



GHIAA

Greater Hartford
— Interfaith —
Action Alliance

House Meeting Toolkit

October 2021, 2nd Edition



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Welcome Letter

Dear GHIAA Leaders,

Thank you for taking the time to participate in GHIAA's House Meeting Listening Campaign process. As you know, we had a successful number of campaigns since our launch 2 years ago and it is time to identify our next issue slate. One of the main reasons we were successful with so many of our campaigns, is that our GHIAA leaders and congregations take individual meetings and the building of relational culture seriously. GHIAA clergy start all group meetings with one on one meetings and they meet each other one on one between meetings. Many of our congregations start leadership meetings, trustee meetings, and parish council meetings with individual meetings. We do this because we are committed to knowing one another better and to building the relational power that allows us to win on concrete issues of justice.

The way we arrive at our issue campaigns in GHIAA is through House Meetings. Between November and January GHIAA congregations and leaders will hold hundreds of house meetings in their congregations and in the community to listen to thousands of stories. These stories will be recorded by note takers and then all of the notes will be reviewed, prayerfully, to identify what issues GHIAA will take on next.

This packet will give you all the tools and resources you need to lead an effective house meeting campaign in your congregation and in the community.

Thank you for your commitment to building power for justice!

In Community,

Cori Nicewander
GHIAA Lead Organizer

UNDERSTANDING HOW GHIAA IDENTIFIES ISSUE CAMPAIGNS

All of these steps are built on a culture of individual meetings!

STEP ONE - HOUSE MEETINGS

House meetings are where we listen to each others' stories.



STEP TWO - IDENTIFY COMMON THEMES

GHIAA leaders and organizers review house meeting notes to identify most urgent and recurring themes.



STEP THREE - CHOOSING GHIAA'S DIRECTION

Research and Campaign Teams will form to identify clear and actionable issues coming from the common themes.



STEP FOUR - ACTION

GHIAA will launch into public action to achieve its issue campaign goals.



STEP FIVE - EVALUATION

At the conclusion of each campaign, GHIAA will evaluate its process to identify next steps.

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Getting Started: Why House Meetings?

A house meeting is a 60 to 90 minute conversation with 7-9 people, led by a trained GHIAA core team leader with a note taker. The house meeting is a chance for people to get together to get to know each other more deeply; to engage one another; and to learn what we are contending with in our lives so that we might imagine together how our neighborhood, city, region... could be more just.

What is the Purpose of a House Meeting?

It is a building block in organizing for change. It helps us discover:

- who else we may want to invite to be a leader?
- what are the forces people are contending with in their lives and in their community?
- common issues that people are contending with across our congregations and towns
- The house meeting is NOT an interview to get information. The main purpose is for us to more deeply engage with each other through the sharing of stories.

When Do We Do House Meetings?

House meetings can happen at any time, but GHIAA congregations will engage in GHIAA-wide house meeting campaigns as we embark on cutting new issues.

Two Types of House Meetings: General and Directed.

Both general and directed house meetings focus on hearing each others' stories. The difference is that in a **general house meeting**, there is not specific issue as a focus of the meeting. Participants are asked to share a story based on an open-ended question such as, "what are you contending with in your life," or "what keeps you up at night." Someone could talk about a healthcare issue, someone else could share about how their mortgage is under water, and another person could talk about a nephew who is in prison and what the experience is of the criminal justice system.

In a **directed house meeting**, leaders gather around a common theme or concern. GHIAA leaders can invite friends and neighbors to their houses (or zoom rooms) to discuss a particular issue, such as their experience of racism in their children's school curriculum, or experiences of not being able to find affordable housing in suburban towns.

Getting Started: Why House Meetings? (continued)

In both types of house meetings, the key is to ask people to reflect on what they are or have experienced, and not to share opinion pieces on various social issues. In directed house meetings, it is important to have those most directly impacted as part of the conversation.

Other Uses of House Meetings:

House meetings are also used for various stages of issue research to more intentionally engage those who are most impacted by the issue. For example, if we are cutting an issue around addressing racism in school curriculum, we may host a series of house meetings with teachers of color who are not connected to GHIAA to broaden the conversation.

Preparing For Your House Meeting

Organizing house meetings within your congregation or community is one of the most important responsibilities of CORE Team members. Since the concerns and issues brought forward through the House Meeting Campaign will shape our next Issues Platform, it is important that the house meeting participants truly represent your membership. Your role as leaders in the design of how your congregation's house meeting is planned is critically important.

Step One - Create Your Congregation's Participation Goals

Total Participation Goal - Set a total participation goal that is based on a percentage (ex 30%) of the number of people in your congregation. Consider what percentage would realistically represent the concerns and experiences of your membership.

Example A - Congregation of 50 people

50 Members x 30% = 15 people Target Participation Goal



Preparing For Your House Meeting (continued)

Example B - Congregation of 200 people

200 Members x 30% = 60 people Target Participation Goal



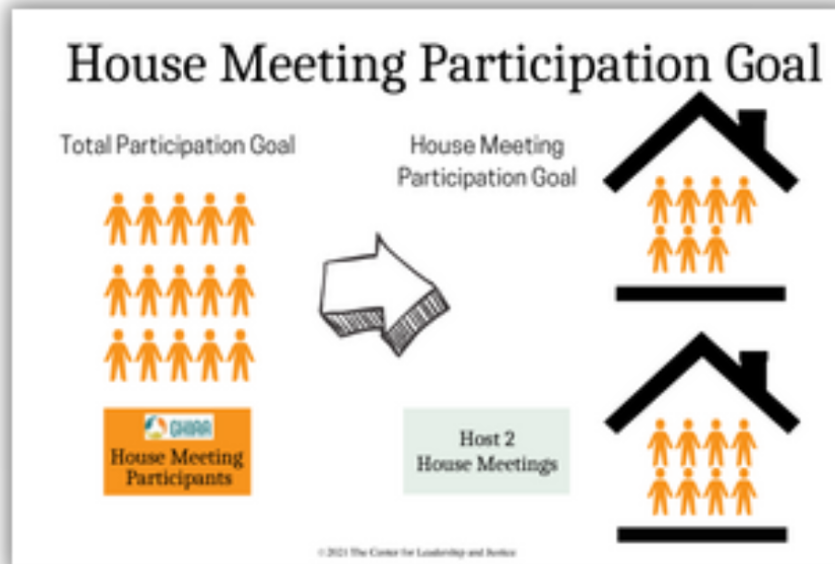
House Meeting Participation Goal - Good House Meetings are 7-10 people. Divide your Total Participation Goal by 7, 8, 9, or 10 depending on what size you would like the meetings to be. This will tell you your House meeting Participation Goal (how many house meetings you should have). It is important to figure out your Total Participation Goal first, not the number of house meetings you plan on doing. That is going backwards and can lead to house meetings that are not truly representative of your congregation.

Preparing For Your House Meeting (continued)

Example A - Congregation of 50 People

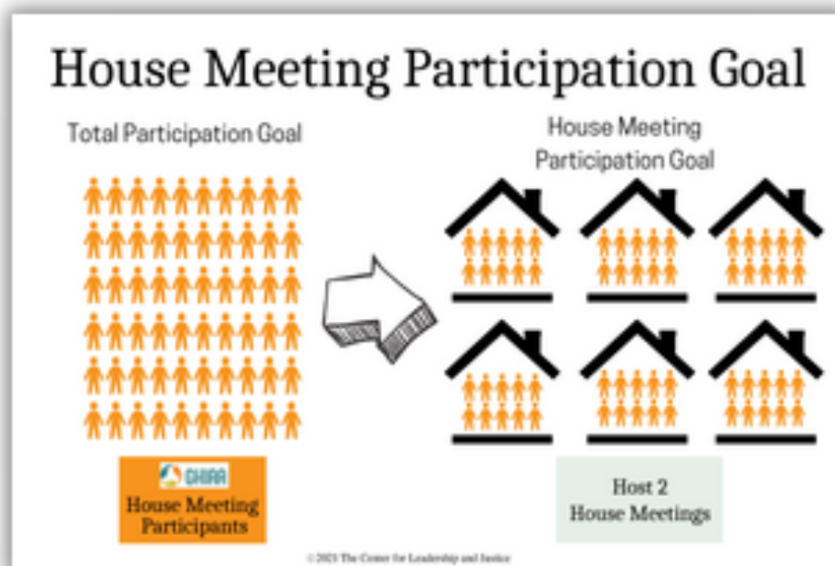
15 Participants / 7 per meeting = 2 House Meeting Participation Goal

(1st Meeting = 7 people, 2nd Meeting = 8 people)



Example B - Congregation of 200 people

60 Participants / 10 per meeting = 6 House Meeting Participation Goal (Each Meeting = 10 people)



Don't underestimate yourself when you put your mind to it or set a lower goal than what you truly need. It is better to set the goal you actually need in order to be successful.

Creating Turn Out

The most important ingredient for successful turn out to your House Meeting is recruiting through personal invitations. While other methods of informing members about meetings are helpful, like flyers, announcements, bulletins, and newsletters, they are passive and impersonal. Again and again, extending direct, personal invitations has yielded far higher attendance rates than relying on traditional passive methods. Here are our best strategies for inviting people to your House Meeting and successfully creating turnout.

1. Create a list of specific people that you will personally invite to come to your House Meeting
2. Use a Tracking Spreadsheet when you begin calling to keep track of who has been contacted and who will attend. Some congregations use Google Docs to keep track of all house meeting participants.
3. Send a personalized Initial Turn Out Email (see appendix page i)
 - a. Make sure to personalize the email for each person with their name.
4. After you've sent your email, start making direct calls. (See phone script in appendix on page ii)
 - a. Call within 1-3 Days after sending your email.
 - b. Calling directly shows your sincere interest in getting their participation. It also is the best way to understand someone's real level of interest.
5. Make the initial call 2-3 weeks before the House Meeting and then have a quick confirmation call (see sample script in appendix on page iii) 2-3 days before the House Meeting to remind people about their interest and plans to attend. This will ensure the highest turn out possible.
6. Following the House Meeting, send a follow up email (see sample follow up emails in appendix on page vi)

Sample: Leader Outline Agenda

Outline

Duration: 60 to 90 minutes

Ideal # of Participants: 7-9

Location: 1. Zoom
2. Large meeting space with room for social distancing

Purposes: 1. Identify issues we can act on
2. Identify other potential leaders
3. Build relationships with and among our neighbors

Note About House Meeting Locations

The best location for House Meeting is clearly indicated in its name ... within the home. It helps foster a sense of community and enhance the relational bonds we are seeking to build. However, in the midst of the serious Covid 19 pandemic, we strongly encourage adherence to CDC Guidelines, practicing social distancing, and exercising reasonable caution. GHIAA has successfully hosted House Meetings virtually through Zoom, taken action and achieved victory while maintaining social distance. We can do this while staying safe together!

Format for House Meeting (In Person or Via Zoom)

Start of Zoom Meeting (5 min)

Leader greets participants as they log into the Zoom meeting. Invite participants to "Rename" themselves to have their full name and how they'd like to be addressed. Team Members can assist anyone unfamiliar with this function.

Sample: Leader Outline Agenda (continued)

Welcome and GHIAA Elevator Pitch (10 mins.)

Welcome everyone. Introduce yourself as a leader, working with other leaders in congregations throughout Greater Hartford who are holding House Meetings just like this one. The purpose of the House Meeting is to discover common issues affecting us that, if we organize together, we can do something about. Introduce all team members (ex. note taker, technical assistant, time keeper)

- Congregations and allied institutions all over greater Hartford have formed a multi-racial, multi-town, multi-faith organization
- The organization is a means for us to act in unison on the common values we share and the common issues we face.
- I am one of the leaders in it.
- By getting together in House Meetings all over the region, we are learning from each other what we are contending with, what we would like to see changed in our daily lives or in the public life of greater Hartford, what issues we need to act on.
- We will bring the common issues to action, where we will present ourselves to the political and economic power players in the region to be recognized, and to win commitments to work on our agenda.

Rounds (5 min)

Introductions around the circle: Name, something about your family, where you live.

Asking the Big Questions (25 mins)

Ask people to be prayerful, serious. Ask them to take a full minute with themselves to answer one of these questions: "What are the main pressures, the main things keeping you up at night when you think of your family, street, neighborhood, workplace, children, kids, school, or any of the institutions you have to deal with in your daily life (like banks, bill collectors, clubs, churches, stores, police, etc.) What is angering you? What do you feel needs to be changed?"

Sample: Leader Outline Agenda (continued)

Leader: Try to be Specific when you share your story. It is Essential that you go first to set the tone.

Give those present at least 1-2 minutes of silence to think about these important questions before sharing your story. Ask people to go around the room to share their story. Follow up questions and comments are encouraged. Just make sure everyone gets to tell their story.

Discussion (25 min)

Review verbally the issues that were brought forward. Allow reactions and general discussion.

Closing (10 min)

Thank everyone for coming. Explain next steps. Ask if there are any participants who are uncomfortable with their story being reported back to GHIAA. Ask anyone if they would like to hold their own house meeting. Ask if they will commit to joining an action if we organize one.

Evaluation (5min)

Ask people to share how they are feeling after this house meeting.

Meeting Close

Remember: If anyone says they don't want their story shared, record their preference in your notes.

Creating A Record

The notes from your House Meeting form an important record of all the concerns that were brought forward during the discussion. This record is then used to identify common themes of concern emerging from within the House Meetings conducted collectively across Greater Hartford. This will help us to identify the most pressing and relevant topics for GHIAA action. We can't be successful without your records!

Note Takers Will Record:

- Topics or categories of concern within stories
- People showing enthusiasm, passion, energy, or the potential to be a leader
- Common themes that are emerging over the course of the session
- Specific details that would assist in making a story more actionable

You've worked diligently to have a successful House Meeting and now it is time to turn in your results to GHIAA. Remember, to be intentional about when you are submitting your reports so that your congregation's concerns can be included in the collective total gathered during the House Meeting Campaign.

During the meeting the note taker will take detailed and specific notes using GHIAA's notetaking form. At the conclusion of the House Meeting, there are three options for getting the notes the GHIAA staff. They are:

Option 1: Online Reporting Form - The note taker will take the notes from the note taking form and enter them into an online google form. This is the preferred method as it helps GHIAA staff organize the material better. When you are done entering the information, the note taker hits submit and you're done!

The Online Form has room for up to 10 participants. If your meeting has more than 10 participants, you will need to fill out a second form with the remaining participants.

Option 2: The note taker can simply take a photo of the notes and email the photo to ghiaa@cljct.org. If using this option, please be sure to write legibly and include the sign in sheet with all of the participants contact information in addition to the notes page.

Option 3: Snail mail or drop off the sign in sheet and notes page to the GHIAA office at 47 Vine Street, Hartford, CT 06112.

Following Up On Your House Meeting

Great job hosting your House Meeting! You just fulfilled an essential role in the process of creating a GHIAA Issue Campaign. ... But wait, don't go yet! We have a few critically important steps left for you to take before your role leading this House Meeting is complete.

Following up with participants is vitally important in transitioning the enthusiasm from the meeting into renewed commitment in your congregation and future action. These Guidelines will help you communicate with participants while you reinforce their energy, then report back to GHIAA.

Follow Up Suggestions:

- Contact participants 1-2 days after the House Meeting to thank them for participating. Send individual Follow Up Emails. (see appendix page vi)
- Determine how you would like to report back the results of the House Meeting Campaign to your congregation and participants. It is important for everyone, both participants and other members to know that their involvement had greater meaning. Share about what themes emerged from the meetings regarding concerns, what is being reported back to GHIAA, and next steps in the development of the Issues Campaign. Some options include:
 - Follow Up Gathering with participants
 - Follow Up Meeting With Congregational Leadership
 - Follow Up Announcement During Worship Service

Note: When sharing out, remember to report back the themes. You are sharing the topics of concerns, not "Mr. G had an awful problem with XYZ" to the entire congregation.

- If someone is committed to the House Meeting Campaign or to help increase your congregation's organizing capacity, make sure they are connected with a person on your Core Team for a 1:1 and next steps.
- Follow the directions for Creating A Record (see page 11) so your Core Team and GHIAA have all of the accurate information they need moving forward to process and analyze the issues most intensely facing your congregation.

How to Model Good Stories at House Meetings

Hearing directly from the community about what is affecting them is one of the purposes of the House Meeting. In order to hear the kinds of stories that might be actionable later in the campaign process (lead to social change action), it is important for leaders to model of a good story. By demonstrating how to tell a story, you will set the tone for everyone who shares after you.

Model Story Essentials

What Makes Stories Effective?

01

Short

- Get to the point right away
- Long enough to share the important details
- Don't share unnecessary information

02

Personal

- Deep, not a surface memory
- Occured to the person sharing or a close family member

03

Detailed

- Includes all of the important details but doesn't overshare
- Doesn't include private personal information

04

Identifies Potential Target For Action

- On A Societal Level
- Not a Personal Level

05

About A Basic Need

- Addressing Common needs like security, education, safety...

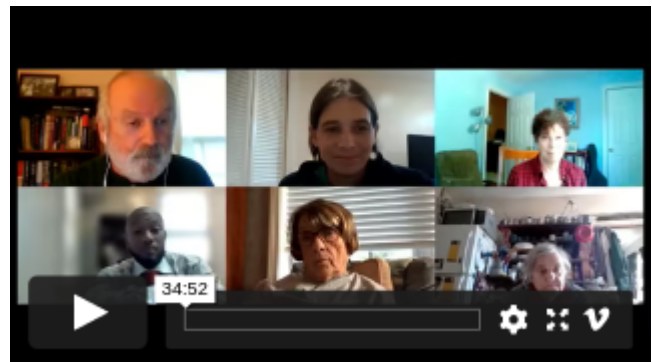
Everyone has a story worth sharing and being heard.

Every story isn't actionable (an issue leading to a GHIAA social action), but it can still be a story worth hearing in order to build stronger, more relational congregations.

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Click Here

or Visit <https://vimeo.com/manage/videos/636543556> to see a recorded house meeting from a core team training. This video will give you an example of how to start a house meeting and how to tell a good story. Please note this is an extremely abbreviated video for training purposes and leaves out the opening rounds, discussion, etc. It is just to give you an example of how to begin with your own story.



Note: Everyone's story is valuable and worth being heard. However, even if a story is not actionable, it can still provide valuable insight into a member of your congregation and help strengthen your ability to support each other. This is one way House Meetings increase a congregation's internal relational cohesion.



Appreciation

Thank you to the
Greater Boston Interfaith Organization (GBIO)
for their willingness to share their resources during the
development of an updated toolkit by the
Greater Hartford Interfaith Action Alliance (GHIAA).

Many of these materials were adapted
from their work with their permission.



Appendix

Sample Forms, Scripts, and Customizable Emails
to Reach Your Congregations.

Basically Everything You Need To Do
House Meeting At Your Fingertips.

Don't Worry.

We Have Your Back.



Appendix

- i Sample: Turn Out Email
- ii Script: Initial Phone Call
- iii Script: Confirmation Phone Call
- iv Sample: Participant Forms
- vi Sample: Follow Up Email
- vii Sample: Summary and Reflection Form

Sample: Turn Out Email

Dear _____,

I hope you are doing alright. As you may have heard during _____ (Insert: Shabbat, Wednesday night prayers, Jumu'ah, Sunday service, Sabbath, in the newsletter, etc), _____ (Insert name of congregation) is engaging in a house meeting campaign as part of our work through the Greater Hartford Interfaith Action Alliance (GHIAA) in conducting House Meetings throughout our congregation. At each House Meeting, 7-10 people _____ (insert the way people will meet: on Zoom, via teleconference, etc.) will meet to hear each other's stories and listen for the issues and problems that keep us from _____ [Choose one: being able to sleep at night; achieving racial, social, or economic justice; moving forward with the dreams and goals we have for our loved ones, etc]

[Choose: I am / Our team is] hosting a House Meeting on _____ [Date] at _____ [Time]. I'd like for you to be there because I respect your opinions. I believe that you would add something valuable to the meeting. You can access the meeting by using [Zoom link, teleconference information.]

_____ [Congregation Name], has set a goal of having _____ [insert number] house meetings and engaging _____ congregation members. This number was created in order to reach enough people to accurately understand experiences and concerns of members in the congregation. This same process is happening in GHIAA across Greater Hartford so by end of this campaign in January, we will have engaged over _____ (Add projected number) people. Our stories will shape GHIAA's next Issue Platform.

I'm going to call you in couple of days, but between now and then, please reach out to either me or a member of our congregation's GHIAA Core Team to let us know if you have any questions.

Thank you so much and we'll talk soon,

Script: Initial Phone Call

Note: This is the first call. You don't have to follow this script word for word. We want for you to feel comfortable that you'll know what to talk about during your conversation.

Leader: “Hi _____, It's _____. How are you? I'm calling to follow up on the email I sent you a couple of days ago. _ [Insert: Congregation Name] is getting started with a process that involves hosting House Meetings to engage members to hear what concerns them. It's important to have enough participants so we can accurately represent people's experiences throughout [Insert Congregation Name] and I value your input. Do you have a minute to talk?”

Option A

Participant: “No. I don't have time to talk right now.”

Leader: “Oh Ok. Sorry about that. Is there a different day or time that I can call back that would better for you?”

Option B:

Participant: “Yes, I have time to talk...”

Leader: “Great, thanks! We have talked about our work with GHIAA in the congregation and I'm a member of our GHIAA core team. All of our GHIAA congregations are starting to hold multiple house meetings in our congregation. The purpose is to be able to hear each others' stories – to know better what we are contending with in our lives or concerned about. I would like to invite you to join a house meeting I am hosting....will you join me?”

Option A:

Participant: “No, I don't think so.”

Leader: “Alright, I understand. Would you be interested in still being involved some other way? We can keep you informed when we reach then next phase.”

If their answer is still no then accept their answer and thank them for speaking with you.

**If the date of your particular house meeting doesn't work for them, but they are interested, invite to get them connected to another house meeting being held in the congregation by a different core team member.*

Option B:

Participant: “Yes, I'd love to.”

Leader: “Great. Thank you so much. I'll send you the Zoom link by _(date). Feel free to let me know if you have any questions. I'm looking forward to seeing you at the House Meeting. Goodbye!”

Option C:

Participant: “Um, I'm not sure...” (non-committal response)

Leader: “What questions do you have?”

Script: Confirmation Phone Call

Note: This is the second call. Your goal is to confirm that they will be coming to the House Meeting. Call participants _____ days before the House Meeting.

Leader: “Hi __, It’s _____. How are you? I’m calling to remind you about our House Meeting. It’s going to be on Zoom or at my house... on _ (date) at _time). You’re still coming, right?”

Option A:

Participant: “Yes, I’m still coming...”

Leader: “Thank you so much __. That is good to hear. I will look forward to seeing you then.”

Mark them as Confirmed on your Participant Tracking Spreadsheet.

Option B:

Participant: “No I’m not going to be able to make it.”

Leader: “Oh, that’s too bad. Can I ask what changed? You seemed pretty interested when we spoke before.”

Note: Depending on what they answer, you may be able to remove the obstacle for them so they can attend if they were genuinely interested.

*If there is a scheduling conflict, explore if they can switch to a different house meeting in the congregation.

House Meeting Participant Forms

General Information on House Meeting

House meeting leader/host name: _____

Phone: _____ Email: _____

Congregation (if applicable): _____

Note Taker Name: _____

Note Taker Phone: _____ Note Taker Email: _____

Date of House Meeting: _____ Location of House Meeting: _____

Total number of participants including leader and note taker: _____

**Please remember to submit completed forms and notes to GHIAA, along with house meetings notes.*

Three ways to submit:

· Online form (preferred): Enter information from contact sheets and notes page into online google form which can be found here:

<https://docs.google.com/forms/d/1v1SKuNHMIqctE7nAE-KKWjV01gx1T9AiMLWZDZ6hfE/edit>

· Email: Take a picture of all of these pages and the notes pages and email to ghiaa@cljct.org. Please make sure writing is legible if choosing this option!

· Snail Mail: Mail or drop off forms to GHIAA, 47 Vine Street, Hartford, CT 06112.

Participant 1

First Name (include title if applicable): _____ **Last Name:** _____

Street address: _____ **City:** _____ **Zip:** _____

Phone: _____ **Email:** _____

Congregation Name and Town (if applicable): _____

In your own words, how would you describe your race or ethnicity?: _____

**We ask about race/ethnicity because it is important that GHIAA centers the voices of people of color in real and authentic ways in the organizing process.*

Gender pronouns (circle): **She/Her** **He/Him** **They/Them** **Other:**

**We ask about gender pronouns so that we do not assume gender identities.*

Age range: **15 - 19** **20 - 39** **40 - 59** **60 - 79** **80 - 109**

Other demographic information that is important for you to share? _____

Sample: Follow Up Emails

Dear _____,

Thank you so much for coming to our House Meeting _____ [day]! I hope that when you left the meeting with as much energy and excitement as I did. Just like we shared with you, we will share what we heard and our congregations' information will be combined with the results from congregations across Greater Hartford. The issues identified will define GHIAA's Issue Agenda and social justice actions for the coming years.

[Leader: If this person made a commitment, be specific about what you heard from them and share specific next steps. Or you can talk about why you felt that they demonstrated leadership potential and let them you that you noted them as someone your Core Team should reach out to for a 1:1 conversation.]

Thank you again,

Sample: Summary and Reflection

Congregation: _____

House Meeting Leader: _____

House Meeting Host (if different): _____

Date: _____

Which particular stories moved you?

What was the tone of the stories?

Were there any over-arching themes?

Who showed leadership potential and appetite? Are there particular people you want to follow up with (to lead a house meeting; attend a follow up session)?

Did any specific, concrete issues come up that we may take action on? Who brought up which issues?

**Please Send Completed Form To CLJ, 47 Vine Street, Hartford, CT 06112 or
Scan and Email to ghiaa@cljct.org.**