



# COMMUNITY DIALOGUES

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## INTRODUCTION

Latinos are the fastest growing community of color in the US, making up 12% of the Washington State population. To address the growing needs of the community, the Latino Community Fund partnered with the Center for Leadership Innovation to put together the first Washington Latino Nonprofit Leadership Academy. Seventeen leaders from nine non-profits working with the Latino community came together to participate in a year-long transformational experience. These leaders shared a vision of lifting up the voices of the grassroots Latino community to decision and policy makers throughout the state. As a result of the Academy, the Washington Latino Equity Network was formed in November 2014.

## STRUCTURE

Leaders from the Intercommunity Peace & Justice Center (IPJC) and Centro Latino collaborated to create the Community Dialogues structure. It was designed to raise critical issues affecting immigrants and to strategize practical next steps to create change.

Each Community Dialogue provided a space for expression in English and Spanish. Participants chose a table depending on their preferred language. Groups were then given three questions and 20 minutes to discuss each question.

1. What are the three most important social justice issues in your community?
2. How are these three issues affecting your community?
3. How can we solve these problems? What changes would you like to see? As a group, come up with three practical next steps to promote positive changes in your community.

Table captains were assigned to each discussion table to facilitate the conversation and take notes. After the three questions were discussed in small groups, all members engaged in a large group discussion based on the common themes that emerged from the three questions.

## GOALS

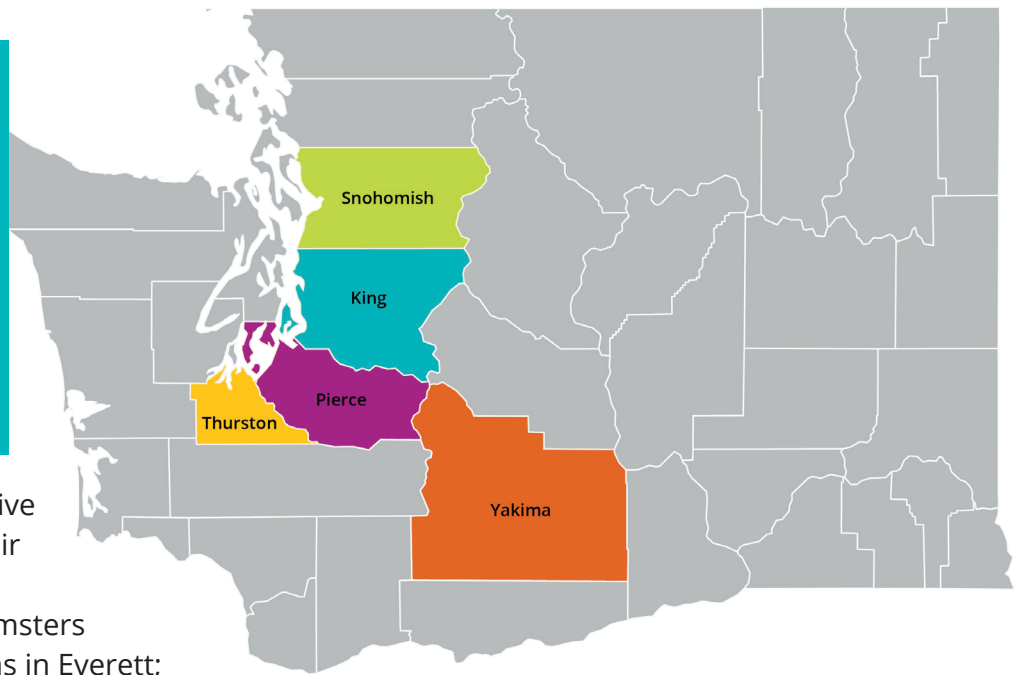
Create safe spaces where the community wisdom is used to:

1. Name the issues that affect them
2. Engage in the decision making process
3. Brainstorm practical next steps for social change

## SITES

Community Dialogues were organized in five Washington State counties:

- Pierce
- King
- Thurston
- Snohomish
- Yakima



The Network partnered with five organizations that offered their space to host each gathering: Centro Latino in Tacoma; Teamsters 117 in Tukwila; Familias Unidas in Everett; CIELO in Olympia and the Sunnyside School District in Sunnyside. Promotional materials and handouts were designed and distributed by IPJC to all Community Dialogue sites.

Grassroots community members participated in Community Dialogues across Washington State to share their experiences with social barriers and brainstorm critical next steps to create social change. They developed short and long term recommendations that would benefit and create achievable change in their community.

Participants came to the table unsure of what would be appropriate to share. As time progressed, and the hum of the room grew louder, groups spent more time sharing on each question. Participants found comfort in knowing others felt similarly and expressed feelings they had previously suppressed.



## OUTCOME

Through these transformative dialogues four common themes emerged:

- **Immigration**
- **Education**
- **Racism and Discrimination**
- **Criminal Justice**

### IMMIGRATION

Participants delved into the lack of immigration reform and the need for more programs like DACA and DAPA. They shared their feelings of fear of deportation that affects their physical, emotional, and mental health.

Community members discussed the abuse they experience due to their undocumented status which leads to lower wages, lack of affordable housing and access to healthcare.

The lack of knowledge and access to information on immigrant rights, tenant rights, and labor rights are other barriers that prevent them from advocating for themselves.

“Immigration affects my family. My parents were professionals in their countries but because of their lack of work experience in the US and their lack of a social security number they can't get the job they deserve.”

## EDUCATION

The insufficiency of English skills and the lack of understanding of how the US school system works limit many Latino's ability to communicate, keeping communities misinformed and segregated.

Parents worried about sending their children to school since their children felt unsafe due to bullying, harassment and discrimination.

Participants also discussed the lack of support for undocumented students and students with special needs and the inability of parents to prioritize education and fully support their children because of long working hours and low wages.

Finally, parents talked about their Latino children being disproportionately disciplined at school, perpetuating the school to prison pipeline.

“My children attend a predominantly white school where their classmates make fun of my kids’ color, heritage and language. It is unfair to have to choose between a predominantly white school with more resources where my children can get a better education and a school with fewer resources where they will fit in better culturally and racially.”

## RACISM AND DISCRIMINATION

Racism and discrimination was discussed at great length because it infiltrates every system and trickles down to personal interactions. Participants talked about being discriminated against in their jobs, housing complexes, social service agencies, their children's schools, and in society, which leads to abuse, a lower quality of life, and being forced to live in subpar housing conditions or threatened with eviction.

## CRIMINAL JUSTICE

In line with racism, many discussed the issues within the criminal justice system such as racial profiling, police brutality, and the lack of police accountability. Some of the participants were previously detained by Immigration Customs Enforcement (ICE) and spoke about the mistreatment and human rights abuses they experienced while in the Tacoma Detention Center.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

### Skill Building Workshops

- Conduct Know Your Rights workshops on tenant, worker and immigrant rights;
- Provide tools to manage fear of deportation, healing from traumatic experiences and internalized oppression;
- Offer English and positive discipline classes and job search and interview skills workshops;
- Organize workshops for parents on how to better advocate for and support their children in school, especially in special education, graduation requirements, and post-graduation opportunities;
- Plan youth self-esteem workshops on how to deal with discrimination and harassment.

### Cultural Sensitivity Trainings

- Advocate for cultural competency/ responsiveness and bias training for teachers, employers, social service providers and legislators.

### Advocacy and Accountability

- Increase opportunities for grassroots communities to be heard and responded to by legislators;
- Organize advocacy trainings;
- Expand the number of Latino voters;
- Advocate for the expansion of services in Spanish.

## NEXT STEPS

**As a result of the Community Dialogue recommendations, two community events have taken place:**

### **Legislative Community Forum:**

In December, a Legislative Community Forum was organized to engage grassroots community members and Washington State legislators from the 21st District in a dialogue about social justice.

Addie Simmons from Washington Family Engagement Trust, Catalina Angel from Intercommunity Peace & Justice Center and Sandra Huber from Familias Unidas organized the Legislative Community Forum. Senator Marko Lias, Representative Lillian Ortiz-Self and Representative Strom Peterson met with 31 community members from Snohomish County.

*Community members shared their testimonies and legislators shared their work and support for:*

- Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) that focuses on discipline management and family engagement.
- Representative Ortiz-Self reinforced her commitment to protecting immigrant rights.

### **Conoce tus Derechos Workshop:**

In January, a Know Your Rights Workshop was held in Spanish to respond to the request for a workshop on immigrant rights and the need to acquire tools to manage the fear of deportation.

Giselle Cárcamo from the Intercommunity Peace & Justice Center collaborated with Paulina López and Jacque Larrainzar to organize a well-attended and interactive workshop in the South Park Neighborhood. The workshop was sponsored by Seattle Counseling Service, Colectiva Legal del Pueblo and the Intercommunity Peace & Justice Center.

**“For there to be justice, immigrants must be accepted.”**



*Almost 100 community members gathered for a Know Your Rights workshop that focused on:*

- Managing fear of deportation through music therapy;
- Learning the importance of exerting immigrant rights;
- Developing an emergency family plan to protect children in the event that their parents are detained by ICE.

Community members left equipped with practical resources in Spanish: a Know your Rights card and a Protect your Family booklet. To download:

[www.ipjc.org/programs/justice\\_circle\\_resources.html](http://www.ipjc.org/programs/justice_circle_resources.html)

We will continue to respond to community needs.

### **Community Dialogues Facilitators:**

Catalina Angel (IPJC); Giselle Cárcamo (IPJC); Carolina Gutiérrez (CIELO); Sandra Huber (Familias Unidas); Micaela Razo; Felipe Rodríguez-Flores (Latino Community Fund); Adie Simmons (Washington Family Engagement Trust); Karlah Tanori (WCSAP); and Rosa Venancio (CIELO)

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