THE CAJM LISTENING CIRCLE MANUAL

A Guide to Listening, Relationship-Building, Leadership Development, and Collective Action

VERSION 1.0

Prepared for the Capital Area Justice Ministry Listening Circle Kick-Off

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The mission of the Capital Area Justice Ministry is to build people power for local community justice.

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This manual establishes the complete process that will guide facilitator training, implementation, follow-up, and movement into CAJM's annual research-to-action cycle.

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1. Why Listening Circles?

The mission of the Capital Area Justice Ministry is to build people power for local community justice. People power begins with relationships, and relationships begin when people know they have been heard. Listening Circles are CAJM's structured practice of bringing people together to share lived experiences, discover common values, identify community concerns, develop leaders, and build the relationships necessary for collective action.

Listening Circles grow from the organizing tradition of House Meetings. The Justice Ministry Conference materials describe a House Meeting as a focused conversation in which people reflect on their values and experiences with serious community problems and receive an invitation to participate in the justice ministry. CAJM preserves that relational and organizing purpose while using language and practices that reflect our interfaith identity, culture, and mission.

Our Core Conviction

Listening is the first act of justice. Before we research, advocate, negotiate, or act, we listen. If we get the listening right, everything else gets stronger.

A Listening Circle is not simply a renamed meeting. It is the front door to CAJM's annual organizing cycle. Stories become themes. Themes reveal community problems. Problems move into research. Research identifies specific, achievable issues. Organized people then act together to secure change.

2. Our Philosophy and Guiding Principle

CAJM is an interfaith organization. Our congregations bring different sacred texts, traditions, languages, and practices to the work of justice. The Listening Circle process does not require every participant to share the same theology. It does invite us to practice values shared across our traditions: humility, dignity, compassion, truthfulness, neighborliness, wisdom, and the discipline of listening before speaking.

A brief source of inspiration

Isaiah 50:4 offers one concise image for the leadership posture we want to cultivate: "The Lord GOD has given Me the tongue of the learned, that I should know how to speak a word in season to him who is weary. He awakens Me morning by morning, He awakens My ear to hear as the learned."

The Hebrew phrase translated "the tongue of the learned" is lishon limmudim, meaning the tongue of those who have been taught, trained, or disciplined as learners. The central insight is the order: the ear is awakened before the tongue is prepared. Wise speech grows from disciplined listening. CAJM uses this insight in moderation as an interfaith-compatible leadership principle, not as a doctrinal requirement.

Guiding Principle

Effective ministry does not begin with speaking. It begins with listening. The awakened ear produces the learned tongue. For CAJM, effective leadership begins with listening, and strong public action begins with a community that has first been heard.

The posture of a Listening Circle leader

A Listening Circle leader remains a learner. The leader does not enter the room assuming that CAJM already knows the community's concerns or that the facilitator has the answers. The facilitator's authority is expressed through stewardship of the process, not control of the people.

- Listen to understand before responding.
- Ask questions before offering answers.
- Honor experience without promising an immediate solution.
- Look for shared values without forcing agreement.
- Protect the dignity, time, and voice of every participant.
- Remain teachable while helping others learn from one another.

3. What a Listening Circle Is - and Is Not

CAJM Definition

A Listening Circle is a structured, relationship-centered conversation in which people share lived experiences, discover common values, identify recurring community concerns, recognize emerging leaders, and receive an invitation to remain engaged in collective action.

A Listening Circle Is	A Listening Circle Is Not
A relationship-building conversation	A survey, focus group, or data-extraction session
A place for lived experiences and stories	A debate about politics or ideology
A disciplined step in the organizing process	A meeting that must solve the problem immediately
An opportunity to discover values and leaders	A counseling session or support group
A welcoming interfaith space	A worship service or doctrinal lesson
A pathway into deeper CAJM participation	A one-time event with no follow-up

People should leave a Listening Circle feeling heard, respected, connected, and clear about what happens next. They should not feel interviewed, managed, or used. CAJM collects enough information to recognize patterns and organize follow-up, but the relationship is always more important than the form.

4. Core Organizing Terms

Listening Circles introduce people to the first stage of CAJM's organizing process. The following terms help leaders understand how a personal story can eventually contribute to organized public action.

Term	Meaning
Story	A person's lived experience of a condition, institution, or community challenge.
Theme	A recurring pattern, value, or concern that appears across multiple stories.
Problem	A broad condition that is wrong and needs to change, such as children lacking access to safe transportation.
Solution	A possible response to the problem that must be tested through research.
Issue	A specific, achievable proposal that defines what CAJM wants, when it is wanted, and who has the authority to say yes.
Campaign	The strategic sequence of research, relationship-building, negotiation, network activity, and public action used to win an issue.

From Listening to Action

Story → Theme → Problem → Research → Issue → Campaign → Public Action → Community Change

5. Purposes and Desired Outcomes

Every Listening Circle should pursue five connected purposes. These purposes prevent the gathering from being reduced to a simple list of problems.

Purpose	What Success Looks Like
Build relationships	Participants learn something meaningful about one another and experience CAJM as a trustworthy relational organization.
Hear lived experiences	Participants share specific experiences rather than only general opinions or abstract concerns.

Purpose	What Success Looks Like
Discover shared values and concerns	The group recognizes dignity, safety, fairness, opportunity, family stability, belonging, accountability, and other values beneath the stories.
Identify emerging leaders	Facilitators notice people who connect others, ask thoughtful questions, accept responsibility, or show willingness to act.
Invite continued engagement	Participants understand the next step and have a clear way to remain involved in CAJM's listening, research, and action process.

A successful Listening Circle does not require unanimous agreement about the most important problem. Its success is measured by the quality of listening, the strength of new relationships, the clarity of recurring themes, the identification of potential leaders, and meaningful follow-up.

6. Roles and Responsibilities

The Listening Circle process depends on shared leadership. Every role contributes to the same outcome, but the responsibilities are different. Clear expectations prevent confusion and help congregations distribute the work.

Role	Primary Responsibilities
Board members	Champion the process, participate in circles, encourage congregational engagement, support accountability, and connect listening to CAJM's annual strategy.
Clergy leaders	Frame listening as part of the congregation's justice ministry, encourage participation, identify hosts and facilitators, and reinforce the connection between faith, relationships, and public justice.
Justice ministry team leaders	Coordinate the schedule, recruit hosts and facilitators, track progress, provide support, collect reports, and ensure follow-up.
Hosts	Invite a diverse group, confirm attendance, create a welcoming environment, provide simple hospitality, and help participants feel comfortable. The host does not have to facilitate.
Facilitators	Protect the purpose and flow, ask story-based questions, manage time and participation, listen for values and themes, prevent debate, explain confidentiality limits, and name the next step.
Note-takers	Capture themes, concerns, values, potential leaders, and commitments without recording every word. Protect privacy and avoid judgmental language.

Role	Primary Responsibilities
Participants	Share from personal experience, listen respectfully, honor community agreements, and consider an invitation to remain involved.

Recommended staffing

Whenever possible, each circle should have a host, trained facilitator, and note-taker. In a smaller gathering, one person may serve as both host and note-taker, but the facilitator should not be expected to guide the conversation and produce detailed notes at the same time.

7. Annual Goals and Accountability

CAJM should establish annual goals before each listening cycle. Before the annual Kick-Off, the Executive Director and justice ministry team leaders will set the targets below and distribute the completed implementation copy to congregations. The numbers may change from year to year, but expectations must be clear enough for congregations to plan, track progress, and ask for support early.

Annual Measure	CAJM Expectation
Listening Circles per congregation	_____
Participants per circle	8-12
People personally invited per circle	10-14
Previously uninvolved participants	At least _____%
One-to-one follow-ups after each circle	_____
Reports submitted	Within 48 hours
Participant follow-up	Within one week
Potential leaders personally contacted	Within _____ days

The Executive Director and justice ministry team leaders should review progress weekly during the active listening period. Congregations should report barriers early so that additional hosts, facilitators, invitations, or coaching can be provided.

8. Preparing for a Listening Circle

Recommended size, length, and setting

The recommended circle includes approximately 8 to 12 participants and lasts 75 to 90 minutes. Listening Circles may take place in homes, congregational meeting rooms, community spaces, or online when necessary. The setting should be accessible, quiet, welcoming, and arranged so participants can see one another.

Inviting participants

Invitations should be relational and personal. Hosts should invite people they know, including individuals who may not already see themselves as justice ministry leaders. A healthy circle includes different ages, backgrounds, levels of involvement, and life experiences. The goal is not to assemble people who already agree; it is to gather people who are willing to listen and speak honestly.

Sample Invitation

CAJM is holding small Listening Circles so we can hear what people are experiencing in our community and ensure our justice work is grounded in real stories. This will be a respectful, structured conversation - not a debate or fundraising meeting. I would value your voice and hope you can join us.

Preparation steps

1. Confirm the host, facilitator, note-taker, date, time, location, accessibility needs, and contact person.
2. Invite 10 to 14 people with the expectation that approximately 8 to 12 will attend.
3. Send a reminder 24 to 48 hours before the gathering and explain the purpose again.
4. Review the facilitator guide, select the opening and story questions, and practice transition language.
5. Prepare the room in a circle or around one table. Avoid classroom seating whenever possible.
6. Have name tags, pens, participant interest cards, the report form, water, and simple refreshments available.
7. Review confidentiality limits, consent language, safeguarding contacts, and who will receive the completed report.
8. Plan follow-up before the gathering begins. Every participant should hear from the host or team within one week.

9. The 90-Minute Listening Circle Agenda

Time	Segment	Purpose and Key Actions
0:00-0:10	Welcome and purpose	Host welcomes participants. Facilitator explains CAJM's mission, the purpose of the circle, confidentiality limits, and what will happen with the learning.

Time	Segment	Purpose and Key Actions
0:10-0:15	Community agreements	Establish listening expectations: speak from experience, listen to understand, share the time, respect privacy, and avoid debate.
0:15-0:25	Opening connection	Use a low-risk question that helps people speak and names something they value about their community.
0:25-0:55	Story round	Invite specific lived experiences connected to unfairness, pressure, barriers, safety, dignity, opportunity, or community well-being.
0:55-1:10	Values and common themes	Reflect back what has been heard. Ask what values were at stake and what concerns appeared more than once.
1:10-1:20	CAJM pathway and invitation	Explain how stories move into themes, research, issues, and action. Invite continued participation.
1:20-1:30	Closing and next steps	Participants complete interest cards. Facilitator names follow-up timeline and closes with appreciation or a brief interfaith reflection.

Community agreements

- Speak from your own experience.
- Listen to understand, not to prepare a rebuttal.
- Share the time so every voice has room.
- Respect the dignity of every person, even when experiences differ.
- Personal stories and identifying details stay within the group unless the storyteller gives permission to share them.
- Themes may be shared with CAJM without identifying the storyteller.
- We are here to understand concerns, not to debate solutions tonight.
- We will be honest about what CAJM can and cannot promise.
- Confidentiality may be limited if someone is in immediate danger or if reporting is legally required.

10. Facilitator Guidance and Sample Language

Opening the circle

Suggested Opening

Thank you for being here. CAJM's mission is to build people power for local community justice. Before we decide what to research or ask public officials to do, we need to listen to people living with the challenges in our community. Tonight is not a debate, and we are not expected to solve every problem. Our purpose is to hear one another's experiences, notice the values and concerns we share, and explain how these stories will help shape CAJM's work. We will report themes without identifying anyone. A name, direct quotation, or identifiable story will not be used publicly without permission. Confidentiality may be limited if someone is in immediate danger or if reporting is legally required.

Moving from opinions to stories

When someone offers a broad opinion, do not correct or dismiss it. Invite the person to connect the opinion to experience: "Can you tell us about a time when you saw or experienced that?" "How did that affect you or someone you care about?" or "Why did that matter to you?"

Listening for values

Values often appear through emotion. Frustration may point to fairness or accountability. Fear may point to safety or stability. Grief may point to love, dignity, or belonging. Hope may point to opportunity or community. A facilitator may gently reflect a value back and ask whether the reflection is accurate.

Managing participation

Make space without embarrassing anyone. To interrupt respectfully, say, "I want to pause you there because your story is important, and I also want to make sure we hear from everyone." To invite quieter voices, say, "We have heard from several people. I would also like to make room for anyone who has not spoken yet." Participants always have permission to pass.

Closing the circle

Suggested Closing

Thank you for trusting this circle with your experiences. We heard concerns tonight, but we also heard values, wisdom, and a desire for change. Our next step is to combine themes from Listening Circles across CAJM, identify recurring community problems, and move those concerns into our assembly and research process. We will follow up within one week, and we invite you to stay connected in the way that fits you best.

11. Questions That Invite Stories

Facilitators should select a small number of questions and allow enough time for meaningful responses. Asking every question is less important than following stories that reveal values, relationships, and community conditions.

Opening questions

- What is something you value or appreciate about this community?
- Who helped shape your understanding of fairness, service, or justice?
- What gives you hope when you think about our community?

Story questions

- Tell us about a time when you or someone close to you faced a community problem that felt unfair, unsafe, or unnecessarily difficult.
- What experience in our community has stayed with you because you believed people deserved better?
- When have you felt that a public system, institution, or service did not work the way it should?
- What pressure are families, young people, elders, workers, or congregations carrying that is not receiving enough attention?
- What is one community concern that has affected your daily life, family, congregation, or neighborhood?

Follow-up questions

- What happened?
- Who was affected?
- How did it affect you?
- Why did this matter to you?
- What value was being honored or violated?
- What did you do next?
- Who else do you know who has experienced something similar?

Questions to avoid

Avoid questions that force participants to choose an issue too early, invite partisan debate, assume a solution, or pressure people to disclose trauma publicly. Examples include: “What should CAJM work on?” “Who is to blame?” “Which candidate will fix this?” and “Tell us the worst thing that ever happened to you.” The purpose is to invite honest stories without pressuring people to perform pain.

12. Listening Skills and Common Pitfalls

Common Pitfall	Facilitator Response
The circle becomes a survey	Slow down, ask follow-up questions, and prioritize stories and relationships over completing every prompt.

Common Pitfall	Facilitator Response
Participants offer only general opinions	Ask for a specific experience: "Can you tell us about a time when that affected you or someone you know?"
One person dominates	Affirm the contribution, interrupt respectfully, and invite voices that have not yet been heard.
The group begins debating	Restate the agreement: "We are here to understand experiences tonight, not to settle the debate."
People jump immediately to solutions	Record the idea and explain that solution research comes after CAJM identifies recurring problems.
The facilitator teaches or preaches	Return to questions. The facilitator's role is to guide the conversation, not deliver the answer.
A participant shares an emotional story	Do not rush to fix it. Thank the person, allow a pause, ask what support is appropriate, and follow the care protocol.
Silence feels uncomfortable	Allow several seconds. Rephrase the question or offer people time to reflect before speaking.
The group names too many problems	Do not force a vote. Capture themes and allow organization-wide synthesis to reveal patterns.
There is no clear follow-up	Name the next step, responsible person, and timeframe before participants leave.

13. Confidentiality, Consent, and Safeguarding

Listening requires trust, but CAJM should not promise absolute confidentiality. Facilitators must explain what will be recorded, how information will be used, and the limits of privacy before participants begin sharing.

What may be shared

- Themes, values, and recurring community problems may be reported to CAJM without identifying the storyteller.
- A person's name, contact information, direct quotation, photograph, recording, or identifiable story may not be used publicly without specific permission.
- Contact information should be stored separately from the Listening Circle report.
- Only people responsible for synthesis, follow-up, or safeguarding should receive the full report.
- Notes should contain only the personal details necessary for follow-up.

Limits of confidentiality

If a participant indicates that they or another person may be in immediate danger, or if a disclosure may involve a legal reporting duty, the facilitator must not promise secrecy. The facilitator should pause, explain the need to seek help, and immediately contact the designated safeguarding lead or CAJM staff contact. Volunteer facilitators should not attempt to interpret reporting law or manage the situation alone. The designated lead will determine the appropriate next step under the protocol in Appendix F; emergency services should be contacted when there is immediate danger.

Consent for public testimony

A story shared in a Listening Circle is not automatically available for a public testimony, media interview, newsletter, grant application, research meeting, or public action. CAJM must contact the storyteller, explain the intended use, confirm what details may be shared, and obtain clear permission. Permission for one use does not create permanent permission for every future use.

Facilitator Boundary

A Listening Circle is a community-organizing conversation, not therapy, pastoral counseling, legal advice, or crisis treatment. Facilitators respond with compassion, connect people to appropriate support, and remain within their role.

14. Capturing Themes and Identifying Leaders

What the note-taker captures

The note-taker records patterns, not a transcript. Notes should use respectful, neutral language and should not include unnecessary personal details. Direct quotations should be recorded only when especially clear and shared beyond the local team only with permission or without identifying information.

- Number of participants and basic congregation or community context.
- Top three recurring problems or barriers named through stories.
- Values underneath the concerns, such as dignity, safety, fairness, stability, opportunity, belonging, or accountability.
- Institutions or systems connected to the experiences.
- One brief anonymized example that illustrates each major theme.
- Questions that require research.
- People who expressed interest in follow-up or demonstrated leadership potential.
- Commitments made, responsible persons, and follow-up deadlines.

Listening for emerging leaders

Leadership potential is not limited to the person who speaks the most. Notice people who listen carefully, connect one story to another, invite quieter voices, name a shared value, ask a strategic question, offer to

take responsibility, or bring others into relationship. These observations should lead to a personal one-to-one follow-up, not an automatic title.

Leadership Principle

We are not only listening for issues. We are listening for people who may be ready to take the next step in building CAJM's power.

15. Follow-Up and the Annual Organizing Cycle

Follow-up is part of the Listening Circle, not an optional task after it. Asking people to share personal experiences creates a responsibility to communicate what happens next. Every participant should receive a thank-you and next-step message within one week.

Official CAJM terminology: A Congregational/Team Review is the local preparation step. The Annual Community Problems Assembly is the organization-wide gathering where recurring problems are considered for research.

The pathway from listening to action

1. Listening Circles build relationships and surface lived experiences.
2. Congregational teams submit reports and conduct one-to-one follow-up with participants and potential leaders.
3. CAJM staff and leaders synthesize recurring themes across congregations without erasing important differences.
4. Congregational and team reviews prepare local themes, and the Annual Community Problems Assembly considers the strongest recurring problems and determines which concerns should move forward.
5. Research teams meet with affected residents, experts, practitioners, public officials, and decision-makers to understand each problem and test possible solutions.
6. CAJM cuts an issue by defining what we want, when we want it, and who has the authority to say yes.
7. Networks are strengthened and exercised through meetings, turnout commitments, negotiations, and public action.
8. CAJM reports back to participants so they can see how listening contributed to research, leadership, and action.

Recommended implementation timeline

Phase	Recommended Window	Primary Outcome

Phase	Recommended Window	Primary Outcome
Preparation and Kick-Off	Weeks 1-2	Train facilitators, recruit hosts, set congregational goals, and distribute tools.
Listening Circles	Weeks 3-8	Conduct circles and one-to-ones; submit reports within 48 hours.
Synthesis and follow-up	Weeks 5-9	Identify themes, contact potential leaders, and clarify stories or missing information.
Congregational/Team Review	Weeks 9-10	Review local themes and prepare leaders for the organization-wide assembly.
Annual Community Problems Assembly	Weeks 11-12	Select priority problems for research based on breadth, depth, urgency, and organizing potential.
Research process	Following 3-5 months	Develop issue teams, complete power and problem analysis, identify solutions, and prepare for action.

16. Standards and Success Measures

CAJM should establish clear participation goals while protecting the quality of the process. Numbers matter because broad listening strengthens legitimacy, but the number of meetings alone does not demonstrate success.

Minimum process standards

- Facilitators complete Listening Circle training before leading a circle.
- Each circle has a designated host, facilitator, and note-taker whenever possible.
- Participants hear the purpose, agreements, confidentiality limits, next step, and follow-up timeframe.
- Reports are submitted within 48 hours.
- Every participant receives follow-up within one week.
- Potential leaders receive a personal one-to-one invitation rather than only a mass email.
- Congregational teams review progress regularly and ask for support early when goals are at risk.

Measure	Questions to Ask
Reach	How many circles, congregations, participants, and previously uninvolved people took part?
Relationship quality	Did participants feel heard, respected, and connected? Did new one-to-one relationships begin?
Leadership development	How many potential leaders were identified, contacted, and given a meaningful next step?

Measure	Questions to Ask
Theme clarity	Did recurring problems and values emerge clearly enough to guide assembly discussion and research?
Follow-up	Were reports submitted on time and participants contacted within one week?
Organizing impact	Can CAJM trace research priorities and campaigns back to stories and relationships from the listening process?
Safety and trust	Were confidentiality limits explained, consent respected, and care concerns handled appropriately?

Final Test

The test of a Listening Circle is not whether people talked. The test is whether people were heard, relationships grew, leaders emerged, and the organization became better prepared to act together.

Appendix A. Listening Circle Planning Checklist

☐ Host confirmed

☐ Facilitator trained and confirmed

☐ Note-taker confirmed

☐ Date, time, location, and accessibility confirmed

☐ Invitation list includes new and established participants

☐ Personal invitations completed

☐ Reminder message sent

☐ Room arranged in a circle

☐ Materials and refreshments prepared

☐ Questions selected and practiced

☐ Confidentiality, consent, and safeguarding plan reviewed

☐ Reporting plan confirmed

☐ Follow-up assignments and deadline confirmed

Appendix B. Facilitator Preparation Worksheet

Preparation Question	Notes
What is the purpose of this particular circle?	
Who is hosting, facilitating, and taking notes?	
Who is expected to attend, and whose voice may be missing?	
Which opening question will we use?	
Which two or three story questions will we prioritize?	
What local tensions or sensitivities should the facilitator understand?	
How will we explain confidentiality and what happens next?	
Who is the safeguarding contact?	
Who will follow up with each participant and by when?	

Appendix C. Listening Circle Report Form

Complete and submit this form within 48 hours. Protect personal information, store contact information separately, and use neutral language.

Field	Response
Congregation / host organization	
Date and location	
Host / facilitator / note-taker	
Number of participants	
Previously uninvolved participants	
Names and contact information stored separately	Yes / No
Top three recurring themes	
Values underneath the themes	
Institutions or systems mentioned	
Representative anonymized story or example	

Field	Response
Questions requiring research	
Potential leaders and evidence for follow-up	
Participant commitments or interests	
Immediate care or safeguarding follow-up needed	
Person responsible for participant follow-up	
Follow-up deadline	

Appendix D. Participant Interest Cards

Print and cut this page to provide one card per participant.

CAJM LISTENING CIRCLE - PARTICIPANT INTEREST CARD

Thank you for participating. Please indicate how you would like to stay connected.

☐ YES, I would like to become a CAJM Network Member.
☐ I am interested in Network Membership. Please tell me more.
☐ I would like updates about what CAJM heard.
☐ I am interested in attending the Annual Community Problems Assembly.
☐ I am interested in learning more about a research team.
☐ I am willing to host a future Listening Circle.
☐ I am interested in facilitator training.
☐ I would like a one-to-one conversation with a CAJM leader.

Name: _____ Congregation/Organization: _____

Phone: _____ Email: _____

Permission for follow-up: ☐ Phone ☐ Text ☐ Email

This card is used only to coordinate CAJM follow-up and record your response. It does not give permission to use your story publicly.

CAJM LISTENING CIRCLE - PARTICIPANT INTEREST CARD

Thank you for participating. Please indicate how you would like to stay connected.

☐ I would like updates about what CAJM heard.
☐ I am interested in attending the Annual Community Problems Assembly.
☐ I am interested in learning more about a research team.
☐ I am willing to host a future Listening Circle.
☐ I am interested in facilitator training.
☐ I would like a one-to-one conversation with a CAJM leader.

Name: _____ Congregation/Organization: _____

Phone: _____ Email: _____

Permission for follow-up: ☐ Phone ☐ Text ☐ Email

This card is used only to coordinate CAJM follow-up. It does not give permission to use your story publicly.

Appendix E. Sample Invitation and Follow-Up Language

Personal invitation

Invitation

I am inviting a small group to a CAJM Listening Circle. We want to hear what people are experiencing in our community and ensure our justice work grows from real stories and relationships. It will be a respectful conversation, not a debate, and your voice would add something important. Can you join us on [date] at [time]?

Reminder

Reminder

I am looking forward to seeing you at the CAJM Listening Circle tomorrow at [time/location]. We will spend about 90 minutes sharing experiences, listening for common concerns, and explaining how the conversation connects to CAJM's research and action process. Please let me know if you need anything to participate fully.

Follow-up

Thank You and Next Step

Thank you for the honesty and wisdom you brought to our Listening Circle. We are reviewing themes from circles across CAJM and will share what we are learning. You indicated interest in [next step], and [name] will contact you by [date]. Your participation is helping CAJM build people power for local community justice.

Permission to explore a public testimony

Follow-Up Request

You shared an experience that may help others understand this concern. Would you be open to a separate conversation about whether and how your story might be used? Saying yes to this conversation does not commit you to sharing publicly. We will discuss the setting, details, and your comfort before anything is used.

Appendix F. When a Story Requires Additional Care

Listening Circles may surface grief, fear, violence, displacement, discrimination, abuse, self-harm, or other painful experiences. Facilitators should respond compassionately without acting as therapists or investigators.

Step	Response
1. Pause	Slow the conversation. Thank the participant for trusting the group. Do not ask for unnecessary details.
2. Check immediate safety	Ask privately, when appropriate: "Are you or someone else in immediate danger right now?"
3. Explain limits	Do not promise secrecy. Explain that immediate danger or a legal reporting duty may require contacting appropriate help.
4. Contact the designated person	Immediately notify the designated safeguarding lead or CAJM staff contact. Volunteer facilitators should not interpret reporting requirements or carry the response alone. Contact emergency services when there is immediate danger.
5. Protect privacy	Share information only with people who need it to provide care or fulfill a legal duty. Record only what is necessary.
6. Follow up	Assign a specific person and timeframe. The facilitator should not carry the responsibility alone.
7. Return to the group	If the circle continues, acknowledge the pause without revealing private details and restate the community agreements.

Designated congregation safeguarding contact: _____

CAJM staff contact: _____ Phone: _____

Emergency response: Call 911 when there is immediate danger or a medical emergency.

A Closing Word

Listening Circles ask CAJM to practice the kind of leadership we want to see in public life: leadership that begins with humility, treats people as more than data, and allows lived experience to shape collective priorities. We do not listen because we lack conviction. We listen so that our conviction is informed by relationship, our strategy is grounded in reality, and our action is owned by organized people.

Remember

Effective ministry does not begin with speaking. It begins with listening. The awakened ear produces the learned tongue. For CAJM, effective leadership begins with listening. If we get the listening right, everything else gets stronger.