Food for Health

Building a Healthy Food System for NYC

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Introduction

THE ISSUE

Meet Luna. On one of the hottest days in July 2010, Luna enjoyed a beautiful day with fresh air, open space, and the kind of discoveries reserved for three-year-olds. It was the first time she ever went to the beach and her only care in the world was whether the seagulls would steal her lunch. Luna lives on the edge of the Bedford-Stuyvesant neighborhood of Brooklyn, New York, the predominately African American/Black home to Spike Lee’s cinematic masterpiece, *Do the Right Thing*.

According to the NYC Department of Health and Mental Hygiene, Bedford-Stuyvesant is also home to particularly brutal economic and health disparities. Luna is 2.8 times more likely to experience a diabetes hospitalization and 2.3 times more likely to die from the disease than her cousins who live a few short miles away in the mostly white affluent community of Tribeca in Manhattan. Luna’s father, who grew up in the deeply impoverished East New York community of Brooklyn has already developed the disease. To boot, back home in Bedford-Stuyvesant, over 70% of Luna’s African American/black and Latino playground friends will be overweight or obese as adults. This puts them at greater risk of heart disease than children in more affluent areas.

Luna is not alone. The health gaps in Luna’s neighborhood are shared by several neighborhoods in New York City, deemed “food deserts” by the city planning commission and the Department of Health. They include the South Bronx, Northern Manhattan, and Central Brooklyn. That means it is hard to find healthy, fresh, affordable food within walking distance in these areas. Meanwhile, these areas are lined with unhealthy fast-food options.

THE TIME IS NOW!

In the U.S. the food and health gap is not a new problem. It dates back to the days of antebellum slavery. Yet, today, we stand at a possible turning point in the history of our city. At this moment New Yorkers have a unique opportunity; the Mayor’s Office of Long-term Sustainability is considering whether it will include food as a part of the city’s 25 year plan for sustainability (PlaNYC2030). Meanwhile, the City Council is working out a plan for a just and sustainable food system for New York City. Finally, Borough Presidents are setting agendas for what it will take to build a healthy food system for their residents. Now is the time to engage.

Many things cause food and health disparities:

- Personal food choices
- Lack of access to healthy food
- Poverty
- Historic and current day structural racism

People from different backgrounds or experiences often view these issues in different ways. Finding common ground for solutions is hard. Most of the time, people who see things differently don’t take the time to talk to each other, much less work together.
OUR PROCESS

Communities need to find answers and take action on many different levels. The dialogue-to-change process brings all kinds of people together to share different views and experiences. In the process, they begin to build stronger relationships and work together to find solutions. We believe this is necessary for long-term change to occur. The "Food, Faith, and Health Disparities Summit" is a key step among many that community members, faith leaders, advocates, and government representatives will take together as we build a healthy food system for all New Yorkers!

This guide is developed to address two key food-related health disparities facing New York City: diabetes and heart-disease. The second word in our summit’s title is "Faith". This is intentional. We believe the food and health gap affects individuals, families, and communities on multiple levels including the level of the spirit or soul. As such, we value the participation of people of all faiths (including those with no faith) and we welcome all to bring the whole of their experience into the dialogue.

WHAT IS A DIALOGUE-TO-CHANGE PROGRAM?

It's when people all over the city meet in dialogue circles—small, diverse groups—over the same period of time. All the dialogue circles work on the same issue, and seek solutions for the whole city. As a result, people from many backgrounds form new networks in order to work together. They see common ground and want to take action for themselves, in small groups, as voters, or as part of a larger effort.

A dialogue circle is a group of about 10 people from different backgrounds and viewpoints who meet over the course of several sessions to talk about an issue. In a dialogue circle, everyone has an equal voice, and people try to understand each others’ views. They do not have to agree with each other. The idea is to share concerns and look for ways to make things better.

A trained facilitator helps the group focus on different views and makes sure the discussion goes well. This person is not necessarily an expert on the issue.

DISCUSSION AGENDA – Saturday, October 30, 2010

8:30-9:00am Arrival and Check In / Continental Breakfast
9:00-9:15am Orientation
9:15-10:30am Session One: Who are We? What is our Vision for a Healthy Food System for NYC?
10:30-10:35am Break
10:35-12:00pm Session Two: What is at the Root of the Problem? Why is this a Problem in our City?
12:00-1:00pm Lunch Time Panel Discussion on Approaches to Change
1:00-1:15pm Break
1:15-2:45pm Session Three: Approaches to Building a Healthy Food System for All New Yorkers
2:45-3:00pm Break
3:00-4:30pm Session Four: Moving to Action. What Can We Do?
4:30-5:00pm Light Meal
5:00-6:30pm Action Forum
More than half of adult New Yorkers are overweight (34%) or obese (23%), and nearly half of all elementary school children (43%) and Head Start children (42%) in New York City are overweight or obese. (NYC DOHMH Epiquery, CHS 2009)

Between 1995 and 2005, the percentage of New Yorkers with adult onset diabetes doubled from 4% to 8%. As of 2009, approximately 10% of New Yorkers (or 559,000 New Yorkers) report having diabetes and more than 200,000 additional adult New Yorkers remain unaware that they have diabetes. (CDC, BRFSS 95-05; NYCDOHMH Epiquery, CHS 2009; NYCDOHMH, 2006)

31% of East Harlem adults are overweight and another 31% are obese, which is the highest proportion of obese adults among all neighborhoods in New York City. (2006, NYC DPHO)

In 2009, New York City’s emergency food providers (EFPs) such as soup kitchens and food pantries, reported a 20.8% increase in need for their services. 55% of surveyed agencies did not have enough food to meet their demand. (2009 NYC Coalition Against Hunger Annual Survey)

In 2009, West Queens had the highest percentage (30%) of uninsured individuals in New York City and the South Bronx had the highest percentage of individuals with Medicaid (30%). (NYCDOHMH Epiquery, CHS 2009)

Currently, 1.76 million New Yorkers rely on SNAP/food stamp benefits. (U.S. Census, 2009 American Community Survey) The average food stamp benefit is $3 per day. (Food Research and Action Center) A recent study published by the Archives of Pediatrics & Adolescent Medicine reports that half of U.S. kids will receive food stamps. (NYC Dept of Social Services Human Resources Administration, August 2010)

Diabetes disproportionately affects low-income people, ethnic minorities, and seniors. In 2009, Black, Latino, and Asian/Pacific Islanders in New York City report diabetes rates at 12%, 13%, and 10% respectively. The New York City average is 9% and the national average is 7%. White New Yorkers report diabetes rates at 7%. New Yorkers with the lowest incomes have diabetes rates twice as high (14%) as New Yorkers with the highest incomes (7%).

There are 11,600 food retailers in NYC: 550 are traditional grocery stores that carry healthy, affordable food. 10,000 are bodegas. 800 are pharmacies like Rite Aid and Walgreens. (UFCW Local 1500’s Building Blocks Project Research from the Dept. of Ag and Markets Food Retail lists.)

According to the American Journal of Preventive Medicine, the presence of a supermarket reduces the prevalence of overweight and obese residents. Only 8% of Black Americans live in a census tract with at least one supermarket; 31% of White Americans live in a census tract with a supermarket.
1.4 million New Yorkers live in homes that can’t afford enough food. Seven New York City Congressional Districts faced severe food hardships in 2008-2009, with more than 1 in 5 residents in each of those districts answering “yes” to the question: “Have there been times in the last month when you did not have enough money to buy the food that you or your family needed?”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>NYC Congress District</th>
<th>Congress Member</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>% Residents Food Hardship (answered “Yes”)</th>
<th>National food hardship rank (out of 436)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>16th</td>
<td>Serrano</td>
<td>South Bronx</td>
<td>39.9%</td>
<td>1</td>
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<tr>
<td>10th</td>
<td>Towns</td>
<td>Central Brooklyn</td>
<td>30.8%</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15th</td>
<td>Rangel</td>
<td>Northern Manhattan</td>
<td>24.1%</td>
<td>49</td>
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<tr>
<td>12th</td>
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<td>Brooklyn/Queens</td>
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<tr>
<td>7th</td>
<td>Crowley</td>
<td>Queens/Bronx</td>
<td>22.5%</td>
<td>75</td>
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<td>6th</td>
<td>Meeks</td>
<td>Queens</td>
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<td>114 (tied)</td>
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<td>17th</td>
<td>Engel</td>
<td>Bronx/Westchester</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>114 (tied)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
SESSION ONE

Who are we? What is our vision for a Healthy Food System for NYC?

Introduction (10 mins)

In this session, we will get to know one another, talk about what is important to us, and see how we want to work together.

Each person will answer these questions:
1. Who are you? Where were you born? Where did you grow up?
2. Where do you live?
3. Why did you come today?
4. What is your favorite food--healthy or unhealthy?

Part One: Setting ground rules (15 mins)

We need to create some ground rules to help our discussion work well. Here are some ideas. Are there rules you would like to add?

1. Listen to one another. Treat each other with respect.
2. Each person gets a chance to talk.
3. One person talks at a time. Don’t cut people off.
4. Speak for yourself. Don’t try to speak for "your group." Use "I" statements.
5. It’s OK to disagree.
6. Stick to the issue.
7. If you talk about people who are not here, don’t say their names.
8. Some of the things we talk about will be very personal. We will not tell these stories to other people, unless we all say it is OK. "What is said here, stays here."

Part Two: What is my connection to the issue? (40 mins)

1. What does a regular dinner plate look like for you? What can we see about your life by looking at your dinner plate?

2. How does your faith influence what you consume?

3. How have health disparities affected you, your family, and your community? Consider... faith, tradition, comfort, family, employment, energy level.
4. What is the food system\(^1\) like in your community? Where do you get food in your neighborhood?

5. How would your community benefit from a healthy food system? When you imagine your community as a healthy community, what do you see, hear, smell, feel? How does it affect children, families, play and work?

6. Ideally, what would a healthy food system look like in NYC? What words come to mind when you envision a healthy food system?

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**Wrap-Up (10 mins)**

- What did you learn in this session?
- What stories touched you or surprised you?
- What do you hope we can accomplish together?

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\(^1\) Diagram: from the city of Vancouver, Canada website: http://vancouver.ca/commsvcs/socialplanning/initiatives/foodpolicy/systems/just.htm.
What Is At The Root Of The Problem?

Introduction

In Session One, we talked about our personal connection to food, faith, and health. In this session, we will talk about what the food and health gaps look like in our city and neighborhoods. We will also discuss a range of views to help us explore the roots of the problem. This will help us develop action ideas in later sessions.

Part One: Getting Started (5 mins)

Review the ground rules.

- Do changes need to be made?

Our facilitator will review the notes from Session One and sum up the main ideas from that discussion. This will help us to be ready for our work today.

Discussion Questions on the Information Sheet (20 mins)

The “information sheet” (pages 5-6) provides information to help us understand what the food and health gaps look like in our city.

Use these questions to talk about the data:

- When you look at the information, what stands out? Why?
- Does anything surprise you? Why?
- What overall themes and trends do you see?
- Who is affected by the food and health gap?

Part Two: Exploring the Food and Health Gap in NYC (60 mins)

People have different ideas about the situation. One view cannot tell the whole story. We may agree with each other on some points, and disagree on others. That is OK.

Each view stated here is in the voice of a person who thinks it is a very important idea. As you read the views, think about these questions.

- Are these the kinds of things people are saying in our community?
- Which views come closest to your own way of thinking? Why?
- Is there a view you would like to add?
- Do some of these views surprise you?
- Is there anything that you don’t agree with?
Views

1. **People are making bad personal choices.**
   We are responsible for our own food choices. If we decide to eat unhealthy foods instead of healthy foods we are causing our own health problems.

2. **Certain neighborhoods are under-resourced with healthy food options or over-resourced with unhealthy options.**
   Not everyone has equal access to healthy and affordable food. In addition, in many cases people in under-resourced areas have more access to unhealthy foods. This results in unhealthy eating habits and diet-related diseases. They can't help it. The problem is structural and out of their control.

3. **Sometimes hunger and obesity are both results of poverty.**
   Poverty causes both hunger and obesity. Low income households often choose unhealthy foods because they are cheapest. Cheap foods help make ends meet. The problem is cheap foods tend to have more fat and less nutritional value. So, eating cheap unhealthy foods leads to obesity, but people's bodies are still hungry for real nutrients.

4. **There is a stigma around receiving help.**
   It's embarrassing to receive food stamps and other government help. The process of enrollment itself is demeaning and people look down on others who receive this kind of help. So, a lot of people reject the idea of seeking help altogether. Without help unhealthy foods become their best option because they are the most affordable.

5. **Historical racism and current day structural racism both play key roles in food and health disparity today.**
   Some people have faced centuries of racism: from being legally barred from purchasing land or growing their own food to lack of access to higher education, etc. They have been denied basic rights that lead to economic opportunity. As a result, these communities have been forced to live in underdeveloped neighborhoods with limited access to healthy food.

6. **People don’t know about the options they have. Government often fails to educate people about the food and health options available to them.**
   Government should do a better job advertising the benefits low-income people can receive, such as food stamps, cash assistance, insurance plans such as Healthy New York, etc. As a result, programs such as food stamps and cash assistance, as well as the free school breakfast program, are widely underutilized. Low-income people are missing out on programs that help them receive proper nutrition.

7. **Some people’s culture or tradition predisposes them to unhealthy food choices.**
   Some people just like their traditional foods too much to give them up. Traditional foods hold a lot more meaning than just a meal. They can mean family cohesion, tradition, cultural connection, etc. So, folks are choosing family and culture over health. Plus, those foods tend to be filled with fat, carbohydrates, sugar, and salt, which makes them taste amazing. Yet, those same ingredients make them a big cause of health disparities in our community.

8. **There are real obstacles to receiving help.**
   Many people who could qualify for food stamps—the elderly, especially those with Alzheimer’s Disease, the disabled, and those who are seriously ill—cannot physically “show up” for the fingerprinting required by New York State for food assistance applications. Developmentally disabled or mentally ill adults may not have the assistance nor the wherewithal needed to negotiate the system.
Wrap-Up (5 mins)

Turn to your neighbor. Discuss the following:

- How did this session go?
- What views do we agree about? What views do we not agree about?
- What themes keep coming up in our discussion?
SESSION THREE

Approaches to Building a Healthy Food System for All New Yorkers!

Introduction

In Session Two, we talked about why the food and health gap is a problem in our city. Now, we will talk about how we can start to close the gap. In the next session, we will talk about specific action ideas.

Part One: Getting Started (5 mins)

1. Please keep our Ground Rules in mind.
2. Brief sharing: thoughts on what we learned in the last session.

Part Two: Approaches to Change (60 mins)

We’ve talked about how our city is doing. Now, we will explore some ways to improve things. What approaches will work well? What will help us deal with the food and health gap? What can we accomplish within one year?

Use these questions to think about the different approaches:

1. Have we already tried any of these approaches? If so, what happened?
2. Which approaches do you like best? Why?
3. What other approaches can you think of?
4. Which approaches address the food and health gap in different types of institutions (government, businesses, schools, nonprofits, etc)?
5. What approaches might we be able to help move forward because they already have traction in NYC?
6. What approaches won’t work? Why?

Approaches

1. **Increase access to healthy affordable foods.**

   In order to eat healthier foods, that kind of food needs to be available in the communities where people live and shop and work. Too many New Yorkers live in food deserts, where healthy food is not available or costs too much. To fix the problem, New York needs to make healthy food like fruits, vegetables, and whole grain and low-fat dairy products more available in every community, well-off or poor. It also needs to make sure that all New Yorkers eligible for food benefits can actually get them.

   - More supermarkets in poor neighborhoods
o More subsidies for fruits and vegetables in the Federal Farm Bill; less for corn, soy and sugar
o Expansion of Food Stamps (SNAP) and lower barriers of enrollment
o Ensure that supermarkets have higher quality and fresher food

2. **Decrease promotion and access of unhealthy foods.**

In recent years, the availability of foods high in the fat, sugar, salt and calories that contribute to obesity, heart disease and diabetes has increased dramatically. Simply making healthy food more available will not lead to improvements in health if people are still eating a Big Mac every day or washing down their fruits and vegetables with a 32 ounce Coke. To make healthy choices easy choices, we need policies that will protect people from deceptive or manipulative food advertising, restrict the ability of the food industry to profit by promoting unhealthy products, and reduce the number of places that sell the foods that contribute to disease.

**Actions that someone who agrees with Approach 2 might support:**

- Restrictions on food advertising to children
- Zoning changes to limit density of fast food outlets in neighborhoods
- Taxes on unhealthy foods
- Restriction on use of public benefits to purchase unhealthy foods
- Rewarding use of public benefits to purchase healthy foods

3. **Focus on children.**

By preventing children from experiencing hunger, obesity or other food-related health problems, we invest in their future—and our own. Offering children healthier diets helps them to do better in school, establishes lifetime health habits and shows our responsibility for protecting the next generation. Because so many children spend time in school, schools are a good place to start offering children healthier food.

**Actions that someone who agrees with Approach 3 might support:**

- Better quality school food
- Free school breakfast and lunch for all
- School-based community gardens to grow their own fruits and vegetables
- Reinstate Home-economics class to teach healthy cooking in schools
- Protect children from unhealthy food advertising
- More and better nutrition education in schools
- Use more food from local farms in school food programs
- Empower parents with childhood nutrition education

4. **Educate people about the benefits of eating healthy food.**

Outreach and education can provide individuals with creative and engaging pathways toward healthy food choices. A food education system built by community groups and faith based organizations can provide the support and creative ideas many individuals need to maintain a commitment to lifestyle change. In addition, by making healthier food choices, communities can use their buying power to shift market demand toward healthier food options in their neighborhoods.
**Actions that someone who agrees with Approach 4 might support:**
- Cooking classes that incorporate healthy versions of traditional meals in faith communities and community centers
- Health education classes offered in faith communities and community centers
- Food and health media campaigns
- Increase the number of nutrition and diabetes advocates and educators in NYC

5. **Take personal responsibility to make healthy food choices for myself and my community.**

Ultimately, access, education, and affordability can only go so far toward changing our food system. Lifestyle changes and lifelong eating habits can only come from personal commitment. The road to a healthy food system for all New Yorkers starts with each of us. We can all take action to choose healthier food for ourselves and our families and to model healthier eating for our children. Plus, a healthy food system will empower individuals to become active stakeholders in food choices for their communities.

**Actions that someone who agrees with Approach 5 might support:**
- Eat a healthy balanced diet
- Exercise at least 20 minutes per day
- Take vending machines out of church buildings and offices
- Start a walking club
- Start a healthy cooking club

6. **Build alternative food system in my community.**

Conventional food access points may not be the best solutions for our community. Creative food system alternatives based on community needs and interests may go further in galvanizing community-wide food health. Local food systems that depend on healthy, affordable local food offer people choices and create an alternative to the mainstream food system, which emphasizes processed products that are often produced in ways that harm the environment and health.

**Actions that someone who agrees with Approach 6 might support:**
- Join or start a food cooperative
- Join or start a CSA (Community Supported Agriculture) program
- Grow your own food
- Faith communities start a CSA cooperative to help lower-income people have greater access to fruits and vegetables
- Churches with land start a community garden
- Faith communities can register with the Department of Health to use the “Health Bucks” program to increase congregants’ access to healthy food
7. **Build a strong food workforce.**

   Food is a business. Individuals can participate in this business as growers, eaters, owners, and employees. The food industry is one of the biggest employers in New York and the nation. It protects every eater to have farmers and farm workers, chefs, food service workers, checkout clerks, and other workers in food business who earn a living wage, understand how good nutrition promotes health and who are given the skills to grow and prepare safe and healthy food. In addition, having a health workforce that can provide accurate and culturally relevant education and counseling on diet and health will help people make healthier food choices. A healthy food system will empower individuals to recognize each of their roles within the food system, their connectedness and their power to create change.

   **Actions that someone who agrees with Approach 7 might support:**
   - Support supermarkets and bodegas that pay a living wage and offer benefits to their workers
   - Support supermarkets and bodegas that prepare their food workers for advancement into management positions
   - Advocate that supermarkets receiving city or state benefits should be required to hire a percentage of their workers from the neighborhood

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**Wrap-Up (25 mins)**

- What good things are we already doing? How can we build on these?
- What else will help us make progress? What problems will we face?
- What action ideas should we make sure we come back to in Session 4?
Moving To Action. What Can We Do?

(Total: 1.5 hours)

Introduction

In this session, we will move to action. First, we will brainstorm action ideas; next, we will look at the assets we have; we will then connect our action ideas with our assets; and, finally, we will set priorities for action toward a healthy food system for New York City.

Part One: Brainstorm Action Ideas (20 mins.)

Turn to your neighbor. Together, think about the approaches discussion. Were there action ideas that you think would work well in our city? Are there other action ideas that weren’t listed? Try to come up with specific actions that fit with the approaches we think will work best. How many different ideas can we come up with?

Make a list of action ideas in the following categories:

- Things that you can do on your own
- Things you can do with other small groups of people
- New Partnerships, collaborations, or projects
- New Policies
- Institutional change
Part Two: Community Assets Brainstorm (15 mins.)

Every city and every neighborhood has strengths or assets. Assets can be people, places, or organizations. Whatever makes our city or neighborhood a better place is an asset.

"Brainstorming" is a creative way for a group to come up with lots of ideas in a short amount of time. Build on one another's ideas. All ideas are OK. Don't stop to discuss or judge them. The facilitator will write down every idea. Use these headings as a guide:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>People</th>
<th>Places</th>
<th>Institutions/Organizations</th>
<th>Funding Sources</th>
<th>Other</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

Things to consider:
1. Who has talents and skills that they might offer?
2. What groups in the community can help us make our neighborhoods healthier?
3. What sources of funding do we have in our city?
4. What groups do you belong to? How can they help?
5. Can you think of anything else?

Part Three: Connect Action Ideas with Assets (10 mins)

Post list of action ideas beside the assets, and talk about which ones can be linked. Keep these connections in mind as we prioritize our action ideas.
Part Four: Set Priorities for Action (40 mins)

Look at our list of ideas for action. Now we are going to narrow it down to a few ideas to take to the action forum where people from all the discussion groups will meet to share their ideas.

These questions will help us set priorities for action:

- Which ideas are easiest to get done?
- Who would work with us on these ideas?
- Which ideas might do the most good?
- Which ideas might have a long-term impact?

>>> As a group, choose two or three ideas that are important and doable. Each person will receive three green dots and one red dot. Please place the three green dots on the action ideas you believe we need to do within the next 6 months to 1 year. Place the red dot on the action idea we definitely should not do within the next 6 months to 1 year.

Write the top two or three ideas on a flip chart labeled Priority Action Ideas.

Then, consider the following questions:

- What would it take to make this happen?
- What community assets could we use to move this idea forward?
- What kind of support do we need to take these steps? Who else could we link up with?
- How do we begin?

Part Five: Get Ready for the Action Forum (5 mins)

The facilitator will explain the agenda for the action forum.
Action Forum

Dialogue-to-change programs lead to action in many ways. One way to do this is through an Action Forum. This is a large-group meeting at the end of a round of dialogues. Ideas from all the study circles are presented at the Action Forum. There are usually several action ideas that many people support.

To move these ideas forward, people form working groups. Some people may join these working groups. Some may choose to help in other ways. In programs that continue over time, more and more people get involved, and many kinds of action occur.

Agenda: Action Forum

(1.5 Hours)

Each dialogue group posts their top three action priorities on the wall.

1. Social time: Refreshments, Entertainment, Gallery Walk  
   (time to read summaries from each circle posted around the room)

2. Welcome and Introductions
   - Moderator welcomes everyone and introduces sponsors.
   - Review agenda.
   - Talk about the study circle effort in the community.
   - Thank facilitators and other key volunteers.

3. Reports From the Dialogues
   - Three representatives from predetermined dialogue circles speak for a few minutes, sharing their experience.
   - Be sure to include vision, community assets, and the top three action priorities they identified.

4. Moving to Action
   - Moderator identifies the most common themes for action from all dialogues, and invites participants to sign up for an action group or task force.
   - Sign-up sheets are passed around. People choose working groups, and check the box of the working group they want to join.
   - Logistics team collects the sign-up sheets. Converts them into comprehensive excel sheet and sends excel sheet to Working Group facilitators. Working Group facilitators contact group members with details about date, time, location of first Working Group meeting.

5. Keynote Address: New York City Council Speaker Christine Quinn
   - While the sign-up sheets circulate, MC introduces Speaker Christine Quinn. Speaker Quinn responds to what she has witnessed of this Action Forum and shares with the group about her top priorities for strategic action, inviting the community to partner with her to pass Food Works legislation.

6. Closing remarks
   - Lisa Sharon Harper offers closing remarks describing how the action efforts will be tracked and tied to further organizing.
   - Next steps. (Include plans for another round of dialogues, celebration, or check-in meeting.)
Tips for Facilitators

A study circle facilitator does not need to be an expert on the topic being discussed. But the facilitator should be the person best prepared for the discussion. This means:

- Understand the goals of the study circle.
- Be familiar with the subject.
- Think ahead of time about how the discussion might go.
- Prepare questions to help the group consider the subject.

If you are well prepared, it will make it easier for you to give your full attention to how the group is acting and interacting, and to what individuals in the group are saying.

Here are a few more tips:

**Stay neutral!**

The most important thing to remember is that, as a facilitator, you should not share your personal views or try to push your own agenda on the issue. You are there to serve the discussion, not to join it.

- Welcome everyone and create a friendly and relaxed atmosphere.
- Well-placed humor is usually appreciated. But, make sure you do not offend anyone or make hurtful jokes.

**Explain the purpose of the study circle, and help the group set ground rules.**

At the beginning of the study circle, remind everyone that the purpose of the study circle is to work with one another to look at the issue in a democratic way. Also remind them that your role is to remain neutral, keep the discussion focused, and guide the conversation according to the ground rules.

Start with the basic ground rules listed in Session One, then ask participants to add their own ideas.

**Stay aware of and assist the group process.**

- Remember, your main role is to help the group stay focused on the subject.
- Help the discussion flow by keeping track of how the participants are communicating with each other—who has spoken, who hasn’t spoken, and who needs more time to make a point. Make sure everyone gets a fair hearing.
- Consider splitting up into smaller groups. This will help put people at ease.
- Only interfere with the discussion if you have to. Don’t allow the group to turn to you for answers.
- Resist the urge to speak after each comment or answer every question. Let participants respond directly to each other. Always be thinking about how to move the discussion forward.
- Once in a while, ask participants to sum up the most important points that have come out in the discussion.
- Remember that some people are uncomfortable reading out loud. Don’t go “around the circle” reading passages; instead, ask for volunteers.
- Don’t be afraid of silence! People sometimes need time to think before they respond. Try counting silently to ten before you rephrase the question. This will give people time to collect their thoughts.
- Don’t let anyone take over the conversation; try to involve everyone.
- Remember that a study circle is not a debate. It’s a group dialogue. If participants forget this, don’t hesitate to ask the group to help re-establish the ground rules.
- Keep track of time!
Help the group look at various points of view.

- Make it clear to participants that you will never take sides on the issue; your role as a facilitator is to be fair and act neutral.
- Use the discussion guide to help participants consider a wide range of views. You might ask participants to consider a point of view that hasn’t come up in the discussion. Ask the group to think about the advantages and disadvantages of different ways of looking at an issue or solving a problem.
- Ask participants to think about the concerns and values that underlie their beliefs.
- Help participants identify common ground, but don’t try to force agreement.

Ask open-ended questions that don’t lead to easy answers.

Open-ended questions are questions that can’t be answered with a quick ”yes” or ”no.” They push people to think about why they believe what they do. Open-ended questions also encourage people to look for connections between different ideas.

Get familiar with the following questions. They are a great resource during any study circle.

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 with this can you share with the group?
- 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 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 might you be willing to give up in order to come to some agreement?
- 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 so hard?
- What have we missed that we need to talk about?
Questions to use when people are feeling hopeless:

- Say a little about how that makes you feel.
- Is there any hope?
- Can the problems that you are talking about be solved in any way? How?

Close with a summary of the discussion and set the stage for the next meeting. When the circle is over, be sure to provide time for evaluation.

- Give people a chance to talk about the most important thing they got out of the discussion. You might ask them to share new ideas or thoughts they’ve had as a result of the discussion. Ask:
  - What are the key points of agreement and disagreement about today’s session?
  - What have you heard today that has made you think, or has touched you in some way?
- If you will be meeting again, remind the group of the readings and subject for the next session.
- If the groups are meeting because they hope to have an impact on community decision making, be sure to document what happens in the discussions. In many study circles, participants record common concerns and points of agreement and disagreement, as well as ideas for action steps.
- After the last session, provide some time for the group to fill out a written evaluation. This allows participants to comment on the process and give feedback to the facilitator.

Thank everyone for their contributions!