



COMMUNITY CONVERSATION WORKBOOK

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ABOUT THE HARWOOD INSTITUTE FOR PUBLIC INNOVATION

The Harwood Institute for Public Innovation is a nonpartisan, nonprofit organization that teaches, coaches and inspires individuals and organizations to solve pressing problems and change how communities work together. With a proven 30-year track record the Institute's approach to change – the Harwood practice – has spread to thousands of communities across the U.S. and to groups in more than 40 countries.

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WHAT GUIDES US

The Harwood Institute is driven by a continuous focus on delivering on our promise and impact, because we know through years of experience that the practice of Turning Outward works.

PROMISE. Each of us has the power within us to choose a path of possibility and hope, where we work to change the negative conditions in communities and society that often hold us back and create new conditions that propel us forward; where we are part of something larger than ourselves. By working together, we can make hope real for all people and communities.

IMPACT. The Harwood Institute provides you with the orientation, practices and tools so that you can make strong choices and work with others to create change.

VALUE PROPOSITION. If you Turn Outward and make more intentional judgments and choices in creating change, you will produce greater impact and relevance in your community.

What is the promise, impact and value proposition of your organization and work?
What guides you?

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WHAT ARE COMMUNITY CONVERSATIONS

- **Community conversations provide** a safe place where people in your community can come together to talk about their aspirations, concerns and how they want their community to move forward.
- **The typical community conversation** has about 8–15 participants and lasts anywhere from 90 minutes to two hours.
- **A moderator guides the conversation** using a discussion guide, which was developed by The Harwood Institute over the past 25 years. This guide has been tested and used in communities of all sizes and makeup.

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UNDERSTANDING PUBLIC VS. EXPERT KNOWLEDGE

EXPERT KNOWLEDGE

Expert knowledge comes from expert or professional analysis. It often includes data, demographic and market studies, evidence-based decision making and best practices.

It is usually presented in expert or professional language

PUBLIC KNOWLEDGE

Public knowledge comes only from engaging in conversation with people in a community. Only the people within the community themselves can tell us their aspirations, concerns and how they see different facets of their community

It is usually in plain language that everyone can understand

WHAT PUBLIC KNOWLEDGE HELPS YOU DO

When you help a community generate public knowledge, you and others in the community can:

- Understand the context of people's lives
- Root your work and decisions in what matters to people
- Identify key issues of concern to people in language that people themselves use
- Uncover and generate a sense of common purpose for action in the community
- Set realistic goals for moving ahead and making change
- Make one's work more relevant and more impactful within the community

ADVICE ABOUT GETTING STARTED

When you are first starting your community conversations, we strongly recommend the following steps:

- Start by holding only three community conversations.
- Avoid falling into a planning loop where you keep talking about who to engage and where.
- Don't worry about who you talk with at first or where. To gain experience and start to hear how people engage with community conversations, identify three easy places where you can find people to speak with.

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DEFINING COMMUNITY

HOW TO GET STARTED

There are many ways to define community. You'll want ask yourself how you should define it:

- Is it the geographic boundaries of your community?
- Is it a particular neighborhood?
- Is it a region?
- Is it a community of interest?

RE-CALIBRATING OVER TIME

However you define community, be sure to keep an open mind about your definition as you engage in more and more community conversations. For instance:

- Sometimes people start with a broad definition of a community and then decide that given their mission and/or capacity, they need to narrow the definition;
- Sometimes people start with a narrow definition of community only to find out that addressing certain aspirations or concerns requires engaging a larger community.

DON'T WORRY!

You will always have the opportunity to redefine the community you are engaging and/or working with. What's most important is to keep the conversation on the table and to revisit it as you learn.

3 STEPS FOR RECRUITING PARTICIPANTS

STEP 1: DECIDE WHOM TO INVITE

Remember that the purpose of community conversations is to engage a diverse group of people.

- Community conversations typically have 8-15 people. You'll want to recruit about 20 participants to account for people who inevitably can't make it.
- If fewer than eight people show up, that's fine. You'll still have a great conversation.
- If more than 20 show up, consider breaking into two groups.

When thinking about who to recruit, consider the following questions:

- Whom do we need to include to hear different perspectives?
- Do you want to learn about how people from across the community are thinking, or a particular part of the community?
- Do you want to engage people with certain experiences (e.g., parents who have children in elementary school)?
- Do you want to ensure that you talk with a cross-section of people from different parts of the community?

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3 STEPS FOR RECRUITING PARTICIPANTS

STEP 2: IDENTIFY WHO CAN HELP US REACH OUT

Think about your community as a web of people and organizations connected to each other through other people and organizations. To get a broad cross-section of the community, it is important to reach out to all parts of this web – not just to the people and organizations you already know.

- To invite people to a community conversation, you'll want to think about who in the community already have relationships that can help you.
- This is a great way to forge stronger relationships and partnerships with different individuals, organizations and groups in the community.

Use these questions to help you develop a list of people and groups that can help with your issue. Think about:

- Who knows the part of the community where we want to engage people?
- Where do people from different parts of the community – or who are concerned with a particular issue – already get together that we can tap into?
- Who already brings people together?
- What are some of the ways that people get information on a regular basis? (Think about church bulletins, local publications, listservs or local coffee shops.)
- Which civic leaders – such as those at community organizations, in religious organizations or neighborhood associations, among others office – could help us get the word out or bring people together for us?
- Who would give us more credibility?
- If we do not know the answers to some of these questions, who can help us?

Consider some of the following types of people:

- Religious leaders
- Members of community or neighborhood groups like Rotary, NAACP, volunteer centers or neighborhood associations
- Students and young people
- Parents
- School officials
- Teachers
- Health care providers
- People who access community services at agencies

3 STEPS FOR RECRUITING PARTICIPANTS

STEP 3: INVITE PEOPLE PERSONALLY

When you can, it's important to invite people personally to the community conversations:

- Make a personal invitation. Ideally, these invitations should go out at least two weeks before the date of the conversation. (If a partner is helping you, have the partner make invitations.)
- In the invitation, be clear about the purpose of the community conversation and to set the right expectations (page 15).
- Follow-up by email or phone to confirm that each person can attend.
- Make sure to send people specific instructions on how to get to the location of the conversation; the name, email and phone number of at least one contact person; and, if applicable, information on how to get to the specific room for the conversation.
- It is helpful the day before the conversation to send out a reminder to the participants.

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SUGGESTED INVITATION

Dear _____,

We are hosting a community conversation at ____ (location) ____ from ____ (start time to end time) ____ on ____ (date) ____.

[Add in information here about your organization and/or the partner helping you]

This conversation is one of several that we will be having with people across the community. Each one is a chance for us to better understand people's aspirations for the community, the concerns they have and what they believe might make a difference in strengthening the community.

While we can't promise that any new initiatives or programs will emerge from these conversations, we will get back to you, share what we learned and how it can help make our work in the community more effective.

We hope that you will be able to join us.

Please RSVP to ____ (person) ____ at ____ (contact info) ____ so we can be sure to have enough refreshments on hand.

For more information please do not hesitate to contact ____ (person) ____ at ____ (contact info) ____.

Thank you.

WHERE TO HOLD COMMUNITY CONVERSATIONS

Where you hold the community conversation can have a big impact on its success. The setting can affect who attends each community conversation, the quality of the conversation, and the group's ability to get its work done. Find a site and reserve the dates as soon as possible.

WHEN THINKING ABOUT WHERE TO HOLD COMMUNITY CONVERSATIONS CONSIDER:

- A place folks in the community are familiar with and use frequently
- A place that is considered to be part of the community
- A place that has a second or third room available, if you need to divide up a large group
- A place that is available in the evenings and/or on weekends
- A place that offers a comfortable environment
- A place that is not too noisy or full of distractions
- A place that is easily accessible to all participants: plenty of parking, centrally located, safe, near public transportation, accessible to those with disabilities
- A place that is affordable

EXAMPLES OF GOOD LOCATIONS AND LESS DESIRABLE LOCATIONS

Here are some examples of both good and less desirable places for the community conversations. This is not an exhaustive list. Think about other potential good sites for the community conversations in your area.

GOOD LOCATIONS	LESS DESIRABLE LOCATIONS
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• PUBLIC LIBRARIES• COMMUNITY CENTERS• PLACES OF WORSHIP• COMMUNITY ORGANIZATIONS (YMCA, ETC.)• RECREATION CENTERS	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• CITY HALL• GOVERNMENT BUILDINGS• SCHOOLS• FANCY HOTELS• OFFICE BUILDINGS (ESPECIALLY AFTER HOURS)

IDENTIFYING CONVERSATION LEADERS

Leading a community conversation doesn't require a professional moderator or facilitator. But, that doesn't mean you want just anyone leading the conversation. This section outlines some of the traits you want to find in a conversation leader, as well as suggestions for how to find such a person.

THE MAIN RESPONSIBILITY OF THE CONVERSATION LEADER

The main responsibility of a conversation leader is to create a safe and inviting environment that enables participants in community conversations to engage, listen to each other and work together.

THE TYPE OF PERSON YOU WANT

Leading a community conversation is different than running a meeting. Look for people who share your commitment to engaging citizens in new ways of talking through issues and working together. Good conversation leaders are curious listeners and focus on creating a conversation based on discovery, learning from one another and exploring their own ideas.

TRAITS OF AN EFFECTIVE CONVERSATION LEADER

- Remains neutral about the topic being discussed – is not seen as having his or her own agenda or siding with a particular group
- Helps people explore different ideas – displays a genuine sense of curiosity
- Actively listens to people and builds trust
- Engages people to consider different perspectives
- Explores with people seemingly conflicting or contradictory views in a nonconfrontational way
- Stays focused on the goal of the conversation: this is about learning, not promoting an organization or group
- Keeps people focused on the questions in the Community Conversation Guide
- Prepares for each conversation by working through the Community Conversation Guide and going over notes from previous conversations

***NOTE:** Conversation leaders do not need to be experts on these issues. Oftentimes it is best if they are not. The conversation leader is there to guide the conversation, not participate in it.*

WHERE TO FIND GOOD CONVERSATION LEADERS

- Partners
- Trusted community/neighborhood groups, nonprofits or religious organizations
- Civic groups like Rotary Club, Urban League, League of Women Voters
- Local businesses
- Colleges and universities

TIPS FOR LEADING CONVERSATIONS

To get the most out of the conversation, you want to go beyond people's surface reactions. Here are several rules of thumb to use when leading these conversations:

TAKE NOTHING AT FACE VALUE: Notice the words and phrases people use. Probe by asking, "What do you mean?" and "What are you getting at?"

LISTEN FOR WHERE PEOPLE GET STUCK: Listen for moments where people need more facts or where a perception prevents them from saying more about a concern.

ENGAGE PEOPLE EARLY ON: Make sure everyone says something early on. Ask people what they think about what others are saying.

ASK PEOPLE TO SQUARE THEIR CONTRADICTIONS: Illuminate what folks are struggling with. Ask, "I know this can be a really tough issue, but how do the two things you said fit together?"

KEEP JUXTAPOSING VIEWS AND CONCERNS: Pointing out contrasts will help people articulate what they really believe and give you a deeper understanding of what they think.

HELP KEEP THE CONVERSATION FOCUSED: Help people stay focused. Remind participants of what they are discussing. Don't let things get too far afield.

PIECE TOGETHER WHAT PEOPLE ARE SAYING: Folks won't make one all-inclusive statement about what they think. Say, "This is what I'm hearing. Do I have it right?"

KEEP IN MIND THE "UNSPOKEN" RULES: Different conversations and spaces have their own sets of "rules." Check the level of trust people have and what it means for how you should interact.

WATCH OUT FOR YOUR OWN PRECONCEIVED VIEWS: Everyone has biases that can filter our questions and interpretations. Be alert to them.

TIPS FOR LEADING CONVERSATIONS

IF	THEN
<p>A FEW PEOPLE DOMINATE THE CONVERSATION</p>	<p>Engage each person from the start. Make sure everyone says something early on. Ask, "Are there any new voices on this issue?" or "Does anyone else want to jump in here?" Be direct and say, "We seem to be hearing from the same people. Let's give others a chance to talk." Call on people by name to answer.</p>
<p>THE GROUP GETS OFF ON A TANGENT OR A PERSON RAMBLES ON AND ON</p>	<p>Ask, "How does what you're talking about relate to our challenge?" or "What does that lead you to think about (the question at hand)?" Ask them to restate or sum up what they said in a few words. If you can't get a person to focus, interrupt him/her when they take a breath and move to another person or question. Then bring him/her back into the conversation later.</p>
<p>SOMEONE SEEMS TO HAVE A PERSONAL GRUDGE ABOUT AN ISSUE AND KEEPS TALKING ABOUT IT</p>	<p>Remind the person where the group is trying to focus. Ask him/her to respond to the question at hand. Acknowledge the person and move on. Say, "I can understand where you are coming from, but we need to move on." If the person continues to be disruptive, interrupt them. Say, "We heard you, but we're just not talking about that right now."</p>
<p>PEOPLE ARGUE</p>	<p>Don't let it bother you too much — it's okay as long as it is not mean-spirited. Find out what's behind the argument. Ask why people disagree, get to the bottom of it. Break the tension with a joke or something funny. Stop to review the ground rules. Take a break.</p>
<p>PEOPLE NEVER DISAGREE OR ARE "TOO POLITE"</p>	<p>Play devil's advocate. Bring up or introduce different or competing ideas and see how people respond. Tell the group you've noticed that they don't disagree much and ask if everyone is really in as much agreement as it seems.</p>

CONDUCTING THE CONVERSATION

Here is a basic script and step-by-step guide to use for the community conversation.

INTRODUCTIONS

- Introduce yourself.
- Thank the participants for coming.

EXPECTATIONS: SHARE WITH THE PARTICIPANTS EXPECTATIONS FOR THE CONVERSATION

- Over the next few (months/weeks), we will be holding conversations like this one with people from across the community to talk about their aspirations, their concerns and how we can move forward.
- We're here to listen and learn.
- We can't promise to create a new program or initiative based on this conversation. But we do promise to get back to you with what we learned and how we'll use it.
- These conversations usually last between 90 minutes and two hours though sometimes folks want to talk more.

EXPLAIN YOUR ROLE AS CONVERSATION LEADER

- My role is to ask questions that help us have a good conversation.
- I won't participate or offer my views. This is a conversation about what you think.
- To be sure I get what you're saying, I may ask follow-up questions, or play "devil's advocate." I'll ask follow-up questions such as, "What do you mean by that?" or "Can you say more about that?" or "What makes you think that?" or "How does that make you feel?"
- To make sure we hear from everyone, I may ask someone who has had a chance to talk a lot to hold off on comments at times. If I do call on you, you can always say, "Pass." I just want to make sure everyone has the chance to participate.

IDENTIFY THE NOTE TAKER

- We have someone taking notes to make sure we accurately hear what you are saying. It would be too hard for me alone to take notes and listen to the conversation.
- When taking the notes, we won't include anyone's name or at any point make your name public unless we have your permission.

REVIEW THE GROUND RULES

- Write the Ground Rules on a flip chart page (see below) and hang them where everyone can see them.
- Review the Ground Rules by going through each one with the group. Then ask, “Do these work for everyone?”

CONVERSATION GROUND RULES

HERE TO HAVE A “KITCHEN TABLE” CONVERSATION

Everyone can participate; no one dominates.

THERE ARE NO “RIGHT ANSWERS”

Draw on your own experiences, views and beliefs. You do not need to be an expert.

KEEP AN OPEN MIND

Listen carefully and try to hear and understand the views of others, especially those you may disagree with.

HELP KEEP THE CONVERSATION ON TRACK

Stick to the questions. Try not to ramble.

IT’S OKAY TO DISAGREE, BUT DON’T BE DISAGREEABLE

Respond to others how you want them to respond to you.

HAVE FUN!

HAVE PEOPLE INTRODUCE THEMSELVES

- Before starting the conversation, have each of the participants introduce themselves.
- Ask, “Please tell us your first name, where you live and what you like to do in your free time.”
- Do not ask people to talk about their job or where they work.

DO THE CONVERSATION

WRAP-UP

- Thank people for attending.
- Remind them that their names will be kept confidential.
- Give them contact information and let them know you will be in touch with them to share what you have learned.

COMMUNITY CONVERSATION GUIDE

1. What kind of a community do you want?

- Why is that important?
- How is that different from the way things are now?

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2. Given what we just said, what are the two to three most important issues or concerns when it comes to the community?

- Decide which issue is most important for the group and use it for the discussion.
- If you are going to test a specific issue introduce it here. Introduce the specific issue with follow-up questions like, "How does that fit with what we're talking about?" and "What concerns do you have about that?"

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3. What concerns do you have about this issue? Why?

- Does it seem like things are getting better? Worse? What makes you say that?
- How do you think the issue/concern came about?

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4. How do the issues we're talking about affect you personally?

- What personal experiences have you had?
- How about people around you – family, friends, coworkers, neighbors, others – what do you see them experiencing?
- Are some people affected more than others? Who? In what ways? Why?

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5. When you think about these things, how do you feel about what's going on?

- Why do you feel this way?
- How do you think other people (in different parts of town) feel about this?

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6. What do you think is keeping us from making the progress we want?

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7. When you think about what we've talked about, what are the kinds of things that could be done that would make a difference?

- What do you think these things might accomplish?
- In terms of individuals, what are the kinds of things that people like us could do to make a difference?
- What's important for us to keep in mind when we think about moving ahead?

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8. Thinking back over the conversation what groups or individuals would you trust to take action on these things?

- Why them and not others?

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9. If we came back together in six months or a year, what might you see that would be an indication that the things we talked about tonight were starting to happen?

- Why would that suggest things were changing? What would it mean to see that?

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10. Now that we've talked about this issue a bit, what questions do you have about it?

- What do you feel you'd like to know more about that would help you make better sense of what's going on and what should be done?
- What kind of follow-up would you like out of this discussion?

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ANNOTATED COMMUNITY CONVERSATION GUIDE

Give people plenty of time here. You don't have to hear from everyone, but don't let one or two people dominate.

Steer people away from only talking about complaints or problems. Keep focused on the kind of community they want.

When people draw connections between concerns they will tend to broaden, not narrow the discussion. Let them. Note the connections between the concerns. These webs of concern are critical to know.

Keep the conversation focused on the issue. For example, if the concern is education, don't slip into talking only about schools.

Listen here for emotions in people's comments. You'll want to draw these out later.

1. What kind of a community do you want?

- Why is this important?
- How is that different from the way things are now?

This is where people will start to name their aspirations. They'll also tell you why this matters and the words they use to describe the community.

2. Given what we just said, what are the 2-3 most important issues or concerns when it comes to the community?

- Decide which issue is most important for the group to use and use it for the balance of the conversation
- If you are going to test a specific issue, introduce it here. How does it fit with what we are talking about? What concerns do you have about that?

Give people room to tell their story.

3. What concerns do you have about this issue? Why?

- Does it seem like things are getting better or worse? What makes you say that?
- How do you think the issue/concern came about?

You can learn a lot here about how people talk about the issue. What words are they using?

Don't let anyone dominate here. Make room for different opinions. Ask, is this how everyone sees it?

Listen for how people relate to the issue. Sometimes people will gain context by asking “What’s in it for me?” But they also become attached through broader context/ beyond their own self-interest. This happens through 1st hand experiences, the experiences of others, what they an imagine.

Throughout the session keep track of “turning points” – those words, questions, or ideas that unlock the issues for people and cause them to rethink or engage more deeply.

Keep an eye out for disconnections or gaps in people’s stories: important parts that are missing, whether it’s a historical perspective, key fact or frame of reference. DO NOT try to fix these “gaps.”

People feel a range of emotions on the issue but may be hesitant to express these in public. Bringing out emotions makes the conversation more dynamic, helping people discover why they care and what they are looking for.

Listen here for ambivalence or people struggling to reconcile competing values or beliefs. Engage these voices, don’t let more certain people cut them off.

4. How do the issues we’re talking about affect you personally?

- What personal experiences have you had?
- How about people around you – family, friends, coworkers, neighbors – what do you see them experiencing?
- Are some people affected more than others? Who? In what ways? Why?

For the first 2/3rds of the conversation you want to keep opening things up rather than closing them down. Give people room to tell their story. Don’t ask questions that box them in or push them to offer solutions before they are able to explore each other’s concerns and points of view.

Ask people start to tell stories you’ll begin to see the context that they use to understand their concerns.

People want to feel a sense of possibility for action on their concerns. Throughout the conversation listen for when people think action is possible. You may also hear the lack of possibility people experience.

5. When you think about these issues, how do you feel about what’s going on?

- Why do you feel this way?
- How do you think other people feel about this?

You may start to hear how people can connect their private concerns to the concerns of others moving from the private to public sphere.

Describing how others feels helps people consider other points of view and opens up the possibility for finding common ground.

Notice if emotion freezes anyone. Does fear or insecurity prompt people to shut down?

6. What do you think is keeping us from making the progress we want?

- Why do you say that?
- How do you think things got to be this way?

Listen here for both ideas and conditions people are expressing and the extent to which they believe change is possible.

Pay close attention to whether people see themselves as potential actors. Listen for their sense of possibility. Also pay attention to whom they trust to engage them and act.

7. When you think about what we've talked about, what are the kinds of things that could be done that would make a difference?

- What do you think these things might accomplish?
- What are the kinds of things that individuals can do to make a difference?
- What do you make of what other people say should be done?
- What's important for us to keep in mind when we think about moving forward?

It may take some people a while to respond. Give them time. Some may say they don't know because they are not experts. Remind them you only want to know what they think, that they don't have to be an expert.

8. Thinking back over the conversation who do you trust to take action on the issues you've been talking about?

- Why them and not others?

9. If we came back together in 6 months or a year, what might you see that would tell you the things we talked about were starting to happen?

- Why would that suggest things are changing?

You want to see what people believe are early wins. Taking action on these things will build a sense of hope and confidence that meaningful change is possible.

This gives you an opening to keep people engaged. Invite them to provide contact information.

10. Now that we've talked about this issue a bit, what questions do you have about it?

- What do you feel you'd like to know about that would help you make better sense of what's going on and what should be done?
- What kind of follow-up would you like out of this discussion?

TAKING NOTES

Taking notes in a community conversation is absolutely critical, even if you are recording the conversation. For each conversation, you will want to have a notetaker.

PEOPLE WHO MAKE GOOD NOTETAKERS ARE:

- Curious about how people think about the world.
- Observant – noting what people say and how they say it (the emotion, tension or doubt).
- Able to capture the essence of the conversation without inserting their own voice, words or judgment.
- Good with details (the specific words that people are using).
- Able help translate details into larger themes.
- Stays focused on the goal of the conversation – "what are we learning?"

AUDIO RECORDING CONVERSATIONS

- Audio recording a conversation is the best way to know you will capture the right insights and quotes. For report writing purposes, we encourage it.
- Audio recording the conversations does not take the place of a notetaker. Do both.
- Make sure to get a signed release form from the participants.

HOW TO TAKE NOTES

- Become familiar with the annotated discussion guide.
 - Make sure to read through and become familiar with the annotated discussion guide.
 - The annotations will help you to deeply listen and hear what people are saying about what matters to them.
- During the conversation:
 - Keep the annotated guide with you and refer to it. It will help you identify and make sense of what matters to people.
 - Take notes on what people are saying for each question.
 - Capture key insights, details and turning points.
 - Write down quotes that best illustrate the feel and focus of the conversation.
- Immediately after the conversation:
 - Talk with the conversation leader using the following questions:
 - "What did you make of the conversation?"
 - "What ideas, actions or comments really seemed to resonate with the group?"
 - "What did you notice in terms of the group's energy and emotion?"
 - "What quotes stood out to you? What do we need to write down while the conversation is still fresh?"

- Organize your notes for each conversation.
 - o You will want to organize your notes the day of the conversation or the very next day. Don't wait. It is much harder to do this a couple of days or more after the conversation.
 - o You should organize your notes into the following six categories:
 - Aspirations (for the community)
 - Main concerns (concerns about the larger community)
 - Specific issue concerns (concerns related to any specific issue you're exploring)
 - Actions that would make a difference
 - Whom do people trust to act
 - Questions people have
 - o It is okay if your notes are fairly long or overlap.
 - o Finally, you want look for patterns or themes in your notes and organize your notes by these patterns.
 - o Make sure to keep all of your notes from every conversation. Do not throw anything away. You may very well need to go back to them.

IDENTIFYING THEMES

- After the first two or three conversations, pull together a small group of those individuals who lead the conversation and the notetakers from the conversations to develop overall themes.
- You will want to repeat this process every five or six conversations that you do.
- As you go through the questions on the next page, be sure to use individual reporting notes that were completed as part of each community conversation. Be as specific as possible when referring to each conversation.

QUESTIONS FOR LOOKING ACROSS COMMUNITY CONVERSATIONS

1. WHAT, IF ANY, COMMON THEMES DO YOU SEE ACROSS THE CONVERSATIONS?

- How are people’s comments connected or related?
- Around which areas does agreement seem most strong? In what ways? Why?

2. WHAT, IF ANY, TENSIONS ARE EMERGING?

- Why are these tensions important?
- How do people in the conversations resolve them, if at all?

3. WHERE DO PEOPLE SEEM AMBIVALENT OR TORN?

- Why are they torn?
- What seems to be at work in their ambivalence?

3. HOW DO PEOPLE TALK?

- What words and phrases do people use?
- What emotions do they convey?
- What quotes or anecdotes best capture the themes that you are identifying?

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SHARING PUBLIC KNOWLEDGE

Sharing the public knowledge that you learn from community conversations with other individuals, organizations and groups is an important way to create community ownership of people's shared aspirations and concerns. It also paves the way to create alignment in people's intent to take action where the reference point for action becomes the community.

What follows is:

- Guidelines for sharing public knowledge;
- Two different options to present public knowledge to others; and
- Questions for engaging others in a conversation when sharing the public knowledge.

GUIDELINES

These guidelines apply for sharing public knowledge both within your own organization and with outside groups.

- **Create Room for Learning** – You want to create room for people to hear about and understand what you are learning from the community conversations. This means, don't jump to solutions too quickly where people lose sight of what is being learned.
- **Keep It Simple** – A good place to start is to frame what you learned in terms of people's shared aspirations and their common concerns. Make sure not to give a long laundry list of "findings." You'll lose people. Keep it short and simple.
- **Focus on Moving Forward** – It's important to generate a discussion around what this means for moving forward. Thus, never use the public knowledge as a means by which to point fingers at someone or some group for failing to take certain action(s) or produce certain results. That is the fastest way to make someone defensive and push them away from the table.
- **Get a Good Agenda Spot** – When engaging people on what you learned, ensure that you're not the last agenda item. Too often you'll be rushed because the meeting is running late.
- **Recruit the Right People** – If you want action to be taken or a decision to be made, make sure key decision-makers are involved.

WAYS OF PRESENTING PUBLIC KNOWLEDGE

There are two main ways for putting together and presenting public knowledge. Each approach serves a different purpose.

FINDINGS FORMAT

When you want to engage a group of people (within, or outside of your organization) in a more in-depth conversation about public knowledge and its implications, you can create a series of themes from your community conversations. This is what the themes might look like if the Community Trust in Step 4 had presented the public knowledge it had gained from community conversations. Notice how straightforward, compact and direct the themes are.

When using this approach you would briefly present your findings and leave most of the time for discussion using the questions on page 60.

COMMUNITY CONVERSATION THEME EXAMPLES

PEOPLE'S SHARED ASPIRATIONS

People want to create a safe, caring and connected community.

MAIN CONCERNS

- **"Safety" within the school** – people are concerned with bullying and students feeling comfortable and safe in expressing their views in an increasingly culturally diverse school
- **"Safety" outside of the school** – people want to ensure that kids can make their way safely between school and home
- **Parental skills** – many parents feel they lack the skills (language, math, reading, computer and other skills) to help kids do their homework and achieve academically
- **Community connectedness** – people have little experience with each other; in fact, there is widespread mistrust within and across some of the neighborhoods, which prevents people from being able to work together to support all kids, including their own

PEOPLE LACK TRUST IN GROUPS AND ORGANIZATIONS

Different parents and residents named different organizations and groups that they trust, but there was little agreement. They feel most groups are out for their own benefit. Trust is in short supply.

PEOPLE WANT TO SEE SMALL SIGNS OF PROGRESS

People said that they are leery of large-scale projects to "fix" their kids or the schools. They said that progress would come in smaller steps forward that they can see, touch and experience.

MADLIB® FORMAT

When you have only a few minutes to present what you are learning – such as at a staff meeting, in a speech, on a radio program or in conversation – then you will want to use the “Madlib®” format. This is a quick way to convey the essence of the public knowledge you have learned.

*People want (aspirations)
But they're concerned that (main concerns) are in the
way of achieving those aspirations. As people talk about those concerns, they talk specifically
about (specific issues) They believe we need to
focus on (actions) and if
(groups) played a part in those actions they would be more likely to
trust the effort and step forward themselves.*

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HOW TO SHARE PUBLIC KNOWLEDGE

THERE ARE FOUR BASIC QUESTIONS TO USE:

1. What do you make of what we are learning?
2. What are the implications for the work that each of us does in our community?
3. Where could we use what we are learning?
4. What possibilities are there for moving ahead?

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FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS (FAQS)

1. WHAT WILL THESE CONVERSATIONS CREATE?

These conversations will help you gain a stronger sense of people's aspirations for the community. Community conversations are a window into how people talk about their concerns and lives, and create a way to develop or deepen partnerships with non-traditional groups. With this knowledge, you can be more effective, more relevant and have greater impact in your community.

2. WHAT DO I ASK?

Use the Community Conversation Guide. This guide has been tested and used across the country for over 25 years. It lays out the questions to ask and walks you through the conversation. We know from experience that it will work and spark a great conversation.

3. WHO SHOULD I TALK TO?

These conversations are designed to help you deepen your understanding of the community and that means you'll get the most out of them by reaching out to people across the community. Use what you know about your entire community to cast a wide net. You should talk with people in different parts of the community and those you imagine will have different types of answers (you'll likely find folks have more in common than you expected). Test yourself by asking, do we have a strong sense of the breadth of the community? Are we working to go beyond "the usual suspects?"

4. HOW MANY DO I NEED TO DO?

The best way to get started is to do three conversations to get your feet wet and to gain experience. Then, you'll be able to decide how you want to expand on those. Overall, a quick test to see if you've held enough conversations is to use the Institute's Intentionality Test for "Authority" from the 3A's: Could I stand up on a table and talk to people about their community, their aspirations and concerns, and would they believe me? Also, beware of the trap of spending so much time worrying and planning that you never get into the community. After your first conversation the next steps become clearer.

5. HOW LONG ARE THE CONVERSATIONS?

Community Conversations generally last about 90 minutes to two hours.

6. WHERE SHOULD I HOLD THE CONVERSATIONS?

You should hold the conversations in a place where folks are used to getting together and where they will feel comfortable talking. You want to find a place that is "part of the community." That is usually not a government or "official" place, nor is it a school. You want places that are easily accessible and open for evening conversations. Other things to consider when picking a location:

- Look for a comfortable place where you can get work done that is not too noisy or full of distractions.
- Look for a place that is easily accessible to participants.
- Examples: Community center, library, YMCA, places of worship, etc.

7. HOW MANY PEOPLE SHOULD I INVITE?

You want a group of between 8-15 for the conversation, the ideal tends to be 12 participants. Generally that means inviting 20 or more people. But don't worry, you can and should work with partners and others to help you reach out. One other note, it's a good idea to track RSVPs so that you have a sense of the size of the group. If you find you're much above 20 participants then it may be a good idea to try to have two conversations on different nights.

8. WHO SHOULD LEAD THE CONVERSATION?

You want someone who can engage participants, someone who is able to remain neutral and isn't seen as having his or her own agenda. You want someone who is curious about what people think and who will gently push people to consider different perspectives while helping folks to understand why others think. Lastly, a good conversation leader doesn't have to be an expert on education issues, they do have to be committed to guiding, not participating in, the conversations. We have found that it is not a good idea to have "experts" lead these conversations; their expertise can intimidate people and reduce their openness.

9. HOW WILL I GATHER UP AND MAKE SENSE OF WHAT I'M LEARNING?

The Community Conversation Workbook includes tools for taking notes and making sense of your findings.

10. WHAT DO I DO AFTER THE CONVERSATION?

After the conversations use the note taking tool to gather up what you learned from the conversation. Then, you want to set up a meeting with the different conversation leaders and notetakers to use the identifying theme tool to talk about the most important things you learned. Remember to focus the conversation on what you learned, rather than the process. Be sure you can answer: What did we learn? What are the implications for our work?

11. DO I NEED TO FOLLOW UP WITH PEOPLE?

These conversations are a great opportunity to build relationships. You'll want to collect names and contact information (use the tools provided as a starting point). After the conversation you'll want to follow up with people. Be sure to thank them for their participation. Also share what you learned and how you're going to use what you learned. This can be as simple as telling people that the conversation prompted you to think of new questions about your work, or as weighty as sharing that through these conversations you're considering a new initiative. Whatever follow up you choose, be clear with them about expectations and thank them for their time and for sharing. And remember, you want to engage with these people over time around the ideas and topics they have expressed interest in.

12. WON'T PEOPLE EXPECT US TO TAKE ON ALL OF THESE ISSUES?

It's important to set clear expectations for the conversations. Tell people that you want to listen and learn to get a better sense of how the community thinks. Make sure that they know you'll report back to them what you learn and how you plan to use what you learned. If this is done, people will be eager to participate.



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