

DISEÑEMOS UNA COMUNIDAD LIBRE DE ODIOS:

a través de la visualización de la equidad, erradicamos el racismo y la xenofobia

SOMOS [I Am Because] WE ARE

SOMOS/WE ARE is a collaborative initiative developed by Alianza Americas, its members, and allies, using art and other cultural expressions to tell the true stories of immigrants and our communities. SOMOS/WE ARE provides a powerful counter-narrative to the negative and misguided perception of immigrants that has come to dominate public discourse and policy making, thereby harming our communities, not just in the United States, but also in other countries around the world, including our own countries of origin. The SOMOS/WE ARE initiative focuses on story-telling as a way to share individual human stories while bringing to light the facts and all of the positive contributions of the immigrant community. As we share our SOMOS/WE ARE initiative with our communities and our allies, we reaffirm our determination to reclaim our humanity, dignity, and pride in our multicultural and multilingual roots and heritage.

In 2016 SOMOS/WE ARE took the form of a national summer art contest titled: *"Because I see myself in you: Transforming Xenophobia and Racism in Equity through the Arts."* This initiative mobilized the communities in the Bronx NY, Morristown NJ, Chicago IL, and Homestead FL, involved children and youth ages 6 to 19. While each location implemented a unique program, in general participants completed art projects of self-expression through painting, drawings, and crafts. They also engaged in a variety of activities to learn about human rights, celebrate their own cultures, and participate in leadership-building exercises through discussions regarding the impact of racism and anti-immigrant rhetoric.

From learning new skills to making new friends and having a safe space in which to express themselves, there are many reasons why SOMOS is an invaluable program for children, youth, and adults. In their own words some participants shared:

"What I liked about this program was that I got to express my thoughts and feelings in my painting."

"I liked that this program created an opportunity for me to be heard."

"What I like about this program is the opportunities that it gives me. I get to facilitate the activities, I have a chance to plan with other facilitators, I make new friends, I also learn how to protect and stay away from violence or other things that are negative to my life."



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In a time when immigrants and other communities are targeted, belittled, and demonized, it is imperative that we invest in nurturing the diverse identities and communities subjected to marginalization across the U.S. and the world. Beyond combating racist and xenophobic ideology, this is the time to acknowledge the many positive contributions of our communities and build pride around the many identities each of us hold. Alianza Americas invites you, your organization, and community to join the SOMOS initiative. Now is the time to celebrate our collective power.

In this handout you will find brief guidelines to implementing SOMOS in your own community. As you prepare to participate in SOMOS, we invite you to read tips (Do's and Don'ts) for a successful program, fill out the planning worksheet, learn our values, and review the SOMOS/ WE ARE toolkit from 2016.

These tips were gathered after interviewing participants from three locations that implemented SOMOS in 2016 and learning about their experiences. They aren't meant to be strict rules, but guidelines to help your program be a success.



SOMOS We Are



SOMOS/We Are, Do's and Don'ts

Do's

- **Select a person who will lead this initiative** in your organization and work as a group to make it happen.
- **After learning about SOMOS and its goals**, choose a topic area or areas around which to focus your program.
- **Choose activities that connect to your topic area** and can be easily implemented in your locale taking into account you space, cost, staff power, and time.
- **Identify a target audience.** Your program may target any group (children, teens, adults, an entire community, etc.), just make sure you have a clear idea of who it is for so you can shape activities accordingly.
- **Keep a detailed account of logistics** (program plans, expenses attendees). Communicate with Alianza along the way, especially when needing support.
- **Carefully frame each activity around your topic area.** Communicate this frame to participants before, during, and at the end of the program.
- **Structure activities to create and maintain community.** SOMOS is a plural initiative with collective learning at its core.
- **Take time to create a safe space for participants.** This is especially important when working with a new group or an existing group engaging in new activities.
- **Prepare for the possibility** that activities and topics discussed may be emotionally difficult for participants. Be ready to respond if people have raw reactions while engaging in the program.
- **Implement some form of follow up:** a short questionnaire, brief meeting later on, or thank you cards can help participants feel more connected and remember the experience.

Don'ts

- **Don't give one person the full burden** of carrying out this work. Working collectively we can achieve more.
- **Don't skip picking a focus.** This is one of the most important parts as all activities you do will in some way revolve around this choice.
- **Don't engage in an activity simply because it's easy or interesting.** Make sure it is a good match for your org. and that you can see the project through.
- **Don't underestimate the role certain identities** (like age, gender, ethnicity, physical ability, etc.) can have in people's engagement. Be mindful of who you are trying to reach from the beginning.
- **Don't keep us in the dark about your amazing program** and don't hesitate to ask for help when you need it.
- **Don't assume participants will make connections** between activities and topics on their own. Make sure the meaning of each thing is directly communicated.
- **Don't underestimate the power of working in community.** For many 2016 participants this was their favorite part of the program.
- **Don't expect a safe space** to emerge simply because people know each other or share identities. Safety is intentionally created and maintained.
- **Don't ignore feelings** (positive and negative) that may come up along the way. Plan in advance to react with sensitivity when people are vulnerable.
- **Don't underestimate the importance of closure.** Simple follow up can help keep participants engaged and excited for new programs.

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This worksheet is meant to help you plan out the program initiative your organization will be implemented. It is meant to act as a guide, not a prescriptive form. The first sections list SOMOS' values and examples of words groups may reflect on as inspiration for projects. You can use these to frame your program or as a launching point to trigger creativity as you tailor your unique approach.

WE ARE	REFLECTION WORDS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Brilliant and beautiful ❖ Creative and innovative ❖ Perseverant and tenacious ❖ Hard-working and entrepreneurial ❖ Spiritual, sensible and compassionate ❖ Loving of our families and communities ❖ Honest and loyal Dreamers and doers ❖ Courageous and strong 	<p>I AM</p> <p>Beautiful Important Unique Needed Powerful Human Happy</p> <p>I BELIEVE IN</p> <p>Diversity Rights Equality Opportunity Dreams the Future Community Justice Perseverance</p> <p>I SAY NO TO</p> <p>racism xenophobia exclusion hate violence discrimination</p>

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Planning Guide: SOMOS/ WE ARE 2017

Organization name: _____

SOMOS leader: _____

Supporting staff and volunteers: _____

Projected program name: _____

Projected date/s: _____

Who is this program for? (Target population): _____

Projected locale: _____

List supplies needed

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What topic/s area/s will your program focus on? _____

What activities do you plan to implement? _____

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How will activities be framed to reflect the identified topic areas? _____

What method will be used to follow-up with participants? Mark all that apply

- Survey Meeting at a later date Thank you notes Other:

What are your program's funding needs? _____
