

# VOICE Listening Session Guide

**INSTRUCTIONS:** Time needed for full agenda, around 60-90 minutes. Yet, if you only have 20-30 minutes--for example you were able to get time on the agenda to meet with the choir right before they practice--then we ask that you be sure to include 3 things: **What is VOICE?, GROUP DISCUSSION (as long as you can) & NEXT STEPS.** If you have any questions you can contact a VOICE leader at your congregation or VOICE staff. Thank you.

## **WHY LISTENING SESSIONS ARE SO IMPORTANT**

They are how we build people power by

- Identifying common self-interests we can only realize together, and
- Intentionally building the relationships necessary to motivate and sustain action.

## **WHY DO GROUP LISTENING SESSIONS?**

- They allow us to identify ISSUES of common concern that are widely and deeply felt.
- They let us identify LEADERS who are willing and able to take action on the issues.
- They motivate participants to take more leadership in improving their communities than they would have had they not heard the concerns of their neighbors.

## **WHAT DOES A LISTENING SESSION LOOK LIKE?**

**Size:** 8-15 people.

**Location:** Your home, at your congregation (after service, before choir practice, etc), school, ethnic club, book group, etc. If your congregation has Small Groups, this is also a good venue.

**Who to Invite:** People you know! Neighbors, people you've met at your congregation, workers, youth organizations, etc – people who, like yourself, might act on their values.

## **LISTENING SESSION AGENDA**

### *BEGINNING:*

- WELCOME & FRAME:** Tonight we are hosting a listening session to hear the concerns & vision we have for Northern VA. It is through these listening sessions, like this one, that VOICE member congregations have identified many issues to act on. On October 16<sup>th</sup>, we will unveil at a 2,000-person Assembly to state and local officials OUR bold Issue Agenda and ask our officials how they will lead with us to move OUR identified concerns. VOICE's bold Issue Agenda will come from what we discuss today and from the 250+ other listening sessions VOICE leaders and allies are holding throughout Northern VA.
- WHAT IS VOICE?** VOICE is a strictly non-partisan, people-power organization with a strong track record of success--both in concrete wins and in bringing people together across race, economics, and geographic divides. VOICE and our sister affiliates have a long track record of success by starting with deep listening to determine our shared interests that we want to act on and building the relational power needed to get officials to work with us to ensure real results, such as winning \$1.1 billion to renovate Baltimore schools, \$500 million for affordable housing in Montgomery County, and winning the funds for 576 new low-income children to attend Pre-K in Prince William County. *See VOICE's Annual Report for a long list of VOICE victories.*

# VOICE Listening Session Guide

## C. WHY IS VOICE IMPORTANT TO YOU? (90 seconds or less) Optional.

*MIDDLE:*

- D. **QUESTION:** What is one concrete specific change that would make life better for you or you family? What story can you share with us that illustrates why you care so much about that issue?

Before you share your response. Please first state your name & what institutions you are connected to.

**INSTRUCTIONS TO SMALL GROUP LEADER:** Please keep in mind. Please give people a minute to reflect. Let them know they have 2-3 minutes to answer the two questions. *It is important that people share a brief story to illustrate their issue.* It is through stories that communities form stronger bonds, and stories will give you a better sense of the person. Let everyone have his/her chance to speak before someone speaks twice. Before the first person shares, ask for permission to interrupt and move on to the next person so you can end on time. PLEASE, remind people to state their name & institution if they forget. We are building relationships & relational power.

F. **DISCUSSION.** After everyone has had a chance to answer the Questions. You may want to ask---

- Have people acted on their concerns? If so, how?
- What issues did people share in common?
- Do participants have concrete ideas on how to solve problems raised?
- How would the group rank the problems shared today?

*END & POSSIBLE NEXT STEPS:*

**Other listening sessions.** (1) Ask who else is affected by the problems raised in this listening group. “Who here has connections or ideas on how we can hold a listening session with them?” “Specifically who do we have relationships with?” (2) Identify others in the group who will hold listening sessions with other groups in the congregation or ministry partners or places where they have relationships. If you can work with new leaders who want to lead listening sessions, great. If you need assistance reach out to another leader.

**Research.** Ask: “Who could we meet with to ask some critical questions?” “What site could we visit to learn more about this issue?” Identify a captain who is willing to set up a meeting and other people who would attend (the captain does not have to run the meeting, just set it up). Research items should almost always be done in teams, this gives people a chance to develop stronger relationships and opportunity to lead.

**Invite participants to engage in VOICE with you.** Sign up those who want to get involved in our VOICE work. Let them know about upcoming events. Get their contact info so you can remind them.

- **June 26<sup>th</sup>,** 4-6 PM: **VOICE-Wide Action Team Meeting**--to hear report backs on all of the Small Group Listening Sessions.
- **September 18<sup>th</sup>,** 4-6 PM: **VOICE-Wide Action Team Meeting**, to finalize our VOICE Issue Agenda & Strategize about our October 2,000 person Assembly
- **October 16<sup>th</sup>,** 4-6 PM: **VOICE 2,000 person Assembly**

# VOICE Listening Session Guide

## EVALUATE YOUR SESSION:

Please fill out right after your session and share with your AIC Team Leader.

NAME \_\_\_\_\_

CONTACT INFO \_\_\_\_\_

INSTITUTION/GROUP \_\_\_\_\_

### Potential Leaders in Your Session:

A. Which participants stood out for their passion, creativity, charisma, or deep social networks?

B. Which participants really seem like they want to do something?

Follow up individually with those people, or pass along their information to a leader in VOICE.

### Issues

A. Which concerns came up the most?

B. Which concerns elicited the most passion and anger?

C. What were the most memorable stories?