

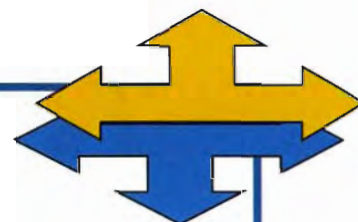
The NeighborCircles Approach—A practice guide for hosts, facilitators, and organizers, is a publication of Lawrence CommunityWorks. This document is a “universal document” and can be reprinted or copied, in whole or in part, without permission form Lawrence Community-Works, Inc. or any other party.

July, 2007

A Guide to the Guide

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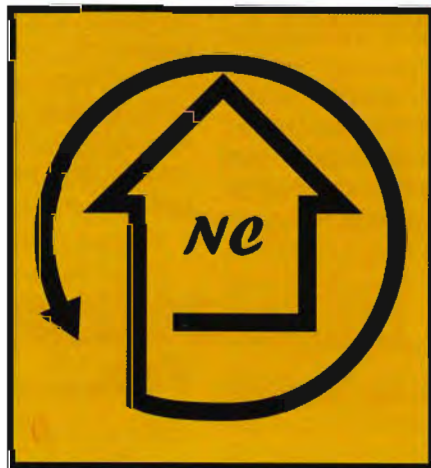


How to Use this Guide

We tried to make this guide as practical and easy to use as possible. There is no need to read it cover to cover if you are looking for something specific: an idea, a tool, a form to use or some advice from a fellow Host or Facilitator. However, we urge you to check out the back page so that you can see how to join your colleagues in a learning community to share what you know and learn from others.



What is a NeighborCircle?



Introduction: What is a NeighborCircle?



A NeighborCircle is 'a good conversation over dinner with neighbors.' That's pretty much it. So, why do we need a guide for this? Don't we all already know how to do that? Well, apparently not. If we are honest with ourselves we will admit that most of us don't know our neighbors and they don't know us. We are too busy, too shy, or too intimidated to make connections and build relationships with people on our street or on our block. The fact is, in this day and age, getting to know neighbors can be hard and a bit scary. Why? We think there are a couple reasons:

First, the people who live on our street (like us) ended up there by accident. On most blocks in our cities, people who live on a given street come from all walks of life and in many cases from all corners of the globe. We have all had a different journey to this one street. We are different from each other; different language, culture, habits, foods, life patterns, colors and religions. And once we arrive on our street, we go off to different jobs, churches, clubs, organizations, and our kids go to different schools.

On the surface we share very little in common other than our proximity to each other.

The second reason is that it's possible that we have forgotten how to communicate with each other in the public square. With cars, TVs, and now the internet and computer games, we simply don't get a lot of practice in public discourse.

In our view, the costs of this *neighbor to neighbor disconnection* are enormous. Behind poor communication lurks distrust, bigotry, and countless lost opportunities to improve our lives and our communities. Some believe that the days of neighbors knowing each other and looking after each other's children are over. At LCW, we think that we all just need more practice and a safer environment to get it started. NeighborCircles is one way of starting up the long-interrupted, neighbor-to-neighbor conversation once again. With NeighborCircles we are rebuilding the public square block by block, starting with something that is easy, enjoyable and that we all know how to do — Eat and alk!

Who Wrote This Guide?

This guide is the result of several years of thinking and practice by over a hundred people who are the staff and members of Lawrence CommunityWorks. All of the people who have contributed to this guide have been a part of the NeighborCircle Movement here in Lawrence.

We have all learned by doing, and as a result have a wealth of practical advice and information for others who want to try this approach. We see this guide as a tool to help residents in other communities to get over the most difficult hump of community organizing — *getting started*.

While this guide is our best effort to communicate how we do NeighborCircles in Lawrence, it is not a "cookbook." We don't expect others to do this work the same way we have done it. Every community is different, and different situations require different approaches. In fact, we hope that this guide can be part of a "community of learning" that we can participate in with our friends and colleagues all over the country as we all try to knit together the social networks in community that are so important to us and to the prospects of our children.



What is Lawrence CommunityWorks?

Lawrence CommunityWorks is a non-profit community organization working to redevelop neighborhoods and build community in the struggling city of Lawrence, Massachusetts. We are doing that by creating and supporting a network of Lawrencians who are a) building their family and community assets, b) helping each other in thousands of ways, and c) coming together through collective action to make change.

The Past: Like many old industrial cities, Lawrence has been struggling for decades to reinvent itself for the 21st century. Along with aging infrastructure, vacant lots and abandoned buildings, our City has suffered from a crumbling civic environment, poor leadership and an atmosphere of distrust and ethnic tension.

Our City is still one of the poorest in the nation.

The Present & Future: The goals of our Network are to a) rebuild civic life and leadership in Lawrence and b) help develop an economic engine by building the asset base of poor and working Lawrencians. We are already seeing progress in Lawrence on both of these goals, fueled by 'new people getting in the game.' Today we have over 2000 members of the network and have generated over \$20,000,000 in new investments in Lawrence neighborhoods. In growing numbers, Lawrence families are buying homes, saving money, getting diplomas, taking on new leadership roles, and changing the way City Hall works. We have much more to do, but our Network is strong and getting stronger each day.

Why NeighborCircles

There are four big reasons why we at Lawrence CommunityWorks created NeighborCircles as our principal outreach and engagement tool to stimulate local action:

(1) Place Matters!

There are some who say that with globalization and regional economies, what happens on one's street or block or in one's neighborhood doesn't matter anymore — that our communities of identity and interest and our cyber-connections are more important than place-based communities.

But anyone who has ever stepped out of their door in an urban neighborhood knows different. Place does matter, and if you are a struggling family in a struggling community, place matters even more. In many ways, your doorstep is still your threshold to the rest of the world. How safe you feel, how many people you know, how free your family is to venture out into the neighborhood, who you can depend on within shouting distance, who you can share information with and have fun with—all of these conditions and more factor into your quality of life. In Lawrence, as we thought about achieving our goal of “repopulating the civic landscape,” we knew that we had to start at those doorsteps and find ways to encourage genuine neighbor-to-neighbor connections.

(2) Conversation Matters!

Conversation in public life today is more stifled than ever. Why? A complicated world, a cynical political environment, mass media and new technology all contribute to the decline of conversation as a means of communication. Debates on the critical issues that face our country and our world are shaped and controlled by experts before we ever hear them. Into that polarized mass public conversation, we all wade carefully, especially with people we do not know well. The truth is that we all know more, think more and have a more nuanced and complex view of the world than the public conversation will allow us to explore with others. But we will only share that thinking with people we trust.

NeighborCircles is a way of creating safe, supportive and intimate environments for people to share more of themselves than they are likely—or used to—sharing with others. We have found that this sharing can have the immense power to break down cultural, political and religious barriers, and uncover genuinely innovative ideas. In NeighborCircles, we



trust that if we can create an environment where great conversation takes place, all kinds of civic engagement, collective power and new thinking can emerge, and the natural instincts for caring, generosity, tolerance and trust can arise.

(3) Structure (and the Lack of it!) Matters!

Across the nation we see a phenomenon: many of the neighborhood associations, block clubs and other grassroots groups that we depend on for local action and decision-making are instead acting as “gatekeepers.” Too caught up in the ‘inside game,’ they fail to be the aggressive advocates and activists that their communities need them to be.

Structure v. Relationships?

Part of this problem comes from habits that encourage us to *rely on structure* instead of *investing in relationships*. In our world today, people who live next door to each other do not typically know each other, do not trust each other and may not be likely to share the same cultures or even language. Formal structures and processes and rules may be necessary to ensure institutional fairness, but they are not a good proxy for building trusting relationships. In fact, when people rely on rules rather than relationships, they are practicing what we call “*Habits of Detachment*.”

NeighborCircles starts where most people are, and asks them to do a very simple thing (which is challenging enough in today's world): Come to dinner and have a conversation. And then it asks them to apply the principle of “*Form Follows Function*” when it comes to building any structure or institution for taking action. In our experience, groups that apply the ‘form follows function’ rule almost always choose less structure, fewer rules and more informal, action-oriented ways to organize themselves. This in turn frees the group to build effectiveness

Conversation is food for the soul.”

Mexican Proverb

out of relationships, stay focused on the job at hand, and integrate the things they do as a community into their personal lives in a more organic way.

Focus on structure also advances a style of leadership that is less useful when it comes to neighbors working together. When groups move too quickly to elect a 'president' or a 'chairperson,' they are both putting too much on one person and releasing the group from overall responsibility for moving the work forward. This kind of 'positional leadership' quickly leads to entrenched leadership and then to power struggles that have little to do with the substance of the group's work. NeighborCircles, and in fact all of LCW's groups, practice a style of facilitative leadership which is informal, provisional (leadership roles change all the time), and which focus on helping to connect people to information and each other. In fact at Lawrence Community-Works, being a "weaver" or "connector" is valued and recognized as the highest form of leadership.

The LCW/North Common Neighborhood Association Experience

In 1999, LCW staff and members began organizing friends and neighbors to take local action to improve conditions in Lawrence. Our approach was a traditional one: going door-to-door, listening to concerns and encouraging people to join a neighborhood association. As that work gained success, the association grew and quickly became the largest and most active group in the city.

Under the surface however, there were problems. The group was diverse - a mix of white property owners and 'newcomers', mostly Latino renters, and there were always tensions just below (and sometimes just above) the surface. We decided to do what a lot of people do in organizing local grassroots groups: help the group develop a structure of democratic decision-making, in the hope that rules, structure, by-laws and "Roberts Rules" would constitute a fair and open forum for decision-making and accountability. This work took the better part of a year and was very successful ... in a sense. With a mission statement, by-laws, 'rules of engagement' for meetings and discussions, and a first Annual Meeting attended by over 150 neighbors to elect the first official board, we felt secure that we had built a foundation for success.

But what happened was quite different from what we expected. With the new structure, the tensions that were latent became potent. In fact, most members of the group found themselves so pre-occupied with 'power playing' - now with a whole set of tools with which to play - that over a very short time, the group became totally focused on process, and stopped doing what they set out to do in the first place: taking action to improve the neighborhood. Worse, as the "anointed community group" in this neighborhood, their inability to take action served as a barrier to many of the neighbors who otherwise would have been active in the streets, alleyways and playgrounds of the area.

"If I can't dance, I don't want to be part of your revolution." —Emma Goldman

(4) Fun Matters!

Mostly, the NeighborCircle approach tries to bring a *human* quality back into the business of community building. After all, people have been building relationships of mutual value for many thousands of years, often under conditions that are at least as difficult as the ones we face today. But we have moved away from the tried-and-true recipes for good relationship building — fun, food, relaxation, trust, and good conversation. None of this can be forced, it has to emerge on its own. All we can do is set up the time, place and circumstances for it to happen. Fortunately, while these things can't be forced, they are infectious, and the human spirit is such that it really doesn't take much — just a little opening of the house and the heart. It's a simple idea, but a time-tested and powerful one, and one which is already having a dramatic impact on our quality of life and sense of hope here in the City of Lawrence.

The Universal Story of Community

Ask any group of adults to talk about what community means to them. Here is a wager about what they'll say:

They will get nostalgic for the neighborhood where they grew up. They will tell some version of the time when "my friends and I were out in the neighborhood, acting out, making noise, doing some minor vandalism or something and Mrs. So & So saw us and came after us with her broom. And by the time I got home, my parents already knew and I got in so much trouble."

This is a curious story. After all, when this happens as a kid, you don't like it. But as an adult, thinking about what you appreciated as a kid, you talk about a community of adults who were looking out for all the kids and who had relationships with each other!

The story tells us a bit about what community building is and is not about: It is not about having institutions, programs, block clubs or neighborhood associations. It's not even necessarily about having perfect parks and playgrounds.

It is about adults taking responsibility for knowing each other and knowing each other's children, and having the kind of relationships that allow all of us to step out into the public space with confidence and caring.



Organizing the Circle

Quick Reference Guide Checklist

- ✓ **Identify Host and Facilitator**
- ✓ **Prepare for the NC**
 - ✓ Print materials for preparation meeting (Organizer)
 - ✓ Hold preparation/orientation meeting for Host (Facilitators, Host, and Organizer)
 - ✓ Invite neighbors (Host)
 - ✓ Prepare materials/equipment for circle and give to Lead Facilitator (Organizer)
- ✓ **Hold First NC Meeting**
 - ✓ Remind participants of 1st NC Meeting (Host)
 - ✓ Hold 1st meeting (Host and Facilitators)
 - ✓ Review and prepare for 2nd meeting (Host and Facilitators)
 - ✓ Give copy of attendance to Host (Lead Facilitator)
 - ✓ Check In (Facilitators and NC Organizer)
- ✓ **Hold Second NC Meeting**
 - ✓ Remind participants of 2nd NC Meeting (Host)
 - ✓ Hold 2nd meeting (Host and Facilitators)
 - ✓ Review and prepare for 3rd meeting (Host and Facilitators)
 - ✓ Check In (Planning Director, Facilitators, NC Organizer)
- ✓ **Prepare Support Strategy**
 - ✓ Research resources and information on identified issue(s) (Facilitators and Organizer)
 - ✓ Identify potential opportunities, strengths, and constraints (Facilitators and Organizer)
 - ✓ Suggest a customized follow up strategy (Facilitators and Organizer)
- ✓ **Hold Third NC Meeting**
 - ✓ Remind participants of 3rd NC Meeting (Host)
 - ✓ Hold 3rd meeting (Host and Facilitators)
 - ✓ Review and talk about next steps (Host and Facilitators)
 - ✓ Complete Exit Analysis (Lead Facilitator)
- ✓ **Review and evaluate**
 - ✓ Collect and review Exit Analysis (Facilitators and Organizer)
 - ✓ Evaluate NC (Facilitators and Organizer)
 - ✓ Collect completed forms: agreements, membership forms, and voter registrations (Organizer)
 - ✓ Collect cameras (Organizer)
 - ✓ Collect meal receipts (Organizer)
- ✓ **Record information and process paperwork**
 - ✓ Complete meal check requests (Organizer)
 - ✓ Develop and save pictures (Organizer)
 - ✓ Prepare brief report of NC (Organizer)
 - ✓ Do NC participant data entry (Organizer)
 - ✓ Copy and mail voter registrations to City Elections Department (Organizer)
 - ✓ Copy and mail meal reimbursement check to Host (Organizer)
 - ✓ Copy and mail stipends checks to Host and Facilitators (Organizer)
- ✓ **Provide support and follow-up**
- ✓ **Provide ongoing training to empower NeighborCircles to become self-sufficient and effective**
- ✓ **Conduct end-of-year evaluation**



The Circle Conversation

Conversation is the point of the NeighborCircle.

A lot of good things can come from a successful NeighborCircle:

- New members for your organization
- More local community participation and action
- Better leadership at the community level
- More people voting on election day

But keep in mind that all of these things are by-products of the NeighborCircle. The primary products of the NeighborCircle are '*new relationships of value.*'

NeighborCircles is based on the belief that good conversations lead to good relationships, good ideas and good outcomes for families and communities. The NeighborCircle helps create the physical and emotional space for those good conversations to take place.

"Good personal relationships among diverse people at the neighborhood level are the "roads and rails" of progress and positive action. Without them all things are hard. With them all things are possible."
 Bill Traynor, LCW Executive Director

To make the best of the conversation, remember the following:

- ✓ Keep the group size manageable: The larger the group, the more difficult it is for everyone to engage. Try to keep the group size between 7 - 10 guests.
- ✓ Share the agenda-making with the group: This is the group's time together and everyone is responsible for making it fun and productive.
- ✓ Discuss ground rules: Bring some basic ground rules into the Circle like "respect each others opinions," "allow everyone to speak," and so on. But ask the group to set its own ground rules so that participants are accountable to each other.
- ✓ Take good notes and review them with the group before moving on with the agenda: Share the progress that the group has made!

Golden Rule of the NeighborCircle #1 *"An ounce of trust is worth a pound of ownership. TRUST THE CONVERSATION ... Don't try to anticipate or drive the outcome of the NeighborCircle. People will find their way to action!"*



The Dinner

"If you really want to make a friend, go to someone's house and eat with him...the people who give you their food, give you their heart." Cesar Chavez

If you think about it, hospitality may be the most ancient and universal of community-building strategies. Throughout time and in all cultures, it has been recognized that there is no greater act of compassion and fellowship than to welcome others to share your shelter and food.

Given the isolation and fear that tends to keep neighbors from neighbors, this is perhaps more true today than it has been for many years. Food sets the mood in a NeighborCircle by saying, 'not only are you welcome in my home, you are someone with whom I would like to break bread.' For those who love to cook and entertain, the NeighborCircle provides a great opportunity to display talent and creativity. Many of our hosts have created elaborate meals for Circle guests, but simple meals or quality take-out have

worked just as well. Preparing and serving the food for the Circle should not be a stressful event, so unless the Host is an aspiring gourmet, simplicity is the key.

Here are a few tips to make the most of your dinner experience.

- **Keep it simple:** For the first dinner, where you still don't know how many guests will come, light appetizers are a great idea. Once you get a sense of how many guests will join the circle, you can plan for a fuller meal.
- **Cook or order out:** Do what works for you. If you do take out, try to do something different and of high quality — another way of showing people that they are welcome and valued.
- **Suggest a potluck for the third dinner:** It can be another way to share more with your neighbors. The group can even suggest a theme, like traditional dishes.

Because food is so important to the NeighborCircle, we provide compensation to the Hosts for both the costs of the food as well as some of the effort that goes into procuring it. This is done as a simple reimbursement based on a maximum amount.

Say "HOSPITALITY" in 26 Ways

Arabic:	كرم الضيافة	Latvian:	viesmīlība
Czech:	pohostinství	Lithuanian:	svetingumas
Danish:	gæstfrihed; beværtning	Norwegian:	gjæstfrihet; servering
Dutch:	gastvrijheid	Polish:	gościnność
Estonian:	külastajaskus	Portuguese (Brazil):	hospitalidade
Finnish:	vieraanvaraisuus	Portuguese (Portugal):	hospitalidade
French:	hospitalité	Romanian:	ospitalitate
German:	die Gastfreundschaft	Russian:	гостеприимство
Greek:	φιλoxενία	Slovak:	pohostinnosť
Hungarian:	vendégszeretet, vendéglátás	Slovenian:	gostoljubnost
Icelandic:	gestrisni	Spanish:	hospitalidad
Indonesian:	keramah tamahan	Swedish:	gästfrihet
Italian:	ospitalità	Turkish:	konukseverlik, misafirperverlik



The Room

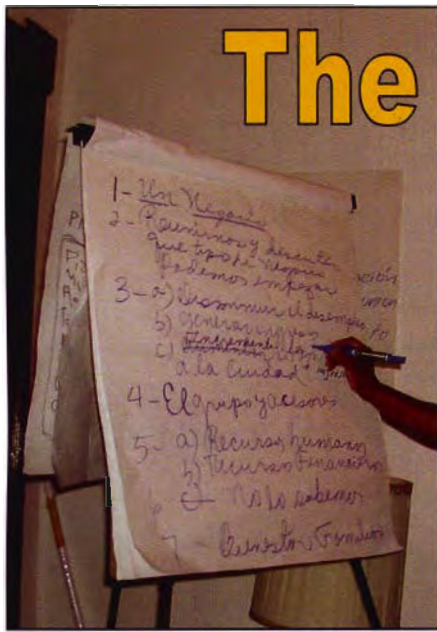
A comfortable, clean, safe, intimate and well-lit environment is crucial for a positive NeighborCircle experience. Not all of us have large rooms in our homes, but with a few preparations, we can make the NeighborCircle experience a success. The Organizer and Facilitator should help the Host think about how best to arrange space for the Circle.

Generally, the Host will need room for:

- ✓ 8-10 people to sit comfortably
- ✓ Room for a flip chart and for the Facilitator to work
- ✓ Wall space for maps (dinner #1) and to hang large sheets of paper
- ✓ A buffet style food table

Things to Remember:

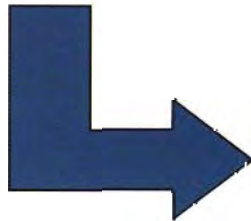
- **Plan ahead:** With the help of the Facilitator, take a look at the available space and talk about the different layout options for the room.
- **Make sure you have enough seating space:** Chairs, sofas and couches can be rearranged throughout the room.
- **Set dinner in a different room:** Allow more room for comfortable seating.
- **Clear wall space:** This is necessary for the map ice-breaker activity and to hang notepaper. Make sure that the group faces the clear wall.
- **If you don't have enough room in your house, try to find another facility:** It's not ideal, but nearby churches, schools or community centers may provide room free of charge. Try to avoid 'institutional' settings if possible.
- **Make sure the way into your house or apartment is well-lit, easy to find, and welcoming:** Some Hosts put out balloons or special decorations the first time to make it clear that people are welcome. If it's a complicated route into your building, have someone outside to greet people.



The Equipment

"For every minute you spend preparing, an hour is earned."

Now that you have invited your guests, planned the dinner and the room, it is essential that you have all the necessary materials to run the meeting. Nothing can be more distracting than scrambling to find pens, markers and tape once the meeting has started. This is a pretty good list of materials needed for the three dinners:



Materials and Equipment Check List

Facilitator Box

- 10 Participant Packages _____ ☐
- 5 Additional LCW Membership Forms _____ ☐
- 5 Additional Voter Registration Forms _____ ☐
- 5 Additional Participant Agreements _____ ☐
- 30 Participant Evaluations _____ ☐
- 4 Attendance Sheets _____ ☐
- 1 Clip Board _____ ☐
- 10 Golf Pencils _____ ☐
- 10 Pens _____ ☐
- 2-3 Rubber Bands _____ ☐
- 2-3 Paper Clips _____ ☐
- Post Its _____ ☐
- Colored Label Dots (15 strips of 3 labels) _____ ☐
- Fifteen Pieces of Paper (3x4") _____ ☐
- Masking Tape _____ ☐
- Dry Erase Markers & Eraser _____ ☐
- Permanent Markers _____ ☐
- Disposable Camera _____ ☐
- Permanent Markers _____ ☐
- Envelope for Completed Documents and Receipts _____ ☐

Other Equipment

- Easel _____ ☐
- Easel Pad _____ ☐

Golden Rule of the NeighborCircle #2 *Leave the PowerPoint presentations at the office. Keep it simple, interactive and conversation-centric."*

Who is a NeighborCircle?





The Host

NeighborCircle Hosts are, in many ways, the boldest risk-takers in the community. They invite neighbors, people that they really do not know, into their homes! They do this because they believe that someone has to take the lead in opening the door to new relationships.

Hosts are recruited by the Organizer or by one of the Facilitators. The Host agrees to hold the Circles in his or her house or in a location of their choosing. The Host identifies, with the help of the Facilitator or Lead Facilitator, a list of up to 8 families that he or she would like to invite to the Circle. (See page 14 for descriptions of the Facilitator and Lead Facilitator.) The Host and the Facilitator then select a timeframe that is convenient and provides enough time to prepare well for the Circles.

The Host is responsible for providing a meal for each of the three Circle dinners. The meal can be prepared at home or purchased. In either case, the Host is reimbursed for the cost of the meals. In Lawrence, Hosts receive a reimbursement for up to \$100.00 for food for all three

Circles. Hosts are also provided with an additional \$100.00 stipend for other costs associated with hosting the Circle, such as child care or cleaning services. As most of us would, Hosts tend to spend a good deal of time making sure that their homes are clean, welcoming and easy to find on the nights of the Circles.

Recruiting the Host

The Host is simply someone who is concerned about his or her neighborhood and wants to share those concerns with neighbors in order to find potential solutions. This person does not need to have any special training or skills to be a Host. However, they need to have a genuine motivation to open their home and get to know their neighbors. An ideal host is flexible, available to work with the Facilitator, and willing to invite neighbors over during hours that are convenient to most people. Once a Host is identified, he or she is contacted by the Organizer and connected to a Lead Facilitator and a Facilitator for orientation.

There is no such thing as the "right approach" for recruiting these risk-takers. Initially, we brought up the idea with some of the folks who were already involved in the organization. With these people we were able to have frank conversations about how important it would be for them to be a pioneer. Initially we had 4 or 5 people who were willing to try it. Now that NeighborCircles are established, we usually find them or they find us through the social networks of our Facilitators, Lead Facilitators, and previous Hosts and Circle members.

Supporting the Host

The Host is directly supported by the Facilitator and the Lead Facilitator during the NeighborCircle dinners; only in special or unusual cases is the Host supported by the Organizer. This is intentional — It is one of the goals of the Circles to connect people who have not yet worked together. Many of the Host/Facilitator pairs in Lawrence have become friends and gone on to support each other in other aspects of life.

Support starts with a brief training/orientation on NeighborCircles. This is done by the Organizer. The Organizer uses the orientation to prepare the Host for their role and discuss ways to work collaboratively with the Facilitator and the Lead Facilitator to make sure everyone has a good experience. Once the Circle has started, the Host receives additional support between each dinner meeting through short debrief sessions with the Facilitator. During the debrief sessions, they discuss the experience of each meeting and make any changes if appropriate.

Advice for the Host

Hi Future Hosts,

My name is Atagracia Portorreal. When NeighborCircles was explained to me, I immediately thought, "This is a great idea!" At the time I was very worried about my community and my neighborhood and I wanted to share my concerns with my neighbors. I took the opportunity that NeighborCircles offered me to hold meetings with my neighbors, in my house, and with the support of trained LCW Facilitators and staff.



Atagracia Portorreal

While I was going door-to-door delivering invitations to the Circle, I expressed my worries about the neighborhood and my desire to meet other neighbors. Then I asked people for their opinions about the neighborhood and what they would like to change. I listened carefully to them and then explained the importance of participating and supporting each other to make positive changes in our neighborhood. I told them about NeighborCircles and continued to encourage them to participate. "This is a great opportunity to get to know each other over a series of dinners," I said. I also asked my neighbors if I could have their phone numbers and permission to call them before each dinner meeting to remind them.

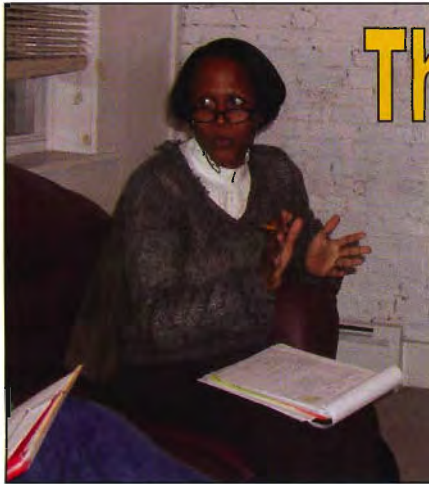
Before each meeting, the Facilitators and I would set up my living room to make it comfortable for the participants and appropriate for the meeting. We would place the maps on the wall, set up the easels, and place name tags and the attendance sheet on the coffee table for the participants.

As a host, it was also part of my role to greet each neighbor and ask them to sign the attendance sheet. Then I would formally start each meeting by welcoming everyone and introducing the Facilitator. For every meeting it is important to provide a meal. When we eat, we talk, and when we talk, we start getting closer. For the first meeting, I decided to prepare light finger food with soft drinks and some fruit juice because I was not sure how many people would attend. You can either cook or order the meals, but there is nothing like a homemade meal.

Sincerely, Atagracia

Practical Things to Remember

- Listen carefully and sensibly to your neighbors, respecting each other's differences.
- Do not waste any opportunity to greet your neighbors and invite them to your house for conversation in order to meet each other and talk about the neighborhood.
- Ask your neighbors if you may have their phone numbers and call them to remind them of the next meeting.
- Always acknowledge your neighbor by greeting them with a smile, even when they are not participating in the Circle. The friendlier and more welcoming you are, the higher your chances to have better participation.
- If for any reason some neighbors have to miss one of the meetings, keep them informed so that they are ready for the next meeting.
- Prepare light finger food for the first meeting because you won't know for certain how many people will be attending. After that you can cook or order appropriately.



The Circle Facilitator

The Circle Facilitator is the person who guides the essential activity of the NeighborCircle—the conversation. It is not an easy job. It's always hard to step into a room with people you might not know and lead a conversation. In the case of the NeighborCircle, there are added challenges:

- First, because this is not a 'business meeting' but a fairly open ended conversation, the Facilitator cannot rely on a structured agenda for guidance.
- Second, the conversation has to be loose enough to encourage informal exchange while offering a safe and comfortable forum for all participants to engage. So, for issues like dealing with a dominant voice in the group, the Facilitator can only rely on his/her technique in the moment to solve that problem.

• Third, there is a tendency in groups for people to assume that because they came together, they are supposed to do something or be something. This tendency is not good for the Circle. The Facilitator has to fight this "rush to identity" to make sure that there is genuine chemistry and motivation for the group to become a group. So not only must the Facilitator be careful not to drive the group to a certain outcome, he/she has to help the group resist that temptation themselves! Facilitating a Circle is really an art form that takes preparation, training and support.

At LCW, Facilitators are resident volunteers who a) are committed to the NC concept, b) have participated in a NeighborCircle themselves, and c) are interested in and committed to developing their own leadership and facilitation skills. In order to be a NeighborCircle Facilitator, interested residents have to complete the Lawrence CommunityWorks Circle Facilitator Training. Specifically, the Facilitator is responsible for:

- Working with the Organizer or Lead Facilitator to identify and recruit suitable Circle Hosts
- Working with the Host to design the outreach and invitations for the Circle
- Ensuring that the Host has what he/she needs to make the Circle experience comfortable for participants
- Providing a written outline of the conversation plan for each Circle dinner
- Facilitating the conversation at each of the Circle dinners

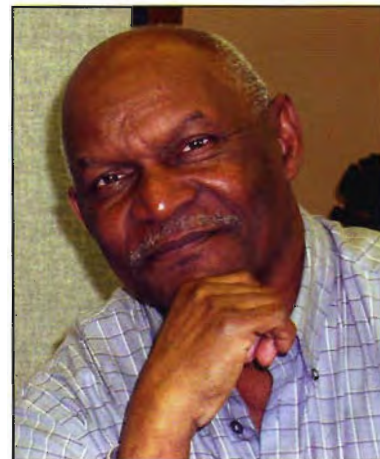
What is a "Lead Facilitator?"

With time and experience, some Facilitators can take on the work of the Organizer. At LCW, these "Lead Facilitators" are experienced Facilitators who support the Hosts and Facilitators with logistics and evaluation for each NeighborCircle dinner. During each Circle, the Lead Facilitator also supports the Facilitator by taking notes and providing guidance and advice. However, the guidance and advice take place before or after each Circle meeting and not during; the Lead Facilitator should never interrupt the meeting with suggestions or comments unless the conversation reaches a point where immediate and more experienced assistance is necessary and requested by the Facilitator. Lead Facilitators are selected and trained by the Organizer and receive a stipend for each Circle completed.

Recruiting the Facilitator An ideal Facilitator is someone who can refrain from influencing the content of the conversation during a meeting and instead focus his/her energy on making sure the group follows a mutually agreed upon path or structure towards a specific goal. The Facilitator should also be someone that reflects the community or environment where he/she will facilitate. Potential Facilitators don't necessarily need to have had previous formal facilitation training but need to get trained before they can start facilitating.

Supporting the Facilitator The Facilitator receives support before, during, and after a NeighborCircle. The support for Facilitators starts with training. All Facilitators go through a NeighborCircles Facilitation Training during which they learn and practice key facilitation skills to promote fun, safe, and productive conversations right in the neighborhood. Facilitators also engage in peer learning, acting as resources and support for each other. Every NeighborCircle is an experience that can be shared with other Facilitators and contribute to their learning and skill development. Regular meetings among Facilitators and Lead Facilitators can have a powerful impact in the collective learning and growth of the group.

Advice for the Facilitator



Francisco Ditrén

Dear Colleagues and Future Facilitators,

My name is Francisco Ditrén and I am an LCW volunteer, NeighborCircles Facilitator, as well as a member and graduate of the PODER Leadership Institute.

It has been a wonderful experience to be able to combine my previous experiences as a community organizer and activist in my country, the Dominican Republic, with the advanced techniques and approach of LCW. LCW's approach has contributed to the strengthening of our network as a place of true popular expression. Based on my experiences, I would like to share with you a few reflections about the work of a Facilitator.

Often times it can be difficult for the Facilitator to differentiate between leading a meeting or an activity and facilitating its development.

It is understandable that almost always, participants see the Facilitators as the guides and the experts on the subjects being discussed — for this reason Facilitators should develop the ability to stimulate participation and encourage natural leaders to emerge. We always need to make it clear that our role is to facilitate the process and not to determine the content of the discussion.

I also must be honest and admit that my major concern as a Facilitator has always been the different expectations for follow-up that the participants may have. For this reason, I suggest that if there is an idea that the group wants to work on, before the end of the third dinner meeting, the Facilitator should encourage the participants to establish clear goals, timelines, tasks, and identify the people responsible for the implementation of each task. This way, there is a better chance that the idea will come to pass and the group will be successful.

Thank you and good luck, Francisco

Practical Things to Remember

- Always try to arrive at least 30 - 45 minutes before each meeting. This should be enough time to set up and do a quick check-in with the Host.
- Take a few minutes at the beginning of the first meeting to introduce yourself, explain your role as Facilitator, and describe the organization you represent (name, philosophy, mission, and approach to organizing and development of its human resources).
- Encourage participants to participate and motivate each other. This will contribute to the synergy of the group.
- Be flexible and creative to maintain high levels of participation without losing control of the process.
- Encourage the participants to establish clear goals, timelines, tasks, and identify the people responsible for the implementation of each task.

The Organizer



The Organizer is the person in charge of overseeing the NeighborCircles strategy from behind the scenes. This person is not necessarily present at every NeighborCircle meeting, but is responsible for providing quality support to each and every one of the Hosts, Facilitators, and Lead Facilitators. The Organizer makes sure that the Facilitators and Hosts have all the support they need to make NeighborCircles a positive experience while at the same time creating an environment of collective ownership and commitment to continuously improve the strategy.

The biggest challenge of the Organizer is to ensure quality without controlling everything. In other words, the Organizer coordinates many moving pieces to ensure success while at the same time encouraging people to be creative and allowing people's ideas to improve NeighborCircles. The Organizer should be an experienced facilitator, preferably with community organizing experience. One of the key attributes of this kind of organizer is the ability to be flexible — to go with what works and let go of an idea or approach that does not work, rather than to blindly promote a “model.” Effective organizing is first and foremost about truth, trust and doing what works.

Specifically, in the NeighborCircle Approach, the Organizer is responsible for:

- Training new Facilitators and Lead Facilitators
- Working with Facilitators and Lead Facilitators in the recruitment of Hosts and other Facilitators
- Overseeing follow up with NeighborCircles who decide to work collectively to address a common issue
- Coordinating and recording the NeighborCircles evaluation process
- Writing reports and maintaining written and visual records of each NeighborCircles

Supporting the Organizer

The support for the Organizer comes from the organization and his/her direct supervisor. It is important that the Organizer is empowered to do a good job. If needed, the Organizer should be provided with facilitation and organizing training. But the most important thing an organization can do for its Organizer is to stand behind the NeighborCircles strategy. This means that the organization is aware of, understands, and supports with actions the philosophy and reasoning behind NeighborCircles.

It is also important for the organization to understand that NeighborCircles are designed to create an environment where participants bring their own content to a mutually agreed upon process. The decisions and final outcome of a NeighborCircle are up to the participants, not the Facilitator or the Organizer. Organizations planning to implement NeighborCircles need to be aware of this and resist any temptation to impose an agenda or specific wishes on the NeighborCircles.

Golden Rule of the NeighborCircle #3 NeighborCircles are not for “others” ...they are for all of us. Encourage staff, board members, friends, even yourself, to participate in a NeighborCircle.

Advice for the Organizer



Nelson Butten

Dear Colleagues,

As an Organizer there are a few things you must always keep in mind. First, provide as much support as possible to the Facilitators. Second, trust the capacity of the Facilitators. And third, allow collective ownership of the NeighborCircles.

One of the main roles of the Organizer is to support the Facilitators and Lead Facilitators. Support starts with good training. Invest the necessary time and effort to train the Facilitators. A good facilitation skills training will at least include the role of the Facilitator, techniques for keeping and recovering the group's focus and techniques for stimulating participation and collaboration. Support continues with providing all the materials and equipment needed for a successful NeighborCircle. Because Facilitators need to be able to focus on the process, actively listen, and carefully observe group dynamics, it is important that they do not get distracted trying to fix faulty equipment or looking for missing materials. The Organizer is responsible for buying, storing, and periodically inspecting the equipment and materials for NeighborCircles.

Once Facilitators are trained, they need to be trusted and empowered. In order for the Facilitators to grow and improve their skills, they need to feel confident and trust in their capacity to do a good job while understanding and accepting that they will make mistakes in the process. Practicing facilitation and learning from your experiences is one of the best ways to become a good Facilitator. If the Organizer or Lead Facilitator constantly interrupts the Facilitator with suggestions about the facilitation of a meeting, the Facilitator will feel disempowered and will not grow. Let the Facilitators facilitate; trust them. If you have important suggestions, provide them either before or after a meeting, never during a meeting or in front of the participants.

One of the most important pieces of advice I can think of is to allow the Facilitator, lead Facilitators, and the Hosts to have collective ownership of the NeighborCircles strategy. Welcome their new ideas, comments and suggestions, and be willing to try some of them. Try to picture NeighborCircles as a room with a basic structure within which you can be creative and adaptive to meet the need and taste of those using it. Having that flexibility allows for fresh ideas to emerge and contribute to the improvement of NeighborCircles. Change can be good, try it.

Sincerely, Nelson

Practical Things to Remember

- Support the Facilitators. Train them and provide them with everything they need.
- Always trust the capacity of the Facilitators. Get out of the way and let them facilitate. That will help them become better Facilitators.
- Allow the collective ownership of NeighborCircles. Welcome the perspectives and feedback of others. It will only make NeighborCircles better.

The Participants

The participants are the reason why NeighborCircles happen—to bring together neighbors and talk about the things that they care about the most. As we go in our daily lives, we sometimes can't find time to get to know our neighbors. NeighborCircle creates the space for those relationships to develop. Participants at NeighborCircles come from all walks of life. At the NeighborCircle they share their life stories, their experiences and talents, tell jokes, support each other and become friends. Together, they explore what community means to them and the things that they all have in common. But most importantly, they do all of this while having fun. Some of them even sing for their neighbors!



Advice from the Participants

- Each person in your neighborhood, each person in your circle of friends, and family member is a potential participant. Inviting a good mix of people that can have different perspectives is ideal. Business owners that seem to be aware of the problems in the neighborhood should also be invited.
- Once the participants have been identified, spend some time talking them about the structure of the meetings, other possible participants, interests and commonalities that the group might share, the benefits of spending some time together getting to know who lives in your neighborhood. Make the person feel that it will be safe to talk about the issues and that the group will do as much as they are able to. It's going to be our agenda.
- Once the outreach is done, the next step is providing follow up to remind of the meetings. We are all busy dealing with day to day challenges and need an enthusiastic reminder that our presence is important, that our opinion can make the difference on what is decided. It is good to share with the people that in a NeighborCircle each person that attends the meeting is the circle. The group decides what to do, when, and how to it, because at the end we all benefit from our efforts. We all grow from the experience of making a difference not matter how small.

The Dinners



The 1st Dinner: What's Your Story?

First impressions are critical, so the first dinner must set the tone for the Circle. The personality of the group will begin to show itself from the moment neighbors walk in the door. Both the Host and the Facilitator need to be conscious of how they welcome people and help people feel comfortable. Establishing an environment that is friendly, easy, relaxed and personal is the key. Below is a guide to the program for the first dinner.

The Basic 1st Dinner Guide

1. **Welcome: (Host and Facilitator)** *The Host welcomes everyone to her home and introduces the Facilitator. The Facilitator introduces her/himself, describes her role as Facilitator, and briefly talks about her involvement with LCW. She also explains that the reason we hold these NeighborCircle meetings is that we believe that good conversations lead to good ideas. These meetings create the environment which allows such conversations to freely take place. The goal is to get to know one another and talk as neighbors about our lives and dreams and what we can do together for a good neighborhood. The final result of these meetings depends on the group.*
2. **Introductions: (Facilitator)** *The Facilitator asks everyone to introduce themselves: names, addresses and how they got to the Host's house.*
3. **LCW presentation: (Facilitator and Lead Facilitator)** *The Facilitator introduces the Lead Facilitator who then makes a brief presentation about LCW and NeighborCircles.*
4. **Group rules: (Facilitator)** *The Facilitator leads the group in order to establish the rules for the discussion. Some of these rules might be:*
 - Arrive on time, start and finish on time.
 - Respect the opinions of others.
 - Talk one at a time.
5. **Next meetings and agreements: (Facilitator and Lead Facilitator)** *First the Facilitator helps the group choose the next dates. Then the Lead Facilitator explains the agreement between the participants and LCW and asks everyone to sign the Participant Agreement Form.*
6. **The Map Exercise** *(See Next Page)*
7. **Break / dinner: (Host)** *The Host asks the participants help themselves to the food and to come back to talk while they eat.*
8. **Discussion: (Facilitator)** *The Facilitator facilitates a discussion on the most outstanding points from the map exercise. She can start by asking what they thought of it, what they learned, and what they found most interesting. Then she can make her own comments. She should be sure that everyone participates.*
9. **Debrief: (Facilitator)** *The Facilitator talks about what the participants discovered during the discussion, emphasizing what they have in common. She recounts what they learned about one another and recognizes the diversity of knowledge, talent and experiences that participants can contribute to the group (for example, someone who sings or paints or teaches). She then asks for final comments.*
10. **Closing: (Lead Facilitator and Facilitator)** *First, the Lead Facilitator asks the group to do an evaluation of the meeting. The Facilitator then reads the list of the first three people who arrived at the meeting, gives each one a gift, and thanks the Host for having entertained the group in her home. She then asks everyone to think of one or two issues of concern in the neighborhood for the next meeting and reminds everyone of the date and time for the next meeting. She also makes sure that everyone signs the Participant Agreement Form before leaving; it is very important that they do this.*



The MAP Exercise

Journeys to Home

Every NeighborCircle starts with stories. Why? Because everyone has a story and most people are happy to share it. For instance — how did people end up on the street where they live? If there are 20 families on your block or in your building, there will be 20 stories, many of them epic journeys spanning the country or the world. The telling of these stories reveal the fading tales of grandparents and parents, favorite aunts and kindly strangers, near disasters and miracles of caring, new languages learned, old ways lost, schools, marriages, births, deaths, divorces, sickness, recovery and healing, special tal-

ents and embarrassing moments. These stories also reveal hard lessons learned, values held, spiritual awakenings, political views, feelings of isolation and oppression, and many other aspects of the human drama.

The Map Exercise: In the map exercise, the Facilitator asks everyone to trace their history as a trip through life using three maps that are posted on the wall. Each participant writes their initials on the place where they were born and then traces a line connecting all the places where they have lived all the way to their arrival in the city and to the street where they live now. Participants do not go in any particular order. A volunteer is asked to start the group off.

The Facilitator's Role: This early exercise helps to establish the role of the Facilitator and also the 'tone of conversation' that the Facilitator wants to bring out in the Circle.

- ✓ First, the Facilitator is focused on actively listening. There is abundant information and perspective about the Circle participants in these stories.
- ✓ Second, he/she can encourage the storytellers with questions to expand on some aspects of the story. *"Maria, you just said that you had nowhere to go for a week when you first came to Lawrence. That must have been tough for a 16-year-old. What did you do? Where did you stay?"*
- ✓ Third, the Facilitator can and should tell his/her own story; he/she can pick the optimal time to do so. It may be that going first can provide a model for a reluctant group. Or if the stories are getting too long or too short, stepping in and re-setting the exercise can work as well.

Materials Needed: All you will need for the map exercise is:

- ✓ 3 Maps — of the World, the Country and your city or region. We have several sets of laminated maps that are part of a kit.
- ✓ A set of multi-colored dry erase markers



The 2nd Dinner: What's Going on?

The Basic 2nd Dinner Guide

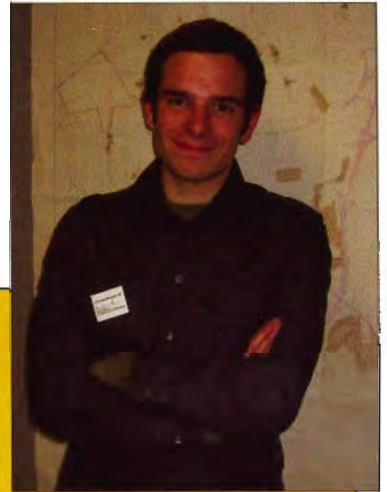
1. **Welcome: (Host)** *The Host welcomes everyone to her home and turns the meeting over to the Facilitator.*
2. **Review of the last meeting and introduction of the evening's agenda: (Facilitator)** *The Facilitator gives a brief review of the first meeting and the rules for the group, and introduces the agenda for the day's meeting.*
3. **Ice-Breaker: (Facilitator)**
 - *The Facilitator gives each participant a sheet of paper to write down an issue or problem in the neighborhood that concerns her, something she would like to change or improve.*
 - *Each participant folds her paper and puts it in a basket, bag or dish. The Facilitator then mixes the papers.*
 - *Each participant picks out a paper and reads out loud what is written. If she picks her own paper, she should fold it again without reading it, put it back and pick another. It does not matter if the paper says the same thing; the important thing is that it was not written by the same person.*
 - *Each participant reads out loud the paper she picked and then comments on the issue in question. One or two comments can be taken from the rest of the group. The Facilitator takes notes on the issues and each participant's thoughts.*
4. **Break/Dinner: (Host)** *The Host asks everyone to help themselves to dinner and come back to talk while they eat. (While the participants are getting food, the Facilitator puts the issues or problems that were identified in order by category).*
5. **Discussion: (Facilitator)** *The Facilitator reviews the list of issues and asks if there are any other important ones that weren't mentioned. She then facilitates a discussion on the issues to narrow them down. During the discussion, she asks a series of questions to help the group eliminate those issues that they can't or don't want to work on, as well as those that are duplicated. She should use the following narrowing process:*
 - *Eliminate duplicate issues*
 - *Ask for clarification on unclear issues*
 - *Have each participant advocate for their proposal or issue*
 - *Use label dots to identify priorities. (The participants place colored dots next to the issue or proposal of their choice.)*
 - *Ask if it is okay to eliminate unpopular issues or proposals*
 - *If two or more issues remain, encourage participants to advocate for those they support*
 - *Repeat the dot process with the remaining issues*

The goal is to prioritize the most important issue that meets the following requirements:

 - *The group agrees on the issue*
 - *The group wants to do something about the issue and can (i.e. it is within the reach of their resources to do so.)*
6. **Debrief: (Facilitator)** *The Facilitator reviews the day's achievements and the process that the group used to decide on the most important issue. She then explains that for the next meeting, they will discuss in detail how to attack the issue or problem identified and create (if the group so desires) a plan of action. She then asks the participants to think of ideas and bring them to the next meeting. She also confirms the date and time for the third meeting and asks the group if they will agree to have the meeting videotaped.*
7. **Closing: (Lead Facilitator, Facilitator, and Host)**
 - *The Lead Facilitator asks the group to complete its evaluation of the meeting.*
 - *The Facilitator reads the lists of the first three people who arrived at the meeting and gives each a gift. The Facilitator can also thank the Host for providing her home for the meeting and make any other comments she thinks appropriate.*
 - *The Host takes the opportunity to thank everyone for attending and make any other comments that she thinks appropriate.*

StoryBoard

Spencer Buchholz: NeighborCircle Host



I have always wanted to live in a place in which there was a strong sense of community, the type of place where you know everyone by name, barbeque together in the street, and watch out for each other's children. Unfortunately, for me this has been difficult to achieve. Every time I have moved to a new neighborhood I have gone in with the same expectations, but have been too nervous to walk up to my neighbors' houses with a plate of oven-fresh cookies and say, "Hi, I'm the new guy on the street."

Having read about Lawrence CommunityWorks, I was aware of the NeighborCircles. They would facilitate the meetings and we would just need to go out and invite our neighbors. This seemed a perfect way to get connected with my new neighborhood.

My housemates and I decided to host a Circle and soon found ourselves going door-to-door inviting neighbors to our house. At first this was just as intimidating as it had always seemed, but it didn't take long for us to realize how warm and open our neighbors were. Everyone seemed to be in the same position we were and also wanted to get to know people in the neighborhood. Through this process we were able to begin discussing many of the issues that affect our neighborhood.

As our group began to meet we found that different people would come with different stories and experiences from the neighborhood. We talked about people's frustrations with parking regulations, concerns about crime, trash and vacant lots. However, the greatest commonality within my neighborhood was that people wanted to know their neighbors. Many, including me, felt that if we know each other first, then any problems/issues that arise in our neighborhood could easily be managed.

Now the houses on my block have taken on the names of those who live there: "That's Manuel's house or that's Betty's house." To me this is community.

Recently, some from my NeighborCircle have gotten together with other NeighborCircles in the area to try and address larger issues facing our neighborhood and city. We know that joining together as neighbors with common expectations for our city, but different strengths and gifts, gives us power to create significant change.

This group has identified our neighborhood's excessive and unnecessary parking regulations as an issue that has been plaguing residents for years. Planning/informational meetings, which our group has held, have been attended by Department Heads from the City. As a result, we are currently in the process of writing a new city ordinance for street parking.

The 3rd Dinner: What Should We Do?

The Basic 3rd Dinner Guide

1. **Welcome: (Host)** *The Host welcomes everyone to her home and turns the meeting over to the Facilitator.*
2. **Object exercise: (Facilitator)**
 - *The Facilitator gives participants an ordinary object (they can be a paper clips, rubber bands, empty bottles, etc.) and a pen or pencil. If they don't have their notebooks, they are given a blank sheet of paper.*
 - *For the next five minutes, each participant privately writes down all the possible uses for that object.*
 - *At the end of the five minutes, each participant says out loud how many ideas she was able to write down (only the number). The Facilitator writes the numbers in one corner of a big sheet of paper.*
 - *The Facilitator says what the largest number was and mentions that this number represents the most ideas that a single individual was able to write down in five minutes.*
 - *In order, starting with the person who had the lowest number, each participant reads her list of uses. The Facilitator notes each use on the big sheet of paper. Only new ideas can be read — if someone has an idea on their paper that was already read by someone else, she has to cross out that idea and only read the ideas that haven't been given.*
 - *When everyone has read their ideas, the Facilitator counts up the total number of ideas that the group generated. This number will be much higher than the number that a single individual was able to write down.*
 - *What the group learns from this exercise is that by thinking together, they came up with more — and better — ideas and solutions. It is in this spirit that they should continue the discussion.*
3. **Brief review of the last meeting: (Facilitator)** *Using the notes from the last meeting, the Facilitator gives a brief review of the issue or issues that were selected at the second meeting.*
4. **Strategy: (Facilitator)** *The Facilitator divides the participants into two small groups (or keeps everyone together if it is a small number of people). The group's task is to plan strategies for the selected issues (one issue per group) and then come together to present their strategies. Each group will have 20 minutes to plan and 5 minutes to present. The plans should respond to the following questions:*
 1. *What is the strategy?*
 2. *How does the strategy help solve the issue?*
 3. *Who should be involved in implementing the strategy?*
 4. *What resources are needed to implement the strategy and where do we find them?*
 5. *How much time will it take to implement the strategy?*
 6. *What are the anticipated results of the strategy?*
 - *After the groups have presented to each other, the Facilitator helps them to discuss, analyze and test their strategies. In order for the discussion to be effective, it is very important that the Facilitator marks the group's progress and write down the decisions that the group makes. The final strategies should be realistic and within the group's reach.*
 - *Once the final strategies are selected, the group answers questions 4, 5, and 6 again. Sources of funds and organizations/associations to which the group can turn for other resources and support will also be identified (by name).*
 - *Ask the group what are the next immediate steps to implement its strategy (tasks, contacts, next meeting, etc.) and who in the group is responsible for each of the steps and tasks.*
 - *Remind the group that Lawrence CommunityWorks can provide them with technical assistance and support.*
5. **Questions: (Facilitator)** *The Facilitator asks the participants if there are any questions and helps them find answers.*
6. **Debrief: (Facilitator)** *The Facilitator reviews the day's achievements, the strategy that the group selected to address the problem, and the steps for follow-up.*
7. **Closing: (Facilitator, Lead Facilitator, and Host)**
 - *Conduct evaluation of the discussion (Lead Facilitator)*
 - *Voter registration (Lead Facilitator)*
 - *Have participants fill out LCW Membership Cards (Lead Facilitator)*
 - *Pass out Certificates of Participation (Facilitator)*
 - *Gift giveaway or Raffle (Facilitator)*
 - *Thank you (Host and Facilitators)*

Storyboard

Juan Williams: NeighborCircle Host



Juan Williams has lived in the City of Lawrence for 10 years. He is originally from the Dominican Republic and moved to Lawrence from another U.S. city, looking for a place for his family to settle. He has always had a great desire to serve the community wherever he has lived. He envisioned a place with a good sense of community, where neighbors knew each other, where he could buy a home, and where his children could attend college and find good jobs. Most of that has already become a reality; the rest is yet to happen.

Juan found out about NeighborCircles from Janice Vargas, an LCW member and NeighborCircle Lead Facilitator, during a meeting at their church. Janice was impressed and motivated by Juan's desire to not only improve his community, but to develop his own leadership skills as well. Juan had identified various issues affecting the quality of life in his neighborhood and he wanted to do something to change that. He was concerned about poor street lighting, drug dealing, dirty streets, and vandalism. He also wanted to gain leadership skills and get to know his neighbors. Janice told him that in addition to being a leader in the church, he could also be a leader in his community. She invited him to hold a NeighborCircle as a way to start improving his neighborhood and he accepted.

Juan hosted a Circle and a total of 13 people participated. The group is currently working on improving street lighting and police vigilance, and is meeting and engaging other neighbors. The goal is to make the neighborhood a safer one. However, Juan also recognizes that one of his biggest challenges is keeping people motivated and engaged.

To help with that challenge, Juan thinks that hosts like him could benefit from additional facilitation training and leadership skill development to be more effective in keeping the group motivated and engaged after the initial three meetings.

Things to Remember

- Try to hold the meetings at three different homes. This may motivate more neighbors to participate, while foster ownership and collective leadership of the Circle.
- Remember this is an opportunity to meet your neighbors and together identify and fix neighborhood issues. Invite 15-20 neighbors and provide the space and opportunity for good ideas to flow.
- Relationships first. The most important goal is to establish and maintain good and positive relationships with your neighbors during and after the Circle. Relationships are key to strong collective action.



What Happens Next?





Taking Action

While the NeighborCircle is all about conversation and building relationships, it's also based on the idea that *if people have the space to connect, action will soon follow*. In our experience, most people are naturally drawn to taking action, so this idea is true most of the time. But we are not likely to take action alone when it comes to taking care of our streets, alleyways, and local parks, improving trash collection and police protection, or securing a derelict building. We need comrades—people we can trust—to walk beside us. NeighborCircles help us find those comrades.

The NeighborCircle Facilitator is careful not to prescribe action or even the possibility of the group taking action. He or she is trained to let the possibilities for taking action develop through the group dynamic.

However, once a possibility emerges, the Facilitator's job is to help the group find the perfect first step—one that a) has the best chance of being successful and b) addresses a real issue that many in the group care about. We call this *"Listening for Resonance."*

Resonance

Careful attention to the group, combined with some experience in community activism or organizing, will often reveal an idea for action that seems right for the group. This is less of a science and more of an art. But there are some guidelines in Listening for Resonance. You might have resonance when:

- ✓ Two or more different kinds of people are saying the same thing: A single Latina mom and an elderly white man are both talking about how difficult it is to get traffic to stop at the stop sign. A father of a teenage son and newlywed couple both think that there is not enough for kids to do in the summer.
- ✓ People can't stop talking about it: No matter what topic the group is on, it keeps coming back to the same thing. The activity in the abandoned house on the corner, the speeding on the street, the trash in the alley etc.
- ✓ The NOD test: We've all been in a room where there has been a lot discussed, but one comment gets all the heads nodding. A poor facilitator might miss that brief moment. A good facilitator is watching for it.

First Steps

Having success at each small step of the way is critical to the group's confidence. Also, it is important to make sure that the group members have the best information possible about the issue on which they want to take action. That is why many times, the first challenge for the group is to get more information.

Often we will encourage the group to do a "research action" as its first step. Let's say that the group wants to have a neighborhood clean-up of some vacant lots nearby — a first step might be getting several volunteers to go together to meet with the Director of the Department of Public Works to see what kind of equipment they can bring to the task and if they would be open to picking up piles of debris on the weekend. (Continued →)

Golden Rule of the NeighborCircle #4 Let "Form Follow Function." You need organization not 'an organization' to get things done. Keep it informal and action-oriented.

The “research action” helps to continue the development of relationships and advance the action in productive ways. In many cases, the group really doesn’t need any more information to take action. Maybe there is a park to improve or people want to have a block party. Keeping it simple and getting the group outside to do something together, however small or fleeting, is a great idea.

Support and Follow-Up

At Lawrence CommunityWorks, the support and follow-up to the NeighborCircles is provided by the whole organization, though coordinated by the Organizer. The principle is that we are there to support the group in their ambitions, so long as they are willing to take the lead. In this, we follow what is known as “The Iron Rule of Community Organizing” (Saul Alinsky, Rules for Radicals): *“Never do for others what they are able to do for themselves.”*

Nonetheless, once you have done a number of Circles, the support and follow-up that is required can become overwhelming. We have had some successes and some failures in building our capacity to support the growing numbers of Circles here in Lawrence. However, we are very honest about this and we’re becoming more creative about the support we can provide.

The Un-Organization

At Lawrence CommunityWorks, we believe that too much ‘organization’ can get in the way of action and relationships. (See Introduction.) The Organizer and the Facilitators are trained to challenge NeighborCircle participants to use the “Form Follows Function” test if and when they decide to take action as a group. The basic question is “How much organization do we need in order to accomplish this task?” Often times, it’s not a whole lot. Usually you need a couple of people to take the lead and a commitment on the part of others to take on a specific task. By-laws, chairpeople, formal rules for decision-making — these things are really not needed to get 20-30 neighbors out on a Saturday to take action.

Of all the rules of the NeighborCircle approach, this is the one we are most insistent on as a community organization. Why? Because we have wasted a lot of time working with (and helping to build) block clubs and neighborhood associations which do little and take up too much space. It’s not because of bad people, it’s because the habits of building and protecting the organization get in the way of taking action and building new relationships. In the long run, it is the building of a deep and broad net of relationships that will last and have the most impact.

Other Kinds of Action

Taking on local issues is not the only kind of action that comes out of a NeighborCircle. At Lawrence CommunityWorks, we measure impact in a number of ways. A positive answer to any of the questions below is an excellent outcome of the NeighborCircle:

- ✓ Is the group taking local action?
- ✓ Is the group continuing to meet/have dinner or social time?
- ✓ Are there new important relationships that have come out of the Circle?
- ✓ Are there participants who have joined the Lawrence CommunityWorks Network?
- ✓ Are there participants who are involved and/or are involving family members in asset building?
- ✓ Are there participants who have joined other groups? Efforts?



The bottom line for us is that because of NeighborCircles, more people are “getting in the game” with their neighbors to actively care for each other, care for the city, and build community here in Lawrence.

Reflection/ Evaluation:

Good practice is the result of constant trial, reflection and honest evaluation. Good community organizing practice has always had, at its foundation, constant real-time reflection so that:

- a) Experiences are fresh and the details and nuances of the experience can be explored, and
- b) Adjustments can be made in a time when they can have a difference.

We have applied the principle of constant reflection to NeighborCircles and it has had a dramatic impact on the quality of our practice. Below is the cycle of reflection that is built into the typical NeighborCircle:

Before:

- ✓ The Host, Facilitator, and Lead Facilitator meet to prepare for the NeighborCircle. During this meeting, they talk about the Host's neighborhood experiences and why he or she wants to host a NeighborCircle. They also talk about how difficult it is today to find the time to have good conversations with our neighbors and how NeighborCircles offers an interesting and fun way for these conversations to happen. This provides a chance for the host to reflect on his or her neighborhood and reasons for hosting a NeighborCircle.

During:

The Host, Facilitator, and Lead Facilitator take time after each NeighborCircle meeting to review and reflect on what happened and to use the lessons learned to prepare for the next NeighborCircle meeting. To help with this, the Facilitators can use the participants' evaluations completed after each NeighborCircle meeting. Topics they discuss include things like:

- ✓ Who are we? At the first meeting, the participants have the chance to meet each other and learn from each other's lives and journeys to the U.S. and to their current neighborhood. (See the Map Exercise on page 19.) The Host, Facilitator and Lead Facilitator can answer some important questions by reflecting on what was heard and how different people connected with the exercise: How can we do the exercise better in the future? How to best facilitate this group? This is also a good time to gain an understanding of habits, attitudes, customs, and behaviors that sometimes can be foreign to many of us and potentially become obstacles to communication.
- ✓ What's going on? At the second meeting, the participants have a discussion about the different issues affecting the quality of life of their neighborhood. The Facilitator helps the group reflect on those issues in order to understand their impact and root causes. How did that go? Are there common views about what is going on in the neighborhood? What are some of the 'fault lines' where members of the group may have disagreements? What kind of third meeting conversation would give the group the best chance of feeling productive?

After:

- ✓ The Facilitators, Lead Facilitators, and the Organizer meet quarterly to reflect, share, and learn from their NeighborCircles experiences. This is a great opportunity for peer support and training among Facilitators and Lead Facilitators.
- ✓ There is also an annual end-of-the-year NeighborCircle evaluation to which all the participants, Hosts, Facilitators, and Lead Facilitators are invited. This is a collective reflection of the NeighborCircle experience where everyone has a chance to share their stories, experiences and lessons learned. This is an amazing opportunity to capture important and diverse ideas, suggestions, and perspectives with the goal of continuing to improve the NeighborCircles approach. See notes from the 2004 evaluation on the next page.

The Annual NeighborCircle Evaluation

Formal evaluation and record keeping is important so that there is an “institutional memory” of what has been learned and why things have changed. For reference, below is a page from the record of the evaluation session held in 2004. On the next page is an example of a participant evaluation form, followed by other examples of forms, checklists, flyers etc. that you should feel free to revise.

Results of the evaluation for the 2004 cycle of NeighborCircles

On January 13, 2005 the LCW Organizing Department held the evaluation session for the 2004 cycle of the NeighborCircles. During this evaluation, the participants highlighted some of the same effective and positive aspects that other participants had highlighted during previous evaluations. The participants also made great suggestions to improve the outreach, follow-up, and leadership development components of the organizing strategy.

Effective and Positive	Needs Improvement
Ice breakers and group exercises	<p><u>Outreach</u> The participants' suggestions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Have a special gift for the first few people that arrive at each of the three initial meetings. This will motivate people to get there on time. • Have a raffle at the end of the third meeting and advertise it in the invitation. This will hopefully encourage people to participate in all three meetings. • A week before the first meeting, ask the Hosts to provide a list of the people they outreached to for their Circles. The Organizing Department then will use the list to send a postcard or letter to remind them of the meeting and to congratulate them for their participation.
Good conversation and freedom of expression	<p><u>Follow up</u> The participants' suggestions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Include a tour of LCW as part of the NeighborCircles experience to expose the participants to resources available for their projects and our different adult and teen programs. • Ask each ongoing NeighborCircle and their initial Facilitator to hold three or four follow up sessions per year. During these follow up sessions, the participants will share any progress or activities that might be going on and the Facilitators will be there to provide technical assistance if necessary and document the Circle's activities.
Good chance to meet the neighbors	<p><u>Leadership Development</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify a leader within the group and ask her or him to co-facilitate part of the Circle. This will hopefully help to create less dependency on LCW staff. • Implement some type of skills or talents survey during the first or second meeting to discover the strengths that each of the participants brings to their Circle. • Support emerging leaders by providing them with various leadership development workshops. These workshops should also be available to the emerging leadership in other LCW committees and programs.
Good facilitators (knowledgeable and prepared)	
Great way to do outreach for new LCW members	

Appendix



Example: Participant Evaluation

Participant Evaluation		
Meeting # _____	Location: _____	Date: ____/____/____
Facilitator: _____	Host: _____	Lead Facilitator _____
How clear and organized was the presentation?		
Outstanding	Average	Unsatisfactory
How knowledgeable and helpful was the Facilitator?		
Outstanding	Average	Unsatisfactory
How appropriate or relevant were the materials? (Maps, participant packages, etc.)		
Outstanding	Average	Unsatisfactory
How would you rate the location or space of the meeting?		
Outstanding	Average	Unsatisfactory
Did you find the meeting useful?	Yes	No
Would you recommend NeighborCircles to a friend?	Yes	No
Comments and suggestions:		

Example: Circle Flyer

Do you want to meet your neighbors
and improve your neighborhood?

Host a



NeighborCircle!



In today's world, it's hard to get to know your neighbors as people, to share hopes and dreams, and to find ways to work together and make positive change on your street, in your neighborhood and in your city. With help from Lawrence CommunityWorks Inc., a non-profit community organization, residents are coming together for good food, good conversation and good connections through NeighborCircles.



For more information or to host a NeighborCircle please contact
Spencer Buchholz at 978-685-3115 x16 or visit us at

60 Island Street, 3rd floor
Lawrence MA 01840



Example: Lead Facilitator Agreement

Letter of Agreement — Lead Facilitator

This is a Letter of Agreement between Lawrence CommunityWorks Inc. (LCW) and the NeighborCircles Lead Facilitator for NC number _____ which will be held at _____ on the following dates:

_____, _____, _____.

The Lead Facilitator is responsible for working with the Facilitator, the Host, and LCW staff to organize all the aspects of the NeighborCircle.

All Lead Facilitators must have completed the NeighborCircles Lead Facilitator Orientation prior to facilitating a NeighborCircle. Specifically, the Lead Facilitator is responsible for:

- Meeting with the Host and the Facilitator to ensure everyone is well-prepared (roles, meeting schedule, participant outreach, room set-up, agendas, and meals).
- Assisting with facilitation **only if** it is really necessary.
- Documenting the Circle by drafting a short record of each meeting and using video and still picture cameras.
- Collecting and turning in receipts for meals expenses of the Host.
- Conducting participant evaluations at the end of each Circle meeting.
- Collecting and turning in completed membership forms and voter registration forms.
- Completing an Exit Analysis sheet after the third Circle meeting
- Meeting with the Facilitator and the NeighborCircles Organizer to debrief and evaluate the Circle.

LCW agrees to offer the Lead Facilitator a \$250.00 stipend at the completion of the debriefing session following the Circle. The purpose of the stipend is to cover travel, materials, day care and other costs associated with the Lead Facilitator role.

LCW also agrees to provide the Lead Facilitator with a one-time \$50.00 incentive for the recruitment and facilitation of three NeighborCircles during a calendar year. The incentive will be given upon successful completion of the third Circle of this kind (recruited and facilitated by the same Lead Facilitator).

The Lead Facilitator agrees that all materials, notes and other documentation related to the NeighborCircle approach is the exclusive property of LCW.

AGREED TO BY:

Nelson Buttén, Community Organizer

Date

Lead Facilitator's signature

Date

Name: _____ Phone: _____

Address: _____ Apt. _____ Lawrence, MA (Zip) _____

Example: Participant Agreement

Letter of Agreement — Participants

This is a Letter of Agreement between Lawrence CommunityWorks Inc. (LCW) and the NeighborCircles Participant for NC number _____ which will be held at _____ on the following dates _____, _____ and _____.

- The participant commits to participate in the full sequence of three dinners that are part of this NC.
- LCW agrees to reimburse each participant family for part of childcare costs related to their participation in this NC. For more information, please contact Nelson Buttén at 978-685-3115 x17.
- If participants choose to work collectively on a specific issue, then they are eligible to apply to LCW for a mini-grant to help fund their strategy to address that issue (amount to be determined by LCW).
- The participant agrees that all materials, notes and other documentation related to the NeighborCircles approach are the exclusive property of LCW.

AGREED TO BY:

Nelson Buttén, Community Organizer

Date

Participant's signature

Date

Name: _____ Phone: _____

Address: _____ Apt. _____ Lawrence, MA (Zip) _____

Example: Facilitator Agreement

Letter of Agreement — Facilitator

This is a Letter of Agreement between Lawrence CommunityWorks and the NeighborCircles Facilitator NC number _____ which will be held at _____ on the following dates: _____, _____.

The Lead Facilitator is responsible for facilitating all aspects of the discussion aspect of a specific NeighborCircle sequence.

Facilitators are volunteers who are a) committed to the NeighborCircle concept and b) interested in developing their facilitative leadership skills.

All Facilitators must have completed the NeighborCircles Facilitator Training prior to facilitating a NeighborCircle. Specifically, the Facilitator is responsible for:

- Meeting with the Host and the Lead Facilitator to ensure everyone is well-prepared (roles, meeting schedule, participant outreach, room set-up, agendas, and meals)
- Providing a written agenda for each of the 3 Circles
- Facilitating all 3 of the Circle meetings
- Drafting a short record of the discussion during each Circle meeting
- Participating in debrief and evaluation sessions with the NeighborCircles Organizer, the Lead Facilitator, and the Host during and after the completion of each Circle

LCW agrees to offer the Facilitator a \$150.00 stipend at the completion of the debriefing session following the Circle. The purpose of the stipend is to cover travel, materials, child care and other costs associated with the Facilitator's role.

LCW also agrees to provide the Facilitator with a one-time \$50.00 incentive for the host recruitment and facilitation of three NeighborCircles during a calendar year. The incentive will be given upon successful completion of the third Circle of this kind (recruited and facilitated by the same Facilitator).

The Facilitator agrees that all materials, notes and other documentation related to the NeighborCircle approach are the exclusive property of LCW.

AGREED TO BY:

Nelson Buttén, Community Organizer

Date

Facilitator

Date

Name: _____ Phone: _____

Address: _____ Apt. _____ Lawrence, MA (Zip) _____

Example: Host Agreement

Letter of Agreement — Host

This is a Letter of Agreement between Lawrence CommunityWorks Inc. (LCW) and the NeighborCircles Host for NC number _____ which will be held at _____ on the following dates: _____, _____ and _____.

- The Host agrees to hold the Circle in his or her house or in another location that he or she chooses.
- The Host agrees to identify, with the help of the Facilitator and the LCW Organizer, a list of up to 10 neighbors (people who live in the immediate area) that he or she would like to invite to the Circle.
- The Host agrees to select a timeframe for the Circle, which is convenient to the Facilitator and the Organizer, and agrees to send out invitations to the Circle.
- The Host is responsible for preparing and serving a meal to the Circle members at each session. The meals can be prepared or purchased by the Host. In either case, LCW will reimburse the Host up to \$100 of the total combined cost of all three meals.
- At the completion of the Circle sequence, LCW agrees to provide the Host with a Stipend in the amount of \$100.00 to cover cleaning or other costs associated with holding the Circle.
- The Host agrees that all materials, notes and other documentation related to the NeighborCircles approach are the exclusive property of Lawrence CommunityWorks.

AGREED TO BY:

Nelson Buttrick, Community Organizer

Date

Host's signature

Date

Name: _____ Phone: _____

Address: _____ Apt. _____ Lawrence, MA (Zip) _____

Example: Reminder Cards

REMEMBER YOU ARE INVITED

Come and share good talk with your neighbors and friends. Get to know more about your neighborhood and give your ideas to improve it.

IT IS TOMORROW!

Saturday, October 14th
63 Osgood St. 2nd floor
6:00 PM – 8:00 PM
978-123-4567



RECUERDA QUE ESTAS INVITADO

Ven y comparte con tus vecinos y amigos una amena plática. Conoce más sobre tu vecindario y aporta tus ideas para mejorarlo.

¡ES MAÑANA!

Sábado 14 de octubre
63 Osgood St. 2do piso
6:00 PM – 8:00 PM
978-123-4567

REMEMBER YOU ARE INVITED

Come and share good talk with your neighbors and friends. Get to know more about your neighborhood and give your ideas to improve it.

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¡ES MAÑANA!

Sábado 14 de octubre
63 Osgood St. 2do piso
6:00 PM – 8:00 PM
978-123-4567

Example: Process Check List

NeighborCircle Process Check List

Host Orientation Package Ready	_____	■
Host & Facilitators Orientation Completed	_____	■
Host Agreement and W-9 Completed	_____	■
L-Facilitator Agreement & W-9 Completed	_____	■
Facilitator Agreement & W-9 Completed	_____	■
Facilitator's Materials/Equipment Ready	_____	■
1 st Meeting	_____	■
2 nd Meeting	_____	■
Resources/Info for Circle's 3 rd Meeting	_____	■
Follow-Up Strategy Meeting	_____	■
Membership Forms Completed & Processed	_____	■
Voter Registration Offered	_____	■
3 rd Meeting	_____	■
4 th Meeting (optional)	_____	■
Certificates of Participation Sent /Delivered	_____	■
Facilitators' Debrief Meeting	_____	■
Participant Evaluations Discussed & Filed	_____	■
Exit Analysis Sheet Completed & Filed	_____	■
Circle Notes Completed & Filed	_____	■
Meal Receipts Received & Processed	_____	■
Meal Reimbursement Check Sent/Delivered	_____	■
Host Stipend Sent/Delivered	_____	■
Facilitator Stipend Sent/Delivered	_____	■

Example: Lead Facilitator's Exit Report

Host / Anfitrión:

Facilitator / Facilitador:

Lead-Facilitator / Facilitador Principal:

Meeting Dates / Fechas de las reuniones:

Participants / Participantes

Key Issues / Asuntos Claves

Local / Locales	Other / Otros

of participants who became members of LCW / # de participantes que se hicieron miembros de LCW?

of participants who became involved in LCW Efforts / # de participantes que se unieron a esfuerzos de LCW?

FAB _____ RGI _____ OH _____ Other / Otro _____

Evaluation Notes / Notas de Evaluación

Host / Anfitrión:

Facilitator / Facilitador :

Example: Child Care Invoice

CHILDCARE SERVICE INVOICE *FACTURA POR SERVICIO DE CUIDO DE NIÑOS*

Date / Fecha _____

Received from / Recibí de _____

The amount of / La cantidad de _____

Date(s) of service / Fecha(s) del servicio: _____

Location of service / Lugar donde se prestó el servicio: _____

Number of children / Numero de niños _____ Number of hours / Numero de horas _____

Children Information

Names of Children	Relationship to Participant	Date of Birth

Provider's full name / Nombre completo del proveedor _____

Signature / Firma _____

Telephone / Teléfono _____

LCW will reimburse the participant \$5.00 an hour per child for up to 3 children.

LCW reembolsará al participante \$5.00 por hora por niño hasta un máximo de hasta 3 niños.

Example: Completion Certificate



NeighborCircles

Lawrence CommunityWorks

Awards this Certificate to / Le otorga este Certificado a

Name

In recognition of your valuable participation in the 156 Garden St. NeighborCircle and for your contributions to the betterment of the neighborhoods in the City of Lawrence

En reconocimiento por tu valiosa participación en el Círculo de Vecinos del 156 de la calle Garden y por tu contribuciones para el mejoramiento de los vecindarios de la Ciudad de Lawrence

Francisco Ditren- NeighborCircles Facilitator	Date : 9/2/06
Maria Betances-NeighborCircles Lead Facilitator	Date : 9/2/06



Lawrence
COMMUNITYWORKS

Be a Part of the NeighborCircle

Learning Community

We hope you have found this guide to be useful!



People in other Massachusetts communities and cities around the U.S. are already trying NeighborCircles. As the NeighborCircle approach spreads, it changes and evolves in exciting new ways!

If you are practicing NeighborCircles, we urge you to share your stories and your lessons with us and others around the country. To help facilitate this, we are setting up a *Learning Community for NeighborCircles*, a way for people to share thoughts and experiences online and on the phone, no matter where you are.

"NeighborCircles are a unique LCW strategy for engaging Lawrence families in positive and productive discussions around the issues that affect their lives."

—Terri Bailey, The Piton Foundation in "Ties that Bind; the Practice of Social Networks"

"...NeighborCircles and property improvement committees are focused on action rather than organizational structure...and act as portals and doorways into the larger Network. Through this process both bonding and bridging links are established among families and LCW staff."

—Audrey Jordan, Annie E Casey Foundation in "Tapping the Power of Social Networks."

To be a part of the NeighborCircles Learning Community, contact Nelson Batten at nbatten@lcworks.org or log onto our website at www.lcworks.org. Nelson will be the first Learning Community Host and will let you know how to participate.