

Creating a Vibrant Hartford: Adult Learning as a Pathway to Change

Participant Guide

About This Project

In 2010, Hartford Public Library received a National Leadership Grant from the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS) to conduct a three-year Immigrant Civic Engagement Project. The purpose of the project is to develop replicable models that respond to the acute need nation-wide for greater immigrant civic integration.

The project employs two strategies, both designed to build social relationships and bridge social capital, considered in the field as essential to promoting immigrant civic integration.

One strategy, mobilizes the volunteer community. Longstanding residents are recruited and trained to volunteer as Cultural Navigators and work one-on-one with newly arrived immigrants to assist them to adjust to their new surroundings by accessing community services, developing an understanding of civic involvement and helping them achieve citizenship. The second strategy employs the Everyday Democracy dialogue-to-change process (or community dialogues) to bring the immigrants and receiving communities together to engage with one another and act on important community issues. By doing so, they will not only create positive community change, but also build lasting relationships with each other.

This Discussion Guide has been designed to assist and complement the first community dialogue in the project, focused on *Creating a Vibrant Hartford: Adult Learning as a Pathway to Change*. In April and May 2012, several groups including immigrants and others will engage in the dialogue process as described in this Discussion Guide. Their conversations will culminate in ideas for action. All dialogue participants will be invited to an Action Forum at which the action ideas will be reviewed and prioritized resulting in an action plan. Task forces will be formed and implementation will begin. Progress and results will be monitored and measured. Many relationships formed during the four-week community dialogue process will continue beyond the life of the project. The community dialogue will result in positive community change and greater civic engagement in Hartford.

With the Library as the catalyst, these integration models transcend the existing naturalization process in that it gives immigrants a sense of belonging within the broader community and facilitates their transition as active community participants and future civic-minded individuals.

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This project is funded in part by the Institute of Museum and Library Services, National Leadership Grant, designed to promote immigrant civic engagement.



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About Everyday Democracy

This discussion guide was developed and produced by Everyday Democracy (a project of The Paul J. Aicher Foundation) in collaboration with the Hartford Public Library, community volunteers, and city employees. Everyday Democracy helps people of different backgrounds and views think, talk, and work together to solve problems and create communities that work for everyone. We work with neighborhoods, cities and towns, regions and states, helping them pay attention to the connection between complex public issues and structural racism. We provide advice and training, and then use what we learn to benefit other communities. Our innovative tools and processes have proved to be effective in furthering the efforts of people who are organizing dialogue that leads to change where they live.

To learn more about Everyday Democracy please visit www.everyday-democracy.org

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CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

Why should we meet to talk about adult learning in Hartford?.....7

Holding Dialogue Circles to Create Change.....7

Where Can This Lead?.....8

Overview of Dialogue to Change.....10-11

DISCUSSION SESSIONS

Session 1: Getting to Know One Another, and Why We Care about Adult Learning...12

Session 2: Adult Learning in Hartford – What are the Assets and Challenges?.....12

Session 3: What are the Most Promising Ways to Improve Adult Learning?.....16

Session 4: Plan for Action.....18

INTRODUCTION

Why should we meet to talk about adult learning in Hartford?

Hartford is a very complex and diverse city. But regardless of how long someone has lived here or where a person is from, one common value holds – people need ample opportunities to learn and to receive training and education that will prepare them for work and life. Quality adult learning is vital to the success of Hartford residents.

By bringing together a wide range of people, we can move toward the goal of providing quality adult learning opportunities for all Hartford residents. If we listen to each other and work together, we will have a better chance of finding solutions that help all Hartford residents do well in the worlds of school and work. This discussion guide will help us talk about and share with each other our vision of the kind of learning community we want.

Holding Dialogue Circles to Create Change

We all need to become better informed. And people from every part of our community need to work together on this issue. We need dialogue among people from many backgrounds that is based on democratic values and gives everyone a voice. These sessions will create an environment where people can:

- Listen with respect, and learn from each other's lives, cultures, values, and traditions.
- Learn about the issues.
- Look at all sides of the issues and talk about common concerns.
- Come up with ways to bring about change in our community.
- Join forces with each other and with public officials.

This guide will help us talk about the kind of change our community needs. It is designed to help us:

- Understand how we are connected to each other.
- Create a vision of a better life for Hartford residents.
- Talk about some of the challenges we face as we work together to improve education and learning opportunities.
- Think about the effects of racism, and other barriers to quality education/adult learning, and what we can do about them.
- Develop plans for action and decide where to start.
- Work on action ideas with others.
- Build on what is already working.

Each Small-Group Dialogue...

- Is a diverse group of 8 to 12 people.
- Meets together for several, two-hour sessions.
- Sets its own ground rules and helps the facilitator keep things on track.
- Is led by a facilitator who does not take sides. He or she is not there to teach the group about the issue.
- Starts with personal stories, then helps the group look at a problem from many points of view. Next, the group explores solutions. Finally, make plans for action and change.

Where Can This Lead?

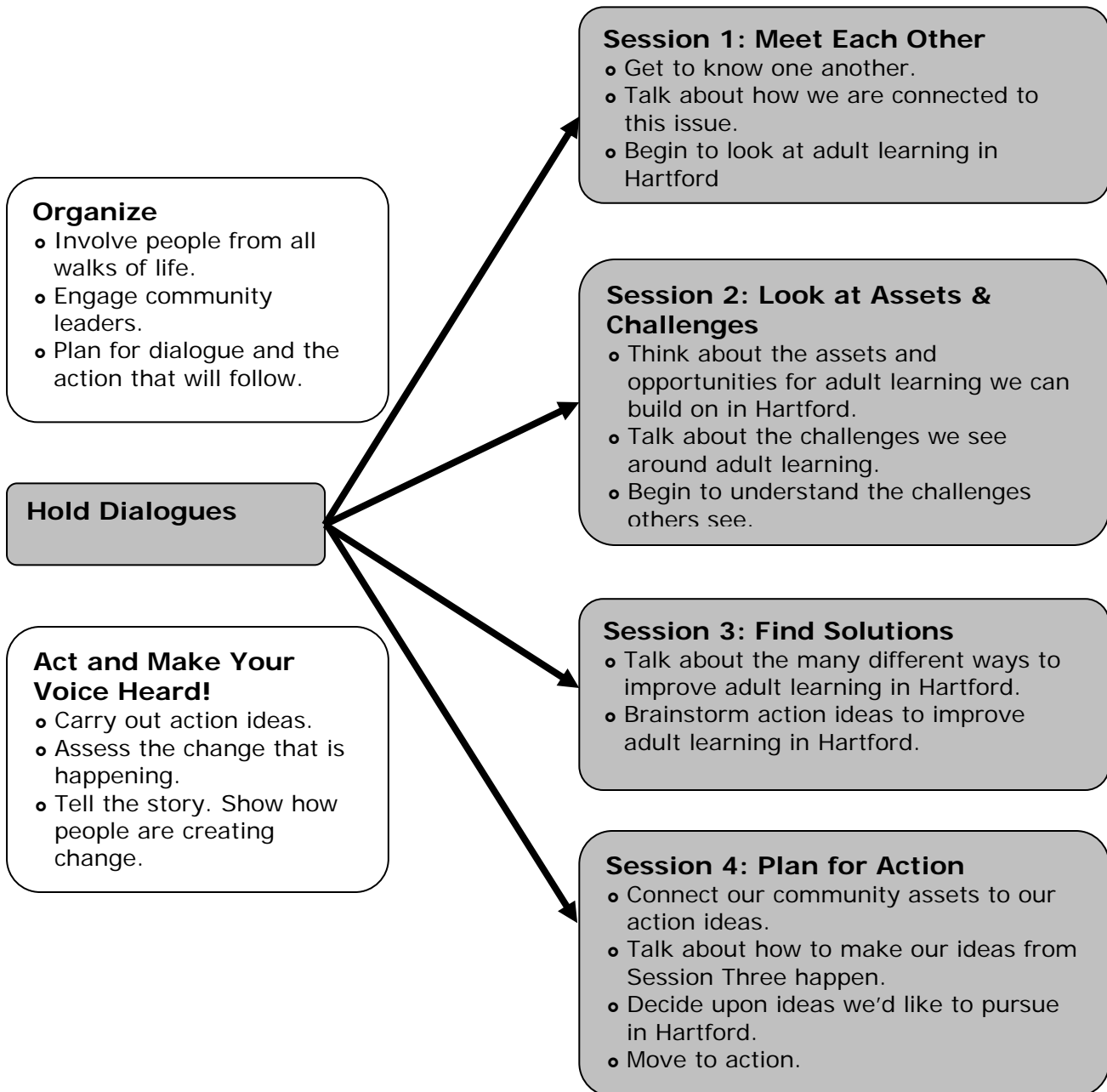
In our talks, we will be creating a vision for change. During the last session, our group will decide on some key actions. Groups will be able to share their ideas at a large “action forum.” Those who want to stay involved will work with others to carry out these ideas.

By taking part in this process, we can have a real impact on our neighbors, our families and ourselves. It will take all types of action and change to make the kind of difference we need.

We can focus on one or more kinds of change. For example, some of us might change our minds about what best meets our community’s adult learning needs. Others might work with community partners on specific issues related to adult learning.

Some may work on changes in public policy at the local, state, or national level. Some may try to change the way institutions work with immigrants, young adults, and families.

OVERVIEW OF THE DIALOGUE-TO-CHANGE PROCESS

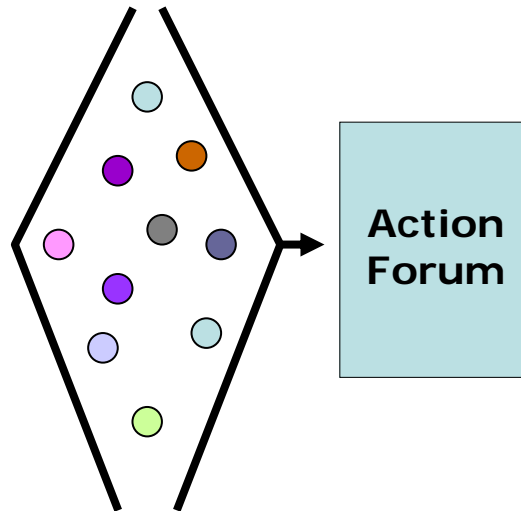


Dialogue to Action & Change

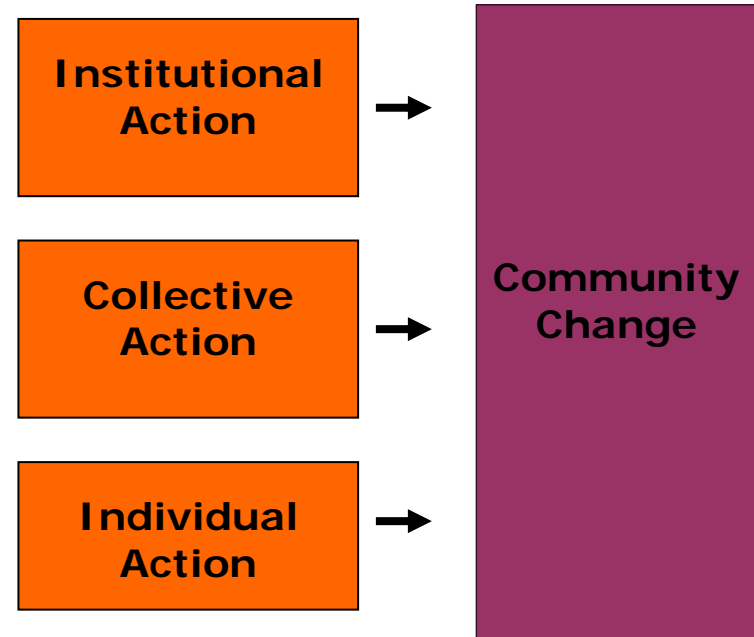
Organizing Phase



Dialogue Phase



Action & Change Phase



SESSION 1

Getting to Know One Another, and Why We Care About Adult Learning

This session will create an environment where people can:

- Get to know one another.
- Talk about how we are connected to the issue of adult learning.
- Learn about the variety of experiences of people in our group.

Your facilitator will guide the discussion for this session.

SESSION 2

Adult Learning in Hartford – What are the Assets and Challenges?

This session will create an environment where people can:

- Think about the assets and opportunities for adult learning we can build on in Hartford.
- Talk about the challenges we see around adult learning.
- Begin to understand the challenges others see.

What adult learning assets do we have to build on in Hartford *Discussion Questions:*

- Are there other assets we should add to this list?
- Think about each asset in turn – what are their strengths? What are the weaknesses that keep them from being fully effective?

What challenges to adult learning do we face in Hartford *Discussion questions:*

- Which views are closest to your own? Why?
- Which views seem most important?
- Is there a viewpoint that's missing?
- Think about a view you don't agree with. Why might someone hold that view? Try to come up with reasons to support that view.

PART 2: What adult learning assets do we have to build on in Hartford? (50 minutes)

We already have many adult learning assets in Hartford. But there may be gaps in opportunities as well. We will list and explore these assets in order to find these gaps.

Asset 1 – Job training programs – and employers who value them

There are a number of job training opportunities in Hartford. Some are operated by unions, government, nonprofit organizations, and others are operated by companies, and other kinds of organizations. Some of them focus specifically on a key skill, while others teach a range of basic job skills. Also essential is the demand for these skills – Hartford employers who hire graduates of these programs.

Some examples:

- Unions
- Capital Workforce Partners
- Northstar Center for Human Development
- Military
- IBEST (at CREC)
- Vocational Training
- Department of Labor (CT Works)

Asset 2 – Adult education programs in literacy, financial literacy, English as a Second Language, and other key skills

Without the basics, adults have a difficult time learning and coping in work and life. A number of programs help adults learn to read, manage their finances, learn English as a second language, and gain other crucial skills. Some programs also help students get jobs by helping them produce résumés and understand how to do well in job interviews.

Some examples:

- ESL
- Urban League
- HART
- Co-Opportunity
- Our Piece of the Pie
- State Treasurer
- Hartford Public Library
- Catholic Charities
- Family Life Education

Asset 3 – Cultural backgrounds, job skills, and experiences brought by recent immigrants

Recent immigrants bring significant learning assets when they arrive in Hartford. Many of them already have valuable job skills and experiences, having had a career in their home country. All immigrants bring a valuable asset in the form of their knowledge about other cultures and countries.

Some examples:

- University degrees
- Professional experience
- Cultural arts and music skills
- Business skills

Asset 4 – Informal networks and associations within ethnic and neighborhood groups

Support networks are essential for helping people get the skills and connections they need to thrive. Many of these networks can be found within particular ethnic groups, as well as within recent immigrant communities, neighborhood associations, and social clubs. Some of them are formal associations, with regular meetings and official roles. Others are much more informal networks of people, often connected by family and neighborhood ties. There are also a number of key media outlets, such as newspapers, newsletters, and radio stations, that reach and inform particular segments of the community.

Some examples:

- Spanish American Merchants Association
- Community centers
- Soccer Clubs
- North End Agents
- Elks and VFW Clubs
- Caribbean Center for Education and Training

Asset 5 – Universities, community colleges, and other formal educational institutions

Colleges and universities usually provide the most comprehensive opportunities for adult learning. Through alumni associations, which can be strong support networks, people help one another make connections and find jobs. Hartford has many institutions of higher education.

Some examples:

- Hartford Adult Education
- Capital Community College
- Capital Region Education Council
- University of Hartford

PART 3: What challenges to adult learning do we face in Hartford? (50 minutes)

In addition to the assets, the system for adult learning in Hartford also has some challenges. Understanding them better can help us figure out what to do about them. Here are a number of views voiced by people in the community:

View 1 – Many people just don’t know about adult learning opportunities, or how they could be helpful

For all kinds of reasons, many Hartford residents just don’t know what adult learning programs have to offer. People who are recent immigrants, who haven’t had a quality K-12 education, or who don’t have good support networks are often not aware of the opportunities that exist. For people who don’t speak English, language is another barrier. Others may not realize the extent to which education can enable them to realize their goals and aspirations.

View 2 – There aren't enough slots available, especially for people who can't afford to pay

Adult education programs in Hartford lack the capacity to meet the demand. Many people who are interested in training and education can't afford to pay for it, and there are not enough spaces available in free or low-cost programs.

View 3 – There is not enough coordination and cooperation between different programs

The 'system' of adult education in Hartford is made up of a piecemeal assortment of programs and activities. They are not driven by a common vision of what residents need to know and be able to do. Also, they don't necessarily train people for the jobs that actually exist in Hartford.

View 4 – Stereotypes and divisions affect what opportunities are offered, and whether people want to take part

Racism, as well as racial and gender stereotypes, play a big role in whether people are accepted for adult learning opportunities, and whether they are treated fairly within those opportunities. An unequal number of young people of color are advised to participate in adult education and job training programs rather than graduating from high school and going to college.

View 5 – Some Hartford employers aren't committed or connected to adult learning programs

Some Hartford employers have a bias against hiring Hartford residents. Others either aren't committed to, or don't even know about, the various kinds of adult education and job training programs that are producing graduates they might hire.

View 6 – Adult education programs aren't welcoming – people don't feel like they belong

Some adult education programs have a very traditional approach, where people sit in classrooms and listen to dry lectures. Students sometimes 'feel like numbers' rather than learners. For recent immigrants, the culture of adult education may feel even more foreign and unwelcoming. Older learners may feel uncomfortable participating in the same classes as young adults.

View 7 – Some people lack the attitudes necessary to take advantage of the opportunities

Some residents simply don't have the discipline, work habits, and positive attitudes required to get the most out of adult learning. In the cultures of some recent immigrant groups, education is valued only as an activity for children, not for adults.

View 8 – Lack of transportation, child care, and other barriers prevent people from participating

Even when adult learning opportunities are offered free of charge, people often can't participate because they lack transportation, child care, or other essential kinds of support.

SESSION 3

What Are the Most Promising Ways to Improve Adult Learning in Hartford?

This session will create an environment where people can:

- Talk about the many different ways to improve adult learning in Hartford.
- Brainstorm action ideas to improve adult learning in Hartford.

How can we improve adult learning in Hartford *Discussion Questions:*

- 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?
- How would this approach help us address opportunities for adult learning in our community?
- Is there anything missing?

PART 2: How can we improve adult learning in Hartford? (50 minutes)

The following list of approaches describes some ways to increase educational and adult learning opportunities in Hartford. They are intended to spark discussion.

Approach 1 – Create more coordination between different adult learning opportunities, and between educators and employers

We can maximize the resources available for adult learning by making sure that the different programs and activities build on one another. For example, people who participate in one program should be told about other opportunities. Meanwhile, educators and employers should work together more closely to make sure that the adult education programs are producing graduates with the right skills – and that companies will seriously consider hiring those graduates.

Approach 2 – Address policies and practices that determine access to adult learning opportunities based on stereotypes

We should work with organizations that provide adult learning opportunities to make sure that the race, ethnicity, and gender of applicants are not determinates of needed adult learning opportunities. We should work to expose policies and practices of discrimination and racism and those that rely on stereotypes and biases, and come up with ways to eliminate inequitable outcomes for all applicants.

Approach 3 – Work more intensively with informal and formal networks within neighborhoods, ethnic groups, and recent immigrant communities

Grassroots networks based on family, cultural, or ethnic ties can be extremely effective for supporting adult learners and helping them succeed in work and life. Administrators in charge of adult learning programs should work more closely with these associations, communities, and clubs to ensure that adult education opportunities are welcoming, well-known, and culturally appropriate for all kinds of people.

Approach 4 – Make it easier for people who already have job skills to get accreditation

Because many recent immigrants have had some sort of career in their home country, they may already have the skills and experience they need to be successful here. We should put a stronger emphasis on getting people the accreditation or licensing they need to use their skills.

Approach 5 – Build the political will to achieve substantive changes, such as higher levels of funding

By mobilizing people to advocate for adult learning, we can help convince decision-makers and other residents to value adult education and provide the necessary resources to make the system work. We should reach out to the people who may have the most at stake, especially recent immigrants and people with lower levels of income and education, and ensure that they have a seat at the table.

Approach 6 – Overcome fundamental barriers such as lack of transportation and child care

By meeting people's needs for transportation, child care, and other kinds of support, we can help them take advantage of adult education opportunities. In addition to establishing new supports and services, we can make it easier to find out about ones that already exist.

SESSION 4

Moving to Action

This session will create an environment where people can:

- Connect our community assets to our action ideas.
- Talk about how to make our ideas from Session Three happen.
- Decide upon ideas we'd like to pursue in Hartford.
- Move to action.

Prioritizing Action Ideas Participant Worksheet

	LOW		HIGH	
E A S Y				E A S Y
F E A S I B I L I T ' H A R D				H A R D
	LOW	IMPORTANCE	HIGH	

THE ACTION FORUM

An action forum is a large meeting that takes place after all the dialogues are finished. Some action forums are open to the public; others include only those who were in the dialogue.

At this event, people pool their ideas, pick a few of the best ones, and make plans for action. Action teams form to move these ideas forward. There will be many ways for people to stay involved.

When programs last a long time, more and more people take many kinds of action. To learn more about moving to action, please visit Everyday Democracy's website at www.everyday-democracy.org.

A Sample Action Forum Agenda (Approximately 3 hours)

1. Snacks, social time, music or poetry, and time to read action ideas from each circle. (Post action lists from each circle where everyone can see them.)
2. Welcome and thanks
 - Review agenda.
 - Talk about the dialogue-to-change program.
 - Thank facilitators and other key people.
3. Reports from the dialogues
 - Ask one person from each dialogue to make a brief report about the group's action ideas.
 - Or, when the group is large (more than 60 people), post summaries from the dialogues for all to see. Invite people from a few dialogues to report out.
4. Overview of community assets
 - A person from the organizing group reviews key assets. These assets will help the community move action ideas forward.
5. Moving to action
 - The MC (Master of Ceremonies) states the main ideas from all the dialogues.
 - People sign up for an action team or task force.
 - Action teams meet and begin their work. They also set the date for their next meeting.
6. Closing remarks
 - Closing remarks (including how our efforts will be tracked and tied to the program in the future).
 - Next steps (including plans for another round of dialogues, celebration, or check-in meeting).
 - Thanks to all.