

HOW TO RUN A COMMUNITY CONVERSATION

To risk stating the obvious, there are lots of effective ways to run a community conversation! This is just one simple way to start. Feel free to change things up and experiment as you see fit. Whatever you do, just remember these two “best principles”:

- (1) Make room for everyone to listen and learn from each other.
- (2) Whatever the choices you make, be sure to make them intentionally and for a reason!

PREPARATION

- Decide on (1) the **goals** of the meeting, (2) a step-by-step **agenda** that will get you to those goals, and (3) the **people** who'll be leading each step of that agenda.
- Set up the room in a way that will encourage sharing and listening and minimize distractions. When in doubt, make a circle of chairs with nothing in the middle.

FACILITATION

- 1) Welcome.** Briefly introduce yourself/yourselves, the goals of the meeting, and the agenda.
- 2) First go-round.** Ask everyone to briefly answer the three questions below. Ask for a volunteer to start, then continue in a set order with no interruptions. When it's your turn, make sure to answer the questions yourself. Facilitators participate like everyone else!
 - *Who are you?*
 - *Where are you from?*
 - *Why are you here?*
- 3) Details.** Take a few minutes and share details about who you are, what you're working on, and what you're hoping to get out of this time together. Make it clear you are interested and excited to hear people's perspectives, and to work together beyond the end of this meeting.
- 4) Second go-round.** Using the same set speaking order, ask each person to spend a few minutes sharing their questions, stories, and/or experience of the issue at hand. A few guidelines:
 - Please share from your own experience. Save discussion and debate for later.
 - Listen closely to what others share. When it's your turn, feel free to share in a way that confirms, complicates, or contradicts what others have shared. We're looking to understand all our diverse experiences, as well as what we may have in common.
 - Anyone can pass; they'll have another chance to share at the end.
- 5) Discussion.** Once you've been around the whole circle, and gone back for people who passed, open the floor for people's reflections. Ask: *What did you hear? What struck you? What surprised you? What are the tensions and challenges? Where's the common ground?*
- 6) Next steps and close.** Thank everyone for their time, share any immediate next steps, and let them know you'll be following up.

EVALUATION Right after the meeting, or sometime the next day or two, make time to take stock:

- What worked well? What could have worked better?
- What did you learn? Issues, questions, tensions, discoveries, breakthroughs?
- Who do you want to be sure to follow up with in the coming days? Who will do it?
- What other next steps need to happen soon, and who will take them?