Mid-Hudson Library System Turning Outward Program Workbook

February 2021

MID-HUDSON LIBRARY SYSTEM

HARWOOD
The Institute for Public Innovation

ALA American Library Association

LIBRARIES TRANSFORMING COMMUNITIES

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INTRODUCTION

Welcome to Turning Outward!

The Mid-Hudson Library System is proud to offer access to the powerful community engagement tools from the Harwood Institute's Turning Outward program in a format tailored to meet the needs of our libraries. Along with the support of MHLS staff and your cohort, these tools will help your library go beyond focus groups and surveys, to create an organizational culture and goals built on the aspirations of the people you serve. Along the way, you'll make connections to people and organizations you've never seen in the library, and provide the people in your community with the space to create a path to the kind of place they want to call home. Whether you've picked up this booklet to use in your own efforts to Turn Outward or as part of an MHLS cohort we want to thank you for taking the first step to creating a more effective organization and a more connected and more resilient community.

Casey Conlin,
Library Sustainability Coordinator,
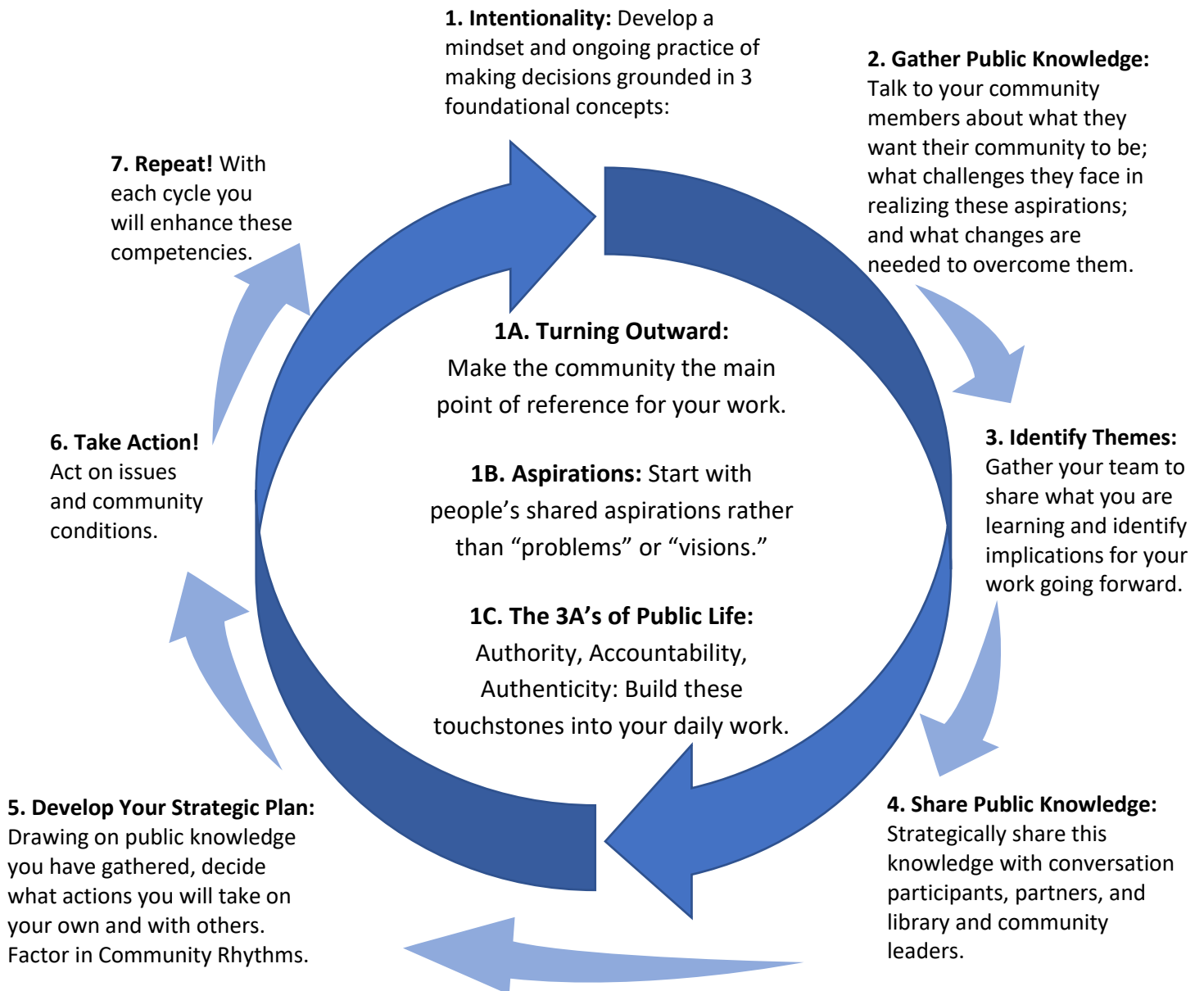Mid-Hudson Library System

TURNING OUTWARD

THE CYCLE OF PUBLIC INNOVATION

1. Intentionality: Develop a mindset and ongoing practice of making decisions grounded in 3 foundational concepts:

2. Gather Public Knowledge: Talk to your community members about what they want their community to be; what challenges they face in realizing these aspirations; and what changes are needed to overcome them.

7. Repeat! With each cycle you will enhance these competencies.

1A. Turning Outward: Make the community the main point of reference for your work.

1B. Aspirations: Start with people's shared aspirations rather than "problems" or "visions."

1C. The 3A's of Public Life: Authority, Accountability, Authenticity: Build these touchstones into your daily work.

3. Identify Themes: Gather your team to share what you are learning and identify implications for your work going forward.

6. Take Action! Act on issues and community conditions.

5. Develop Your Strategic Plan: Drawing on public knowledge you have gathered, decide what actions you will take on your own and with others. Factor in Community Rhythms.

4. Share Public Knowledge: Strategically share this knowledge with conversation participants, partners, and library and community leaders.

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THE 3A'S OF PUBLIC LIFE

Self-Assessment Questions

Purpose: To measure individual progress in Authority, Authenticity and Accountability.

Directions: Please respond to the following 20 statements in terms of your personal work. Rate the questions use this rating scale:

The Harwood Rating Scale

Rating	What it means
We've Got It	We feel good about saying we've got this factor.
Real Progress	We're steadily improving and moving in the right direction. Still room for improvement.
Starting to Improve	We're beginning to demonstrate genuine effort. Things are starting to get better.
Lip Service	We're talking a good game, but our actions are not in line with what we're saying.
Business as Usual	We haven't changed at all—it's "business as usual."
Not Applicable	This factor is either not relevant to our work or not on our radar.

THE 3A'S OF PUBLIC LIFE

Self-Assessment Questions: Authority

Rate yourself for each question below in terms of your personal work.

	We've Got It	Real Progress	Starting to Improve	Lip Service	Business as Usual	Not Applicable
We hold deep knowledge about the community: we understand people, their lives, where they live, and their aspirations and concerns.						
Our internal conversations reflect a deep knowledge of the community.						
We actively apply knowledge of the community in making internal decisions and working with external partners.						
We design and implement our programs based on a deep understanding of the community.						
People outside the organization would describe us as operating as part of the community rather than apart from it.						

THE 3A'S OF PUBLIC LIFE

Self-Assessment Questions: Authenticity

Rate yourself for each question below in terms of your personal work.

	We've Got It	Real Progress	Starting to Improve	Lip Service	Business as Usual	Not Applicable
What we say and do rings true to people in the community.						
People in the community believe we have the community's best interests at heart.						
We see and treat people as community residents, rather than mostly as donors or members.						
We exercise a sense of affection for the community in our daily operations and work.						
Our work reflects the wholeness of the community, capturing the different perspectives, ambiguities and tensions that exist.						
If you asked people in the community, they would say our words and actions reflect the reality of people's lives in the community.						
We have created ways to deeply listen to the community in an ongoing way.						

THE 3A'S OF PUBLIC LIFE

Self-Assessment Questions: Accountability

Rate yourself for each question below in terms of your personal work.

	We've Got It	Real Progress	Starting to Improve	Lip Service	Business as Usual	Not Applicable
We are focused on pursuing actions that are meaningful for people and we are careful to avoid window-dressing.						
We set realistic expectations about the potential impact of our work in what we promise to people in the community.						
We don't do things just because they sound good; we are focused on what will make a real difference in improving our community's civic health.						
We have a culture open to learning about the community and we account for what we learn in our daily work.						
We know the role we want to play in the community – it's clear internally and to those outside the organization.						
We regularly take stock of our pledges and promises to the community whether we are fulfilling them.						
We clearly work from the assumption that community change unfolds over time and our work reflects that understanding.						
In working in the community, we actively seek to build on what came before and create a foundation for what might follow.						

THE 3A'S OF PUBLIC LIFE

Small Group Discussion

1. Looking at the 3 A's Self-Assessment Questions, what key concepts jumped out at you? Why those?

_____

_____

2. What are the implications of the 3 A's for how you work in the community?

_____

_____

NOTES

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

THE 3A'S OF PUBLIC LIFE

Authority

- Holding Authority means having knowledge rooted in the community—understanding people, their lives, where they live, their aspirations and their concerns. You hold a deep knowledge of the community.
- Holding Authority means applying this knowledge to inform your decisions, how you design and implement programs, and how you conduct yourself. Your actions are pivotal.
- Holding Authority means acting as part of the community as opposed to acting apart from it. You are rooted in public life.

Authenticity

- Being Authentic means that your words and actions reflect the reality of people's lives. Being Authentic means that you see and treat people in a human way, not as objects to be manipulated.
- Being Authentic means seeking to understand the wholeness of a situation—capturing the different perspectives, ambiguity and tensions that exist. What you say rings true.
- Being Authentic means genuinely listening to the community in an ongoing way. You can then reflect the community in your work.
- Being Authentic means that the community believes you have their best interests at heart. You exercise a sense of affection for the community.

Accountability

- Exercising Accountability takes being open to learning along the journey of change. You must account for what you are learning.
- Exercising Accountability takes setting realistic expectations for change and making progress. You must account for your own pledges and promises.
- Exercising Accountability takes understanding and reflecting a sense of public time and rhythms. You can accelerate the natural rhythms of a community, but you cannot violate them.
- Exercising Accountability takes pursuing actions rooted in purpose and meaning for people. You must avoid window-dressing or merely undertaking actions that sound appealing.

TURN OUTWARD QUIZ

Look at the two columns below. For each row choose the word that best describes the focus of your work or efforts in the community.

INWARD I am generally focused on:	OUTWARD I am generally focused on:
☐ Activity	☐ Action
☐ Programs	☐ People
☐ My Organization	☐ My Community
☐ People as Consumers	☐ People as Citizens
☐ Process	☐ Progress
☐ Outreach	☐ Engagement
☐ Public Relations	☐ People's Reality
☐ Inputs	☐ Impact
☐ Claiming Turf	☐ Coming Together
☐ Charity	☐ Change
☐ Feeling Good	☐ Doing Good

Count the checkmarks in the right column to find your Turn Score _____

TURN OUTWARD QUIZ

Take your score from the first page and rate yourself:

(0-3) Good Start: Focusing on Aspirations leads us to Turn Outward. Try the Aspirations tool to remind yourself of the kind of community you want.

(4-7) Real Progress for you and your community: As you work to Turn Outward it's critical to focus on making intentional choices and judgments. Use the Intentionality tool to help accelerate your progress.

(8-11) Keep Your Focus: Congratulations, you're Turned Outward toward the community. Use the Sustaining Yourself tool to think about the support you need to stick with it.

HOW TO MAKE IT WORK

1. Post this at work or at home. Remind yourself to refer back to it. Ask yourself: What would it take for you to more fully Turn Outward?

2. Share this exercise with others—with your co-workers, at your place of worship, with friends, your PTA, your board, etc. Ask: What are the implications for our work? What other groups could use this exercise for their own work?

TURN OUTWARD

Key Behaviors

- Use the community as our first frame of reference

- Embrace notion that having to make judgments and choices is part of Turning Outward and innovating

- Approach work as unfolding over time

- Constantly seek to recalibrate efforts

- Talk about work as being connected to something larger than themselves

How does being turned outward affect the following functions?	Turned-Outward Examples
Engaging the community (e.g., inward: talk only to people we know)	
Managing relationships and selecting partners (e.g., inward: keep partners that won't use community as first frame of reference)	
Communication (e.g., inward: only talk about our organization and good work we do)	
Raising resources (e.g., inward: all the money and volunteers should come to us)	
Strategy (e.g., inward: focus on our programs)	

What are the implications of being Turned Outward for decision-making?

_____

How would your community score your organization on the Turn Quiz? What are the implications?

_____

What is one behavior that you can change to further incorporate a Turned-outward mindset in your work?

_____

INTENTIONALITY TEST

Each day, we make hundreds of choices, and while we can't control everything, if we become more intentional about the choices we do make—we can have far greater impact.

Test the quality of your choices by asking yourself the following questions:

1. **TURN OUTWARD:**
   Am I Turned Outward toward the community?

2. **ASPIRATIONS:**
   Are my actions rooted in people's shared aspirations?

3. **AUTHORITY:**
   Could I stand up on a table and talk to people about their community, their aspirations and concerns, and would they believe me?

4. **AUTHENTICITY:**
   Do I reflect the reality of people's lives and do they believe I have their best interests at heart, even when we disagree?

5. **ACCOUNTABILITY:**
   Am I living up to the pledges and promises I have made?

PUBLIC KNOWLEDGE

What is Public Knowledge?

Public Knowledge is deep knowledge about the community formed from conversations with community members.

1. **Aspirations:** What aspirations do people hold for their community/topic, their futures, and those of others?

   _____

2. **Main Concerns and Specific Issues:** What are the concerns, challenges, and issues people talk about? How do they define those concerns? What themes emerge? What tensions are people struggling with and why?

   _____

3. **Sense Of Place:** What is the history of the people, places, and issues of concern? What is the evolution and development of these things over time? What is the look and feel of the community/topic?

   _____

4. **Sources:** Who are the people in the community that people consider to be authentic, credible, and trusted? Make sure to go beyond "officials" and consider a wide range of sources.

   _____

5. **People:** What are the things people hold valuable (heritage, sports, stories)? What language do people use as they talk? What norms shape people's interactions? Who else do you need to talk with?

   _____

6. **Civic Places:** Where do people get together (offline and online)? In what kinds of places can people be engaged?

   _____

7. **Stereotypes to Watch:** What preconceived notions (and/or professional biases) do you and/or others have about the community/topic you are exploring?

   _____

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UNDERSTANDING EXPERT VS. PUBLIC KNOWLEDGE

In Turning Outward, we make a distinction between "expert knowledge" and "public knowledge." Both are important, but far too often expert knowledge crowds out public knowledge. Being Turned Outward requires us to make room for public knowledge.

EXPERT KNOWLEDGE	PUBLIC KNOWLEDGE
Expert Knowledge comes from expert or professional analysis. It often includes data, demographic and market studies, evidence-based decision making and best practices.	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 presented in expert or professional language.	It is usually in plain language that everyone can understand.

THE VALUE OF PUBLIC KNOWLEDGE

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

PUBLIC KNOWLEDGE

Ask Exercise

We want to get a sense of people's aspirations for their community and learn about the kind of community they want to create. Choose a partner and introduce yourself by saying, "Hi, I'm part of the Mid-Hudson Library System Turning Outward Cohort. We're trying to learn more about people's aspirations for their community. Would you be willing to answer four quick questions?"

1. What kind of community do you want to live in?

   _____

2. Why is that important to you?

   _____

3. How is that different from how you see things now?

   _____

4. What are some of the things that need to happen to create that kind of change?

   _____

NOTES FROM CONVERSATION

Key ideas you want to remember:

_____

_____

_____

PUBLIC KNOWLEDGE

Ask Exercise Observations

1. Who did you talk with?

_____

_____

2. What stood out for you?

_____

_____

3. What was similar across those you spoke with? Different?

_____

_____

4. How did you feel doing this exercise?

_____

_____

5. How is this way of engaging people different from focus groups, surveys, or town halls?

_____

_____

ASPIRATIONS

Common Starting Points

Starting point	What we get	What it creates
Identifying "the problems"	• Rooted in complaints • Private demands on public • resources • Finger pointing, blaming • Solution wars	• Long list of problems • A sense that the community • is full of problems, deficits, • and people to blame • No shared sense of where the community wants to go
Visioning exercises	• "Wish lists" • Conversations disconnected from present reality	• False hope • A document or set of ideas that people will not fight for—because it's not rooted in their reality • "Vision" documents relegated to desk drawers and collecting dust
Aspirations	• A conversation based on reality and a sense of possibility • Shifts conversation from the individual or organization to the community • Conversation about what people value, where they wish to go, and why	• A sense of shared aspirations that roots our work in something uniquely public • The possibility for building public will • A set of ideas that people will go to bat for

COMMUNITY CONVERSATIONS

The Value of Community Conversations

Community Conversations serve two important purposes:

- They are a Turned Outward way to authentically engage members of the community.
- They generate Public Knowledge that can then be used to inform decision-making of all kinds.

Engage the community to understand:

- People's aspirations for the community.
- People's concerns.
- How people think and talk about a given issue in relation to the community.
- The changes needed to reach our aspirations for the community.
- What people believe we can do, and who they'd trust to take action.

Community Conversation themes help inform how you:

- **Engage the community:** Inviting new people opens the door to new relationships.
- **Find new partners:** Sharing Public Knowledge creates coalition opportunities.
- **Develop strategies:** Working on the issue AND building capacity to work together.
- **Mobilize resources:** Creating natural pathways for people to contribute.

COMMUNITY CONVERSATION QUESTIONS

1. **What kind of 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 two or three most important issues 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. How about _____, how does that fit with what we're talking about? What concerns do you have about that?

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?

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, co-workers, neighbors, others —what do you see them experiencing?
   - Are some people affected more than others? Who? In what ways? Why?

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?

COMMUNITY CONVERSATION QUESTIONS CON'T

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

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?
   - How about 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?

8. **Thinking back over the conversation, what groups or individuals would you trust to take action on these things?**
   - Why them and not others?

9. **If we came back together in six months or a year, what might you see that would tell you 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?

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?

TRAITS OF CONVERSATION LEADERS

The responsibility of a Conversation Leader

The main responsibility of a Conversation Leader is to create an environment that enables you to learn about the community and people's aspirations. It's more than just running a meeting. Good Conversation Leaders are curious listeners, focused on creating a conversation where people can discover and learn from one another and explore their own ideas.

An Effective Conversation Leader:

- Remains neutral about the topic under discussion; is not seen as having his or her own agenda or siding with one group.
- Explores ideas with people; displays a genuine sense of curiosity.
- Listens to people and builds trust.
- Pushes people to consider different perspectives, helping folks to understand why others think in different ways.
- Helps people reconcile conflicting remarks in a non-confrontational manner.
- Has experience leading or facilitating group discussions.
- Stays focused on the goal of the conversation — this is about learning, not promotion.
- Prepares for each conversation by reading the guide and going over notes from previous conversations.

Note: Conversation Leaders do not need to be experts on these issues. They are there to guide, not participate in, the conversations.

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:	Watch for places 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 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 LEADNG CONVERSATIONS

Troubleshooting Conversation Behavior

IF	THEN
A few people dominate the conversation	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.
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 "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.
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.
People never disagree or are "too polite"	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.

SETTING EXPECTATIONS

Setting realistic expectations

As you invite people to the conversations, it is important to set clear, realistic expectations. These are different from the conversations most groups hold, so it is helpful to explain what these conversations ARE and what they ARE NOT.

First, what these conversations are:

- Ninety-minute to two-hour conversations that help us better understand the community and how we can restore our belief that we can get things done together.
- Focused on learning. We pledge to follow up with you after the conversation to share what we've learned and how we will use that information.

Secondly, what these conversations are not:

- A town hall, academic research or a focus group. They are conversations.
- Sponsored by a political party, a business development effort, etc.
- About trying to sell a particular solution or approach
- A gripe session

CONVERSATION GROUND RULES

1. Have a "kitchen table" conversation

Everyone participates; no one dominates.

2. There are no "right answers"

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

3. Keep an open mind

Listen carefully and try hard to understand the views of those who disagree with you.

4. Help keep the discussion on track

Stick to the questions; try not to ramble.

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

Respond to others how you want to be responded to.

6. Have fun!

SETTING UP THE CONVERSATION

1. **Introductions**
   - Introduce yourself.
   - Thank any groups or individuals involved in setting up the conversation.
   - Thank the participants for coming.

2. **Set expectations**
   - Over the next few months, we will be holding conversations like this one with people across town to talk about their aspirations, their concerns and how we can move forward.
   - Tonight's conversation is a chance for us to better understand how you see things in our community.
   - We can't promise to create a new program based on this conversation. We will promise to get back to you with what we learn tonight and how we'll use it.
   - These conversations usually last between 90 minutes and two hours, though sometimes folks want to talk more.

3. **Review the ground rules**
   - Go over the ground rules. Ask, "Do those rules work for everyone?"

4. **Explain your role as a Conversation Leader**
   - Tonight, 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."
   - To make sure we hear from everyone, I may ask you to hold off on comments at times.

5. **Identify the Note-taker**
   - We have someone (point them out) taking notes tonight. The notes won't include anyone's name or be made public; they're to make sure we catch what you're saying.

6. **Get started**
   - Before we get started, please tell us your first name, where you live and what you like to do in your free time.

THE ROLE OF NOTETAKER

The Main Responsibility of a Notetaker

The main responsibility of a Notetaker is to capture key insights, ideas, themes, turning points and quotes from the Community Conversation. Notetakers work with Conversation Leaders to identify themes within conversations and across several conversations.

Note: Don't try to write down everything you hear (it's not a transcript). Nor should you just summarize a few points. The goal is to capture details, key quotes, turning points and patterns that can be used to create themes.

An effective Note-taker:

- Is curious about how people think about the world.
- Is observant, noting what people say, how they say it (the emotion, tension or doubt) and even what people aren't saying (what's being ignored).
- Captures the essence of the conversation without inserting his/her own voice, words or judgment.
- Is good with details (like the specific words that people are using) AND able to help translate that into larger themes.
- Stays focused on the goal of the conversation: "What are we learning?"

Immediately after the conversation, talk with the Conversation Leader to compare notes. Ask:

- 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 for you? What do we need to write down while it's fresh?

Key Step: Be sure to organize your notes. After the conversation, **the Notetaker should organize their notes into six categories:** *Aspirations, Main concerns, Specific issue concerns, Actions, Who people trust and Questions.* These categories will be critical for identifying themes and implications later in the process. The goal is to capture details, key quotes, turning points and patterns that can be used to create themes.

TIPS FOR NOTETAKING

What to look and listen for:

During conversations, look and listen for these key concepts to help you better understand what participants are saying. **The goal is not just to hear what participants are saying, but to understand why they are saying it** (as well as what they might not be saying).

Starting points: What are participants' initial thoughts and perspectives? How do their starting points differ with where they end the discussion?

Language: What words do participants use? How is their language distinctive?

Body language: Are participants engaged or do they hang back?

Emotions: What feelings do participants bring to the table? How strongly do they feel these emotions? What emotions prevail in the conversation?

Common ground: Where do folks agree? How strong are these areas of agreement?

Tension: Where do participants disagree? What is at issue for them?

Ambivalence: On what issues are participants torn and why?

Obstacles: What emotional, factual or perceptual barriers are preventing participants from moving forward? How intractable are these barriers?

Connections: What issues do participants seem to link together?

Hidden story: What are participants not saying? What is going on beneath the surface that drives what people are saying?

Turning points: Where were you able to break through in the conversation? What questions or issues triggered that?

ORGANIZING YOUR NOTES

Review and combine your notes from the different conversations. Organize them into six categories. It's okay if these are fairly long or overlap. You want to keep things broad so you can see patterns. You'll be narrowing and clarifying as you go. Have notes in a form that will be easy for people to access and use (e.g. electronic file they can print and bring with them).

Aspirations (for the community, their children):

Main concerns (top-of-mind concerns about the larger community):

Specific issue concerns (those concerns related to the issue you're exploring):

Actions that would make a difference:

Whom do people trust to act:

Questions people have:

PLANNING THE CONVERSATION

The ideal size for these conversations is between 8 and 10 people. To get that many, invite at least 20 people, as some will be unable to make it. If fewer than 8 show up, that's fine. Go ahead. It'll be worth your time. If more than 20 show up, consider breaking into two groups.

Decide whom to invite

These conversations are a powerful way to get to know different parts of the community or learn from voices not usually heard. Think about what you want to learn. Do you want to get a general understanding of how people see the community? If yes, then invite a broad group of people to come and talk. This is a great starting point. Maybe you want to get a better sense of how a specific group of people or people from a certain part of town think and talk about their community. Then you will want a more targeted strategy in inviting people. Any of these options is fine. No matter what you choose, remember since these are conversations, not rigorous academic research, you do not need a random or demographically representative sample.

After you've identified whom you want to engage, think about the individuals or groups who could help you reach those people. Ask yourself:

- Who knows the part of the community or the people we want to talk to?
    - Staff, volunteers, board members
    - Partners and their staff
- Who already brings people together? Think about asking for help from:
    - Local businesses: barber shops, beauty parlors, diners
    - Religious leaders, congregations, choirs, prayer groups
    - Book clubs, gardening groups, parenting groups, neighborhood associations
    - Groups like YMCA, Rotary, the PTA, unions

Tips for getting people to come

- Invite people personally and encourage your staff and partners to do the same.
- Contact people on your email lists or via social media.
- Ask people to suggest others to invite (friends, neighbors, peers).
- Set clear expectations in the invitation.
- Follow up by email or phone to determine how many people are coming.
- When possible, try to invite people at least two weeks before the event.

WHERE TO HOLD COMMUNITY CONVERSATIONS

Site location can have a big impact on the success of your Community Conversation. The setting can affect who attends each Community Conversation, the quality of the conversation and the group's ability to get its work done. Ensure that the invited participants will be comfortable in the chosen location. Amid the global pandemic and recovery, a mix of outdoor and online meetings might be best to reach the most participants and allow them to participate in ways they feel comfortable and safe.

Look for a place that:
- Folks are familiar with and use frequently.
- Is considered to be part of the community. Usually this excludes government or "official" places and schools.
- Has a second or third room available if you need to divide up a large group.
- Is available in the evenings and/or on weekends.
- Offers a comfortable environment.
- Is not too noisy or full of distractions.
- Is easily accessible to all participants: plenty of parking, centrally located, safe, near public transportation, accessible to those with disabilities.
- Is affordable given project resources.

More and less desirable places to look for sites

Here are some examples of both more and less desirable places for the Community Conversations. This is not an exhaustive list; think about other potential sites for the Community Conversations in your area.

More Desirable	Less Desirable
Public libraries	City hall
Community centers	Government buildings
Places of worship	Schools
Community organizations (YMCA, etc.)	Fancy hotels
Recreation centers	Office buildings (especially after hours)

INVITATION TEMPLATE 1

Suggested Community Conversation invitation template

(Library name) is hosting a Community Conversation at (location) from (start time) to (end time) on (date). (IF YOU HAVE A PARTNER HELPING YOU, BE SURE TO MENTION THEM HERE.)

This conversation is one of several that we'll be having with people across the community. Each one is a chance for us to better understand people's aspirations for their community, the concerns they have and what they believe might make a difference in strengthening the community. We'll take what we learn from these conversations and use it to help make our work in the community more effective.

We can't promise the conversation will lead to a new program or policy. We pledge to get back to you with what we learned and let you know how we'll use what we heard.

Hopefully you'll be able to join us. If so, please RSVP to (person) at (contact info) so we can be sure to have enough refreshments on hand.

Thank you.

P.S. For more information don't hesitate to (contact person) at (contact info).

INVITATION TEMPLATE 2

Suggested Ask Exercise invitation template

(Library name) is engaging in community conversations to help us better understand people's aspirations for their community, the concerns they have and what they believe might make a difference in strengthening the community. We'll take what we learn from these conversations and use it to help make our work in the community more effective.

As an important voice in our community, we hope you can find time to meet with us and share your aspirations for our community.

Please let (contact person) at (contact info) know if there is a good time to schedule a conversation, or if you have any questions about our work in this area.

Thank you.

REMINDER TEMPLATE

Suggested Community Conversation reminder template

Hello,

This is just a reminder that our Community Conversation at (location) on (date) from (start time) to (end time) is coming up. (IF YOU HAVE A PARTNER HELPING YOU, BE SURE TO MENTION THEM HERE.)

This conversation is one of several that (Library name) will be having with people across the community. Each one is a chance for us to better understand people's aspirations for their community, the concerns they have and what they believe might make a difference in strengthening the community. We'll take what we learn from these conversations and use it to help make our work in the community more effective.

We look forward to seeing you. If you can't make it please let (contact person) know as soon as possible.

Thank you.

P.S. For more information don't hesitate to (contact person) at (contact info).

SAMPLE TALKING POINTS/ BOOMARK

The (Library name) will be having conversations with people across the community. Each one is a chance for us to better understand people's aspirations for their community, the concerns they have and what they believe might make a difference in strengthening the community. We'll take what we learn from these conversations and use it to help make our work in the community more effective.

The conversation may not lead to a new program or policy, but it will inform our plans and decisions at the library, and we pledge to get back to everyone involved with what we learned and how we'll use what we heard.

The conversations will be on the following dates and locations.

To register or if you have any questions contact (contact person) at (contact info).

Conversation 1: (date) (start time) to (end time) at (location)

Conversation 2: (date) (start time) to (end time) at (location)

Conversation 3: (date) (start time) to (end time) at (location)

Conversation 4: (date) (start time) to (end time) at (location)

Conversation 5: (date) (start time) to (end time) at (location)

ONLINE CONVERSATIONS

The pandemic and recovery make planning and safely carrying out conversations in our communities difficult. A mix of outdoor and online meetings might be best to reach the most participants and allow them to participate in ways they feel comfortable and safe. Online meetings, which participants can join from their home can be more accessible for people who may not be able to drive to an in-person meeting or attend an in-person because of child-care issues. Below are some considerations for preparing and conducting meetings online.

Tips for setting up an online conversation:
- Send an email reminder to participants the day of the conversation including instructions for how to access the meeting.
- Ensure you have a good audio connection to hear and speak to participants. Headphones and a microphone are usually a good option.
- Try to position your camera at eye level or slightly higher if possible. Moving windows in your software can help you make better "eye contact" with the camera and audience.
- Try to find a space with lighting that enables the camera to "see" your face clearly and a background that isn't distracting.
- Presenters and participants can utilize "gallery view" and other meeting software settings to see the entire group.
- Do not share online meeting links on public-facing calendars and websites, but share them with people that have registered for the event to avoid "zoom-bombings" and other unwanted attendees.
- Keep online meeting software up-to-date, and use online meeting software security features like waiting rooms, restricted controls for hosts, meeting locks, and other options that can help you maintain control of the meeting.

Additional Ground Rules for online conversations:
- Ask people to turn on their camera if they have one and are comfortable doing so.
- Ask people to mute when not speaking.
- Do a tech check to ensure participants understand controls and can be heard, seen and participate.
- Ensure preferred names are set in meeting software by participant or facilitator.
- Unmuting, raising physical or digital hands can be used to signal when someone wishes to speak.
- Encourage participants to participate by speaking rather than using the chat function.

OUTDOOR CONVERSATIONS

The safest way to conduct an in-person conversation amid the pandemic is likely outdoor conversations. Some people may not be comfortable participating online and may not have the equipment and resources to participate effectively in an online conversation. Having a mix of online and in-person meetings will ensure all people that want to participate in your community conversations get the opportunity to do so.

Tips for outdoor conversations:

- Consider spaces that can provide shelter from light rain or sun that will allow people to social distance and talk and listen without shouting. Parks with pavilions or locations with large umbrellas or outdoor heaters may be good locations for conversations.
- In reminder communications, ensure participants are aware that the conversation will take place outdoors and encourage them to dress accordingly.
- Have a rain date or backup online conversation plan and communicate changed plans to participants ASAP to avoid confusion and ensure people can attend the conversation.
- Bring towels and other supplies to clean and dry outdoor spaces if necessary.
- Arrive early in case the space and seating need to be reconfigured.
- At conversations, participants should observe any safety protocols recommend by local, state, and federal health authorities to reduce the transmission of COVID. If such safety protocols call for Personal Protective Equipment (PPE), having extra on-hand for participants that need it will be helpful.
- In an outdoor location, it may be more necessary to repeat what participants have said or ask them to speak up when talking. Conversation facilitators should be mindful of this, and ensure everyone hears what participants are saying by encouraging them to speak loudly enough for all to hear, or paraphrasing statements if necessary.