

# THRIVING COMMUNITIES

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Working together to move from poverty to prosperity for all



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A guide for public dialogue and problem solving



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## THRIVING COMMUNITIES

This discussion guide was developed and produced by **Everyday Democracy** ([www.everyday-democracy.org](http://www.everyday-democracy.org), formerly the Study Circles Resource Center) and the **Northwest Area Foundation** ([www.nwaf.org](http://www.nwaf.org)).

Designed as a tool for dialogue-to-change programs, this guide can help communities make decisions about how they will address poverty. It is based on views and ideas that many different people hold, and is a starting place for open and fair discussions.

This guide is based on research and experience — in understanding poverty, and in knowing how people work together in communities. The research that underlies this guide includes a study of current literature on poverty, a review of significant national survey work, focus groups, and interviews with people in communities. The guide was tested extensively in a dozen dialogue-to-change programs with more than five hundred people participating, overall.

For more information about Everyday Democracy and the Northwest Area Foundation, please see page 39.

***Thriving Communities: Working together to move from poverty to prosperity for all*** is also available on Everyday Democracy's web site at [www.everyday-democracy.org](http://www.everyday-democracy.org)

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## INTRODUCTION

People in communities across America want to live in a place where they have the chance to thrive. This is true in all kinds of places: small towns, rural areas, urban neighborhoods, American Indian reservations, and others.

People talk about it in different ways. But when they talk about what holds their community back, one thing that comes up is poverty.

Poverty is everywhere. It may look different in rural places than it does in cities or suburbs. It may look different on a reservation. But there are things about poverty that look the same in all these places.

Poverty may look different to each of us. A single parent may see the cost of housing in terms of how many jobs it takes to pay for a place to live. To a senior who lived through the Great Depression, poverty today may not look all that bad. For people who live on tribal lands, losing their culture and land may be worse than lack of money. People new to the United States may think life here is not as hard as it was back home. For those who live in a community where almost everyone is poor, it is hard to imagine what life without poverty would look like.

### Is This The Type Of Community You Would Like To Be A Part Of?

- |                                 |                                 |                                  |
|---------------------------------|---------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| <input type="radio"/> Welcoming | <input type="radio"/> Healthy   | <input type="radio"/> Prosperous |
| <input type="radio"/> Peaceful  | <input type="radio"/> Safe      | <input type="radio"/> Exciting   |
| <input type="radio"/> Diverse   | <input type="radio"/> Spiritual | <input type="radio"/> Fair       |
|                                 | <input type="radio"/> Connected |                                  |

This discussion guide will help us talk about the kind of community we want to live in. No community is doing well where there is poverty. If we work on getting rid of poverty, we can have a better community. And, by working on making our community better, we can help reduce poverty. These two important tasks go hand in hand.

Poverty affects us all. Even wealthy parts of the community are touched by poverty. We need to share our vision of what kind of community we want. We need to take action to change things so that we all can thrive.

### Why Might a Dialogue-to-Change Program Work for Us?

- People care. They want to make things better.
- Problems like poverty call for many solutions.
- It takes people from all parts of our community to solve problems.
- When we all join in, we all win.
- When we talk face-to-face, we get to know each other. Trust builds. We can come up with new ideas and plans.





## Why Use This Approach to Talk about Poverty?

Some people may already be working on poverty in our community. But to move ahead, more of us need to be part of that work. In a dialogue-to-change program, we can learn what others are already doing to overcome poverty. And more people can get involved.

This approach to community change brings together small, diverse groups of people who meet several times to think, talk, and work together to address public problems, like poverty. The process works best when many small dialogue groups happen all at once, across a community.

First, people look at how poverty has touched their lives; then, they talk about why they believe poverty exists. Finally, each dialogue group (or “study circle”) works on ideas for action.

When we work together this way, we can bring new life and ideas to existing efforts in our community. We can also learn about needs that have not been met. Together, we can figure out how to do even more.

The goal is change in the community!

## How a Small-Group Dialogue Works

In a dialogue, each session builds on the one before it. This guide is a tool to help us look at poverty in our community and create change.

Here’s how this dialogue works:

### Session One: MEET EACH OTHER

- > Get to know each other.
- > Talk about how we’re connected to the issue.
- > Begin to look at poverty.

### Session Two: CREATE A VISION

- > Create a vision of a community where *everybody* thrives.
- > Talk about what poverty looks like here.

### Session Three: STUDY THE PROBLEM

- > Talk about why there is poverty here.

### Session Four: FIND SOLUTIONS

- > Talk about ways to reduce poverty.

### Session Five: PLAN FOR ACTION

- > Talk about the assets in our community.
- > Talk about how to make our ideas from Session Four happen.

## What is a Dialogue-to-Change Program?

- Many dialogues will meet at the same time.
- 8 to 12 people will be in each dialogue. They will come from different groups in the community.
- Groups will meet together for five, two-hour sessions.
- Each group will use this guide.
- After the dialogues finish meeting, members of all the groups will meet together in an action forum.
- 2 facilitators will lead each group.
- Someone will take notes for each group.

## The Action Forum

After the fifth session, we will all meet. We will collect action ideas from all of the dialogues. At this action forum, people can sign up to do something or to learn more.





### Poverty Can Be About More Than Money

There is no one definition of poverty that everyone agrees on.

When people in communities talk about poverty, they often talk about things like:

- Feeling hopeless
- Doing without
- Working more than one job, and still not making ends meet
- Being on a downward path
- Feeling ashamed to invite people over
- Sending kids to school hungry or with clothes that don't fit
- Being turned away even if you're able to work

Some people talk about poverty in terms of money. The U.S. Census says that in 2005, the poverty line for a family of four was \$19,350 per year. For an individual, the poverty line was \$9,570. Living on less than this means living "in poverty."

Many people think these numbers are too low. And some think they are too high. In fact, federal agencies cannot agree on a "poverty line." Different government offices use different numbers.

Some people say that there are different kinds of poverty, like being all alone, without the support of family and friends. Or like not having the skills to handle day-to-day life. Some people say poverty isn't always about individuals. It can affect whole communities.

Others blame social forces we can't control. Even people with good support networks and life skills often don't get equal access to jobs.

This guide is designed to help our group talk about and reduce poverty in our community.







## SESSION ONE

### How Are We Connected to Our Community and to Poverty?

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

#### PART ONE

#### Getting Started (30 minutes)

- Read the introduction to the group. Or ask if someone is willing to read parts of it aloud. This tells us what a dialogue is, and how it might help.
- The facilitators will explain how they work. They are not teachers. A dialogue is not a class. It's a place for the group to talk and work together. The facilitators help make sure the talk goes well and is useful. They do not take sides.
- Most sessions usually take about 2 hours. If the group agrees, we can choose to talk longer. There are many questions in each session. We do not have to cover every question.
- We need to create some ground rules to help our dialogue work better. Here are some ideas. Are there rules you would like to add? Talk about them.

#### Sample Ground Rules

- Listen to one another. Treat each other with respect.
- Each person gets a chance to talk.
- One person talks at a time. Don't cut people off.
- Speak for yourself. Don't try to speak for "your group."
- It's OK to disagree. If you feel hurt, say so and say why.
- Stick to the issue. No name-calling.
- If you talk about people who are not here, don't say their names.
- Some of what we talk about will be very personal. We will not tell these stories to other people, unless we all say it is OK.
- Help the facilitator keep things on track.

#### Facilitator Tips

This session has four parts. Use the amount of time suggested for each as a guide. You don't have to cover every question in the session. Choose the ones that you think will work best for your group.

#### Collect ideas for action

- From the start, participants may come up with ideas about what to do to reduce poverty. Ask the recorder to keep a list of **Action Ideas**, and add to it from one session to the next. (Please see note-taking tips on page 33.)
- Post the list where everyone can see it.
- Assure the group that they will talk more about action ideas in sessions four and five.

#### Goals For This Session

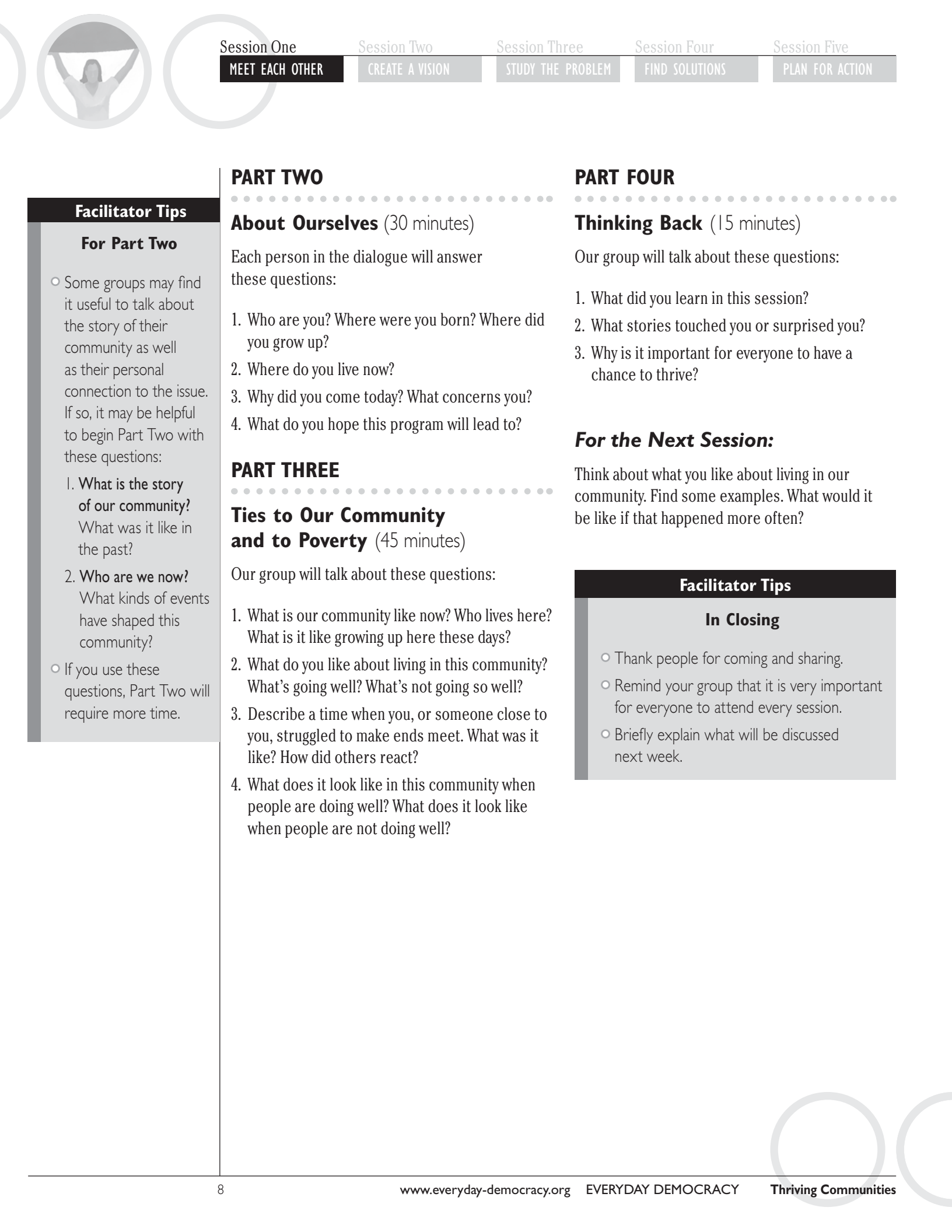
- > Get to know each other.
- > Talk about how we are connected to the issue.
- > Begin to look at poverty.

#### Facilitator Tips

#### Help the group work well together

- Help everyone feel welcome. Be sure each person has a chance to speak and to hear the other group members.
- Some people find it easier than others to talk about this subject. Give everyone room and time to get comfortable with the issue.
- Ask for volunteers to read out loud rather than going "around the circle." Be prepared to do this yourself, if no one volunteers.



**Facilitator Tips****For Part Two**

- Some groups may find it useful to talk about the story of their community as well as their personal connection to the issue. If so, it may be helpful to begin Part Two with these questions:
  - What is the story of our community?**  
What was it like in the past?
  - Who are we now?**  
What kinds of events have shaped this community?
- If you use these questions, Part Two will require more time.

**PART TWO****About Ourselves** (30 minutes)

Each person in the dialogue will answer these questions:

- Who are you? Where were you born? Where did you grow up?
- Where do you live now?
- Why did you come today? What concerns you?
- What do you hope this program will lead to?

**PART THREE****Ties to Our Community and to Poverty** (45 minutes)

Our group will talk about these questions:

- What is our community like now? Who lives here? What is it like growing up here these days?
- What do you like about living in this community? What's going well? What's not going so well?
- Describe a time when you, or someone close to you, struggled to make ends meet. What was it like? How did others react?
- What does it look like in this community when people are doing well? What does it look like when people are not doing well?

**PART FOUR****Thinking Back** (15 minutes)

Our group will talk about these questions:

- What did you learn in this session?
- What stories touched you or surprised you?
- Why is it important for everyone to have a chance to thrive?

**For the Next Session:**

Think about what you like about living in our community. Find some examples. What would it be like if that happened more often?

**Facilitator Tips****In Closing**

- Thank people for coming and sharing.
- Remind your group that it is very important for everyone to attend every session.
- Briefly explain what will be discussed next week.





## SESSION TWO

### A Vision for Our Community.

#### What Does Poverty Look Like Here?

In Session One, we talked about our connections to the community. We also talked about what it looks like when people aren't doing well.

In this session, we will talk about how we would like our community to be. We will also talk about what poverty looks like here.

### PART ONE

#### What Good Things Did We See?

(15 minutes)

Think back over the time since we last met. Talk about these questions:

1. When you looked for things you like about living here, what did you see? What would it be like if those things happened more often?
2. Did you see anything that surprised you?

#### Facilitator Tips

- This session has three parts. Use the amount of time suggested for each as a guide. You don't have to cover every question in the session. Choose the ones that you think will work best for your group.
- In Part Three, you will need the **Information Sheet** prepared by the steering committee. See page 25 for additional information.
- Post the notes from the first session where everyone can see them.
- Ask the recorder to list major themes from this session on large sheets of paper so everyone can see them. (Please see note-taking tips on page 33.)
- Save the notes so that you can refer to them in later sessions.

#### Collect ideas for action

- As participants come up with ideas about how to reduce poverty, ask the recorder to add them to a list of **Action Ideas**. Group members may also mention things that the community is already doing to reduce poverty. List these under **Things We Are Already Doing**. Remind the group that they will use these notes when they talk about action ideas in sessions four and five.

#### Goals For This Session

- > Create a vision of a community where *everybody* thrives.
- > Talk about what poverty looks like here.



## Facilitator Tips

### For Part Two

- Encourage everyone to come up with their own words in addition to the ones listed in the box.
- Ask the people in the group to try to choose their top three ideas before you divide them into smaller groups.
- Remind everyone that these words are about how we would like the community to be. But it's OK if some of the words describe things as they are now.
- Ask participants in the small groups to talk about what the ideas and words mean to them.
- Let participants know they do not have to cover every question in their small groups.
- Don't worry if the large group cannot reach agreement on what words to include.

## PART TWO

### A Vision for Our Community

(60 minutes)

Imagine a place in the community where almost everyone goes. Maybe it's a main road, or a park. Think of a public place. It's a place that visitors are likely to see. It's also a place that school buses pass each day.

Imagine that we will build something (like an archway or a statue) that stands for the things we like about our community. We want to carve some words into it — words of hope.

We need to find words to describe our vision of our community when it is thriving.

There is only room for four or five words. Our group has to come up with these words.

- Look at the box, **Things You Might Find in a Thriving Community**. It has some ideas for words that might go on a statue. The facilitator may ask someone to read the ideas out loud.
  1. What words would *you* like to carve into our statue? As a group, we will brainstorm some words to add to this list.
  2. Once our list seems long enough, we will stop and think for a moment. Which three matter most *to you*?

### Things You Might Find in a Thriving Community

**Opportunity** — Everyone has an equal chance to succeed. There are local resources and opportunities for all.

**Respect** — People treat each other fairly. They allow others to live the way they want to.

**Order** — Things run smoothly. People do what they are supposed to do.

**Safety** — People feel secure. They aren't too worried about crime or drugs. They don't think their things will be stolen or damaged.

**Prosperity** — The community is growing and the economy is strong. Businesses are successful, and there are plenty of jobs that pay enough.

**Health** — People are healthy. And it is easy to get to good health care.

**Diversity** — There are all kinds of people in the community. They come into contact with each other often. They can all work together and help each other.

**Spirituality and Culture** — People feel connected to something larger than themselves. They understand their culture and keep it alive in their day-to-day activities. People take pride in who they are.





- Now, you will form groups of three or four. In your small group, talk about:
  1. What do the words mean?
  2. Which ideas matter most to you?
  3. How would others feel about them?
  4. What ideas would you like to add?
  5. Try to come up with a **list of three words** that your group can agree on.
- Return to the whole group and talk about your ideas. Together, we will try to agree on five words to carve on the statue.
  1. Each small group will read their words and say what they mean.
  2. Which ideas are alike? Which ideas are different?
  3. Try to agree on five words for your statue. (The facilitator or recorder will list them on a piece of paper labeled **Our Community Vision**.)
  4. Which other words do you want to save for later?
  5. How do you feel about this list of ideas?
  6. Imagine what it would be like to live in a place like this.

## PART THREE

### What Does Poverty Look Like Here? (45 minutes)

We have talked about our vision, but we still have poverty here.

Look at the list of ideas under **Our Community Vision**. As a whole group, talk about these questions:

1. In our community, who might think that this vision seems out of reach? Why?
2. How much poverty is there in our community? What does it look like when you see it?
3. How does poverty make it hard to have the kind of community we described in our vision?

The steering committee for this program has put together an **Information Sheet** on how our community is doing.

1. What do you think of these facts? What stands out?
2. What does this information tell us?

### For the Next Session:

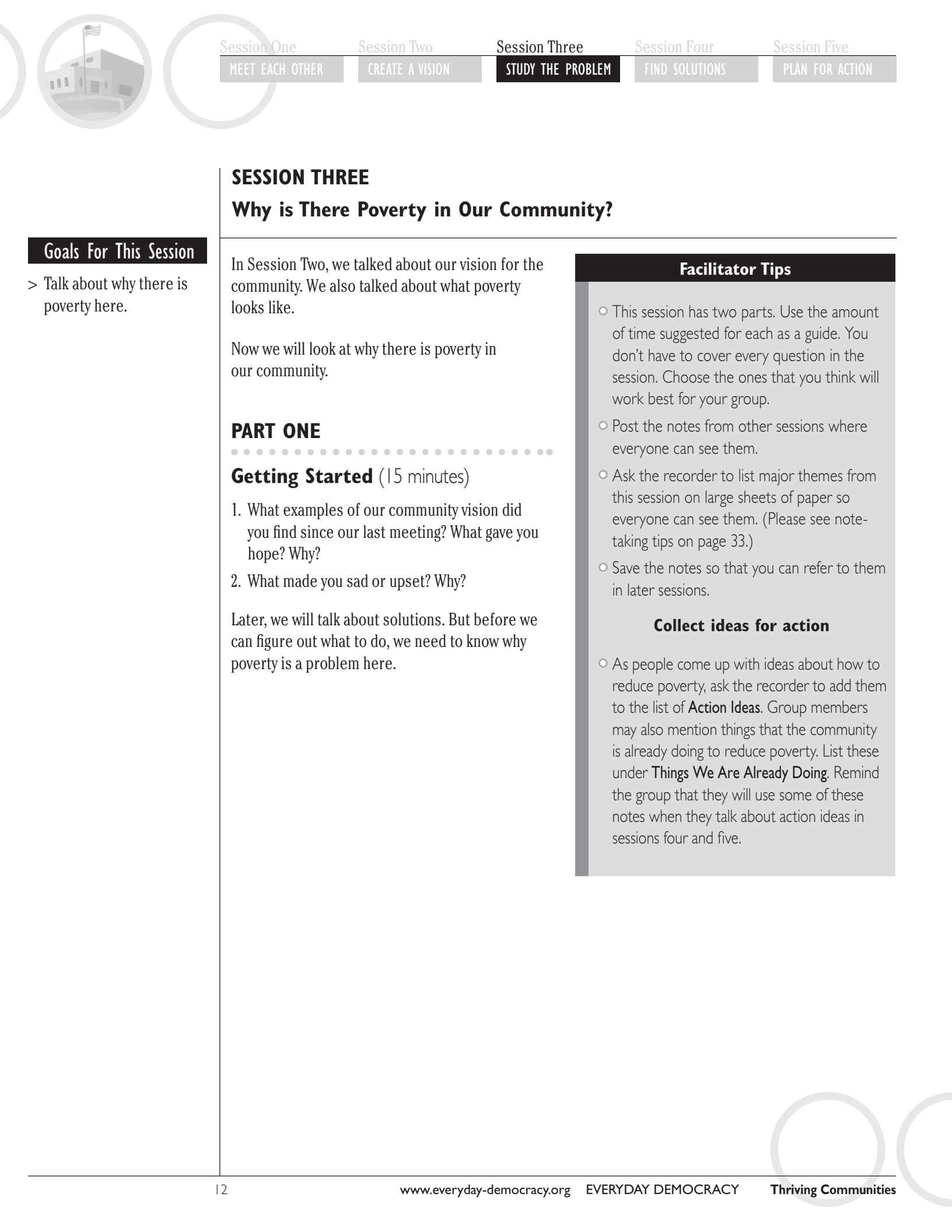
Think about the words we chose for our statue. See if you can find some examples of these ideas in the community.

#### Facilitator Tips

##### In Closing

- Thank people for coming and sharing.
- Remind your group that it is very important for everyone to attend every session.
- Briefly explain what will be discussed next week.





## Goals For This Session

- > Talk about why there is poverty here.

## SESSION THREE

### Why is There Poverty in Our Community?

In Session Two, we talked about our vision for the community. We also talked about what poverty looks like.

Now we will look at why there is poverty in our community.

## PART ONE

### Getting Started (15 minutes)

1. What examples of our community vision did you find since our last meeting? What gave you hope? Why?
2. What made you sad or upset? Why?

Later, we will talk about solutions. But before we can figure out what to do, we need to know why poverty is a problem here.

## Facilitator Tips

- This session has two parts. Use the amount of time suggested for each as a guide. You don't have to cover every question in the session. Choose the ones that you think will work best for your group.
- Post the notes from other sessions where everyone can see them.
- Ask the recorder to list major themes from this session on large sheets of paper so everyone can see them. (Please see note-taking tips on page 33.)
- Save the notes so that you can refer to them in later sessions.

## Collect ideas for action

- As people come up with ideas about how to reduce poverty, ask the recorder to add them to the list of **Action Ideas**. Group members may also mention things that the community is already doing to reduce poverty. List these under **Things We Are Already Doing**. Remind the group that they will use some of these notes when they talk about action ideas in sessions four and five.





## PART TWO

### Why Is There Poverty Here?

(105 minutes)

Poverty has many faces. People have many views about what causes it, and why it stays with us. One view cannot tell the whole story.

Here are some different views about why there is poverty. You may agree with some of them. Or, you may disagree.

Someone will read the views out loud.

We will use the questions in the **Discussing the Views** box to help us talk about them.

We will talk about solutions later. For now, if you think of a way to reduce poverty, ask the facilitator to write it down on a list of **Action Ideas**.

### Why is There Poverty?

Here are some things people say about what causes poverty:

#### View #1

*Some people say:* **Bad Things Can Happen.**

People can get sick or hurt. Health insurance, even when people can get it, doesn't cover all the costs. And medical bills can push a person or a family into poverty. What if you lose your job or get divorced? Or what if there's a disaster, like a tornado or hurricane? When things like this happen, it is hard to make ends meet.

#### View #2

*Some people say:* **Poor Education.**

Some schools don't teach students the skills they need to get a job and hold it. Students drop out or fail. Then, they get lost in poverty.

#### View #3

*Some people say:* **Low Wages.**

Some jobs don't pay enough. People work hard. Many hold two or more jobs. But they can't make enough to cover costs. And they can't be sure that their jobs will last. Many women get paid less than men doing the same job, but they still have to support families. Lots of people who work are still in poverty.

#### View #4

*Some people say:* **Racism.**

Some people and structures in our society have kept people down because of their skin color and ethnic group. People of color are more likely to be in poverty. And for people of color, it can be even harder to get out of poverty. Banks, bosses, and real estate agents may treat people of color unfairly. And there are structures and unwritten rules that make it more likely they will be poor.

### Facilitator Tips

#### For Part Two

- Read the views. Then refer to the list of questions in **Discussing the Views**.

### Discussing the Views

These questions will help you talk about the views.

- Which views are closest to your own (you may agree with more than one)? Why?
- Think about a view you don't agree with. Why would someone agree with that view? Try to come up with reasons to support that view.
- Do some of these views surprise you? Why?
- Which views conflict with each other?
- What view would you like to add?
- If we want to achieve our vision, which views are most important to work on?





### Discussing the Views

These questions will help you talk about the views.

- Which views are closest to your own (you may agree with more than one)? Why?
- Think about a view you don't agree with. Why would someone agree with that view? Try to come up with reasons to support that view.
- Do some of these views surprise you? Why?
- Which views conflict with each other?
- What view would you like to add?
- If we want to achieve our vision, which views are most important to work on?

### View #5

*Some people say:* **No Jobs.**

In some places there just aren't enough jobs, and so many people fall into poverty. There may not be housing, shops, or cell-phone service. That means they can't attract new businesses. And some businesses move out and take jobs with them. This happens in a lot of places.

### View #6

*Some people say:* **Greed and Selfishness.**

In some places, a few powerful people control what happens in the community. They just look out for themselves, and take care of their friends with jobs and favors. This keeps everyone else down and hurts community spirit. People stop helping each other.

### View #7

*Some people say:* **Cut Off From Culture.**

Poverty and other problems come when communities lose their connection to cultural values. Many people try to stay connected to their past. But it is hard when society tries to rob them of their culture.

### View #8

*Some people say:* **Bad Public Policy.**

Some public policies can keep people from trying to stand on their own. Some policies, like welfare, just let people "work the system." There are also policies that are unfair to certain groups of people. So, those people are more likely to live in poverty. Sometimes, government plans that seem like good ideas don't work well, or have bad side effects.

### View #9

*Some people say:* **Not Being Responsible.**

Some people just don't try. They don't look hard enough for jobs, or refuse to work. And they don't make the most of resources, like job training. They drop out of school. They turn to drugs, gambling, alcohol, or crime.

### View #10

*Some people say:* **Economic Inequality.**

We don't like to admit it, but our country is divided into classes. Not everyone has the same amount of money, land, or resources. Some people live in poverty. Others are rich and have success just because they were born into wealth. And then there are those in the middle. Rigid class structures make us think that we cannot do anything about poverty.

### View #11

*Some people say:* **Lack of Support.**

People need more than money to succeed. They need job training, a car or bus line, child care, or just moral support. Some seniors may need help with everyday things like getting food or moving around. Some need help to get over addictions or depression. Without support from family, friends, and the community, it is hard to get out of poverty.

### For the Next Session:

Think about these views on what causes poverty. See if you hear them from others in the community. Who has these views?

### Facilitator Tips

#### In Closing

- Thank people for coming and sharing.
- Remind your group that it is very important for everyone to attend every session.
- Briefly explain what will be discussed next week.





## SESSION FOUR

### Reaching Our Vision and Reducing Poverty

In Session Three, we talked about causes of poverty.

In this session, we are going to talk about what we can do to reduce poverty.

#### PART ONE

##### Getting Started (10 minutes)

1. What did you hear in the community since our last meeting? Did anything surprise you?

#### Facilitator Tips

- This session has three parts. Use the amount of time suggested for each as a guide. You don't have to cover every question in the session. Choose the ones that you think will work best for your group.
- Post the notes from other sessions where everyone can see them.

#### PART TWO

##### Making a Difference (80 minutes)

The following is a list of ways to reduce poverty. We will talk about each one, and come up with our own ideas.

*(For more ideas, please look at What Can We Do? on page 23.)*

Someone will read each approach out loud. Use these to talk about how we might reduce poverty in our community. If you know about other examples of action, be sure to tell us.

The facilitator will write down our action ideas as we come up with them.

On each page, there is a box labeled **Questions to Discuss**. These questions will help us talk about these approaches.

#### Goals For This Session

- > Talk about ways to reduce poverty.

#### Facilitator Tips

##### For Part Two

- The “approaches” in this part help people look at the big picture, while also giving us a chance to see specific examples of how to reduce poverty. Record new action ideas on the **Action Ideas** and **Things We Are Already Doing** sheets. We'll talk in more depth about action ideas in Part Three of this session.



**Questions to Discuss**

We can use these questions to help us talk about the approaches:

- Which approaches appeal to you and why? What doubts do you have? Concerns?
- What is already going on in our community that reflects these approaches?
- Which approaches might help us get closer to our vision?
- How would this approach help us address poverty in our community?

**Ways to Reduce Poverty****Approach #1**

**Focus on early childhood, youth, and schools.**

*A person who supports this approach might say:*  
More young people live in poverty than adults. When people grow up in poverty, they are more likely to stay in poverty. We need to stop this cycle. To prevent poverty later in life, we must meet our children's basic needs. We must make sure that they have enough food, good schools and health care, and strong role models.

***Here is what is happening in other places:***

- Schools give low-cost, healthy meals to children every day.
- Some states offer free health insurance for young people.
- In some places, people call on officials to provide equal funding for schools in wealthy and poor neighborhoods.
- In one tribe, adults mentor youth and pass on important skills for life.
- A group of counties shares ideas about how to take care of very young children so they can learn what works best.
- One school works hard to welcome new families of all different cultures. For example, the principal goes door-to-door to invite them to community meetings.
- One town asks youth to serve on the board of education. Another town has a "youth council." This way, young people help make the decisions that affect them.
- Some states give more money to WIC ("food stamps" for Women with Infants and Children), Head Start, and other early childhood programs.

**Approach #2**

**Create more and better jobs.**

*A person who supports this approach might say:*  
We need to help business, and get rid of unfair taxes and rules. Everyone benefits when people are working. We need to create more jobs that pay enough so people can take care of themselves and their family.

***Here is what is happening in other places:***

- A town held an "entrepreneurship showcase" — a special event to create interest in business and help local people start up new businesses.
- A foundation gives money to local credit unions. These credit unions make loans to local businesses.
- Some groups are calling for a law that promises a higher minimum wage. This way, people can earn enough to live on.
- One town got more people to visit their area. They got the word out about how good the hunting was in the region, so people would travel there.
- Some towns and cities help people who just came to this country. They help people who have skills (like doctors or plumbers) get certified so they can do their work, here in the United States.
- Some towns try to keep taxes low. They make sure that new businesses know about all the benefits the town offers.





### **Approach #3**

#### **Help people meet their urgent needs.**

*A person who supports this approach might say:*

We need to make sure that no one goes hungry.

Everyone should have a safe place to sleep.

Everyone needs basic services. If there are more services for people who need them, we all will be better off.

#### ***Here is what is happening in other places:***

- A community center started a food pantry. They donate food to people in need.
- On one American Indian reservation, they started a shelter in an unused building. It gave homeless people a place to sleep in the winter.
- Many towns have programs that deliver meals to seniors at home.
- A health care center helps people who don't have insurance. They help those who can't speak English. They teach people how to get welfare. They even give out food.
- A community group makes a list of all the local resources for people who are in need. The list shows where to go for help.
- A tribal government helps people pay their fuel bills and rent.

### **Approach #4**

#### **Join with others to create change.**

*A person who supports this approach might say:*

Some people in the community don't want to work together. We need to find better ways to bring people together to deal with conflict and to face hard issues. We need to find more ways for people to unite and work for new, fair policies. If we do this, we all will be better off.

#### ***Here is what is happening in other places:***

- In many places, people get together to write letters and make phone calls to elected officials. They want new policies and ideas.
- In one community, neighbors joined with the police to fight crime. They made a deal. If you report a problem, you do not have to give your name.
- One area created a co-operative buying group so people can get better prices for health care.
- One town tries to help Native Americans and other community members make peace. They run special programs for all area third-graders. They also hold a program at a powwow each September.
- In one community, people join together in small "Circles of Support" to help individual families and connect them with the rest of the community as they work to get out of poverty.
- Some neighbors are helping older people get food, like Meals on Wheels. They also help them find services and fill out forms.



**Questions to Discuss**

We can use these questions to help us talk about the approaches:

- Which approaches appeal to you and why? What doubts do you have? Concerns?
- What is already going on in our community that reflects these approaches?
- Which approaches might help us get closer to our vision?
- How would this approach help us address poverty in our community?

**Approach #5****Build assets and hold onto them.**

*A person who supports this approach might say:*

Assets can be people or skills; they can also be money or things we own. We can use assets to help ourselves and each other. Taking care of each other is an asset. For example, you can use your car to drive someone who needs a ride, or to visit a sick person. Some assets can be handed down in families, or from group to group.

***Here is what is happening in other places:***

- One group started a program that helps people buy and repair their own cars.
- A Native American group brings families together to build — and own — their own homes.
- In one town, people wanted to support local businesses. They started a “Buy Local” movement. They found that keeping money in the area helped everyone.
- A local foundation and neighbors started a “lending circle” program. It helps people get credit to start a business of their own. People work on their plans in small groups and the group decides when each plan is ready for funding.
- In one state, the government helps people fill out tax forms, for free. They teach people how to get refunds such as the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC). In other places, community groups help people fill out tax forms.

**Approach #6****Fight racism.**

*A person who supports this approach might say:*

Racism hurts everyone and keeps some people in poverty. It affects jobs, loans, housing, arrests, and schooling. Native Americans, African Americans, Hispanics and Latinos, Asian Americans, and others face racism and unfairness every day. We must end the practice of racism, by people and by institutions.

***Here is what is happening in other places:***

- In one town, a group paired families from different ethnic groups. They shared child care, rides, and job hunting. They helped each other and got to know each other.
- One community focused on places with higher poverty levels, dropout rates, and unemployment. They made plans to improve those “target areas.” In three years, 29 new businesses were added and violent crime dropped by 18%.
- A group in one town worked with a local hospital where no one on staff could speak Spanish. They asked hospital leaders to hire Spanish-speaking staff to help Latino patients. The hospital agreed, and hired translators to work, day and night.
- In one community, a group worked with bankers to get them to change lending practices that were unfair to people of color. Several of these bankers convinced the banks they worked for to stop unfair lending practices.
- A group in one city helped the public talk about how segregation is linked to gaps in housing and education. They raised money to promote a positive image of people who live in low-cost housing. They also got more funding from the state for low-cost housing.





## Approach #7

### Invest in basic community resources.

*A person who supports this approach might say:*

Many communities lack basic resources. We need good roads, reliable electric service, medical care, and cellular phone coverage for businesses and emergencies. We also need more people who can be community leaders. If we develop these resources, then everyone in the community will be better off.

### Here is what is happening in other places:

- One rural town is working with the state to have its own housing authority to create affordable housing for low-income people.
- Another town is making sure bus routes go where workers live.
- A local group convinced a nursing home to convert some units for assisted living, which allows residents to be more independent. They also got a construction firm to build a new assisted living center. This helps older people, whose income makes up almost a third of the town's economy.
- A town worked with a local group to create new jobs for people who had lost their farms. Now some farmers use their skills to build and repair large windmills.
- Some places think of local leaders as basic resources. They set up programs to recruit and train both community and elected leaders.
- A number of government agencies have teamed up to offer "one-stop" help for people to find jobs and get other services. This makes it easier for people to get the services they need.

## PART THREE

### What Are Our Best Action Ideas?

(30 minutes)

Let's think about some of our ideas for action.

#### Review and add to the list of action ideas:

We have made lists of action ideas as we talked about many ways of reducing poverty.

1. Take a look at the list of action ideas. What ideas would we like to add?
2. Think about things that you can do on your own, things you can do with other small groups of people, and things that the whole community could do, maybe even with government. Look at page 23 for more ideas.
3. How many different ideas can we come up with?

#### Narrow down the list of action ideas:

Let's begin to narrow down the list. We will do this again in the next session. First, we will combine ideas that are nearly the same. Then, we will think about our community vision and how to make it happen. Talk about the **Questions for Setting Priorities**.

### For the Next Session:

Think about these ideas. Choose one approach and see if you can find it in the community.

Think about the approaches. Choose one approach and see if you can find it in the community.

#### Facilitator Tips

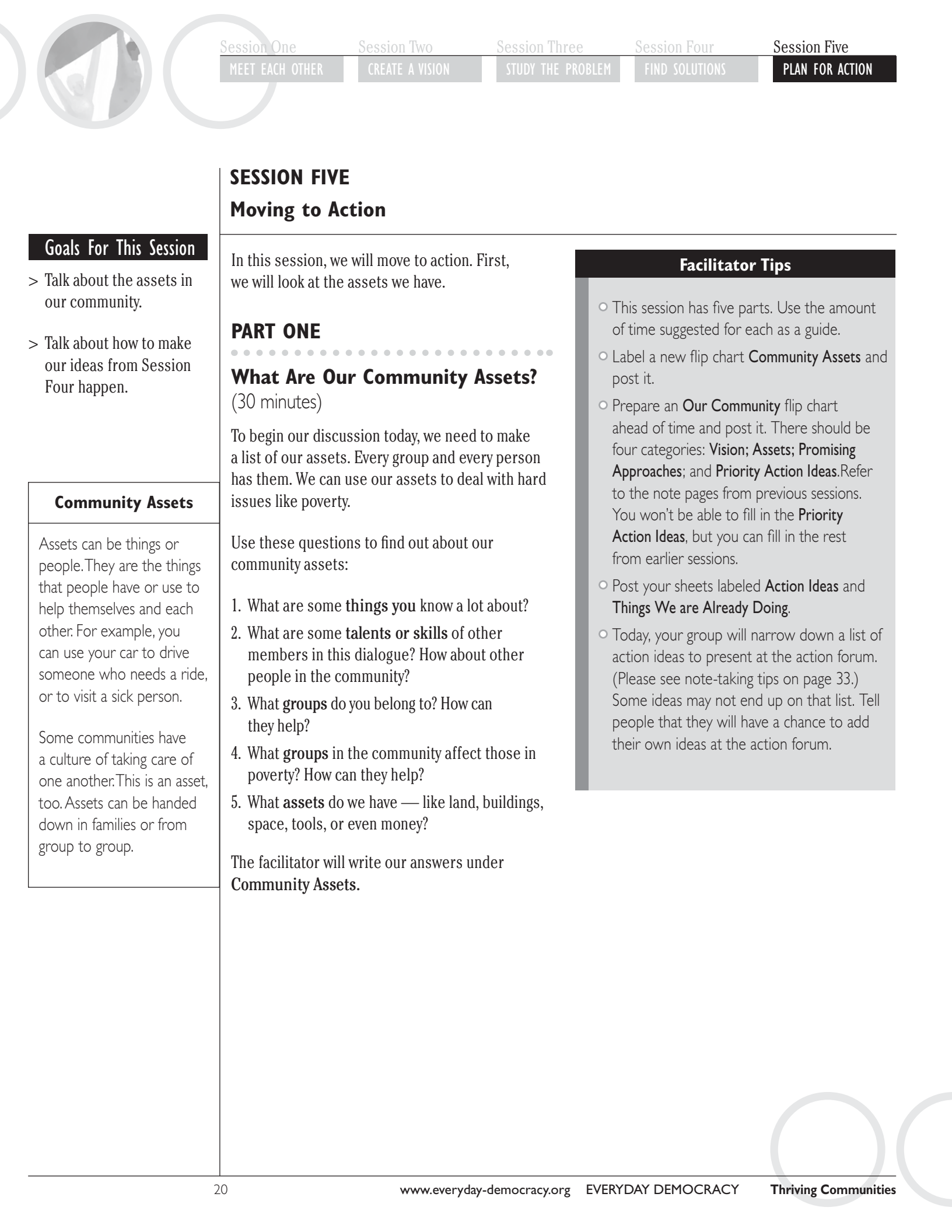
##### In Closing

- Thank people for coming and sharing.
- Remind your group that it is very important for everyone to attend every session.
- Briefly explain what will be discussed next week.

#### Questions for Setting Priorities

1. What five or six ideas seem most real and useful?
2. Who would work with us on these ideas? Are they things we can really get done?
3. Have they worked before? What other communities are trying them?





### Goals For This Session

- > Talk about the assets in our community.
- > Talk about how to make our ideas from Session Four happen.

### Community Assets

Assets can be things or people. They are the things that people have or use to help themselves and each other. For example, you can use your car to drive someone who needs a ride, or to visit a sick person.

Some communities have a culture of taking care of one another. This is an asset, too. Assets can be handed down in families or from group to group.

## SESSION FIVE

### Moving to Action

In this session, we will move to action. First, we will look at the assets we have.

### PART ONE

#### What Are Our Community Assets?

(30 minutes)

To begin our discussion today, we need to make a list of our assets. Every group and every person has them. We can use our assets to deal with hard issues like poverty.

Use these questions to find out about our community assets:

1. What are some **things** you know a lot about?
2. What are some **talents or skills** of other members in this dialogue? How about other people in the community?
3. What **groups** do you belong to? How can they help?
4. What **groups** in the community affect those in poverty? How can they help?
5. What **assets** do we have — like land, buildings, space, tools, or even money?

The facilitator will write our answers under **Community Assets**.

### Facilitator Tips

- This session has five parts. Use the amount of time suggested for each as a guide.
- Label a new flip chart **Community Assets** and post it.
- Prepare an **Our Community** flip chart ahead of time and post it. There should be four categories: **Vision**; **Assets**; **Promising Approaches**; and **Priority Action Ideas**. Refer to the note pages from previous sessions. You won't be able to fill in the **Priority Action Ideas**, but you can fill in the rest from earlier sessions.
- Post your sheets labeled **Action Ideas** and **Things We are Already Doing**.
- Today, your group will narrow down a list of action ideas to present at the action forum. (Please see note-taking tips on page 33.) Some ideas may not end up on that list. Tell people that they will have a chance to add their own ideas at the action forum.





## PART TWO

### Connecting Our Action Ideas with Our Assets (35 minutes)

Look at our list of **Community Assets**. See if any assets link up with our action ideas.

For example, one action idea may be: “Start an after-school program.” Here is how we could connect this to some assets:

- **Problem:** Young children are home alone after school.
- **Asset:** A group of grandmothers gathers for coffee each afternoon.
- **Asset:** A senior center has great space that nobody uses in the afternoons.

We can link these three things together. We have a place to hold an after-school program for young people. And there are grandmothers who can watch over them.

Think about other kinds of links you can come up with. Doing this will lead to more ideas and remind you of new assets.

## PART THREE

### Setting Our Priorities for Action (25 minutes)

Look again at our list of ideas for action. Now we are going to narrow it down to a few ideas we can work with. Then, we will come up with our final list for the action forum.

1. Which ideas are easiest to get done?
2. Which ideas might help people get out of poverty and stay out of it?
3. Pick two or three ideas that seem useful and ask yourself the following questions:
  - a. What would it take to make this happen?
  - b. What community assets could we use to move this idea forward?
  - c. What would our next steps be?
  - d. What kind of support do we need to take these steps? Who else could we link up with?
4. Choose up to three action ideas to take to the action forum. We should choose ideas that are not too big, or hard to do. Write these ideas under **Priority Action Ideas on Our Community** flip chart. They should be things we can do on our own, or in groups. People from other groups will also be bringing their ideas to that meeting.

### Facilitator Tips

#### For Part Three

- Some groups may get bogged down here. They may get stuck thinking about big change projects instead of things that can be done within the community.
- Remind people to focus on things they can do. This includes things they might do alone or with groups of people.





## PART FOUR

### Getting Ready for the Action Forum (15 minutes)

When the dialogues end, we will all meet at the action forum. We will share our ideas and sign up for action groups. We may want to write a report for public officials, leaders, the media, and others.

Look at the box on page 24, **A Sample Action Forum Agenda**. The facilitator will explain what will go on at this meeting.

Choose someone to speak for your group at the action forum.

Please look at the **Community Assets** flip chart. These are some of the things we have talked about over the last sessions. We will review them with the facilitator to see how far we have come. See if there is anything you would like to add.

## PART FIVE

### Wrapping Up (15 minutes)

Thank you for taking part in this dialogue. You are making a difference in the community. Please discuss these questions:

1. What has surprised you?
2. Has your thinking changed about these issues? If so, how?
3. How will you stay involved in addressing poverty?
4. Is there anything you will do differently because of this dialogue?

#### Facilitator Tips

##### In Closing

- Thank people for coming to the dialogue and for working to make a difference in the community.
- Ask if anyone has questions about the action forum.
- If the date has been set, tell your group where and when the action forum will take place. Let them know how important it is for them to come!

**Thank you for working to reduce poverty in our community.**





## WHAT CAN WE DO?

Poverty is a big problem. There are many ways to begin. Different people and groups can work together. One person can take action. In some cases, the whole community or government should take the lead. All of these steps can fit together to create change.

Think about some of the action ideas we talked about in Session Four. Where do they fit in here?

### On our own, we can...

- Help people directly.
- Notice that some people look OK on the outside but are not getting by.
- Buy from local businesses.
- Write letters to the editor or town council.
- Learn more about poverty and talk to others.
- Offer jobs that pay enough to live on.

○ **What else?**

### With our neighbors, or in small groups, we can...

- Mentor young people.
- Remember we all have something to offer.
- Call for affordable housing.
- Donate food to the food pantry.
- Help someone who needs child care.
- Volunteer to build or repair homes.
- Talk together about what we think should be done.
- Plant community gardens for food and beauty.

○ **What else?**

### As a community, or with government, we can...

- Get the state to support local credit unions.
- Work to stop abuse of drugs and alcohol.
- Teach youth how to budget and how to handle money.
- Work to make sure that new businesses provide decent wages and benefits for employees.
- Hold an event that shows our area is a good place to do business.
- Provide shelter for the homeless.
- Start a "neighborhood watch" program.
- Make sure people get services they need.
- Help people pay fuel bills.
- Work to preserve or expand programs for the poor.
- Help people fill out tax forms.
- Stop unfair lending.

○ **What else?**





## THE ACTION FORUM

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

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

### A Sample Action Forum Agenda (1 to 3 hours)

1. Social time: Refreshments, Entertainment, Gallery Walk (time to read summaries from each circle posted around the room)
2. Welcome and Introductions
  - Moderator welcomes everyone and introduces sponsors.
  - Review agenda.
  - Talk about the effort in the community.
  - Thank facilitators and other key volunteers.
3. Reports From the Dialogues
  - A representative from each dialogue speaks for a few minutes. This person summarizes key issues or concerns, plus major ideas for action.
  - Be sure to include vision and community assets.
4. Moving to Action
  - Moderator identifies the most common themes for action and invites participants to sign up for an action group or task force.
  - People choose action groups, and sign up.
  - Leader for each action group collects names, and sets a date for the first meeting.
  - People sign up for facilitator training, or to help organize future dialogue-to-change programs.
5. Closing remarks
  - Closing remarks. (Describe how the action efforts will be tracked and tied to further organizing.)
  - Next steps. (Include plans for another round of dialogues, celebration, or check-in meeting.)
  - Thanks to all.







## HOW TO MAKE AND USE AN “INFORMATION SHEET”

Many programs develop “information sheets” to use along with their discussion guides. An information sheet should provide objective information about how the issue is playing out in your community. It can cover a range of information — from general to specific.

A good information sheet paints a picture of the community and the issue, and provides basic facts and a framework for the discussion. It should include:

- data that describe the community as a whole;
- data that illustrate the situation or issue under discussion;
- information about what is already being done in the community to address the issue.

Get a few people together to think about what kind of information should be in your fact sheet. Be sure this group is diverse and represents many points of view. Don't forget to include seniors and young people in this process.

**Keep the information simple, clear, easy to understand, and brief — two or three pages, at most.** Provide enough data (facts) to frame the discussion. But don't overwhelm people. Be sure the information is balanced and objective, and relates directly to the issue. Don't use too many words. Simple graphics — such as pie charts or bar graphs — are a good way to get complex information across. You can also use newspaper articles or official documents. Always say where you got the information.

**Try to include more than just economic data.** It is easy to find economic data. It is harder to find information that tells the real story. Poverty can be about more than money. There are other resources that people need. Some of this will take detective work in the community. Don't be discouraged if it is hard to find some of the information, or if you have to piece it together. Just try to create a very broad picture.

The United States Census Bureau has good profiles of many communities, all the way down to ZIP code in many cases: [factfinder.census.gov](http://factfinder.census.gov).

Here are a few other sites on the Internet that can provide statistical information on poverty in communities. Also, look at the section, **For More Information** on page 34.

- American West (organization preserving heritage of 22 western states provides information on Native Americans): [www.americanwest.com/pages/indians.htm#genres](http://www.americanwest.com/pages/indians.htm#genres)
- Bureau of Economic Analysis Regional Facts: [www.bea.doc.gov/bea/regional/bearfacts/](http://www.bea.doc.gov/bea/regional/bearfacts/)
- Community Information Resource Center, Rural Policy Research Institute (RUPRI): [www.circ.rupri.org](http://www.circ.rupri.org)
- DataPlace (Fannie Mae Foundation): [www.dataplace.org](http://www.dataplace.org)
- Index of Native American Resources on the Internet (maintained by an individual): [www.hanksville.org/naresources/](http://www.hanksville.org/naresources/)
- Indian Health Service: [www.ihs.gov/nonmedicalprograms/ihs%5Fstats/Statistical\\_Databases.asp](http://www.ihs.gov/nonmedicalprograms/ihs%5Fstats/Statistical_Databases.asp)
- Links from Talks with Wolves (organization working in Native American and African-American cultures): [www.nyct.net/~twwolves/links.html](http://www.nyct.net/~twwolves/links.html)
- National Center for Education Statistics “The Condition of Education”: [nces.ed.gov/programs/coe/](http://nces.ed.gov/programs/coe/)
- Northwest Area Foundation Indicator Website (information on Northwest states): [www.indicators.nwaf.org](http://www.indicators.nwaf.org)
- U.S. Census Bureau. Every state has a federally funded data center to help in finding state-specific information. A list of them is here: [www.census.gov/sdc/www/](http://www.census.gov/sdc/www/)

### One Last Thing

After you have collected all of your information and you are ready to put your fact sheet together, ask: “What is really *essential* to the discussion?” Resist the temptation to include everything!





### Things You Can Include in an Information Sheet

Here is an example of what to include in an information sheet. It is based on materials created by a community that used this guide in a dialogue-to-change program:

- **Demographics** — Census data on age and gender for the community and the county, including numbers from past years to show how things are changing.
- **Employment** — Information on employment and job trends in the area.
- **Economic Conditions** — Which industries are doing well and which are struggling. Income distribution, including how many families are below the poverty line (broken down by age), how much is spent on Women, Infants, and Children (WIC), Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), the Crop Disaster Program, and other programs.
- **Health** — Birth and death rates for the area.
- **Children** — Information on immunization rates and school attendance. Information on child abuse and neglect, juvenile offenses in the last year.
- **Adult/Family** — Percentage of adults who live alone compared with the national norms. Methamphetamine and other drug use, and other information.
- **Cultural Issues** — Some communities may want to include information about cultural connections. For instance, in Native American communities, what percentage of residents speak their tribal language? Do people have access to traditional ceremonies there? What percentage of enrolled tribal members attend western churches?

*This is not the only way to create an information sheet. There are many kinds of information. You may want to include some of these ideas. You may also want to add to this list, or choose other information. You may also want to make charts or graphs to show some of the information. This will make it easier to see and understand.*







## TIPS FOR FACILITATORS

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

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

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

Here are a few more tips:

### **Stay neutral!**

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

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

### **Explain the purpose of the dialogue, and help the group set ground rules.**

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

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

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

- Remember, your main role is to help the group stay focused on the subject.
- Help the discussion flow by keeping track of how the participants are communicating with each other — who has spoken, who hasn't spoken, and who needs more time to make a point. Make sure everyone gets a fair hearing.
- Consider splitting up into smaller groups. This will help put people at ease.
- Only interfere with the discussion if you have to. Don't allow the group to turn to you for answers.
- Resist the urge to speak after each comment or answer every question. Let participants respond directly to each other. Always be thinking about how to move the discussion forward.
- Once in a while, ask participants to sum up the most important points that have come out in the discussion.
- Remember that some people are uncomfortable reading out loud. Don't go "around the circle" reading passages; instead, ask for volunteers.





- Don't be afraid of silence! People sometimes need time to think before they respond. Try counting silently to ten before you rephrase the question. This will give people time to collect their thoughts.
- Don't let anyone take over the conversation; try to involve everyone.
- Remember this is not a debate. It's a group dialogue. If participants forget this, don't hesitate to ask the group to help re-establish the ground rules.
- Keep track of time!

### **Help the group look at various points of view.**

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

### **Ask open-ended questions that don't lead to easy answers.**

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

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

#### **General questions:**

- What seems to be the key point here?
- Do you agree with that? Why?
- What do other people think of this idea?
- What would be a strong case against what you just said?
- What experiences with this can you share with the group?
- Could you help us understand the reasons behind your opinion?
- What do you think is really going on here? Why is that important?
- How might others see this issue?
- Do you think others in the group see this the way you do? Why?
- How does this make you feel?







### **Questions to use when there is disagreement:**

- What do you think s/he is saying?
- What bothers you most about this?
- What is at the heart of the disagreement?
- How does this make you feel?
- What experiences or beliefs might lead a reasonable person to support that point of view?
- What do you think is really important to people who hold that opinion?
- What is blocking the discussion?
- What might you be willing to give up in order to come to some agreement?
- What don't you agree with?
- What do you find most convincing about that point of view?
- What is it about that position that you just cannot live with?
- Could you say more about what you think?
- What makes this so hard?
- What have we missed that we need to talk about?

### **Questions to use when people are feeling hopeless:**

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

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

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

***Thank everyone for their contributions!***





## WORKING WITH MULTICULTURAL DIFFERENCES

### **Be aware of the ways that cultural differences show up when people from different cultures interact:**

- **Communication styles**
  - Verbal communication — shades of meaning differ (even in the same language) from one culture to another. Volume: shouting may mean a person is excited, not angry.
  - Non-verbal communication: facial expressions and body language; personal space (seating arrangements matter!); sense of time; touching.
- **Attitudes toward conflict**
  - In some cultures, people deal with conflict directly.
  - In other cultures, face-to-face conflict is embarrassing, and people prefer to work things out quietly, perhaps in writing.
- **Approaches to completing tasks**
  - People have different notions about time and relationship building. In some cultures, more value is placed on getting down to work first, and building relationships along the way.
  - Other cultures start by building relationships; then, people are ready to work together to complete the task.
- **Decision-making styles**
  - In some cultures, managers delegate responsibility for decision making to an assistant.
  - In some cultures, people value being able to make decisions themselves.
  - Sometimes, group decisions are made by majority rule.
  - Sometimes, groups make decisions by consensus.
- **Approaches to “knowing”**
  - People in some cultures learn by measuring, and counting — quantifying things.
  - In other cultures, “knowing” comes from experience and intuitive reasoning.

### **Working with Multicultural Differences**

Adapted from an essay, “Working on Common Cross-Cultural Communication Challenges,”  
by Marcelle E. DuPraw and Marya Axner in *Toward a More Perfect Union in An Age of Diversity*.





## Helping multicultural groups function well:

- Make people feel welcome. At the beginning, give participants time to share information about their culture.
  - Ask them to bring something to the dialogue that helps people learn about their culture.
  - Ask people to tell the story of their name/their whole name/all of their names. Give each person an equal amount of time.
- Think about how your own culture and communication style is affecting the conversation. You may need to ask the questions in a different way.
- Set a tone of unity. Help people see their similarities as well as their differences.
- Help people understand that there is no one “right way” to communicate.
  - Help group members appreciate different communication styles. Talk together about things like body language and personal space, about traditions of listening, and speaking out.
- Avoid stereotyping. Cultural norms don’t apply to all the individuals within a culture.
- Help the group understand that no one can represent his or her entire culture.
- Try to build empathy and understanding among group members, but remind them that no one can know exactly how it feels to be in someone else’s shoes.
- After a couple of sessions, ask participants how culture affects the way they view the exercises and ideas that come up in the discussion. — After the group develops a list of options for action, ask about the role of culture and race in developing and carrying out the options.

## Working with interpreters:

- Remind interpreters that their job is to translate accurately, not to add their own opinions.
- Give interpreters written materials ahead of time, and go over the process with them.
- Make sure the interpreter feels comfortable letting the facilitator know if s/he needs more time.
- Speak in short sentences and keep ideas simple. (This gives the interpreter time to catch up.)
- Pay attention to the interpreter. Even if you don’t speak the language, you can tell if s/he is translating everything, or not.
- After every session, ask interpreters to translate ground rules and notes that were posted on newsprint.





## WORKING WITH GROUPS WHERE LITERACY IS A CONCERN

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- At the start, give a simple explanation of how the dialogue will work, and tell participants the goal of each session. (Each time you meet, restate the goal of the session.)
- If the people in your group can't read, or have trouble reading, limit your use of the flip chart.
- If participants are required to fill out forms, assign someone to ask the questions and fill out the forms with/for them.
- Be prepared to read aloud to the group, if participants are uncomfortable doing that.
- Ask people to rephrase or summarize to make sure everyone understands.
- Avoid using jargon or acronyms. When these terms come up and people look puzzled, ask: "What does that mean?"
- In between sessions, check with participants to make sure they know that what they have shared is very important to the group.
- Give people extra time to collect their thoughts before they talk. Remember, this may be the first time they have spoken in public, and/or in a different language.
- Consider putting people in small groups, but don't separate people by language groups. (You may need more than one interpreter per dialogue.)







## NOTE-TAKING TIPS

Every dialogue needs a **recorder** — someone to take notes. This person's job is to listen carefully, keep track of the big ideas that come up, and list them, in categories, on large sheets of paper so everyone can see them.

- If there are two facilitators for your group, they can take turns recording.
- If a volunteer takes notes, make sure it is not the same person each session. (The recorder is too busy to take part in the discussion.)

### *Note taking serves many purposes:*

- It helps group members stay on track and move the discussion along.
- It provides a way to capture the wisdom and common themes that develop in the discussion.
- Notes from all the dialogues in your program can be turned into a report that summarizes what you have done.
- *Caution:* People should talk to each other, not to the recorder.

### *How to do it:*

- Capture big ideas and themes, not every word.
- Use the words of the speaker as closely as possible.
- Check with the group to make sure your notes are correct.
- Some groups organize their records this way:
  - Areas where we agree
  - Areas where we disagree
  - Areas that are mixed
  - Action ideas
  - Things we are already doing
- Write neatly so everyone can read the notes.
- Save the notes so that you can refer to them in later sessions.
- After each session, share the notes with the program organizers so they can follow your progress.





## FOR MORE INFORMATION

This guide is meant to help communities begin to take action. In your dialogue-to-change program, you created a community vision, talked about why poverty exists in your community and what it looks like, and discussed approaches to reducing poverty. Here is information about organizations and resources that can tell you more about poverty and help you take action.

### Resources to learn more about poverty and to take action

- American Enterprise Institute for Public Policy Research: [\*\*www.aei.org\*\*](http://www.aei.org)  
Focuses on preserving and strengthening what it calls the “foundations of freedom” (limited government, private enterprise, vital cultural and political institutions, and a strong foreign policy and national defense) through scholarly research, open debate, and publications.
- The Brookings Institution: [\*\*www.brook.edu\*\*](http://www.brook.edu)  
Focuses on independent research and innovative policy solutions.
- Carsey Institute, a research institute at the University of New Hampshire: [\*\*www.carseyinstitute.unh.edu\*\*](http://www.carseyinstitute.unh.edu)  
Supports policy research that informs policy makers and practitioners engaged in increasing opportunities for social mobility, and building healthy, sustainable communities.
- Annie E. Casey Foundation: [\*\*www.aecf.org\*\*](http://www.aecf.org)  
Seeks to restore the strong connections between vulnerable families and the circumstances vital to building stronger families and more supportive neighborhoods.
- Cato Institute: [\*\*www.cato.org\*\*](http://www.cato.org)  
Seeks to broaden the parameters of public policy debate to allow consideration of the traditional American principles of limited government, individual liberty, free markets, and peace.
- Center on Budget and Policy Priorities: [\*\*www.cbpp.org\*\*](http://www.cbpp.org)  
Works at federal and state levels on fiscal policy and public programs that affect low- and moderate-income families and individuals. Conducts research and analysis to inform public debates over proposed budget and tax policies, and to help ensure that the needs of low-income families and individuals are considered in these debates.
- The Heartland Center for Leadership Development: [\*\*www.heartlandcenter.info\*\*](http://www.heartlandcenter.info)  
Focuses on leadership training, citizen participation, community planning, facilitation, evaluation, and curriculum development. Its programs and publications stress the critical role played by local leadership, as communities and organizations build capacity for sustainable development.
- The Heritage Foundation: [\*\*www.heritage.org\*\*](http://www.heritage.org)  
Formulates and promotes conservative public policies based on the principles of free enterprise, limited government, individual freedom, traditional American values, and a strong national defense.
- Dr. John Iceland (University of Maryland) poverty links page: [\*\*www.bsos.umd.edu/socyl/jiceland/poverty1.html#Links\*\*](http://www.bsos.umd.edu/socyl/jiceland/poverty1.html#Links)  
A collection of poverty research and information, including Dr. Iceland’s work, as well as links to many other poverty websites, research centers, and government sites.



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- **Joint Center for Poverty Research**  
(Northwestern University / University of Chicago): [\*\*www.jcpr.org\*\*](http://www.jcpr.org)  
Supports academic research that examines what it means to be poor and live in America. Concentrates on the causes and consequences of poverty in America and the effectiveness of policies aimed at reducing poverty.
  - **Kirwan Institute for the Study of Race and Ethnicity:** [\*\*www.kirwaninstitute.org\*\*](http://www.kirwaninstitute.org)  
Seeks to deepen understanding of the causes of and solutions to racial and ethnic disparities and hierarchies. Focuses explicitly on Ohio and the United States, but also on the Americas as a whole, and on the larger global community.
  - **MDRC**, a nonprofit social policy research organization focusing on low-income issues: [\*\*www.mdrc.org\*\*](http://www.mdrc.org)  
Seeks to learn what works in social policy and to affect the design and implementation of policies and programs in five main areas: family well-being and child development; public education; transitions to adulthood; low-wage workers and communities; and barriers to employment.
  - **National Center of the Area Poverty Research Centers Program** (University of Michigan): [\*\*www.npc.umich.edu\*\*](http://www.npc.umich.edu)  
Conducts and promotes multidisciplinary, policy-relevant research on the causes and consequences of poverty. Also provides mentoring and training to young scholars.
  - **National Center for Children in Poverty** (Columbia University): [\*\*www.nccp.org\*\*](http://www.nccp.org)  
Identifies and promotes strategies that prevent child poverty in the U.S., and improves the lives of low-income children and families.
  - **Poverty and Race Research Action Council:** [\*\*www.prrac.org\*\*](http://www.prrac.org)  
Links social science research to advocacy in order to address problems at the intersection of race and poverty.
  - **Project Money:** [\*\*www.projectmoney.org\*\*](http://www.projectmoney.org)  
Works with people to help them achieve their financial goals and learn how to deal with their money. Project Money is also hosted by Project Read at the San Francisco Public Library.
  - **Public Agenda**, poverty and welfare reform issue guide: [\*\*www.publicagenda.org/issues/debate.cfm?issue\\_type=welfare\*\*](http://www.publicagenda.org/issues/debate.cfm?issue_type=welfare)  
Public Agenda stimulates meaningful public debate with its “Choicework” discussion guides, which present three or four different points of view about how to address a particular issue. Public Agenda does not advocate one approach over another, but seeks to clarify alternatives and promote discussion on issues.
  - **Rural Poverty Research Center:** [\*\*www.rprconline.org\*\*](http://www.rprconline.org)  
Commissions, supports, and conducts research that leads to informed policymaking and effective practice.
  - **The Rural School and Community Trust:** [\*\*www.ruraledu.org\*\*](http://www.ruraledu.org)  
Involves young people in learning linked to their communities, improves the quality of teaching and school leadership, and advocates for appropriate state educational policies, including the key issue of equitable and adequate funding for rural schools.





## For further reading

- DeParle, Jason. ***American Dream: Three Women, Ten Kids, and a Nation's Drive to End Welfare.***

DeParle follows three women in one extended family and traces their story back six generations to a common ancestor — a Mississippi slave — and adds politicians, case workers, reformers, and rogues to an epic exploration of America's struggle with poverty and dependency. This book offers a highly complex response to the welfare debate and illuminates the economic landscape.

- Duncan, Cynthia M. ***Worlds Apart: Why Poverty Persists in Rural America.***  
Duncan, professor of sociology, researches rural poverty in America. This book is the result of a five-year study of how the poverty cycle can be broken.

- Ehrenreich, Barbara. ***Nickel and Dime: On (Not) Getting By in America.***  
Millions of Americans work for poverty-level wages, and one day Ehrenreich decided to join them. This book reveals low-wage America in all its tenacity, anxiety, and surprising generosity — a land of Big Boxes, fast food, and a thousand desperate strategies for survival.

- Hartman, Chester (ed.). ***Double Exposure: Poverty & Race in America.***

This book focuses on our country's most troublesome and seemingly intractable social problem: the intersection of race and poverty. Hartman provides an up-to-date and comprehensive review of the major topics surrounding this issue: affirmative action; the permanence of racism thesis; the use and utility of racial and ethnic categories; multiculturalism; immigration; the underclass debate; and democracy/equality. Sixty-three contributions (by some of the nation's leading thinkers and activists) pose key questions and offer a range of progressive responses.

- Iceland, John. ***Poverty in America: A Handbook.***

In an in-depth look at trends, patterns, and causes of poverty in the United States, Iceland combines the latest statistical information, historical data, and social scientific theory to provide a comprehensive picture of poverty in America — a picture that shows how poverty is measured and understood and how this has changed over time, as well as how public policies have grappled with poverty as a political issue and an economic reality.

- Payne, Ruby K. ***A Framework for Understanding Poverty.***

*Framework* illuminates differences between generational poverty and situational poverty, presents the issues central to teaching students from poverty, and offers proven tools educators can use immediately to improve the quality of instruction in their classrooms.

- Schiller, Bradley R. ***The Economics of Poverty and Discrimination, Ninth Edition.***

A leading classroom authority on the causes of poverty and antipoverty options. The ninth edition has been thoroughly updated with new data, policy initiatives, research findings, and new issues.

- Shipler, David K. ***The Working Poor: Invisible in America.***

Shipler, a journalist, observed some impoverished working Americans and their families, for a number of years. His research reveals the interlocking problems that challenge the climb out of poverty.





### Books That Communities Have Found Useful

Many communities are already working on reducing poverty. We asked some of them to suggest resources and information that they have found useful. Here is a list of resources that many of them recommend:

- Baum, Howell S. *The Organization of Hope: Communities Planning Themselves*. (State University of New York Press)
- DeVol, Philip E. *Getting Ahead in a Just-Gettin'-By World: Building Your Resources for a Better Life*. (aha! Process, Inc.)
- Smith, Terie Dreussie, Payne, Ruby K. and DeVol, Philip E. *Bridges Out of Poverty: Strategies for Professionals and Communities*. (aha! Process, Inc.)
- Duncan, Cynthia M. *Worlds Apart: Why Poverty Persists in Rural America*. (Yale University Press)
- Emery, Merrelyn and Purser, Ronald E. *The Search Conference: A Powerful Method for Planning Organizational Change and Community Action*. (Jossey-Bass)
- Heartland Center. *Better Schools Through Public Engagement*. (Heartland Center)
- Kielburger, Marc and Kielburger, Craig. *Take Action! A Guide to Active Citizenship*. (John Wiley & Sons, Inc.)
- Kretzmann, John P. and McKnight, John L. *Building Communities from the Inside Out: A Path Toward Finding and Mobilizing a Community's Assets*. (ACTA Publications)
- Lareau, Annette. *Unequal Childhoods: Class, Race, and Family Life*. (University of California Press)
- Luther, Vicki and Wall, Milan. *Clues to Rural Community Survival*. (Heartland Center)
- Luther, Vicki and Wall, Milan. *Clues to Rural Community Survival Workbook*. (Heartland Center)
- Miller-Adams, Michelle. *Owning Up: Poverty, Assets, and the American Dream*. (The Brookings Institution)
- Payne, Ruby K. *A Framework for Understanding Poverty*. (aha! Process, Inc.)
- Putnam, Robert D. *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community*. (Simon & Schuster, Inc.)
- Rank, Mark Robert. *One Nation, Underprivileged: Why American Poverty Affects Us All*. (Oxford University Press)
- Rans, Susan A. *Hidden Treasures: Building Community Connections by Engaging the Gifts of\** \*People on welfare \*People with disabilities \*People with mental disabilities \*Older adults \*Young people. (ABCD Institute)
- Sachs, Jeffrey. *The End of Poverty: Economic Possibilities for Our Time*. (Penguin Group)
- Shieler, David K. *The Working Poor: Invisible in America*. (Knopf)
- Valle, Isabel. *Fields of Toil: A Migrant Family's Journey*. (Washington State University Press)





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**Noel Cazenave**, Associate Professor of Sociology, University of Connecticut

**Cynthia Duncan**, Director, The Carsey Institute, University of New Hampshire

**John Iceland**, Associate Professor of Sociology, University of Maryland

**Vicki Luther**, Co-Director, Heartland Center for Leadership Development

**David Shipler**, Correspondent, *New York Times*

**Ruth Yellowhawk**, Co-Director, Indigenous Issues Forums

**Lori Villarosa**, Director, Philanthropic Initiative for Racial Equity

**Maya Willey**, Director, Center for Social Inclusion

Poverty crosses many boundaries. Important advice on handling multicultural issues came from John Landesman, director of Montgomery County Public Schools Study Circles Program, as well as many others.

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## ABOUT THE NORTHWEST AREA FOUNDATION AND EVERYDAY DEMOCRACY

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### About the Northwest Area Foundation

The Northwest Area Foundation is dedicated to helping communities reduce poverty for the long term. It does this by sharing lessons learned from its programs and from the work of other communities and organizations. The Foundation also supports this work through program-related and mission-related investments.

The Foundation provides financial resources and technical assistance that help communities create a climate and build the capabilities to achieve: asset identification and development; expanded economic opportunities that create living-wage jobs; increased community skills for planning, teaching, leading and implementing poverty reduction initiatives; and decision making that incorporates the voice and vote of broad segments of the community, including those of people in poverty.

The Foundation works on strategic efforts with a small number of rural, urban, and American Indian reservation communities, and with organizations supporting these efforts, in its eight-state region: Minnesota, Iowa, North Dakota, South Dakota, Montana, Idaho, Oregon and Washington. These states were served by the Great Northern Railway, founded by James J. Hill. In 1934, Hill's son, Louis W. Hill, established the Foundation.

***[www.nwaf.org](http://www.nwaf.org)***

### About Everyday Democracy

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

Everyday Democracy was created as the Study Circles Resource Center in 1989 by The Paul J. Aicher Foundation, a national, nonpartisan, nonprofit organization. Since 1989, we have worked with more than 550 communities across the United States on many different public issues.

***[www.everyday-democracy.org](http://www.everyday-democracy.org)***





## NOTES

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Ideas & Tools for Community Change

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reduce poverty*

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