



# Community Conversations

Harwood Institute Public  
Innovators Lab  
Tuesday, August 21, 2018



Welcome!



# Introduction : 5 Key Areas of Focus

- ★ **Being Turned Outward** - where the community, and not our conference room, is our point of reference. Our community must always be in our line of sight.
- ★ **Understanding our community** - which starts with shared aspirations. We must know what matters to people.
- ★ **Creating conditions for change and sustainability** - where we start with where the community is, and not where we wish it were.
- ★ **Deciding on the right path** - there are numerous paths for taking action.
- ★ **Making an agreement with yourself** - about what we value and how to stay true to that when doing demanding work.

# Understanding Our Community

## FOCUS ON 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.

## COMMUNITY CONVERSATIONS

- ★ **Community conversations** provide a safe place where people in your community can come together to talk about their aspirations, concerns and how they want their community to move forward.

# Community Conversation

- ★ **HERE TO HAVE A KITCHEN TABLE CONVERSATION** - Everyone can participate; 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 to understand the views of others, especially those you may disagree with.
- ★ **HELP KEEP THE CONVERSATION ON TRACK** - Stick to the questions. Try not to ramble.
- ★ **IT'S OKAY TO DISAGREE, BUT DON'T BE DISAGREEABLE** - Respond to others how you want them to respond to you.
- ★ **HAVE FUN!**

Break!

# Case Study: Part 1

1. Where does the information that is driving this plan come from? What would you say they know, don't know?
  
1. What do you make of this plan given what you know?
  
1. What questions do you have given what we have discussed at the Lab so far?

Lunch!

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# Turning Outward

{verb} 1. The act of seeing and hearing those in the community, and acting with intentionality to create change. 2. A reorientation toward the public; a posture 3. A framework for making choices about public life.



# Community Conversations

- ★ **Community conversations provide** a safe place where people in your community can come together to talk about their aspirations, concerns and how they want their community to move forward.
- ★ **The typical community conversation** has about 8-15 participants and lasts anywhere from 90 minutes to two hours.
- ★ **A moderator guides the conversation** using a discussion guide, which was developed by The Harwood Institute over the past 25 years. This guide has been tested and used in communities of all sizes and make-ups.

# Public Knowledge Report

- ★ **Sharing the public knowledge** that we learn from community conversations with other individuals, organizations and groups is an important way to create community ownership of people's shared aspirations and concerns.
- ★ **It also paves the way** to create alignment in people's intent to take action where the reference point for action becomes the community.
- ★ **This is knowledge we will use** to inform our strategic planning, program development, outreach efforts, and so much more...

# Stages Of Community Life



IMPASSE

**WHAT TO DO:**

- Engage in conversations to articulate what people are for
- Figure out what language helps people imagine a better future
- Find small ways to demonstrate people coming together

# Stages of Community Life

- ★ **The Waiting Place** - people sense that things are not working right; unable to clearly identify the problem; feel disconnected from leaders; divisive; waiting for someone else to solve the problem
- ★ **Impasse** - Hit rock bottom; sense of urgency, but lack of clarity about what to do; mired in turf wars; lacks the capacity to act
- ★ **Catalytic** - starts with small steps; small numbers experimenting; small actions that give people hope; links and networks being built; hope vs. status quo
- ★ **Growth** - clearer signs of how the community is moving forward; can name leadership; networks are growing; renewed spirit of community; common story emerging about community
- ★ **Sustain and Renew** - ready to take on nagging issues that require long-term sustained effort; new norms, lessons, and insights pervade the community; struggling to maintain momentum; in danger of new waiting place

Break!

# Deciding on the right path

- ★ **Current Work** - Deepen and accelerate our impact in the community or within a specific program
- ★ **New Work** - Demonstrate that the community can work together in different, more effective ways through a new program or initiative
- ★ **Organizational Excellence** - Focus on serving the community better by improving relationships, trust and ability to be a real partner for change.
- ★ **Collection Action and Impact** - A team of organizations want to figure out how to work together more effectively around a shared issue to achieve a greater impact

# Library Case Study

Red Hook Public Library  
Red Hook, NY

The Red Hook Public Library used their training to engage residents in town.

The only stoplight in town, which didn't work properly came up many times in conversation.

The Library team brought public officials together to figure out how to fix the problem.

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# Library Case Study

Spokane County Library District  
Spokane, WA

Staff used their training to focus on how they could build stronger community relationships and embed in the library a culture that put the community at the center of decision making,

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Questions?

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