Memorandum

To: Chip Rerig, City Administrator

From: Ashlee Wright, Library and Community Activities Director

Subject: Community Conversations

Date: September 1, 2018

BACKGROUND

Libraries Transforming Communities is an American Library Association initiative with the Harwood Institute for Public Innovation. This initiative is supported by the U.S. Institute for Museum and Library Services under the provisions of the Library Services and Technology Act, administered by the State Librarian.

The Harwood Institute has coached hundreds of library professionals in developing an approach or practice called Turning Outward. Libraries that Turn Outward are better connected to their communities, and those communities often shape their collective thinking into action.

The Harwood Institute was recommended to me at a half-day workshop at the Fresno Public Library called "Communicating Change". Nearly three fourths of those in attendance that day had been trained in the Harwood methodology and were emphatic about how transformative it had been for their libraries and communities. In May 2018, Local History Librarian, Katie O'Connell, and I received state grant funding to attend a three day training with the Harwood Institute alongside other library professionals, including representatives from neighboring Monterey Public Library.

COMMUNITY CONVERSATIONS

Community conversations are a central part of the Harwood methodology, which provide a safe place where people in our 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 up 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 makeup.

Starting with people's shared aspirations is critical to building community ownership and forward momentum to pursue a path of possibility and hope. But it's not how most conversations in communities are started or framed. Here are two conventional ways that many conversations in communities start (and stall), and how using people's shared aspirations produces a more productive path forward:

STARTING POINT	WHAT WE GET	WHAT IT CREATES
Identify "the problems"	Rooted in complaints Private demands on Public Resources Finger pointing; blame 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 is not rooted in their reality "Vision" documents relegated to desk drawers and collecting dust
Aspirations	A conversation based on reality and a shared 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

PUBLIC VS. EXPERT KNOWLEDGE

The Harwood Institute makes a distinction between "public knowledge" and "expert knowledge". Public knowledge is about understanding people's aspirations, concerns, and how they see change happening in their community. Expert knowledge (e.g., technical studies, best practices, statistical data) is vital, but too often substitutes for public knowledge. Community conversations are the best tool we have for generating public knowledge. While traditional methods of public engagement like surveys and questionnaires can result in useful information, community conversations create connections between community members and organizations, not simply between the community members and the Library, as well as creating greater community ownership of/investment in the outcomes of the conversations.

When we help a community generate public knowledge, we and others in the community can: understand the context of people's lives, root our 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, and make our work more relevant and impactful within the community.

HOW WE USE PUBLIC KNOWLEDGE

Recently, I engaged the library staff in a highly successful, full-day training on the Harwood practice and turning outward to the community. Ms. O'Connell and I moderated this initial community conversation with the library staff and representatives from the Carmel Public Library Foundation. Aside from the larger implications for the conversation as part of a public knowledge report, everyone listened to what others were saying, and we have already been able to implement some small changes to how we communicate with each other for the better.

Beginning with the groups that we are most closely associated with, such as the Carmel Public Library Foundation, and Friends of the Library, and then branching out, it is our intention to continue conducting community conversations throughout the Fall and Winter and to use the public knowledge that we gather to inform the library's strategic plan and programming going forward.

As we conduct these conversations, we are not promising that any new initiatives or programs will emerge, only that we will get back to people, share what we learned and how it can help make work in the community more effective. Sharing the public knowledge from community conversations with other individuals, organizations and groups is an important way to create community ownership of people's shared aspirations and concerns.

Each of us makes the choice about the direction we face when we seek to make a difference, and each of us has clear reasons to turn outward to see and hear our community and act with intentionality to create change. I am so pleased that we as a Library staff have committed to re-orienting ourselves to be more turned outward to the public and are starting down a path of making lasting change for our library patrons and the community.