



A Guide for Hosting Community Conversations

Community Conversation: What's It All About?

Communities discover what they care about through conversation.

Conversation is part of life. And it's an important part of community building. In conversation, we not only discover what we care about, we uncover new ideas for building healthy community.

Getting started with BCHC's Community Conversations Kit

The Community Conversations Kit supports people to come together to talk about the things that matter to them, and to generate action for positive change. The goal? Increased health, well-being and healthy development in every BC community.

What is a community conversation?

Community conversations happen when a small group of people gets together to talk. A conversation can take place wherever people can gather: kitchens, living rooms, offices, schools, libraries, community centres, places of worship. All it takes is a few people and a few good questions.

Hosting a Community Conversation? It's as Easy as ...

1. Invite a few folks
2. Choose a few questions to guide the conversation (we can help!)
3. Jot down ideas as they emerge

"There is no power for change greater than a community discovering what it cares about."

Margaret Wheatley





Hosting a Community Conversation:

1. Getting Started

a) Plan the conversation: people, place and potential

Who Hosts a Community Conversation? Anyone can host a Community Conversation. You don't need to be an experienced meeting facilitator, just someone who cares about their community and enjoys conversation with others.

How many people should participate? Conversations can happen in groups of two or twenty. But small groups work best – six to eight people is a good size.

Who will I invite? With diverse thinking and diverse experiences to draw on, new insights are possible, as well as new ideas for action. So, choose people who hold diverse perspectives, and who are able to respect and respond to the perspectives of others.

Where will we meet? Conversations can take place anywhere. Just make sure that the room is quiet enough that everyone can hear, and that there won't be any interruptions.

What will we talk about? Community Conversations are a great way to explore questions that matter. When we come together to talk about the things that are important to us, we open up to new possibilities, and unleash new potentials – for thinking, and for action.

b) Create hospitable space

- Welcoming
- Safe
- Comfortable
- Informal
- Fun
- Food

2. The Conversation

- a) Encourage creative communication
 - Share thinking and experience
 - Encourage diverse ideas and perspectives
 - Listen to understand
 - Expect disagreement
 - Connect ideas
 - Listen together for patterns, insights and deeper questions





Questions function as open-handed invitations to creativity, calling forth that which doesn't yet exist.

Marilee Goldberg

b) Conversation Etiquette: A few guidelines ...

How we talk together is a good indicator of how we make community together. It's important we bring our "best self" to the conversation. This means that:

- Everyone speaks – from the heart as well as the head.
- Everyone listens – with curiosity and respect.
- Everyone challenges – not each other, but our own fondly held assumptions.
- Everyone learns – about ourselves, about others, and about our community.
- Everyone imagines – possibilities and potentials for positive change.
- Everyone makes a difference! Each of us, through our own thinking and actions, contributes to the building of healthy community.

c) Questions to guide the conversation ...

Here are a few questions to help shape your conversation:

- What is great about our community? What makes our community a healthy place to live, work, learn and play?
- How does each of us make a contribution?
- How would we describe our community's greatest potential?
- How can we help turn community potential into community reality?

For additional ideas, see "Community Conversations: Questions That Matter"

d) Or make up your own questions.

What are some questions that will generate great conversation in your community? Good questions, powerful questions, have a few things in common:

- Simple and clear
- Thought provoking
- Generate energy
- Focus inquiry
- Surface unconscious assumptions
- Open new possibilities



World Café founder Juanita Brown says: “well crafted questions attract energy and focus our attention to what really counts.” According to Juanita, good questions needn’t lead to immediate action steps or problem solving. Instead, they should invite inquiry and discovery. “You’ll know you have a good question,” she advises, “when it continues to surface new ideas and possibilities.”

And that’s what we’re after: new ideas and new possibilities.

e) Harvest and share collective discoveries

Close your conversation with some reflection:

- What did we learn about our community? About ourselves?
About our ability to create our future together?
- What insights emerged from our conversation?
- How will these insights influence our thinking and action
– tomorrow, and into the future?

3. We’d like to hear from you

Tell us about your Community Conversation. Who participated? What did you talk about? What perspectives, possibilities, and action ideas emerged from your conversation? What’s next?

The Community Conversations Feedback Sheet (attached) is an easy way to let us know about your conversation. Just fill it in and send it to the BCHC facilitator in your region. Or use the online feedback sheet that’s available on our website: www.bchealthycommunities.ca.

4. The conversation continues ...

Since conversation builds healthy community, there’s no end to the conversations that might take place. So you might want to do this again.

- You might want to invite different people to discuss the same topic.
- Or you might want to choose a different topic.
- Or you may want to explore the same topic with same people, getting together a second time to take the conversation deeper.





Keep the conversation going in your community. It makes a difference.

9. If you'd like to read more about community and conversation, try:

Brown, Juanita (2005).

The World Café: Shaping our futures through conversations that matter.

San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler Publishers.

Wheatley, Margaret J. (2002).

Turning to one another.

San Francisco: Berrett Koehler Publishers.

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