SOPHIA Chapter Handbook

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I. Introductory Message from SOPHIA's National Leadership

Thanks for your interest in SOPHIA! Our organization believes that philosophy can offer a lot to public discourse. We therefore strive not only to show philosophy's usefulness but to build relationships between the academy, its scholars, and local communities. We believe that there are too few public occasions for engaging in enriching philosophical dialogue today. SOPHIA therefore aims to build communities of philosophical conversation and we welcome you to join us in pursuing this mission.

SOPHIA chapters are a key to our efforts. In general, chapters are tasked with helping communities cultivate philosophical habits by working with and seeking to understand a community's needs and concerns. This handbook is designed and written with an eye towards two main groups. First, it is written for those interested in starting a SOPHIA chapter. If this applies to you, our handbook should outline a SOPHIA chapter's ins-and-outs and show you how a chapter can support your local community. SOPHIA, among other things, believes that philosophy is relevant to everyday life and a chapter's primary objective is to enrich local social climates by creating, building, and supporting communities of philosophical conversation.

Second, this handbook is for existing chapters looking for guidance on issues related to regular meetings, a chapter's organizational structure, chapter finances, and more. If this applies to you, our handbook should give you the resources to move forward in your relationship with SOPHIA's national leadership and provide you with a general path for sustaining a successful chapter.

SOPHIA's national leadership is committed to supporting and growing local chapters. We believe that successful chapters hold regular meetings, create partnerships and collaborations within the local community, and become a philosophical resource to their community. Regular meetings are important because they cultivate strong bonds of solidarity among participants, allow for partnerships to grow, and position the chapter as a positive influence on the local community.

It is our vision to support multiple chapters of SOPHIA that meet to inquire philosophically into local and current issues. Through the support of the national SOPHIA leadership, we want to extend philosophy beyond the academy and actively recruit chapter leaders and members. We thank you for taking the time to further explore SOPHIA and the opportunities our organization has to offer.

Warmly,

Dr. John Lachs, Chairman
SOPHIA Board of Trustees
Centennial Professor of Philosophy
Vanderbilt University

II. What is SOPHIA?

Our Origins: The Society of Philosophers in America (SOPHIA) was founded in 1983 to promote philosophical education in the academy and wider culture. There were several different but related conditions that motivated the group's formation. The first was a shared feeling of frustration about the adversarial ways in which institutionalized philosophy was practiced in higher education. Another was the perceived need for the philosophical discipline to engage with matters important for people's lives. As these factors converged, it became clear that the first motive was inwardly focused on reshaping the academic culture surrounding philosophy's relationship to public space. The second motive was outwardly focused on increasing the public's perceived value of philosophy. The SOPHIA of today is built with both of these goals in mind.

SOPHIA follows the examples of past leaders, including John Smith, Jack Loughney, and Bruce Wilshire, as well as of our current Chairman of the Board of Trustees, John Lachs of Vanderbilt University. These individuals were among the leaders of a movement concerned about the distance philosophy had traveled away from accessible and inviting conversations that matter to the public. As Lachs explains: "The success of [SOPHIA's conversational] approach surprised us and enriched our philosophical work." SOPHIA continues to believe in the potential for philosophy to be relevant, to be inviting and open-minded, or open-ended. This approach was vital to the origins of SOPHIA and continues to be a driving force behind our organization's future. Between 2008 to 2015, SOPHIA hosted over a dozen local symposia and socially-relevant panels. The guiding values behind these gatherings included (1) an appreciation for the public value of philosophy, (2) the felt need for philosophy to be engaged not only within the academy, but also in conversation with people from other fields and from beyond higher education settings, and (3) the recognition that people beyond the academy can contribute invaluable insights for scholars – that philosophy and wisdom are a two way street in philosophical conversations.

SOPHIA Today: In 2015, SOPHIA leaders agreed that the organization's old charter and mission statement needed revision. Among the key insights that emerged during this revision process was the vital need for SOPHIA to focus on community-building. People sometimes do not know what philosophy is or they doubt that there will be a way for them to genuinely and meaningfully participate in it. SOPHIA has also transitioned from being an honorary society to a membership organization. The aim of community-building made clear that we needed to establish local chapters of SOPHIA. Thus, today, SOPHIA's aim is to build communities of philosophical conversation, understood broadly to include local, national, and international communities, with in-person and online forums. The qualification that SOPHIA is "in America" was never intended to limit philosophical engagement across borders. It remains in our name as a matter primarily of our organizational, historical origin. One of our members has established a chapter in India, and we hope more and more people will establish chapters around the world. Moving forward, our intention is not to change the way that all philosophers do their work. Instead, we want to open up opportunities for more philosophers and community members to participate in publicly engaged and accessible philosophical dialogue. In our current political climate, it is clearer than ever that there is a need for richer and more abundant philosophical dialogue in the public sphere. SOPHIA's aim is to open up and support forums in which more of that kind of philosophical and conversational community-building can take place and flourish.

SOPHIA's Mission

The mission of the Society of Philosophers in America (SOPHIA) is to use the tools of philosophical inquiry to improve people's lives and enrich the profession of philosophy through conversation and community building.

SOPHIA's Core Values

I) Building philosophical community and engagement – *Philosophy is for everyone.*
II) Philosophical inclusiveness – *Philosophers learn from others.*
III) Respectful communication – *Everyone has a voice.*
IV) Professional excellence and public relevance – *Philosophy goes beyond the realm of academia.*

Primary Directives of the National Organization

- To create and support publicly-engaged SOPHIA chapters which are locally-focused.
- To create, maintain, and share resources which provide formal or informal structures for meetings and events hosted by local chapters.
- To utilize technology effectively to extend the reach of philosophy's influence on society by: (1) creating and maintaining a social media presence, (2) producing audio and video content, and (3) supporting the development of thematically focused written content in some online medium by local chapters.
- To serve as a community organizer between the philosophical academy and the non-academic world while focusing on the development of partnerships that can support the overall mission of SOPHIA by means of funding or spirit.

III. What is a SOPHIA Chapter?

SOPHIA chapters are the groups embedded within local communities which serve to facilitate and support occasions for philosophical discourse. A chapter holds local meetings and events to discuss philosophically relevant topics which resonate with the needs and concerns of their community. In general, SOPHIA chapters are asked to:

- Coordinate regular but informal philosophical dialogues (i.e., hold meetings) for the community about local or current issues 4 or more times per year. Some regularity and frequency of meetings such as 4 or more are needed to advance sincerely the aim of community-building.
- Maintain an online presence that communicates meeting information to the local chapter membership and invites the wider community to participate.
- Cultivate relationships with local organizations and groups to support the development of a philosophical coalition within the existing community.
- Coordinate at least one SOPHIA event per year. SOPHIA events are publicly accessible symposiums which stand apart from smaller, regular chapter meetings because these events are somewhat larger in scale. New chapters are not expected to complete this task in their first year.

IV. Why SOPHIA?

Your Motivations: Are you in need of an occasion to critically consider, explore, and critique the many aspects of public and private life? Do you wish that the existing discussions in your community were deeper, featuring greater breadth of viewpoints, more welcoming, inclusive, or precise? Are you hoping to get more people invested in meaningful dialogue? If you said yes to any of these questions, we suspect that a SOPHIA chapter is for you. SOPHIA chapters offer the opportunity to engage in meaningful dialogue with others about topics such as public policy, medical care, education, literature, history, popular fiction, and so on.

Benefits of a National Network: SOPHIA's national leadership can support your efforts. This support, including philosophical internships, meeting materials, meeting consultations, event funding, grants, and the ability to connect to other SOPHIA members are some additional benefits to starting a chapter.

V. How can I start a SOPHIA Chapter?

The following steps are intended to provide a foundation for the development of a SOPHIA chapter. Overall, most chapters will share the same "starting steps" but will develop their own unique communities depending on the needs and interests of their particular members. Some options, or paths, are discussed below, but no two communities are the same. The key to remember is that you should seek to develop an inclusive philosophical community in ways you believe would be the most successful.

General Starting Steps

1) *Identify a leadership team.* The goal is to identify a small group to coordinate your efforts. Each chapter needs a president, a membership officer, and an operations officer.
2) *Create and maintain partnerships within your community.* Take the time to identify and research the many organizations that currently exist in your community. Then, introduce yourself and your goal (to cultivate philosophical dialogue in the community) to those groups.
3) *Promote investment in a philosophical dialogue centered on local interests and issues.* While developing partnerships and engaging with the local community, it is important to notice that people are often already engaged in philosophical discussions in some shape or form, whether they are recognized as such or not. The goal, then, when developing partnerships is to foster an awareness of these discussions and to take the time to show how regular community dialogues on those topics can be valuable.
4) *Develop a strategy for holding regular philosophical dialogues.* This strategy should include a plan regarding meeting facilitation, resources, format, and frequency. It does not matter if you do these during lunch or if you do these during a more formal meeting time. The process adapts to facilitate the desired outcomes. Platforms like Google Hangouts are an option for people who cannot attend face-to-face meetings, and MeetUp.com can help identify community members who have interest in philosophical conversations. In addition, SOPHIA offers tools to make meetings easy to plan and hold, such as "one-sheet" documents prepared on the basis of shared interests and

resources. In addition, with the help of our guidelines document, chapters can create their own "one-sheets" and are encouraged to share them for other chapters to put them to use. See our online set of "Meeting Resources" for more helpful tools and guidance.

5) *Have a meeting.* Once a few partnerships and discussion topics have been identified, the leadership team should ensure that the first organized meeting takes place in an accommodating time and place. Again, see our online set of "Meeting Resources" for more helpful tools and guidance.

These starting steps are intended to set the basic ground work for founding and running SOPHIA chapters and growing local SOPHIA memberships.

Paths to Cultivating Your Chapter

Path #1: Community Organizing Method – Starting from Scratch

One of the primary goals of SOPHIA chapters is to bring people together to the philosophical table. If you believe that all people deserve a voice at the table, that some problems require collectively derived solutions, and that diversity is an asset, then this path may be well suited to your efforts to create a SOPHIA chapter. The community organizing method focuses on developing relationships with existing organizations, finding discussion topics that intersect the interests of those organizations, and coordinating meetings around those topics. These partnerships may be used to recruit people into official SOPHIA memberships, as a national organization, and into the local SOPHIA chapter. To start, the national organization encourages you to choose a One-Sheet from our webpage and invite people from existing groups like book clubs, library groups, coffee shops, or your local college or university philosophy department. Using tools like Meetup.com (some cost, but very effective) or Facebook Groups (can be free) can be ways to include and reach out to potential participants. Establishing a strong, meaningful partnership with at least one organization to start with (i.e., like a local library or college or university's humanities or philosophy department) is important if this is the pathway you need to choose for two reasons: (1) it establishes a way to access resources and people for developing or growing your chapter and (2) it provides an anchored foundation from which your chapter can spread by plugging into established social structures.

Path #2: Turning an Established Group into a SOPHIA Chapter – Reinventing Yourself

Sometimes, a leadership team may already exist in an established club, or organization, that shares the values and interests of SOPHIA. If this is the case, then SOPHIA chapters can be founded by transforming an existing group or club into a SOPHIA chapter. The first step in this transition is to ensure that the group's leaders become official members of SOPHIA and to recruit other members through expanding your organization's partnership outreach as a SOPHIA chapter. This pathway requires some change management and, as such, all existing members of a group should be consulted on the transition and guide organizational change in whichever way is needed to meet basic chapter requirements. Other than that, your organization can decide the direction of your chapter.

Path #3: Creating a SOPHIA chapter in an existing organization – Bolstering What You Are

Like path 2, this path utilizes existing leadership teams to establish a SOPHIA chapter but allows a chapter to exist as a committee or club within other organizations like schools, universities, and so

on. The first step in this transition is to ensure that the group's leaders become official members of SOPHIA and to recruit other members through expanding your organization's partnership outreach as a SOPHIA chapter. In some ways, this path is like the community organizing method, but is distinct because there may already be partnerships from which to draw on to establish a SOPHIA chapter.

VI. Chapter Expectations

To emphasize, chapters have the authority to determine most organizational decisions in ways they deem best. There are, however, several core expectations that a chapter most likely will need to meet in order to advance the goals of the national organization.

1) **Chapter members and leadership teams share in SOPHIA's core values.**

2) **Chapters must have a President, a Membership officer, and an Operations Officer.**
   Additional offices may be created at the discretion of each chapter.
   a. **The President** organizes regular meetings and provides leadership to the chapter and its members. This person will create and maintain partnerships with local organizations and groups and may wish to have regular meetings with other officers.
   b. **The Membership officer** should focus on inviting potential chapter members to meetings and recruit dues-paying members into SOPHIA. This person may also wish to coordinate social events outside regular meetings. This person will monitor the dues-paying status of chapter members to ensure that at least three people are dues-paying members of SOPHIA.
   c. **The Operations officer** should focus on communication and fiscal operations. This includes the promotion of chapter meetings and SOPHIA events, management of the SOPHIA Chapter Facebook page, regular updates sent to the national organization of the chapter's upcoming activities and managing fiscal operations.
   NOTE: Given the customizable nature of these positions, each person holding an officer position will inherit other duties as determined by the local chapter. Also, one person can hold these roles temporarily during the initial startup of a chapter.

3) **Chapters must also**
   a. have at least three dues-paying members of SOPHIA.
   b. hold at least 4 meetings per year.
   c. hold at least one larger or more formal SOPHIA event per year after the inaugural year.
   d. make continuous efforts to cultivate local partnerships.
   e. create and maintain a SOPHIA Chapter Facebook group & link it to the national organization's page (have the group "like" and "follow" the national organization's FB page).
   f. communicate with the national organization about challenges, needs, and insights as they arise regarding chapter development.

VII. Chapter Meetings

Regular chapter meetings should fit the needs of your community by ensuring that the topics discussed, the meeting formats, and the norms for participation that you adopt are reflective of your group's diverse identity. This is more than merely setting another place at the table. Rather, when holding chapter meetings, the leadership team should consider the following:

1) *Developing an agenda and choosing a facilitator*: It will be necessary to have a facilitator to help direct discussion. This person (or persons) will need to encourage audience participation while ensuring that no single person monopolizes the discussion. The agenda for your meeting should be the guide by which the facilitator conducts the meeting. When constructing the agenda, you should involve the core group of leaders and partners in topic selection when you can. The agenda should make the goals of the meeting clear for every participant.

2) *Picking a familiar location:* The meeting site should be accessible, visible, and familiar to as many potential participants as possible. Schools, recreation centers, libraries, and the town hall are likely locations.

3) *Picking an accommodating time:* The time set for the meeting should be determined by the hour most likely to attract a good turnout. This will depend on the rhythms of your community. Online tools like Doodle.com or MeetUp.com can be very helpful here.

4) *Identifying Participants:* The community at large should receive an open invitation to participate in your meetings, but personal invitations should be issued to your community partners. People should be encouraged to bring at least one person to the meeting. Local teachers, school administrators, representatives of the teachers' union, religious leaders, local government officials, the local newspaper editor or publisher, business leaders, representatives of local service and volunteer groups, and so on are good stakeholders with whom to make these partnerships.

5) *Announcements:* Flyers that contain meeting purposes, meeting topics, location, time, and contact information are good ways to get the word out. Announcements in papers or online can be helpful as well. SOPHIA's national organization can also assist you in this task. Let us know about your event ideally several weeks ahead, so that we can announce it to our members and followers, spreading the word via our Web site, email listserv, and social media channels. The most effective ways are word of mouth, personal invitations in note form, and online posts. The more people that understand the intent, scope, and purpose of a SOPHIA chapter meeting the more prepared people will be when attending the meeting.

For a checklist to use in advance of a meeting, see our **Meeting Preparation Checklist**, available online.

For a checklist to use on the day of your meeting, see our **Meeting Day Checklist**, online too.

The important thing to remember is that chapter meetings should be regular, focus on some philosophical topic, and be sensitive to the needs of potential participants.

VIII: Hosting a Larger or More Formal SOPHIA Event

A SOPHIA symposium, a more formal or larger gathering than a typical chapter meeting, should be structured around an issue selected in consultation with the local community. In the most general terms, a SOPHIA event should begin by presenting some philosophical content or issue and modeling philosophical approaches for engaging that material. In this way, SOPHIA events are not unlike chapter meetings. The difference between the two is that **the goal of SOPHIA events is to hold a public forum which facilitates philosophical dialogue on a topic important to the larger community.** It is important for the SOPHIA facilitator(s) to keep the conversation focused in a philosophical direction and with a civil tone and manner. SOPHIA events can take several forms, provided they strive for community building and inviting philosophical conversation. One might start coordinating a SOPHIA event by:

I)   Utilizing the partnerships your chapter has made to develop interest in the event. This can also help you select an appealing topic. Example: Contacting a university's medical center as well as doctors, nurses, hospice care workers, and attorneys to gauge interest in "Ethics at the End of Life." Religious leaders may also be interested, and other professionals should be invited to join the conversation. The event would then be coordinated by the chapter's membership.

II)   Gathering a team of interested organizers to share event management tasks with the chapter leadership.

III)   Coordinating with SOPHIA's national leadership on a current events topic that has been proven to have wide appeal. (This is encouraged for first time SOPHIA event holders).

IV)   Planning a symposium with one or more meeting sessions. This would allow for your chapter to cover a lot of different topics.

V)   Seeking funding for the event as needed. Affiliations with colleges and universities will offer meeting space and help organize continuing education credits for professionals. SOPHIA's national leadership is also here to help. Community partners can also offer support.

VI)   Creating a promotion plan. Send an announcement to local newspapers. Invite people from all over, and then invite them genuinely into a two-way conversation, in which you engage the public and demonstrate clearly what philosophy has to offer.

VII)   Planning for the future. Have a sign-up sheet! Gather names of attendees and then invite them to become members, growing your community of philosophical conversation. Then, include those people in meetings to discuss what topics they feel would be most engaging to talk about in community with others.

Appendix I: Example Chapter Meeting Agenda

A SOPHIA meeting should be structured around an issue selected in consultation with your community. The main challenge is to make it as easy for people to attend: there is no need to give homework assignments for SOPHIA meetings. Meetings should be framed around a set of guiding questions but should allow for open exploration of the topic. The goal is to encourage participants to provide an occasion for thinking about the topic in various ways.

SUGGESTED SOPHIA MEETING AGENDA (TOTAL MEETING LENGTH: ABOUT 1.5 HRS.)

1) (5-10mins) **Greetings**: Welcome your group and pass around a sign in sheet (for tracking attendance). If first meeting or if there are new members, do introductions, giving people a chance to get to know one another in smaller groups. SOPHIA is developing exercises and games that can be fun for breaking the ice.

2) (5-10mins) **Set Clear Ground Rules about how to contribute to the larger conversation or review and modify previously agreed upon ground rules**. It should be noted that there are several question and answer applications for android and iPhone that can be used in group settings to allow people to submit comments and questions. Some even let people vote for other's suggestions. The facilitator should provide suggestions and solicit group approval for these rules. Some may include:
   a. Agreeing to using "I feel…" statements rather than "You are …" statements.
   b. Agreeing to follow up with people we publicly disagree with after the meeting to resolve any potential animosity about our disagreements and reaffirm our respect for that person.
   c. Agreeing to speak when we have a well-formed thought to contribute and reserve the right to cut ourselves off if we start to ramble.
   d. Agreeing to keep language simple, to define technical terms as we use them, and to resist name dropping. The goal is to keep conversation accessible.

3) (15-20 mins) **Topic Introduction & Engagement**: A facilitator should briefly introduce the topic of discussion. Then, allow the group time to engage with the topic by reading a handout, watching the video, or listening to the speaker. SOPHIA One-sheets regarding the Philosophy Bakes Bread Podcast or *Civil American* are useful for this. Encourage people to take time to think about the topic and develop some questions about it on their own. After a short time, encourage them to pair up with another member, explore their questions and thoughts with one another and think about how they might contribute to a larger group discussion.

4) (35-40 mins) **Group Discussion**: The facilitator should then bring the group back together and ask for volunteers to share their thoughts. Be sure to give people the opportunity to respond to the thought given before moving onto another group's thoughts. The goal is to get people to find connections, dissimilarities, and similarities in the way that they are thinking about the topic. Allow the discussion to take whatever direction seems enriching. At the same time, the facilitator should prepare topic specific questions that encourage larger group discussions and should aim to make connections where they might prove helpful. He or she should also draw people back to relevant questions and points of concern when comments stray from relevance to the discussion topic.

5) (5-10 mins) **Facilitator Wrap-up:** Conclude the meeting by thanking everyone for attending, encourage people to sign the attendance sheet, and ask people to suggest future topics of discussion. Lastly, briefly make any administrative announcements that need to be made.

Appendix II: Resources for organizing philosophical communities

Online Resources for Community Organizing

- University of Kansas, Community Tool Box: http://ctb.ku.edu/en/table-of-contents
- National Education Goals Panel Community Organizing Guide: http://govinfo.library.unt.edu/negp/reports/orguide.pdf

Philosophical Community Organizing Principles

- **Effective Organizing Balances Process and Outcome**
  - o No one path exists for developing a philosophical community. Adapting the process to reflect local sensibilities and multicultural expectations should temper formalization.
- **Organizing is a Complex Value-Based Process**
  - o Multicultural literacy is essential to communicating and cultivating interest in a philosophical dialogue. People's values reflect and inform lived experiences and needs.
- **Interests and Issues are Defined by the Community according to its Perceptions**
  - o Unique experiences shape the needs and relevant issues within a community. The members of the community, and its parts, define the interest and issues which should be philosophically explored.
- **Community Interests are both Factual and Value Based**
  - o There is an intimate relationship between facts and values; this should be explored in any philosophical dialogue.
- **Communities are neither Monolithic nor Homogenous**
  - o No single member or group in a community represents the interests of the entire community. Practically speaking, there is always another perspective to engage.
- **Communities, even informal ones, possess relationships of authority and influence.**
  - o Every community has multifaceted structures of power in a formal and informal sense.

Community Organizing: Step-by-Step Process

Step 1: Identify a leadership team

- This can be a small group of two or three that have an interest in engaging in a deeper exploration of local issue. It is important to remember that this is a leadership team, not a topic selection team. This group should be looking to foster and mediate local dialogue in a philosophical manner, rather than selecting which topics are important. *Identify a small*

group which can aid in the coordinator of your effort to create philosophical dialogue.

Step 2: Create and maintain partnerships within the existing community

- It is important to recognize that there are multiple organizations within a community which have their own missions and goals. *Take the time to identify and research the multiple organizations that currently exist and take efforts to introduce yourself and your goal (to cultivate philosophical dialogue in the community).* Making partnerships requires acknowledging that the organizations you are looking to work with have an important agenda of their own. Your goal is to open a philosophical venue for deep discussions of issues and concerns from those groups' perspective. Note: meetings over a meal are very helpful here.

Step 3: Develop a sense of multicultural literacy by exploring local community interests which identify community issues

- It is important to remember that the larger community is made of smaller communities as well. *Considering the cultural differences and concerns at stake in the partnerships you have made is important.* A cultural audit is where you compare your chapter's cultural representation with that of the larger community. It helps you identify who has yet to be invited to the philosophical discussion, what communication styles and languages are present, and makes you sensitive to the following features: local attitudes towards conflict, approaches to completing tasks, decision-making styles, local attitudes regarding emotional or personal matters, and how people value certain knowledge clams (rational vs intuitive).

Step 4: Promote investment in a philosophical dialogue centered on local interests and issues

- While developing partnerships and engaging with the local community, it is worth noting that *everyone is already engaging in philosophical discussions about value in some shape or form*. The goal, then, is to develop partnerships that *foster an awareness* of this fact and take the time to encourage an investment in a regular community dialogue these sorts of ongoing and relevant philosophical topics.

Step 5: Develop a strategy for holding regular philosophically collaborative dialogues

- While partnerships are being made, develop a strategy for holding regular meetings in which people can engage in philosophical dialogues about issues in the community. *This strategy should include a plan regarding: who will facilitate that small discussion, what role the leadership team can play in supporting that meeting, the level of informality/formality for that meeting, and in developing a general rhythm for those meetings.* Again, the goal here is to let the community define its own terms. If you do these during lunch or if you do these during a more formal meeting time, *the process adapts to facilitate the outcomes*.

Step 6: Implement Strategy & Evaluate

- Once a few partnerships and issues have been identified, the leadership team should ensure that a first philosophical dialogue takes place in a low risk and accommodating time and place. Once the meeting takes place, *the leadership team in conjunction with those who participated should evaluate the effectiveness of the format, time, location, and topic discussed*. This evaluation can be in the form of an informal discussion or an anonymous participation survey, or in another effective way. Note, such feedback should be collected in ways comfortable for the local community, again: the process adapts to facilitate effective outcomes.

Step 7: Continue to develop cultural literacy & partnerships.

- Ultimately, *you should never stop engaging in learning or developing partnerships with the community*. Most of the community organizing process involves a level of diplomacy and exploration regarding issues which aims at cultivating a culturally inclusive community. This means that the ultimate goal of developing a philosophical community among the existing community is to (1) have people engage in discussions which impact their lives, (2) expand the sense of communal connectedness between existing segments in the community, (3) articulate practices which correct inequities in the promotion of topics relevant to community dialogue, and (4) *establish bridges and social ties among people from different backgrounds and cultures that live together in a larger local community.*