Design Circles & Sample Protocols

Design Circles (DCs) are a way of honoring community leadership and perspectives by creating space for conversations that are focused on co-designing solutions rather than only on voicing and naming challenges (Bang et al., 2010). Design circles are in-depth, reciprocal working groups or focus groups that aim to engage stories, experiences, and expertise within our communities in order to catalyze action within a particular context. Although the exact format and details vary by context, the circles contrast with traditional research focus groups or listening sessions that have often exploited family and community traumas for research or systems decision-making purposes without prioritizing community agency to contribute to solutions.

DC Protocols: Design circles can be an opportunity to start something more ongoing or can be situated in existing work. Either way, they are never single events. The work simultaneously attends to both the relationships and interactions in the design space *and* the action, product, tool or process being designed. Below we outline two options for undertaking design circles. Each Design Circle will involve tailoring to the local context and conversation with the design circle members in mind.

- Option 1: Co-Designing Strategic Action
- Option 2: Co-Designing A Tool/Product/Process

Each design circle will be tailored to the specific context, but we offer these sample protocols as starting places for beginning to structure a series of design sessions over time.

Sample Protocols		
	Option 1: Co-Designing Strategic Action	**Option 2: Co-Designing A Tool/Product/Process**
Purpose	This option may be better suited for a group of people who are coming together for the first time to tackle a particular strategic opportunity.	This option is better suited for a group that is already working together and is ready to take collective action. For example: a digital case/story, a syllabus for a class on family engagement, a rubric for assessing a school, or guidelines for responding to microaggressions.
Design Circle Participants	Will vary by context, but can be a combination of FLDC collaborative member(s), community partner(s), families, students, community and faith-based leaders, and/or other stakeholders related to broad focus.	There may already be a group that is working together, however it is critical to think about what voices might be missing from the conversation. Potential participants include FLDC collaborative member(s), community partner(s), researchers, families, students, community and faith-based leaders, and other stakeholders relevant to the apertura.
MEETING 1		

Opening	Introductions Why we are here FLDC context Ongoing commitments	
Relationship Building & Shared Understanding of the Problem	Sharing personal/family experiences with topic Identifying shared experiences & systemic inequities	
Activities	Split into two groups: *Group 1: Challenges in your community *Group 2: What do you imagine for your community in 10 years from now? Share out	Discussion: Framing and elaborating the apertura in your particular context What are opportune next steps to build/redesign something that will speak to the opportunity the group identifies
Closing	Closing Circle/Appreciations	
Homework	Brainstorm opportunities for the group. One person type up and send out before next session. Also bring one thing you dream for your community	Reflect on the discussion and talk to other people in your networks and brainstorm some tools/products/processes that this group could create.
MEETING 2		
Opening	Check-Ins	
Homework Share Out	Share in small groups- People should join the opposite group from the one they were in on day 1 What else needs to be on the table for the conversation to be meaningful?	Share in small groups -People should share their tool/product/process ideas Each small group selects 1-2 tools/products/processes to share out with larger group
Activities	Conversation about strategic moves and actions and initiatives 0-5 years out	Select which tool the group will co-design by ranking or doing color dots activity. Families get more dots or a different color Break into small groups to begin designing the tool/process/product selected by the group
Closing	Closing Circle/Appreciations	

Homework	Talk about the strategic actions discussed at the meeting with your community to gather feedback and continue brainstorming.	Take rough draft of tool/process/product to your people for feedback
MEETING 3		
Opening	Check-Ins	
Homework Share Out	Compile feedback from conversations with participant's networks in small groups	Compile feedback from HW assignment *have people put on post-it notes-- "what did you hear/learn?"
Activities	Begin flushing out action plan in small groups Identify points of leverage and additional people who need to be at the table	Iterating co-design of tool/process and co-create criteria for Phase II Identify next steps to move the group/tool/process forward
Closing	Appreciations and Next Steps	