
Building the Rhythm of Change

Developing Leadership and Improving Services Within the Battered Rural Immigrant Women's Community

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Introduction

Combating domestic violence is a high priority for community leaders, service providers of all kinds, and federal and local governments. Congress and the Attorney General have made clear that domestic violence services and civil and criminal justice system protections must be available to all, regardless of immigration status.

This project targets battered immigrant women in rural areas where the women are more isolated due to the dearth of resources. In many areas of the country, however, resources for helping battered immigrant women are rare or nonexistent. *Helping immigrant women become their own advocates may be the best and only sustainable way to address the needs of immigrant survivors of domestic violence.*

Consequently, the Family Violence Prevention Fund (FVPF) sponsored a pilot project to develop immigrant women’s leadership capacity and bring immigrant women leaders together with key service providers. FVPF chose two locations likely to benefit from such an effort: Iowa and El Paso, Texas. The project focused specifically on Latina immigrant women, both documented and undocumented. Very successful forums took place in both areas, and vital and vibrant grassroots immigrant women’s groups are now working to help organize and educate other battered immigrant women about issues of violence and asserting their rights.

Using the experiences of the pilot projects and of existing grassroots immigrant women’s organizations, this manual provides suggestions and guidance on how to organize a similar project aimed at improving services and eliminating barriers to safety for battered immigrant women by empowering the women. The manual is geared primarily toward domestic violence service providers focused on advancing the rights of battered immigrant women and improving their access to services, but may also be a useful reference for other organizations or individuals advocating for immigrants’ legal rights.

Participating in this project provides the following benefits:

- Build immigrant women’s trust in you, your agency and other service providers
- Help you and other service providers learn more about the special dynamics of domestic violence in immigrant communities and the barriers battered immigrant women must overcome
- Help battered immigrant women learn more about their rights and the services available to them
- Expand access to immigrant communities
- Improve your resources for battered immigrant women
- Inform and improve efforts to fund expanded, appropriate services for this under-served population
- Eliminate system and service barriers facing immigrant women fleeing abuse
- Ensure that all service providers are the allies of all battered women, regardless of race, language ability, culture, or immigration status.

The Marimba Band Model

The immigrant women participating in the pilot projects suggested a useful analogy — that of a marimba band. Each player is essential to creating a harmonious whole; without each player, the band is incomplete and its music dissonant. The analogy applies both to the ways the women may participate as leaders in their group and to how the partners in the project work together.

Just like forming a marimba band, you need to recruit the players, give them the music to practice and build their talent, and unite them all to play together. The music of this project has two themes: the goal of eliminating barriers and improving the services for immigrant survivors of domestic violence, and treating immigrant women as equal partners in efforts to achieve this goal. With all the players participating equally, not one dominating the sound, they can build the rhythm of change.

Using This Manual

To begin, the manual will discuss the resources necessary for success and help in identifying and developing an immigrant women’s group and in targeting service providers to participate in a forum that brings them together with the women on an equal footing. The second part details all of the steps of the forum, from planning logistics to tracks in leadership building and using skits (teatros) for educating and organizing. At the conclusion of the manual, the group’s next steps are briefly discussed. Subsequent manuals derived from the pilot projects will address in detail the group’s goals following the forum and how to ensure it achieves its long-term goals.

The Project's Goals

The goal of the project is to break down the barriers facing battered immigrant women to improve services available to them. The best strategy to achieve this end is to develop the women's leadership skills.

Only immigrants themselves (with support from allies) can change the anti-immigrant, racist, and ignorant attitudes, policies, and practices that prevent them from becoming visible and fully participating in society. By giving the women the skills to become their own advocates they can make those changes.

By achieving this goal you build the capacity, confidence, and expertise of immigrant communities. You also provide services in a more respectful, credible, effective, and enduring manner.

Developing The Women's Leadership Skills

Immigrant women who have survived domestic violence have great leadership potential. All of these women exhibit great strength of character when they decide to find assistance or to leave a violent home to save themselves and their children. All immigrant women, especially those who lack secure immigration status, face numerous barriers to obtaining services and to gaining access to the civil and criminal justice systems. These women possess strengths, experience, and knowledge that qualify them to advocate for other battered immigrant women. They can educate immigrant communities about domestic violence and advocate for changes in system policies and practices because they speak credibly and eloquently about the obstacles they face and how they overcame them. Immigrant communities are more likely to trust them than "outsiders" because they have experienced the discrimination and stereotyping that is part of an immigrant's daily life.

The best way to create dynamic partnerships among service providers and immigrant communities is to help immigrant women gain the confidence and skills they need to insist that service providers and policy makers treat them as equals. Immigrant women leaders can articulate system problems and help those systems develop appropriate solutions.

Grassroots Leaders

Our society might not identify battered immigrant women as leaders — they may not be recognized professionals or may have low-income jobs (if they are able to gain employment at all). Nevertheless, with their strong community links, they are truly from the "grassroots" and are well equipped to succeed as advocates for other undocumented, marginalized, immigrant women.

"The project must be based on the real-life needs and experiences of the women as they perceive them, recognizing and respecting their culture and values.

Recognize that the women's work for the rights of immigrant and refugee women is a form of civic political participation that contributes to community education and the democratic process." —Clara Luz

Partnering with Service Providers

It is imperative that service providers understand the barriers immigrant women face in fleeing domestic violence. Fear of deportation, lack of awareness of services and protections available to them, and language barriers all inhibit many immigrant women from leaving violent homes. Their abusers have instilled in them a fear of the U.S. legal system and misinformed them about what will happen if they seek help.

Since it is the service providers' charge to provide services to all, regardless of race, language, culture, or immigration status, they cannot effectively do their jobs if they alienate or intimidate immigrant communities. Through dialogue with the women at the forum and by listening to their experiences, the service providers will create partnerships with the women that ultimately will help them do their jobs better. Indeed, the Iowa and El Paso projects demonstrate that involvement in this project inspires unmotivated system personnel and service providers to take on initiatives they otherwise might have resisted.

Steps to Creating a Successful Project

Adequate preparation and resources are vital to the success of the project. A lack of preparation may result in failure and damage future work with the community.

All participants in the effort must adopt and further the project's goal of improving services by empowering the immigrant women to advocate for themselves. This is not the traditional service provider model. Organizations, institutions, and individuals inclined to revert to a service provider approach must remember that the women leaders are equals in the effort to challenge and redress the issues of domestic violence against immigrant women. They should not be viewed merely as translators or free service providers.

The first step is to realistically assess the human and institutional resources in your area and the women's needs and expectations. Tailor your plans accordingly. Once the expectations and objectives are clear, you will be ready to implement the steps listed below, all of which are described in detail in this manual.

- Find a sponsoring organization
- Designate one or more project coordinators
- Consult national resources
- Develop the budget and timeline, and identify funding sources
- Identify a grassroots immigrant women's group

Once the women's group has been identified and brought together, the group will be ready to implement these next stages:

- Identify key issues and prepare for the forum, which includes a leadership skills training and a meeting with service providers
- Identify, contact, and follow up with service providers who should attend the forum
- Plan for the forum
- Ensure service providers and the women's group make concrete commitments to working together in the future
- Provide ongoing support to the women necessary to sustain their work and growth.

Recruiting the Sponsoring Organization

A local "sponsoring" organization must provide substantial support for the project. For instance, the Iowa Coalition Against Domestic Violence initiated the project in that state. In El Paso, Las Americas Immigrant Advocacy Project provided the staff and institutional support.

The sponsoring organization has the following responsibilities:

- Be committed to the rights of immigrant survivors of domestic violence
- Support the project coordinator by allowing her to focus on the leadership development project without distractions or restrictions on her outreach and recruitment efforts
- Provide the financial support necessary to fund the project coordinator's work
- Commit to providing ongoing financial and logistical support for the women's group
- View the leadership development project as an essential part of its long-term plan
- Provide ongoing institutional support until the women's group is selfsupporting.

Maintaining and furthering the work of the women's group must be an integral part of the sponsoring institution's program for at least three to five years.

Designating the Project Coordinator

At least one staff person must adopt the role of project coordinator. She will identify and recruit existing leadership or support the development of a new group of immigrant women leaders. Finding potential leaders and including all the agencies and organizations that affect immigrant survivors of domestic violence is essential to the project. This effort is timeconsuming and may transgress established organizational territorial boundaries. Whenever possible, however, the project coordinator must not be deterred nor subject to other demands from the sponsoring organization that may undermine her ability to effectively coordinate the project. The project need not be the individual's only task, but it must be a significant aspect of her job. An existing staff person may be well equipped to incorporate the project into her overall work. If no current staff person is

available, consider paying an experienced volunteer with demonstrated commitment and the requisite skills. The best project coordinators will have the following skills:

- Self-motivated
- Creative
- Strong organizers
- Experienced in conducting outreach and organizing meetings, preferably in the target immigrant communities
- Experienced advocate for survivors of domestic violence
- Fluent in the language of the immigrant women.

Consulting National Resources

National organizations can provide expertise on domestic violence in immigrant communities. The Family Violence Prevention Fund and the National Immigration Project of the National Lawyers Guild have extensive experience training and working with many kinds of service providers, including health care providers, shelters, and law enforcement personnel. Líderes Campesinas and Mujeres Unidas y Activas, the California-based immigrant women’s organizations that participated in the Iowa and El Paso pilot projects, also can provide valuable leadership training, explain the historical context of their efforts, and offer their significant expertise derived from years of experience. See National Resources in the Appendix section for contact information.

They also can help you identify topics and materials for the women’s early meetings. As in the pilot projects, they may be willing to meet with the women ahead of time, help them prepare for the forum and participate in their training. Find out what they have done or are planning to do to avoid duplicating efforts. Consider working collaboratively if you are pursuing similar projects.

If the group decides to consult national resources, it should do so early enough in the planning process to ensure their participation. Alter the budget to include the expenses of incorporating them into the forum and the preparatory meetings.

Budgeting, Establishing a Timeline, and Identifying Funding Sources

An initial task for the project coordinator and the sponsoring organization is to develop a budget that should include expenses for the following:

- Outreach activities
- The women’s meetings
- The forum

- Implementing the goals from the forum
- The project coordinator's salary.

Another important task is to establish a timeline for the project. Make sure to allow ample time for outreach and preparation. Ensure that the budget and timeline are flexible enough to respond to changes in your plans.

Once the women become partners in the project, review the budget and timeline with them. They may raise concerns and suggestions that did not occur to you when you drafted the plan. They also may decide to fundraise as part of their journey to independence. See the Appendix section for a sample budget.

Finding Funding for the Project

Federal, state, and city governments fund many domestic violence programs. Look for “requests for proposals” designed for “under-served” populations. Battered immigrant women fit this definition. Check out private foundations in your area; many of them may be interested in new, dynamic, collaborative proposals. Consult with the development director of the sponsoring organization — she or he can give you leads and advice on framing applications for money. Build partnerships with other local, state, or national organizations interested in actively participating in this project to increase funding opportunities. Collaborate with the women in the efforts to find funding.

Building and Nurturing the Women's Leadership Group

Recruiting Immigrant Women Leaders

Many of the suggestions in this section come from the manuals by Líderes Campesinas and Mujeres Unidas y Activas, and from their presentations and tracks during the El Paso and Iowa training sessions. See Resources in the Appendix section for information on obtaining the manuals.

Why A Women's Leadership Group?

A frequent topic of discussion will be why forming a group and working as a community of women is important. A grassroots immigrant women's group does the following:

- Provides support for women by women from their own community
- Raises consciousness of shared experiences
- Sponsors leadership trainings that raise self-esteem and teach skills
- Educates women about their rights and other social and political issues relevant to their lives

- Facilitates identifying the issues and problems affecting battered immigrant women
- Helps women become involved in events and projects to change policies that harm them
- Provides a vehicle for working as equals with institutions and service providers
- Builds healthier and stronger families and communities by encouraging active, self-confident women leaders
- Provides a place to celebrate individual and collective accomplishments.

The women who participate in this project need never have played a formal “leadership” role, but they must have experience with domestic violence and be committed to helping other battered immigrant women. The group may include some immigrant women who work for domestic violence programs or other related service institutions, but organizations of professional women and women without experience in domestic violence may not serve as good advocates for poor and undocumented immigrant women. Similarly, do not rely on the few immigrant women who already serve in leadership roles; they may already be busy advocating for the rights of immigrants or women or both. The point of this project is to develop *new* leadership.

Include women in support groups for survivors. Survivors still receiving some services from domestic violence programs are good potential leaders because of their experience, knowledge, and understanding.

In many places, immigrant women have joined together to share their experiences, assert their rights, learn new skills, or develop work and childcare options. Women in such grassroots groups may be interested in participating in the project. To find battered immigrant women, ask the following questions:

- What agencies and organizations are likely to have encountered battered immigrant women?
- What and where are the immigrant communities in your area?
- Has any outreach or collaboration with these communities already taken place on domestic violence or other issues?
- Are there outreach materials on domestic violence in languages appropriate to the immigrant communities you seek to reach?
- Have you placed these materials in strategic and accessible places where immigrant women can find them?

Organizations that may (and should) work with immigrant women and may be interested in joining the group include:

- Domestic violence shelters and other domestic violence organizations

- Immigrant cultural organizations
- Immigration legal service organizations
- Day laborer groups
- English as a Second Language programs
- Health care centers and outreach programs
- Religious institutions that serve immigrant communities
- Family-based services, such as Head Start
- Public benefits agencies
- Other agencies that work with immigrants or migrant workers in your area.

Risks of Involvement

Although it is best if the women involved in the project are survivors of domestic violence, they need not have yet escaped the violence. Remember, however, that becoming involved in this work may put such women at additional risk, and place at risk other women in the project. Significant considerations in the risk assessment include the woman's approach to dealing with abuse and how violent and dangerous the abuser is. The women must understand the risks before agreeing to participate.

These organizations also may be interested in participating in the forum. You may encounter resistance and distrust from these organizations. Explain how this project can benefit their communities, as well as the women who participate.

Keeping It Simple

Try to keep groups to around 25 women, and focus on women who speak a common language and share some common culture. Start simple and use your initial success to spur leadership development projects in other communities of immigrant women.

Creating Supportive Meetings and Unifying the Group

“Participating in the group helped me turn inaction into action. It made me part of the solution to my problems.”

Building the group's cohesion, unity, and confidence are primary objectives in the meetings early on. Creating an inviting atmosphere is an important first step.

Make meetings as accessible as possible by

- Conducting all meetings in the women's first language
- Helping women find transportation to the meetings
- Scheduling convenient meeting times
- Providing free, on-site childcare and food to accommodate women who work several jobs.

Encourage an environment in which participants

- Feel welcome, supported, and encouraged by other women like themselves
- Know that their children are welcome and that childcare will be provided
- Trust that they can talk freely and in confidence
- Develop skills that they have identified as ones they wish to learn
- Find the information they receive from the group useful and accurate.

For the first group meetings, you may wish to discuss common fears and concerns, barriers facing immigrant women who suffer domestic violence, and the benefits of working together. To promote conversation, prior to the meeting ask two or three of the women to share their experiences with the whole group. This will encourage others to discuss their own stories.

Since this may be the first time the women share their experiences, make it clear that this is a safe, confidential environment and that no one should be ashamed or feel "stupid" for saying or feeling anything. The understanding and support women will receive from the group help develop self-esteem.

Children who are old enough may wish to attend the meetings, since they also have experienced the effects of domestic violence. They are our future leaders.

"Know Your Rights" Training

Will a battered immigrant woman or her children be deported if she leaves her abuser? Explaining basic legal rights at a meeting gives women the knowledge and tools to assert their rights and resist their abusers' intimidation and manipulation. See Resources in the Appendix section for organizations that can provide training materials and immigration law expert referrals in your area.

Contributing to the Group

Many of the women may ask, especially when they first join the group, how they can help others and the group as a whole. Discuss and reinforce all of the skills women can contribute to the group:

- Make phone calls to invite or remind members about meetings

- Help other members find transportation to meetings and events
- Send out mailings
- Provide child care
- Keep notes at meetings
- Help develop outreach pieces
- Tell their stories to others
- Act in a “know your rights” skit (teatro)
- Involve other women and allies in the group’s efforts
- Meet with police, health care providers, shelter workers, and others to explain the needs of immigrant survivors of domestic violence
- Speak at community meetings and other settings where immigrant women may need information on their rights
- Work with the media to cover the group’s issues and projects.

Discussion Ideas

The common problems women experience in escaping abusive homes will be important ongoing topics of the group. The group should discuss the following issues:

- Leaving a violent home and gaining independence is a long and difficult process
- Leaving the abuser is not a requirement for participating in the group
- If someone isn’t ready to leave, how to try to stop the physical abuse
- The group’s support helps build and sustain a woman’s self-esteem and courage, whether she is ready to leave or not
- Even if they are not physically abused, children living in violent homes suffer emotional and psychological harm
- Family pressure and cultural issues, such as machismo and male dominance, may make breaking away difficult
- All religions condemn violence against women and children
- Freedom from violence is a fundamental human right

- Women are individuals (not just mothers and wives) with the strength and power to change their lives and the lives of their children.
- Learning about immigration rights is essential to overcome fears of deportation.

Identifying Issues and Transforming Them Into Skits (Teatros)

In their early meetings, the women should discuss and develop a list of problems. Using a questionnaire, preferably created with the help of some of the women, is an effective way to identify key issues. The women will use the issues they identify to prepare skits (teatros) for the service providers who attend the forum. They should do this well in advance of the forum, so they have time to identify and invite the system personnel and service providers involved in these issues. See the Appendix for a sample questionnaire.

The women in the El Paso and Iowa pilot projects identified problems common to all systems and services, including police, health care providers, and shelters:

- Lack of interpreters of the women's language, lack of materials in the women's language, and reliance on the English-speaking abuser or family members for information
- Disrespectful and discriminatory behavior toward immigrant women
- Lack of culturally competent programs and services
- Lack of understanding of the immigrant experience
- Ignorance or insensitivity to domestic violence issues, especially for undocumented women
- Cultural stereotyping about immigrants (Latinas) and domestic violence within the immigrant (Latin) culture
- Ignorance of battered immigrants' rights.

Problems specific to the kind of service, but apparently widespread, included:

- Unaffordable or unavailable health care and other essential services for poor, undocumented women and their children
- Police favoritism toward the batterer (or hear only "his side of the story"), especially if he is a citizen and English speaking.

Finally, problems endemic to being an immigrant with uncertain status included:

- Lack of awareness of their legal rights or of the services they could receive
- Fear of deportation if they access services or the civil and criminal justice systems.

Existing grassroots immigrant women's groups have found skits to be one of the best ways to communicate issues and to generate discussion. Based on true, simple stories, skits are a compelling way to raise myriad issues in a short period. Because the service providers are merely viewers, they are more likely to see the problems from an objective, "third party" perspective.

Targeting and Recruiting Service Providers

Strong alliance and partnership between service providers and immigrant women determine this project's success. Through discussion at the group meetings and preparing skits (teatros), the target service providers will become clear. Service providers to target include prosecutor and law enforcement personnel, domestic violence shelters and other domestic violence advocates, immigrants' rights advocates and legal service providers, health care centers, and health care department representatives. Personnel that have the power or the ability within the target agencies to change policies and practices must attend the forum. In addition to decision-makers, invite lead staff assigned to work with immigrant communities at these institutions. If they seem particularly interested, encourage them to become involved in the project earlier.

Think about inviting institutions and service providers connected to these agencies that could benefit from the forum's education and training. For instance, those who administer public benefits, those who provide housing, and criminal and civil justice system personnel in general may see many parallels to their work. You also may wish to invite funders and political policy makers to the forum.

Assess how previous experience with target service providers affects the outreach you will need to conduct to ensure they participate in the forum and in an ongoing partnership. Will they come to a meeting just because you asked, or must you convince them that it is in their interests to learn more about battered immigrants?

Remember the Goal

When you contact service providers, reinforce the project's goal: Breaking down the barriers facing battered immigrant women and improving services to them by empowering them to become leaders and advocates with whom the service providers can work in partnership.

Use Connections

Focus on your existing relationships with domestic violence service providers, legal service providers, health care providers, law enforcement personnel, and prosecutors in your area. Do you have any relationship with local officers of the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS)? If you don't, is there another organization or individual who does and who shares the goals of this project? If you or others have trained any of these service providers and system personnel in domestic violence or issues of concern to immigrants, or both, ask them if they would like to participate.

Use Your Allies

Who do you know with connections to the target service providers? These are your allies. They need not be high-level decision-makers to help identify who is in a position to affect the problems identified by the women and facilitate communication with these key actors. Involve your allies early on, so they understand the project's purpose and goals, and become invested in its success. They may help set up meetings or work with the women to train service provider personnel before the forum on issues affecting battered immigrants.

Work in Coalition

Organizations you contact may wish to participate in planning the project. Working in coalition strengthens the project's effectiveness, but each organization's role and responsibilities must be clear from the start. Identify, acknowledge, and meet the needs of the other organizations, as well as your own. Assess each organization's strengths, what they can contribute, and what is beyond their capacity.

Be straightforward about financial and political concerns and conflicts; fashion mechanisms for addressing them. Base the coalition on a foundation of honesty and trust. If individual or organizational self-interest becomes a problem, emphasize and remember the common goals.

Preparing for the Forum

Checking Logistics

In addition to helping the women prepare for the forum and targeting key service providers, make sure the group's timeline includes advance planning for all of the tasks listed below. When organizing food preparation and childcare, remember that the women participating in the forum should not provide these services. Training other immigrant women in these skills may be a project the group wishes to undertake.

Similarly, organizational staff should take primary responsibility for basic logistical tasks. The women should focus on learning leadership skills and developing self-confidence, not on licking stamps. Finally, make sure your budget incorporates adequate funds for each task.

- Space
 - Find a place large enough to accommodate the entire group (25 to 30 women plus 30 service providers), with separate spaces for breakout sessions and a large room for the children to play.
- Food
 - Plan dinner the evening before the forum, and breakfast and lunch both days.
- Audio/Visual Aids

- Order easels, markers, microphones, and videotaping equipment if you decide to videotape the forum. (Note that you must obtain the women's permission ahead of time for the taping, and ensure confidentiality in any of the tape's uses.)
- Interpretation
 - Order transmitters and microphones for simultaneous translation. (The entire forum should be in the women's first language, although parts of the service provider meeting may be in English.)
 - Line up translators with experience in simultaneous translation for the whole two-day period
- Ensuring Participation
 - Develop an invitation list based on the group's and allies' outreach efforts.
 - Send invitations early, with a response form to all the different participants.
 - If you do not receive a response from someone, send a reminder and call to follow-up.
- Media
 - Consult with the women about involving the media. Discuss, in turn, confidentiality concerns with the media.
- Childcare
 - Childcare, supervised by trained staff, must be available from dinner the first night until the end of the meeting on the second day.
 - Consider including art therapy in the children's program. Also make sure they can play outside, weather permitting.
- Facilitators for Small Group Discussions
 - Identify experienced facilitators and a facilitator trainer.
 - Set up a meeting to plan the small group discussions and train facilitators to run productive discussions.

The Forum

Leadership training for Immigrant Women: First Evening and Day One

Forum Agenda

Evening Before:

Dinner with the Women – Building Self-Esteem and Teamwork

Tracks: Breaking the Ice

Sharing Experiences

Introducing Skits (Teatros)

Day One:

Leadership Training: Developing Confidence and Cohesion

Morning Session

Tracks: Who Is a Leader?

Team Building

Break for Lunch

Afternoon Session

Tracks: Immigrants' Rights and Domestic Violence 101

Discussing the Target Issues and Preparing Skits (Teatros)

Day Two:

Meeting with Service Providers to Create a Partnership Model

Morning Session

Presenting Skits (Teatros) followed by Group Discussions

Break for Lunch

Afternoon Session

Small Group Discussions: Creating Commitments

Concluding Meeting

Goals

- Build confidence and cohesion as a self-identified group
- Develop trust and familiarity
- Solidify the women's understanding of leadership skills and of themselves as leaders

First Evening

The leadership training starts the first evening with a series of tracks designed to bring the group together. The women and the forum facilitators, including the national experts, participate as equals in this evening. All participants should identify themselves by name, not by organization. In El Paso and Iowa, women from Líderes Campesinas and Mujeres Unidas y Activas ran the evening session.

Track: Breaking the Ice

An effective track used in El Paso and Iowa is a “tree” on which each person in the room attaches a sticker with her country of origin and one good thing she thinks people say about her. Before attaching the sticker to the tree, each participant reads the positive statement. The women may be timid about speaking in front of the group, but should derive great satisfaction when the group recognizes them individually.

Track: Sharing Experiences

A few of the women may be willing to briefly relate how they left or are trying to leave abusive homes. The rest of the women hear their own experiences in these stories and applaud and support the speakers’ courage.

Track: Introducing Skits (Teatros)

A skit or two, acted out by experienced immigrant women leaders, demonstrates the usefulness of skits as an educational tool and the ability of anyone to act in a skit. For instance, depicting an abbreviated day in the life of a farmworker woman may raise issues of sexual harassment, workers’ rights, and domestic violence. Following the skit, the women who act in the skit ask the others questions about what they saw, showing how skits educate women about asserting their rights. Skits that are realitybased, reflecting the lives of the women, will be well received by the women, bringing both laughter and tears. The demonstration should help inspire them to participate in their own skits at the meetings with the service providers.

Morning Session

Women experienced in leadership training in grassroots groups should lead this part of the forum. Líderes Campesinas and Mujeres Unidas y Activas facilitated this session in El Paso and Iowa.

Leadership Lessons

- Everyone has the ability to be a leader
- Everyone has interior strength, inner potential, and talents to explore and develop
- Honesty, simplicity, authenticity, teaching, and delegating are all valuable leadership qualities
- Surviving domestic violence and leaving your abuser are acts of courage
- Developing leadership is a step-by-step process that takes time; we never stop working on it
- Helping one is helping many; like ripples in a pool, all those affected by that person benefit

- We are all only human; we need to take time for ourselves, as well as for others
- Let us use our strengths to build a team; the team keeps us together

Track: Who Is a Leader?

Facilitators may use this series of tracks to encourage the women to think of themselves as leaders. Key questions to help them identify leadership qualities include:

- What does it mean to be a leader?
- Who are leaders?
- What character traits do these leaders possess?

The facilitators ask two or three women from the group to think back to the first time they exhibited one of the leadership characteristics they identified, such as standing up for someone else or for themselves. They may take them as far back as their childhood to review many courageous acts, most of them unrecognized and unacknowledged by society. They point out that these are acts of leadership, that all the leaders they identified started the same way, and that, together, the women have hundreds of years of leadership experience.

“By working together, everyone gains confidence and loses fear, and when women gain confidence, lose fear, and assert their rights, they bring about change.”

Track 2: Team Building

A series of questions and answers helps raise the importance of team building and how to do it effectively. Here are some sample questions and answers to create discussion.

Q: What brings about change?

A: The power of women working together.

Q: Why should we work together?

A: To hear each other, to help each other, to bring about change, to share our talents, to learn from each other, to educate ourselves about our rights, to make things better for others, such as our children.

Q: What are the obstacles?

A: Fear, men who do not respect us, and embarrassment about speaking or putting ourselves forward.

Q: What strategies should we use to organize ourselves?

A: Dialogue, the courage to keep moving ahead, allowing the process to take time, and finding people who can help us.

Q: How do we work together?

A: Like a marimba band, we share our talents. You don't have to have a school or university degree to have talents and strength.

Q: Who is an ally?

A: Someone with common concerns, with whom we can work on the same goal.

Q: Why is it important to find allies?

A: To learn more about others, to be heard by others, to gain help, to give help, and to grow.

Afternoon Session

Track: Domestic Violence 101 and Immigrants' Rights

The group breaks into two parallel training tracks: one on domestic violence and one on the rights of immigrants and immigrant survivors of domestic violence. A domestic violence advocate may work with some of the women to present the domestic violence 101 workshop. Materials used in the training included the "Power and Control Wheel" specific to battered immigrant women's issues. Refer to Appendix section for a copy of this document. An expert in immigration law relating to battered immigrants must run the immigration workshop. The national organizations involved in the project, or those listed in Resources in Appendix section, may help with these workshops or refer you to local experts who can help.

Track: Discussing Target Issues and Preparing Skits (Teatros)

Day One: Experiences From El Paso and Iowa

By the end of the first day, the women identified themselves as a group and demonstrated this unity by organizing aspects of the event on their own. For instance, in Iowa, the women developed a song and presentation, which they presented to everyone at the end of the forum. In El Paso, the women created a quilt composed of pieces on which each participant, including the service providers, had inscribed a phrase.

Women break into small groups to discuss specific system problems they identified before the forum. An important part of this process is for the women to "report back" to the group on the list of issues they developed for their issue area. Before the end of the day, the groups reconvene to prepare and practice skits on those issues to present to service providers the next day.

Providing sample skits based on issues previously identified will help organize this discussion, even if the women decide to modify the samples. (The Appendix section has some sample skits.) Encourage every woman to take a role in a skit. Not all need be actors; some can give an introduction “setting the scene,” or translate what the actors are saying. Allocate at least an hour to practicing. This track helps bond the women together, gives them an opportunity to influence the content of the meeting with the service providers, and helps build a sense of group cohesion and purpose.

Here are some examples of skits used in Iowa and El Paso (*italics indicate targeted service providers*):

- A battered immigrant woman going to the hospital (with her abuser) because of her injuries (*doctors and other health care workers*)
- Her attempt to find safety for herself and her children at a local domestic violence shelter and the problems she encounters with shelter policies (*shelter workers*)
- The barriers and attitudes battered immigrants encounter when the police are called in to investigate a domestic violence incident (police)

In Iowa, a fourth skit focused on problems with accessing public benefits.

Service Providers Meeting: Day Two

Goals

- Begin a new partnership and dialogue in which the service providers treat the women as equals
- Allow both sides to meet and make personal connections
- Teach service providers about problems battered immigrant women encounter when they attempt to access their services
- Identify specific problems and develop plans for fixing them
- Establish an external identity for the women’s group, recognized by service providers as composed of advocates, resources, and leaders
- Leave with task lists and plans for further collaboration.

Tips to Preparing Skits (Teatros)

Women may be nervous at first, but will quickly rise to the challenge as they make suggestions, adapt the skits to reflect their experiences, and immerse themselves in acting out the various parts. If the service providers know the skits are realistic portrayals of common experiences, they cannot dismiss them as exceptions or exaggerations. Here are some points to remember when preparing the skits.

- Skits should reflect the women’s experiences

- They should neither inflate nor downplay the problems
- Immigrant women should act out all the parts; no organizational staff, service providers, or system personnel should play a role
- The women should create the skits ahead of time or adapt a sample skit.

Morning Session: Presenting Skits (Teatros)

The morning session should follow, as closely as possible, the following plan:

- The forum's sponsors introduce the session's participants
- Facilitators of the leadership training preface the skits, explaining that the intent is not to affront, but to assist in communicating clearly
- The women present their skits
- Following each skit, two experts facilitate a discussion of the problems raised in the skit, encouraging the women to participate fully and forcefully.

During the discussion, the facilitators

- Underline general points about the problems raised
- Ensure that participants discuss all of the important points
- Highlight and reinforce how the women may work with the service providers to fix problems
- Encourage the women to speak for themselves
- Help service providers and the women feel more comfortable speaking to each other as equals
- Encourage them to share their individual frustrations with existing problems and their visions for how they can work together as allies
- Encourage service providers to be candid about the barriers and frustrations they face, and to acknowledge the women's experiences.

These acknowledgements are important: Usually ignored or treated as inferior, the women's perspectives receive unprecedented respect and attention. Participating as equals in the discussion is empowering.

“The skits present real stories in a simple way. They raise the issues of concern to battered immigrant women and illustrate why they need the service providers' help.”

Lunch

The women and service providers eat lunch together, informally discussing the concerns raised in the morning.

Afternoon Session: Creating Commitments

The afternoon focuses on solidifying discussions from the morning sessions into action plans. During this session, the women and service providers break into small groups organized by issue. The objective is for each group to identify a specific problem and develop a concrete plan for addressing the problem. The rest of the afternoon, the groups focus on solidifying these discussions into action plans. Each participant should leave with a commitment to implementing the plan. Experienced facilitators must run these discussions, and should not play other key roles in the forum, nor should they take on tasks arising out of the discussions. Facilitators should meet before the forum to discuss how to ensure each group stays focused, articulates a plan, and assigns specific tasks.

This was the first time many of the service providers had heard women speaking for themselves. For many, it seemed to be the first time they had heard the system did not work well for immigrant women and, more importantly, why it didn't work. Inspired and motivated by the women's courage and dedication, the service providers were eager to engage them in conversation. By the end of the day, most of them viewed the women as useful sources of information and as resources for fixing the problems.

For instance, in both El Paso and Iowa, the police apologized for the disrespect and lack of understanding the women had experienced from fellow police officers. They asked the women to participate in training police about the experience and barriers affecting battered immigrant women.

Conversely, it was the first time many of the women had heard how the system was supposed to work and that the service providers were committed to fixing problems, but faced bureaucratic obstacles. All of this occurred in a positive, non-antagonistic atmosphere, proving that putting real faces on issues greatly improves communication.

Some of the outcomes are hard to measure, but they are extremely important:

- Service providers gain respect for immigrant women
- The women come to trust the service providers more
- Fear, lack of self-confidence, and other barriers to communicating break down
- Stereotypes about "immigrant women" and "bureaucrats" dissipate

- Service providers and women build the bridge between community and service provision.

Organizing the Small Groups

Assign participants to groups by topic, each group focusing on specific problems, developing appropriate responses, and creating an ongoing working group on its issue.

Assign system personnel and providers by their area of expertise, e.g., health care to health care table, shelters to shelter access, police and law enforcement (and INS, if involved) to police, etc. Allow the women to choose which topic interests them (they probably will stay with their skit's topic). If the participants are from multiple cities, organize the groups by region.

Sample Commitments

Here are some of the commitments service providers made at the forums in Iowa and El Paso:

Community Education and Training

- Develop workshops and staff training on issues related to culture, immigration, and domestic violence
- Invite women from the group to speak at trainings and workshops and to help design agency policies regarding access
- Develop trainings and outreach campaigns for community members regarding their legal rights, domestic violence, and services available to them
- Create a videotape that features personal stories from survivors and use it as an educational resource for providers
- Design diversity training for law enforcement personnel and new recruits that incorporates women's personal testimony.

Alliance Building

- Develop or expand partnerships with clergy and other allies/advocates
- Meet with defense attorneys, judges, and district attorneys regarding issues related to deportation, interpretation, and cultural sensitivity
- Meet with INS officials to build trust and create ongoing dialogue
- Create a plan for networking and connecting with the women's group: meet regularly for cross training, accountability check, and ongoing planning and problem solving
- Introduce the women to high-level staff and decision makers

- Become better listeners, be more patient, become better allies to the community.

Improve Advocacy

- Create a policy against using children and family members as interpreters
- Interview women separate from husband/partner (police, health, social services, district attorney, etc.)
- Document and report all incidents of mistreatment or illegal treatment to a trusted superior
- Review intake protocol at agencies regarding questions of status, etc; translate forms
- Ask women from the group to accompany witnesses and victims to court.

Improve Accessibility

- Translate informational and resource materials into Spanish
- Identify, recruit, and create stipends for Spanish-speaking volunteers
- Seek funding for more bilingual interpreters during all shifts
- Ensure that shelter has culturally competent staff and services and is prepared for and accessible/welcoming to non-English speaking women and children
- Consciously address the needs of battered immigrant women in all program planning and design
- Find money to fund ongoing liaison and outreach positions.

Next Steps

Sustaining the Group, capitalizing on Commitments, and Focusing on Growth

Concrete goals arising from the forum provide an immediate focus the group may pursue, and each woman should have a role or task in a specific project. Building the group's strengths and identity will be a high priority. Some steps necessary to maintain the momentum of the group may include:

- Maintaining contact with all the service providers who attended the forum
- Following up with service providers to ensure they are pursuing their assignments
- Monitoring and enforcing the commitments made at the forum
- Continuing outreach to build the group and its allies

- Finding financial support for both the group and for individual women who wish to work as advocates for battered immigrant women: neither the group nor the women should depend solely on volunteer labor
- Starting to transfer the coordinator's tasks to women in the group
- Increasing leadership skills while pursuing discrete system change goals
- Avoiding lapsing into a service provider model
- Developing a plan with numerous interim steps to chart the group's progress and to provide a sense of accomplishment as the group completes tasks
- Incorporating ongoing evaluations into regular meetings to determine the group's ongoing priorities and work plan
- Educating itself about the history of social change efforts and the work of other groups.

Building Skills

Here are some skills the group may wish to discuss and learn:

Organizing Skills

- Facilitating/running meetings
- Developing a meeting agenda
- Taking notes, learning to summarize and identifying key issues
- Planning and coordinating an event
- Organizing short and long-term projects: identifying targets, establishing and implementing discrete tasks and interim objectives.

Advocacy Skills

- Learning to channel anger and frustration into action
- Advocating for other women with service providers
- Developing and presenting a skit
- Teaching and training other women
- Negotiating, meeting with agencies and officials
- Advocating and organizing for legislative and policy change

- Working with the media.

Organizational Development

- Developing a mission statement
- Representing the group in coalitions
- Building and establishing group recognition and credibility
- Working with partner and sponsoring organizations
- Building an effective group decision-making structure
- Recruiting, retaining, and involving members
- Learning to do effective grassroots fundraising.

Conclusion

The pilot projects in El Paso and Iowa show how productive this project can be for everyone involved. This manual should motivate you to start a similar project in your area. The women's strength, courage, and wisdom will be both inspiring and sustaining. If the women succeed in becoming leaders respected by service providers and the immigrant community, the project will have made a significant contribution to eliminating the discrimination and violence so many immigrant women suffer.

National Resources for Technical Assistance

The National Network on Behalf of Battered Immigrant Women

The National Network on Behalf of Battered Immigrant Women, founded in 1993 co-chaired by FVPPF, IWPNOW and NIPNLG, is a national coalition of domestic violence agencies, battered immigrant women's groups, and immigrants' rights organizations. Consider joining the National Network to work to empower battered immigrant women to speak for themselves, and thereby change policies, practices, and attitudes that harm them. Contact FVPPF, IWPNOW or NIPNLG to join the Network.

Technical Assistance

The Family Violence Prevention Fund (FVPPF), the Immigrant Women Program of NOW Legal Defense (IWPNOW), and the National Immigration Project of the National Lawyers Guild (NIPNLG) all provide technical assistance, with each focusing on its areas of expertise. FVPPF: domestic violence in immigrant communities, community-based organizing on the special needs of battered immigrant women, culturally sensitive services. IWPNOW: family law and protection

orders, shelter access, access to welfare, and basic VAWA immigration advice. NIPNLG: access to immigration status. FVPF and IWPNOW also have brochures for battered immigrants in many languages.

Contact Information

Family Violence Prevention Fund, 383 Rhode Island St., Ste. 304, San Francisco, CA 94103; Publications: phone (415) 252-8089, email ordering@fvpf.org or check the website: www.fvpf.org. [FVPF is now Futures Without Violence <http://www.futureswithoutviolence.org/>; email info@futureswithoutviolence.org [mailto:info@futureswithoutviolence.org]] Technical assistance (Leni Marin): phone: (415) 252-8900, ext.16; fax: 415-626-8651; email: leni@fvpf.org.

Immigrant Women's Project of NOW Legal Defense and Education Fund, 110 Maryland Ave., N.E., Ste. 311, Washington, D.C. 20002. For both publications and technical assistance (Leslye Orloff & Janice Kaguyutan): phone: 202-546-1100; fax: 202-546-3850; email: immwomenpro@aol.com [mailto:immwomenpro@aol.com].

National Immigration Project of the National Lawyers Guild, 14 Beacon St., Ste. 602, Boston, MA 02108. For publications, phone: 617-227-9727 ext. 3, email: nip@nlg.org, or check the website: www.nlg.org [<http://www.nlg.org>] under "National Immigration Project (domestic violence)." Technical assistance (Gail Pendleton): phone: 617-227-9727 ext. 2; fax: 617-227-5495; email: nipgail@nlg.org [mailto:nipgail@nlg.org].

Publications

For Domestic Violence Service Providers

Battered Immigrant Women Legislation Information, IWPNOW. Free.

Domestic Violence in Immigrant and Refugee Communities: Asserting the Rights of Battered Women, 2d Ed., Jang, Marin and Pendleton, eds., FVPF, the Northern California Coalition for Immigrant Rights and the NIPNLG (1997).\$75.00, order from FVPF.

Introductory Material on Serving Battered Immigrants, IWPNOW. \$5.

Somewhere to Turn: Making Domestic Violence Services Accessible to Battered Immigrants: A "How to Manual" for Advocates and Service Providers, IWPNOW. \$30.

Working with Battered Immigrant Women: A Handbook to Make Services Accessible, Volpp, Marin ed., FVPF. \$8.00, English and Spanish.

You Have the Right to be Free from Violence: Questions and Answers for Immigrant and Refugee Women, available in English, Spanish, Russian, Tagalog, Vietnamese, Chinese, Korean, and Arabic. \$5.00 for 50 copies, FVPF.

Caught at a Public Policy Crossroads: The Impact of Welfare Reform on Battered Immigrant Women, Goldfarb, Wadhwani, ed., FVPPF. (1997).

For Judges and Law Enforcement Personnel

Cultural Considerations in Domestic Violence Cases: A National Judges Benchbook, Ramos & Runner, FVPPF (1999). \$47.00.

Domestic Violence and Immigration in the Criminal Justice System, Maher & Pendleton, American Bar Association Commission on Domestic Violence (1999). For cost and to order, call (202)662-1737.

Working with Battered Immigrant Women: A Guide for Prosecutors, Breall & Adler (Volcano Press, 2000). For cost and to order, call Ruth Gottstein at (209)296-3445.

For Attorneys, Advocates and Service Providers Helping with VAWA Immigration Applications

Resources on New Rights for Battered Immigrants (training materials), NIPNLG. \$16 (basic packet).

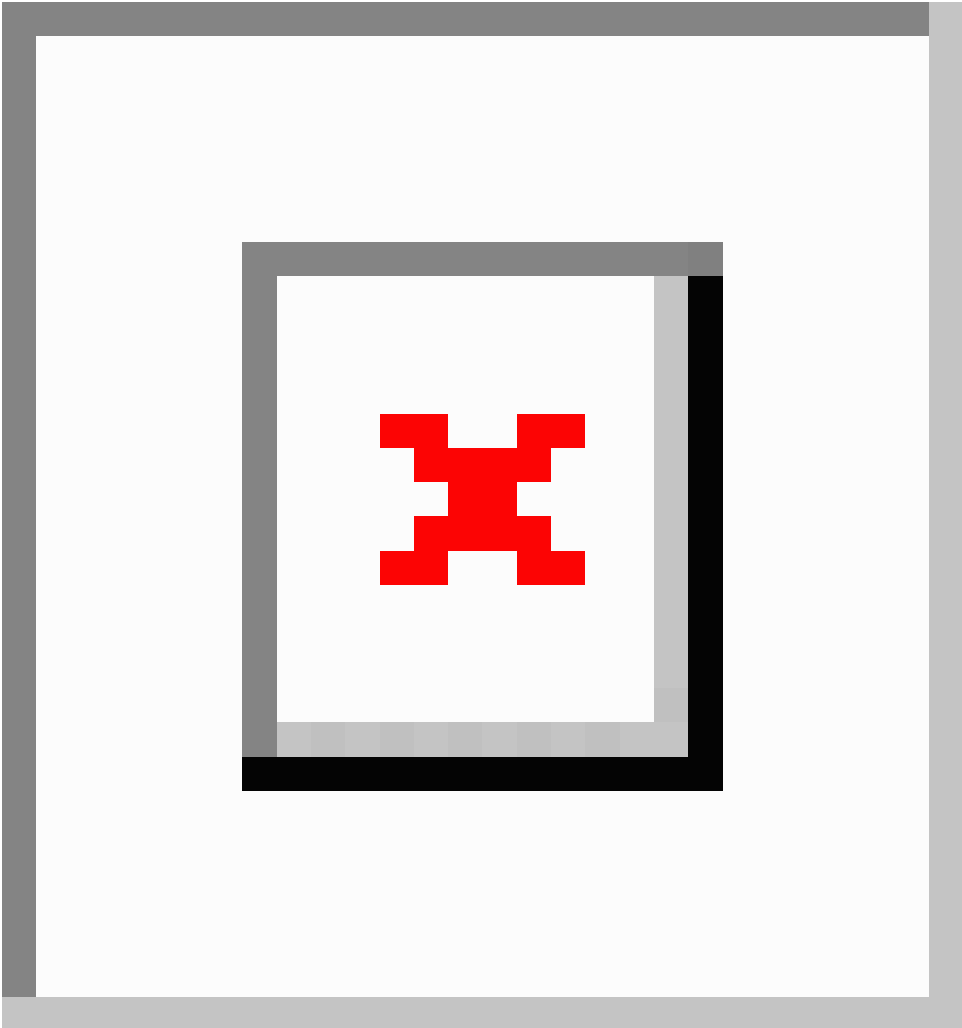
Helping Grassroots Immigrant Women Organize

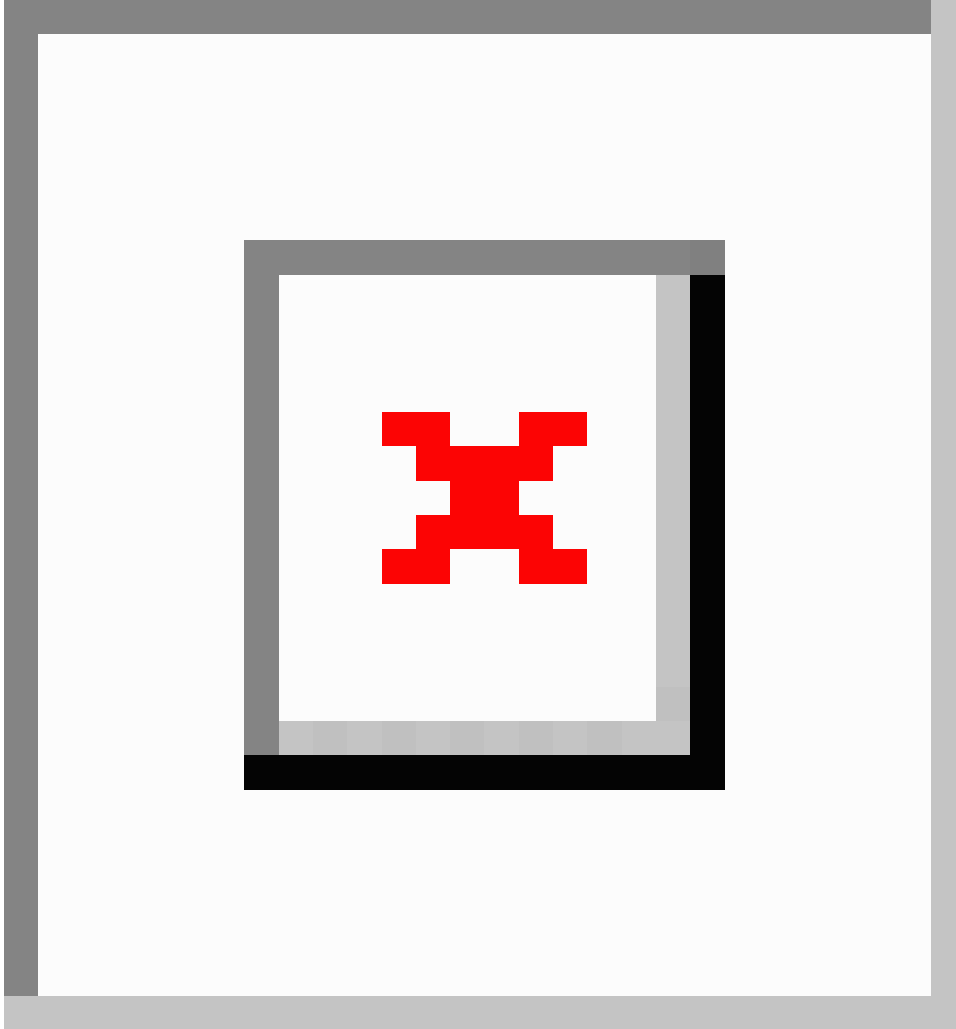
Migrant Clinicians Network & Líderes Campesinas, Training on Domestic Violence/Entrenamiento sobre la violencia domestica (1998). For cost and to order, call (512)327-2017.

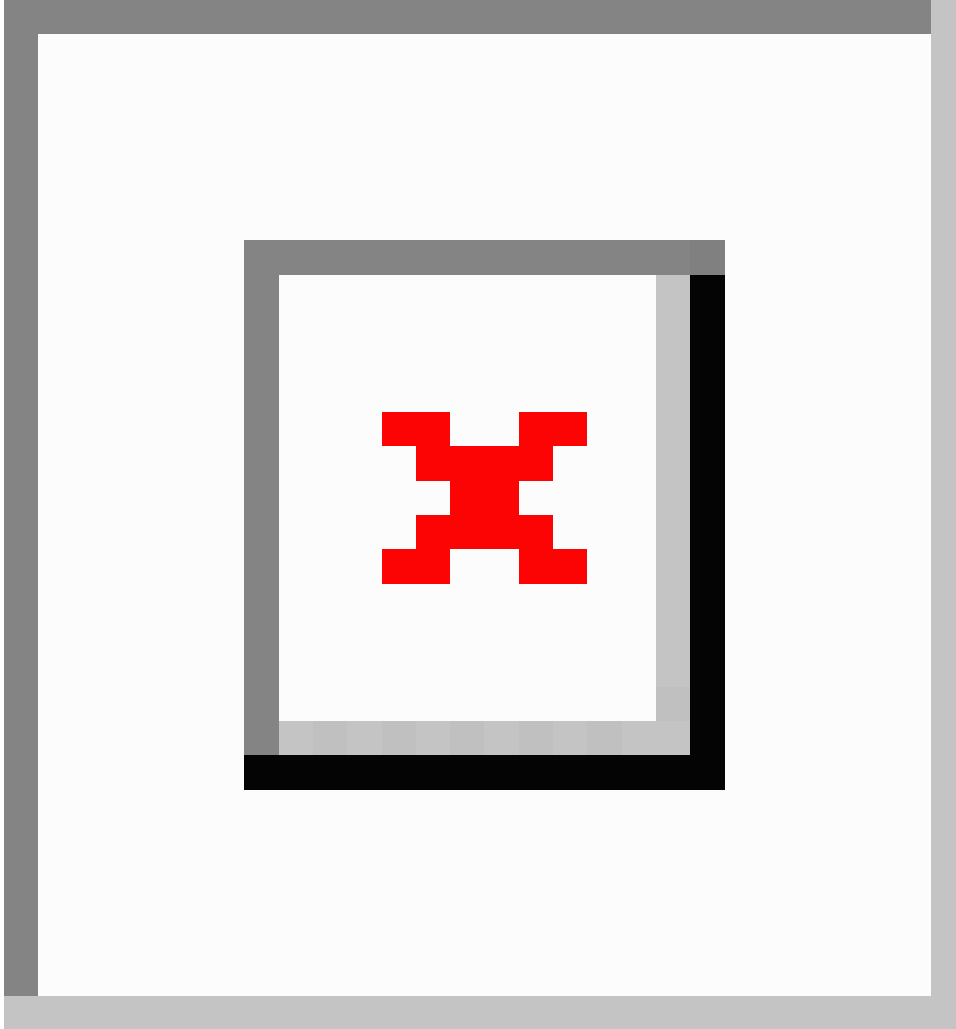
Mujeres Unidas y Activas, Comenzando a Volar/Taking Flight: Latina Immigrant Women Organizing for a Better Future (August, 1999). For cost and to order, call (415)243-8215.

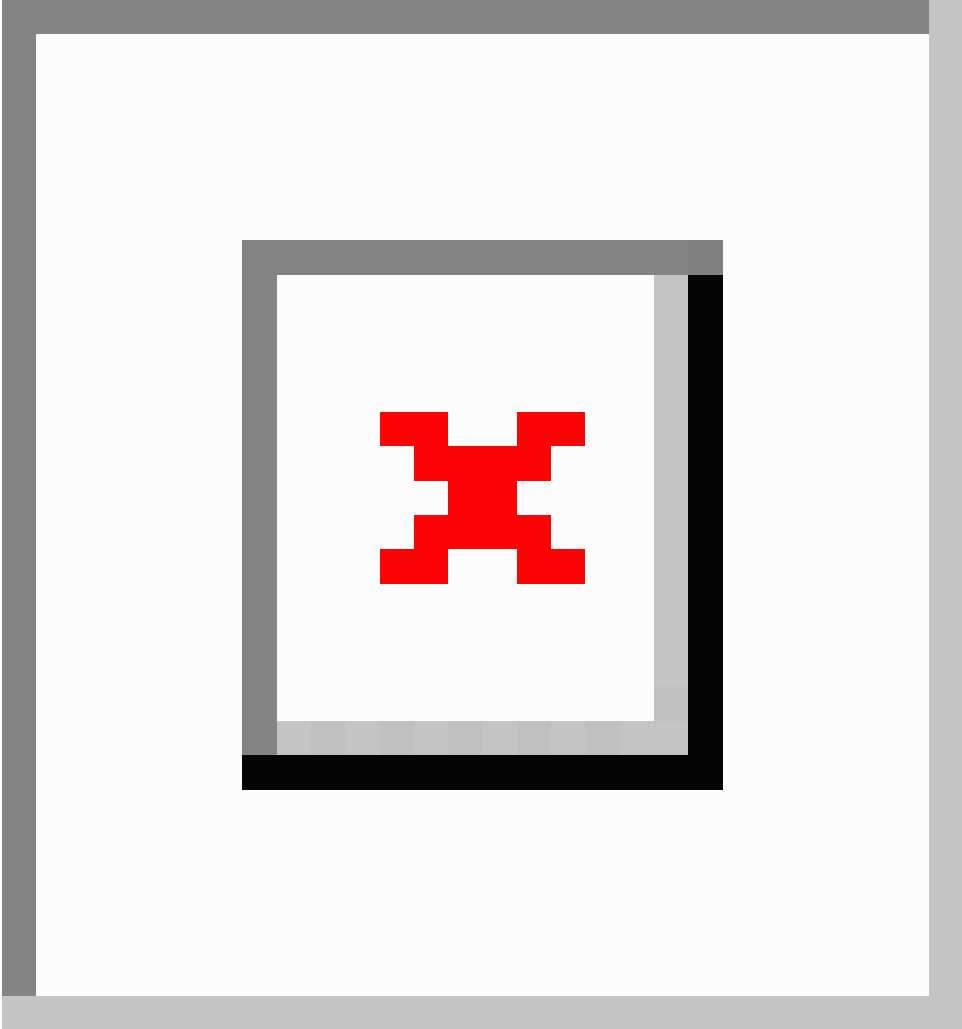
Appendix

Sample Agenda

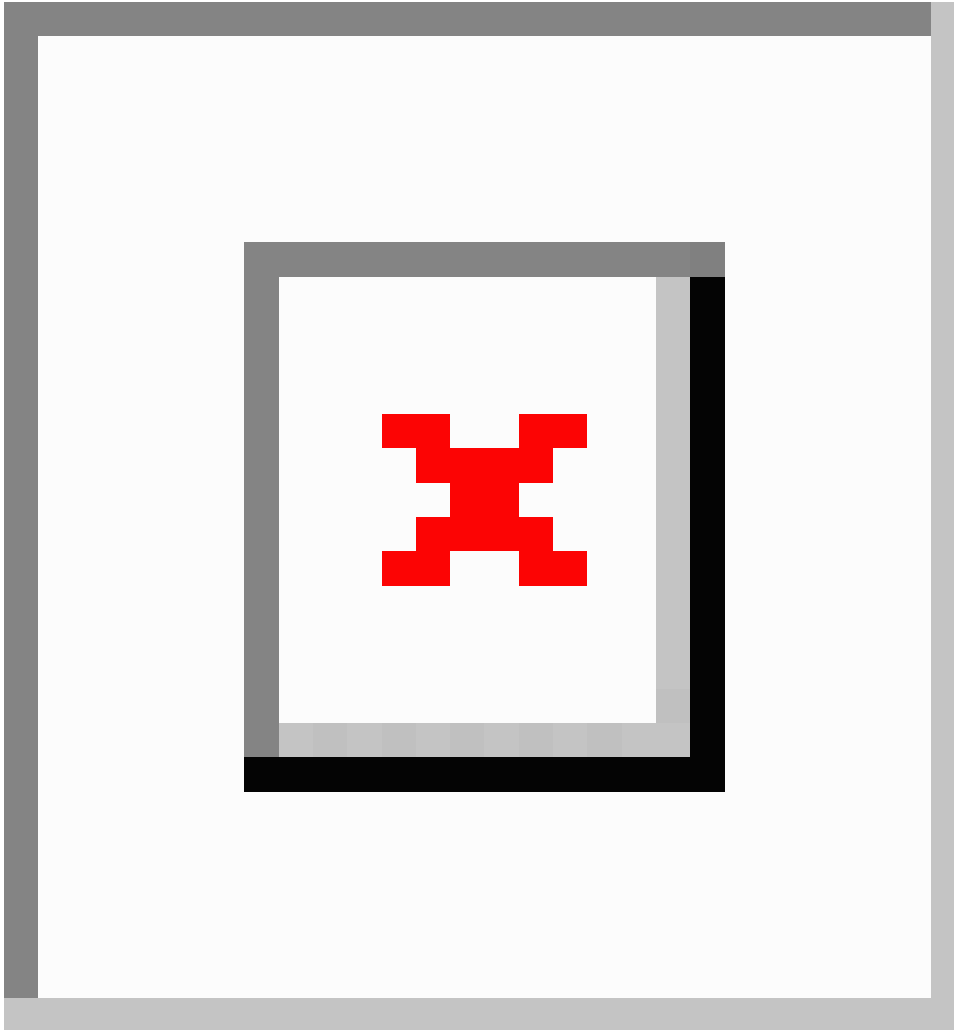


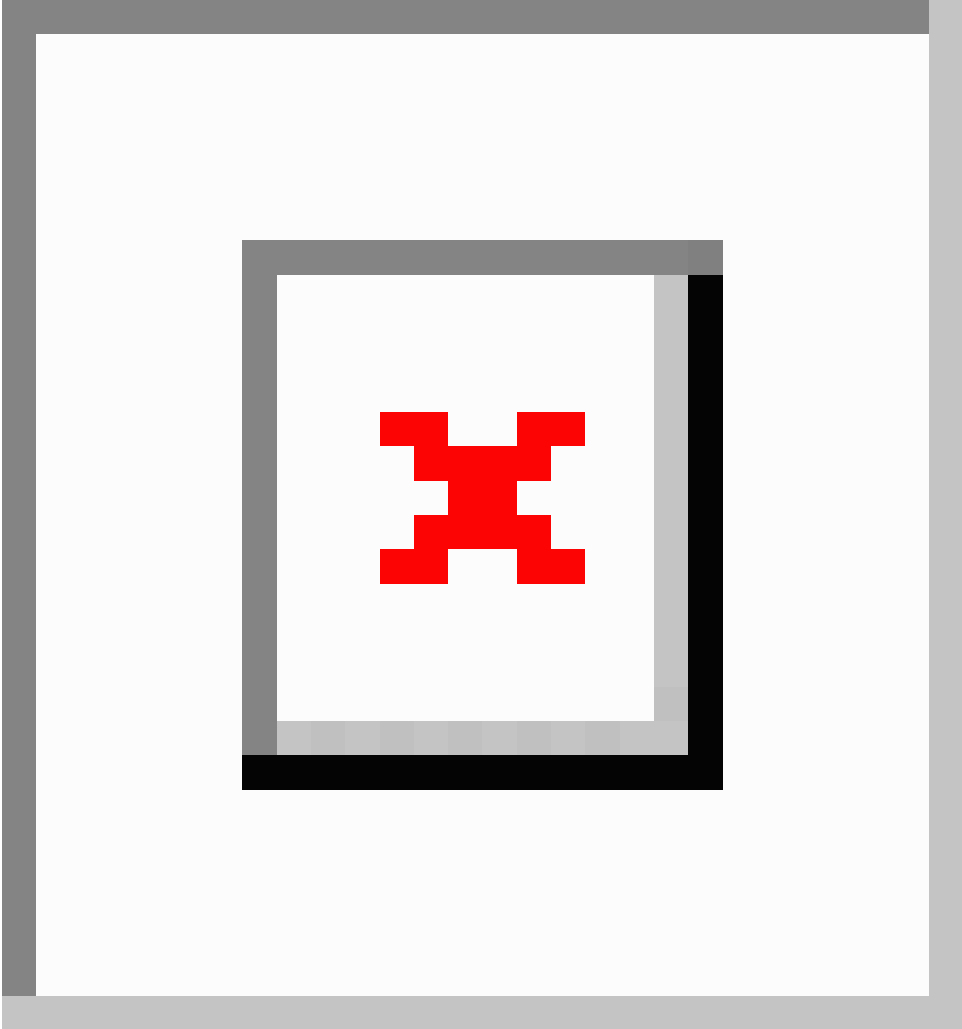


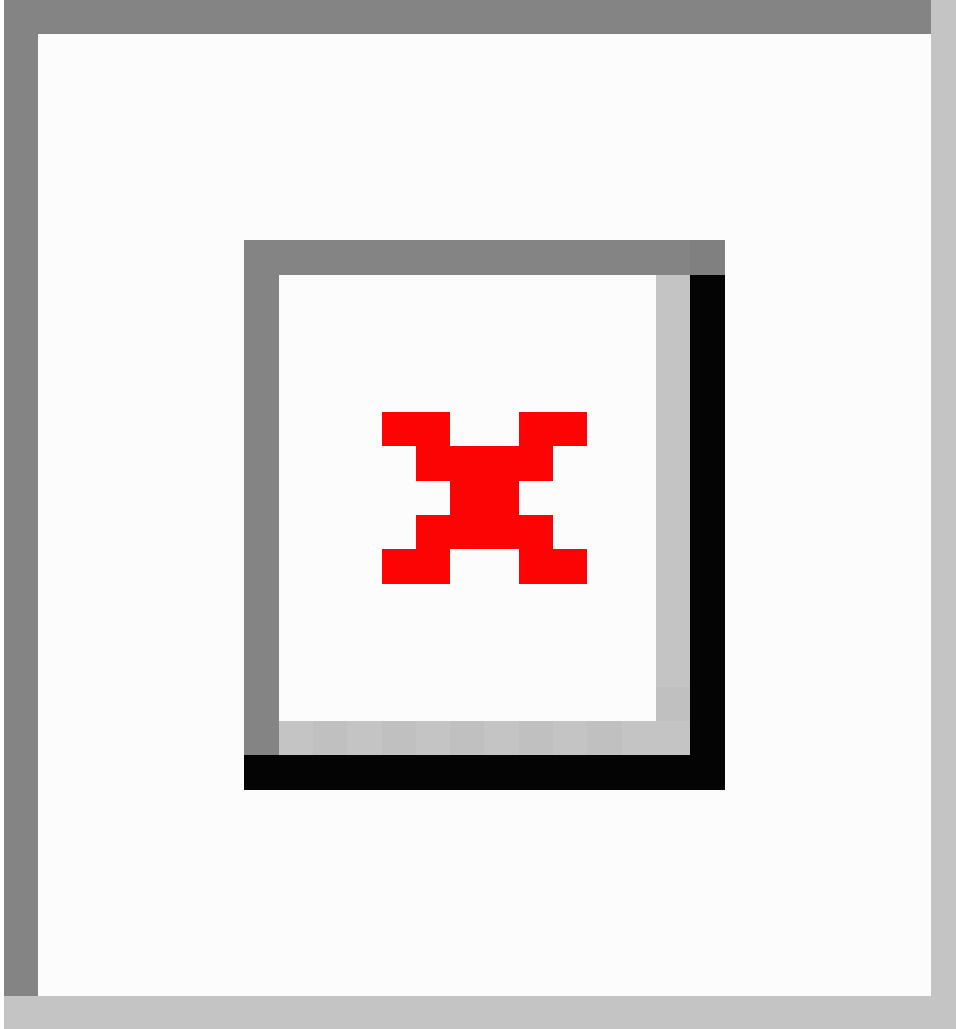


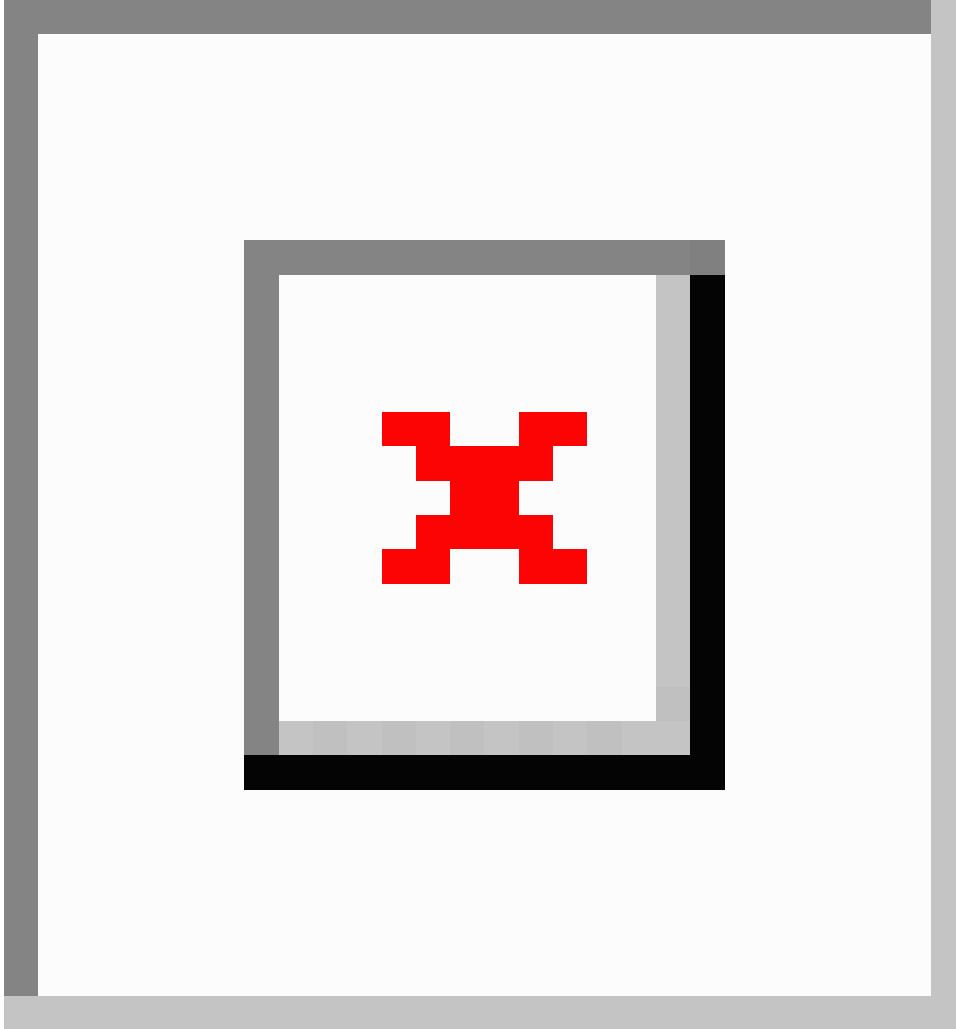


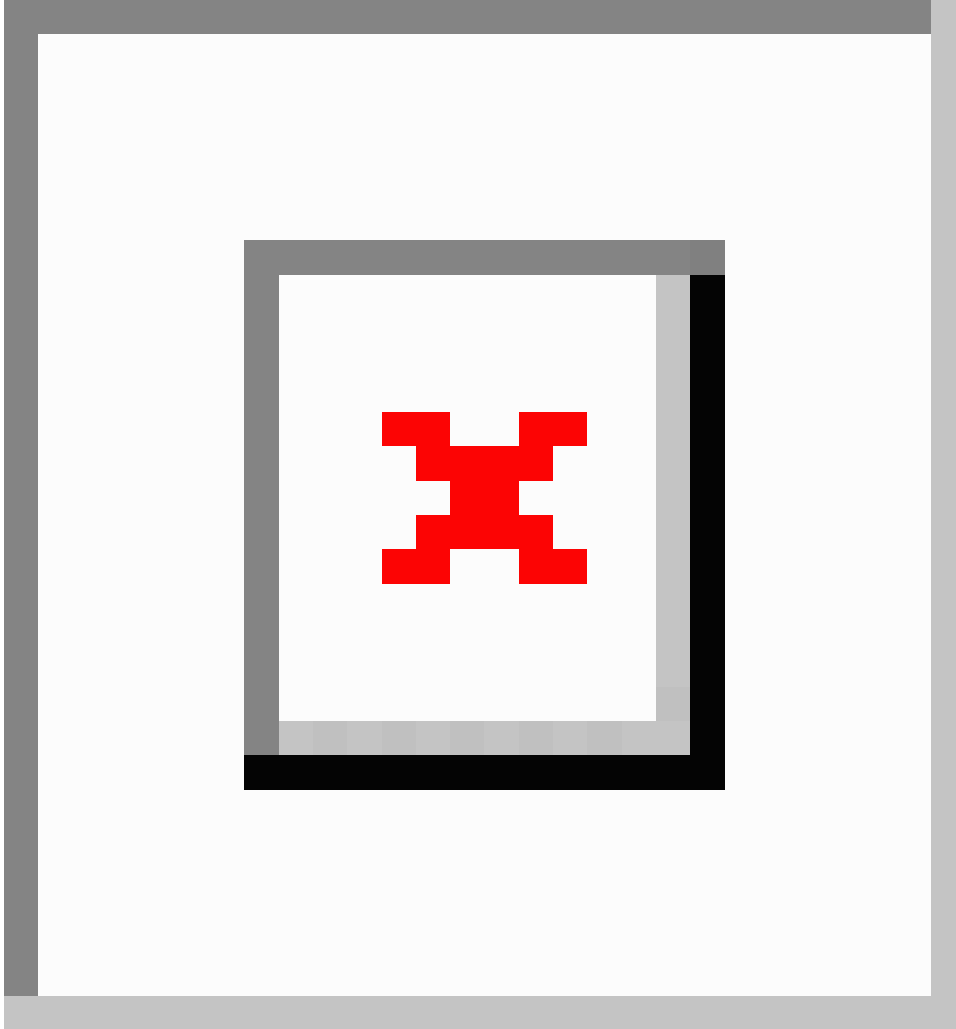
Sample Skits

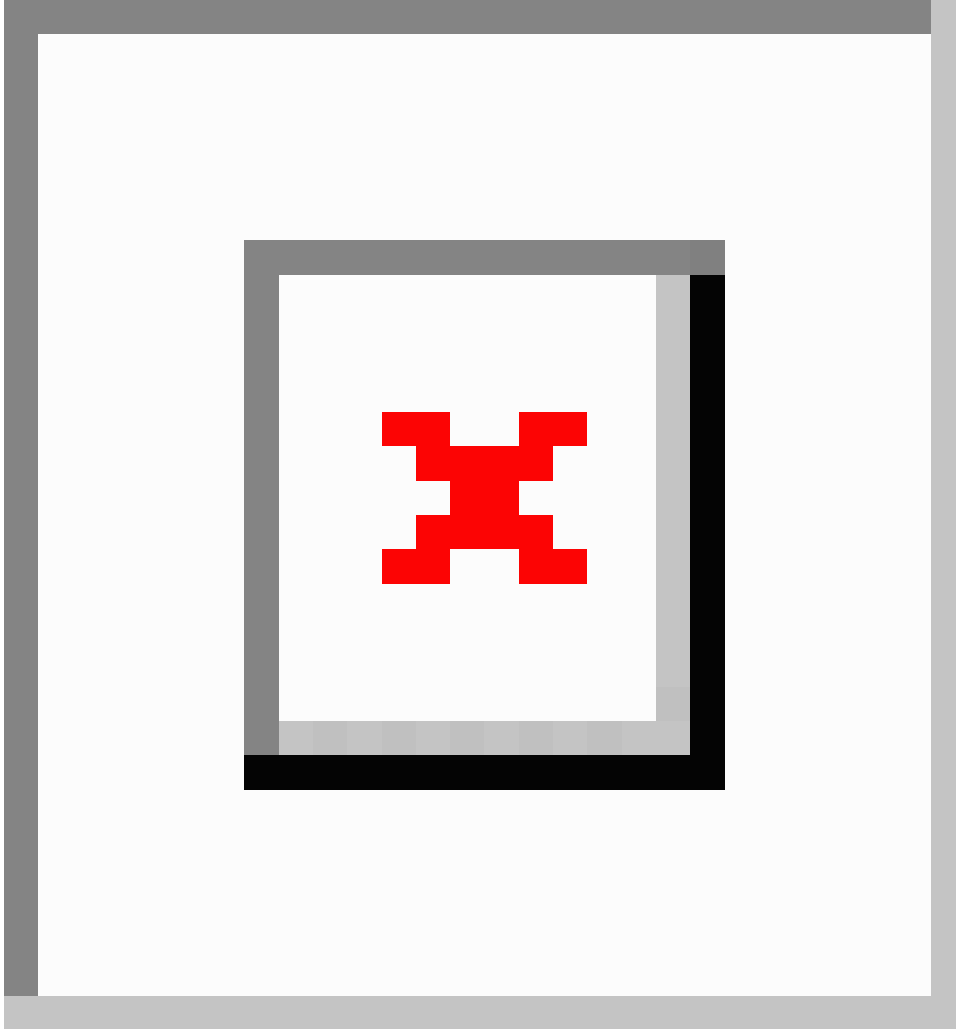












Power and Control Wheel

Sample Budget for the Forum

