



Changing Faces, Changing Communities

Immigration

&

race, jobs, schools,
and language differences

2nd Edition

The busy citizen's guide for
public dialogue and problem solving

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This guide is a joint publication of the Study Circles Resource Center and Congressional Exchange. We would like to help you organize large-scale, community-wide study circle programs using this material. Please contact us for free assistance.



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The Study Circles Resource Center (SCRC) is a project of the Topsfield Foundation, Inc., a nonprofit, nonpartisan foundation dedicated to advancing deliberative democracy and improving the quality of public life in the United States. SCRC carries out this mission by helping communities organize study circles – small-group, democratic, highly participatory discussions. Contact SCRC for information on topical issue guides, “how-to” publications, and organizing and networking assistance. Organizers of large-scale programs receive free materials and assistance.



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The mission of Congressional Exchange (CX), a sister project of SCRC, is to provide new ways of bringing citizens and Members of Congress together in direct, deliberative dialogue about the nation’s most important public challenges. Housed in Washington, DC, CX provides technical assistance and publications for individuals and organizations who are working to promote study circle dialogue between citizens and their Congressional representatives.

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FOREWORD

Why should we talk about immigration and race, jobs, schools, and language differences?

In 1992, the civil unrest in Los Angeles woke up a lot of people in the nation. Some wondered if people from different races and cultures could ever really live and work together. After the violence, the National Civic League brought together a number of people who lived in Los Angeles to talk in focus groups. They looked at ways to stop these violent flare-ups from happening. What they found was a very complex picture.

People talked about conflict at many levels:

- *between* races and cultures – whites, African Americans, Asian Americans, and Latinos
- *within* races and cultures
- in schools
- between those who spoke different languages
- between those competing for jobs

One big issue that came up in the focus groups was immigration. People who are newcomers to this country (some of whom were in the focus groups) were often in the middle of much of the tensions. These new immigrants had also helped the economy and brought many cultural gifts to the community.

To make their communities work better, people said they wanted:

- safe settings to talk with people from different races and cultures about common problems
- chances to get rid of stereotypes about each other
- chances to make a difference, and to work with others to do something positive
- ways to be heard by public officials and other community leaders

Los Angeles is a very complex and diverse place. It also shows how many other places in America will probably look in the future. Many communities are already becoming very complex and diverse. One reason for this is that more and more people are moving here from other countries. For many of us, immigration is not a distant national issue; it is part of our everyday lives.

The purpose of this guide is to help people use study circles to talk about and take action on these community changes. It is set up to help people do the same things they wanted to do in Los Angeles:

- honest and positive talk
- community building
- local action
- changes in government policy

What are study circles?

*Study circles
are small-group
democracy in action.*

A study circle is a group of 10 to 15 people who come together to talk to each other about complex public issues. In study circles, people try their best to understand others' views. There is no pressure in a study circle for everyone to agree to everything. People do not have to give up things that are important to them for the study circle to be a success. By sharing common concerns and looking for ideas for action, people often can work together to improve their community.

The group is led by a facilitator who is not an expert on the issue, but is there to help the meeting go well. The facilitator and the discussion materials help the group stay focused and look at many different views.

Study circles work best when there are many going on at the same time in a community. They need the support of a number of key groups and leaders in town. These study circle programs can include thousands of people. Study circles can be used to discuss many issues, such as race, crime and violence, or schools.

As a result, people from different cultures and races form new networks to work together. They see some common ground and gain a greater desire to take action – for themselves, with others in small groups, or as voters.

Study circles on community change

Talking about immigration can be hard. The questions that come up are difficult to answer: Who are “we” in the first place? How many people and which people should be allowed into the community? It is important to look at these questions, think deeply about them, and give our public officials some thoughtful ideas for change. Session 4A in this guide gives several views about what direction our government policies could take. Session 4B is a guide for meeting with public officials.

In most communities, national policy issues seem far away. Local issues about immigration seem more important. We need to decide what to do about such issues as:

- the effect of immigration on racial tensions, jobs, and schools
- language differences
- prejudice against immigrants

This guide can help you deal with these issues. Sessions 1, 2, and 3 deal with immigration in our community. In these sessions we will look at how immigration issues touch our daily lives and how they affect our communities. Session 5 has a list of action ideas on how to make a difference on your own, in small groups, or with the whole community. ↗

SESSION 1



Who are we? The many faces of our community

Changes are making the places we live more and more complex. In some communities, immigration is a big part of these changes.

People have many ideas about immigration. Some people say that when we talk about it we also need to talk about:

- racism and ethnic backgrounds
- jobs, money, and where we work
- schools and neighborhoods

No matter how long we have lived in the U.S. or how we got here, we are all part of the changes going on in our communities. We can't just sit back and watch what is going on.

Before we try to change things and do something about our problems, we need to listen to each other. Let us listen with respect to each other's ideas and concerns. The purpose of this first session is to:

- share stories and views
- listen with respect
- talk about what we have lived through and seen

PART I

Starting the discussion

Here are some questions to talk about. Choose the ones you think are best for your group.

1. Who are you? Introduce and describe yourself to the group.
2. Why have you described yourself this way? How are you like others in the group? How are you different?
3. How would you describe yourself to groups other than this study circle? How might your description be different? the same? Why?
4. What was it like when you were growing up? How did growing up affect the way you see yourself?
5. How have others described you? How is it the same as or different from the way you describe yourself?
6. How are things different for you now, as compared to a few years ago?
 - in the mix of people living near you?
 - in how people get along?
7. How have recent changes in the mix of people living in your community changed things at work and at home?
 - in your place of worship?
 - in school?
8. How is the way you think about these issues different from your parents? How is it the same? Why?
9. How often do you talk to new immigrants? to people from other cultures?
10. How does it affect you when people speak a different language than the one you speak?

PART II

Stories to discuss

(Read over and pick a few)

- ❑ An African American man is looking for a job. All the jobs he hears about are looking for someone who speaks two languages. He speaks only English and is very upset.
- ❑ A man from a country in Central America brings his family to the United States. They left the war there and did not come here through legal channels. The U.S. says it will deport him and his family. He argues that the U.S. helped start the fighting in the first place.
- ❑ A white mother worries about the schooling her children are getting. The classes are crowded. Many of the other students are new immigrants and demand a lot of the teacher's time.
- ❑ An Asian American man is riding on a bus. Someone asks him if he can speak English. He says, "I was born in New York and have lived here all my life!"
- ❑ A new immigrant is working as a housekeeper in someone's private home. She is not in the U.S. legally. After several weeks of work, her boss refuses to pay her. She is afraid to go to the police because she doesn't want to be deported.
- ❑ An African American woman gets a hard time from some of her fellow workers. They make fun of her when she does her hair in braids and beads or wears African dresses.
- ❑ A white man owns a local company. He sees the government giving money for loans to help women, people of color, and new immigrants starting their own companies. He is angry because he never got this kind of help for himself.



QUESTIONS TO THINK ABOUT WHEN DISCUSSING THESE STORIES

- ◆ What is your first response to each of these stories?
- ◆ Do you have stories like this? What about stories of your friends or family? Why are they important?
- ◆ What, if anything, should the people in the stories do?
- ◆ What, if anything, should others do? community groups? businesses? churches and other places of worship?
- ◆ What, if anything, should the government do?

- ❑ A mother of three children is about to lose her food stamps and welfare because of the new welfare reform laws. She is in the U.S. legally, but is not yet a citizen. She is worried about how to support her three children.
- ❑ An Arab American college student often travels by plane. At the airport he is often stopped and his bags searched.
- ❑ Even when the U.S. soccer team is playing at home, the crowd often cheers for the other country's team.

Final questions (Use these questions to summarize your discussion.)

- ◆ Why did you want to be part of this study circle program?
- ◆ What did you learn from this meeting? What new insights and ideas did you get from listening to others? ↻

For next time ⌚

- ◆ *When it comes to immigration, race, schools, and language differences, what problems are we facing?*

SESSION 2



How is our community changing?

You often hear people say “Our world is changing so fast.” One way or the other, we all feel the effects of these changes. This is why they seem to overpower us at times.

Newcomers to this country change our community. This has been true throughout our country’s history.

How are our communities changing now? How can we use what we know about these changes to build a better community?

Each of the following views is written in the voice of a person who holds that view. Use these views to start talking about issues and to come up with your own best thinking.

VIEW 1

Racism is on the rise.

Racism has always been a major force in the community. Having so many newcomers here makes it even harder to deal with racism. People still judge others because of the color of their skin. Immigrants from Europe are accepted more easily than people from Latin America, Africa, or Asia. Sometimes, white people think Asian and Latino people are new to this country, even if they have lived here a long time.

Newcomers also bring old racist ideas and cultural conflicts with them. We need to bring issues of race and racism out into the open so we can deal with them.

VIEW 2

Our schools have a hard time teaching children from other countries.

Teaching young people is a hard job. It is even harder to teach people who are new to this country, who aren't used to being here, and who may not speak English. This is especially true of cities where the schools have less money and there are more students who are newcomers to America.

Schools have always been places where people learn about our country and our culture. Today, all kinds of different ethnic groups and cultures are filling up our schools. This is a challenge for the schools. The schools need a lot more help if we expect them to do their job.

VIEW 3

We have stopped trying to keep our common culture.

All Americans used to have the same values and ideals. Children used to learn the Pledge of Allegiance, sing the "Star-Spangled Banner," and read the "Gettysburg Address." We still do these things, but no one seems to really care about being an American. Why? Because of all the new people coming here.

Newcomers have their own books, songs, politics, languages and beliefs. Schools for both children and adults spend too much time on these issues and not enough on civics or American history. It doesn't even seem like we're living in the same country anymore. There are certain ideals that make us Americans, and we need to hold on to them.

VIEW 4

It creates problems when people don't speak English.

When you shop, talk to a neighbor, or take a taxi, and the people you meet don't speak English, it's a problem. At the very least, people who speak another language are annoying. At the most, they make you feel like you are not part of the same community or even the same country.

The problem is getting worse with more and more new people moving here.

There are whole parts of our town where people never speak any English and don't seem to want to learn it. Now businesses and the government print things in other languages. Don't they care if people can't read English? To get along and to work together, we need to be able to communicate.



QUESTIONS TO THINK ABOUT WHEN DISCUSSING THE VIEWS



Which view(s) is closest to your own? Why? What are the beliefs or things you have done or seen that have helped form your ideas?

- ◆ Think about a view you don't agree with. What might lead someone else to agree with that view?
- ◆ What other views would you add? What points of view are missing?

VIEW 5

New cultures make our community better.

Each new group of people coming here brings a whole new culture. This has always been true. Immigrants bring all kinds of new music, foods, languages, clothes, and ideas. This is so great for our community. It makes us more diverse and exciting. People should not have to give up their cultures just to be like other Americans. We should celebrate the many cultures around us.

VIEW 6

When new immigrants do well, racism gets worse for African Americans.

As we get more diverse, things seem to be getting more unfair. Racism is one of America's oldest problems. It is more hidden and more painful than ever. On TV, newcomers see people of color as

drug addicts and robbers. Racism in institutions is everywhere: in banks, stores, welfare offices, the courts and more.

African Americans are hurt by this. When a new immigrant group does well in our community, white people ask, “Why can’t you people succeed?” To have a diverse community that is fair and open, we need to address racism in institutions head-on.

VIEW 7

People are coming here just to make money, not to become Americans.

The reasons people come to America are changing. The more recent newcomers seem to be mostly interested in making money. They want the benefits of being an American, but do not want to be part of the community. Many of them want to go back to their own country some day.

If people just want to make money, keep their own cultures, and remain separate from everyone, we end up with communities with no common bonds. We need to insist that people who want to move and work here must also want to become Americans.

Final questions (Use these questions to summarize your discussion.)

- ◆ What did you learn from this meeting? What new insights and ideas did you get from listening to others?
- ◆ How has our community gotten better with the coming of new immigrants? Name three or four of the most important benefits.
- ◆ What are the three or four biggest problems we face in our community around immigration, race, language, and schools? Why are these problems so important? ↕

For next time

- ◆ *Is it easier or harder to find a good job than it was a few years ago? Does immigration seem to have anything to do with this?*
- ◆ *How have newcomers to our community affected jobs, wages and money? What does this look like? For example, do we have new types of jobs coming into the community?*

SESSION 3



How are jobs and the economy changing in our community?

Being able to earn a living is a big concern for almost everyone. Whether you came here recently or have lived here all your life, getting and keeping a job is very important.

The ways people get jobs and money in our community are changing rapidly. How are these changes taking place? How can we use what we know about these changes to make it easier for people to earn a good living?

Each of the following views is written in the voice of a person who holds that view. Use these views to start talking about these issues and to come up with your own best thinking.

VIEW 1

There are more people competing for jobs.

People want jobs that will give them a decent wage, help them support their families, and make them feel secure about the future. There don't seem to be as many of those jobs as there used to be. To get a good job these days you need more skills, schooling, and experience than ever.

Many jobs have moved overseas. For other jobs, the wages keep falling as people agree to work for less and less. Some jobs are being filled by newcomers willing to work for less money: for example, janitors, construction, and service jobs. With each newcomer, the chances of getting a job go down.

VIEW 2

Some people are trapped in poor jobs.

There are whole groups of people working at poor and dead-end jobs. They live day-to-day, working in garment, hotel, meat-packing, and other industries. Many are recent immigrants who cannot read and don't have many skills. These jobs are very hard on the body. Many of these jobs are also very dangerous.

Racism also plays a role. If the workers were white, people would not allow such bad working conditions. Some people who hire newcomers take advantage of them by denying them basic rights, and exposing them to many health hazards. An immigrant worker who does not have a green card will remain silent because he or she is afraid of being deported.

VIEW 3

People new to this country are hard workers.

Over the years, immigrants have added a great deal to our work force and economy. They bring new skills and ideas. Even newcomers with low skills are eager to work hard and succeed. Having more people compete for more jobs is good for business.

When people move here they are at the bottom of the job ladder, but with hard work and long hours, they can make a better life for themselves. Many immigrants have started new businesses which, in turn, create more jobs. As rich and poor strive for a better life, each person's efforts improve life for everyone.

VIEW 4

It is harder to find the “American Dream.”

Many people still want the “American Dream,” which means that with hard work we can be successful and we can prosper. In today’s complex world, basic job skills are no longer enough. Jobs in fields like medicine, law, and engineering demand years of schooling that cost a lot of money.

Blue-collar jobs are also demanding more and more high-tech skills. Today almost everyone needs to know how to use a computer. People who came here years ago did not face these issues. Many newcomers today don’t have the schooling or high-tech skills needed to reach the American Dream.

VIEW 5

Workers from many cultures are needed more than ever.

More and more the economy is connected all around the world. We rely more on other countries for trade and goods. Communities with diverse cultures have an advantage. Companies benefit greatly from having a work force that knows many languages.

Cities with strong ties to other parts of the world can more easily build bridges of trade and business to other countries. A diverse community is attractive to tourists from around the world. Newcomers have started many new businesses themselves and are helping to build the economy of our cities.

VIEW 6

There is a much greater burden on our social services.

With more and more people in need, our social services and schools have a hard time keeping up. It costs money to support new immigrants



QUESTIONS TO THINK ABOUT WHEN DISCUSSING THE VIEWS

- Which view(s) is closest to your own? Why? What are the beliefs or things you have done or seen that have helped form your ideas?
- ◆ Think about a view you don’t agree with. What might lead someone else to agree with that view?
- ◆ What other views would you add? What points of view are missing?

who are poor, do not know our culture, and can't speak English.

In 1996, the U.S. Congress made it harder for newcomers to get welfare. Political refugees, though, can still get welfare, housing, and classes to learn English. Meanwhile, these welfare cuts also affect many other poor people. People who are already here end up making sacrifices to fund the programs that newcomers need.

Final questions (Use these questions to summarize your discussion.)

- ◆ What did you learn from this meeting? What new insights and ideas did you get from listening to others?
- ◆ What are the common concerns?
- ◆ What are the two or three most important changes you have seen in our local economy in recent years? What seems to be driving these changes? ↻

For next time

- ◆ *How can the institutions in our community and nation help make the changes we want?*
- ◆ *What can the government do? What direction should our public policies take?*
- ◆ *How can families, schools, religious groups, the news media, and business help?*
- ◆ *What can each of us do to make a difference?*

SESSION 4A



What should we do about immigration and community change?

What can we do to deal with our common concerns about immigration, race, jobs, schools and language differences? How can we best solve our problems and meet our goals?

The more we talk about immigration, the more we must talk about the government's policies and their impact on all of us. Many changes in immigration policy have been made in recent years and there may be more to come. It is important that we as citizens – or future citizens – have a voice in what these changes look like.

The goals of this session are to:

- “try on” some of the views listed below and learn from each other’s ideas
- talk about government policies that address how immigration has changed our community and nation
- prepare for possible meetings with public officials
- think about what actions each of us can take to address how newcomers have changed our community

VIEW 1

We should protect all people who want to live here.

Immigration has been good for the United States. Except for Native Americans, we are all immigrants to this land. Immigrants have filled our country with jobs, cultural diversity, hope and new ideas. Allowing newcomers here shows America as strong and noble. America is proud of giving a home to those who are persecuted.

In the past, we often invited people to live here just because they were against communism. Now that the Cold War is over, the U.S. should allow anyone who is being persecuted to move here. We should also make it easier for people living in poor countries to move here.

The new U.S. immigration policies make it harder for people to come here and have good lives. When we try to enforce these policies, both newcomers and U.S. citizens often lose their basic civil rights.

Once someone comes to the U.S. through legal channels, we should protect their rights and help them live here. Everyone should be treated fairly in finding a job, a place to live, and schooling. Even those who come here through illegal channels should be offered basic human rights until the government decides if they can stay.

Policies and actions that someone who agrees with View #1 might support:

- Give more people permission to immigrate to the U.S.
- Give stiffer penalties to those who mistreat newcomers in housing, jobs, or schools. Hire more federal agents to protect the rights of immigrants.
- Overturn recent changes to the immigration laws that limit newcomers' access to welfare, food stamps, and Medicaid.
- Make it easier for people to become legal citizens. Then people won't have to go underground to flee the INS (Immigration and Naturalization Service).
- When new immigration laws are enforced, make sure people's rights are respected.
- Broaden the INS definition of "political persecution" so more people can come here.
- Hold community discussions between people of different races and ethnic groups to build trust.
- Increase funding for social services and schools that serve immigrants.
- Help teachers in schools learn how to teach students about different cultures, how to respect each other, and how to welcome new people.
- Expand ESL (English as a Second Language) programs. Lend a hand by teaching English to someone.
- Create services for new people that offer job training, job placement, and housing advice.



**QUESTIONS
TO THINK
ABOUT WHEN
DISCUSSING
THE VIEWS**

After reading all four views, discuss some of the "Questions to think about" on pages 26-27.

What other ideas do you have for actions that go with this view?

VIEW 2

We should first help people who are already here get better jobs.

We already have too many poor and working class people who need jobs. Current immigration policy gives businesses lots of low-cost workers. What about the poorest parts of the African American community and other poor people? These policies seem foolish when the government is trying to get people off welfare.

Maybe we should not reduce the number of immigrants. But let's look at who we are allowing into the country. We are focusing mostly on reuniting families and not on creating more and better jobs. Many entry level jobs go to new immigrants and not to our own poor people. Look at the workers in hotels, janitors, the garment industry, and hospitals.

Newcomers who are skilled workers can help the economy. Poorly educated and low-skilled workers only cause more problems. We should keep everyone but the most skilled workers out.

We also need to make stronger connections between newcomers here and markets in Latin America, Asia, and other parts of the world. That way, immigration will help create more jobs, not take

them away.

Policies and actions that someone who agrees with View #2 might support:

- Replace the policy that allows families to reunite with a policy that allows more skilled and educated workers to come here.
- Create more job training and schooling for *everyone*, not just immigrants.
- Stop supporting any business that knowingly hires workers who are here illegally.
- Support the growth of unions so that people are better able to get and keep jobs that have good wages.
- Enforce labor laws to punish bosses who exploit immigrants. This will make businesses improve working conditions and raise wages for everybody.
- Give job-training and support to low-skilled immigrants who are fleeing political persecution.
- Create programs that give small loans to people who want to start a small business.
- Confront or report people who are breaking the immigration and naturalization laws.

What other ideas do you have for actions that go with this view?

VIEW 3

We should allow fewer people to move here.

It is not fair to people who already live in the U.S. to let more people move here. There are so many newcomers that the need for housing, health care, and schooling has become too much. Maybe the federal government is getting more tax dollars from immigrants with jobs, but it is the local communities that are stuck with the bill for services, often in the form of higher property taxes.

Trying to meet the needs of immigrants means that the needs of America's poor (especially people of color) are not being met. Many of our schools are already too full of newcomers.

We destroy the environment when we let too many newcomers move here. Farms and forests are being plowed under to make room for all the new people. Soon, many communities will not even have enough water for everyone. Why cause such pressure on nature?

How can newcomers be part of our political and cultural life if they cannot even speak English? We don't do enough to get newcomers to learn English. When we all don't speak the same language, we split our community into too many separate groups.

We must guard the U.S. borders and stop people from coming across them. We should also take away any real "safety net" for those wanting to come to the U.S. in search of a free ride.

Policies and actions that someone who agrees with View #3 might support:

- Reduce, by law, the number of people allowed to come to the U.S. each year.
- Print official things in English, and teach only English in schools so that newcomers have to learn the language and fit in.
- Return extra federal tax money to local communities to help with schools and health services.
- Give every citizen and legal resident a job ID card. Then, when people are hired, we can make companies do the right thing.
- Enforce housing codes to limit the number of people who can live in single-family homes. This will protect the schools and public services from having to serve too many people.
- Keep recent changes in the law to limit welfare, food stamps, and Medicaid for newcomers.
- In places where a lot of people are out of jobs, extend the time when people can be on welfare.
- Increase funding for the INS to stop people from coming here illegally.
- Keep recent changes in the law that make families take financial responsibility for relatives they bring to the U.S.
- Deny citizenship to American-born children of people who came here through illegal channels. We might have to change the U.S. Constitution to do this.

What other ideas do you have for actions that go with this view?

VIEW 4

We should help countries around us solve their own problems.

This is a long-term and real answer to the problems of immigration: Help other countries help themselves. The U.S. spends very little to help other countries. In 1995, the U.S. spent .15% (less than one percent) of its federal budget to help other countries. Canada and Denmark put aside .43% and 1.03%, respectively, of their budgets to help poor countries.

We should do all we can to help poor countries with their problems of war, poor health, too many people, and pollution. We do not want a “quick fix.” We want programs that really help people help themselves. This will reduce people’s desire to move here.

We, as a nation, have helped cause some wars and we have given money to support brutal governments. Now, we owe the people fleeing from those countries a safe home here in the U.S. Also, if a U.S. business sinks a competing business in a poor country, we should help pay them for the loss.

***Policies and actions that someone who agrees with
View #4 might support:***

- Give more aid and trade benefits to Mexico, the Caribbean and other poor countries close to the U.S.
- Urge other rich countries to join the U.S. in helping the economy of poor nations.
- Stop the “brain drain.” Do away with policies that try to bring talented and skilled workers here from poorer countries.
- Businesses should pay better wages to workers they hire in other countries.
- Use “sister city” programs to lend help to poorer countries.
- Don’t buy products made in countries that treat their workers unfairly.
- Join the Peace Corps or other programs that help countries get the skills they need to compete in the world economy.
- Create programs that give small loans to people in poorer countries who want to start a small business.
- Urge U.S. businesses that have branches in poor countries to invest more money in those countries. They need to do more than just create jobs.
- Urge U.S. businesses to hire native workers at all levels, not just the lower levels of work. This will help countries develop more skilled workers, better jobs, and a better economy.
- Force U.S. businesses to protect and not pollute the other countries in which they are located. They should use the same standards as in the U.S.

What other ideas do you have for actions that go with this view?

Questions to think about

Here are some questions to talk about. There is not enough time to discuss them all. Choose the ones you think are best for your group.

1. Which view(s) is closest to your own? Why? What are the beliefs or things you have done or seen that have helped form your ideas?
2. Think about a view you don't agree with. What might lead someone else to agree with that view?
3. What other views would you add? What points of view are missing?
4. Current policy allows immigrants into the U.S. for the following three reasons:
 - to bring family members back together
 - to bring in well-trained or skilled workers to help the economy
 - to protect people fleeing social, political or religious persecution


Which of these reasons is most important? Which is least important? Why? What other reasons may be missing?

5. What, if anything, does the U.S. owe people who are being persecuted? What about those living in deep poverty?
6. What, if anything, does the U.S. owe people who are here legally but are not citizens? What about social services, food stamps, welfare, and Medicaid?
7. Should the U.S. deny citizenship to American-born children of people who came here through illegal channels?

8. In order to immigrate to this country, what kind of family ties should be given first preference? For example: Who should be allowed to come here first?
- spouses and children of immigrants who are here legally but who are not yet citizens

OR

- the “extended family” (brothers, sisters, and adult children who are married) of any citizen
9. What changes in public policy do we need locally – and at the state level – to deal with the changes that come with large numbers of new immigrants?
10. Are laws and government policies the best solutions to immigration?
11. What can each of us do now? ⇨

For next time 

Getting ready to meet with public officials

Many study circles invite public officials to join them for Session 4B. The purpose of such a meeting is to include public leaders in a respectful and free-flowing discussion of ideas. This discussion should feel like the other study circle sessions. These questions will help you prepare for the next session.

- ◆ *What are the most important things to talk about with public officials? For example:*
 - ⇨ *What are our hopes and concerns for the community when it comes to immigration?*
 - ⇨ *Which policies and actions seem promising to address our concerns?*

SESSION 4^B

An optional companion session to 4A



Meeting with public officials

In this session, we plan to meet with public officials. These may be elected officials or people who are paid to work for the government in certain departments like welfare, health, or police. They may be local, state or federal (U.S.) officials.

To face the changes that immigration has brought to our community, we need to have our public officials in the discussion. You will hear how both officials and community people see the issues and what needs to be done. In this way, both community people and officials in government can come to better understand each other.

PART 1

Preparing to meet with public officials (30 minutes)

If your study circle is part of a larger community effort, it is good to prepare for a meeting with public officials. You need to know what to expect and be able to express the views of the whole community.

1. The ground rules on this page address some of the problems that come up when citizens and public officials meet together. Add them to the ground rules you have been using in earlier study circle sessions. Make changes to the list, as you see fit.
2. Review what you have already discussed by using the “focus questions.” They will guide your meeting.

Ground rules

We agree to:

- Have a give-and-take discussion. We do not lecture or “sell” our point of view.
- Let everyone look at all sides of an issue. No one has to have an instant answer.
- Keep our personal complaints to ourselves.
- The news media can come to the meeting only if we all agree. Comments during the meeting are “off the record” and not to be used in the media.

PART 2

Talking with public officials (60-75 minutes)

Before starting the meeting, look over the ground rules and see if anyone, including the public officials, wants to add anything to the list. Then, in order to “break the ice,” have 2 or 3 people share what they have learned from the study circles so far. Keep these comments brief and related to the “focus questions.” This will keep people relaxed and on-track.

Focus questions

1. What are our hopes and concerns for the community when it comes to immigration?
2. What are the most promising ideas for change? Why?
3. What questions or doubts do we have about these ideas?

4. How can government help us address the change that immigration has brought to our community?
5. What questions do we have for our public officials? Why are these questions important?

Next, open up the discussion to everyone. Ask people to ask each other questions. Use the “focus questions” to guide the talk.

PART 3

Ending the discussion (15-30 minutes)

To close the meeting, ask people what they have learned from each other during the discussion. Make sure that both public officials and study circle participants get a chance to say what they think. ↗

For next time

By the end of this session, you may have a clearer idea of how to address the problems and chances for progress in immigration, race, jobs, schools, and language differences. Between now and the next meeting:

- ◆ *read the “Action ideas from other communities” on pages 33-37 in Session 5. They provide examples of things that other people around the country are doing to work on these issues; and*
- ◆ *think about what you can do on your own – and what you can do with others – to move toward the kind of future you want for your community.*

SESSION 5



Making a difference: What can we do in our community?

As we try to take on the issues of immigration, race, jobs, schools, and language differences, we need to involve everyone. Facing the problems and chances for progress when newcomers arrive in our community is a job worth doing.

Coming together to learn from each other and share ideas is a very real form of action. Finding ways to keep talking and include more and more people from the community is a very good next step. Study circles often lead to action groups in which some people decide to put their ideas from the study circles into action.

The following questions will help you think about actions you might want to take to address the issues you have discussed in earlier study circle sessions.

PART 1

Thinking together about how we can make a difference

(45 minutes)

Use the following questions to come up with ideas for action steps. As you discuss the questions below, keep track of the ideas that emerge by writing them on newsprint or on a chalkboard. Try making three different lists of the types of actions that can be taken by individuals, small groups, and institutions (for example: churches, schools, businesses, government).

1. Think back to the issues and concerns discussed in your study circle. What things would you most like to see people in our community work on? Why?
2. What can each of us do to make a difference?
3. How have other communities like ours faced these issues and changed things for the better? What ideas in the list of “Action ideas from other communities” seem promising? What other action ideas would you like to see put into use in our community?
4. What efforts are already going on in our community to address these issues? What groups or institutions (private and public) are trying to do something and make changes? What other groups could help, and how can we reach them?

PART 2

Setting priorities for action (45 minutes)

Use the following questions to decide what needs to be done to begin organizing for action, and to help you prepare for an action forum:

1. What two or three ideas seem most practical and useful?
2. What would it take to turn these ideas into reality? What kinds of support or help do we need in order to take these steps?
3. What resources are already in place that could help us move ahead? Where is our community already strong?
4. What is our next step? What other groups should we link up with?
5. Will we be meeting with other study circles to share ideas for action? If so, what ideas do we want to present?

PART 3

Final questions (30 minutes)

- ◆ What have you learned so far that has surprised you? What will have the biggest impact on how you think? On your actions in the community?
- ◆ What did you learn from the session with the public officials? What new questions or concerns were raised which you want to discuss?
- ◆ How has your participation in the study circles affected the way you think about issues of immigration, race, jobs, schools, and language differences? How will it affect your involvement in the community?
- ◆ How will you continue to make a difference on these issues in the community?

Action ideas from other communities _____

The ideas for action listed below reflect many different views about issues of immigration, race, jobs, schools, and language differences. Use them as a resource to jump-start your own thinking.

People with very different opinions about these issues can all find action ideas that match their views. Which action steps best fit your views about immigration and the effect it is having on our community?

What can each one of us do?

- Take leadership. You don't have to be a public official or a well-known person to lead. Ask top community leaders to talk about this issue in public. Start study circles with your neighbors. Your skills will improve and your role in the community will grow.
- Help immigrants, even long-time community members, go through naturalization. This is the formal process of becoming a citizen.
- Learn about other cultures and traditions. Start with your own and branch out to others.



Notes:



Notes:

- Keep a file on local immigration stories. Note the ones that talk about the costs to the community. Use these stories to convince public officials to change the laws so that fewer people can move here.
- Don't do business with places that hire workers who came here illegally.
- Help teach someone to read or write English.
- Be an informed voter. Learn about your elected officials. Are the people in your community well-represented?

After being in several study circles, one group in New Jersey focused their efforts on local school board elections.

- Write or call your elected officials and tell them how you feel about changes in immigration policy.
- Support your local border patrol.
- Write letters to your local papers about problems caused by high immigration.
- Teach immigrants their basic rights: minimum wage, safety at work, fair housing, and freedom from family abuse.

In Howard County, Maryland, the Foreign-Born Information and Referral Network was founded to help immigrants adjust to American life, learn English, file for citizenship, find jobs, and enroll their children in school. It also offers workshops on citizenship and immigration law.

- Ask yourself some basic questions: Do you know or are you close to people from different cultures? Why or why not?
- Support and join national groups that push for the same things you believe in.
- Be willing to change any racist ways or ideas you might still have.
- Join the Peace Corps or other programs that help poorer countries get the skills they need to compete in the world economy.

- Confront or report people who are breaking the immigration and naturalization laws.

What can we do with our neighbors?

- Reach out and welcome new neighbors who are immigrants.
- Hold events that bring people together, such as sports events or lunches with foods from different cultures.

In Miami, Florida, city commissioner Willie Gort organized domino contests between the neighborhoods of Little Havana and the mostly African American Black Grove. The contests go beyond just playing dominos, and foster lots of cultural and community exchange.

- Hold classes on being a good citizen. Share U.S. history and culture.
- Start an ESL (English as a Second Language) class for your new neighbors.
- Start programs to teach poor people job skills, about housing, reading and writing, and more. Immigrants are not the only people who are poor and need help.
- Help prepare our young people to deal with different cultures:
 - ✓ Ask stores to carry toys and books that reflect different cultures.
 - ✓ Teach young people not to stereotype people, but to care about the “content of a person’s character” (Dr. King).
 - ✓ Find out about special events or holidays in other cultures. What do they mean to those who observe them? Talk to children about what they mean.
- Work with a number of racial groups and cultures to take on a common community problem.

In Los Angeles, California, All Peoples’ Christian Center worked with the Newton Street police station to start a neighborhood watch group. It was made up mostly of immigrants who set out to stop crime and reduce the power of gangs.

In Eau Claire, Wisconsin, a city-sponsored youth group formed a Teen Advisory Group (TAG) to recruit Hmong and white students to work together on community projects which the students selected.

In Hartford, Connecticut, a youth leadership program called Common Ground, brings together area high school students for leadership training and community service. The program gives youth a chance to learn how people from different racial and ethnic backgrounds can work together.



Notes:

What can we do in our community?

- If there are ongoing tensions between groups in a community, leaders could form an alliance to talk about what to do.

In New York City, African American and Korean American leaders worked together to create the “Black/Korean Mediation Project.”

In Miami, Florida, the Hispanic Affairs Advisory Board holds discussions between the Cuban and Puerto Rican communities.

- People from different faiths could hold joint services, or work together on a common problem.
- Work with local city or county officials to pass resolutions calling for less immigration.
- Start a community art project. Use the arts and the media for groups to express their cultures and beliefs. Some examples are: a cultural festival; a photo show; painting a mural; or holding a “speak out” on TV or radio.

In Springfield, Ohio, they held a cultural festival to show off and celebrate local ethnic cultures. At the event, there were bands, local artists, various acts, and food.

In Lima, Ohio, three different churches got together to do a stage production of “Godspell.”

- Insist that public officials, agencies, and the Chamber of Commerce make businesses hire only legal immigrants.
- Help new immigrant parents talk to their children’s teachers and school officials.

In Fairfax County, Virginia, Annandale High School hired three parents who speak Spanish, Korean, and Vietnamese, in addition to their ESL staff. These parents act as translators and help explain about school life to non-English speaking parents. A school counselor is also there to help with problems.

In response to concerns by Hmong parents in Eau Claire, Wisconsin, a youth coalition started a parent support network to give counseling and help on parenting skills to immigrant parents.

The Washington, D.C. public school district started a special “newcomer school,” Bell MultiCultural High School, that helps ease the transition of immigrant youth into their new life in the U.S.

- Join your local PTA or PTO (Parent-Teacher group).

In San Antonio, Texas, a first grade teacher worked with neighborhood mothers in immigrant communities to form Avancé, a community-based early childhood program. Now there are workshops on parenting, a family support center with on-site nurseries, and skills classes for adults. Today the program is used throughout Texas. Avancé kids are proud of a 90% high school graduation rate, with half of the graduates going to college.

- Create homeless shelters for workers who are newcomers but are not here legally. They face poverty and the fear of being deported and abused.
- Hold a big citizenship drive to help those who want to become citizens. Teach them where to get help.
- Create services for everyone (not just newcomers) that provide job training, job placement, and housing advice.

In Eau Claire, Wisconsin, the city worked with a local community college and local businesses to start an internship program for people of color. The program found and trained people of color to intern for jobs in local businesses and in city government.

In Massachusetts, The United Electric Control Corporation launched an in-house training program for its non-English-speaking workforce. Workers in the program were given time off work to attend ESL classes.

- Start a “sister city” program with a city in a poorer country to share ideas about how they can improve their economy.
- Create programs that give small loans to people in poorer countries who want to start a small business.
- Offer workshops to local officials and other public servants on cultural diversity.

The Hmong Mutual Assistance Association and the Eau Claire, Wisconsin Coalition for Youth have offered community workshops for teachers, police, and service providers on Hmong culture and history. Local Hmong citizens led the workshops. Over 200 members of the police department in Lansing, Michigan have been in study circles run by the Lansing Coalition for Community Concerns. The program has been a critical step in dealing with race relations within the police department and between the police and the community.

- Find ways to get young people into study circles. Including youth in talks about these important issues is very good for the community and our nation.

In Tallahassee, Florida, The Public Agenda project started “Teen Speak-Out Forums” for teens to speak about difficult issues including race, affirmative action, cultural differences, myths and lies about race.

Glossary

Asylee – A person who asks to immigrate to the United States and is allowed to stay here because he or she is fleeing violence in their home country due to their race, politics, nationality, religion, or membership in a social group. When such a person is allowed to live here, it is called *asylum*. An asylee must live in the U.S. for one year before asking to be a full citizen.

Green Card – A written record that allows someone who is not a U.S. citizen to work in the United States. Not all immigrants can get green cards. Green card holders are also called *lawful permanent residents*.

Illegal Alien – A person living in or visiting the U.S. who does not have the proper legal documents allowing them to be here. Also known as an *undocumented alien*.

Immigrant – A person who is a citizen of another country, and who is allowed to live in the U.S. legally.

Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) – The federal agency that carries out and enforces U.S. immigration laws and rules. The INS takes an immigrant through the formal process of becoming a citizen. It also searches for and deports people who are found to be living here illegally.

Naturalization – The process by which a person who is not born in the United States becomes a U.S. citizen. Examples:

- A lawful permanent resident who applies and is accepted for citizenship
- A person who is born in another country to at least one parent who is a U.S. citizen

Refugee – A person who is allowed (by the INS) to immigrate to the U.S. because he or she has fled violence in their own country due to race, religion, politics, nationality or being a member of a social group. Some people have been allowed to move here as refugees because of great poverty in their home country.

Resident Alien – A person who is a citizen of another country, but is legally allowed to live in the U.S. This person may be a new immigrant or someone who has lived here for many years. Resident aliens have the right to work. They do not have other rights like voting or running for office. They do, however, have duties like paying taxes and Social Security.

Student Visa – A written record that allows a person to live in the U.S. for a certain period of time so that he or she can go to school.

Undocumented Alien – See illegal alien.

Undocumented Worker – A person working in the U.S. without the legal right to do so.

Current federal regulations: How to become a citizen

For an adult immigrant to become a citizen he or she must:

- be at least 18 years old
- be a Lawful Permanent Resident (Green Card holder) for at least five years, or three years if married to a U.S. citizen
- be a good, moral person
- not have broken the law or done a serious crime
- know and understand what are the basics of U.S. history and how the government is run

Other ways to become a U.S. citizen are:

- be born in the United States
- be born outside of the U.S., with at least one parent who is a U.S. citizen

Three reasons why immigrants are allowed into the U.S.:

1. **to bring family members back together.** (also known as **Family Sponsored Immigration**).

Those first in line to move to the United States are people with family members living in the U.S. who want to sponsor relatives coming here. The sponsors do not need to be U.S. citizens, but they must be lawful permanent residents. The sponsor supports these relatives legally. If the immigrant relative cannot find a job, the law says that the sponsor must support them.

2. **to bring well-trained or skilled workers to help the economy.** (also known as **Employment-based Immigration**).

Workers from other countries can come to the United States if a U.S. employer wants to hire them. The U.S. employers must prove to the government that they cannot find a U.S. citizen for the job.

3. **to protect people fleeing social, political or religious persecution** (also known as **Refugee or Asylum status**).

People who ask to move to the United States for this reason must be able to prove that their fear of persecution is real.

The information in this glossary was drawn, in part, from the following documents:

The A, B, Cs of U.S. Immigration. Washington, DC: National Immigration Forum, 1997.

Becoming an American: Immigration and Immigrant Policy, A Report to Congress. Washington, DC: U.S. Commission on Immigration Reform, 1997.

A comparison of dialogue and debate

Adapted from a paper prepared by Shelley Berman, which was based on discussions of the Dialogue Group of the Boston Chapter of Educators for Social Responsibility (ESR). Other members included Lucile Burt, Dick Mayo-Smith, Lally Stowell, and Gene Thompson. For more information on ESR's programs and resources using dialogue as a tool for dealing with controversial issues, call the national ESR office at 617.492.1764.

Dialogue is collaborative: two or more sides work together toward common understanding.

In dialogue, finding common ground is the goal.

In dialogue, one listens to the other side(s) in order to understand, find meaning, and find agreement.

Dialogue enlarges and possibly changes a participant's point of view.

Dialogue reveals assumptions for reevaluation.

Dialogue causes introspection on one's own position.

Dialogue opens the possibility of reaching a better solution than any of the original solutions.

Dialogue creates an open-minded attitude: an openness to being wrong and an openness to change.

In dialogue, one submits one's best thinking, knowing that other peoples' reflections will help improve it rather than destroy it.

Dialogue calls for temporarily suspending one's beliefs.

In dialogue, one searches for basic agreements.

In dialogue, one searches for strengths in the other positions.

Dialogue involves a real concern for the other person and seeks to not alienate or offend.

Dialogue assumes that many people have pieces of the answer and that together they can put them into a workable solution.

Dialogue remains open-ended.

Debate is oppositional: two sides oppose each other and attempt to prove each other wrong.

In debate, winning is the goal.

In debate, one listens to the other side in order to find flaws and to counter its arguments.

Debate affirms a participant's own point of view.

Debate defends assumptions as truth.

Debate causes critique of the other position.

Debate defends one's own positions as the best solution and excludes other solutions.

Debate creates a closed-minded attitude, a determination to be right.

In debate, one submits one's best thinking and defends it against challenge to show that it is right.

Debate calls for investing wholeheartedly in one's beliefs.

In debate, one searches for glaring differences.

In debate, one searches for flaws and weaknesses in the other position.

Debate involves a countering of the other position without focusing on feelings or relationship and often belittles or deprecates the other person.

Debate assumes that there is a right answer and that someone has it.

Debate implies a conclusion. ↪

Tips on how to make the most of your study circle

Each study circle belongs to those who take part. Here are some things you can do to get the most out of your study circle:

- Come to all the meetings. It takes time to build trust.
- Help keep the discussion focused. Make sure what you say is to the point.
- Seek first to understand, then to be understood.
- Help develop one another's ideas. Listen well, and ask good questions.
- Be open to changing your mind. This will help you listen to others' views.
- If people argue, don't take it personally. Look to see what ideas are in conflict. Look closely at these ideas to see what the common concerns are.
- Think about how you might work together to act on your common concerns. ↻

Setting clear ground rules

Ground rules help facilitators and participants manage even difficult discussions. Here are some suggestions for ground rules to guide your study circle. Use these as a starting point for coming up with your own list.

- Everyone gets a fair hearing.
- Share "air time."
- One person speaks at a time.
- Speak for yourself, not for others.
- If you are offended, say so.
- You can disagree, but don't personalize it. Stick to the issue. No name-calling or stereotyping.
- What is said in this group stays here, unless everyone agrees to change that. ↻

This busy citizen's guide is designed as a handout for study circle participants.
A companion organizer's and facilitator's guide is also available from the
Study Circles Resource Center and Congressional Exchange.



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