



# DIALOGUE FOR AFFINITY GROUPS

OPTIONAL DISCUSSIONS TO ACCOMPANY  
*FACING RACISM IN A DIVERSE NATION*



**Everyday Democracy** (formerly the Study Circles Resource Center) is a national organization that helps local communities find ways for all kinds of people to think, talk and work together to solve problems. We work with neighborhoods, cities and towns, regions, and states, helping them pay particular attention to how racism and ethnic differences affect the problems they address.

Everyday Democracy has been helping people do this work throughout the nation since 1989. Our organization has grown — we now have 13 full-time staff members, plus associates across the country and a network of hundreds of communities. We provide advice and training, and then use what we learn to benefit other communities. This work has yielded innovative, effective tools and processes with a proven track record of furthering the efforts of people who are looking for ways to organize dialogue that leads to change where they live.

We want to help you work for long-term change in your community. Please see our website at [www.everyday-democracy.org](http://www.everyday-democracy.org) for information about how to create large-scale dialogue-to-action programs that engage hundreds (and sometimes thousands) of residents. Call us for help at 860-928-2616, or e-mail us at [info@everyday-democracy.org](mailto:info@everyday-democracy.org).

This affinity group guide is available on our website in English and Spanish. It is intended to be used with ***Facing Racism in a Diverse Nation***, which is available in English and Spanish on our website and in print from Everyday Democracy.

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*\* Designed for communities where the number of people of color may be small and/or for people identifying as having multi-racial backgrounds.*

## INTRODUCTION

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The goal of the affinity sessions is to give people with similar racial or ethnic backgrounds an opportunity to talk about issues that are very important to them. Individuals who consider themselves multiracial may choose any affinity group where they feel they belong. These are not intended to be used as stand-alone sessions. They are designed to add to a community-wide dialogue on racism.

### **1) Why hold affinity group dialogues?**

- Through talking with people who are like us, we can gain new insights into our own beliefs as well as others.
- We can gain support. We can practice talking about difficult issues before we join discussions in a mixed group.
- We can unpack our own “baggage” before joining dialogues with mixed groups.

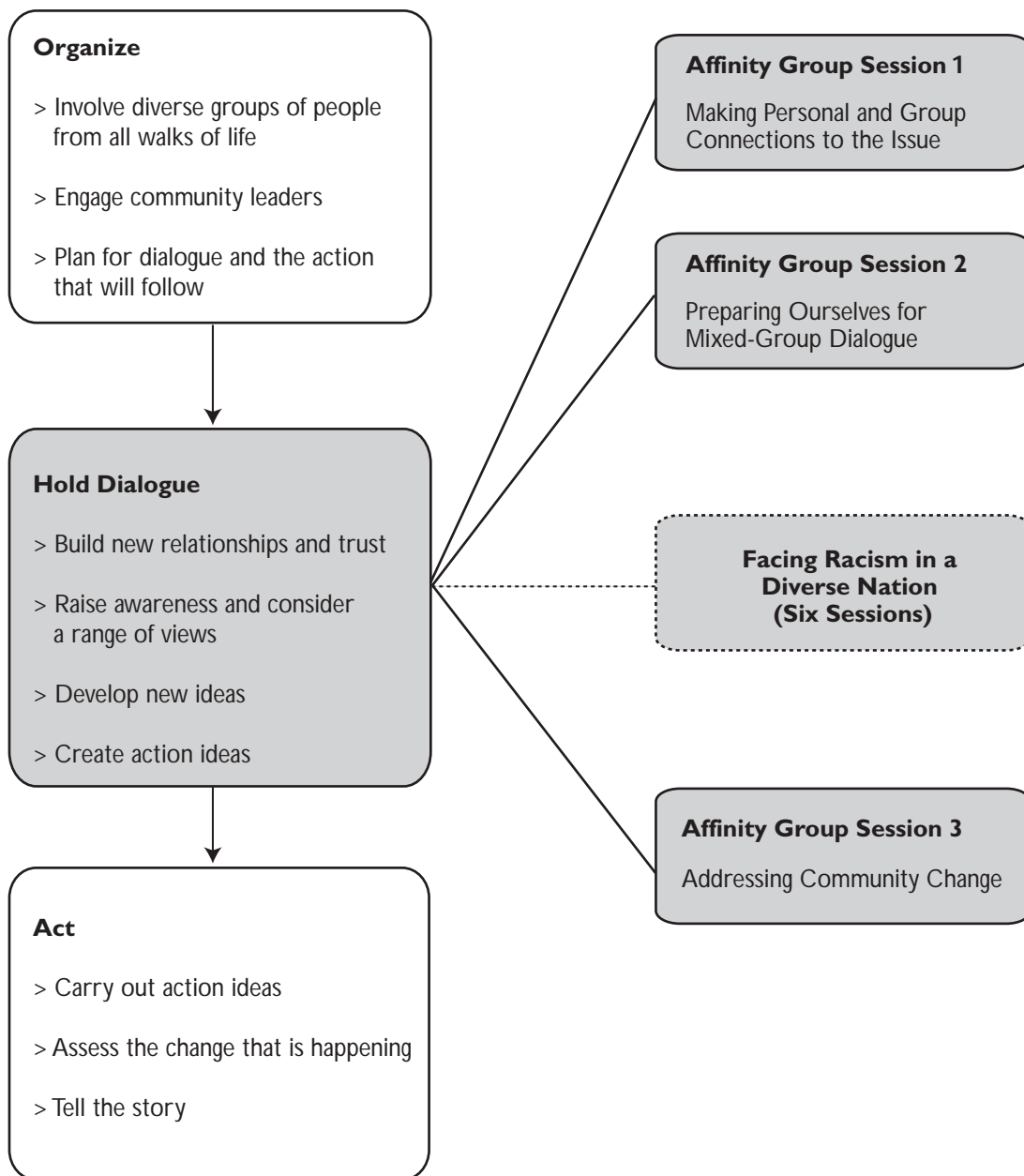
### **2) How can affinity group dialogues help us make progress on racism?**

- Participants gain mutual support and learn that they have a voice in making a difference.
- Participants build new relationships and trust.
- Participants explore different ways to work with others.

The affinity sessions are optional. Two sessions take place before the community-wide dialogues begin. The third session happens after the community-wide dialogue ends.

Session 1 helps us connect with the issue of racism and each other. In Session 2, we talk about how people from different backgrounds can bring about change in the community. In Session 3, we reconnect, and identify what action we can take.

## Overview of How Affinity Groups Fit into a Dialogue-to-Change Program





### Facilitator Note for Part 1

- Introduce yourself as the facilitator. Explain that your job is to help the group members have a rich conversation and make room for all voices. Make it clear that you will not share personal views and stories, or try to push an agenda.

### Facilitator Note for Part 2

- Refer to page 5 for an overview of the process.
- Talk about the purpose of the affinity sessions, and explain that they are part of the community-wide dialogue.
- Explain the purpose of the discussion guidelines. Then, ask group members to develop their own list of guidelines. Record them on newsprint and post them where everyone can see them. For a start, refer to the list of sample guidelines.

## SESSION 1

### Making Personal and Group Connections to the Issue

In this session, we will talk about how racism affects our lives. We will also learn more about how we are connected to one another. And we will discuss how racism affects us as a group.

#### PART 1: Introductions/Who We Are (10 minutes)

Say your name and why you decided to take part in this affinity group.

#### PART 2: Overview of the Process (10 minutes)

Before we begin our conversation, we will spend a few minutes talking about what will happen during the dialogue. (Take a look at the overview on page 5.)

To help the dialogue work well, we need to agree about how we are going to talk together. We can use the following list as a starting point to develop our own guidelines.

- Be respectful.
- Everyone gets a fair hearing.
- Share “air time.”
- One person speaks at a time. Speak for yourself, not for others.
- If you are offended, or uncomfortable say so; and say why.
- You can disagree, but don’t personalize it. Stick to the issue. No name-calling or stereotyping.
- Everyone helps the facilitator keep the discussion moving and on track.
- Personal stories remain confidential unless the group decides it’s OK to tell them to other people.

## PART 3: Exploring Identity

(40 minutes)

- .....
1. Describe your racial or ethnic background.
  2. When was the first time you realized you belong to a certain racial / ethnic group? What did that mean to you?
  3. When was the first time you noticed people who were different from you? What do you remember?
  4. When you think about racism, what comes to mind? Share a brief story of how racism has affected your life.
  5. What has been your experience when you talk about racism with people from your same background?
    - Where have you found support?
    - Where have you found barriers?

### Facilitator Note for Part 3

- Some people may want to talk about the meaning of "racism" and "discrimination." Let them talk about it the way they see it. There is no need for the group to agree about definitions, but you can point out common themes.
- Make two columns on a piece of newsprint. Label one column "Support." Label the other column "Barriers." List what people say on the newsprint. Keep this newsprint for Session 2 when we revisit the same question.

**Facilitator Note for Part 4A**

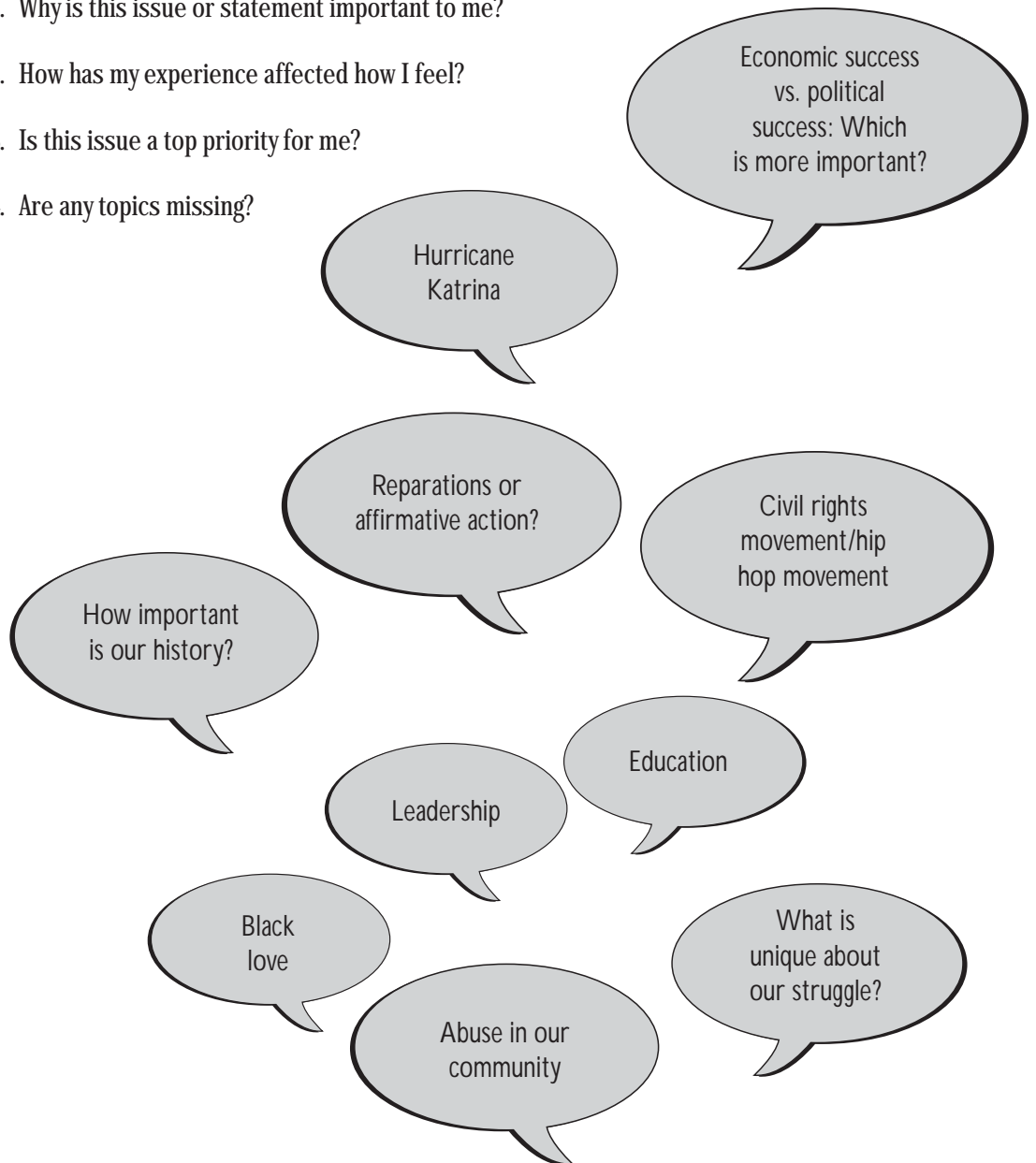
- At the end of the discussion, have the group name its top three issues. It can do this as a group, or as individuals. Record priorities, noting areas of agreement and disagreement on newsprint.
- Ask people to narrow down the list by combining similar ideas. Invite them to make a case for their favorite ideas.
- Next, ask people to put a check, on the list, next to their top three choices.
- Cross out the ideas that have the fewest checks. Give people a chance to make a case for the ideas that are left.
- Repeat this process until you have only three ideas left.

**PART 4A: Key Areas of Concern for African Americans**

(50 minutes)

Sometimes, we face challenges that are unique to our group. What are some of our most pressing concerns? Below are some ideas to help us get started. It is not necessary to talk about every topic. Feel free to add any ideas that are important to you. Use the following questions to guide the discussion.

1. Why is this issue or statement important to me?
2. How has my experience affected how I feel?
3. Is this issue a top priority for me?
4. Are any topics missing?



After our discussion, what three issues seem most important? Where do we agree or disagree?

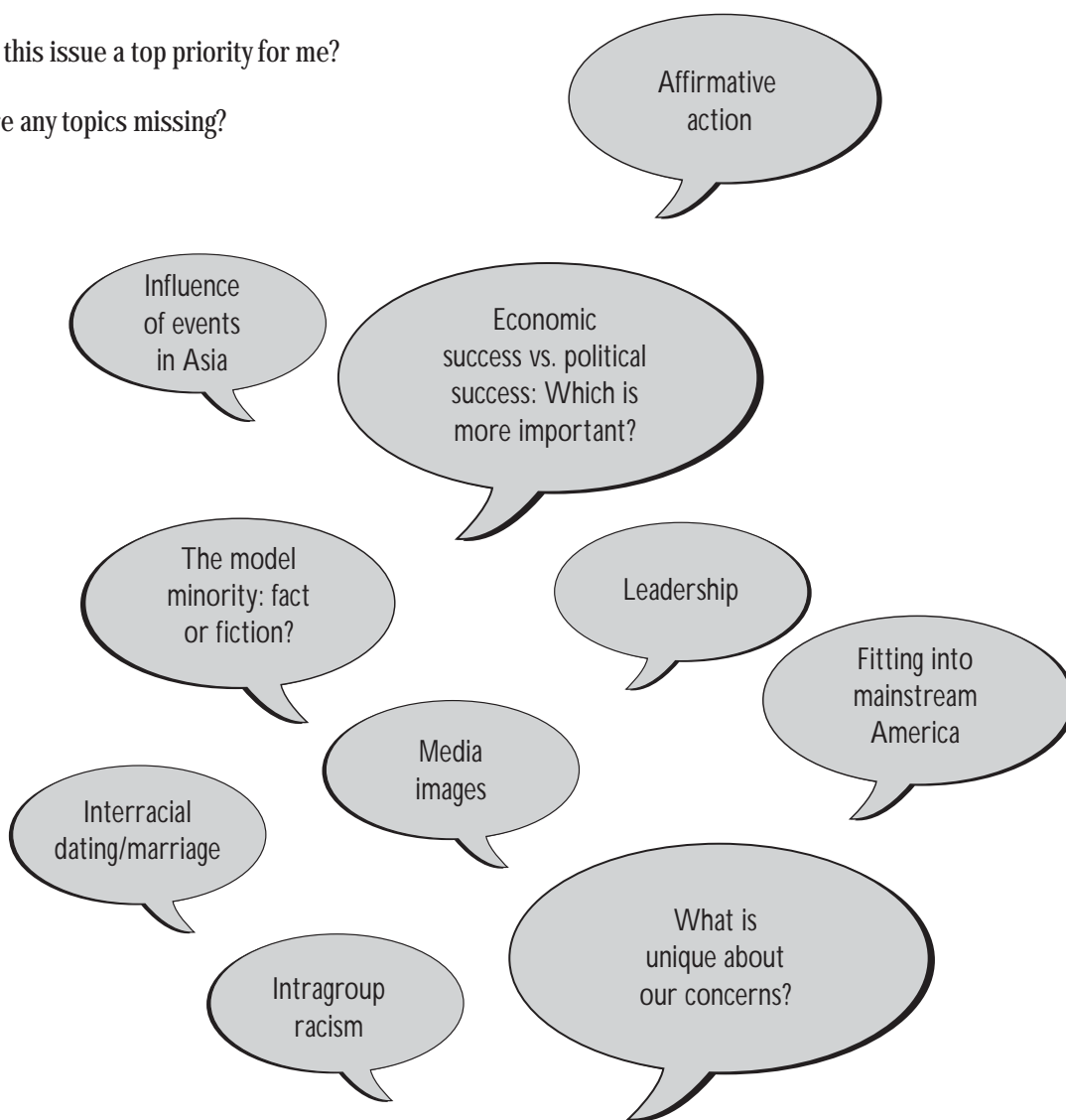


## PART 4B: Key Areas of Concern for Asian Americans

(50 minutes)

Sometimes, we face challenges that are unique to our group. What are some of our most pressing concerns? Below are some ideas to help us get started. It is not necessary to talk about every topic. Feel free to add any ideas that are important to you. Use the following questions to guide the discussion.

1. Why is this issue or statement important to me?
2. How has my experience affected how I feel?
3. Is this issue a top priority for me?
4. Are any topics missing?



### Facilitator Note for Part 4B

- At the end of the discussion, have the group name its top three issues. It can do this as a group, or as individuals. Record priorities, noting areas of agreement and disagreement on newsprint.
- Ask people to narrow down the list by combining similar ideas. Invite them to make a case for their favorite ideas.
- Next, ask people to put a check, on the list, next to their top three choices.
- Cross out the ideas that have the fewest checks. Give people a chance to make a case for the ideas that are left.
- Repeat this process until you have only three ideas left.

After our discussion, what three issues seem most important? Where do we agree or disagree?

**Facilitator Note for Part 4C**

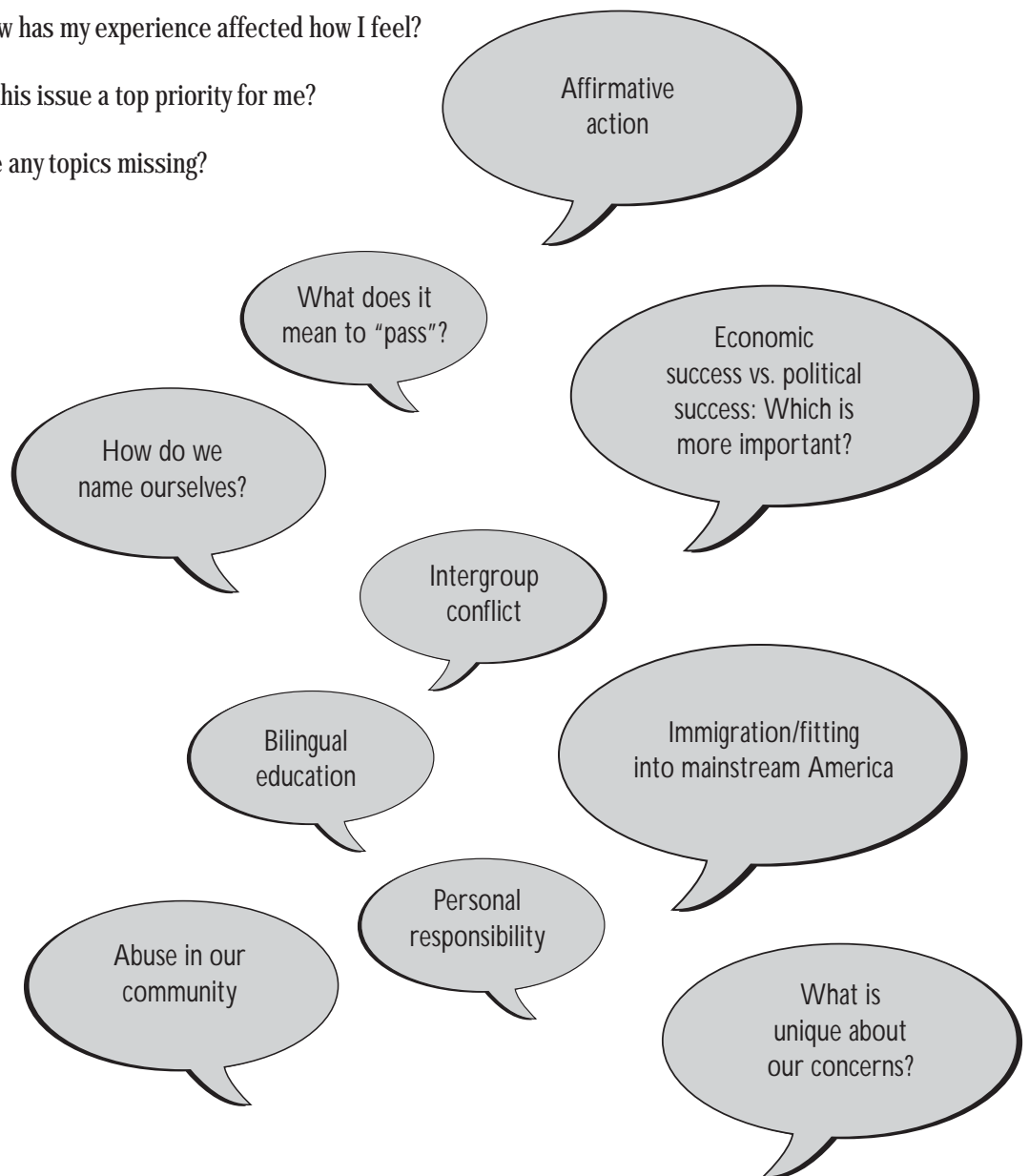
- At the end of the discussion, have the group name its top three issues. It can do this as a group, or as individuals. Record priorities, noting areas of agreement and disagreement on newsprint.
- Ask people to narrow down the list by combining similar ideas. Invite them to make a case for their favorite ideas.
- Next, ask people to put a check, on the list, next to their top three choices.
- Cross out the ideas that have the fewest checks. Give people a chance to make a case for the ideas that are left.
- Repeat this process until you have only three ideas left.

**PART 4C: Key Areas of Concern for Hispanics**

(50 minutes)

Sometimes, we face challenges that are unique to our group. What are some of our most pressing concerns? Below are some ideas to help us get started. It is not necessary to talk about every topic. Feel free to add any ideas that are important to you. Use the following questions to guide the discussion.

1. Why is this issue or statement important to me?
2. How has my experience affected how I feel?
3. Is this issue a top priority for me?
4. Are any topics missing?



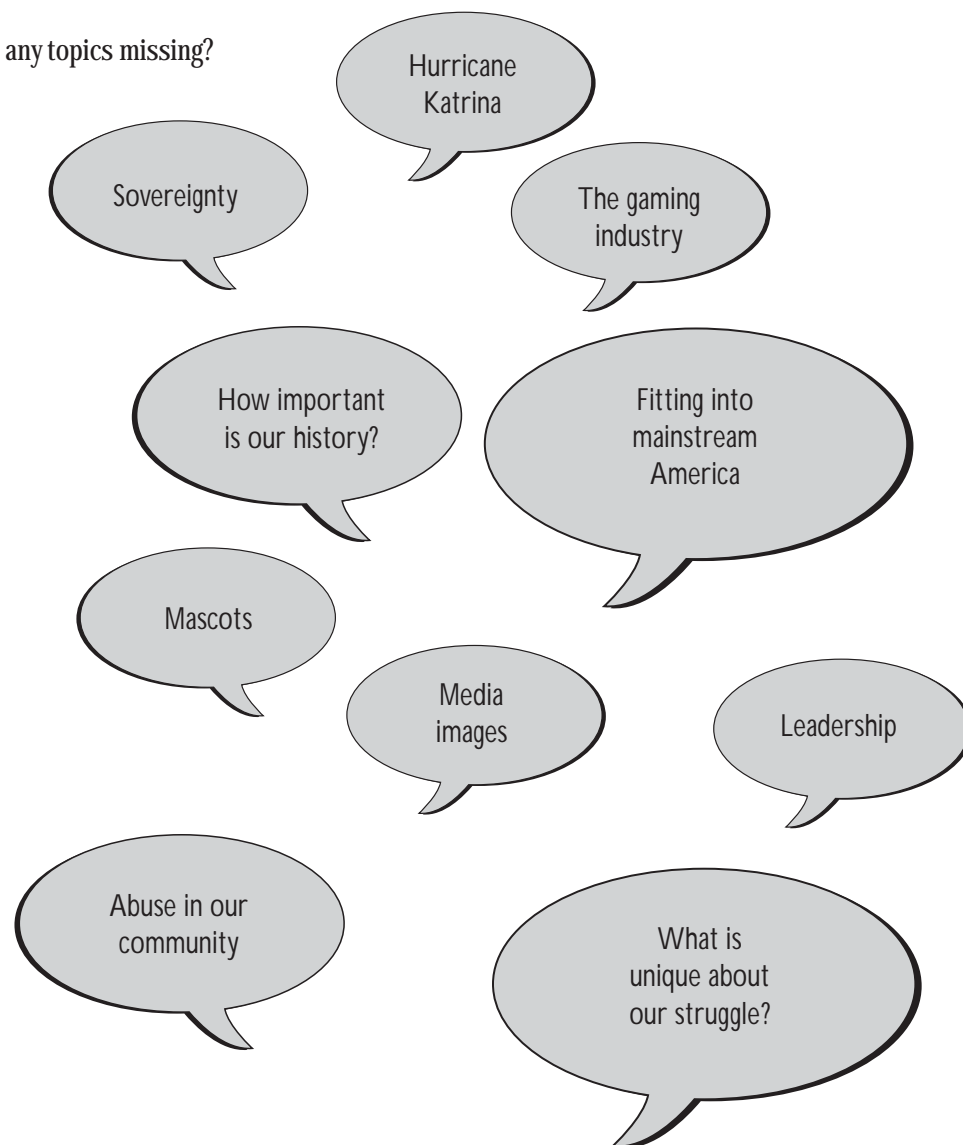
After our discussion, what three issues seem most important? Where do we agree or disagree?

## PART 4D: Key Areas of Concern for Native Americans

(50 minutes)

Sometimes, we face challenges that are unique to our group. What are some of our most pressing concerns? Below are some ideas to help us get started. It is not necessary to talk about every topic. Feel free to add any ideas that are important to you. Use the following questions to guide the discussion.

1. Why is this issue or statement important to me?
2. How has my experience affected how I feel?
3. Is this issue a top priority for me?
4. Are any topics missing?



### Facilitator Note for Part 4D

- At the end of the discussion, have the group name its top three issues. It can do this as a group, or as individuals. Record priorities, noting areas of agreement and disagreement on newsprint.
- Ask people to narrow down the list by combining similar ideas. Invite them to make a case for their favorite ideas.
- Next, ask people to put a check, on the list, next to their top three choices.
- Cross out the ideas that have the fewest checks. Give people a chance to make a case for the ideas that are left.
- Repeat this process until you have only three ideas left.

After our discussion, what three issues seem most important? Where do we agree or disagree?

**Facilitator Note  
for Part 4E**

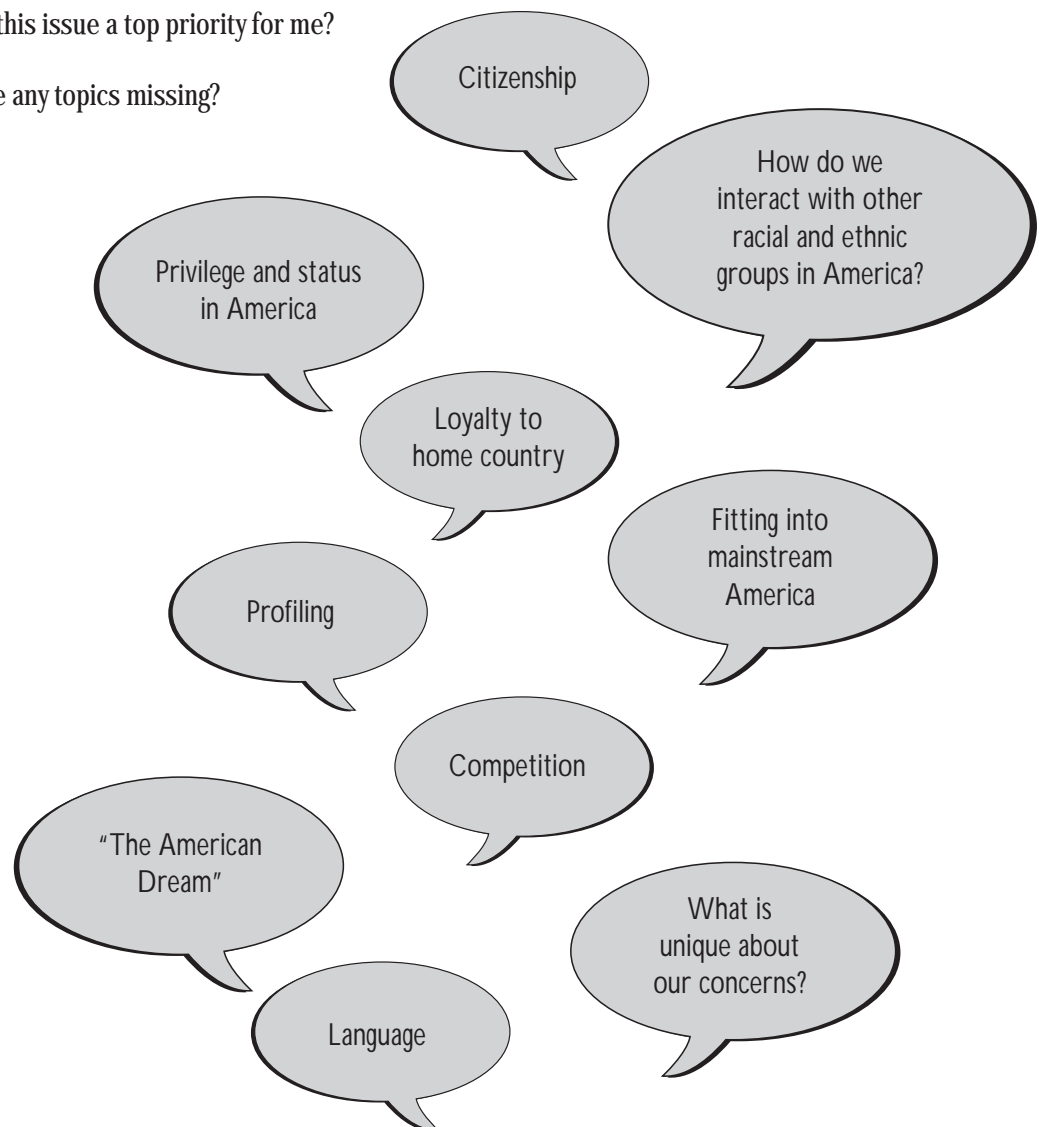
- At the end of the discussion, have the group name its top three issues. It can do this as a group, or as individuals. Record priorities, noting areas of agreement and disagreement on newsprint.
- Ask people to narrow down the list by combining similar ideas. Invite them to make a case for their favorite ideas.
- Next, ask people to put a check, on the list, next to their top three choices.
- Cross out the ideas that have the fewest checks. Give people a chance to make a case for the ideas that are left.
- Repeat this process until you have only three ideas left.

**PART 4E: Key Areas of Concern for Recent Immigrants**

(50 minutes)

Sometimes, we face challenges that are unique to our group. What are some of our most pressing concerns? Below are some ideas to help us get started. It is not necessary to talk about every topic. Feel free to add any ideas that are important to you. Use the following questions to guide the discussion.

1. Why is this issue or statement important to me?
2. How has my experience affected how I feel?
3. Is this issue a top priority for me?
4. Are any topics missing?



After our discussion, what three issues seem most important? Where do we agree or disagree?

## PART 4F: Key Areas of Concern for Whites

(50 minutes)

Sometimes, we face challenges that are unique to our group. What are some of our most pressing concerns? Below are some ideas to help us get started. It is not necessary to talk about every topic. Feel free to add any ideas that are important to you. Use the following questions to guide the discussion.

1. Why is this issue or statement important to me?
2. How has my experience affected how I feel?
3. Is this issue a top priority for me?
4. Are any topics missing?

Affirmative action

White privilege

What obligation do whites have to address racism and inequities?

Blame

Reverse discrimination

How can we support white people who work on this issue?

Does white culture define America?

What challenges do we face?

What is unique about our work on this issue?

Fear

### Facilitator Note for Part 4F

- At the end of the discussion, have the group name its top three issues. It can do this as a group, or as individuals. Record priorities, noting areas of agreement and disagreement on newsprint.
- Ask people to narrow down the list by combining similar ideas. Invite them to make a case for their favorite ideas.
- Next, ask people to put a check, on the list, next to their top three choices.
- Cross out the ideas that have the fewest checks. Give people a chance to make a case for the ideas that are left.
- Repeat this process until you have only three ideas left.

After our discussion, what three issues seem most important? Where do we agree or disagree?

**Facilitator Note for Part 4G**

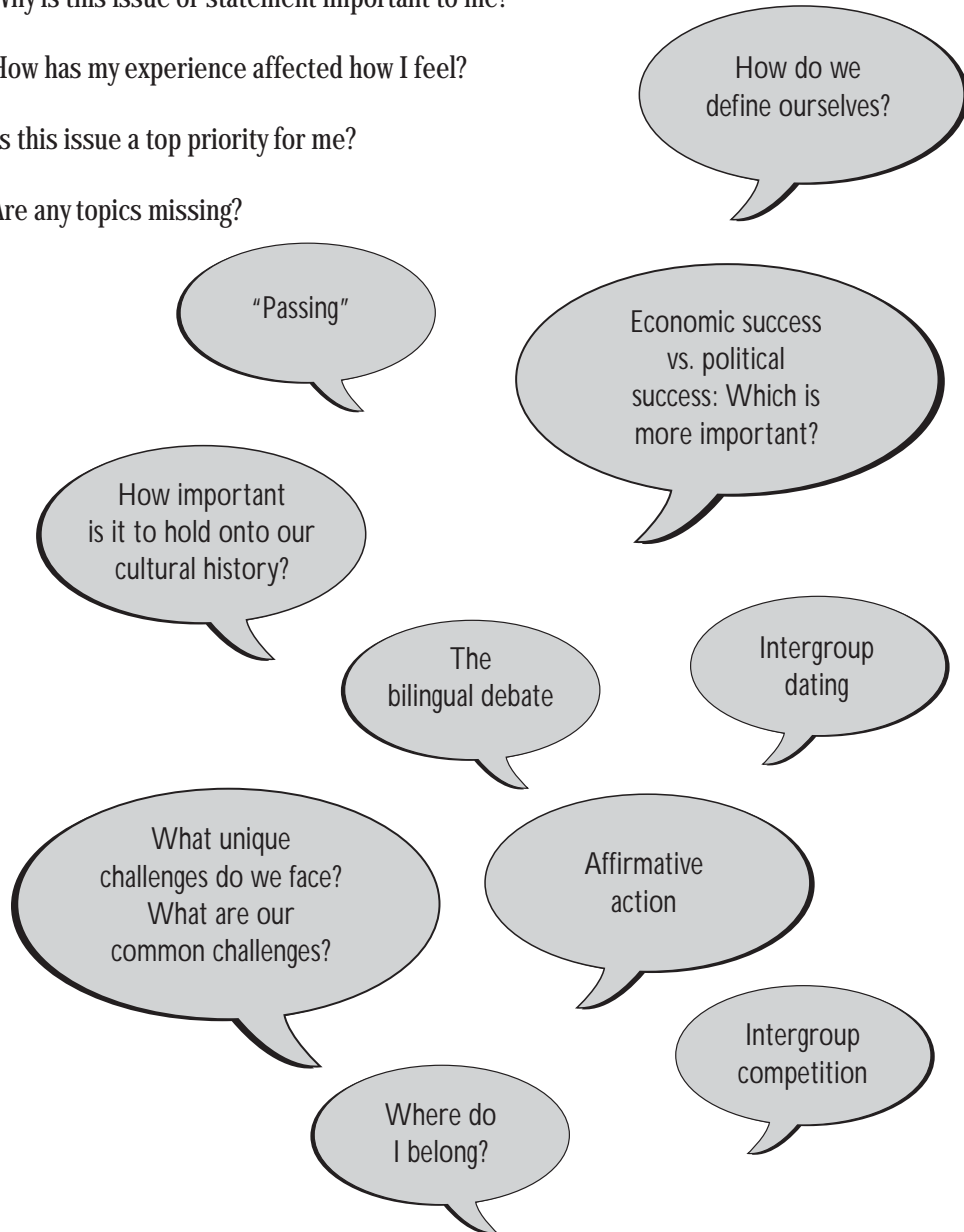
- At the end of the discussion, have the group name its top three issues. It can do this as a group, or as individuals. Record priorities, noting areas of agreement and disagreement on newsprint.
- Ask people to narrow down the list by combining similar ideas. Invite them to make a case for their favorite ideas.
- Next, ask people to put a check, on the list, next to their top three choices.
- Cross out the ideas that have the fewest checks. Give people a chance to make a case for the ideas that are left.
- Repeat this process until you have only three ideas left.

**PART 4G: Key Areas of Concern (People of Color)\***

(50 minutes)

Sometimes, we face challenges that are unique to our group. What are some of our most pressing concerns? Below are some ideas to help us get started. It is not necessary to talk about every topic. Feel free to add any ideas that are important to you. Use the following questions to guide the discussion.

1. Why is this issue or statement important to me?
2. How has my experience affected how I feel?
3. Is this issue a top priority for me?
4. Are any topics missing?



After our discussion, what three issues seem most important? Where do we agree or disagree?

*\* Designed for communities where the number of people of color may be small and/or for people identifying as having multi-racial backgrounds.*

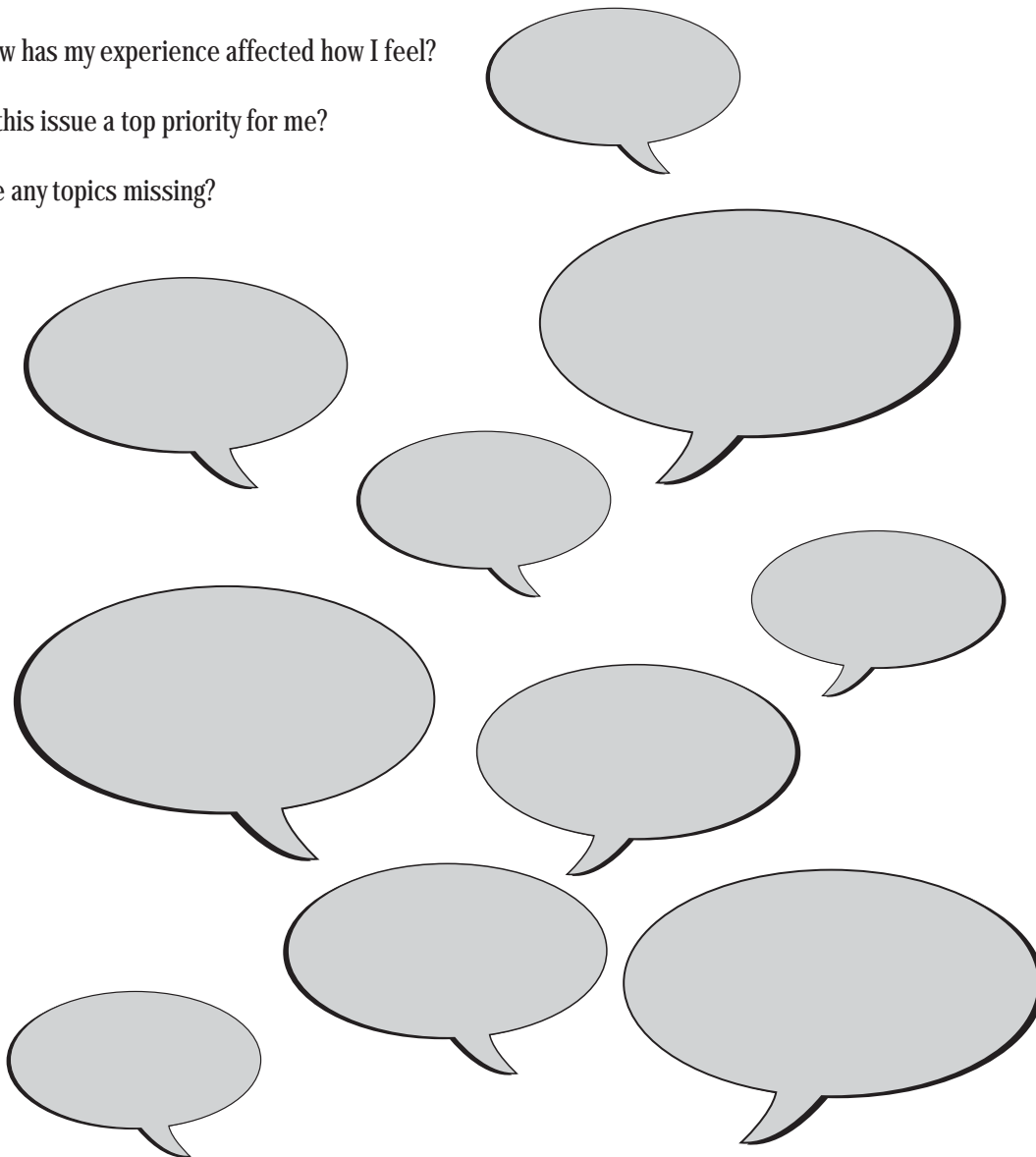


## PART 4H: Key Areas of Concern—Blank Form

(50 minutes)

If you are a member of a group that is not represented in this Affinity Guide, please use this form to create your own conversation. Look at the examples in the other Affinity Group sessions. Then, brainstorm some issues that are of concern to you. Please share this information with your program organizers. Also, if you design your own session, please share the results with Everyday Democracy. You can use the following questions to guide your discussion.

1. Why is this issue or statement important to me?
2. How has my experience affected how I feel?
3. Is this issue a top priority for me?
4. Are any topics missing?



After our discussion, what three issues seem most important? Where do we agree or disagree?

### Facilitator Note for Part 4H

- At the end of the discussion, have the group name its top three issues. It can do this as a group, or as individuals. Record priorities, noting areas of agreement and disagreement on newsprint.
- Ask people to narrow down the list by combining similar ideas. Invite them to make a case for their favorite ideas.
- Next, ask people to put a check, on the list, next to their top three choices.
- Cross out the ideas that have the fewest checks. Give people a chance to make a case for the ideas that are left.
- Repeat this process until you have only three ideas left.

### Facilitator Note for Part 5

- After the closing questions, invite a few people to share highlights of their one-on-one conversations.
- Keep a copy of the *guidelines* for the next affinity group session.
- Keep a copy of the *top three issues* for the affinity group check-in session that will follow the community-wide dialogue.
- Thank people for coming. Encourage them to stay in touch and attend the next session.

## PART 5: CLOSING (10 minutes)



Turn to your neighbor and spend a few minutes discussing the following questions:

1. What was it like to take part in this conversation?
2. What did you hear that fit with your experience?  
What did you hear that surprised you?

## SESSION 2 Preparing Ourselves for Mixed-Group Dialogue

Many of us want to improve things in our community. We know that change is more likely when we work with others.

In this session, we'll talk about our experience working with mixed groups. And we will talk about how we can work with others to create change.

### PART 1: Making Connections (15 minutes)

1. Review the guidelines.
2. Turn to your neighbor and spend a few minutes discussing the following question: Have you noticed or heard something about the issues we discussed last time?
3. Share the highlights of your discussion with the whole group.

### PART 2: Moving to a Conversation with a Diverse Group (50 minutes)

Think about the issue this dialogue-to-change program will address: (*Racism and Inequities*). Discuss the following questions:

1. What went well during the last session?
2. What was challenging about the last session?
3. What happens when you talk about racism and inequities with people from a different racial or ethnic background? Share a story or lessons about your experience.
  - a. Where have you found support?
  - b. Where have you found barriers?
4. What are some of your concerns about having a conversation in a mixed group?
5. What are some of your hopes about having this conversation in a mixed group?
6. What would it take for you to say what's on your mind in a mixed group? What can help you prepare for that conversation?

#### Facilitator Note for Part 2

- Make two columns on a piece of newsprint. Label one column "Support." Label the other column "Barriers."
- List comments from group members under each heading.
- Ask people to compare this list with the list they made in Session 1, Part 3. Have the group talk about the similarities and differences they see.

### Facilitator Note for Part 3

- Post the list of the top three issues the group identified in the last session.
- Ask the group to think about the ideas on this list as they address the questions.

### Facilitator Note for Part 4

- Remember to bring the list of the *top three issues* to the last affinity session.
- Thank people for coming. Encourage them to stay in touch and support each other during the program.

## PART 3: Focusing on Community Change (40 minutes)

1. Think about the top three issues we identified in the last session. How will talking about this with a more diverse group help us make progress on these issues?
2. How can we bring about long-term change in our community? How have you worked toward change in the past? What worked? What didn't work? Did you need allies? Why? Tell a story about your experience.
3. What is the best way for us to work with other racial and ethnic groups to bring about change? What challenges do you see? What could we do about them?

## PART 4: Connections/Closing (15 minutes)

Discuss the following questions:

1. What did you hear today that surprised you? Upset you? Inspired you?
2. How will this conversation help you join the community-wide dialogue?
3. What one word or phrase describes your experience in the affinity group sessions?

## SESSION 3 Addressing Community Change

We've talked about issues that are important to us as a group. We have also talked about what we can do to make progress working with others in our community. Now, let's talk about what we can do as a group to make progress.

### PART 1: Making Connections (20 minutes)

1. Review the guidelines.
2. Talk with your neighbor for a few minutes about the following questions. Then share your views with the group.
  - a. What was the most valuable experience for you in the mixed dialogue?
  - b. What did you find the most challenging?

### PART 2: Focusing on Action and Change (85 minutes)

1. Think about the top three issues from our first session as you answer the following questions.
  - a. Did these same issues come up in your dialogue?
  - b. Were there any new issues that your group discussed?
  - c. What do you think accounts for the similarities or differences?
2. Given your experience in both groups, what do you think we need to focus on to improve the community?
3. Is there anything that our affinity group wants to work on to address racism? If so, brainstorm a list of action ideas (projects) that can help us make progress on racism and inequities. These can be ideas that came from your dialogue or new ideas. Try to list no more than eight ideas. These can be small projects as well as large ones.
4. Now, let's try to narrow our list to one or two "doable" ideas our group wants to work on. Be practical. Try to settle on projects we can accomplish quickly. Think about what resources we might need to complete our project.

#### Facilitator Note for Part 2

- Post the group's top three issues from Session 1. List any new issues (including any from their dialogue) on the same newsprint.
- For more information about brainstorming and prioritizing action ideas, refer to pages 34-36 in *Facing Racism in a Diverse Nation*.
- Have the group exchange contact information, and ask for a volunteer to be responsible for scheduling a follow-up meeting to work on the group's action ideas.

### Facilitator Note for Part 3

- After the closing questions, thank people for coming, encourage them to stay in touch, support each other, and support the community action teams.

## PART 3: Closing/Staying in Touch

(15 minutes)



Discuss the following questions:

1. What are your hopes and concerns about working with other community members?
2. How would you describe your experience during these conversations?