels, ages, races and ethnicities, religions, political views, etc. Be sure to include people from all parts of the region. Inviting a diverse group of people is a way to demonstrate that this meeting is a genuine effort to give everyone a voice in decisions that affect them.
- Invite key policymakers and elected officials.
- Invite people from the business, nonprofit, and government sectors who are working on similar projects or have similar goals.
- If communities in your region participated in the *Thriving Communities* dialogues, invite the people who took part. And make sure that others know they are welcome.
- Use many methods to invite people. Follow up invitations with a phone call or face-to-face visit. Personal invitations are the most effective.

Invite key organizations and individuals to help with recruitment. Provide written information and your flier, and ask them to help recruit participants through their regular communication channels. These may include word of mouth, phone, email, website, an e-newsletter or events calendar, and social media.



## 6. Prepare for the meeting.

- Reach out to key leaders and people who care about the issue, before the meeting. Ask them to help you predict some likely outcomes. Are there opportunities for collaboration or action that will probably come up? Identify some community leaders who might be willing to lead an initiative after the meeting.
- Prepare a brief presentation on the nature of poverty and prosperity-building efforts in the region. Include current data and policy initiatives.
- Meet with the person who will host the regional meeting to review the agenda, discuss responsibilities, and answer questions.
- Consider assigning people to small groups, ahead of time, to ensure diversity in each group.
- Get in touch with facilitators before the meeting. Review the meeting agenda and facilitation tips. Make sure facilitators understand their role.
- Plan ahead for the setup of the room. Ideally, there should be circles of chairs, or round tables that each seat eight people.
- Check to see if the materials you will need are on hand (markers, name tags, handouts, easels and flip charts). And test the AV equipment to make sure it works.
- Provide a sign-in sheet to keep track of attendance and/or collect contact information.

### Panel Recommendations

Consider inviting panelists with expertise in the following issue areas:

- Housing
- Education
- Health
- Public transportation
- Criminal justice
- Youth
- Economic development
- Food security
- Regional or state policymaking

### The Roles of the Host and Facilitators

- The **host** is the person who leads the entire group through each session of the dialogue process, gives directions on how the sessions will take place, and lets people know when to break out into the small groups that will be led by facilitators. The host also keeps track of time and moderates any report-outs from the small groups. There is one host. The host is a lot like an emcee or master of ceremonies.
- A **facilitator** is the person who is responsible for guiding a small group through the activities and discussion questions in each session. The facilitator makes sure that everyone has a chance to participate. There are one or two facilitators for each small group.



## REGIONAL MEETING AGENDA (6 hours)

### Purpose

Increase the impact of local, regional, and statewide efforts to reduce poverty and build lasting prosperity.

### Goals

- Develop shared understanding of local, regional, and statewide efforts to reduce poverty and build lasting prosperity.
- Develop shared understanding of the ways that economic and racial inequities affect efforts to reduce poverty and achieve prosperity.
- Explore opportunities to connect efforts in local communities with regional and statewide initiatives.

## LARGE GROUP

### Welcome and Overview

(30 minutes total)

#### *Instructions for Large-group Host*

#### Opening Activity (10 minutes)

- If there are fewer than 20 participants, invite them to say their name, where they are from, and the name of their organization.
- If there are more than 20 participants, introduce different groups in the room. Ask people to stand or raise their hands if:
  - they are working in their community to reduce poverty or build prosperity;

- they are connected with a regional organization working to reduce poverty or build prosperity;
- they are connected with a statewide organization working on these issues;
- they are elected officials who are working on these issues.

#### Meeting Overview (5 minutes)

- Review meeting purpose and goals
- Review agenda

#### Agreements (5 minutes)

- Review agreements to help the group work well together:
  - Each person gets a chance to talk.
  - One person talks at a time. Don't cut people off.
  - Speak for yourself. We are all experts on our own life experience.
  - Assume best intentions when other people are speaking.
  - It's OK to disagree. If you feel hurt, say so and say why.
  - Listen harder when you disagree.
  - Stick to the issue. Challenge ideas, not people.
  - If you talk about people who are not here, don't say their names.



- Honor confidentiality. 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.

## SMALL GROUPS

### Opportunity Stories\*

(75 minutes total)

#### *Instructions for Small-group Facilitators*

### Beginning the Discussion

- Introductions (5 minutes)
  - Say your name, where you are from, and why you came today.
- Take a few minutes to think about the following questions. Then talk about them with the person sitting next to you. (30 minutes)
  - What in my life and my parents' lives opened up opportunities for me?
  - What in my life and my parents' lives has limited my opportunities?
  - How has this impacted me? How has it shaped the story of my life?
  - If my children have access to opportunities, how will that affect them? If they don't, what is likely to happen?
  - Invite pairs to share highlights with the small group.
- Continue the discussion using these questions: (30 minutes)
  - Are there other kinds of opportunity stories you didn't hear in this group? What might they be like?
  - How do people's racial, ethnic, or cultural background affect their opportunities?

### Setting the Context (10 minutes)

- Make a brief presentation about the issue
  - Provide a snapshot of data that describe:
    - where poverty is present
    - what groups are most affected by poverty (racial, ethnic, age, geography)
    - trends (where progress is being made and the nature of ongoing challenges)
- Introduce the next activity
  - There are lots of reasons why some people and communities experience poverty. One reason has to do with the kinds of opportunities people have. We will spend some time thinking about our own personal experience and how it has shaped our lives and our opportunities.
  - Why are opportunity stories important? When people connect to the stories of their families and their own lives, they can see how the ways in which our communities are built and governed have shaped their lives. Telling stories helps them talk about how the doors of opportunity have been opened or closed for them. They begin to understand how social structures, policies, and institutions can affect people of different racial/ethnic backgrounds and create inequities in our society. This understanding is a first step on the path to creating healthy communities.



- How does the gap in opportunity affect prosperity in communities?
- When you think of important community structures and organizations (in schools, health care, criminal justice, social services, the environment, jobs, etc.) what systems or policies might be contributing to gaps in opportunities?

\*Background and questions are adapted from ISAIAH and The Kirwan Institute for the Study of Race and Ethnicity. (2010) *Shining the Light: A Practical Guide to Co-Creating Healthy Communities*. Retrieved from <http://bit.ly/au3eRR>.

## LARGE GROUP

### Share Key Themes

(10 minutes total)

#### *Instructions for*

#### *Large-group Host*

- Invite several participants to share their thoughts about the opportunity stories.
  - What important ideas did you hear?

**Break** (15 minutes)

## SMALL GROUPS

### What are Communities Doing to Reduce Poverty and Build Prosperity?

(35 minutes total)

#### *Instructions for*

#### *Small-group Facilitators*

### Community Stories

- Invite people to briefly describe efforts in their own community to reduce poverty, build prosperity, and create opportunities for all.
  - What's going well?
  - What challenges are you noticing?
  - What projects have had the most impact?
  - Did the project reduce barriers to opportunity? Why, or why not?
  - Did everyone in the community benefit?
- Invite everyone to reflect on this discussion:
  - What stands out for you about these stories?
  - What common themes are you hearing?



## LARGE GROUP

### Identify Key Issues and Opportunities

(40 minutes total)

#### *Instructions for Large-group Host*

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- Invite each small group to report discussion highlights:
  - Briefly share examples of community projects.
  - What efforts have been most successful and why?
  - What are the key challenges communities are facing?
- Ask the group to identify key themes or issues that are emerging from the discussion.

#### *Meal Break (60 minutes total)*

## LARGE GROUP

### What is Happening in the Region and the State to Reduce Poverty and Build Prosperity?

(30 minutes total)

#### *Instructions for Large-group Host*

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#### Panel Discussion

- Briefly introduce each member of the panel and give panelists two minutes to share a brief description of their background and their organization's work.
- Questions for the panel:
  - What practices or programs seem to be working well?
  - What kinds of policy changes are needed to help the region continue to make progress on reducing poverty and building prosperity?
  - Earlier in this meeting, you heard about work that is happening in communities to reduce poverty and build prosperity. What stood out for you when you listened to these stories?
  - How does the work in communities connect with the work that your organization is doing?
  - What is one thing you hope will happen as a result of today's meeting?



## SMALL GROUPS

### What Can We Do Together?

(30 minutes total)

#### *Instructions for Small-group Facilitators*

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#### Explore Opportunities

- Invite people to begin with individual reflection.
  - Spend a few minutes writing down your thoughts about what you've heard and discussed today.
- Invite people to discuss the following questions:
  - What are some opportunities for our communities to work together?
  - What would we like our public officials to know about?
    - What questions do we have for them?
    - What concerns and hopes do we want to share?
  - What regional or state-level changes are required for us to continue to make progress?
    - What opportunities do you see for people at the local, regional and state level to work together?
  - Given all we've heard and discussed today, what seems especially important to keep in mind?
- Based on the discussion, make a list of next steps.

## LARGE GROUP

### Identify Next Steps

(30 minutes total)

#### *Instructions for Large-group Host*

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- Invite each small group to share its next steps.
- Based on the reports from the small groups, identify key themes or action ideas that are emerging across groups.
- Summarize the most important common themes for action, and invite people to sign up for an action group or task force.
- Ask volunteers to collect names and contact information and schedule the first meeting of each group.

## LARGE GROUP

### Closing

(15 minutes total)

#### *Instructions for Large-group Host*

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#### Closing Activity

- If there are fewer than 20 participants, invite them to say one word that describes their experience in this meeting.
- If there are more than 20 participants, invite them to turn to their neighbor and say one word that describes their experience. Invite several participants to share their word with the whole group.

#### Wrap-up

- Inform participants about plans to stay in touch.
- Remind participants to sign up for an action group or task force before leaving.
- Thank everyone for coming!



## APPENDIX A

### Participant Handout: Opportunity Stories\*

1. What in my life and my parents' lives opened up and created opportunities for me?

2. What in my life and my parents' lives has restricted opportunity for me?

3. How has this impacted me? How has it shaped the story of my life?

5. How does access to and restriction from opportunity impact my children's lives?

\*These questions are adapted from ISIAH and The Kirwan Institute for the Study of Race and Ethnicity. (2010) *Shining the Light: A Practical Guide to Co-Creating Healthy Communities*. Retrieved from: [http://4909e99d35cada63e7f757471b7243be73e53e14.gripelements.com/publications/shining\\_the\\_light\\_co-creating\\_healthy\\_communities\\_isaiah\\_kirwan\\_may2010.pdf](http://4909e99d35cada63e7f757471b7243be73e53e14.gripelements.com/publications/shining_the_light_co-creating_healthy_communities_isaiah_kirwan_may2010.pdf).



### Key Facilitation Skills

- Reflecting and Clarifying
- Summarizing
- Shifting Focus
- Asking Probing or Follow-Up Questions
- Managing Conflict
- Using Silence
- Using Non-Verbal Signals (Body Language)

The most important thing to remember is that the facilitator should not share personal views and stories, or try to push an agenda. The facilitator's job is to serve the group and help people have a productive conversation.

## APPENDIX B Facilitation Tips\*

**Reflecting and Clarifying**—feeding back or restating an idea or thought to make it clearer.

- “Let me see if I’m hearing you correctly....”
- “What I believe you are saying is....”

**Summarizing**—briefly stating the main thoughts.

- “It sounds to me as if we have been talking about a few major themes....”

**Shifting Focus**—moving from one speaker or topic to another.

- “Thank you, John. Do you have anything to add, Jane?”
- “We’ve been focusing on views 1 and 2. Does anyone have strong feelings about the other views?”

**Asking Probing or Follow-Up Questions**—using questions to help people explore disagreements, understand multiple perspectives, and uncover common ground.

- “What are the key points here?”
- “What would someone with a different point of view say?”

**Managing Conflict**—helping conflict and disagreement to be productive.

\*These tips are extracted from Chapter 5 of *A Guide for Training Public Dialogue Facilitators* produced by Everyday Democracy. Download a free copy of this guide at [www.everyday-democracy.org](http://www.everyday-democracy.org)

- “Let’s refer to our ground rules.”
- “What seems to be at the heart of this issue?”
- “What do others think?”

**Using Silence**—allowing time and space for reflection by pausing between comments.

**Using Non-Verbal Signals (Body Language)**—recognizing and understanding how people communicate without using words.

- “What signals am I sending with my body?”
- “What signals am I reading from others?”
- “How do I signal encouragement?”
- “How do I invite others to participate?”

### A Neutral Facilitator...

- Explains her/his role.
- Sets a relaxed and welcoming tone.
- Introduces him/herself, but does not share personal opinions or push an agenda.
- Does not take sides.
- Makes everyone feel that their opinions are valid and welcome.
- Does not use her/his personal experiences to make a point or to get people talking.
- Uses probing questions to deepen the discussion.

- Brings up issues that participants have not mentioned.
- Reminds participants of comments they shared in earlier sessions.

## Facilitating Viewpoints and Approaches

### How to Facilitate

- Write the topic sentence for all the views/ approaches on a flip chart, to use as a quick reference.
- Help people understand they are not choosing a “winner” but rather exploring a range of ideas.
- Give people time to look over the information.
- Ask participants to choose one view to discuss. They can agree or disagree with it.
- Ask for a volunteer to read the view or approach aloud.
- Touch on all of the views/approaches, and help people see the connections.
- Summarize the discussion by noting areas of agreement and disagreement.
- Help people think about how this issue plays out in their own lives and in their community.

### Helpful Questions

- Which views are closest to your own? Why?
- Think about a view you don’t agree with. Why would someone support that view?
- Which views conflict with each other?
- What views would you add?
- Which approaches appeal to you and why?
- What approaches would work best in our community? Which wouldn’t?
- How would this approach help us make progress?

### Helping the Group Do Its Work

- Keep track of who has spoken, and who hasn’t.
- Consider splitting up into smaller groups occasionally. This will help people feel more at ease.
- Enter the discussion only when necessary. When the conversation is going well, the facilitator isn’t saying much.
- 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.



Exploring different points of view about an issue is one of the hallmarks of this approach to dialogue. These viewpoints reflect some of the ways that different kinds of people think and talk about a public concern.

This method allows participants to deliberate about different ways to create change. Looking at different “approaches” helps people understand the complexity of an issue and the tradeoffs that are often necessary to make progress. As the group develops a sense of what might work in their situation, they are more likely to come up with action ideas and strategies that make sense.



### A **dialogue facilitator**

does not need to be an expert on the topic being discussed. But the facilitator should be well prepared for the discussion. This means the facilitator...

- Understands the goals of the community change effort.
- Is familiar with the discussion materials.
- Thinks ahead of time about how the discussion might go.
- Has questions in mind to help the group consider the subject.

- Try to involve everyone; don't let anyone take over the conversation.
- Remember that this is not a debate, with winners and losers. If participants forget this, don't hesitate to ask the group to help re-establish the discussion ground rules.
- Don't allow the group to get stuck on a personal experience or anecdote.
- Keep careful track of time.

### **Helping the Group Look at Different Points of View**

- Good discussion materials present 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 how their own values affect their opinions.
- Help participants see the things they have in common.

### **Asking Open-Ended Questions**

Open-ended questions can't be answered with a quick "yes" or "no." Open-ended questions can help people 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?
- Could you 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 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 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 position that you just cannot live with?
- Could you say more about what you think?
- What makes this topic hard?
- What have we missed that we need to talk about?

### **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?

### **Questions to Use When People are Feeling Discouraged**

- How does that make you feel?
- What gives you hope?
- How can we make progress on these problems? What haven't we considered yet?



## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

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You can view or download free copies of the following resources at [www.everyday-democracy.org](http://www.everyday-democracy.org).

- *Organizing Community-wide Dialogue for Action and Change*
- *A Guide for Training Public Dialogue Facilitators*
- *Organizing in Rural and Reservation Communities*

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## ABOUT EVERYDAY DEMOCRACY

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Created in 1989 by The Paul J. Aicher Foundation, Everyday Democracy has worked with more than 600 communities across the United States on many different public issues. 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.



Ideas & Tools for Community Change

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