

Guide | How to host a listening conversation

Imagine:

People of all ages, from every sector in our community, from all experiences, working together to actively create a welcoming and thriving future for our community... a place where all who live here know that they belong... a place where everyone's gifts and talents are honoured and shared... and a place where we all play a role in creating the future we want to live into.



It all begins with a conversation

How does this hope become a reality? It all begins with a conversation and an experience of community between neighbours. This is the starting point... and the guiding force... that will help us harness the collective wisdom and creativity needed to realize our shared hopes for the future.

A shared vision for the future can help us to galvanize our collective energy and resources, and focus them on achieving shared priorities that benefit our entire community.

The most inspiring and compelling shared visions are grounded in the individual ideas, experiences and aspirations of a diversity of people. These visions are positive and inspiring because each of us can see our own vision reflected in the broader shared vision.

How to get started

Choose a space that invites conversation

- ✚ Somewhere relatively quiet and free from distractions and interruptions.
- ✚ Somewhere familiar and accessible to all who want to participate.
- ✚ Somewhere comfortable with enough room for everyone to sit in one big circle.

Make it welcoming

- ✚ Be sure to greet and welcome people.
- ✚ Introduce people to each other.
- ✚ Thank them for coming.
- ✚ Make it celebratory – flowers, snacks, music all help create a sense of joy and fun.

Logistics and supplies

- ✚ The conversations last approximately 1.5 hours depending on the number of questions you want to explore.
- ✚ Bring along nametags, markers, paper and pens in case people want to take notes or draw pictures to represent their vision for the future.
- ✚ Ask people to fill in a name tag and sign a consent form with their name, email list and phone number so that we can keep them informed of how this work is unfolding.
- ✚ You will need someone who can take notes or consider using an audio recorder if that makes it easier to capture the conversation.

Opening the conversation

Set the context

- ✚ Take a few moments at the start to outline the purpose for the conversation.
- ✚ Explain why and how you personally decided to get involved.
- ✚ Let people know that the ideas they share today will be combined with those generated by many other conversations like this one.
- ✚ Conversations that are happening throughout the community in the next month or so in order to build a consensus of the kind of community we want to be part of in the future.
- ✚ Tell people they are welcome to continue to be part of this process as it unfolds.

Create a safe container “to hold” the conversation

The goal of a great conversation is to help people to think together. To achieve this, it is often helpful to outline, and get agreement on, guidelines for the conversation. These can include:

- ✚ Turning off cell phones
- ✚ Listening with attention
- ✚ Being comfortable with silence
- ✚ Speaking with intention
- ✚ Asking questions
- ✚ Being open to new ideas and possibilities
- ✚ Being tolerant and willing to shift your opinion
- ✚ Attending to the well-being of the group
- ✚ Having fun!

The conversation guide

Getting warmed-up (25 minutes)

Ask people to form into groups of three and share their answers to the following question (10 minutes):

- Share a story of a powerful experience of community that you've had. What made it powerful?

Then, when all have shared their story, invite them to capture their insights to the following questions (15 minutes)

- Given the stories we've shared, what do we see as the benefits of community?
- What do we see as the challenges of community?
- What do we see as the job /purpose of community?

Exploring the desired future for our community (35 minutes)

Ask people to close their eyes and imagine that it is five years into the future and this community has succeeded in creating a welcoming, dynamic and thriving place (10 minutes):

- What does our community look like?
- What has made the community successful?
- How do we know that it is welcoming and inclusive?
- What are you personally most pleased about?
- What unique contributions are the community recognized for?
- What businesses, programs and services are offered?
- Who are the organizations, groups and individuals that have contributed to the community's success?
- What has been important about how the community's success was achieved?

Invite people to share their drawings and ideas in groups of three and then capture the common elements and unique ideas that emerge across all their pictures (15 minutes.)

Debrief with the entire large group (10 minutes)

Invite each person to share one thing that they are taking away from this conversation today...
Thank everyone for coming.

Identifying and mapping our assets

When the conversations are completed, encourage participants to spend a few moments to complete the remaining questions (if needed). This would be a great time to hand out an Asset Inventory Survey (if you have one). A survey would allow you to:

- Evaluate your experience and the impact of this conversation.
- Compile a profile of the perspectives engaged by this project.
- Identify potential projects for shared action.
- Map the assets (gifts, talents and knowledge) that residents of our community are willing to share.

This survey should take no more than 10 minutes to complete.

Conversation wrap-up

- Thank and acknowledge your host.
- Thank everyone for coming to the conversation.
- Remind them to finish the survey and hand it in before they leave.
- Check in with your note taker (we strongly recommend you have one, but it is ok if you don't) to review the conversation.

Don't forget to...

Remind participants that the conversation they have been part of today is part of a community-wide project that will build consensus around a shared community vision and identify opportunities for shared action.

Tell participants who are interested how they can stay involved and continue contributing to the project. Here are some examples:

1. **Signing the registration list** (and give us your phone number, email or social media handle) so that we can send you periodic updates and information about what we are learning from this process.
2. **Recommending other groups** in the community who you think would be interested in contributing to this project (i.e., We are hoping to engage at least [insert your target #] people).
3. **Attending the community events (if planning them).** We are planning to host an event to share what we are learning and create an opportunity to identify possible projects.
4. **Staying Involved!** If you would like to help with this project (organizing events, hosting your own conversation or anything else) please contact [insert name].