


# Fuerza Unida:

*An Approach for Engaging Communities*



**BE AN ADVOCATE**  
Crear conciencia  
**ACHIEVE OUR DREAMS**  
**LISTEN**  
HONRAR NUESTRA  
**sabiduría**

# **Fuerza Unida:**

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## **Acknowledgments**

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<sup>1</sup> Casa de Esperanza has chosen to use "@" in place of the masculine "o" when referring to people or things that are either gender neutral or both masculine and feminine in makeup. This decision reflects our commitment to gender inclusion and recognizes the important contributions that both men and women make to our communities.

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### Introduction

*Fuerza Unida* is a community engagement process developed by Casa de Esperanza. This manual will give you both the philosophy and the “nuts and bolts” to implement a similar process in your community.

*Fuerza Unida* (literally, Strength United) is a strategy that Casa de Esperanza began as a result of our 1998 strategic plan. *Fuerza Unida* changed our organization: our philosophy, mission and framework. The background and history of our organization is helpful in understanding the significance of this change.

*Casa de Esperanza's* mission: Mobilize Latinas and Latin@ communities to end domestic violence.

*Casa de Esperanza's* vision: Latinas, their families and communities in Minnesota and throughout the world recognize and act to end domestic violence.

### Our History, Our Philosophy

In 1982 a collective of Latina activists founded Casa de Esperanza to shelter and support Latinas afflicted by violence in St. Paul, Minnesota. The new shelter obtained per diem funding from the state of Minnesota, which mandated that women be served on a “first-come, first-served basis.” The culturally welcoming environment soon drew women of various populations. Always seeking to reach Latinas, the agency launched community education that touched hundreds of Latina lives.

Casa de Esperanza grew and operated successfully, but questions about identity and mission were always “just below the surface” and periodically a source of open discussion. Was Casa de Esperanza primarily a domestic violence organization (and as such, appropriately housing women as mandated by the state, even though few were Latina)? Or was Casa de Esperanza's primary identity Latina (and if so, why was it investing so few resources in its work with Latinas)?

A strategic planning process launched in 1998 became a defining moment for the organization. The Board of Directors defined Casa de Esperanza, first and foremost, as a **Latina** agency - not a domestic violence shelter. During the strategic planning process Latinas told us that they wanted Casa de Esperanza to be more visible and active in their communities. We responded in 1999 with *Fuerza Unida*, collaborating with community Latinas and with other agencies to listen to Latinas and develop an action agenda that assisted in reaching their hopes and dreams. *Fuerza Unida* set Casa de Esperanza on a path of community engagement that changed our organization's course.

Casa de Esperanza has implemented listening sessions in various ways since 1998, sometimes adapting the original process to meet a specific goal or answer a specific question. This revised manual explores the original listening sessions process and incorporates key learning from listening sessions conducted more recently. The most recent listening session process was in 2012, which resulted in significant enhancements to this manual.

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Our commitment to the use of listening sessions to evaluate and inform the development of our work demonstrates the fact that community engagement is not just an “add-on” at Casa de Esperanza; it is our essence. Recognizing that we alone cannot end family stress, Casa de Esperanza strives to “put the work in the hands of more and more people.” Building on the collective orientation, interdependence and group identity that are foundational to Latin@ cultures, we have integrated social capital as our organization’s theory of change. The central premise of social capital is that social networks have value. Social capital refers to the collective value of all social networks (who people know) and the inclinations that arise from these networks to do things for each other (norms of reciprocity). Many Latin@ families who come to Casa de Esperanza are immigrants experiencing isolation, minimal connection to support systems (within our culture or the mainstream), strict gender roles, racism, and high levels of acculturation stress. Often, they are learning English as a second language. Enhanced social capital—such as associations within community, personal support or resources—can transform a family’s life and decrease these stressors. A recent review of current research provides documentation and insight into the benefits of using community engagement for social change.

## Literature Review

### **The Importance of Social Connectedness**

An individual’s connection to his or her community has been linked to citizen participation and increased psychological empowerment. Citizen participation means that ordinary community members and groups become engaged in addressing social problems and informing policy that can improve their quality of life (Ohmer, 2007). Participation in community organizations can take many different forms. For example, volunteers may organize activities, attend meetings, participate in outreach, or take leadership roles (Ohmer, 2007; Speer, Peterson, Armstead, & Allean, 2012).

Individuals participating in various community-based, cultural, or organizational groups report a higher level of sense of community and social well-being. In one study, the experience of actively participating in an organization appeared to be emotionally and cognitively empowering for lower- and middle-income individuals (Speer, Peterson, Armstead, & Allean, 2012). Similarly, a study of adolescents participating in structured group activities (e.g. athletic, cultural, religious groups etc.) reported a higher sense of community and a higher pro-social civic engagement than peers who did not participate in any group (Albanesi, Cicognani, & Zani, 2007). A study of low-income urban neighborhoods found that participants who attended religious events and participated in group activities (e.g. neighborhood organizations) also reported a greater sense of community (Brotsky, 1999).

In addition, ecological and individual characteristics influence how participation links to empowerment processes. Studies have found that socioeconomic status (e.g. income or education) contributes to different patterns of empowerment scores. In a study of nonprofit organizations in vulnerable, low-income neighborhoods, individuals reporting greater participation in community organizing efforts were also more

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likely to report higher levels of knowledge and skills, confidence in their leadership, and connection to community (Ohmer, 2007; Peterson, Lowe, Aquilino, & Schneider, 2005). When taking into account sense of community, different patterns for men and women also emerge; studies have found that women in rural areas experience greater benefits with increased sense of community (Peterson, Lowe, Aquilino, & Schneider, 2005).

Further community and neighborhood characteristics also influence individuals' sense of connectedness and well-being. For example, a study in low income urban neighborhoods found that collective neighborhood variables such as percentages of registered voters, homeowners and those involved in neighborhood organizations all increased reports of sense of community by individual neighbors (Brodsky, O'Campo, & Aronson, 1999). However, this sense of community diminished when the percentage of unemployment and population density increased. A study of rural and urban adolescents found that greater community attachment was related to lower rates of problem substance use and delinquency for both rural and urban youth. Additionally, the authors found that higher community detachment was related to higher levels of depression (Van Gundy, Stracuzzi, Rebellon, Tucker, & Cohn, 2011).

### **Community Engagement as a Tool for Social Change**

Community leaders have used the tool of community engagement for quite some time to actively involve their constituents in a wide variety of prevention efforts, intervention strategies and research. In fact, larger entities in the United States—including the National Institute of Health—and in other countries have embraced and promoted community engagement as a tool for social change and as an important component of any community change initiative. (Ahmed & Palermo, 2010; Attree et al., 2011; Grinker et al., 2012).

Recently, community engagement as a tool for social change has drawn the attention of researchers who have investigated it in the context of community based research, health and mental health outcomes, youth violence prevention, and most recently, in the area of information systems and technology (Ahmed & Palermo, 2010; Baillie et al., 2004; Euerby & Burns, 2012). This research has documented the effectiveness of community engagement across numerous variables, including:

- increasing community members' knowledge of the topic being studied;
- providing researchers and program developers with the priorities of community members;
- developing culturally competent services for community members;
- increasing a sense of community for those involved;
- individual and community benefits, and more (Ahmed & Palermo, 2010; Zeldin, 2004).

As the literature indicates, community engagement has evolved to being used across many disciplines documenting its impact on individuals and communities.

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### **Impact on Individuals and Communities**

Community engagement methods documented in the research base have ranged from consulting with community members to actively engaging community members in the development and delivery of services. In a review of the literature, Attree and colleagues (2011) documented the subjective experience of individuals across methods of community engagement. These researchers found numerous benefits for the individuals who participated in community engagement projects around the subject of health, including:

- their own increase in healthy behaviors;
- an increase in positive thinking about their well-being and health;
- an increase in self confidence and self-esteem;
- personal empowerment;
- social benefits such as getting to know others in their neighborhood and getting involved in local organizations.

Attree and colleagues (2011) also documented the benefits for the local community in which these individuals were active. They found increases in mutual trust and understanding among diverse groups and an increased sense of the community as a better place to live. This literature review indicates positive outcomes on both individual and community level variables that provide support for our use and promotion of these engagement strategies within our communities.

Additional research conducted by Mancini (2006) reveals specific impact related to domestic violence prevention; when a community understands both the problems and solutions associated with domestic violence, its community networks can influence the way that intimate partners relate to each other, especially when disagreements and problems arise.

### **Implementation of *Fuerza Unida*—a Community Engagement Process**

In this manual, we describe three variations of a community engagement process. Each of these examples used different methodologies and produced different outcomes. Throughout this manual, we will try to give you an idea of how each process was similar or different to help illustrate options for implementing listening sessions in your community. It is important to understand that community engagement is not a model or a program. Rather, it is a WAY of thinking, doing the work and achieving results. Your community is, no doubt, very different from those in Minneapolis or St. Paul. Therefore, it is important to remember that you should take the principles presented in these pages and devise your own strategies to engage your unique community. An overall snapshot of each of the listening sessions is on the following page.



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## AT A GLANCE

	<b>1999 - Minneapolis</b>	<b>2003 - St. Paul</b>	<b>2012 – Twin Cities (St. Paul and Minneapolis)</b>
<b>Audience Surveyed</b>	169 Latinas	107 Latinas	122 Latinas
<b>Listening Instrument(s)</b>	In-person Interviews and Listening Circles	In-person Interviews	Listening Circles
<b>Interviewers</b>	Latinas and Staff	Latinas and Staff	Latinas
<b>Primary Goal</b>	Understand Latina priorities in South Minneapolis	Understand Latinas' experiences when receiving state welfare	Understand Latina priorities in the Twin Cities Metro Area
<b>Key Learning</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Latinas did not want to leave their relationships to get support around violence.</li> <li>• Often, other priorities took precedence over domestic violence.</li> <li>• Latinas wanted greater access to information and resources.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Family was of utmost importance to Latinas.</li> <li>• Latinas wanted training, education and access to credit to advance their goals.</li> <li>• Latinas on welfare expressed extreme challenges with gaining financial independence.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Latinas saw education &amp; personal development as key to their success.</li> <li>• Latinas wanted more time and emotional support to achieve their goals.</li> <li>• Information was more readily accessible now, but services were not. Increased access to resources and cooperation between organizations was requested from the community.</li> </ul>

## Our Story

1999: In South Minneapolis, Casa de Esperanza trained Latinas from the community as well as representatives from Latin@ nonprofit organizations to interview Latina women and girls. The individual and group “listening sessions” were conducted in places where Latinas where Latinas typically congregated—in homes, in laundromats and in the marketplace.

2003: On the East Side of St. Paul, we interviewed Latinas individually and compared the responses of Latinas on MFIP (Minnesota Family Investment Program; Minnesota’s name for welfare) with those not on MFIP.

2012: Our most recent process engaged Latinas across the Metro Area in focus group-style listening sessions conducted in homes, organizations and in other places where Latin@s typically meet. We trained a strong group of volunteer interviewers who conducted all of the listening sessions, which proved to be an exciting community engagement and leadership development opportunity. Each of these processes gave us insight to Latinas’ lives, and gave us action plans for enhancing our work and for engaging community in new and different ways.



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The primary framework for a community engagement process is as follows:

- Decide why you are at the table.
- Make sure the right people are at the table.
- Decide what information you want to learn.
- Determine the best way to gather the information.
- Recruit people to gather the information.
- Support and train the interviewers to get the best possible results.
- Determine where you will conduct interviews and how many participants you need.
- Gather the information.
- Compile what you learned.
- Share with the community, figure out what you learned and listen again.
- Develop an action plan based on your analysis.
- Start taking action.
- Adapt and/or enhance strategies.
- Begin to listen again.

A simplified way to visualize this framework is:



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### **Things to Remember while Reading and Implementing**

We recommended that you keep three main points in mind:

1. *Fuerza Unida* is not a model to be replicated word-for-word (or action-for-action). It is a way of thinking and a belief that intentionally listening to and believing in the community will accomplish tremendous things. The beauty of this process is that it must be community-based in order to be successful.
2. Throughout the manual we highlight questions for you to consider so that you may adapt this process to be relevant to your community.
3. First, listen to your community; then, engage the stakeholders in action, collectively analyze your successes and challenges, adapt strategies, and listen all over again.

If you follow this framework and believe in its principles, you will experience unimaginable results and successes. This process works for just about any organization—not just for domestic violence or Latin@ organizations.

If you understand and implement these principles, you will be successful.

¡Buena Suerte!

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### How to Use this Manual

This manual tells the story of an organization that fundamentally changed its philosophy and its strategies. The spirit of this change is about the mobilization and authentic engagement of a community toward a common goal. In this case, the community is Latin@, and the goal is the end of domestic violence for the well-being of families and communities. We believe that our story has value for others who would like to change their worlds. But we also have a few words of caution: *Use at your own risk. Do so respectfully. Know your role.*

**Use at your own risk.** If you undertake this journey, your group will change dramatically. Your structure, approach, strategies, relationships, and shoe size will change. (Maybe the part about the shoe size is an exaggeration, but you will be taking bigger steps.) It will feel like a total upheaval, and some people will not like it. You might not like it . . . at least, not at first. If you're not interested in shaking up your own world, don't undertake this journey. It won't work.

**Do so respectfully.** This is about working from within a community to create change. It is *not* a new strategy for reaching a community you haven't reached well before.

**Know your role.** All of us have roles to play, and they're all important. If you are interested in creating change in your own community, you are a leader. Have courage, step forward and carry the torch. If you are someone who cares about and wants to support transformation in other communities, you are an ally. Allies are very important in every effort, and you should proudly wear this moniker. Be proud of either role-leader or ally-but never confuse them.

#### Disclaimer

There are a lot of people looking at community engagement as a strategy for social change. We believe we have something to offer to the mix. But even after more than a decade of practicing community engagement, this is a work in progress. We have developed some very successful strategies, and we have hit some roadblocks. We don't have all the answers. But we have hopes, dreams, a true pride and love of our community, and a vision for what it can be that keeps us searching.

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### **A Little Background**

Casa de Esperanza's 1998 strategic planning process changed the course of our organization and led us to create *Fuerza Unida*. We began to see women as strong and resourceful rather than needy. We changed from being service providers to advocates. We recognized that we had to transform our entire approach. In order to understand this change, it is important to consider the nature of service in the United States of America and its effect on the people being "served."

#### **The nature of service**

Community life in the United States of America has become increasingly complex and institutionalized. Where there once were few institutions other than houses of faith that supported people in building their lives, now there are many. Whereas neighbors and families once worked together to create solutions, now many turn to institutions and agencies for help and expertise. Unfortunately, this is an insidious process of displacement. Institutions are pushing aside people's natural tendency to band together to get things done.

On the positive side, people are now able to talk about and get support for issues that were once taboo, such as domestic violence. However, vast numbers of people now see themselves as clients or consumers rather than as contributors or leaders in their communities.

This is a self-reinforcing image that leads to estrangement rather than connection. As a result, people care less—rather than more—about their neighbors and family. Being a user of the system has replaced being a citizen of the community. Not surprisingly, issues such as domestic violence continue to plague families despite huge investments of time, effort and money by very well intentioned people.

Over the last few decades, researchers, community groups, and even institutions have grappled with how to make real change. Many have come to agree that the answer lies in going back to the basics, neighbor to neighbor. Individuals in this movement use several concepts and terms: asset-based community building, social capital, appreciative inquiry, community engagement, and building civil society, to name a few.

Behind this thinking is the premise that community members are resources; when community members apply their collective will toward a goal, they can make it happen. When it really matters to them, people align to get something done, especially when it reflects hopes and dreams for their families and community.

Everyone in a community should be seen for their gifts and energies, not defined by their problems. Furthermore, as communities look at themselves, they should assess their strengths and interests, not their needs.

Strong social connections are a hallmark of Latin@ communities, sometimes because many institutions that are familiar to us in the United States of America simply don't exist in Latin American countries, especially in rural areas. Interdependence and identity with family and community haven't been displaced

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by service providers. Working together and supporting one another is a way of being for Latin@ families. For these reasons, a community engagement approach makes a lot of sense as a way to work with Latin@s.

### **An evolving approach**

As part of Casa de Esperanza's continued evolution back to our cultural roots, we have reaffirmed our place in community. We are moving away from being a provider of services and toward being a community convener and mobilizer.

Through much reflection and analysis, as well as some very hard decisions, we have come to the stance from which we work today:

- One lone agency cannot change the world.
- The only way that change will ever happen is for Latin@ communities themselves to decide what they want and then take action.
- Latin@ communities, driven by their own core values, can and will create a safer and more just world.
- Clear, strong partnerships with allies leverage the resources we have to put toward any given initiative.

This manual describes the process we used to determine what matters to women in our community. It also describes how community members helped us interpret what we learned, discussed how this fit with their own priorities, and began to work on projects that they cared about.

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## Stopping to Listen: A Process You Can Use

### Decide why you are at the table

Every organization has reasons for undertaking a specific project, and listening sessions are no exception. It's important to understand clearly what you want to do and to communicate your intentions in a very transparent way to the community you hope to engage. While Latin@ communities and other communities of color have often been the subject of research, the benefit is rarely seen within the community. A clear purpose and a commitment to following through with sharing the results of the listening sessions are crucial to ensuring a successful experience.

#### AT A GLANCE

	<b>Motivation</b>
1999	We needed new strategies for supporting Latinas experiencing violence. Because Latinas were underutilizing shelter, we needed to know what would work better.
2003	A growing Latin@ population on St. Paul's East Side was highly underserved. A partnership with a local county agency provided a unique opportunity for connecting with Latinas on the East Side.
2012	As local communities continued to experience the impacts of the economic crisis, we noticed participation changes in existing engagement strategies. We wanted to assess those strategies and to identify the most helpful supports given current realities.

### Our story

When Casa de Esperanza first conducted listening sessions in 1999 and 2003, we'd thrown our old service model out the window. What would the next phase entail? What would it look like to mobilize people rather than to serve them?

We were also women who had been in the battle against domestic violence for quite some time. What were women thinking who weren't a part of this battle, whose lives were not linked to any human services networks?

Our Latin@ communities had grown by leaps and bounds over the last decade or so, with literally thousands of new faces in our midst. What was most important to our expanding communities? Where were people's hearts and spirits already ignited? Where were people ready to act? And toward what goals?

We knew some of the answers but not enough. It was clear that we needed to hear directly from our communities. Our expertise was in working with women, and our ideal was for them to be safe. We, thus, had to start by listening to women about their realities, worries and dreams. Their voices had not been heard enough, and we knew they had a lot to offer.

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We also knew that we had to build women's confidence and belief that they could change the world. As a result, our goals were to:

- learn what was most important to the women in our community (within the context of their lived realities);
- help them see their own strengths and leadership potential; and
- begin to frame strategies for mobilizing the community to end violence against women.

We continued to listen, evaluate and adjust our strategies over time, but inconsistent participation in some of our community initiatives, the lingering impact of the 2008 economic crisis, and increasing anti-immigrant sentiment signaled to us that we needed to determine whether our initiatives and approaches were still relevant and responsive. In 2012, our communities were still feeling strong impact from the economic crisis, many families had moved away or returned to their home country, fundamentally changing the social networks from just a few years before. In this critical time, we needed to check in with women in our communities and to identify how we could be responsive to changing realities.

### **Some things to keep in mind**

This work requires a real commitment to a philosophy of community engagement. It requires a belief that community members are capable of and have a right to self-determination.

This work also requires that you know your role. If you are a member of the community you are focusing on, take a leadership role. If you are not, be an ally. Support community members toward their goals.

Advocates of community building from a strengths perspective vary in their thoughts about the role of agencies or institutions. Some feel that agencies should work to develop strengths within communities; others feel that institutions should only play a peripheral role. It's important to determine where you are on this philosophical spectrum.

### **Some questions to ask**

1. What are the goals of your group? What difference do you hope to make in the community?
2. What is your organization's place/fit within the community's agendas?
3. What is your role in community-building? Are you willing to change what you do and how you do it, based on what you learn?
4. Why do you want to hear from the community? What role do you ultimately want them to play?
5. Are you committed to engaging people in action? What is the community's readiness for moving on issues you care about?
6. How willing are you to adjust the focus of your work?



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7. What do you want to see happen as a result of this effort? How will you ensure that the information you gain will be of benefit to the community?

### A note about mission

You may be tempted to see this process as one that advocates a change in an organization’s mission. It is not.

As nonprofit organizations, our mission is to support the community in the best way that we can. To be effective, we must remain relevant to the communities we serve or engage. Listening sessions are a way to make sure that your day-to-day work actually addresses the concerns central to your mission.

If feedback from listening sessions indicates that you aren’t clearly addressing your mission, it’s up to you to decide how to respond. However, backed by solid research, a mission change can be beneficial as it means you’re clearly following your community’s mandate.

### Make sure the right people are at the table

Prior to conducting listening sessions, it’s important to think critically about who is at the table. You want to ensure that the voices you hear are well-represented, and that you can engage key partners or stakeholder groups to enhance your process.

Listening sessions frequently seek the input of people who often aren’t asked to the table. As a result, your strategies, partnerships and communications will depend greatly on whom you want to engage.

#### AT A GLANCE

	<b>Communities Engaged</b>	<b>Interviewers<sup>2</sup></b>	<b>Key Partners</b>
1999	169 women and girls in South Minneapolis	16 bilingual women, including 15 Latinas; two women were staff members	A collaboration of 13 local organizations and a core group of community members
2003	107 Latinas on the East Side of St. Paul	Six Latina volunteers, one Latina staff member	Ramsey County Community Human Services (Welfare Office)
2012	122 Latinas throughout the Twin Cities Metro Area including urban and suburban areas.	Nine Latina volunteers; one Latina staff member provided support for note-taking, coordination, etc.	Led primarily by Casa de Esperanza volunteers in collaboration with key organizations like churches, schools, and other Latin@-focused agencies.

2 We use the term interviewer to refer to anyone collecting information from community members no matter which method is used (focus groups, one-on-one interviews, etc.) You may chose to use a different term depending on your group.

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### Our Story

Though Casa de Esperanza has long provided shelter and advocacy to Latinas experiencing domestic violence, at the time of our first listening sessions we had intentionally not built a strong and visible presence within the broader Latin@ community. We had a solid reputation with other organizations and strong connections with Latinas who had accessed our services, but we didn't have networks with large numbers of Latin@s.

Within this context and in order for the listening process to begin greater community engagement, we realized that, first and foremost, we had to get **community women** to the table. They had to be involved in every facet of the process. Staff immediately began recruiting women through informal networks. One primary target group was Latinas who'd experienced domestic violence, whether or not they participated in our initiatives. However, we also spoke with women who *hadn't* experienced violence because as mothers, friends, daughters, and neighbors, all Latinas play a critical role in working to end domestic violence. We needed to learn how they wanted to be involved with the work.

For practical purposes, we knew we also needed some potential **institutional partners** at our table:

- First, we simply weren't sure we had the resources to act alone, and other agencies could help us with staff, mailing lists, etc.
- Second, we knew that inviting partners into the listening endeavor would increase the likelihood that they too would mobilize to end violence against women.
- Third, we thought we'd be more successful as a coalition in getting support from funders. We knew that the more we worked together as agencies, the fewer women would fall through the cracks.

*If your organization lacks strong connections with your target audience, you may want to consider engaging **key partners** to conduct listening sessions.*

Because this was a new endeavor for us, we wanted to keep things simple. Too many partners might become difficult to manage. Along that same line of thinking, we wanted to start with agencies with which we already had good working relationships. We wanted to give ourselves a chance for success wherever we could, and we knew that staying on the same page regarding the purpose of the project was critical.

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Casa de Esperanza's Executive Director met with the heads of several other Latin@ agencies to explain her vision of how this process could change the way we did business. She wanted everyone to be clear about their commitment, both philosophically and in terms of resources.

In the end, three other Latin@ agencies joined us. Each had been trying to keep pace with the Twin Cities Latin@ population's recent explosive growth. None wanted to duplicate services; all wanted to ensure adequate support for women.

We also enlisted the help of some experts to ensure that our process and data would be the best they could be. Two skilled culturally competent researchers advised us on research design.

### **Fast forward to 2012**

After more than 10 years of practicing community engagement, we had established multiple contacts within the community and could readily connect with hundreds of Latin@s. As a result, we were able to conduct this round of listening sessions almost exclusively with our own staff resources and with volunteer interviewers already connected to our community engagement efforts. Additionally, several staff members were familiar with the listening session process and with community-based research methods. For all of these reasons, we felt that we had the internal capacity to successfully complete the project. The original *Fuerza Unida* manual served as our foundation and proved to be a highly relevant tool that still works very well.

In order to have a realistic idea of how many interviewers we would need, we had to first decide:

- the number of women we wanted to hear from;
- how many listening sessions we were able to do; and
- the time frame for training interviewers and completing the listening sessions.

Once we identified the number of interviewers needed, we had to decide what we were looking for in an interviewer. In short, we wanted interviewers who were:

*If your organization already has strong connections with your target audience, you may want to consider engaging **community members** to conduct listening sessions*

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- bilingual;
- familiar with Casa de Esperanza's work and mission;
- related to community at different levels;
- responsible, committed team players;
- flexible and prepared for the unexpected; and
- able to provide their own transportation.

Finally, if we wanted to have women-to-women conversations, then the interviewers had to be women. (See page 53 for more information on interviewer recruitment and training).

Next, we invited current participants from our community engagement initiatives to be trained as interviewers. Two staff members, the Community Initiatives Manager and the Community Engagement Coordinator provided interviewer training. We created a power point with relevant information to guide us through the training process. (This PowerPoint is available as a separate download at [nationallatinonetwork.org](http://nationallatinonetwork.org)). Ultimately, we trained eleven interviewers, and nine of the trained interviewers completed listening sessions. A staff member was present at every listening session to offer support and to help with difficult conversations if necessary.

Staff members analyzed the results of the listening sessions.

### **Some things to keep in mind**

First, be clear about your definition of community. You might be talking about a geographic area, an ethnic or cultural identity, or an age group.

In 1999 and 2003, our definition of community was all Latin@s living in the St. Paul/Minneapolis metropolitan area. At the time, our focus was on women, so we felt we needed to hear from them. We then selected a specific geographic location for each of our two listening projects. We chose two neighborhoods that were seeing the most growth in terms of Latinas: South Minneapolis and the East Side of St. Paul. In 2012, Latin@ communities had grown considerably in both urban and suburban areas, so we were interested in hearing from Latinas throughout the greater Metropolitan area. As a result, we hosted small listening session focus groups throughout the area.

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Once you define who you are talking about, you must make sure that you have the right people with you around the table, from start to finish.

### **Some questions to ask yourselves when recruiting partners to conduct listening sessions**

1. What is the ideal size of your group? How many people do you need at the table to accomplish your task?
2. When you talk about your community, whom do you mean? Are you talking about one town? About all Latin@s living in the town? About Latin@s working in a particular industry? About women who don't work outside the home? Be specific.
3. Who are the natural leaders in that community? Do you already know them? With whom do you already have strong relationships?
4. Who has interest in accomplishing the things you care about?
5. Who else could help you accomplish your goals? Are there allies who could help? Or areas of expertise that you'd like in the mix?
6. How will you balance the voices around the table to ensure that your efforts are truly community-driven?

*Start small to ensure success.*

*Make sure that any people you invite to the table know the spirit of the work before they join.*

### **Some questions to ask yourselves when planning to conduct listening sessions with staff**

1. Does your staff have the time necessary to invest in this project?
2. Will you need additional staff?
3. What additional training and support will your staff require?
4. What strengths will your staff bring to this approach?
5. How will you provide emotional support to staff and volunteers?

Whether you decide to utilize key partners, staff members, volunteer interviewers, or a combination of all three to conduct listening sessions, it is important to know that the process of conducting listening sessions can be emotionally challenging. As an organization, you'll need to support the interviewers to process the experience in healthy ways. It is also helpful to be prepared for

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participants in the listening sessions to want support for specific issues that may surface during a listening session. See page 37 for more information about self-care and about responding to participants who request additional support during or after a listening session.

### Decide what information you want to learn

Community-based research is a delicate process of gathering as much information as you can during the valuable and brief time that community members give you to ask personal questions.

Listening sessions are also an opportunity to engage community members in your work long-term. You may want to ask very personal information, and if you don't have an established relationship with interviewees, you may inadvertently make a negative impression.

In this process, balance is key. Challenge yourself to be reasonable in the number of questions you ask individuals. Ask yourself how you (or your mother, father, or grandparent) would feel answering the same questions.

#### AT A GLANCE

	<b>Goals</b>
1999	Understand Latina priorities in South Minneapolis
2003	Understand Latinas' experiences when receiving state welfare
2012	Understand Latina priorities in the Twin Cities Metro Area and assess our current initiatives' responsiveness to these priorities

### Our Story

Once we had decided which resources (partnerships or staff) we would use to engage community in listening sessions, we were ready to talk through what we wanted to learn. We didn't want to focus every question around domestic violence. Rather, we wanted to get a context to better understand the lives of the women in our community. We wanted to know, from women's perspectives:

- How do they spend their time-what fills their days?
- What do they most value in life?
- What would they like their lives to be like?
- What are their hopes for their children?
- What stops them from following their dreams?

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- What are their pressing needs? To whom do they turn for support?
- What do they perceive as their own strengths and successes?
- What they would like to contribute to the world?

We also wanted an idea of general demographics. Recent immigration patterns made it important to know how long they'd been in our community. The realities of established third- or fourth-generation families are very different from those of newly immigrated or migrant families. Other factors would fill out the picture of their lives, such as the types of jobs they held, language fluency and income levels.

We purposely didn't ask directly about a number of topics, even though we knew they influence women's ability to follow their dreams. We didn't want to scare women by asking questions that were too personal or that might raise mistrust. For example, women living with domestic violence might find it too difficult to be asked about the experience; likewise, questions about immigration status could set off too many alarms for those fearful of deportation. Instead, we allowed women to decide how much they wanted to tell us.

From our experience, we believe that staff and interviewers must have a clear understanding of all questions for successful implementation. Interviewers will have to answer many questions that arise from participants, and they must feel confident in the process.

For example, the five questions that make up the foundation of the listening session process are intended to explore specific aspects of daily life and community concerns.

### ***What do you spend most of your day doing?***

This question will examine her daily roles and routine activities, e.g., work, taking care of her home and children, community involvement, caregiver, student, etc.

### ***What are your most important day-to-day concerns?***

This question will get at: 1) her most pressing needs, e.g., rent, healthcare, childcare, food, job, etc.; 2) how she manages household money and where it comes from; 3) personal needs, e.g., assistance from community/social services, time to do what she enjoys, etc.

### ***List one personal achievement that makes you proud and why.***

This question will get at her level of self-esteem and, more importantly, acknowledge her success. Many Latinas immediately respond with the achievements of their children or their partner. This is important to capture, as it reveals Latinas' communal nature and the value of *familia*. However, we've always challenged women to go a bit deeper and identify an individual accomplishment as well.

### ***To whom do you turn when you have a problem?***

This question will provide information regarding an extended family support network, intra-family support network, or a community support network. Latinas have asked if we want to know only about local resources or about any resource. Leaving the question open and allowing women to share about any



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kind of support can be very revealing. For example, this question helped us document the fact that local Latinas' networks of support are not only local, but also international. In addition, many Latinas turn to God or faith for support. Such information is valuable for planning and identifying important partnerships.

### ***What are your personal goals, dreams or wishes? What would you need to reach that goal?***

This question will bring out her aspirations and what she needs to achieve those goals, e.g., education, job, dreams. Historically, the answers to these questions have been some of the key responses that inform action planning and program development.

### **Some things to keep in mind**

Asking questions is easy; the important thing is to ask meaningful questions that provide exactly the information you need. When developing questions for this purpose, there are a few things to consider:

- Questions should be easy to understand at all community levels.
- Try to answer your own questions and test them with your group of interviewers to see the type of responses you get.

Traditional needs assessments gauge needs, problems, services desired, etc. This kind of information-gathering reinforces people's identification with their problems rather than with their contributions.

You will probably want to know what challenges community members face, but don't start there. You will get the richest information, and uplift the people you talk with, when you start with their dreams and goals.

In addition, it's important to consider a broader picture of people's lives than you might obtain if you focus on one issue, such as domestic violence. People will get involved where their hearts are, while reinforcing strengths and connections has an amazing tendency to spill over into all kinds of areas.

Our experience conducting listening sessions in 2012 reinforced all of the key points in this section. Through our experience, we identified several benefits of using an approach to research that explores context and strengths before exploring needs and barriers. We found that this process helps inform organizational decision-making by learning directly from the community:

- What is needed?
- How do we move forward?
- What are the existing resources (formal and informal)?
- What can we do?
- How will the changes benefit community?

Using a strengths-based listening process allows you to get a better understanding of the community being served by knowing its background, beliefs, values, priorities, goals, and challenges. All of these

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elements help identify appropriate and more effective ways in which an organization can connect and initiate communication with community members.

Additionally, listening sessions are an opportunity to introduce an organization to community members with which they are not familiar, bridging relationships so that both ends can benefit.

Finally, this type of process gives you a chance to hear what the community has to say about your current services and the role that it would like your organization to play.

### **Some questions to ask**

- Are you conducting this assessment to understand a specific issue?
- What context or realities are you trying to understand?
- What will you do with the information gained?
- What kind of community engagement do you want to start with this process?
- If you are already involved in engagement, what do you hope to learn about your work and its impact?

### **Determine the best way to gather your information**

Many methods can be used to collect information among the community. Written surveys, telephone or in-person surveys, individual interviews, focus groups, online surveys, and many other options exist for collecting the right kind of information.

This is another decision that requires reflection, planning, testing, and balancing. Consider the audience you hope to engage and carefully evaluate the power dynamics between it and your organization. Because organizations are perceived as more powerful than individuals, you will want to design strategies that give the community as much power in the process as possible.

Some methods may take longer than others, such as individual interviews vs. an online survey. However, the opportunity to authentically connect with individuals, to really understand their realities and concerns, and to determine how your organization can best respond, is an incredibly powerful and valuable experience. Also, as we've mentioned before, this process opens the door to ongoing engagement with more community members.

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### AT A GLANCE

	Survey Methods
1999	Individual interviews and small focus groups with five key questions
2003	Individual interviews to complete a more lengthy survey
2012	Focus groups of six to eight individuals discussing five key questions. Some took place in private homes, some at partner organizations.

### Our Story

We knew why we were gathering information and what we wanted to learn. Next, we had to figure out how to do it.

The women and girls we wanted to hear from were probably not accustomed to having their opinions sought through research. We needed to be prepared to listen to women with diverse educational and life experiences, some of whom would be fluent in English and Spanish, and some of whom might not be able to read at all. We knew that we might encounter timidity and uncertainty about how to respond, confusion about the purpose of the questions, and feelings of privacy around sensitive issues.

With this combination of factors, we knew that a survey the women filled out themselves would probably not gather very much information. Moreover, it could alienate them; a written document is simply not very personal and feels like filling out an agency's intake form. It also raises problems for individuals with low literacy and limited English proficiency. Overall, a written survey could alienate individuals who experience difficulty reading in English or Spanish.

A conversation is much more engaging. We had to—in a very short amount of time—help women open up. Moreover, we had to spark their interest in getting involved. It became clear to us that the listening process had to involve women chatting with women.

Indeed, we found that conversations allowed women to freely share their thoughts and feelings. Listening sessions allowed us to ask questions in an environment of comfort and trust. They encouraged relationship-building as individuals got to know each other. Listening sessions were not just about gathering information, they were a way to give the community a voice and to create a space to be heard and engaged in initiating change.

Throughout the process, we wanted to encourage women to think of themselves, in the most culturally appropriate *and* liberating sense, as the backbone of the Latin@ community—as powerful matriarchs capable of framing the issues, envisioning solutions and marshaling forces to build community.

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In South Minneapolis in 1999, after completing a one-page demographic sheet, we really only asked five questions. The questions were very open-ended. We conducted some listening sessions through focus groups and some as one-on-one interviews.

These group discussions were wonderful because women heard others talk about being in the same boat. We saw women literally brighten as they recognized potential new friends in the faces of other women. On the down side, shy women were more likely to echo what they heard someone else had said.

On the East Side of St. Paul in 2003, we wanted to get at more specific information and be able to generalize the data. As a result, the survey tool was actually quite long and complicated. We only administered this survey in one-on-one interviews.

In 2012, we wanted to better understand general impressions, trends and community realities. As a result, we chose to conduct all of the listening sessions as focus groups.

### **Some things to keep in mind**

While listening sessions have many positive aspects, unless these sessions are done with an honest intention to listen, learn and eventually adapt the outcomes, the experience can result in an organization's loss of trust and credibility with community members. Failing to communicate the results of the listening sessions can send a message to the community that their efforts, opinions and suggestions were not valued. We have seen that community members are genuinely interested in the results of the process and feel that their investment of time in the project is honored when the results are shared with them.

When conducting individual interviews, we decided that we'd get the best results by assuring women their information would be kept in strict confidentiality. Some argue that this framework limits connections among interviewees. However, our experience is that participants appreciate the anonymity and confidential space to share personal information, especially if you are open and transparent about how it will be used.

If your goal is to build networks, you may benefit from choosing topics that people consider public information. Remember that people hesitant to tell you much may have a number of reasons, especially when the conversations involve members of the same family with both men and women.

If you want to pull information from your study by subpopulations, you'll need to track responses to individual people (for example, if you want to know what the women under 30 think, compared to the women over 40). This requires individual surveys or interviews.

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If you want people to discuss topics, add to each other's thoughts, and learn from one another, you should conduct listening sessions or focus groups.

If you want to quantify your results (for example, 40 percent of interviewees care about making the streets safer for children), you must also ask for individual responses. This information can be obtained in group settings through individual responses (a show of hands, or votes recorded on a flip chart, as examples).

For all of these reasons, it's important to understand how you'll report and use the collected information before you can design a strategy that produces the answers you need.

### Some questions to ask

- Are there cultural issues affecting how you should gather your information? Identify the barriers and evaluate solutions.
- Are people in your community more comfortable with group discussion formats? Or might they prefer speaking with someone one-on-one?
- Does a written survey play any helpful role in your community?
- How direct should your questions be? Is it better to use open or closed-ended questions?
- Are there styles of inquiry that feel more or less natural for people? How can you shape your assessment to fit them as closely as possible?
- Do you want to be able to know how many people think a specific way?
- If you are utilizing written surveys or forms, how will you collect information from individuals with low levels of literacy or limited English proficiency?

### Recruit people to gather the information

Although this process can be implemented exclusively with staff members, it's important to remember that it can engage and build relationships with community members. This process can take a little more time, but the benefits of recruiting, training and supporting community volunteers to facilitate listening sessions are too positive to ignore.

#### AT A GLANCE

	<b>Interviewers</b>
1999	16 bilingual women; 15 were Latinas, two were staff
2003	Seven bilingual Latinas; one was a staff member, six were volunteers
2012	Nine bilingual Latinas; eight were volunteers and one staff member provided support but didn't conduct any of the listening sessions

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### **Our Story**

For our study in South Minneapolis, Casa de Esperanza and its partner agencies recruited 16 bilingual women to conduct focus groups and surveys; fifteen of them were Latina. On the East Side of St. Paul, seven Latinas—all bilingual and connected in the Latin@ community—were recruited as interviewers. In 2012, all of the interviewers were Latin@ and familiar with our work. In all of our listening sessions, we wanted to understand Latina realities, including Latinas who'd experienced violence as well as those who hadn't. In all cases, something magical happened during the interviews and focus groups: women really opened up quickly.

The women interviewed in 1999 and 2003 later told us how important it was to them that the interviewers weren't from the government. One can assume all kinds of things about what this meant, but it probably involved something about people doing a job, as opposed to caring. The interviewers truly cared; they were genuine, real people.

Furthermore, this perception was possible in part because the interviewers looked and talked like the women they were interviewing. Their conversations were women-to-women. Moreover, they were women of color-to-women of color. Even more specifically, they were Latina-to-Latina. The interviewer is crucial to how much a participant shares during the group. And this individual must be able to create an environment of trust and confidence.

We learned that isolation was a strong undercurrent in the lives of many women engaged by the listening sessions. Causes varied: language barriers, culture shock, partner abuse, fear of deportation, recent arrival, long work hours, long hours spent caring for family, etc. We found these women starved for conversation—the chance to connect with someone and talk about their lives. For many, the interviews and focus groups felt like sitting in the kitchen with a sister or neighbor and talking about life.

Despite our concerns that women would feel uncomfortable with personal questions, we found that interviewees were very open and eager to tell about their lives. Beyond some basic common sense about what was considered too personal, it didn't really matter what we asked.

However, it was important that facilitators listened carefully—and between the lines—to get a real picture of what they heard. For example, no one talked directly about experiencing domestic violence. Rather, some talked about marital difficulties, about wanting more harmony in the family, or about wanting more support from their partners. As the interviewers listened to whole stories, they heard in some of them fear and anxiety that could indicate domestic violence.

Our 2012 experiences highlighted the pride and sense of accomplishment that volunteer interviewers felt in conducting listening sessions and the tremendous value that participants placed on the opportunity to share their opinions and experiences. In most listening sessions, individuals naturally shared information and resources with one another and offered mutual support—trading phone numbers as the sessions came to a close.

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### Some things to keep in mind

Some experts say that the purpose of informal associations is caring. We couldn't agree more. Recruit people who care about the community, who care about the well-being of its members, and who have the capacity to communicate that caring very clearly.

The people who gather information in a community must truly believe that they're talking to people who have something important to say. They must also believe that these people are valuable, contributing members of the community.

It's important that the people gathering the information feel like neighbors, rather than like researchers or census workers. It's preferable not to cross gender and race lines, because doing so changes the tone and feel of these sessions change the tone and feel.

### Some questions to ask yourselves

- Are there gender, age, or other issues in your community that should guide how you pick the people who will gather the information? Would factions within your community consider a particular individual as either an insider or an outsider? How can you find information gatherers that are generally trusted by all?
- Where will you find people who fundamentally believe that their fellow community members have something important to say?
- What other qualities matter to you in the people who will gather the information?

## Support and train the interviewers to get the best possible results

Because we value the time and experience of volunteer interviewers, we've always provided small stipends for the focus groups or interviews. It's one way of demonstrating our appreciation and partnership with them.

Providing training also greatly enhanced the comfort level of community members involved in the project. It's important to remember that these individuals are representatives of your organization while conducting the listening sessions. They must be prepared to speak confidently about your organization, the purpose of the listening sessions, and the intended outcomes of this research.

### AT A GLANCE

<b>Since 1999, all our interviewers have:</b>	
Had initiative;	Been willing to help, learn and teach;
Not been afraid to ask questions or make suggestions;	Been responsible and committed.



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### Our Story

In 1999 and 2003, our first decision was to pay community interviewers—those not paid as staff of partner agencies—for their time. Our next decision was to train and support them in their roles.

Before sending women out to begin the interviews and listening sessions, we trained them in the project's principles, as well as in how to facilitate the sessions. A coordinator supported the interviewers and ensured that the process kept moving. The coordinator:

- called each interviewer at least weekly to see how she was progressing and if she needed any help; took anything she learned from them and immediately revised the process or alerted other interviewers to potential problems; and
- coached them on how to get through challenges.

Interview length is another example of how the ongoing training and communication helped. Interviewers soon perceived a great sense of isolation among the community women. Word quickly spread from interviewers to coordinator that the most important thing was to really listen. Interviewers understood that the sessions could take quite a bit of time.

Because the interviewers made it their mission to help women tell their stories—fully and without hurry—the sessions worked beautifully. Each lasted from forty-five minutes to almost two hours. The women shared details of their lives that were very personal, often saying things like, “It feels so good to have someone really listen to me.” In the end, we heard from interviewers and interviewees alike that the power of this study was in giving women a venue for telling their stories to someone with whom they identified.

The coordinator also stressed to the interviewers the importance of asking all the questions. She stressed that women should be encouraged—but not forced—to answer them.

*“There may be questions that women are reluctant to answer, but don’t make any assumptions about that. Go ahead and ask. If they don’t want to answer, let them know that is just fine and move on. But don’t hurry them. They may just need some time to think.”*

As a result, we generated a huge amount of data about the women. (In a related study conducted in a smaller rural city, very little data was actually collected. Interviewers seemed hesitant to ask, not sure that anything of value was really there. They didn’t communicate a sense of patience and presence.)

In 2012, we followed a similar structure. We paid volunteer interviewers, providing training and support throughout the process. We recognized that conducting individual interviews and facilitating focus groups required similar skills but specific training and support. We developed a PowerPoint presentation for training interviewers that’s available for download at [nationallatinonetwork.org](http://nationallatinonetwork.org).

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In each of our listening sessions, we asked the interviewers to complete evaluations of their conversations. We also held debriefing sessions with all interviewers at the end of each study. These sessions gave the formal opportunity to add their impressions, interpretations and observations, and to talk about commonly-heard themes. In many cases, these sessions rounded out the information we received.

The sessions also helped interviewers reflect on what they'd learned through the process. One interviewer told us, *“Doing this motivated me to help—gave me the energy to get out and do things. I was battling my own lack of motivation. In the end it got me going. It made me reflect on my own life.”* The process moved many listeners to a place where they felt ready to take on more leadership.

For some helpful questions to consider when debriefing with the interviewers, see handout on page 67.

As a coordinator working with volunteer interviewers, it's helpful to:

- Be sure you know and understand the process before you begin.
- Identify the most effective way to train interviewers.
- Establish clear boundaries for you and the interviewers.
- Have and discuss clear expectations during training.
- After training, give interviewers time to carefully review materials and contact you with any questions.
- Provide interviewers with a contact list for additional support, or in case they want to exchange ideas, tips or questions.
- Together, discuss self-care, how to identify when they need it and/or some strategies to use. (See Self-care section on page 37.)
- Have fun!

*“Doing this motivated me to help-gave me the energy to get out and do things. I was battling my own lack of motivation. In the end it got me going. It made me reflect on my own life.”*

### **Some things to keep in mind**

It's important to find a balance between an interviewer's natural ability to connect with her neighbors and the need to gather thorough information. To strike the right balance, interviewers need a real interest in others, balanced with a deep-seated sense of respect.

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Too much formality can result in not connecting personally with the woman being interviewed. It may also cause the woman to give brief, surface-level information or not answer some questions at all. If a woman really doesn't trust the interviewer, she may even make up stories that distort results.

How an interviewer demonstrates connection and concern is also layered with language. In Latin@ communities, respect is an important factor that can be heard in the language. As an example, Spanish has two forms for the one English word you—*tú* or *vos*, and *usted*. *Tú* or *vos* is most commonly used with friends, with younger people and sometimes with colleagues. *Usted* is used with elders and others to whom one shows respect. These norms about formal and informal address vary by country. What feels like disrespect to a person from one country could feel like “chumminess” to a person from another country. Be careful about the terms you use.

### Some questions to ask

- What is the skill set of the people you recruited to serve as information gatherers? What else do they need from you in order to be really successful?
- How can you ensure that they understand the philosophy of what you are trying to do, as well as the tasks required of them?

## Determine where you will conduct interviews and the number of participants

Every step in the process discussed to this point will inform your decisions about whom you will interview, how you connect with them, and where the interviews or focus groups take place. During this step in the process, it's important to consider your method, desired outcomes, privacy and confidentiality concerns, and existing connections with the community.

### AT A GLANCE

	<b>Locations of Interviews/Focus Groups</b>
1999	Mostly public spaces, some private homes. Participants were approached at random or through existing groups.
2003	Private homes and public spaces, depending on where participants felt most comfortable. Participants were identified in conjunction with the county and were initially contacted by phone.
2012	Mostly private homes or existing groups. Participants were most often connected in some way to the interviewers (friends, family, acquaintances, etc.).

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### **Our Story**

We knew that we'd have the best luck connecting with women in the places where they were already comfortable. Each partner agency came up with a list of group activities where it might be appropriate to hold a focus group. We also asked all of the interviewers to think of groups with which they were connected. In the end, some sessions were held with existing groups (such as an English as a Second Language class) at Latin@ agencies and churches. Other sessions were organized like Tupperware parties-held in private residences with acquaintances of the interviewers.

Many women and girls were interviewed through one-on-one interviews at public spaces, such as laundromats, grocery stores, or the Mercado Central shopping mall in Minneapolis.

On the East Side of St. Paul, we only did one-on-one interviews. Because we developed this project in partnership with Ramsey County (which wanted to know more about how to assist Latinas on public assistance [MFIP]), we recruited many of the women we interviewed from a list of MFIP recipients. Mostly, we relied on our interviewers to recruit from within their own social and contact circles.

For the listening sessions in 2012, it once again proved important to know where community naturally congregates; interviewers had great input in recruiting participants. Flexibility with meeting locations helped us guarantee success. Some listening sessions were held at established groups during their regular meeting time; others were done at women's homes. Facilitating the sessions on terms that agreed with the participants' lifestyles and schedules increased participation.

### **Some things to keep in mind**

It's important to understand the sample of people you developed. No sample is wrong, but a limited sample can limit the possibility of generalizing results. For instance, if you only talk to young people, you might conclude that education is most important to the community. If you only talk to recent immigrants, you might think it's English as a Second Language. If you only talk to women who've been beaten in their homes, you might determine that the most important thing is violence-free relationships. In reality, all of these issues are probably important, but you won't hear about some of them unless you talk to a representative population sample.

Set a goal for the number of people you want to hear from; then create a plan to find twice that many.

### **Some questions to ask**

- Where do people in your community naturally congregate?
- Do you already know how to find community members?
- How can interviewers help you find people to include in the study?

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- Does the sample you've developed represent the whole community? Or might you need to look harder to find a broader cross-section of people?
- How will you get community members to participate? What are the benefits for participants?

## Gather the information

One thing in this process is certain: community-based research is unpredictable. Flexibility, adaptability and persistence are necessary to keep staff and volunteers motivated. Again, careful planning and consideration of elements in the preceding sections will build a strong foundation for successful information-gathering. Transparency, authenticity and demonstration of genuine interest in participants will produce better results.

### AT A GLANCE

	<b>Information-Gathering Timeframes</b>
1999	12 months
2003	Five months
2012	Four months

## Our Story

Once our infrastructure was in place, it was a question of hitting the streets and making it all happen. We set up a tight timeline and pushed ourselves to stick to it. However, it's amazing how easy it is to fall behind schedule. No matter how carefully you schedule community-based research, something always changes. Some of the sessions will be wildly successful. However, sometimes you'll arrive to facilitate a session, and only two people will show up to participate.

### Conducting Listening Sessions with Groups

In 1999, we wanted to survey 200 women and girls in South Minneapolis. In the end, we reached 169. For each group, two interviewers were present, and childcare was provided. At the beginning of the session, the interviewers introduced themselves, explained the purpose of the study and named the partner agencies. They repeatedly told participants that their input would be of great help to the community as a whole. Women were then asked to complete a written demographic information sheet and a sign-in sheet.

The format for these listening sessions was designed to give every woman a chance to speak and feel heard through a free-flowing discussion. One interviewer asked a question. For each question, women

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were able to give one response, more than one or none at all. The second interviewer wrote each response on flip chart paper, which gave the interviewers the opportunity to ask if they had recorded each answer correctly. This process continued until everyone present had answered all five questions.

At the end of the session, the interviewers answered questions about community resources and gave women gift packets for their help. Gift packets included information about the partner agencies, as well as personal products such as shampoo and lotion.

### Reflections from the Fuerza Unida Coordinator

*“Listening sessions allow us to initiate conversations with the community we work with or are hoping to serve. Through them we can learn what drives the community, their interests, needs, hopes and obstacles, it is also a good way to engage community members, encouraging participation on the subjects that matter to them. But what good is it to listen and learn if we are not flexible enough to adapt; it would be like asking for advice that we are not even willing to consider.”*

In 2012, we allowed a minimum of two-and-a-half to three hours per listening session, including time to complete the demographic information, answer questions, and engage in small conversation with host and participants prior to and sometimes after each session.

Since we did not have partner agencies in the project, Casa de Esperanza provided participants with much of the information and resources. We discussed volunteer and leadership training opportunities as well as services at the Information and Resource Centers and at the shelter. As a thank you for their participation, the women all received a gift card from a local store.

### Conducting Listening Sessions as Individual Interviews

In South Minneapolis in 1999, individual interviews took place in public spaces, such as laundromats, grocery stores, and the Mercado Central shopping mall. Interviewers contacted the proprietors of these businesses and asked for permission to conduct the interviews. Then interviewers stood in the public space with clipboards in their hands. They approached women walking through or using the space and asked if they would mind being interviewed for a community study.

Where possible, women were invited to interview in an out-of-the-way area. They filled out a demographic information sheet and were asked the series of five questions. Interviewers took notes on women’s comments. They thanked each woman at the end of the interview and gave her a gift packet.

In 2003 on the East Side of St. Paul, interviews were much longer and more detailed. The majority were arranged in advance by

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phone. Interviewers set appointments, either in the home of the woman to be interviewed or in a public place. In all cases, the coordinator checked back frequently with all interviewers to ensure steady progress.

### **Some things to keep in mind**

Determine how many interviews you want to complete, then set a timeline for completing them. Be very practical. For example, if you have five interviewers, want to interview 100 people, and have four weeks to complete them all, each interviewer must average five interviews a week. (By the way—in our experience—that’s not realistic!)

The research space is also an important factor in how comfortable community members will feel with the process. Arrive early, give yourself time to familiarize with the setting, to be prepared and engage in casual conversations with participants. This initial “small talk” helps ease their transition into the listening sessions and makes it easier to ask questions about their lives. In some interviews or focus groups, women may need additional time to debrief, so keep this in mind as you are scheduling your time, arranging childcare if it’s provided or planning which space you’ll use.

Be sure to take notes so you can refer to them later for reflection and clarification.

### **Some questions to ask**

- In what settings are community members likely to trust you?
- What support do your interviewers need in order to keep pace with your goals?
- If you are not keeping pace with the number of interviews you wanted to complete, where else can you turn to quickly reach more people?
- How many people do you need to hear from in order to feel comfortable with what you’ve learned?

In the case of interviews and focus groups, we’ve found some practices to be more helpful than others. For a quick reference sheet to use during the listening sessions process, refer to the **Best Practices** handout on page 63.



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### Reflections from our Community Engagement Coordinator

*“During this process I took care of myself in different ways, after each the listening sessions unintentionally, finding somebody at the office that helped me debrief, talking with the participants and interviewers after the sessions and moving the conversation to happy less emotional subjects helped. After a couple of sessions, I took care by allowing myself to feel the emotions I had and act on them whether it was crying, talking, screaming, running or finding my comfort zone, food etc.”*

## Self-care

Self-care can mean something different for each individual; with many self-care techniques available, interviewers need to individually decide what works for them. Nothing can really prepare interviewers for the intensity of the information shared during a listening session, especially when the subject is as sensitive and emotional as domestic violence. This reality leaves us with a critical question: how can interviewers anticipate their reactions or feelings toward what’s shared?

### Before the Listening Sessions Begin

Prior to the listening session process, we recommend having a conversation about self-care among staff and volunteer interviewers. Keep in mind that it’s important to create a safe and confidential space before volunteers will feel they can share personal stories:

- Find out what self-care means for the interviewers and coordinator.
- What self-care tools are available?
- If there isn’t a self-care plan in place, establish a procedure or plan that fits the needs and personalities of everyone involved. This isn’t a one-size-fits-all plan, and individualized plans can be developed during a one-on-one check-in, or as an activity pairing two team members as self-care “buddies.” They can share self-care plans and check-in with each other during the process.
- Based on the listening session questions, try to anticipate what type of information will be shared; how do you feel about that information? Are there any concerns?
- Ask yourself whether any of the questions make you uncomfortable? Why or why not?
- What’s your experience with the subject to be discussed? Based on your experience, how do you think you’ll act or react to the information shared?

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### How can interviewers identify when they need to practice self-care?

During the listening session process, some indicators of the need for self-care could include:

- You can't disconnect your mind from work.
- You feel emotionally overwhelmed, experience feelings that you don't know how to handle or an irrational need to cry.
- You feel stressed, tired, upset, and anxious about work and the listening sessions.
- You have trouble sleeping.
- People around you keep asking you what's wrong because you're acting differently than usual.

Our Community Engagement Coordinator shared some self-care strategies that helped her during the listening session process. These strategies helped her stay grounded, feel less overwhelmed and maintain balance with other parts of her life:

- Communicate, find somebody to talk with and schedule a check-in or follow-up with a supervisor after the listening sessions.
- Keep a journal, answering the 30 reflective questions (see page 74). This might help you get rid of some of the stress.
- Find activities that make you happy and take time for them. Consider simple things such as listening to music, drinking tea, going out for a walk, meditating, taking a long bath or reading.
- Make sure you rest enough, eat and sleep well.
- Give yourself at least 24 hours between each listening session.
- Make sure you ask for help or additional support when needed.
- Don't bring work home.
- When you are at work, find some space where you feel comfortable and safe.
- Cry as you need to.
- Define, remember and respect your boundaries between work and personal life.
- Don't forget to have fun.

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### Compile what you learned

Having a plan for how you'll analyze data *before* you begin collecting from the community is a good idea to ensure adequate resources. You'll also be able to analyze data as soon as it's collected. The staff or volunteers who'll be analyzing the data may require additional training to prevent bias and to ensure that the community voice comes through.

#### AT A GLANCE

	<b>Data Analysis Strategies</b>
1999	Followed-up focus group with interviewers; compiled some data into spreadsheets to be able to aggregate information; performed analysis of open-ended survey questions.
2003	Compiled data into spreadsheets to be able to sort, compare and aggregate information; coded and developed themes from open-ended responses.
2012	Used audio-recordings to code and develop themes from the discussions.

### Our Story

In 1999 and 2003, each interviewer filled out an evaluation form about how the interviews went. In addition, as the interviews were coming to conclusion, interviewers were assembled for a debriefing session. The purpose of these debriefing sessions was to capture anything that had not been explicitly written down—impressions, feelings, etc.

For example, we wanted to know about the women's strengths, and it proved difficult for them to tell us directly. Culturally, the women were uncomfortable bragging about themselves. They loved talking about their family members but not themselves. Despite this, from listening to how the women talked about their lives, the interviewers were able to extrapolate some answers to this question.

In addition, we wanted to know if the interviewers felt listening sessions were a worthwhile endeavor. They resoundingly said *yes!*

Once we received all the data, we began to compile and analyze it.

Our raw data from the 1999 South Minneapolis study was a mixture of Spanish and English. Anything that could be tracked to individual responses was compiled on a spreadsheet. We typed up comments from group discussions in their original language. Because these responses were not linked in any way to the individuals who made them, they had to be analyzed in aggregate. We were not able to do much quantitative analysis because most of the data came from open-ended questions and responses that couldn't be tracked to individuals. As a result, the study gave a picture of what women were thinking about at the time we talked with them.

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For the 2003 study on the East Side of St. Paul, we wanted to quantify a little better what we learned. As a result, we only did one-on-one interviews and added several multiple-choice questions. Because we kept all responses linked to individuals, we were able to sort the data by demographic sub-groups and then compare responses.

For example, we were able to look at the difference in responses between women on public assistance and those not on public assistance, or compare responses between women born in the U.S. and those born in Latin America. The ability to differentiate led us to understand the complexity of our community at a much deeper level.

Analysis began by separating all comments into discrete responses (e.g., if someone said, “I clean house, go to work, and then pick the kids up from daycare,” it was divided into three separate responses). All comments were then translated into English. At this point, responses were categorized and coded.

In 2012, we used audio recordings of each focus group to develop lists of codes and themes for analysis. This information was then shared with Casa de Esperanza staff members in a short report. ([www.casadeesperanza.org/local-programs/fuerza-unida/](http://www.casadeesperanza.org/local-programs/fuerza-unida/)).

We presented our findings in simple charts to make it as easily understood as possible. Our last step was to translate the final report back into Spanish so the data would be accessible to the community women who contributed.

In 2012, as in previous years, we were able to learn as much from the women during the side conversations that happened before and after each session as from their answers to the questions. We learned about their fears, concerns, goals, what made them smile, their dreams and achievements. For example, we again saw that it was difficult for the women to talk about their own individual achievements. We also learned that participants viewed their family achievements as their own. These observations were captured in the reflections and feedback provided by interviewers and staff and integrated into the final data analysis.

### **Some things to keep in mind**

If your data is in more than one language, it's important that the person doing data entry understand both/all languages. It's also important that he or she enters the data as it's written. You can translate and summarize later, but the first step is to capture data exactly as it comes to you.

### **Some questions to ask**

- In what languages will your data be recorded?
- Who will compile your data? Are they fluent in the necessary languages?
- In what format should your findings be presented? What format is most accessible to the people with whom you will work?

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### Share with community members, determine what you learned and listen again

Community validation is an essential component of community-based research. It demonstrates ongoing engagement with the community; it's an opportunity for participants to learn about a project's results, and engages them more than once. It's also necessary to provide community members with the opportunity to clarify, expand or challenge the data interpretation.

This process is different from many traditional research approaches in which someone from outside comes to the community, asks a lot of questions and then leaves. In this scenario, the community often doesn't learn results of the research, which can leave individuals feeling resentful, tokenized and taken advantage of.

On the contrary, a community validation process informs the community of the research results and engages them in defining how this information should be used.

#### AT A GLANCE

	<b>Community Validation Strategies</b>
1999	Engaged a small group of Latinas who participated in the listening sessions to validate the themes and discuss them at a deeper level.
2003	Engaged community members and partner organizations to review and discuss themes at a deeper level.
2012	Utilized a World Café-style discussion among a large group of Latinas who had participated in the listening sessions to further discuss the key themes and to identify potential action items or strategies for addressing community concerns that surfaced during the listening sessions. ( <a href="http://www.worldcafe.com">www.worldcafe.com</a> )

### Our Story

The first thing we did was pull together some preliminary findings. Then, we brought some of the women we'd interviewed back to the table to review the summary. We asked them to help us go deeper in some areas and give their reactions to some of the findings. This feedback loop helped ensure that what we learned continued to be grounded in the community. It also helped prepare women for participating in the planning phase of *Fuerza Unida*.

As we sat down to analyze what we'd learned on a deeper level, we decided that we needed a broad mix of voices around the table. Partners knew that a strong plan would involve a broader group of agencies and interested parties. Latina voices had to be central—all agreed on that. In addition, we wanted any group that could bring resources to the table to join in this work. However, anyone new coming to the table had to agree to the community-driven nature of the project.

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We invited representatives from all partner agencies, other interested agencies and from the Latin@ community to become part of the planning team. The project coordinator met with each prospective team member and explained the philosophy of the project, the progress to date and meeting expectations. This step proved very important, as team members came to the table informed and eager to work within the project's stated philosophy.

We had to set up a process that would provide opportunities for all team members to participate on equal footing. Some of the important components of the process:

*All materials and discussions were bilingual.* The planning team included monolingual English and Spanish speakers, so we facilitated each meeting in both languages. No formal interpreter was present; rather, the team shared translation responsibilities. Bilingual individuals made their own comments in both languages; they also helped translate the comments of the monolingual members.

We carried out a great deal of the process in *small breakout groups*. Community women weren't accustomed to participating in planning activities, and they were less likely to speak up in large groups. Small group activities gave them the opportunity to feel critical to the process. Because of the mixture of people on the team, each breakout group included agency representatives, community women and at least one bilingual person. Small group activities also gave team members the opportunity to get to know each other better and to bond as a team.

*Just the facts, ma'am.* We gave the planning team information from the project's research phase in as straightforward a manner as possible, without interpretations. We wanted the team's collective wisdom to provide a richer interpretation of the data than one person might offer. We also wanted people to interpret the information about their own community.

The planning team for the 1999 listening sessions pored over women's responses and pulled out nine issues (in prioritized order) to address in order to create a plan that would support women in following their dreams:

- English Proficiency
- Legal Status
- Employment and Career Development
- Childcare
- Basic housing
- Transportation
- Family and Community Connections
- Financial Planning and Strength
- Institutional Support and Collaboration

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### Some things to keep in mind

In all three studies, we found some striking issues.

In South Minneapolis, we asked very general, open-ended questions of 169 women, a group composed primarily of relatively recent immigrants. These women did not want handouts or caretaking. They wanted *opportunity* to be able to follow their dreams of providing for their families and of creating better lives for their children.

We also heard that many of them felt *isolated* in this community and didn't know where to turn for help. Many felt that they must make it on their own here, despite deep cultural values about family and community. Therein lay both their vulnerability and their strength. When we invited women back from this group to analyze and plan, we had a great turnout.

On the East Side of St. Paul, we were more specific about what we wanted to learn, based on our findings from South Minneapolis. Also, since we specifically sought women on MFIP, we talked with more women who'd been in the country for some time—with many born and raised here. We also talked with recent immigrants.

In this study, we saw firsthand the effects of service models that turn people into clients. Many of the women on MFIP seemed to have lost their cultural grounding. Their lives seemed to center around institutions and thinking about their deficits. While they did have lower incomes, their ongoing engagement with institutions seemed to impact their self-perception and outlook. Additionally, most of these women were not interested in participating in follow-up activities. Unfortunately, most weren't involved in the process to validate the data, which could have provided a deeper understanding of these results.

It seemed that women who lived closest to Latin@ culture and connections held a more positive outlook for themselves. They didn't view themselves in terms of their needs. Rather, they viewed themselves as people striving for a good life.

In 2012, World Café conversations concentrated on the four previously identified common themes: Education, Emotional Support, Personal Development, and Childcare. We asked participants to:

1. Share an experience in which a help, support or service received related to the identified common themes made a difference on their life (positive or negative).
2. Tell us what made the experience different from others.
3. Inform us about what kept them from utilizing or accessing help and services currently available.
4. Share ideas about how community and organizations could work in new, simple and innovative ways to provide services in a more effective manner.

Most women shared the same dreams but identified different paths to achieving their goals. The women we heard from all had an intense desire to learn and succeed; they also had a need to be heard. They

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weren't looking for advice or for direction, but wanted a space to express their emotions and concerns without feeling exposed.

### Some questions to ask

- Who should be involved in interpreting the findings of your listening process? What balance do you need to ensure that the picture stays true?
- How will you ensure that the way you summarize your findings is as unbiased as possible?
- How will you help all people on the team participate on equal footing with each other?

## Develop an action plan

At this point in the process, you will have powerful information in your possession. Deciding what to do

### AT A GLANCE

	<b>Impact of Listening Sessions</b>
1999	Identified new strategies for community engagement in Minneapolis focused on new overarching goals.
2003	Validated the need for increased engagement on the East Side of St. Paul to decrease a sense of isolation among Latinas and to increase access to information, resources and support.
2012	Informed significant redevelopment of community engagement initiatives.

with it can be a transformative or defining moment for your organization or for your project. This decision may be challenging, exciting, and possibly a little uncomfortable, but it's important to remember that, moving forward, you're following the voice of the community, which gives a certain degree of security.

### Our Story

Once we'd looked at all the South Minneapolis data and discussed what it meant, we had to pull out some priority issues. It was our responsibility to create plans based on the strengths of the women we had heard from. The first thing we did was to create some overall goals that all Latinas:

- are able to have their basic needs met;
- feel support for maintaining a strong family and raising healthy children;
- have the opportunity to create and participate in interpersonal and community connections;
- have the opportunity to develop their strengths and skills; and



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- are supported in following their dreams.

Next, the planning group discussed strategies for setting up systems and reducing barriers within each area of discussion. They also came up with concrete programmatic strategies for addressing some of the issues—usually where the group had personal passion for getting involved. Planning team members divided into leadership groups to move the areas they cared about.

It's important to note that the group saw solutions as coming from for-profit, public and nonprofit sectors, as well as from individuals within the community. These solutions weren't about creating more "programs" or "services" *per se*; they were about mobilizing everyone to live as a community designed around the wants, needs and aspirations of its members.

As we replicated the process on the East Side of St. Paul—and generated data at a deeper level—our thinking became more global. We saw the need for strategies:

- to support women and their families by *strengthening cultural identity and connections*;
- to ensure that women and their families had *access to information* they need to make decisions about their own lives; and
- to *decrease women's isolation*.

Community women were the backbone of our efforts throughout this planning process. They were the most regular participants in the collaborative meetings. They provided leadership and reality checks for everything the group discussed, giving an invaluable authenticity to the work. In order to ensure these women were on equal footing with those who participated as part of their jobs, we paid them on an hourly basis for their participation. We also provided childcare at meetings, which was critical to their ability to participate and to our emphasizing how much we valued their time."

*In 2012, the key themes that surfaced from the listening sessions included: Education, Emotional Support, Personal Development and Childcare.*

In 2012, the key themes that surfaced from the listening sessions included: Education, Emotional Support, Personal Development and Childcare. We decided that we wanted to check in with women to make sure that these were, indeed, their key concerns, and to ask them about what would really make a difference in these four

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areas. Our process included using a “World Café” style meeting, where small groups of women connect to discuss one question, and then change tables to meet new women and discuss another question. In this way, women meet with and connect with many other women in a short period of time, while having critical conversations in a relaxed atmosphere.

### **Some things to keep in mind**

It's important to get a sense of the order of priority of the community's key issues. It's also important to gauge the passions of those who've stepped forward as members of your planning team. No matter how important an issue may seem, nothing will happen if no one wants to take leadership.

Create a plan that includes both short and long-term goals. Don't lose sight of the long-term goals, but don't get bogged down by them either.

You will always identify more opportunities than you currently have the resources to address. Start where you have the most energy as leaders. In order to make a real difference, begin with the things you can start most easily and quickly. In this way, you'll build energy for tackling more complex projects.

The long-term goal is that community engagement becomes the norm for creating any change in your community. To shape the future, institutions become accustomed (and have mechanisms in place) to working with community. Community members become accustomed to playing a role. The idea is not to create dependency; rather, this process is intended to provide community with the tools to create change.

### **Some questions to ask**

- Out of the data you collected, what seems most important to the community members who informed your study?
- What issues do your planning group members care about the most?
- Where do the two overlap? In other words, what's the intersection between community priorities and leadership passion/energy?
- What small things can get done quickly to build energy and momentum or lay groundwork for things down the road?
- Where can you ensure success?

## **Start taking action and take stock of how things develop**

Persistence is the name of the game in community engagement. During our years of implementing this approach, we've experienced many setbacks, changes and challenges. Early on, we learned that

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### AT A GLANCE

	<b>Engagement Outcomes</b>
1999	Teams of community members mobilized to launch five new community engagement projects in Minneapolis.
2003	Internal staff restructured to implement new engagement strategies on the East Side for both community members for and non-profit leaders working with Latin@ communities.
2012	Enhanced engagement strategies are in development to provide more opportunities for the development of community-driven engagement projects.

supporting community members to maintain leadership over projects, promoting accountability among partner organizations, and developing multiple contingency plans are key strategies for maintaining the momentum built by listening sessions. Remember, however, that it's not the goal of listening sessions to create new programs or services; rather, to create opportunities for community leadership, engagement and change. You will need to *adapt and enhance* your strategies as you go along.

### Our Story

After we completed the planning phase, our planning team selected five activities to pursue in the first implementation year. This group also laid out specific tasks to be accomplished under each of those activities.

We then broke into five different teams. Each team member agreed to take the lead and make progress on one of the specified activities outside the collaborative meetings. At this stage, active members of the *Fuerza Unida* collaborative shared a strong collaborative spirit and unified vision. Connections between active agencies were genuine and mutually beneficial. In fact, due to the efforts of this project, additional agencies were eager to partner with Casa de Esperanza.

Members also shared in the general feeling that they'd accomplished a lot in a very collaborative spirit. One of the men involved commented on the strength of the project, *"I'm struck by how different this feels. When a group of men get together to do something, there just isn't the same cohesion and energy. We've done a lot!"*

However, implementing the initiatives did not prove to be as easy as imagined. We continued to meet every two months to coordinate our efforts. At each meeting, the smaller groups reported on their individual projects, and the full group evaluated progress.

Implementation was a challenging period. Planning phase excitement gave way to frustration with the barriers teams faced in trying to make progress. Many of the initiatives required that people outside the group open doors or contribute resources. Their cooperation was not always forthcoming on a timely

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basis, and sometimes, not at all.

In addition, many of those who participated in the overall planning as a part of their job affiliations (for example, as representatives of partner agencies) began to miss meetings. Follow-through waned.

Community women remained the backbone of the efforts, leading many of the specific initiatives and providing ongoing project evaluation. Despite our disappointment in those who informally dropped out of the project, the women's energy and passion kept the projects moving. At every meeting, community women asked about the participation of the partner agency staff members; they expected staff to step up to the plate and keep their commitments.

As a result, we knew that we had to reframe the situation and create new "rules;" we supported the community women in making things happen, rather than waiting for agency staff members to create change. Our first plan of attack was to develop a very strong leadership development program for the women involved. We also made it clear that these community women, not the agency staff, were the initiative leaders. Although staff were then invited to sit in on the coordination meetings, they weren't the group's main participants.

As a result of supporting community women in this manner, all but one of the projects were completed in a way that everyone felt good about. The most successful initiatives that evolved from the process were relatively concrete; for example, a small team of women organized driver's education classes for Latinas and Casa de Esperanza set up an information and referral site in a local Latin@ shopping area.

Perhaps the most important result overall was that community women felt proud of their work and its potential impact. The project philosophy was actually being lived out and the work was authentic—based on the voices of community women and then driven by these same individuals. Connections within the group helped women feel more like they were a part of something. The women's friendships and their confidence have continued to grow over time.

### **Some things to keep in mind**

When asked what they had learned, many of the women came back to the same words: patience and perseverance. *"Little by little, we just keep pushing, and it will happen."* The other strong message they all gave was one of contingency planning. *"We have to have options. If one track toward our objectives doesn't work, we have to have a back-up plan."*

During the listening sessions, longer-term needs and dreams will be discussed, but participants may also raise some challenges and concerns that can be addressed quickly. Indeed, during the 2012 listening sessions, we were able to address some of the women's concerns and goals immediately. For example, we supported participants by identifying opportunities for volunteers, by providing domestic violence

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presentations when requested locally and by helping them connect with other needed services already in place.

Finally, no matter how well you've thought through your plan of attack, problems will arise. It's really critical to have back-up strategies for moving your agenda.

### **Some questions to ask**

- How will you keep the energy going?
- How will you ensure that those who commit to the process stay with it?
- How will you keep things going as some participants drop out?
- How will you support the people who show up? How will you let them know that their efforts matter?

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### The Impact on Casa de Esperanza

The effects of *Fuerza Unida* continue to inform our strategies at Casa de Esperanza.

As an organization, we've changed our entire structure and our way of doing business:

- When we talk with potential partners, we now have a very clear process for evaluating the possibility of real collaboration.
- We've systematically examined all of our programs to determine how they can be retooled as mechanisms of engagement rather than as services.
- We've changed our staff structure and job descriptions.
- We developed new initiatives and continue to adapt our approaches based on feedback from participants and ongoing listening to overall the community.

That said, this process hasn't been easy for us. In fact, we are still grappling with some of its challenges:

- We're still trying to help some of our staff see their work in a new paradigm—one that's murkier than simply providing service. We always have to think about the “why” of what we do, rather than just the “what.” The “what” will change as we continue to ensure that we're moving in the right direction.
- We're always balancing the pace of community work with our desire to see change. It takes much longer to work organically in the community. We want to see change today, but we know that if we drive the efforts as a service, the changes won't take hold. The only real way for change to occur is for the seed to grow naturally in community soil.
- We have developed new initiatives and continue to try to strike a balance between community-driven work and providing effective staff support for community efforts. For example, we opened two Information and Resource Centers (Centros) with the intent of turning them over to community at some point. We ended up running the Centros with staff-coordinated volunteer support, never realizing the goal of handing them over to the community to sustain. We recently closed one of them, which has created an opportunity to support interested volunteers in running the Centro themselves. The evolution of community-driven initiatives is ongoing.
- This work is more difficult to fund over the long haul. It was relatively easy to find funders to invest in our exploration of this new approach. However, it's much harder to find ongoing support, in part because the answers to funder questions like “How many people did you serve?” or “What difference did you make for them?” are not linear.
- We reaffirmed our belief that commitments between agencies must be made at the highest organizational level and based on clearly outlined self-interest. The Executive Director must assign staff to this effort and make active participation part of their performance assessment.

Our most important learning from *Fuerza Unida* was that it's essential for community members to have avenues for creating the communities they want; furthermore, agencies and institutions must listen to community voices, build in processes for community involvement, and then put their resources at the community's disposal.

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# Appendices

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## **Appendix A–Interviewer Training**

The following pages offer an example of the interviewer training provided by Casa de Esperanza. As stated in the manual, the selection and training of interviewers is critical to the success of the process. If you would like to use these handouts for a training for your organization, editable text boxes have been provided to include your organization's name and a few other details if you wish.

### **Agenda**

1. Welcome
2. Introductions
3. Purpose and History of the Project
4. Interviewers' Tasks
5. Listening Group Process
6. Role-play
7. Questions
8. Team Assignments and Schedules
9. Closing



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### INTERVIEWER TRAINING

#### Job Description

The role of the interviewer is to work as a team member to make these listening sessions a positive and worthwhile experience for all participants. Each session will have two interviewers: one leads the group through the process and the other acts as recorder.

#### **Specific tasks for the interviewers:**

- Bring materials and resources to the group as agreed upon during the Interviewers' Training.
- At all times during the session, be present and act as a role model.
- Lead discussions without overpowering participants and facilitate the group process.
- Pay attention to the group participants.
- Act as a resource for the participants during the session.
- Remain with the group. At no time should the group be left without an interviewer present.
- Decide beforehand which interviewer will lead the discussion and which will do the recording.

Remember that the interviewers are there to support and facilitate this experience with Latinas and to draw out their responses. *Please take care not to dominate the discussion.* We need to hear about where the women have been, where they are today and where they want to be tomorrow.

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## INTERVIEWER TRAINING

### Script

*(Feel free to modify elements of this script as necessary to match your goals and community realities.)*

#### **Purpose and history of the project**

The mission of *Fuerza Unida* is to help Latina women and young girls in [your area] meet their goals and dreams. Although many social service and Latin@ agencies serve women, women's particular issues are sometimes lost, and women seldom have a voice in determining what solutions will best fit their needs. The first phase of this project is listening to Latina women and young girls. Our training today will prepare us to do this.

#### **Objective of the listening sessions**

Our objective is to create a picture of Latinas in this area that will inform the development of projects to support them. *The philosophy underlying this project is that the strengths of Latinas are a primary resource upon which to build other supports.* (Interviewers are asked to encourage discussion during the listening sessions that focuses on the strengths of Latinas, not on weaknesses.)

#### **Purpose of the listening sessions**

To encourage Latinas to share their stories:

- The good and the bad
- Their hopes and dreams
- Where they want to be and what would help them get there
- Resources and services that have worked (and not worked) for them in the past

#### **Who will participate?**

[Share information about your target population.]

Example: 200 adult and teen Latinas living in or near South Minneapolis.

#### **Who will lead the groups?**

Community women will lead the groups. Each group will have two interviewers: one leads the group discussion and the other acts as the recorder.

#### **What is the best group size group?**

Six to eight participants per group create a feeling of critical mass while allowing each person time to be heard.

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### **Where will sessions take place?**

Sessions will take place in organizations, churches, schools, support groups, and homes—really anywhere that Latinas already congregate.

### **Will referral materials be available for participants?**

Each partner agency will provide the information for participant packets. Try to anticipate what information will be useful for participants. (For example, if it is almost summertime, consider developing a handout with information about affordable summer camps or children’s activities.) Each participant will receive a gift bag. Community hostesses, who are responsible for recruiting groups, will also receive a gift bag or a gift certificate.

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## INTERVIEWER TRAINING

### Listening Session Discussion Guide

#### **What do you spend most of your day doing?**

¿Usualmente, que haces durante el día?

This question will examine her daily roles and routine activities, i.e., work, taking care of her home and children, professional commitments, community involvement, caregiver, student, etc.

#### **What are your most important day-to-day needs?**

¿Cuáles son las necesidades más importantes que enfrentas a diario?

This question will get at: 1) her most pressing needs, i.e., rent, healthcare, childcare, food, job, etc.; 2) how she manages household money and where it comes from; 3) personal needs, i.e., assistance from community/social services, time for her to do what she enjoys, career advancement, etc.

#### **List one personal achievement you are proud of and why.**

Nombre algún éxito personal que represente un orgullo para ti y por qué.

This question will get at her level of self-esteem and, more importantly, acknowledge her success.

#### **To whom do you turn when you have a problem?**

Cuándo tienes un problema, ¿a quién acudes?

This question will provide information regarding an extended family support network, intra-family support network, or a community support network.

#### **What are your personal goals, dreams or wishes? What would you need to reach that goal?**

Quáles son sus metas, sueños o deseos, ¿Qué necesitarías para verla realizada?

This question will bring out her aspirations and what she needs to achieve those goals, i.e., education, job, dreams, etc.

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### INTERVIEWER TRAINING

## How to Conduct Group Listening Sessions

**Introduce yourself.** Use a standard greeting to ensure that the same information is provided at all sessions.

**Ask each participant to introduce herself.** The format for introductions will be left to each group interviewer – ensure that it helps women to feel welcome and at ease.

**Give a brief overview of the group process.** Let the women know that they can ask questions at any time if they need any clarification. If you are using the Ground Rules handout, review it with participants and request any additional ground rules that will help them feel comfortable in the session.

**Stress confidentiality.** Information resulting from the group discussions will be incorporated into a report; names will not be used. Share openly about whom the report is for, how it will be used, and what will be done with it.

**Explain that there are five questions.** Each question should be written on a separate sheet of flip chart paper (Usually, it is best to write the questions prior to the session).

Tell the women that their responses to these five questions will give us a picture of the following:

- What their lives are like today
- Their goals, hopes and dreams a
- Where they currently get support
- What kinds of support would help them achieve their goals, hopes and dreams.

**Emphasize that there is limited time.** Tell the women that it will be important to answer all questions within a specified time frame.

**Let them know that you will start with the first question.** However, they can respond to any of the questions at any given time. Inform the women that each response will be recorded on the flip chart paper as you go along. If participants do not understand the question, give a general example of an answer.

**Write legibly.** Use different colors of markers for each response to make it easier to read.

**Ask the same questions of all individuals in the group.** If an individual has not responded, say something like “Teresa, do you have any comments to add?” Continue this process until you have covered all five questions. Additionally, in order to ensure consistency across groups, don’t ask any questions that aren’t on the question sheet.

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**Make sure that everyone completes a demographic form and signs in.** We need demographic information for the purpose of profiling the group that informed this process (e.g., 50% of the women we heard from are between the ages of 20-30). If someone doesn't feel comfortable filling out the demographic sheet, make a note of it and indicate that all of her information is "unknown" on a blank form. Please do not ask participants to write their names on the form; clarify that providing information is voluntary and that all information will be kept confidential.

**Summarize responses and reiterate how the information will be used.** All responses will be combined to show the themes that we heard. A group of participants will be asked to review the combined information and comment. This information may also be used as a educational tool with other agencies, which will use it to determine the steps they can take to build support for Latinas in these neighborhoods.

**Thank everyone for attending.** Tell them how you plan to share the final report (mail them a copy; invite them to community check-in meetings, etc.). Distribute the gifts with the information packets to each participant and present the hostess with the gift certificate.

**Record observations.** Be sure to fill out evaluation forms or observations after each session.

**Debrief with the Coordinator.** Share your thoughts, observations, concerns or frustrations with the Coordinator after the session and throughout the process as necessary.

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## INTERVIEWER TRAINING

### What Makes A Successful Listening Session?

Personally welcome everyone.

Start and end on time.

Use culturally appropriate humor.

Actively listen to each person.

Support each other (for the interviewer team).

Participate in discussion when appropriate.

Encourage and allow everyone to speak.

Avoid having one individual take control of the discussion.

Hand out referral information at the end of the session.

Thank everyone for coming.

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### INTERVIEWER TRAINING

## Ground Rules for Listening Sessions

### Basic Rules

1. **Confidentiality**

What is spoken here stays here. It's very important that the information shared during this session isn't repeated to others who didn't participate.

2. **Respect**

Please remember that we have all gone through different circumstances, so we must respect different opinions, points of views shared during the session but we disagree.

3. **Take Turns Speaking**

Please do not interrupt other participants; remember that everyone will have an opportunity to share her opinion.

4. **Stay Positive**

We will not allow critical comments towards other participants. Please avoid criticism or negative comments towards other participants.

5. **Avoid Giving Advice**

During the listening session, time is limited; if you have any suggestions that can benefit any participant, please share them at the end of the session.

6. **Stay on Topic**

During the session avoid off-topic discussions or discussions that stray far from the purpose of the session. At the end of the session, there will be time to talk about other topics of interest. It is important to be respectful of the time that we have together to do this work.

7. **Please Put Your Cell Phones on Vibrate**

During the session, we ask for your full attention; ringing phones can be a distraction for everyone.

8. **Unplug**

During the session, we need your full attention. Please refrain from sending text messages or posting on FaceBook or Twitter. Unless there is an emergency, please refrain from using social media during the session.

9. **Take Care of Yourself**

Your well-being is important. Be aware of your feelings and emotions, and do what you need to take care of yourself. Allow yourself to laugh, cry and share to the extent that you feel comfortable.



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### INTERVIEWER TRAINING

## Guidelines for Paraphrasing during Listening Sessions

Generally speaking, participants will always want to share more information than there is time for in a listening session. As an interviewer, sometimes it will be necessary for you to help keep the conversation moving. One approach is to summarize a participant's main point as a way to encourage her to finish the thought and bring closure to a topic. It's important to remember that the participants' thoughts are the most important information you're collecting, and any amount of paraphrasing can change the meaning of something. You will always want the participant to confirm that your summary accurately reflects what she wanted to say.

Some points to consider when summarizing:

- Restate what you have just heard, e.g.,
  - "Let me see if I have this correctly" or "It sounds like..."
- Keep your statements clear and concise (avoid being long-winded).
  - "Did I hear you say that your three main goals are...?"
- Summarize comprehensively—reflect *all* aspects of essential disclosure.
  - "So in your story the main problem was...and it was resolved by...but it could have worked better if..."
- Address disclosed feelings and/or content directly and explicitly.
  - "You said that you felt...and...about that experience, correct?"
- Use language that is appropriate for the group. Avoid jargon.
  - Whenever possible, use the same language that the participant used.
- Paraphrase only what was said; be careful not to add your own perspective.
  - It can be hard to keep your personal thoughts and beliefs to yourself during this process, but it is very important to do so.
- Watch the time.
  - "I see that we have 20 minutes left in our session; I have heard these three key resources in the community...and if no one has any more to add at this time, we can move on to the next question."

Paraphrase when...

- You need clarity in order to understand.
- You want to indicate understanding and to facilitate discussion.
- You need to help the speaker clarify her thoughts.
- You need to move on to a new topic.

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## **INTERVIEWER TRAINING**

### **Materials Needed For Listening Sessions**

#### **Materials**

Name tags  
Pens  
Easel and flip chart paper (pad)  
Colored markers  
Box of Kleenex  
Thank you gifts for participants  
Refreshments  
Recorder  
Timer

#### **Forms**

Sign-in sheet (if necessary)  
Demographic information sheets  
Interviewers' timesheets/travel reimbursement forms  
Childcare provider timesheets  
Coordinator's information:  
    Emergency telephone number where coordinator can be reached by interviewers  
    Contact information of other interviewers  
    Main office number

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### INTERVIEWER TRAINING

## Listening Sessions Best Practices

- 1. Groups should be no bigger than 10 women in a listening session of four to five questions.*  
During the sessions we had small groups of three to four women and large groups of 13-16. Larger groups become more difficult for the facilitator to manage, take notes, and listen. The session gets longer and participants get tired.
- 2. Sessions should be at least two hours, no more than three.*  
Remember there are things to do before the session begins; everybody needs a little time to settle, fill out forms and eat. Three hours can be too much for the participants (and their children, if child care is provided), especially if they have put aside other responsibilities to participate in the group.
- 3. Give yourself one day between sessions; do not schedule more than one session per day.*  
Listening sessions involve a lot of planning and organizing; last minute details or inconveniences may arise. Allowing yourself a day between sessions will give some time to take care of any minor details, and more importantly, some time to practice self care so that you do not get emotionally overwhelmed.
- 4. Make sure you understand the purpose of each question.*  
You may find yourself having to repeat or explain the question more than once. It's important to remember there are cultural and linguistic differences within the Spanish speaking community. Understanding the questions and knowing what information you are hoping to obtain will be helpful in those situations where the participants don't understand what's being asked.
- 5. As much as possible try to avoid having family members or close friends in the same session.*  
Confidentiality is very important during and after the sessions. As the group begins to feel comfortable with each other, participants may share personal life stories, feelings and experiences that they may have never shared before. This could create a difficult situation if friends or family members are learning the information for the first time; it could also keep participants from sharing.
- 6. Discuss and establish a self-care plan for interviewers and participants.*  
Self-care means something different for each individual. Before you begin this process, have a conversation with the coordinator, your supervisor or with a trusted individual about self-care. Remember that a good plan doesn't have to be complicated; the idea is to identify simple things that make you happy and help get rid of emotional stress that can surface during listening sessions.
- 7. Wait for all interviewers to be trained before starting listening sessions.*  
Give interviewers the time and opportunity to review materials and ask questions. Check in with your supervisor as needed to answer questions; address concerns as they arise. See the **Frequently Asked Questions** sections for issues that we had to respond to.

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8. *Schedule a one-on-one meeting with interviewers prior to the session to go over any last minute details.*
9. *Follow up with interviewers after each listening session and provide weekly updates as the project progresses.* Communication is always important; the coordinator and interviewer need to know the details of the sessions and what's going on at all times. In this way, they can support each other. Listening sessions are a team effort, not a one-person job.
10. *Prepare and practice a standard greeting, introduction and background information about the process and your organization to share at each session.*  
Following this best practice will ensure that all participants receive the same background information about the organization you work for.

For example: “Welcome to our listening session, my name is Ivette Izea-Martinez, I'm the community engagement coordinator at Casa de Esperanza. Casa de Esperanza is the National Latin@ Domestic Violence Resource Center whose mission is to mobilize Latinas and Latin@ communities to end domestic violence. Headquartered in St. Paul, MN, Casa de Esperanza works within communities by providing advocacy, emergency shelter, a 24-hour bilingual crisis line, and opportunities for peer education. The organization's National Latin@ Network for Healthy Families and Communities incorporates training and technical assistance, a public policy initiative in Washington, D.C., and a research center in Atlanta, GA, in an effort to advance effective responses to eliminate violence and promote healthy relationships. We are gathered here today because we would like to hear from you about your dreams, your hopes, and if there are any obstacles that keep you from achieving them.”

11. *Take time after each session to document any thoughts or notes.*  
Any notes or thoughts you had during the session will be handy when analyzing the data and doing reflective work. Every reflection counts.
12. *As the coordinator, arrive at least 40 minutes early to each session.* This way you can familiarize yourself with the setting, meet the host and welcome any participants that arrive early. Be prepared; set a positive tone. If you feel comfortable, then it will be easier to make participants feel welcome.
13. *When culturally appropriate, engage in small, casual conversations with the participants before and after the session.*
  - Prior to the session, small talk will give participants some time to adjust to the setting, get to know you and other participants, and feel comfortable.
  - Spending some time talking to the participants after the session will help you determine if the participants are okay with the information shared or if they have any immediate needs that surfaced during the session. It will also reassure participants of your commitment and interest.

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- When listening to and observing participants, try to find a common interest to start a conversation. You may ask about a woman's family, her children, her country of origin, or just share a cup of coffee/tea. Be yourself and treat the interaction as a casual encounter with somebody you want to get to know and not somebody from whom you need information.

14. *Complete the demographic information form before the session.*

Filling out forms takes time; people always have doubts when asked to provide personal information. Demographic forms are an important part of the data we collect during listening sessions. If done before the session, then you'll have time to answer questions and ensure that all participants have time to complete their forms. You will also be able to keep the focus on questions asked during the session.

15. *Know your community: who they are and where they come from.*

Have a basic understanding of the community you will work with. What are some of their values, beliefs, language barriers, age ranges, etc.? If it's an already established group, learn what brings people together.

16. *When planning a listening session/focus group, you should always think about food, transportation, daycare, and an incentive for participants.*

Because participants volunteer their time and their stories, it's important to show appreciation and take into consideration those things what will help facilitate their participation and engagement. Remember to work with and for your community.

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## **Appendix B—Handouts and Tools**

The following handouts and tools were developed to support coordinators in their role of recruiting, training and supporting volunteers, staff, and key partners engaged in the listening sessions.

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### **Volunteer Check-Ins**

When working with volunteer interviewers, it can be helpful to have questions prepared for your regular check-ins. Here are some questions that Casa de Esperanza has found helpful at various phases of the listening sessions process.

#### **Before the listening sessions start:**

- What strengths do you bring to this process?
- Why do you think listening to community is important?
- What is your concept of community?

#### **During the sessions:**

- Ask women when they've felt uncomfortable and/or unprepared? Does anything need to be changed or improved. Do you need additional information?
- What happened that was unexpected?
- What main themes were raised during the session?

#### **After the listening sessions end:**

- What did you learn about community through the listening sessions? In what ways has this process impacted the way you think about community?
- What are the most important ideas you will take away from this experience?
- Looking back on the experience, what would you say was most useful?
- What do you believe are the benefits to those who participated and to your organization?
- What was the worst and best part of something you heard in a listening session?

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### HANDOUTS AND TOOLS

## Self-Care Self Assessment

The listening sessions process can be emotional, intense and also very rewarding. Feel free to review this checklist several times over the course of the process to be attentive to your own emotional needs.

- Are you having trouble disconnecting from your work at the end of the day?
- Are you feeling emotionally overwhelmed or experiencing feelings that you don't know how to handle?
- Do you feel an irrational need to cry?
- Are you feeling stressed, tired or upset and anxious about work and the listening sessions?
- Are you having trouble sleeping?
- Are people around you asking if you are okay or observing that you are acting different than usual?

If you answered yes to any of these questions, you should take action to provide some self-care. Review the self-care plan that you made at the beginning of the project or talk to the staff coordinator.

Other ideas for self-care include:

- Communicate, find somebody to talk to, schedule a check-in or follow up with a supervisor after the listening sessions.
- Journal.
- Find those activities that make you happy and take some time to do them: simple things such as listening to music, drinking tea, going out for a walk, meditating, or taking a long bath or read.
- Rest, eat and sleep.
- Give yourself at least 24 hours between each listening session.
- Make sure you ask for help or additional support when needed.
- Don't bring work home.
- At work, be sure to have some space where you feel comfortable and safe.
- Cry if you need to.
- Define, remember and respect your boundaries between work and personal life.
- Don't forget to have fun.



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### Listening session FAQ'S

During the 2012 listening sessions, we developed this list of frequently asked questions to help anticipate the types of questions that may surface during the various phases of the listening session process.

**1. Can a participant paraphrase?**

Paraphrase: Explain or comment on something read, written, listened to clarify its meaning. Yes, the interviewer and participants can paraphrase the questions and /or responses when necessary. Although all participants speak Spanish, it's important to remember that vocabulary may vary.

**2. Can you do the demographic survey before the session?**

If possible, we recommend that participants fill out the demographic information sheet before the session. This will help focus their attention on the interviewer and on her questions during the session.

**3. The Community Survey questions and the demographic sheet included in the manual are the same. Do we need to use both?**

The *Fuerza Unida* manual contains an example of the community survey and an example of the demographic information sheet. Depending on the purpose and method you've chosen to follow, you can use both or only one. For the listening sessions held in 2012, we used only the demographic information sheet. However, in previous years we used both the demographic sheet for group listening sessions and the community survey for interviews. Remember that both the demographic information sheet and the community survey are examples and can be modified according to your needs and the realities of your community.

**4. What happens if a person does not fill out the demographic information?**

Often, providing a brief explanation of why the information is important helps participants understand the role that it plays in the overall project. However, some participants may still feel uncomfortable providing personal information. You should discuss this possibility before starting the listening sessions and develop a plan for capturing some of the information another way. A small number of "unknown" demographics will not undermine your results. As an alternative, you may record general observations of the group after the session. You'll learn a lot about the participants through the conversation.

**5. Will there be food and childcare?**

This detail will need to be considered before you invite the community to participate in listening sessions. All of our sessions included childcare and snacks or a light meal, depending on the time of day.

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### 6. **Will transportation be provided?**

Although transportation is one of the obstacles to women's participation, it's not always possible to provide when organizing focus groups or listening sessions. We've had success in addressing this problem by engaging groups that already meet on a regular basis and by offering to conduct the sessions there to make them more convenient and accessible for everyone. It's easier to invite one or two additional people to an already established group.

### 7. **What will you do with the information?**

Participants will want to know what happens to the information obtained during a listening session. As a result, interviewers will need to have a clear idea of the listening session's purpose and goals.

### 8. **What if a person has a poor opinion of your organization and shares it in the group?**

The idea of this process is to listen to community dreams, concerns and realities to guide and help improve our work. Learning from our mistakes—hearing what's worked and what hasn't—helps us improve. It's important to accept and value the opinions of others, especially when expressed in a respectful environment for all participants. However, if comments become a distraction or create discomfort, we suggest that the participant expresses their concerns during a private meeting.

### 9. **If the group doesn't agree with the rules or would like to add more, can you change them?**

Yes, the rules can be modified to fit the needs and realities of the group convened.

### 10. **Why the group is only for women?** (All of Casa de Esperanza's groups focused on interviewing women.)

Depending on the subject discussed, it may be helpful for the listening sessions to be specifically targeted to a group of people; for example, a specific age or sex. This may help participants feel more comfortable and open to participating. In the case of listening sessions, we wanted to hear specifically from Latina women, and we wanted to provide an open space in which they felt free to share with us their dreams, goals and needs.

## **FAQs From Participants During the Listening Sessions**

### 1. **Should I give my full address?**

No, the name and zip code of the city in which you live is enough.

### 2. **Why do you need demographic information?**

This information helps us learn a little more about the community: where they live and go to school, where they work, their age, country of origin, and more. This helps us identify where we need to be, what information the community needs, how they prefer to communicate, and how we can improve.

### 3. **What if I don't know my household income?**

We need accurate information, but you can provide an approximate income based on your best guess.

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### 4. **Am I going to get something for my time?**

Before inviting participants, decide how they'll be thanked for their cooperation. It's important to recognize the time and value of the information provided by community members. Furthermore, this was one of the most common questions received when we invited community members to participate. In the 2012 listening sessions, each participant received a gift card to Target, Wal-Mart, or a local grocery store. Hosts who offered their home to conduct the listening session received a gift basket.

### 5. **How long will the group last?**

Group duration may vary according to the number of participants and questions. Sessions typically lasted one to three hours. This included time for introductions, for filling out the demographic sheet, for questions, lunch, and a short break.

### 6. **If I decide to participate, do I have to stay until the end?**

The expectation is that all participants remain until the end of the session, with the exception of an emergency or of a session that runs longer than planned.

### 7. **What will you do with the information?**

Participants naturally want to know what will happen to the information obtained during the listening session. As a result, it's important that interviewers have a clear idea of the purpose and goals.

### 8. **And what is Casa de Esperanza?** (Expect questions about your own organization).

Casa de Esperanza is the National Institute against domestic violence for Latin@ communities. Our mission is to mobilize Latinas and Latin@ communities to end domestic violence. Located in St. Paul, MN, Casa de Esperanza works with the community providing advocacy services, emergency shelter for women, a 24-hour bilingual crisis line, an information and resource center, as well as opportunities for leadership development.

### 9. **What is the age to participate?**

This answer will depend on the decision made by the coordinators. In 2012, women had to be at least 16 years old.

### 10. **If I'm not a victim of domestic violence, can I still participate?**

Due to the nature of our organization, we heard this question a lot. Our listening sessions were open to Latinas in Minnesota, and their experiences with violence weren't a consideration for participation.

### 11. **Why are you doing the listening sessions, and who is in charge of this project?**

Participants need to know who will have access to their information, as well as who they can contact later if they have any questions, concerns or want to stay involved with your work.

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### HANDOUTS AND TOOLS

## Sample Listening Session

The following is a step-by-step example of how one of the 2012 listening sessions went. This focus group was held at the home of a community member who'd offered to invite a group of friends to participate. As a coordinator and/or interviewer, this example can help you prepare for the unexpected, but you still need to be flexible and adaptive during a session.

### Setting Up

It was around 10am, and it was raining a lot. I arrived at the participant's home and verified was correct. I made sure that somebody knew where I was. I met the host and her daughters; they showed me around the house. While getting to know each other, we set up the food and area for the session. A couple of minutes later, the interviewer arrived. We had coffee together and talked a little while we waited.

### Starting the Session

We invited the participants to have breakfast or something to drink while filling out their demographic forms. Due to the rain, only two other participants arrived, and after 15 minutes of waiting, we decided to begin. I turned on the recorder.

The interviewer welcomed all participants, introduced herself and me, and talked about the work of Casa de Esperanza and the Líderes. Each participant introduced and shared a little about herself; the interviewer talked about the listening sessions and the purpose. The interviewer and I went over the rules.

### Asking the Questions

We began with the first question; one of the women struggled a little to answer, but they all responded. Question two had a bit more participation. Women weren't shy to talk about their needs. We were moving really fast because there were only three participants.

When we were about to begin question three, one of the phones rang and the participant said she had to answer because it was her advocate from Casa de Esperanza. She started screaming, jumping, laughing, and screaming again. We waited for her to finish with her conversation before continuing. I asked her if everything was okay and if she was able to continue. She said yes: "She was calling to let me know they have approved my petition, and I will get a work permit and a Social Security card." She was happy. The women hugged her and congratulated her. The participant had a huge smile on her face. After a few minutes, we continued.

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One of the women shared that she was proud of herself because she had the courage to leave an abusive relationship; another woman was proud because she was able to leave her depression behind; still another was proud because she had organized a group of women at a nearby school. We got a little sidetracked talking about the group at the school.

The volunteer interviewer was able to regain the group's attention; we moved on to questions four and five. The women were happy and willing to share.

### Wrapping Up

At the end of the session I asked whether there was anything else they wanted to share or something we didn't ask about. They all shared additional comments about Latina realities in their communities, and the specific needs of Latinas in Minnesota.

Another participant told us she would like *Líderes* (Latina Peer Educators) to do *talleres* (workshops) for the women's group at the school and that they need support from us or another organization to continue with the group. Once they didn't have more to add, I turned off the recorder.

I gave them the packet of information and explained what each thing was. I thanked all of them for sharing and talking to us. I started to clean up while the women grabbed something else to eat, joked and talked. We had another cup of coffee. I gave them their gift cards for participating.

I talked to one of the women about possible *Líderes* training and gave her staff contact information. I also talked to the group about volunteer opportunities, made sure everyone had my card and knew about the Information and Resource Centers, and made sure I had all the demographic forms, my notes and everything I needed. I told them to divide the remaining food among themselves. I said goodbye; one participant left at the same time I did and the others stayed talking.

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### HANDOUTS AND TOOLS

## 30 Reflective Questions for Coordinators

### Overall Impressions

1. What is the purpose of using the listening session approach?
2. What do you see as the value of doing listening sessions?
3. If another organization wanted to use this approach, what do you think are the benefits?
4. Why do you think that listening to community is important?

### Recruiting and Training Interviewers

5. Describe the process you followed for recruiting interviewers.
6. Outline the process for training interviewers.
7. Describe those steps in the process you found most and least effective in terms of preparing interviewers and why?
8. What strengths do interviewers bring to this process?

### Conducting the Listening Sessions

9. How did you recruit participants? What information did you share with them?
10. What was the best thing you heard in a listening session? Why?
11. What was the worst thing you heard in a listening session? Why?
12. What happened that was unexpected?
13. When did you feel uncomfortable or unprepared?
14. How would you modify the listening session content for participants?
15. Describe what happened at one of the focus groups, from beginning to end. Pick one that you felt had an impact on you.

16. What do you believe are the benefits to participants?

### Final Reflections

17. What were the main themes identified by the participants?
18. How will the information from the listening sessions be used?
19. What strengths do you bring to this process?
20. What are you most proud of regarding the listening sessions? Why?
21. In what way has this process impacted the way you think about community?
22. What did you learn about community through the listening sessions?
23. How did you take care during the listening sessions? What else would have helped?
24. If someone asked you, "How do I do a listening session?" How would you describe it?
25. If you were to do this process again, what would you do differently and why?
26. What do you wish you had known before you started this process? Why?
27. Looking back on the experience, what would you say was the most useful?
28. What are the most important ideas you will take away from this experience?
29. Would you recommend the listening session process to others? Why or why not?
30. What advice would you give others who want to use this process?

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## **Appendix C—Sample Forms**

The following pages show samples forms used in this process throughout the years. It's important to remember that these are examples and should be modified to gather the information your organization, association or group wants to obtain. We also present a bilingual format that should be adapted to fit the primary language of your interviewers/interviewees.

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## Interviewer Timesheet

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

Phone \_\_\_\_\_

Email \_\_\_\_\_

Date	Time In	Time Out	Name and Address of Contact	Total Hours

Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Approved by \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_



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## Demographic Information

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_ City \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_ Zip \_\_\_\_\_

Marital Status  Single  Married  Separated  Divorced

How many people live in the house?  Adults  Children (ages \_\_\_\_\_ )

How long have you lived in Minneapolis?  Months  Years Country of origin \_\_\_\_\_

Telephone (Day) \_\_\_\_\_ (Evening) \_\_\_\_\_

Your Age  13-15  16-18  19-21  22-30  31-40  41-50  51-60  60+

Type of current employment \_\_\_\_\_ Salary  Hourly  Monthly  Yearly

Main form of transportation \_\_\_\_\_

Check any of the following agencies where you have received services  Casa de Esperanza  
 Centro, Inc.  Centro Legal  CLUES  La Oportunidad  La Familia Guiance Center  
 Other \_\_\_\_\_

Are you a member of a church?  Yes  No Name of church \_\_\_\_\_

**Consent:** I hearby give Casa de Esperanza permission to use my reposnses and comments, **without using my name**, in the Fuerza Unida Final Report.

\_\_\_\_\_  
(Participant's Signature)

\_\_\_\_\_  
(Date)

Yes, I would like to participate in a small group discussion to review the preliminary findings.

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## FUERZA UNIDA Listening Group Roster

<b>Date</b>	<b>Location</b>	<b>Contact/ Telephone OnSite</b>	<b>Interviewers</b>	<b>Number in Group</b>

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## CASA DE ESPERANZA

### Encuesta Comunitaria (Community Survey)

**Desarrollado para las sesiones de escucha en 2003-Realizado por entrevistas individuales**

Fecha (Date): \_\_\_\_\_

Nombre (Name): \_\_\_\_\_

Dirección (Address): \_\_\_\_\_

Teléfono (Phone): \_\_\_\_\_

Edad (Age): \_\_\_\_\_

# de adultos viviendo en su casa  
(# of adults living in your house) \_\_\_\_\_

# de niños viviendo en su casa  
(# of children living in your house) \_\_\_\_\_

¿Hace cuantos años vive en St. Paul?  
How many years have you lived in St. Paul? \_\_\_\_\_

País de origen (Country of origin) \_\_\_\_\_

Idioma principal (language you feel most comfortable speaking) \_\_\_\_\_

Fuente de ingreso  
(Source of income) \_\_\_\_\_

Sueldo por mes  
Monthly salary \_\_\_\_\_

Si tiene empleo, ¿qué tipo de trabajo es?  
If you have work, what is it? \_\_\_\_\_

¿Cuántos trabajos tiene?  
How many jobs do you have? \_\_\_\_\_

Estado civil (Marital status)

Soltera (Single) Casada (Married) Divorciada (Divorced) Conviviendo (Living together)

Viuda (Widowed) Separada (Separated) Otro (Other)

¿Tiene interés en recibir información sobre los resultados de esta encuesta?  
(Are you interested in the results of this survey?) \_\_\_\_\_

¿Tiene interés en participar en una platica sobre los resultados?

¿Podemos llamarle para participar en la reunión? \_\_\_\_\_

Are you interested in being part of a discussion about the findings of the study?

May we call you to participate in the meeting? \_\_\_\_\_

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Poner una X en el punto que **más** describe cómo está su vida en estos **días**.  
(Put an X in the place that most closely describes what your life is like these days.)

1	2	3	4	5
Apenas sobreviviendo <b>(Barely surviving)</b>	Luchando <b>(Struggling)</b>	Marchando <b>(Moving along)</b>	Prosperando <b>(Prospering)</b>	Viviendo un sueño <b>(Living a dream)</b>

¿Qué hace Ud. durante las 24 horas del día? O sea, en un día normal, ¿cuántas horas...  
(What do you do during a 24-hour day? In a normal day, how many hours...)

	<b># Horas (# of Hours)</b>	<b>Comentarios (Comments)</b>
¿Trabaja Ud. por pago? <b>(Work for pay?)</b>		
¿Pasa Ud. cuidando a la casa? <b>(Take care of the house?)</b>		
¿Pasa Ud. cuidando a su familia? <b>(Take care of your family?)</b>		
¿Pasa Ud. en clases o estudiando de alguna forma? <b>(Take classes or study?)</b>		
¿Pasa Ud. estudiando inglés o tomando clases de inglés? <b>(Study English?)</b>		
¿Da su tiempo a la comunidad? <b>(Volunteer your time?)</b>		
¿Duerme Ud.? <b>(Sleep?)</b>		
¿Pasa Ud. en un entretenimiento o hobby que le gusta? ¿Cuales son sus entretenimientos? <b>(Spend with entertainment or hobbies? What is fun to you?)</b>		
¿Otra cosa? ¿Cuál es? <b>(Anything else? Describe?)</b>		

¿Cuáles son las cosas más importantes para Ud.? (What is most important to you?)

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¿Cuáles son sus sueños? ¿Si Ud. tuviera la vida que quiere, cómo sería su vida?

¿Qué estaría haciendo Ud.? (What are your dreams? If you had the life that you wanted, how would your life be? What would you be doing?)

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¿Cuál es la cosa que más le impide de llegar allí? (What most stops you from getting to your dreams?)

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Favor de poner una X al lado de los 5 puntos que más le impide prosperar en su vida.  
(Please put an X next to the 5 things that most prevent you from prospering.)

Asuntos legales ( <b>Legal issues</b> )	
Cuidado de niños ( <b>Childcare</b> )	
Dificultades en mantener la salud ( <b>Health problems</b> )	
Discriminación ( <b>Discrimination</b> )	
Domino del inglés ( <b>Command of the English language</b> )	
Educación ( <b>Education</b> )	
Empleo ( <b>Employment</b> )	

Falta de apoyo ( <b>Lack of support</b> )	
Inmigración ( <b>Immigration issues</b> )	
Problemas o violencia familiar ( <b>Family problems or violence</b> )	
Saber como desenvolverse en la cultura aquí ( <b>Knowing how to get along in the culture here</b> )	
Transporte ( <b>Transportation</b> )	
Vivienda ( <b>Housing</b> )	
Otro – nómbrelo ( <b>Other - describe</b> )	

¿Qué necesita Ud. para alcanzar sus sueños? (What would help you reach your dreams?)

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---

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### Quando tiene un problema, ¿a quién acude?

Poner una X al lado de quiénes le apoyan en estos días.

(When you have a problem, to whom do you turn? Put an X by the people who support you these days.)

	Sí o no	Comentario (Comments)
Familia aquí (Family here)		
Familia en su país (Family at home)		
Vecinos (Neighbors)		
Amigos Latin@s (Latin@ friends)		
Amigos No-Latin@s (Non-Latin@ friends)		
El gobierno (The government)		
Negocios (Businesses)		
Servicios sociales (Social services)		
La iglesia (The church)		
Las Escuelas (The schools)		
Nadie (No one)		
¿Alguien más? ¿Quién? (Someone else? Who?)		

### ¿Hay información o recursos que Ud. busca ahora? ¿Cuáles son?

(Are you looking for information or resources right now? What?)

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### ¿Tiene interés en participar en otros proyectos comunitarios? ¿Sobre qué asuntos?

(Are you interested in getting involved in other community projects? If so, what kind of projects?)

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### ¿Hay algo más que Ud. nos quiere contar?

(Is there anything else you'd like to tell us?)

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## **Appendix D–Evaluation**

It's always important to evaluate the success of your planning process. The following example was used in the evaluation of *Fuerza Unida* and reflects feedback we received from community women and partner organizations. Your group might be interested in evaluating the satisfaction of your interviewees or another constituency group.

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## Fuerza Unida Project Evaluation

### How successful was our collaborative planning?

Please rank each criterion from 1 to 5 where:

1 = *greatly disagree*    2 = *disagree*    3 = *neither agree nor disagree*    4 = *agree*    5 = *greatly agree*

- I participated regularly in meetings—through the whole process.    1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5
- I feel that my time was well spent.    1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5
- The group listened to my perspective.    1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5
- I helped to shape the plan.    1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5
- We reached our decisions by consensus.    1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5
- The plan we developed is driven by what we heard from women.    1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5
- The plan we developed will make a difference for Latinas in South Minneapolis.    1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5
- I am happy with the plan we developed.    1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5
- I am committed to moving our work to the next step.    1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5
- Communication across team members has been strengthened as a result of this process    1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5

Overall, how do you feel about the planning process we went through? Please explain.

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What did you like about this process?

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# Fuerza Unida:

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What worked really well?

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What didn't work as well?

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How would you change our process for next time?

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Did you feel you had a real say in shaping the plan? Please explain.

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How could we have helped you participate more fully?

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What are the strengths of the plan we developed?

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What are the weaknesses of the plan?

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What do we need to keep in mind in order to be successful in moving the plan forward?

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Is there anything else you want to say?

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