


Fuerza Unida:

An Approach for Engaging Communities



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

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Acknowledgments

Casa de Esperanza thanks the following individuals and groups for their contributions to the *Fuerza Unida* efforts and to the creation of this manual:

Our visionary founders, and the other Latinas throughout our organizational history, who believed in the eternal power of community, possibility, and hope

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

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Introduction

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

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

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

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

Our History, Our Philosophy

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

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

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

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

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

Literature Review

Social Connectedness and Self-Determination

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Community Engagement as a Tool for Social Change

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

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

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

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

Impact on Individuals and Communities

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

- their own increase in healthy behaviors,
- an increase in positive thinking about their own well-being and health,
- increase in self confidence and self-esteem,

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- personal empowerment, and
- social benefits such as getting to know others in their neighborhood and getting involved in local organizations.

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

Additional research conducted by Mancini (2006) reveals specific impact related to domestic violence prevention because when a community understands both the problems and solutions regarding domestic violence, the community networks can influence the way that intimate partners relate to one another, especially when disagreements and problems arise.

Implementation of *Fuerza Unida*—a Community Engagement Process

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

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AT A GLANCE

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

Our Story

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

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

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

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The primary framework for community engagement process is as follows:

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

A simplified way to visualize this framework is:



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Things to Remember while Reading and Implementing

There are three main points that we recommend that you keep in mind:

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

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

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

¡Buena Suerte!

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How to Use this Manual

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

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

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

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

Disclaimer

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

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A Little Background

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

The nature of service

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

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

Worse yet, people have come to see themselves as clients or consumers -a self-reinforcing image that leads people to estrangement rather than connection. This leads people to care less (rather than more) about their neighbors and family. Being a user of the system is replacing being a citizen of the community. Not surprisingly, issues such as domestic violence continue to plague families despite huge investments of time, effort, and money by very well intentioned people.

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

The premise behind most of this thinking is that community members are resources; and when community members apply their collective will toward a goal, they can make it happen. People align themselves to get something done when it really matters to them-when it reflects their hopes and dreams for their families and community.

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

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

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been displaced by service providers. The natural inclination to support one another and work together to make things happen is a way of being for Latin@ families. For these reasons, a community engagement approach makes a lot of sense as a way to work with Latin@s.

An evolving approach

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

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

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

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

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Stopping to Listen: A Process You Can Use

Decide why you are at the table

Every organization has reasons for undertaking a specific project. Listening sessions are no exception. It is important to have a clear understanding of what you want to do, and to be able to communicate your intentions in a very transparent way to the community you hope to engage. Latin@ communities and other communities of color have often been the subject of research and then the benefit of the research is never seen within the community. Clarity of purpose and a commitment to following through with coming back and sharing the results of the listening sessions is very important in ensuring a successful experience.

AT A GLANCE

	Motivation
1999	We needed new strategies for supporting Latinas experiencing violence. Shelter was underutilized by Latinas, so we needed to know what else would work better.
2003	A growing Latin@ population on St. Paul's East Side was highly underserved. A partnership with a local County agency provided a unique opportunity for connecting with Latinas on the East Side.
2012	As local communities continued to experience impacts of the economic crisis, we noticed changes in participation in existing engagement strategies. We wanted to assess those strategies and to learn what supports are most helpful given current realities.

Our story

When we first conducted listening sessions, in 1999 and 2003, we at Casa de Esperanza had thrown our old service model out the window. What would the next phase entail? If we were to mobilize people rather than serve them, what would that look like? We were women who had been in the battle against domestic violence for quite some time. What were women thinking who were not a part of this battle, whose lives were not linked to any human services networks?

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

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

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We also knew that in order to mobilize women, we had to build their confidence and belief that they could change the world. So our goals were to:

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

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

Some things to keep in mind

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

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

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

Some questions to ask yourselves

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

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

A note about mission

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

As non-profit organizations, our mission is to support the community in the best way that we can. In order to do this effectively, we must remain relevant to the communities we serve or engage. Listening sessions are a way to make sure that your day-to-day work actually helps address the concerns or issues that are the focus of your mission. As organizations, we each must do the thing that we do best, and we must do it in ways that are helpful and beneficial to the community. Through the listening sessions, you will hear what you are doing well, and where you can improve, it’s up to you to decide how to use that information. With solid, community based research; a change in mission can be an outcome that makes sense because you are very clearly following the mandate of the community.

Make sure the right people are at the table

When preparing to conduct listening sessions, it is important to think very critically about who is at the table because you want to make sure that the voices that you want to hear are well represented, and that you can engage key partner organizations or stakeholder groups to enhance your process.

With listening sessions, we are frequently seeking the input of people who are not often asked to the table, so your strategies, partnerships and communications will depend greatly on who you want to engage.

AT A GLANCE

	Communities Engaged	Interviewers²	Key Partners
1999	169 women and girls in South Minneapolis	16 bilingual women, including 15 Latinas; 2 women were staff members	A collaboration of 13 local organizations and a core group of community members
2003	107 Latinas on the East Side of St. Paul	6 Latina volunteers, 1 Latina staff member	Ramsey County Community Human Services (Welfare Office)
2012	122 Latinas throughout the Twin Cities Metro Area including urban and suburban areas.	9 Latina volunteers. 1 Latina staff member provided support for note-taking, coordination, etc.	Led primarily by Casa de Esperanza volunteers in collaboration with key organizations like churches, schools, and other Latin@-focused agencies.

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

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Our Story

It is important to understand that the first time we conducted listening sessions, , though we had been providing shelter and advocacy to Latinas experiencing domestic violence for a long time, we intentionally had not build a strong and visible presence within the broader Latin@ community. We had a solid reputation and strong connections with Latinas who had accessed our services and with many other organizations, but we did not have the networks or connections with large numbers of Latin@s.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Fast forward to 2012

After more than 10 years of practicing community engagement, we had established lots of contacts within the community and could readily connect with hundreds of Latin@s in our area. Because of this fundamental difference in our position within and among local Latin@ communities, we were able to conduct this round of listening sessions almost exclusively with our own staff resources and volunteer interviewers who were already connected to our Community Engagement efforts.

Additionally, we had several staff members who were familiar with the listening session process and with community-based research methods. For this reason too, we felt that we had the internal capacity to successfully complete the project. We used the original *Fuerza Unida* manual as our foundation, which proved to be a highly relevant tool that still works very well.

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

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

- the number of women we wanted to hear from;
- how many listening sessions we were able to do; and
- the time frame we had to train the interviewers and complete the listening sessions.

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

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

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

We then evaluated our options and invited current participants from our community engagement initiatives to be trained to facilitate the sessions. We reached out and invited current participants and volunteers to be part of the process. Ultimately, we trained eleven interviewers and nine of the trained interviewers completed listening sessions.

Interviewer training was provided by two staff members, the Community Initiatives Manager and the Community Engagement Coordinator, using the original Fuerza Unida manual. We created a power point with relevant information to guide us through the training process. (This PowerPoint is available as a sample in [Appendix XX](#)).

Community members serving as trained interviewers conducted the listening sessions. A staff member was present at every listening session to offer support and help facilitate difficult conversations if necessary.

Staff members analyzed the results of the listening sessions.

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Some things to keep in mind

First, be clear about your definition of community. You might be talking about a geographic area, an ethnic or cultural identity, an age group, etc. In 1999 and 2003, our definition of community was all Latin@s living in the St. Paul/Minneapolis metropolitan area. Our focus at the time was on women, so we felt we needed to hear from them. We then selected a specific geographic location for each of our two listening projects. We chose two neighborhoods that were seeing the most growth in terms of Latinas: South Minneapolis and the East Side of St. Paul. In 2012, Latin@ communities had grown considerably in both urban and suburban areas, so we were interested in hearing from Latinas throughout the greater Metropolitan area and hosted small listening session focus groups throughout the area.

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

Start small to ensure success.

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

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

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

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

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

Whether you decide to utilize key partners, staff members, volunteer interviewers, or a combination of all three to conduct listening sessions, it is important to know that the process of conducting listening sessions can be emotionally challenging. As an organization, you need to be prepared to support the interviewers to process the experience in healthy ways. It is also helpful to be prepared for participants in the listening sessions to want support for specific issues that may surface during a listening session. See page 38 for more information about self-care and responding to participants who request additional support during or after a listening session.

Decide what information you want to learn

Community based research is a delicate balance of gathering as much information that you can during the valuable time that community members are giving you to ask them personal questions.

Listening sessions are also an opportunity to engage community members in your work long-term. You may want to ask very personal information about your community, but if you do not have an established relationship with whom you are talking to, you may inadvertently make a negative impression.

Balance in this process is key. Challenge yourself to be reasonable in the number of questions you can ask during the period of time that you are requesting from individuals. And ask yourself how you (or your mother, father, or grandparent) would feel answering the questions that you want to ask.

AT A GLANCE

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

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Our Story

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

- How do they spend their time-what fills their days?
- What do they value most in life?
- What would they like their lives to be like?
- What are their hopes for their children?
- What stops them from following their dreams?
- What are their pressing needs? Who do they turn to for support?
- What do they perceive as their own strengths and successes?
- What they would like to contribute to the world?

We also wanted an idea of their general demographics. Because of recent immigration patterns, it was important to get a sense of how long they had been in our community. The realities of established, third or fourth generation families are much different from those of newly immigrated or migrant families. Other factors, such as the types of jobs they held, language fluency, and income levels, would fill out the picture of their lives.

There are a number of topics that we purposefully did not ask about directly, even though we knew they were factors that greatly influence women's ability to follow their dreams. We did not want to scare women by asking questions that were too personal or might raise their mistrust of us. For example, being asked about domestic violence might have been too difficult for those grappling with the issue, and questions about immigration status could set off too many alarms for those fearful of deportation. Instead, we allowed women to decide how much they wanted to tell us.

For successful implementation, staff and interviewers must have a clear understanding of all of the questions that will be asked. Many questions arise from listening session participants that the interviewers will have to answer, and understanding why each question is asked and what types of information you hope to learn is critical to helping the interviewers feel confident in the process.

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

What do you spend most of your day doing?

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

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

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

List one personal achievement you are proud of and why.

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

To whom do you turn when you have a problem?

This question will provide information regarding an extended family support network, intra-family support network, or a community support network. Latinas have asked if we want to know only about local resources or any resource. Leaving this question open and allowing women to share about any kind of support can be very revealing. This question helped us be able to document that local Latinas' networks of support are not just local; they are international, and that many Latinas turn to God or faith for support. This type of information is very valuable for planning, identifying important partnerships, etc.

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

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

Some things to keep in mind

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

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

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

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

In addition, it is important to consider a broader picture of people's lives than you might obtain if you only focus on one issue, such as domestic violence. People will get involved where their hearts are, and

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reinforcing strengths and connections among people in any area has an amazing tendency to spill over into all kinds of areas.

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

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

Using a strengths-based listening process allows you to get a better understanding of the community being served by knowing its background, beliefs, values, priorities, goals, and challenges. All of these elements help identify appropriate and more effective ways in which the organization can connect and initiate communication with community members.

Additionally, listening sessions are an opportunity to introduce the organization to those that are not familiar with it. It is a bridge to build relationships with community members where both ends can benefit.

Finally, this type of process gives you a chance to hear what community has to say of your current services. It will also allow you to know what is the vision community has of your organization.

Some questions to ask yourselves

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

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Determine the best way to gather your information

There are many methods that can be used to collect information among the community. Written surveys, telephone or in-person surveys, individual interviews, focus groups, online surveys, and many more options exist for getting the kind of information that you want to collect.

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

Some methods may take longer than others -- like individual interviews vs. an online survey, But the opportunity to make an authentic connection with an individual, really understand their realities and their concerns, and understand how your organization can best respond, is an incredibly powerful and valuable experience. And as we have mentioned before, it opens the door to ongoing engagement with more community members.

AT A GLANCE

	Survey Methods
1999	Individual interviews and small focus groups with 5 key questions.
2003	Individual interviews to complete a more lengthy survey.
2012	Focus groups of 6-8 individuals discussing 5 key questions. Some took place in private homes, some at partner organizations.

Our Story

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

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

With this combination of factors, we knew that we would probably not get very much information from a survey that women filled out themselves. Moreover, we would probably alienate them. A written document

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is simply not very personal and feels like filling out an agency's intake form. There are also considerations for individuals with low literacy and for individuals with limited English proficiency. A written survey could alienate individuals who experience difficulty reading in English or Spanish.

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

Indeed, we found that conversations allowed women to share; and by listening we learned. Listening sessions allowed us to ask questions in an environment that created a space of comfort and trust. There were opportunities for relationship building as individuals got to know each other. Listening sessions are not just about gathering information, they are a way to give community a voice, and to create space to be heard and engaged in initiating change.

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

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

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

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

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

Some things to keep in mind

While listening sessions have many positive aspects, if they are not done with an honest intention to listen, learn and eventually adapt the outcomes, the experience could be negative, resulting in the organization's loss of trust and credibility with community members.

When conducting individual interviews, we decided that we would get the best results by assuring women that the information they gave us would be kept in strict confidentiality. There are those who argue that this

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framework prevents making connections among the women you interview, but our experience is that if you are open and transparent about how the information will be shared, participants appreciate the anonymity and confidential space to share personal information.

If your goal is to build networks, it may behoove you to limit what you ask to topics that people would consider to be public information. Remember that if people are hesitant to tell you much, they may have any number of reasons. This is particularly important to remember when conducting listening sessions with groups that contain members of the same family, or groups with both men and women in the same room.

If you want to be able to pull information out of your study by subpopulations, you need to track responses to individual people (for example, if you want to know what the women under 30 think, compared to the women over 40). It requires collecting the information in individual surveys or interviews.

If you want people to discuss things, add to each other's thoughts, and learn from each other, you should do listening circles or focus groups.

If you want to quantify your results (for example, 40% of the people interviewed care about making the streets more safe for children) you must also ask for individual responses. This information can be obtained in group settings, but you must ask for individual responses in some way (by a show of hands, or recording votes on a flip chart, for example).

For all of these reasons, it is important to understand how you want to report and use the information that you collect before you begin to be able to design a strategy that will give you the answers you are looking for.

Some questions to ask yourselves

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

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Recruit people to gather the information

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

AT A GLANCE

	Interviewers
1999	16 bilingual women; 15 were Latinas, 2 were staff
2003	7 bilingual Latinas; 1 was a staff member, 6 were volunteers
2012	9 bilingual Latinas; 8 were volunteers, 1 staff member provided support, but did not conduct any of the listening sessions

Our Story

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

Women who were interviewed in 1999 & 2003, told us later that it had been important to them that the interviewers were not from government. One can assume all kinds of things about what they meant by that, but they probably include something about people doing a job, as opposed to caring. The interviewers truly cared; They were genuine, real people.

This was possible in part because the interviewers looked and talked like the women they were interviewing. The conversations were women-to-women. Moreover, they were women of color-to-women of color. And, specifically, they were Latina-to-Latina. The interviewer plays an important role on how much a participant decides to share during the group. They have to be able to create an environment of trust and confidence.

We learned that isolation was a strong undercurrent for many of the women we engaged in the listening sessions. The causes varied: language barriers, culture shock, abuse from their partners, fear of deportation, recent arrival, long work hours, long hours spent caring for family, etc. We found that they

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were starving for conversation—starving to connect with someone and talk about their lives. For many, these interviews and focus groups felt like sitting in the kitchen with a sister or neighbor talking about life.

Despite our concerns that it would feel uncomfortable for women to be asked personal questions, women were very open and eager to tell about their lives. Given some basic common sense about what would be too personal to ask, it didn't really matter what we asked them.

It was important that the women facilitating the interviews and focus groups listen carefully between the lines to get a real picture of what they were hearing. For example, no one talked directly about experiencing domestic violence. Rather, some talked about marital difficulties, wanting more harmony in the family, or wanting more support from their partners. But as the interviewers and focus group interviewers listened to whole stories in these cases, they heard in some of them fear and anxiety that could indicate domestic violence.

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

Some things to keep in mind

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

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

It's important that the people gathering the information feel like neighbors, rather than researchers or census workers. It is preferable not to cross gender and race lines in selecting the information gatherers because it does change the tone and feel.

Some questions to ask yourselves

- Are there gender, age, or other issues in your community that should guide how you pick the people who will gather the information? Are there factions within your community that might consider a particular individual either an insider or an outsider? How can you find information gatherers that are generally trusted by all?

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- Where will you find people who fundamentally believe that their fellow community members have something important to say?
- What other qualities are important to you in the people who will gather the information?

Support and train the interviewers to get the best possible results

Because we value the time and experience of the volunteer interviewers, we have always provided small stipends for the focus groups or interviews that they conduct. It is one way of demonstrating our appreciation and partnership with them.

Providing training greatly enhanced the comfort level of community members who were involved in the project. It is important to remember that these individuals are representatives of your organization while they are conducting the listening sessions. It is critical that they are prepared to be able to speak confidently about your organization, the purpose of the listening sessions and the intended outcomes of this research.

AT A GLANCE

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

Our Story

In 1999 and 2003, the first decision we made was that we would pay community interviewers-those not paid to do this work as staff of partner agencies-for their time. The next decision was that we would train them well and support them in their roles.

Before women were sent out to begin the interviews and listening sessions, they were trained in the principles of the project, as well as in how to facilitate the sessions. We had a coordinator who supported the interviewers and ensured that the process kept moving. She:

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

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The length of the interviews is an example of how the ongoing training and communication helped. Interviewers soon perceived a great sense of isolation among the women they interviewed. So word quickly spread from the interviewers to the coordinator and back that the most important thing was to really listen and that they should prepare for the interviews to take quite a bit of time.

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

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

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

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

In 2012, we followed a similar structure as in our previous process. We paid volunteer interviewers and provided training and support throughout the process. We recognized that conducting individual interviews and facilitating a focus group required similar skills, but also additional training and support. We developed a PowerPoint presentation for training interviewers that is included with this manual as [Appendix XX](#).

In each of our listening sessions, we asked the interviewers to complete evaluations of how the conversations went. We also held debriefing sessions with all interviewers at the end of each study. The sessions gave them a formal opportunity to add their impressions, interpretations, and observations; and to talk about the common themes they heard. In many cases, they rounded out the information we received.

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

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For some helpful questions to consider when debriefing with the interviewers, see handout on [page 67](#).

As a coordinator working with volunteer interviewers, it is helpful to remember:

- Be sure to know and understand the process before you begin.
- Identify what will be the most effective way to train the interviewers.
- Establish clear boundaries for you and the interviewers.
- Have clear expectations and discuss them during training.
- After training give the interviewers time to carefully review materials and contact you with any questions.
- Provide interviewers with a contact list with each others information for additional support, in case they want to exchange ideas, tips or questions.
- Together discuss self-care, how to identify when they need to practice self-care and /or what are some strategies they could use. (See Self-care section on page 38.)
- Have fun!

Some things to keep in mind

It is really important to find a balance between natural ability to connect with your neighbors and the need to gather thorough information. It takes a real interest in others, balanced with a deep-seated sense of respect, to strike the right balance.

Being too formal can cause an interviewer not to connect personally with the woman being interviewed. It also may cause the woman to give very brief, surface-level information or not to want to answer some questions at all. If a woman really doesn't trust the interviewer, she might even make up stories that distort the results.

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

How you demonstrate connection and concern is also layered with language. Respect is an important factor in Latin@ communities and can be heard in the language. The Spanish language has two forms for the one English word you—tú or vos, and usted. Tú or vos is most commonly used with friends, younger people, and sometimes

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colleagues. Usted is used with elders and others to whom one shows respect. The norms about formal and informal forms of address vary by country. What feels like disrespect to a person from one country could feel like “chumminess” to a person from another country. Be careful about the terms you use.

Some questions to ask yourselves

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

Determine where you will conduct interviews and how many participants you need

Every step in the process that has been discussed to this point will inform the decisions that you make about who you will interview, how you will connect with them and where the interviews or focus groups will be conducted. It is important to consider your method, desired outcomes, privacy and confidentiality concerns, and existing connections with the community during this step in the process.

AT A GLANCE

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

Our Story

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

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

On the East Side of St. Paul, we only did one-on-one interviews. Because we developed this project in partnership with Ramsey County (who wanted to know more about how to assist Latinas on public assistance [MFIP]), we recruited many of the women we interviewed from a list of MFIP recipients.

Mostly, we relied on our interviewers to recruit from within their own social and contact circles.

For the listening sessions in 2012, knowing where community naturally congregates proved once again to be important; interviewers had great input in recruiting participants. Something that helped us guarantee the success of the listening sessions was being flexible with meeting locations. Listening sessions were held at already established groups during their regular meeting time, others were done at women's homes. Facilitating the sessions on terms that agree with the participant lifestyle and schedule will increase participation.

Some things to keep in mind

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

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

Some questions to ask yourselves

- Where do people in your community naturally congregate?
- Do you already know how to find members of your community?
- How can your interviewers help you find people to include in the study?
- Does the sample you've developed seem representative of the whole community? Or might you need to look harder to find a broader cross-section of people?
- How would you get community members to participate? What do you believe will be the benefits for those that participate?

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Gather the Information

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

AT A GLANCE

	Information-Gathering Timeframes
1999	12 months
2003	5 months
2012	4 months

Our Story

Once our infrastructure was in place, it was a question of hitting the streets and making it all happen. We set up a really tight timeline and pushed ourselves to stay within it. It's amazing how easy it is to fall behind schedule. No matter how carefully you schedule

community-based research, for example, something always changes. Some of them will be wildly successful. Sometimes you'll arrive to facilitate a session, and only two people will show up to participate.

Conducting Listening Sessions with Groups

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

The format for the listening sessions was designed to give every woman a chance to speak and feel heard through a free-flowing discussion. One interviewer asked a question. Women were able to give one, more than one, or no response at all to each question. The second interviewer wrote each response on flip chart paper, giving the interviewers the opportunity to ask if they had recorded each answer correctly. This process continued until all five questions had been answered by all present.

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

In 2012, we allowed a minimum of 2½ to 3 hours per listening session, including time to complete the demographic information, answer questions and engage in small conversation with host and participants prior to and sometimes after each session.

Reflections from the Fuerza Unida Coordinator

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

Since we did not have partner agencies in the project, a lot of the information and resources provided to participants were from Casa the Esperanza. We discussed volunteer and leadership training opportunities, services provided at Information resource centers and at the shelter. All the women received a gift card from a local store as a thank you for their participation.

Conducting Listening Sessions as Individual Interviews

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

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

On the East Side of St. Paul in 2003, the interviews were much longer and more detailed. The majority of these interviews were arranged by phone in advance. Interviewers set appointments, either in the home of the woman to be interviewed or in a public place. In all cases, the coordinator checked back frequently with all interviewers to make sure that steady progress was being made.

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Some things to keep in mind

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

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

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

Some questions to ask yourselves

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

With interviews and focus groups, we have found some practices to be more helpful than others. For a quick reference sheet that you can use during the listening sessions process, refer to the Best Practices handout on page 64.

Reflections from our Community Engagement Coordinator

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

Self-care

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

Before the Listening Sessions Begin

Prior to the listening session process, a recommended best practice is to have a conversation about self-care among the staff and volunteer interviewers. Keep in mind that it is important to create a safe and confidential space before volunteers will feel that they can share personal stories.

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

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How can a person identify when they need to practice self-care?

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

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

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

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

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Compile what you learned

Having a plan for how you will analyze data before you begin collecting data from the community is a good idea to ensure that you have adequate resources to do so. It also allows you to begin to analyze data as soon as it is collected. Additional training may be required for your staff or volunteers who will be analyzing the data to prevent bias and to ensure that community voice comes through.

AT A GLANCE

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

Our Story

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

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

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

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

Our raw data from the South Minneapolis study (1999) was a mixture of Spanish and English. Anything that could be tracked to individual responses was compiled on a spreadsheet. Comments from group discussions were typed into a word processing document in the language in which they had originally been recorded. Because these responses were not linked in any way to the individuals who made them, they had to be analyzed in aggregate. We were not able to do much quantitative analysis because most of the data came from open-ended questions and responses that could not be tracked to individuals. So in that study we got a picture of what women were thinking about at the time we talked with them.

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

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

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

In 2012, we used audio recordings of each focus group to develop lists of codes and themes for analysis. The information that we collected was then shared with Casa de Esperanza Staff members in a short report. (See [page 42](#) for additional information on the 2012 results).

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

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

Some things to keep in mind

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

Some questions to ask yourselves

- In what languages will your data be recorded?
- Who will compile all of your data? Are they fluent in the necessary languages?
- In what format should your findings be presented? What format would make it most accessible to the people with whom you are going to work?

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Share with community members and figure out what you learned and listen again

Community validation is an essential component of community-based research. It is important as a demonstration of ongoing engagement with the community; it is an opportunity for the community to learn about the results of the project; and it is necessary to provide community members with the opportunity to clarify, expand or challenge the interpretation of the data.

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

On the contrary, the process outlined here informs the community of the results and engages the community in defining how the information should be used.

AT A GLANCE

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

Our Story

The first thing we did was pull together some preliminary findings. Then we brought some of the women we had interviewed back to the table to review the summary. We asked them to help us go deeper in some areas and asked for reactions to some of the findings.

This feedback loop helped ensure that what we learned continued to be grounded in the community. It also helped to prepare community women for participating in the planning phase of *Fuerza Unida*. During the listening session process, community members will have the opportunity to be involved in different ways and their participation will be needed more than once. This is not a one-time focus group process; there must be a commitment from the organization to follow through with the identified community.

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

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

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

All materials and discussion were bilingual. There were monolingual English and Spanish speakers on the planning team, so each meeting was facilitated in both languages. No formal interpreter was present; rather, the team shared translation responsibilities. Bilingual people made their own comments in both languages and helped translate the comments of the monolingual members.

A great deal of the process was **carried out in small break-out groups**. The community women were not accustomed to participating in planning activities. They were less likely to speak up in large groups. Small group activities gave them the opportunity to feel critical to the process. Because of the mixture of people on the team, each break-out group had agency representatives, community women, and at least one bilingual person. Small group activities also gave team members the opportunity to get to know each other better and to bond as a team.

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

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

- English proficiency
- Legal status
- Employment and career development
- Childcare
- Basic housing

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- Transportation
- Family and community connections
- Financial planning and strength
- Institutional support and collaboration

Some things to keep in mind

In our three studies, we found some striking issues.

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

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

On the East Side of St. Paul, we were more specific about what we wanted to learn, based on our findings from South Minneapolis. Also, because we specifically sought women on MFIP, we talked with more women who had been in the country for some time-many born and raised here. We also talked with recent immigrants. In the study on the East Side of St. Paul, we saw firsthand the effects of service models that turn people into clients. Many of the women on MFIP seemed to have lost their cultural grounding. Their lives seemed to center around institutions and negatives. Granted, they did have lower incomes, but the distinction went far beyond that-it went to their self-definition. We had a very difficult time involving these women in follow-up activities, and unfortunately, most of them were not involved in validating the analysis of the data.

It seemed that the women who lived closest to Latin@ culture and connections fared best. They did not view themselves in terms of their needs. They viewed themselves as people striving for a good life.

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

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

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Most of the women shared the same dreams but identified different paths to achieve their goals. The women we heard from have an intense desire to learn and succeed; they also had a need to be heard. They were not looking for advice or to be told what to do, but wanted a space to express their emotions and concerns without feeling exposed.

Some questions to ask yourselves

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

Develop an action plan

At this point in the process, you will have powerful information in your possession. Deciding what to do with it can be a transformative or defining moment for your organization or your project. This may be challenging, exciting, and possibly a little uncomfortable; but it is important to remember that moving forward, you are following the voice of the community...and there is a certain degree of security in that.

AT A GLANCE

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

Our Story

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

That all Latinas

- are able to have their basic needs met;
- feel support for maintaining a strong family and raising healthy children;

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- have the opportunity to create and participate in interpersonal and community connections;
- have the opportunity to develop their strengths and skills; and
- are supported in following their dreams.

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

It is important to note that the group saw solutions as coming from for-profit, public, and nonprofit sectors, as well as from individuals within the community. The solutions were not about creating more “programs” or “services,” *per se*; they were about mobilizing all to live as a community designed around the wants, needs, and aspirations of its members.

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

- for supporting women and their families that center on **strengthening cultural identity and connections**;
- to ensure that women and their families have **access to information** they need to make decisions about their own lives; and
- to **decrease women’s isolation**.

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

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

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In 2012, the key themes that surfaced from the listening sessions included: Education, Emotional Support, Personal Development and Childcare. We decided that we wanted to check in with women to make sure that these were indeed their key concerns, and to ask them about what would really make a difference for them in these four areas. Our process included using a “World Café” style meeting, where small groups of women connect to discuss one question, and then change tables to meet with new women to discuss another question. In this way, women meet with and connect with many other women in a short period of time, while having critical conversations in a relaxed atmosphere.

Some things to keep in mind

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

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

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

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

Some questions to ask yourselves

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

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Start taking action; and take stock of how things are going

Persistence is the name of the game in community engagement. In our years of implementing this approach, we have had many setbacks, changes, and challenges. We learned early on that supporting community members to maintain leadership over projects, promoting accountability among partner organizations, and developing multiple contingency plans are some of the key strategies for maintaining the momentum that the listening sessions can build within the organization and community. Remember that it is not the goal of the listening sessions to create new programs or services; the goal is to create opportunities for community leadership, engagement and change. You will need to adapt and enhance your strategies as you go along.

AT A GLANCE

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

Our Story

After the planning phase was done, our planning team selected five activities to be pursued in the first year of implementation. The group also laid out specific tasks to be accomplished under each of those activities.

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

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

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

This was a challenging period for the group. The excitement of the planning phase gave way to frustration with the barriers the teams faced in trying to make progress. Many of the initiatives required that people outside the group open doors or contribute resources. This cooperation was not always forthcoming on a timely basis and sometimes not at all.

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

Community women remained the backbone of the efforts, led many of the specific initiatives, and were a constant source of project evaluation. Their energy and passion kept the projects moving despite their disappointment in the people who informally dropped out of the project. At every meeting they asked about the participation of the partner agency staff members. Community women expected the agency staff to step up to the plate and keep their commitments.

We knew that we had to reframe the situation and create new “rules;” we supported the community women to make things happen, rather than waiting for agency staff members to create change. Our first plan of attack was to develop a very strong leadership development program for the women involved in this project. We also made it clear that the community women were the leaders of the initiatives, not the agency staff. Agency staff were then invited to sit in on the coordination meetings, but they were not the group’s main participants.

The result of supporting the community women in this manner was that all but one of the projects was completed in a way that all felt good about. The most successful initiatives that grew out of this planning process were relatively concrete—for example, organizing driver’s education classes for Latinas or setting up an information and referral site in a local Latin@ shopping area.

Perhaps the most important result was that the community women felt very proud of their work and its potential impact. The philosophy of the project was being lived out. The work was authentic—based on the voices of women and then driven by community women. They developed connections with each other that helped them feel more a part of something. The friendships and confidence have continued to grow over time.

Some things to keep in mind

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

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During the listening sessions, needs and dreams will be discussed, but there may be some challenges and concerns raised by participants that can be addressed immediately instead of waiting for the process to be done. During the 2012 listening sessions we were able to address some of the concerns and goals women raised almost immediately. For example, we supported participants by identifying opportunities to volunteer, providing domestic violence presentations when they were requested locally and helping them connect with other services needed that were already in place.

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

Some questions to ask yourselves

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

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The Impact on Casa de Esperanza

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The aftereffects of this project continue. As an organization, we have changed our entire structure and way of doing business.

- We have a very clear process for evaluating the possibility for real collaboration when we talk with potential partners.
- We have systematically looked at all of our programs to determine how they can be retooled to become mechanisms of engagement rather than services.
- Our staff structure and job descriptions have changed.

This process hasn't been easy for us. In fact, we are still grappling with some of the challenges:

- We're still trying to help some of our staff see their work in a new paradigm. This paradigm is murkier than simply providing service. We always have to think about the "why" of what we do, rather than just the "what." The "what" will change as we continue to ensure that we are moving in the right direction.
- We are always balancing the pace of community work with our desire to see change. It takes longer to work organically in the community. We want to see change today, but we know that if we drive the efforts as a service, the changes won't take hold. The only real way for change to happen is for the seed to grow naturally in community soil.
- This work is harder to get funded over the long haul. It was relatively easy to get funders to invest in our exploration of this new approach. But it is harder to get ongoing support. The answers to funder questions, "How many people did you serve?" or "What difference did you make for them?", are not linear.
- We reaffirmed our belief that commitments between agencies must be made at the highest levels of the organizations and based on clearly outlined self-interest. Staff must be assigned to this kind of effort by the Executive Director, and active participation must be part of staff performance assessment.

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

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Appendices

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Appendix A: Interviewer Training

The following pages offer an example of the interviewer training provided by Casa de Esperanza. As stated in the manual, the selection and training of interviewers is critical to the success of the process.

Agenda

1. Welcome
2. Introductions
3. Purpose and history of the project
4. Interviewers' tasks
5. Listening group process
6. Role play
7. Questions
8. Team assignments and schedules
9. Closing

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Job Description

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

Specific tasks for the interviewers

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

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

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Script

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

Purpose and history of the project

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

Objective of the listening sessions

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

Purpose of the listening sessions

To encourage Latinas to share their stories:

- The good and the bad
- Their hopes and dreams
- Where they want to be; the things that would help them get to where they want to be
- What resources and services have worked (and not worked) for them in the past.

Who will participate?

[Share information about your target population.]

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

Who will lead the groups?

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

What is the best size group?

6-8 participants per group create a feeling of critical mass while allowing time for each to be heard.

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Where will sessions take place?

Organizations, churches, schools, support groups, and homes...really anywhere that Latinas already congregate.

Will referral materials be available for participants?

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

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Listening Session Discussion Guide

What do you spend most of your day doing?

¿Usualmente, que haces durante el día?

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

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

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

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

List one personal achievement you are proud of and why.

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

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

To whom do you turn when you have a problem?

Cuándo tienes un problema, ¿a quién acudes?

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

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

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

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

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How to Conduct Group Listening Sessions

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

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

Briefly, give an overview of the group process. Let the women know they can ask questions at any time if they need any clarification. If you are using the “Ground Rules” handout, review the handout and request any additional ground rules that will help the participants feel comfortable in the session.

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

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

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

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

Emphasize that there is limited time; therefore, it will be important that all the questions be answered within a specified time frame.

Let them know that you will start with the first question, however, they can respond to any of the questions at any given time. Inform the women that each response will be recorded on the flip chart paper as you go along.

Write legibly; use different colored markers for each response to make it easier to read. If participants do not understand the question, give a general example of an answer. Do not ask any questions that are not on the question sheet in order to ensure consistency across the groups.

Ask the same questions of all individuals in the group. If an individual has not responded, say something like “Teresa, do you have any comments to add?” Continue this process until you have covered all five questions.

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

Summarize responses and reiterate how the information will be used. All responses will be combined to show the themes that we heard. A group of participants will be asked to review the combined information and comment. It is also possible that the information gathered will be used as an educational tool with other agencies. The partner agencies will use the information to determine the steps they can take to build support for Latinas in these neighborhoods.

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

Record Observations. Ensure that you fill out evaluation forms or observations after each session.

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

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What Makes A Successful Listening Session?

- Personally welcome everyone.
- Start and end on time.
- Use humor.
- Actively listen to each person.
- Support each other (interviewer team).
- Participate in discussion when appropriate.
- Encourage and allow everyone to speak.
- Avoid having one individual take control of the discussion.
- Hand out referral information at the end of the session.
- Thank everyone for coming.

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Ground Rules for Listening Sessions

Basic Rules

1. **Confidentiality**

What is spoken here stays here. It is very important that the information shared during this session is not repeated to others who did not participate.

2. **Respect**

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

3. **Take Turns Speaking**

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

4. **Stay Positive**

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

5. **Avoid giving advice**

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

6. **Stay on Topic**

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

7. **Please put your cell phones on vibrate**

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

8. **Unplug**

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

9. **Take Care of Yourself**

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

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Guidelines for Paraphrasing during Listening Sessions

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

Some points to consider when summarizing:

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

Paraphrase when...

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

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Materials Needed For Listening Sessions

Materials

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

Forms

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

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Listening Sessions Best Practices

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

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

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

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

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

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

Filling out forms takes time, people always have doubts when asked to provide personal information. Demographic forms are an important part of the data we collect during listening session, if done before the session then you will have time to answer questions and can ensure all participants have time to complete their form. It will also help keep the focus on the questions being asked during the session.

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

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

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

Participants volunteer their time and tell you their stories, it is important to show appreciation and take in consideration those things what will help facilitate their participation and engagement. Remember to work with and for your community.

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Appendix B: Handouts and Tools

The following handouts and tools were developed to support the coordinator in their role in recruiting, training and supporting volunteers, staff and key partners who may be engaged in conducting the listening sessions.

Volunteer Check-Ins

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

Before the listening sessions start:

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

During the sessions:

- Ask them when they have felt uncomfortable and/or unprepared? Does anything need to be changed, improved, do you need additional information?
- What happened that was unexpected?
- What were the main themes raised during the session?

After the listening sessions end:

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

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Self Care Self Assessment

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

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

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

Other ideas for self-care include:

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

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Listening sessions FAQ'S

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

1. Can a participant paraphrase?

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

2. Can you do the survey, demographic information before the session?

If possible, it is recommended that participants fill out the demographic information sheet before the session. This will help to focus the attention of participants to the interviewer and questions during the session

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

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

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

It is important to recognize that not all participants will feel comfortable and will have the confidence to provide us with personal information, such as their date of birth, telephone number or income information. The purpose of the sheet is to collect demographic information to help us learn a little more to the community with which we work. We cannot force participants to provide us with this information and completing the demographic sheet is required for participation. As an alternative, you may record general observations of the group after the session. You will learn a lot about the participants through the conversation.

5. Will there be food and child care?

This is another detail that you need to consider before inviting the community to participate in listening sessions. All sessions included child care and snacks or a light meal according to the time of day.

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6. **Will transportation be provided?**

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

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

It is natural that the participants want to know what will happen to the information obtained during the listening session, so it will be important that interviewers have a clear idea of the purpose and goals of the listening sessions. .

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

The idea of this process is to listen to community dreams, concerns, and realities to guide and help improve our work. It is important to hear what has worked and what did not; learning from our mistakes we can improve. It is important to accept and value the opinions of others, and it is important that these views are expressed in a respectful environment for all participants.

If these comments will become a distraction or create an uncomfortable environment, we can suggest the participant express more of their concerns during a private meeting.

9. **If the group does not agree with the rules or would like to add some, you can change?**

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

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

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

FAQ from participants during the listening sessions

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

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

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

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

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3. **What if I do not know how the income of the household?**

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

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

This was one of the most common questions when inviting community members to participate. It is important to recognize the time and value of the information provided by community members. Before inviting participants, you should decide how they will be thanked for their cooperation. In the listening sessions held in 2012, each participant received a gift card to Target, Wal-Mart, or local grocery stores. Hosts who offered their home to conduct the listening session received a gift basket.

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

The duration may vary according to the number of participants and questions. Sessions typically lasted 1-3 hours. This includes time for introductions, filling out the demographic sheet, questions, lunch and a short break.

6. **If I decide to participate I have to stay until they finish or I can go before?**

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

7. **What will they do with the information?**

It is natural that the participants want to know what will happen to the information obtained during the listening session, so it will be important that interviewers have a clear idea of the purpose and goals of the listening session.

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

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

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

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

10. **What if I am not a victim of domestic violence, I can participate?**

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

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

When conducting listening sessions or focus groups, it is important that participants know who will have access to information and who they can contact later if they have any questions, concerns or want to stay involved with your work.

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HANDOUTS AND TOOLS

Sample Listening Session

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

Setting Up

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

Starting the Session

We invited the participants to have breakfast or something to drink while filling out their demographic forms. Due to the rain only 2 other participants arrived, after 15 minutes waiting we decided to begin. I turned on the recorder.

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

Asking the Questions

We began with the 1st question, one of the women struggled a little to answer, but they all responded. Question #2 had a bit more participation. Women were not shy to talk about their needs. We were moving really fast because there were only 3 participants.

When we were about to begin question # 3 one of the phones rang and the participant said she had to answer because it was her advocate from Casa de Esperanza. She started screaming, jumping, laughing, and screaming again. We waited for her, to finish with her conversation before continuing. I asked her if everything was ok and if she was able to continue. She said yes "She was calling to let me know they have approved my petition and I will get a work permit and a Social Security card" she was happy. The women hugged her and congratulated her. The participant had a huge smile on her face. After a few minutes we continued.

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

The volunteer interviewer was able to regain the group's attention, we moved on to questions 4 and 5. The women were happy, willing to share.

Wrapping Up

At the end of the session I asked them if there was anything else they wanted to share, something we didn't ask about. They all shared some ideas of what they see and the need of Latina women in MN.

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

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

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

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Appendix C: Sample Forms

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

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Interviewer Timesheet

Name _____

Address _____

Phone _____

Email _____

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

Signature _____ Approved by _____

Date _____ Date _____

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Demographic Information

Name _____ Date _____

Address _____ City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Marital Status ___ Single ___ Married ___ Separated ___ Divorced

How many people live in the house? ___ Adults ___ Children (ages _____)

How long have you lived in Minneapolis? ___ Months ___ Years Country of origin _____

Telephone (Day) _____ (Evening) _____

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

Type of current employment _____ Salary ___ Hourly ___ Monthly ___ Yearly

Main form of transportation _____

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

Are you a member of a church? ___ Yes ___ No Name of church _____

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

(Participant's Signature) _____ (Date)

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

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CASA DE ESPERANZA

Encuesta Comunitaria (Community Survey)

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

Fecha (Date): _____

Nombre (Name): _____

Dirección (Address): _____

Teléfono (Phone): _____

Edad (Age): _____

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

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

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

País de origen (Country of origin) _____
Idioma principal (language you feel most comfortable speaking) _____

Fuente de ingreso
(Source of income) _____

Sueldo por mes
Monthly salary _____

Si tiene empleo, ¿que tipo de trabajo es?
If you have work, what is it? _____

¿Cuántos trabajos tiene?
How many jobs do you have? _____

Estado civil (Marital status)

- Soltera (Single) Casada (Married) Divorciada (Divorced) Conviviendo (Living together)
 Viuda (Widowed) Separada (Separated) Otro (Other)

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

¿Tiene interés en participar en una platica sobre los resultados?
¿Podemos llamarle para participar en la reunión? _____

Are you interested in being part of a discussion about the findings of the study?
May we call you to participate in the meeting? _____

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Favor de poner un X al lado de los 5 asuntos que más le impide de prosperar en su vida.

(Please put an X next to the 5 things that most prevent you from prospering.)

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

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

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

Quando tiene un problema, ¿a quién acude?

Poner un X al lado de los quiénes que le apoya en estos días.

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

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

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

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

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

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

¿Hay algo más que Ud. nos quiere contar?

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

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Appendix D: Evaluation

It is always important to evaluate the success of your planning process. Following are two examples that were used in the evaluation of Fuerza Unida. We felt that it was important to receive feedback from the community women and partner organizations. Your group might be interested in evaluating the satisfaction of your interviewees or another constituency group.

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Fuerza Unida Project Evaluation

How successful was our collaborative planning?

Please rank each criterion from 1 to 5, where:

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

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

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

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What did you like about this process?

What worked really well?

What didn't work as well?

How would you change our process for next time?

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

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How could we have helped you participate more fully?

What are the strengths of the plan we developed?

What are the weaknesses of the plan?

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

Is there anything else you want to say?

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