



# Conversation Cafés

Adapted from "Community Conversations" by Paul Born

These events provide the opportunity for people in the community to converse and collaborate on a common issue or topic.

## Things to do Ahead of Time:

- ✓ Choose a topic that you feel will be meaningful to those in your community. Write down some questions ahead of time related to this topic and pick two that you think will inspire the most idea sharing (we've included some tips for crafting questions on the next page).
- ✓ Choose a time and location
- ✓ Advertise and send out invitations for your Conversation Café

**Recommended Time:** Evenings or weekends; allow at least two hours for the whole activity

**Recommended Location:** School classroom or library

## Recommended Materials:

- ✓ Copies of Agreements for each guest (see next page)
- ✓ Brown paper table covers
- ✓ Pens and markers
- ✓ Sign-in sheet
- ✓ Nametags
- ✓ Refreshments

## Set-Up:

- ✓ Show up early to set up tables and chairs. Each table should have room for approximately 5 people. Tape down brown paper onto tables and make sure each table has at least one dark marker for writing on the paper.
- ✓ As participants enter, provide them with a name tag and have them sign-in with their name and contact information if they wish to be invited to more events in the future.
- ✓ Welcome all of the participants and have them find a seat. Some things to discuss as you introduce the process:
  - Clarify the ending time to respect people's time.
  - Review Agreements (see next page) and ask guests to commit to these.
  - Present the group with the some information about the topic you will be discussing.
  - Have each table elect a leader to take notes about the group's discussion. The leader will also be in-charge of moderating the conversation and ensuring that everyone has a chance to speak.
- ✓ Provide the first question and allow the group 30-45 minutes to discuss this question while the leader records responses.
- ✓ After providing 30-45 minutes for the first question, have each group get up and go to a new table while the table leaders stay behind.
- ✓ Participants continue the conversation with new groups and each table leader shares their notes with the new group.

## Reference

Born, P. (2008). *Community conversations: Mobilizing the Ideas, skills and passions of community organizations, governments, businesses, and people*. Toronto: BPS Books.



- ✓ Repeat this exercise with your second question
- ✓ After doing this twice, take time with your participants to debrief and allow people to share what they learned with the whole group.

### Additional Ideas:

Decorate the room. Provide fun music to set the tone, ensure the room is spacious and lighting is comfortable, and provide coffee and light refreshments.

You may even chose a theme for the space such as a European café or a fancy restaurant.

For more ideas and information for hosting a Conversation Café, check out:

[www.conversationcafe.org](http://www.conversationcafe.org)

#### Conversation Café Agreements

*From [www.conversationcafe.org](http://www.conversationcafe.org)*

- **Open-mindedness:** Listen to and respect all points of view.
- **Acceptance:** Suspend judgment as best you can.
- **Curiosity:** Seek to understand rather than persuade.
- **Discovery:** Question assumptions, look for new insights.
- **Sincerity:** Speak from your heart and personal experience.
- **Brevity:** Go for honesty and depth but don't go on and on.

#### How to Craft Questions

*From [www.conversationcafe.org](http://www.conversationcafe.org)*

To ensure that your questions provide the best opportunity for sharing, make sure they are:

- **Open:** There are no embedded cultural, political, or ideological assumptions.
- **Inviting:** It involves both head and heart. People can respond with their feelings and their thoughts.
- **Honest:** It has not already been answered conclusively—yet finding an answer is crucial to moving forward.
- **Experiential:** Provides the opportunity for people to tell a story or recall an experience that relates to the question, if they choose.
- **Inclusive:** Anyone could have something to say—whatever their age, race, gender, or level of education.
- **Generative:** Can't be answered with just a "yes" or "no".
- **Relevant:** Applies to real issues that we all face.
- **Inspiring:** Makes you want to find an answer and do something about it.

### Reference

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