Popular Education Intro and Discussion Guide for Communities Creating Healthy Environments[1]

Popular Education, has also been called "Educación Liberadora" (Education for Liberation")"Educación Dialógica" (Dialogic Education) and Participatory Adult Education and is based upon the principle that all people have knowledge, based on their experiences in life, and all people have dignity as human beings. From this base the goal of Popular Education is to open a space for trust and participation where human dignity can be affirmed, diversity can be honored and knowledge can be created and recreated. However, **the main distinctive element of Popular Education is the political intention of building a knowledge that turns into collective action for liberation.** This liberation includes the personal, and community levels and aims toward a larger social transformation that reshapes the power structures and addresses power relationships and inequalities.

Popular Education is a process where many dialogues have to take place :

1. Dialogue among all the participants in a workshop, including the facilitation team. This means co-creating an environment that invites participation and co-responsibility/co-ownership of the space and the process.
2. Dialogue between the "issues" and the reality, experiences and needs of the group. Connecting individual experiences to a shared context finding commonalities and differences, using a common language that actually speaks from and about the realities the group is sharing. It is not about infantilizing issues or "dumbing things down" or putting things at somebody's level, it is about <u>relevance</u>! Asking how important and close are the issues and language we are using to the realities the group we are working with are facing?
3. Dialogue between the tools used to explore the issues and the tools the group already has. Keeping things simple, accessible and at scale helps democratizing the use and control of tools.
4. Dialogue between the issue of the workshop and its historical and social context: exploring the root causes of the issue and experiences being discussed. Situating the conversation and the people in the room in their relationship with other social actors ("naming" the moment and mapping the social and historical space)
5. Dialogue between the issue of the workshop and the ongoing organizing effort. Connecting the event to the process, asking not only what are we doing but why and what for. Balancing the need to Win something (a campaign, an issue) with the need to Build something (local leaders and local power, an organization or coalition, a larger popular movement for social and racial justice).

All these dialogues require of a design and a process: A challenging balance of planning the process and activities and improvising and adapting this process to the realities of the group, the team and the context. This balance becomes a lot easier if both, the group and the team stay close to their central values and focused on honoring and affirming human

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[1] By Pancho Argüelles Paz y Puente, *Colectivo Flatlander* adapted for CCHE from materials developed in Nicaragua for Universidad Campesina in Estelí (1991-1993), for BRIDGE with the National Network for Immigrant and Refugee Rights (NNIRR 2000-2004), and for Colectivo Flatlander Talleres Vida Digna (2000-2007 and the Institute for Immigrant Leadership Development with the Highlander Center in Tennessee (2004-2006).

dignity. This is important to remember in the U.S. organizing context, it is not just about individual anger and self interest, it is about personal and collective dignity and survival.

Popular Education is a political ethic and a methodology to **accompany** organizing processes for resistance and liberation.

Information-Knowledge-Wisdom

In this "age of information" the skill to transform information in knowledge is essential.

Knowledge is information in context, *"concientizacion"* is knowledge applied in collective action to affirm human dignity, to resist oppression and to fight for liberation, this requires a **wisdom** that is usually found in the lives and stories of persons and communities that have been able to survive and overcome suffering and oppression. We don´t have to go far to find people that can tell us these stories and share with us this wisdom, they are around us in the barrios, in the fields and factories, in our own homes, they are our elders our neighbors our brothers and sisters in the struggle. Popular education opens a space for dialogue where information, knowledge and wisdom are created, shared, reproduced and transformed to build local power that transforms structural power.

From this perspective organizing can be described as a continuous process of reflection-action-reflection through dialogue. If we eliminate the reflection part, we are reducing organizing to mobilizing, if we eliminate the action part, we are just intellectualizing the struggle... In popular education the process is a goal on itself, it is not all about power, it is about human dignity. We can not build a more dignified society if we don't build organizations that honor and respect the human beings that participate on them. We cannot build a more democratic society with anti democratic organizations. Popular Education is centered on values and long-term systemic change through everyday actions for survival and resistance.

At the core of the principles that define what popular education there is a commitment to listen to what those who have endured the most have to say. This is assumed both as a moral and strategic obligation. It is not about being *"the voice of the voiceless"* but about accompanying-creating an organizing process where the voices of those who are suffering and risking the most are the ones leading the conversation and making strategic decisions. As professional organizers being an ally means in some ways learning to be *"ear of the earless",* learning how to be silent when working with communities that will come up with questions than our privileges could not even dream of asking. Popular education is also about producing good questions and then working together to build common answers.

Below you can find a visual representation of some of the elements mentioned above and some questions to analyze these diagrams:

1. Compare it to the diagram on Banking Education: What are the differences?
2. Can you apply this diagram to describe one of your training activities, does it helps you to have a more integrated vision of your praxis?
3. What is missing?

Add your own questions to analyze and describe Popular Education

Paulo Freire called conventional education "Educación Bancaria", (Banking Education) because students are treated as empty things that need to be filled with a knowledge that pretends to be politically neutral. In this model both, students and knowledge are treated as objects and the only subject is the "Teacher". He or she posses the knowledge and the power to give it to the passive recipients.
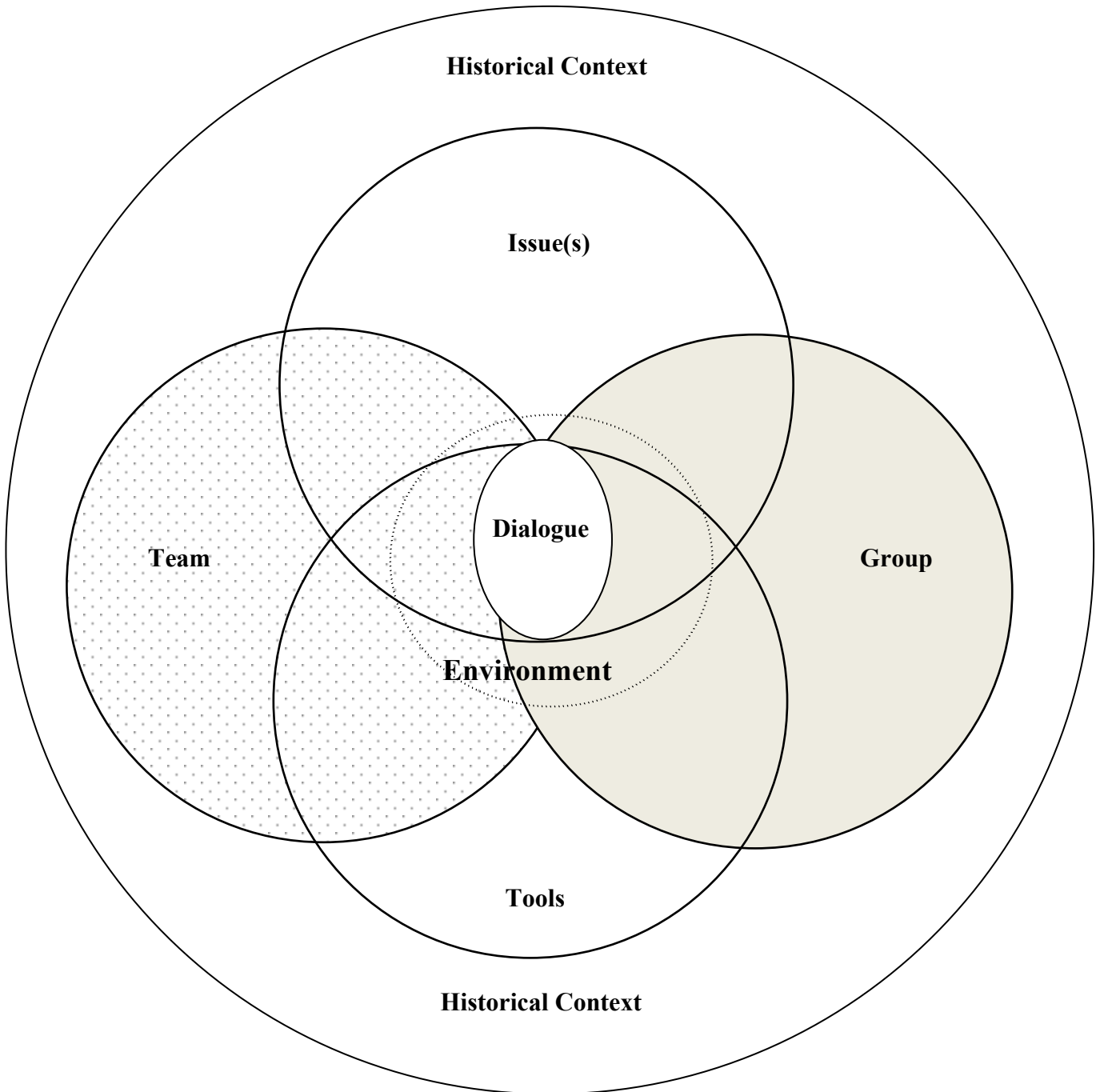
Some questions to analyze this diagram:

1. How are the power dynamics in this model? Who has the control of the process?
2. Does it relates to your learning experiences?
3. Does it relates to your teaching experiences?
4. What happens to the experiences, values and knowledges of the group in this model?
5. How does Dialogue happens?
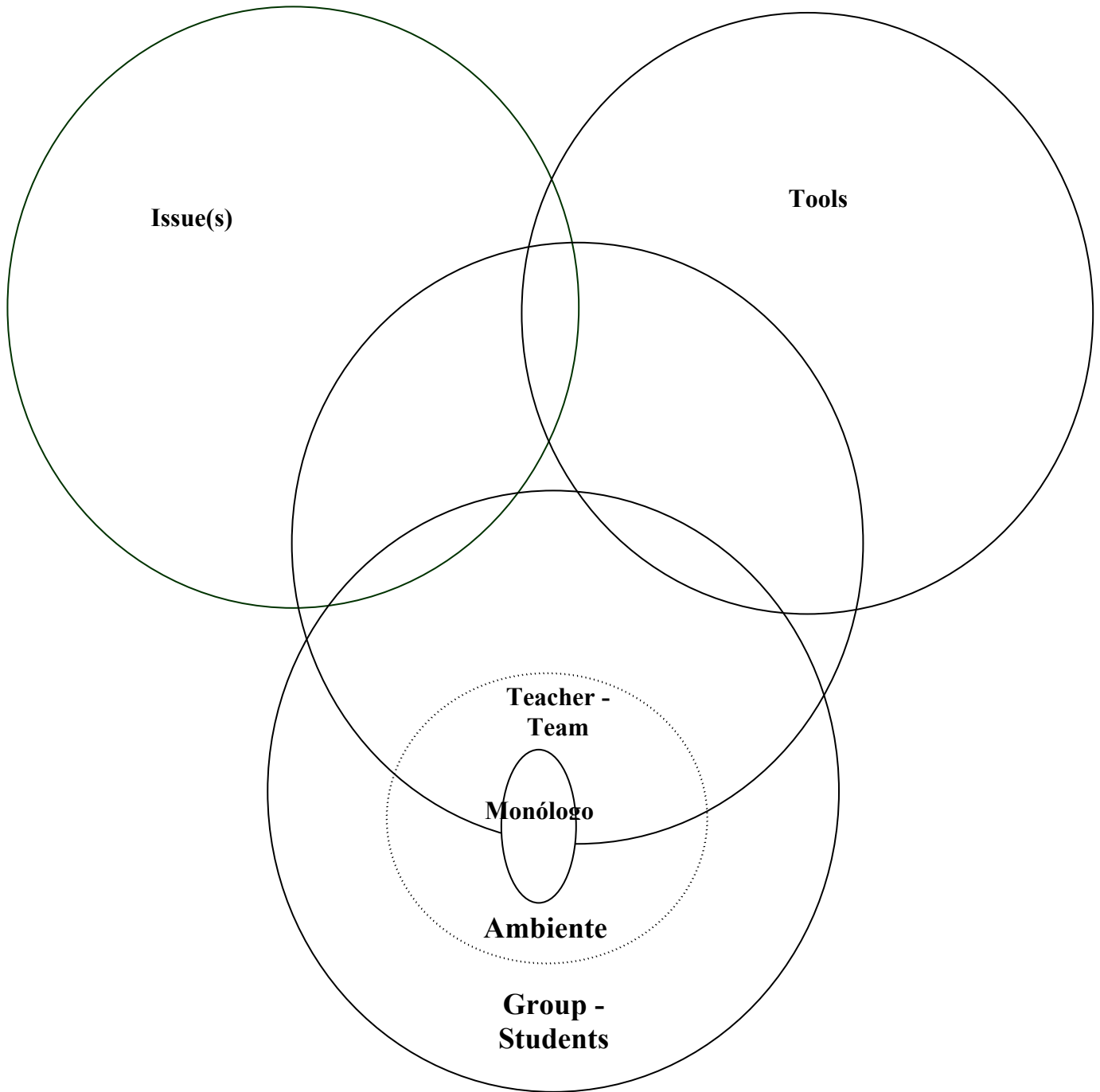6. What about the Context of this teaching-learning model: Is it acknowledged?

Add your own questions to analyze and describe Banking Education:

Components of a learning experience
(Popular Education Perspective)

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Historical Context

Issue(s)

Team

Dialogue

Group

Environment

Tools

Historical Context

Components of conventional teaching
("Banking" education)

Issue(s)

Tools

Teacher - Team

Monólogo

Ambiente

Group - Students

More principles and tips for and from a popular education practice *(praxis!)*:

A "methodological model" aims to identify some general principles that guide our action and that can be adapted to different circumstances. **These principles are a synthesis of values, attitudes, knowledge and skills based upon concrete experiences.** We don't want to pretend that we are "inventing" hot water of discovering the wheel. From our experience of doing something in a concrete place and time, we are extracting some ideas confirmed and learned down the road; with the hope that they can be helpful to those who are walking similar paths. Method means Road, not Recipe, as usual a poet explains it better:

"Caminante no hay camino, se hace camino al andar.

Al andar se hace camino, y al volver la vista atrás

Se ve la senda que nunca se ha de volver a pisar

Caminante, no hay camino, sino estelas en la mar."

Antonio Machado

- **To do a workshop is to open a space for dialogue**, it is the creation of a "safe space" for learning, and therefore the initial effort is to open the space. But a safe space exists around behaviors, attitudes and values, it doesn't exist just because the trainer says that the space is safe, or because the people with more privileges feels safe.

- The ways in which we define what is a "safe space" depends on our circumstances: our background, our race and ethnicity, class, gender, sexual orientation, age, immigration status, disabilities, and many other variables that imply inclusion or exclusion, privilege and oppression. As facilitators of a workshop we can not solve these differences, but we must acknowledge them if we want to open a space for dialogue and not for simulation. Therefore I think that instead of defining a workshop as a "safe space" it is better to think that **a workshop is a place for trust and participation**.

- **The main tool in a training process is the facilitator him/herself**, if he/she doesn't attend with an attitude of dialogue and openness then she/he can't really facilitate the participation of others. (Notice: The facilitator is the tool, the group is the builder)

- Education is always Reproduction and Resistance of values, ideologies, skills, and attitudes; the more we can be explicit about what we are reproducing and resisting, the better we can keep the direction of our process**. Being explicit and specific about our values, (the political-ethical center of our educational-organizing effort) helps to create your own center of gravity for the process** and when you have your own center of gravity there is less probability of getting lost and ending spinning around somebody else interests.

- From a conventional point of view, education implies transmission, conservation, and creation of knowledge. (knowledge includes: information, skills, values, attitudes, and behaviors in an specific context; **information without context is not knowledge, and doesn't necessarily means empowerment**)

- **In the tradition of Popular Education: Any educational project should be an ethical and political process that looks for the liberation of the oppressed**, the inclusion of the excluded, the empowerment of the individuals and group, the transformation of the structures of power and the building of a more just society. It has several "dimensions": Person, Family, Community, Popular Organization, Society and History.

- **Popular Education processes are based upon *Concientización*: Experience in Context. Knowledge that leads to Action** The personal story (experiences) of Oppression/Resistance/Liberation shared in dialogue and related to the stories of others and then to the structures of power from an historical perspective. It is learning and unlearning, redefining my personal reality in relation with the experiences of those around me.

- **The synthesis of Action and Reflection/Theory and Practice is known as Praxis**: Learning through action how to transform my reality in the everyday struggle for survival, resistance and affirmation of rights. Action without reflection is *activism*, is doing a lot of isolated actions but without long term goals and strategies. Reflection without action is... well, "intelectualism", is just blah, blah, blah...

- **Popular Education implies Participatory Methods, but it is not reduced to that**. Participatory methods without organizing and political vision/action are not popular education. Participatory methods and "icebreakers" are used at large corporations retreats too, it is not a matter of playing games at the beginning of the meeting or doing emotional rituals at the end, it is about accompanying a well defined political project connected to an organizing process and a action strategy.

- **There are several ways of doing organizing. From a Popular Education perspective, it must be a long term participatory and democratic process. Leadership will be service, in some way, the process of becoming "unnecessary". Or in the Zapatista's words: Leadership is "Mandar obedeciendo" (To command by obeying)**

- **Becoming Unnecessary is a long term goal and it is lot easier if we are developing new organizers**, so they can do what we are doing, so that we can go do something else or go somewhere else to do the same. Developing new leaders or organizers has also been called "Forming Promoters"; and in the experience of the movement *De Campesino a Campesino* in Central America it was done under this principles: Little by little, from the practice, starting in small scale, with demonstratives experiences, building a model that can be applied elsewhere. Becoming unnecessary doesn't means becoming irrelevant!

- **Any educational process implies planning and evaluating, from the popular education perspective these two activities have to be participatory in order to be coherent with the ethical and political vision**. There are several methodologies

for planning and evaluating here we offer a guide with some principles to have in mind when choosing or designing one.

PICOSO

BRAINSTORMING ON THE DIFERENT ELEMENTS OF A PARTICIPATORY METHODOLOGY

Participassion   Process perspective and Ownership of the process: Moving from Dependence - to Independence - to Interdependence. Different levels and types of participation

Integration   Landing the process on Every Day life*: staying afloat, making waves and changing the tide*. Survive, resist and transform the system by naming and addressing racism, sexism, classism and other *isms* and intentionally connecting services, advocacy, organizing, civic participation and other aspects of the larger social movement.

Critical/Creativity   Information in Context…. Self Criticism/ Structural Critic. Historical perspective. Openness to create and to what is new.

Organizing   What happens if I leave? Becoming unnecessary, creating community and local power

       Becoming unnecessary, Creating Community and Power

Symbolism   Other kind of power/ Culture, Celebrations, Faith!

Operation   Being effective transforming reality. Have a real membership, develop local leaders, create an organization, change public policy, transform institutions, strengthen democracy at all levels and advance racial and social justice. Work towards financial autonomy-sustainability. Evaluate to improve.

SOME "PREGUNTAS GENERADORAS" TO REFLECT ON OUR WORK:

1. How are people **Participating** in the decision making process and in managing resources? Are we really democratic?
2. How are we trying to **Integrate** the long and short term needs? How are we trying to **Include** those who are not included now?
3. Do we make space for **Creativity and Criticism** within our team and processes, are we addressing the causes of the problems or only the visible symptoms?
4. Are we creating new social actors? What happens when the campaign ends? What happens if we disappear… if things end when we leave, then we are mobilizing, not **Organizing**. What are we winning and what are we building?
5. What kind of power are we using and creating? Are we playing with the rules and language of the oppressor or are we *drinking from our own wells*: How are we using our Culture and Faith? How are we using, creating and recreating our **Symbols**?
6. Are we solving some concrete problems related to the need of our membership, to their survival? Are we transforming reality? Achieving some concrete victories? Are our **Operations** and systems efficient? How do we measure this? What are we doing right? How can we improve?

Some ideas about Planning.

As they say in NASA: "It is not rocket science!". You can design you own planning method based upon your experiences and some common sense. The real challenge is to develop a collective commitment to planning and evaluating so that it becomes a permanent part of our organizing work.

Any Planning tool should be able to answer the following questions:[3]

What? (Activity)

What for and Why? Goals (general and specific)

Who? (Who is responsible and who supports)

How? (Methodology and process… don´t jump to this one without being clear on goals!)

When and for how long? (Date and time)

Where? (Place)

With what? (How much? Materials, Resources)

Then what? (Follow up: who, how, when… what's next?) This last question makes all the difference: Are we doing isolated events or are we accompanying a process to build collective leadership and community power locally rooted?

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[3] *See the attached planning table if you want an example of these questions as a tool in table format.*

EVENT/Team: **DATE** **PLACE:**

What (Activity) When and for how long	Why and What for (Goals)	How? Method	Whom?	With what? Materials-Resources

NOTES AND OBSERVATIONS:

1. **Translation and Interpretation:** (it is not just a matter of need it is about offering people the opportunity to participate in the language of their choice, it is about democratic principles)
   a. Interpreters: (do we know their technical capacity? It is important to remember that some times bad interpretation is worst than not interpretation!)
   b. Equipment: (earphones, transmitters, do they work in the room of your event?)
   c. Translated Materials: Give enough advanced time (agenda, handouts, etc.)

2. **Accessibility for people with disabilities:**
   a. Transportation?
   b. Ramp?
   c. Sign Language?
   d. Participation in activities that require physical activity?
   e. What else?

3. **Childcare:**
   a. Who is in charge? (Paid or volunteers)
   b. Program and educational resources according to our values (please don't just seat them in front of the TV!)

4. **Youth and elders leadership and participation;** It has to be designed and intentional, who is responsible?

5. **How are we going to integrate culture(s) as part of the event and process?** It can start with Songs, Music and Food but it has to go beyond this.

6. **Spirituality:** Are we going to have a moment to pray together? How are we going to do it in a way that respects the religious diversity of the group?

7. **How are we going to document our event/process?** Photos, video, interviews, etc.

8. **Tools for membership and volunteer recruitment?**

9. **News and invitations to future events:** We need to have a flyer ready

10. **Do we have a concrete action (letters, calls, petition, for people to sign)**

11. **Costs:** How much are we going to expend? Are we going to use the event to raise funds? Sell food or other stuff? (if we sell food let´s make sure is healthy food and no sodas and junk food!)

12. **What else can you and your team can think of?**