

The Harwood Institute *Community Conversation Kit*

Education





Community Conversation Cheat Sheet

What to Ask

- Use the Harwood Community Conversation Discussion Guide

Who You Should Talk To

- People with different perspectives
- Not just your traditional “audience”
- Go to enough parts of the community that you feel confident in what you know

How Many Conversations

- Start with three conversations
- Look for patterns to emerge
- A good test: Could you stand up in front of 100 people and talk about their concerns, aspirations, the issues that they wrestle with – and would they believe you?

How to Leverage Partners

- Who knows the part of the community we want to go to?
- Who already brings people together?
- Who would give us more credibility?

Where You Should Hold Conversations

- Places folks are familiar with and use frequently. Part of the community which usually means not a government or “official” place, nor a school
- Comfortable, not too noisy, not too many distractions
- Easily accessible for participants
- Examples: Community center, library, YMCA, places of worship, etc

What to Listen For

- You want to listen for the 7 Public Knowledge Keys
- Look for patterns - not just anecdotes.
- What are people wrestling with? Where are people getting stuck in the conversation?

Using What You Learned

- Use the 7 Public Knowledge Keys to help organize what you learned
- Meet with decision makers about the 2-3 most important things you learned
- Focus on what you learned – not the process
- Ask: What are the implications of what we learned for our work

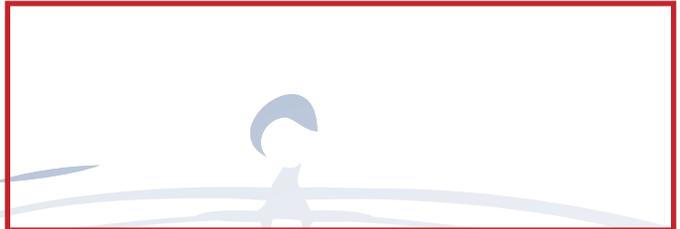
Community Conversation Work Sheet

Who we should talk to:



How many should we do:

How will we leverage partners:



Where to hold the conversations:



How to use what we learn:
Who needs to be in the meeting:





Community Conversation Public Knowledge Assessment

	We've Got it	Real Progress	Starting to Improve	Business as usual	N/A
Issues of concern					
Aspirations					
Sense of place					
Sources					
People					
Civic places					
Stereotypes to watch					



Community Conversation Moderator Tips

Making Conversations Work

Here are a handful of rules of thumb to use when leading authentic engagement conversations:

Take nothing at face value.

Notice what words and phrases people use. Probe by asking, “What do you mean?” and “What are you getting at?”

Listen for where people get stuck.

Watch for when people want more facts or if a perception blocks them from talking more about a concern.

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.

Piece together what people are saying.

Folks don't usually make one all-inclusive statement about what they think or how they feel. 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 out the level of trust people have and what that means for how you should interact.

Watch out for your own preconceived views.

Everyone has biases that can serve as filters when asking questions and interpreting what you hear. Be alert to them.



Community Conversation Moderator Tips

Troubleshooting Guide

IF	THEN
A few people dominate the conversation	Engage each person from the beginning. 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.
The group gets off on a tangent or a person rambles on and on	Ask, “How does what you’re talking about relate to our challenge?” or “So what does that lead you to think about (the question at hand)?” Ask the person 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.
Someone seems to have a personal grudge about an issue and keeps talking about it	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.”
People argue	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. Consider having a separate conversation to work through the conflict.
People never disagree or are “too polite”	Play devil’s advocate. Bring up different or competing ideas (even if one of them comes from you) and see how people respond. Check it out — 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.



Community Conversation Ground Rules

Have a “kitchen table” conversation

Everyone participates; 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 hard to understand the views of those who disagree with you.

Help keep the discussion on track

Stick to the questions: try not to ramble.

It is okay to disagree, but don't be disagreeable

Respond to others how you want to be responded to.

Have fun!



Community Conversation Guide - Education

Kick-off the conversation by reviewing the ground rules.

Ask people to introduce themselves – go around the table and ask people to tell everyone their first name, where they live and what they like to do in their free time.

1. What kind of a community do you want?

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

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

(Let people talk about all their concerns even if education comes up. If education does not come up, after people talk about their concerns, pivot to #3)

3. Given our aspirations for the community, what do we want education to be like in our community?

- Why is that important?
- What difference will that make?

4. How will what we just said about education help us to get the kind of community we want?

5. Overall, how do you think things are going when it comes to education in our community?

- What makes you say that?
- What's going well?



Community Conversation Guide - Education

6. How do the issues (on education) we're talking about affect you personally?

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

7. 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 (in other parts of the community) feel about this?

8. What kinds of things are keeping us from having the education we want for kids?

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

9. 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?
- How about in terms of individuals: 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 ahead?

(This would be a place in the discussion to try out any specific ideas you want to test or propose)

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