

UNITED WAY
COMMUNITY
CONVERSATION
WORKBOOK
**ON CREATING
OPPORTUNITY**



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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS AND USE OF MATERIALS

This conversation guide was adapted from tools licensed to United Way Worldwide through a partnership with The Harwood Institute for Public Innovation. The Harwood Institute inspires and guides people to step forward and take action rooted in their community and stay true to themselves. They work with individuals, organizations, and communities to turn outward and develop their ability to make more intentional choices and judgments that lead to impact. For more Harwood tools and support, visit <http://online.unitedway.org/harwood> or www.theharwoodinstitute.org.

Through our partnership, all United Ways have license to use these materials in their communities, including training volunteers and partners to use the materials for United Way purposes. The materials cannot, however, be distributed to individuals or other organizations to be used for non-United Way purposes. Any questions on the usage of these tools and materials should be directed to Michael Wood at michael.wood@unitedway.org.

OVERVIEW OF COMMUNITY CONVERSATIONS

Problems in communities cannot be solved without a deep understanding of that community – whether you define “community” as a neighborhood, a city, a region, or even a nation.

Knowledge of a community is developed not only by understanding research data, but also listening to and learning from people in communities. That kind of learning only happens through real, authentic conversations that are designed for people to share with you and one another what they want to see in their communities and what they see as the challenges facing them and others.

We also know that when people have a chance to share their aspirations and their concerns for their community, they are more likely to want to join in helping to solve problems. So creating opportunities to have community conversations can be a powerful first step in actually achieving our mission to mobilize the caring power of communities around the world to advance the common good.

The approach to community conversations used by United Way is based on some key principles:

- Listening first – These conversations are deliberately designed not to be a chance for United Way to educate individuals. A common misconception is that people need to be educated to have a good discussion when in fact, often it is the organization that needs to be educated on how people in communities see those communities. In some cases you may bring people together to educate them on various issues, but these conversations are not meant for that.
- Letting people frame this issues and challenges for themselves – These learning conversations and the questions are deliberately designed to allow people to describe what they want to see in their communities and the challenges they face in their own terms, so United Way can better understand how people talk about and think about these issues.
- Quality, not quantity of conversation – The approach in this guide is not designed to create a process for a great number of people to “feel involved,” but instead is designed to create space for people to real dialogue and for United Way to listen and really learn. These conversations certainly can be replicated with many people over a broad geographic area, but the main purpose is not simply to aggregate numbers of people.
- Real dialogue, not “process” – These conversations are designed to be informal and allow people to have a real dialogue. There will be a need to keep the conversation moving, but they are focused on people talking with one another. Sometimes public participation “processes” can be helpful when an organization needs to get input quickly on specific items, but that is not the purpose of these conversations.

Many United Ways have used the approach in this guide. Benefits for the United Way include:

- Understanding the issues better in a community, which leads to better strategies
- Understanding how people talk about issues, which leads to better communications
- Building credibility, so more people see United Way as really caring about the community
- Building authority, so United Way is seen as a leader in solving problems, not just a fundraiser
- Getting more people involved, because when you listen to people they want to work with you
- Raising more money, because people are more likely to give if you are interested in what they have to say, and businesses and foundations want to support organizations that have a deep knowledge of their communities.

More on the power of these community conversations, including stories from United Ways, can be found on “Mobilization Jumpstart” at <http://online.unitedway.org/mobilization-jumpstart>.

RECRUITING PARTICIPANTS

There are four steps to recruiting participants:

- Step One - Decide whom to recruit
- Step Two - Develop a list of people/partners who can help you reach out
- Step Three - Invite people personally
- Step Four - Tell people the value of these community conversations

Step One: Decide whom to recruit

Remember that the purpose of these conversations is to reach out to a diverse group of people.

As you decide how to focus your recruiting efforts, think about the following:

- Whom do we need to include to hear different perspectives? This includes community leaders and “everyday” people.
- Do we have a shared sense of what a cross-section of our community looks like?
- Remember that you want to hold conversations in different locations around the community, so you will want to recruit from those areas. Many people are uncomfortable traveling to conversations or simply do not have the time, so it will be important to make it as easy as possible for them.

Step Two: Develop a list of people/partners who can help you reach out

Think about your community as a web of people and organizations connected to each other through other people and organizations. To get a broad cross-section of the community, it is important to reach out to all parts of this web — not just the people and organizations that you already know.

Think about these questions as you make a list of people and partners to help you reach out:

- Who knows the part of the community we want to go to?
- Where do people from different parts of the community usually get together?
- Who already brings people together?
- What are some of the ways that people get information on a regular basis? (Think about church bulletins, local publications, local coffee shop)
- Which civic leaders — such as pastors or neighborhood association presidents could help us get the word out to different groups?
- Who would give us more credibility?
- If we do not know the answers to some of these questions, who can help us?

Consider some of the following types of people:

- Religious leaders
- Members of community or neighborhood groups like Rotary, NAACP or volunteer centers
- Students and young people
- Parents
- School officials
- Teachers
- Employees of banking and financial institutions
- Health care providers
- People who access community services at agencies (your partners often can help recruit these people)

Step Three: Invite people personally

- Spend time in places where members of the community frequently gather such as a local diner or sporting event. Make and bring flyers with information about the conversations.
- Ask partners to make personal invitations to potential conversation participants.
- Ask partners to publish information about the conversations on their site or eletter.
- Get in touch with individuals, organizations, or publications on your contacts list.
- Personally invite your contacts to attend a conversation.

Step Four: Tell people the value of these community conversations

Because this is a different type of conversation and you are trying to reach out to people who might not typically be involved in the community, it is important to explain why you want them to attend.

Things Participants Want to Know:

- What this meeting is about. Emphasize this is an effort to engage the community about their aspirations and concerns. Let them know that the conversation is a chance to help the community move forward by understanding how it thinks about these topics.
- What it's not. It is not: sponsored by a political party; a business development effort; a complaint session; or a session to sell a particular solution or approach.
- The importance of their role. Let people know that the purpose of these conversations is to hear from them. It is the most important step in shaping the future of the community.
- Logistics. Not only where and when, but specific instructions on how to get to the location, the name and phone number of at least one contact person, and, if applicable, information on how to get to specific room for the conversation.

IDENTIFYING CONVERSATION LEADERS

Leading a Community Conversation doesn't require a professional moderator or facilitator. But that doesn't mean you want just anyone leading the conversation. This sheet outlines some of the traits you want to find in a Conversation Leader, as well as suggestions for how to find such a person.

What's the main responsibility of a Conversation Leader?

The main responsibility of a Conversation Leader is to guide discussion. They must be focused on helping create a discussion that enables the United Way to learn about the community and people's aspirations.

NOTE: In addition to a Conversation Leader each conversation needs a note taker. This person should use the note taking tool on Page 13 to track the conversation.

What type of person are you looking for?

Conversation Leaders need to be able to engage participants in a different kind of conversation. You need someone who can do more than just run a meeting. Look for people who share your commitment to engaging citizens in new ways of working together and talking about tough public issues. Remember, this may often be someone beyond the traditional United Way volunteer or partner.

An effective Conversation Leader:

- Remains neutral about the topic under discussion — and 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 to reconcile conflicting remarks they or the group make in a non-confrontational manner.
- Has experience leading or facilitating group discussions.
- Stays focused on the goals for the conversation - remember this is about learning and helping United Way to mobilize for action on education.
- Prepares for each conversation, reading the guide, going over notes from previous conversations.

NOTE: Conversation Leaders do not need to be expert on education, income, and health issues. They are there to guide, not participate in, the conversations.

Where to find good Conversation Leaders:

- Partners, trusted community/neighborhood groups, nonprofits, or religious organizations.
- Civic groups like Rotary Club, Urban League, League of Women Voters.
- Local businesses
- Your own staff

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. It is likely that the most desirable sites are the hardest to reserve. Find a site and reserve the dates as soon as possible.

When looking for a place to hold discussions consider:

- A place folks are familiar with and use frequently.
- A place that is considered to be part of the community – that is usually not a government or “official” place, nor is it a school.
- A place that has a second or third room available if you need to divide up a large group.
- A place available in the evenings and/or on weekends.
- A place that offers a comfortable environment.
- A place where the Conversation Leader and participants can get work done –not too noisy or full of distractions.
- A place that is easily accessible to all participants: plenty of parking, centrally located, safe, near public transportation, accessible to those with disabilities.
- A place that is affordable given project resources.

Examples of Good and Less Desirable Places to Look for Sites

Good	Less Desirable
Public libraries	City hall
Community centers	Government buildings
Places of worship	Schools
Community organizations (YMCA, etc)	Private clubs
Community colleges	Office buildings (especially after hours)
	Fancy hotels

HOW TO SET UP A ROOM

For each community conversation, someone needs to be responsible for coordinating logistics, setting up the room, and getting participants settled. You might want to consider recruiting some volunteers to help you out.

Logistics

- Arrive one hour early. Leave time to set up the room before people arrive. The room is never what you expect; you'll probably need to rearrange it.
- Put up signs to direct people from the main entrance to the meeting room.
- Have a sign-in sheet for participants (page 19.) Have people fill this out before the conversation. Use this to build your network of people in the community who are interested in staying involved. Remember collecting this data and contact information is critical.
- The room should be well-lit but not too bright. Make sure the temperature in the room is comfortable.
- Make sure the room has tables. Tables tell people "work" is going to be done; that this is not just going to be another "nice" discussion. It also makes it easier to take notes.
- Provide blank name tents and name tags for people to write in their names. Encourage folks to call each other by their first names. Fill one out for yourself.
- Put refreshments in a location easily accessed without interrupting the discussion.
- Find the rest rooms so you can tell people where they are before the discussion begins.

Supplies to Bring with You to the Site

- Extra pens/pencils
- Name tags and table tents
- Sign-in sheets
- Paper to make signs
- Charts and easels (if needed)
- Refreshments
- Copies of the Ground Rules (page 11)
- Copies of the Note Taking Tool (page 15 and 16)
- Copies of the post-conversation survey. (Find this on page 20 of this workbook)

TIPS FOR LEADING CONVERSATIONS

To get the most out of the conversation you want to go beyond people's surface reactions. This means creating the opportunity for people to discover and learn from one another and to explore their own ideas. These tips are essential for Conversation Leaders to know, they're also really useful to share with your staff so that they're able to go deeper when working with people in the community. (They're great for staff to use in the office as well!) Here are several 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.

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.
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.

COMMUNITY CONVERSATION GROUND RULES

To have a productive conversation people want to know what's expected of them — what are the norms for interaction. Print out or write on a flip chart these ground rules and walk through them with participants before the conversation. Ask people if there are any rules they'd like to add. Going over the ground rules up-front helps put people at ease and enables them to participate productively.

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!

CONDUCTING THE CONVERSATION

Here is a basic script with questions to use for this conversation:

Expectations: Share with participants expectations for the conversation:

- 1) United Way is interested in working with people and groups in the community to solve problems together.
- 2) We're here to listen and to learn.
- 3) We want to better understand the kind of community you all want and hear more about what you see as the challenges we're facing. We think it's important to hear from people who live in our community. It's just as important as research and what the experts say.
- 4) The sign in sheets are so that we can follow up with you later - and share with you what we've learned.
- 5) We can't promise any new initiatives or programs will emerge from this, but we'll get back with you and share what we learned and how we're going to use it to move forward.
- 6) If you have any questions about United Way or our work, we'd be happy to talk with you more about it after the conversation, but we're really here to listen and not do a lot of presenting.

Note Taking We are going to have someone (point them out) taking notes during the conversation. The notes won't include anyone's name or be made public. They are to make sure we're able to learn from this conversation.

Ground Rules 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.

Questions	Things to Keep in Mind
<p>1. What kind of a community do you want?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Why is that important? • How is that different from the way things are now? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Here people may ask you to define community. Tell them they should answer based on their own definition. • Be comfortable with silence. It may take them a while to get into it. Resist the urge to fill the silence. • Some will jump straight to problems. Tell them we'll get there but you really want to spend some time on the kind of community people want first. • Be careful not to take up too much time in the early part of the conversation. A common problem is spending half the time on the first couple of questions. Pace yourself appropriately. At the same time, it's important to give people space here to talk so it's a balancing act. • Don't let one or two people dominate. Seek out the quieter voices. This is important. • Here they will tell you not only about what they care about but why. We'll learn a lot about the words they use.
<p>2. Given what we just said, what are the 2-3 things you think are standing in the way of the kind of community you want?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Why do you say that? • How do you think things got to be this way? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • They may jump to problem solving right away. If this happens identify that they're jumping to solutions and just say you don't want to get too far ahead. Come back to the challenges. Say, "Let's stick with the challenges for now." • When people draw connections between concerns they'll tend to broaden, not narrow the discussion. Let them. Note the connections between different concerns. • Give people room to tell their story.
<p>3. How do these issues we're talking about affect you personally?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • For the first 2/3rds of the conversation you want to keep opening things up rather than closing them down. Give people room to tell their story. Don't ask questions that box them in, or push them to offer solutions before they're able to explore each other's concerns and points of view. • People want to feel a sense of possibility for action on their concerns. Throughout the conversation listen for when people see action is possible, or when they tell hopeful stories. You may also hear the lack of possibility that people feel on some concerns. • As people start to tell stories you'll begin to see the context that they use to understand their concerns - it might be personal experiences, or not.
<p>4. What do you think it means to have a good life?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Why do you say that? • Why is that important to you? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There will be repetition here. Some participants may notice it and complain. But, repetition is actually a good thing, because they will start to see parallels between what they want in a community and what it means to have a good life. It's important to come at the same issues in slightly different ways. Just say, "I know, this may seem like we are repeating but let's just keep at this."

<p>5. What kind of community would you need for everyone to have the chance at a good life?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Why do you say that? • Why is that important to you? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Here people often will be specific with solutions to the problems they see. Try to dig into their ideas and see what they are getting at.
<p>6. What kinds of things are keeping us from having this kind of community?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Have you experienced these things? • Why do you think they're important? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This question may provoke anger and negative emotions as people voice complaints. That's OK.
<p>QUESTIONS TO ADD ON AT-RISK/DISCONNECTED YOUTH: Use these questions if you want to go deeper on the challenges facing young people. <u>Optional</u> for United Ways contributing to the Opportunity Report for CLC. <u>Required</u> for United Ways contributing to the project with the White House Council for Community Solutions.</p>	
<p>6a. Thinking about young people, in particular ones that have dropped out of school or don't have a job right now, what do you think is keeping them from having a chance at a good life?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Listen for personal stories here and give people room to tell them. • There may be blame embedded in people's comments. For example, "bad parenting," "bad schools," etc. Be ready to probe, i.e. "Why are you saying that?"
<p>6b. How does this affect the community we live in?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Listen for connections between the challenges facing young people and the barriers to a good life and strong community people have identified. Part of what we want to do is draw out connections here.
<p>6c. What do you think could be done to work on these issues?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What role do the young people have? • What role do we as individuals have? • What roles do others groups like businesses, the government, and organizations have? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • People may be slow to respond. Give them time. • You might have to remind them that they don't need to be an expert but you just want their thoughts and ideas. • Listen in particular to see if they see a personal role before you have to probe with the follow-up questions, but if they aren't reflecting on different groups, use the follow-ups. • If they explicitly leave some group out (government or business for example), you might say, "You all didn't say anything about the government's role or businesses' role. How come?"

<p>7. When you think about everything we've talked about, what do you think could be done to would make a difference?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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 could others be doing, like businesses, the government, and other groups? • What do you make of what other people say should be done? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It may take some people a while to respond. It is often hard for people to imagine how things could change. Give them time. • Some may say they don't know because they're not experts. Remind them you only want to know what they think, that they don't have to be expert. • Listen here for both ideas and conditions people are expressing and the extent to which they believe change is possible. Sense of possibility. • Pay close attention to whether people see themselves as potential actors. Listen for their sense of possibility. Also pay attention to whom they trust to engage them and act.
<p>8. Thinking back over the conversation, who do you trust to take action on the issues you've been talking about?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Why them and not others? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sometimes participants will answer: "Nobody." Try not to settle for that. Say, "You're saying you don't trust anybody to make progress? There's really no one?"
<p>9. Now that we've talked about this issue a bit, what questions do you have about it?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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? 	

Wrap-Up

- Thank people for attending
- Make sure they sign up and fill out the post-conversation survey.
- Remind them that their names will be kept confidential.
- If you want, feel free to share with them context – that United Way is doing a report and we want to make sure people's voices are part of the national discussion about how to create opportunity.
- Give them contact info but also let them know that you will be in touch to share what you have learned from all of this.

TAKING NOTES

Note-taking in a community conversation is absolutely critical, even if you are recording the conversation.

Here are some important guidelines for note-taking:

- Capture the actual words people use. We are not looking for paraphrasing or summaries but the words people use are important.
- If you can type notes, it's often better and easier in the long run. Best advice is to capture as much of a word as you can and quickly move to the next word to keep up. If you aren't a fast typist, do not choose this option.
- Clean up your notes IMMEDIATELY after the conversation. Do not wait. You think you will remember, but you won't. Go back, fill in the words you left out, add in the letters you didn't type and other contextual notes.
- Leave as much time for cleaning up notes as you did for the conversation.

Summarizing Notes

Use these questions after you have cleaned up your notes to draw some conclusions from what you've heard:

1. What kind of community do people want? What are their aspirations?
2. In talking about their concerns, what do people really care about? What words do they use? What issues do they connect together?
3. What's going well and not so well in the community?
4. How do people describe what it means to have a good life for all?
5. What do people think can be done to deal with the issues they raised?
6. What role do they see for themselves, businesses, nonprofits, and government?
7. What did they say about trusting people to help? Did they name people or groups they could trust?
8. What personal stories in particular stood out?
9. What questions do people still have? What follow up do people want?

Audio Recording Conversations

- Recording conversations is the best way to know you will capture the right words. For purposes of writing a report, we encourage it. In the past we have not encouraged it because of a concern it would interfere with the organic nature of the dialogue, but experiences have shown in most cases it doesn't interfere.
- If you can get your conversations transcribed, even better. But you still want to take notes. Recorders fail, and even if they don't you want to track when important things are said so you can reference the recording or the transcription easily.
- MAKE SURE YOU GET A SIGNED RELEASE FROM EVERYONE IF YOU PLAN TO USE THE AUDIO RECORDING IN ANY PUBLIC WAY.

Video Recording Conversations

- We do not recommend this option. It changes the dynamics with a camera in the room.
- If you want, sometimes it's good to optionally video people and interview them at the end of a conversation. You can ask them follow-up questions that give you clips you can share, if they're willing to go on camera and share their names.
- MAKE SURE YOU GET A SIGNED RELEASE FROM EVERYONE YOU VIDEOTAPE.

IDENTIFYING THEMES

After a couple of conversations (2-3) pull together a small group of those who led or listened to the conversations. You want to look for patterns, and listen for themes across the conversations. Come back together after every couple of conversations to check your thinking.

Remember, theme development is more of an art than a science, but using a group to look at the conversations builds rigor in. Experience shows that when patterns emerge from these conversations, they typically resonate with the community.

We discourage the use of more intense theme development processes. Remember that these conversations are meant to first and foremost build relationships with people and learn. We are not conducting a research project per se. Also, we have found that a simpler process typically yields the same results as more complex approaches to theme development.

NOTE: Before you search for themes, make sure to use the note-taking questions to summarize what you have learned to start thinking about it. Having different people answer those questions will build a stronger conversation.

Identifying Themes

- Identify someone to lead this discussion based on the questions below.
- Use examples from conversations to provide concrete examples as you talk.
- Have the “Note Taking” sheets handy for this conversation.
- As you talk record your thoughts. Label your findings under: Themes, Tensions, Ambivalence, Language.

Questions

What, if any, common themes do you see across the conversations?

How are people’s comments connected or related?

Around which areas does agreement seem strongest? Why?

What, if any, tensions are emerging?

Why are these tensions important?

How do people in the conversations resolve them, if at all?

Where do people seem ambivalent, or torn?

Why are they torn? What are they torn between?

How do people talk?

What language do people use?

What emotions do they convey?

What quotes or anecdotes capture the flavor of what people are saying?

Use “Voices for the Common Good: America Speaks Out on Education” to get a sense of the kinds of themes that emerge from these kinds of conversations. www.liveunited.org/report.



Post Conversation Survey

We are committed to involving the diversity of our community in our conversations. We'd also like to learn what you think about this experience. Please help us see how we are doing by filling out this brief survey. This survey is completely confidential and you will NOT be asked for your name. If you do not wish to answer the questions about yourself, please feel free to skip that section and go right to the questions about the community conversation.

About yourself

What zip code do you live in? _____

Please identify your age.

16-34 35-54 55-74 75+

How do you describe your race or ethnic group? (If multi-racial, please check all that apply)

- Asian, Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander;
- Black, African American or of African descent;
- American Indian, Aleut, Native American or Alaskan Native;
- White, Caucasian, or of European descent;
- Other

Do you consider yourself Latino or Hispanic? Yes No

How do you identify yourself? Female Male

What is your primary language?

- English
- Spanish
- Other (please write in) _____

What is your family income?

- \$0-20,000
- \$20,001-40,000
- \$40,001-60,000
- \$60,001-80,000
- \$80,001-100,000
- \$100,001+

About the Community Conversation

How would you rate the quality of the discussion tonight?

Excellent Good Fair Poor

As a result of this experience, how likely are you to get involved in other conversations and activities about important community issues?

Less likely Equally likely More likely

Please indicate your relationship, if any, to United Way: None Volunteer Other

Please use the space on the back to write any additional comments about the discussion. Thank you.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

1. What will these conversations create?

These conversations will help you gain a stronger sense of people's aspirations for the community and education. Community Conversations are a window into how people talk about their concerns and lives and create a way to develop or deepen partnerships with non-traditional groups. With this knowledge United Way's can be more effective, more relevant, better mobilize people around education and ultimately have greater impact in their communities.

These conversations are uniquely local, you'll be asking about your community and learning about people's aspirations. But, while the conversations are local because United Ways across the country are participating, your local results will inform a national report that United Way Worldwide is compiling. So you'll be able to learn locally AND benefit from a national effort to mobilize people around creating change on education.

2. What do I ask?

Use the Community Conversation Guide. This guide has been tested over 20 years and across the country. It lays out the questions to ask and walks you through the conversation. We know from experience that it will work and spark a great conversation.

3. Who should I talk to?

These conversations are designed to help you deepen your understanding of the community – so that means you'll get the most out of them by reaching out to people across the community. Use what you know about your entire community to cast a wide net. You should talk with people in different parts of the community and those you imagine will have different types of answers (you'll likely find folks have more in common than you expected). Test yourself by asking, do we have a strong sense of the breadth of the community? Are we working to go beyond "the usual suspects."

4. How many do I need to do?

We're asking you to do 3-5 of these, but typically once United Ways get into it they see the value and want to go further. Together with other local United Ways this will help us gain a broad picture of people's aspirations for their community and how we can create opportunity for a good life. We find that three conversations are enough to identify some strong patterns and from there you can decide how to best move ahead. Ultimately don't let doing three conversations prevent you from doing one. Beware of the trap of spending so much time worrying and planning that you never get into the community. After your first conversation the next steps become clearer.

A quick test to see if you've held enough conversations: 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? If not, that's fine, but it probably means you need to spend a little more time in Community Conversation.

5. How long are the conversations?

Community Conversations generally last about 90 minutes. You can shorten to an hour if you need to but we ask you not to go shorter than an hour.

6. Where should I hold the conversations?

You should hold the conversations in a place where folks are used to getting together and where they will feel comfortable talking. You want to find a place that is “part of the community” – that is usually not a government or “official” place, nor is it a school. You want places that are easily accessible and open for evening conversations.

Other things to consider when picking a location:

- Look for a comfortable place where you can get work done –not too noisy or full of distractions.
- A place that is easily accessible to participants.
- Examples: Community center, library, YMCA, places of worship, etc.

7. How many people should I invite?

Ideally you want a group of between 10-20 for the conversation, the ideal tends to be 12 participants. Generally that means inviting 30 or more people. But don't worry, you can and should work with partners and others to help you reach out. For more information on recruiting for the conversations check out the Community Conversation Workbook. One other note it's a good idea to track RSVPs so that you have a sense of the size of the group. If you find you're much above 20 then it may be a good idea to try for two conversations – on different nights.

8. Who should lead the conversation?

You want someone who can engage participants, someone who is able to remain neutral, and isn't seen as having his or her own agenda. You want someone who is curious about what people think and who will gently push people to consider different perspectives — helping folks to understand why others think. Lastly, a good conversation leader doesn't have to be an expert on education issues, they do have to be committed to guiding, not participating in, the conversations. We have found that it is not a good idea to have “experts” lead these conversations; their expertise can intimidate people and reduce their openness.

9. How will I gather up and make sense of what I'm learning?

The Community Conversation Workbook includes tools for taking notes and making sense of your findings.

10. What do I do after the conversation?

After the conversations use the note taking tool to gather up what you learned from the conversation. Then you want to set up a meeting with key decision makers in your United Way and use the identifying theme tool to talk about the two or three most important things you learned. Remember to focus the conversation on what you learned, rather than the process. Be sure you can answer: What did we learn? What are the implications for our work?

11. Do I need to follow up with people?

These conversations are a great opportunity to build relationships. You'll want to collect names and contact information (use the tools provided as a starting point). These are people that may raise their hand and demonstrate a real interest in giving, advocating and volunteering. After the conversation you'll want to follow up with people. Be sure to thank them for their participation. Share what you learned and how you're going to use what you learned. This can be as simple as telling people that

the conversation prompted you to think of new questions about your work, or as weighty as sharing that through these conversations you're considering a new initiative. Whatever follow up you choose be clear with them about expectations and thank them for their time and for sharing. And remember you want to engage with these people over time around the ideas and topics they have expressed interest in.

12. Won't people expect us to take on all of these issues?

It's important to set clear expectations for the conversations. Tell people that you want to listen and learn to get a better sense of how the community thinks. Make sure that they know you'll report back to them what you learn and how you plan to use what you learn and people will be eager to participate.

13. Where else could Community Conversations be useful?

You can use the Community Conversation guide, note taking tool and theme tool with audiences like: workplace employees, Leadership Councils, young leaders, loyal contributors, major gifts/Tocqueville donors, existing partners, student United Ways, and others.