LEADING CONVERSATIONS
IN SMALL AND RURAL LIBRARIES

FACILITATION GUIDE

IES

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

It's a question we at the American Library Association (ALA) have heard quite a bit throughout our Libraries Transforming Communities initiative: *Why should I, a librarian—or library assistant or branch manager or media specialist—be able to facilitate a discussion?*

First o , let's demystify the "f" word for the time being. "Facilitate" can be a loaded word, one that may fill us with images of crowded rooms, microphones, and the fear of saying the wrong thing.

A facilitator is discussion leader—and discussions happen at the library all the time.

A book club meeting is a prime example: people gather to share ideas, socialize, and learn from one another. There can be heartfelt moments of connection and tense moments of disagreement; chatty, harmonious gatherings; and times when one person takes over the discussion. Sometimes, it can be hard to get people to talk at all.

How do you, as the discussion leader—the *facilitator*—handle these situations?

This guide is designed to help you, as a library worker in a small or rural community, gain the skills you need to not only prepare for and lead discussions, but also to overcome common challenges that arise when people gather to speak in groups. We will cover the roles and responsibilities of a facilitator, how to ask the right questions, tips for keeping a conversation constructive, and best practices for defusing tension.

Of course, these skills have relevance far beyond book clubs. The material covered in this guide (and the companion course, available for free at **ala.org/LTC**) will help you in a range of situations: leading meetings with fellow sta or trustees, moderating a panel discussion, or helping residents work through a topic that divides them.

These skills are part of an umbrella term known as *community engagement*: the process of working collaboratively with community members—library users, residents, faculty, students, and/or local organizations—to address issues for the betterment of the community.

Once you have explored this guide, you may wish to explore ALA's other community engagement resources—all available, free of charge, through the Libraries Transforming Communities initiative at **ala.org/LTC**.

We welcome your feedback and questions at **publicprograms@ala.org**.

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WHO DOES WHAT? FACILITATION ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

FACILITATOR'S ROLE

A facilitator helps a group of people understand their common objectives, share their opinions, and sometimes work toward action.

As a library worker, you might facilitate a sta conversation about a change in your library, bring together voters to talk through a concern in your community, or explore common ground and di erences among readers in a book club meeting.

Your role as a facilitator is to help organize and guide the conversation by:

- Identifying the purpose, expected outcome, and topic
- Building the agenda
- Developing discussion questions
- Setting ground rules
- Actively listening to the conversation in order to summarize, reframe, and ask good questions
- Managing time and interpersonal dynamics of the participants
- Helping the group identify common ground, next steps, and/or plans for action

The facilitation skills and resources covered in this guide can be used in a variety of settings—from internal sta meetings to public programs with your patrons. The goal is to help you craft thoughtful, engaging meetings and conversations with active participation from all, and that you feel comfortable leading!

SUPPORTING ROLES

While the goal of this guide is to develop your facilitation skills, there are several important roles that support good meeting management. Depending upon the type of conversation you're planning (e.g., sta meeting, book discussion), you could ask others to fill these roles or you could take them on yourself, in addition to acting as facilitator.

TIMEKEEPER

It's important for any meeting or event to start and end on time, and a designated timekeeper can help to ensure everyone stays on track. The facilitator may serve in this role or may designate this responsibility to someone else.

The timekeeper will use the agenda or time frames o ered by the facilitator to track the conversation's allotted time periods for topics or questions. They will notify the facilitator when it is time to move to the next part of the conversation.

Tips for notifying the facilitator that it is time to move on:

- Give a warning. Let everyone know that there are just a few minutes remaining for the topic
- Decide upon a non-verbal cue in advance—a raised hand, for instance, to signal time is up
- In larger meetings or events, a sign notifying the facilitator of the time remaining (e.g., 5-minute, 1-minute) may be helpful.

Tips for moving the conversation forward as a facilitator:

- Let the group know. Wait for the current participant to finish speaking, and then tell everyone it's time to move on and introduce the next topic or question. Give advance notice if you can.
- If people are having a hard time transitioning, explain why it is necessary to move to the next phase of the conversation. Explain how it connects to what they have been discussing. Invite them to take a moment to think about this before continuing.
- If someone continues to speak to the previous topic, thank them for their contribution and ask them how they connect the first topic to the second. Or, politely ask them to allow a few participants to respond to the next topic so they can think about this connection.

RECORDER

Having a designated rec17 (ip/Span 23 9will help you captur)1.2 (e input, insights, ideas, and decisions in a)1TJETEMC /Sp

Should you take your group's notes publicly or privately?

Here are a few circumstances in which you may prefe 9o take notes publicly, such as on a white boar

- The conversation is public, and transparency 9s important.
- The conversation will build upon the questions asked. Having the notes visible 9will help participants

Here are a few circumstances in which you may prefer to take notes privately, such as on a laptop:

- The conversation is a closed conversation or internal meeting, so posting anything that might be viewed by people outside the meeting would be inappropriate.
- The conversation is focused on gathering information, not on finding common ground.
- The information gathered is for internal purposes only.

PRO TIP **Keep your conversation small and nimble—ideally, no more than 15**

Either way, you can use your notes to help participants feel heard. It can be helpful for people to see their comments noted publicly, but you can also ask a notetaker to read notes aloud from their notebook or laptop to ensure that they were captured correctly.

If you have more than one recorder available, you might ask one person to take notes on the content of people's comments, while the other observes interactions, body language, and any changes in energy the room (e.g., did a certain comment or topic cause people to tune out?).

A note: it is generally advisable to not take notes about people's personal experiences. Sometimes in a conversation, you may start with personal experiences before moving to exploring options for addressing the topic. Take notes after the personal stories have been shared or get participants' permission to capture their stories—but be clear how they will be used and why.

LOGISTICS COORDINATOR

Having someone to manage the logistics of the meeting or event is essential. This may be the facilitator or someone else.

Logistical considerations include time and location of the meeting, set-up, and materials. A logistical coordinator will work with the facilitator to determine what is needed for the event and make sure everything is set up in advance.

COMMUNICATIONS COORDINATOR

You may have a need for someone to manage communications. Whether the facilitator or someone else, a few key communication tasks are necessary.

Communications includes messaging about the event in advance and spreading the word to attract participants. The communications coordinator may work with community partners on these e orts or use the library's traditional communications methods to reach out to patrons. Following the event, the coordinator may send follow-up emails to participants with notes or other information and may also post information about the event online.

SERVING IN MULTIPLE ROLES AS A FACILITATOR

While it can be tempting to take on multiple roles, we recommended that you delegate tasks whenever possible—especially if you are new to facilitating.

In some instances, participants can act as your timekeeper or recorder; don't be afraid to ask for volunteers at the beginning of the session you're facilitating! In other instances, try to identify sta , partner organizations or library volunteers who can help you in advance. It may be easy to hand o these tasks to a participant when the event is casual, such as a book club meeting, but may be harder in the case of a community conversation on a divisive topic.

Consider whether participants will be able to participate as well as serve in these roles. More involved topics may make it di cult for them to participate fully if they must also take notes or watch the time. The more formal the meeting or event, the more likely you will want to identify a recorder and timekeeper in advance.

to selecting a topic that reflects the community's priorities or aspirations. People are more likely to participate in a conversation of their own choosing.

There are several ways to learn about your community's interests and needs:

- **Talk to your library patrons.** Ask: What is important to them? What is happening in the community that they would like to discuss? What keeps them up at night? You can do this informally or formally, through one-on-one conversations or focus groups, but be sure to reach outside your most regular users. If you don't, you risk an a nity bias—an unconscious tendency to connect withthrough one-on-

Framing is not always as tricky as it sounds. For many programs, the topic will be light or neutral, and you won't have to think much about framing. But for some of the tough topics, how something is worded is critical.

FINDING PARTNERS

When it comes to recruitment, partnerships are incredibly helpful and sometimes even essential. Partnerships ensure that the right people are in the room and that the e orts to engage the community do not sit solely on the shoulders of any one entity.

Consider a conversation about Spanish-speaking services at the library. Organizations who are trusted by the Hispanic/Latinx community make great partners for thinking through the plans for the event, as well as helping to get participants to attend.

Partners can be organizations, institutions, and even individuals in the community. Partners could also become potential hosts of community conversations or even co-facilitators.

Tips for finding partners:

- **Think about your community leaders.** Which leaders or sta /board members of local institutions

Other costs may include marketing, refreshments and materials. Much of this can be done at a low cost by using existing resources or by working with the community. Refreshments, for instance, could be managed by making the event a potluck.

TIMING

Community conversations should be planned for times that work well for the members of the community invited. If inviting working parents, for instance, holding the conversation outside of regular work hours is essential. Sometimes, you may wish to schedule multiple conversations throughout the day or week in order to allow people to attend at a time convenient for them.

Most conversations can be completed in ninety minutes to three hours. Two hours or less is preferred, as this is generally the maximum amount of time people can attend. Sometimes, the type of meeting you are planning will require more time—consider holding these events on a weekend or another time when participants are likely to have more time and flexibility.

At extended meetings, make sure you have a plan to keep people comfortable with food, drinks, and su cient time for breaks. Promote the event as a retreat, and find somewhere special to host it.

LOCATION

Consider whether the conversation should be held at the library or elsewhere. This can be a matter of space, accessibility, or comfort. The library is often not the best location; you should go where people will be most comfortable, and partners may have space that is preferable for your needs. You will need to consider how many people you are hoping to attract and how much space you will need for them. The set-up of your event will impact this.

PRO TIP **If you divide a large group into smaller groups for the discussion, try bringing the whole group back together after and having one person from each group report back with a summary of what was shared. This gives attendees the opportunity to hear all perspectives, not just those shared in their group.**

SET-UP

Most conversations are set up in a circle, “U” shape, or occasionally a square. It is important that participants be able to see one another, and these set-ups make it easier for everyone to be heard.

When meeting with a small internal group, such as your board, sitting around a table boardroom style is appropriate. When meeting with a larger group of community members to discuss a book, you will want to seat them in a circle of chairs or a square of chairs and tables.

For larger community conversations of 30 people or less, we recommend setting up chairs in a circle. For groups larger than 30, we suggest small tables for groups of 6 or 8.

In addition to seating, you may need tables for refreshments or materials, easel(s) and paper, a screen and projector, markers, and tape.

PRO TIP **Ask your partners (or community members) what it takes to bring their participating members to a conversation. When possible, try to add discussion events to a partner's existing venue or event, rather than creating your own event.**

REFRESHMENTS

Are you allowed to serve food and drinks in your meeting space? If so, o ering refreshments can help get people to attend your conversation.

If you plan to serve food, include that information in your communications about the event. If you hold a conversation during a mealtime, o er something substantial or let folks know to bring their own food. At other times, cookies and drinks should be enough to keep people satiated and draw them in. You may even wish to make the event a potluck and invite everyone to contribute a snack or dish.

ACCESSIBILITY

Ensure accessibility of space and materials. For more information, check out the following resources:

- www.ada.gov
- www.access-board.gov

INTRODUCING THE GROUND RULES

At the outset of a conversation, the facilitator should welcome participants and introduce themselves before outlining the ground rules.

Best practices for introducing ground rules to a group is to:

- Review the rules verbally.
- Provide the rules in writing. This can be done via a handout, posted on a wall, or projected on a screen.
- Introduce them as a set of guidelines to help set expectations for the conversation.
- Ask participants if they have any questions about the ground rules you just covered.

ADDING GROUND RULES FROM PARTICIPANTS

Depending on the group and the conversation, you may wish to ask participants for suggestions of additional ground rules. This gives participants the chance to suggest additional rules that they feel will ensure a respectful and productive conversation.

This will likely work best when facilitating a small group and/or a group that will meet multiple times. With larger groups or one-time events, using the ground rules you establish in advance is usually su cient.

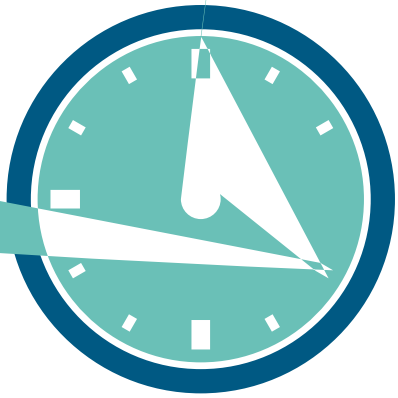
Once an additional ground rule is suggested, ask participants if they would be willing to agree to it. You should always ask participants if they agree to abide by the ground rules set forth at the start of the meeting. This will ensure that if any participant breaks the ground rules, you can refer back to them as a shared agreement.

Be sure to add any new ground rules or agreements to your list. If posted on the wall, write it in on the paper or add a second piece of paper for the additional rule(s). You can ask participants to add it to their ground rules handout, if you are using one.

EXAMPLES OF GROUND RULES

There are many di erent conversation models with many di erent ground rules. Below are several examples. Borrow from them or mix and match to find the rules that work for your group!

SETTING A GENDA



Creating an agenda helps you in your role as facilitator. It outlines what you hope to accomplish, what questions you will pose, outputs you hope to achieve, and the time you will allot to various topics or questions. It provides you with a roadmap for your conversation or meeting. If you plan to lead the conversation with a partner, you may also wish to note which one of you will lead each section.

When planning a meeting, such as a sta or board meeting, it's helpful to share the agenda with your participants ahead of time. When it comes to public conversations, the agenda may suit your needs more than it will aid the participants. Use it as your game plan for running the conversation. You may wish to use a detailed agenda for the facilitator, notetaker, etc., but distribute a simplified version to the attendees.

SAMPLE AGENDA

"Community Conversation: Welcoming Community"

Time	Topic	Leader	Output
6:00–6:10 p.m.	Welcome, review of topic and ground rules	Jane	Participants clear about the topic, agreements on the ground rules
6:10–6:20	Introductions: Tell us your name and one reason you decided to join tonight's conversation.	Joe	Participants introduce themselves
6:20–6:45	First round—prompt: Describe what a welcoming community would look like to you	Jane; Joe takes notes	Share and explore the meaning of being a welcoming community
6:45–7:10	Second round—prompt: How might we create a more welcoming community in our town?	Joe; Jane takes notes	Idea generation for creating a welcoming community
7:10–7:25	Reflections—prompt: What might we do as a result of today's conversation?	Jane; Joe takes notes	Identify potential actions, future conversations of interest
7:25–7:30	Closing—thank you!	Joe	Participants are provided with next steps and expectations of any follow-up that will be done

FACILITATING A CONVERSATION: THE BASICS

A person is not born a great facilitator; these are learnable skills that are strengthened through practice.

Solid communication skills are the foundation for good meetings and conversations. For you to be e ective as a facilitator, you need to be able to communicate e ectively with participants. By modeling good communication, you also show participants how to respectfully communicate with one another.

In the following sections, we explore tips and techniques for becoming an e ective facilitator.

FACILITATION TECHNIQUES

ACTIVE LISTENING

The foundational practice for a facilitator is active listening—showing the person speaking that you

Best Practices for Paraphrasing

- An e ective paraphrase is best made as a statement. You might start your paraphrase with the words "What I hear you saying is . . . " or "Let me make sure I understand you. You are saying . . . ."
- If you don't understand what the person said, simply say so, or paraphrase the part you do understand.

Example

> *Pa ici an : I ked ha d f e e hing I ha e. I ha e been king ince I a, a eenage . We h ldn' be handing hing, e le, e h ld be e ec ing hem k ha d. B kid, d n' ha e a ch ice. We h ld hel he kid, h need f d, cl hing, ha n .*

- **Poor Paraphrasing:** "You think that we shouldn't help people."
- **Good Paraphrasing:** "I hear you saying that you value hard work, but that we should also look out for children in need."

A paraphrase can be helpful when a participant finishes speaking. It confirms they have been understood and makes a good transition to a question or others' comments. An e ective paraphrase will either be greeted with "yes" or "no" by the speaker. If the answer is "no," be sure to ask for clarification.

SUMMARIZING

Summarizing is a tool for improving shared understanding in a group by re-stating key information that has been shared.

At points in a conversation where a lot of information has been shared, it can be helpful to recap key ideas. Summarizing can also be helpful in keeping participants on the same page when the facilitator is looking to transition to a new question or sub-topic.

Summarizing is used in concert with paraphrasing to help clarify statements and keep the conversation moving. While paraphrasing works best after one participant speaks, summarizing is most helpful after several participants have contributed, as a way of capturing the most salient information.

Best Practices for Summarizing

- **Focus on key words you heard participants using.** You may wish to have a piece of paper and a pen with you to jot down these words or phrases.
- **Use your group notes.** If you are working with a recorder who is taking notes publicly in the room, refer back to them if helpful.
- **Emphasize commonalities first, then note any areas of di erence.** This will help participants remember their shared thoughts, not just the areas where they are far apart, and it could help depersonalize di erences between participants
- **Ask the group to confirm that you accurately summarized the conversation.** This is particularly helpful for the recorder to help them capture additional clarifications or expansions.

Examples

- **Poor Summarizing:** "Jane says she thinks X, but Trevor over there said he thinks Y."
- **Good Summarizing:** "We have been discussing this topic for some time. To recap, here are some of the key points I heard . . . Is there anything I missed?"

REFRAMING

Reframing is a facilitation skill that focuses on defusing loaded or angry statements. When people make statements that are hostile or potentially polarizing, it is helpful to restate the comment in calm, neutral language so the information within the statement can be heard by others. This helps others hear the important information being shared without getting mired in the emotions behind the original language. It validates the concern of the participant without placing value in the specific words they use.

Best Practices for Reframing

- Listen for the key value or concern behind the

QUESTIONS

Questions stimulate thinking and rethinking. In a conversation, statements are challenges that provoke a counter challenge or assert or defend an idea. Questions, on the other hand, create a pause in the action for reflection or for transitioning to the next topic.

As a facilitator, posing questions can be a powerful tool. It can help you eliminate much of the superfluous posturing and banter that can occur in conversations and keep it on track.

The core requirement of a good question is that it is open-ended. This means that the question cannot be answered simply with a "yes," "no" or one-word response. Open-ended questions require thoughtful responses and can broaden the conversation.

- **Open-ended question:** How might we impact our business community if we begin o ering 3D printing services?

Closed-ended questions, on the other hand, can be useful when seeking agreement or clarity, such as when you want to close the current part of the conversation and move on to the next topic.

- **Closed-ended question:** Is a 3D printing service likely something our business community would utilize?

CRAFTING QUESTIONS

Like choosing a discussion topic, the process of crafting questions should include consideration of framing. Just as you want everyone to feel welcome by the topic, you also want people to feel comfortable responding to your questions. This means, again, removing any underlying assumptions they may have.

A couple well-crafted questions can help guide your conversation and make your job as the leader a lot easier.

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STARTING A CONVERSATION: CREATING AN OPENING QUESTION

A good opening question will kick o discussion by asking participants to share their initial thoughts or experiences on the topic at hand. This provides an opportunity for sharing with one another, which can help build rapport before digging deeper or getting into decision-making. The topic and goals of your meeting will help determine what this opening question should be.

To evaluate your opening question, ask yourself:

- Is it welcoming of all perspectives? A good starting question does not appear biased or slanted toward a specific outcome.
- Can it be built upon or examined further? A good question will ask for experiences or perspectives on the topic in a more general way so follow-up questions can dig deeper.
- Is it easy enough to answer? Participants should feel able to respond to it without needing data or expertise.

Examples

- "Tell us about a time that you experienced . . . "
- "What were your initial reactions to . . . ?"
- "What are your hopes for the library in the coming year?"

CONTINUING A CONVERSATION: FOLLOW-UP QUESTIONS

As you get further into a conversation, good follow-up questions can help a facilitator move the

KEEPING A MEETING ON TRACK

As a facilitator, you're charged with keeping the meeting or conversation on track. Having an agenda or a plan for your time is helpful. But there are additional techniques you can use in the moment to help you keep the conversation moving.

As mentioned earlier, facilitators can use questions to lead the process and spark thinking. A question can also keep the meeting on track by indicating a need to stick to the agenda.

Below are some examples of questions you can use throughout a conversation to keep things on track.

- **To start a conversation when people are chatting:**

MANAGING GROUP DYNAMICS

DEALING WITH CHALLENGING PARTICIPANTS

On occasion, participants may act in ways that create tension and conflict with others. Ultimately, this behavior is unhelpful to everyone involved. A common danger, when this occurs, is for you and others to judge these behaviors by attaching labels or referring to the person in terms of their behavior.

It is important to remember that people behave the way we do for many reasons. Problematic behaviors occur when we are struggling to cope with stress, change, fear, or insecurities.

Problematic behavior does not make an individual a "bad" person, but rather makes them someone who might need help and understanding. People also need an opportunity to understand the e ect their behavior has on others and ultimately on their own lives.

As you review the common problems listed on the following pages, keep in mind that no one can change anyone except themselves. But there are some ways that you, as a facilitator, can address these behaviors to keep the conversation on track.

HOSTILITY

> *D ing a b k cl b di c , i n ab* Catcher in the Rye, *Beck , a e, ha , he didn' like he b k beca e he cha ac e f H lden a hin and en i led. A, Beck , a , de, c ibe h , he fel hi, a , J e ang i in e , he , a ing ha , he clea didn' ead he b k beca e if, he did, he l nde , and ha i', a g ea c ming f age , ' ab he dilemma f being be een ad le, cence and ad l h d.*

Some people may direct their anger toward others. This may be done cynically, sarcastically, or argumentatively in response to statements made by others. In some instances, they may try to undermine the conversation. At times, this can be a defensive behavior, a way to gain a sense of control, or the result of someone feeling obligated to participate.

How to address hostility:

- Identify the behavior (e.g., "That comment sounded sarcastic to me.")
- Use empathy (e.g., "It sounds as though you feel angry about that," or "It seems as though you have some strong feelings about that topic.")
- Be honest about your role (e.g., "I feel responsible for making sure everyone is heard, but I also have to keep the meeting on track.")
- Divert the conversation (e.g., "I'd like to talk with you about this later.")

You do not have to allow people to be disruptive. Set clear expectations for meeting behavior with your ground rules at the start, and be consistent. If someone is disruptive, refer back to the ground rules as an agreement everyone made for how they would engage one another.

If the hostile person refuses to cooperate, take a break if needed and speak with the person privately. Explain to him/her that you want them to have an opportunity to participate but that their behavior is disruptive. Give examples and ask for their cooperation.

If they simply refuse or continue to be hostile to others despite your e orts, you may need to ask that person to leave or end the conversation. This decision will depend on the type of meeting, time remaining, and your comfort level with confronting the hostile person. You may wish to refer to library policies on hate speech when appropriate.

DOMINATION

> *In a c-mm ni, c-n e,a.in ab- f nding blic ed ca.in, B ce ,a , he c-n e,a.in b alking ab- hi, idea - ha e b ,ine,, e, , -n,- ,ch-l ac.i i.ie,. The facili.a- hank, him f- ,ha ing and in i.e, - he, - ,ha e. Af.e Alma begin, - , eak ab- he c-nce n, f- b dening l- -inc-me familie,, B ce j m , in again and , eak, -e he, ,a.ing ha i.h hi, idea he é - ldn' be a b den -n he, e familie,. He c-n.in e, - , eak -e he, , efe ing back - hi, idea and i, al e ab-e all - he idea,.*

Individuals who constantly talk or interject when someone else is speaking may begin to dominate the conversation. Often this person feels what they have to say is more important than what anyone else could possibly contribute. The person may not be aware of the amount of time they have spoken during a meeting. It's possible that they act this way because they do not feel valued, do not know how to express themselves, or are looking for attention.

Tools for preventing domination:

- **Use a talking object.** By setting the rule that whoever has the talking object is allowed to speak, you set the expectation that people will not speak out of turn. Refer back to that rule when someone violates it.
- **Be explicit in your ground rules.** Instead of stating "no one will dominate," be more specific in your language, such as, "once you have spoken twice, wait for four others to contribute before weighing in again."

How to address domination:

- When there is a pause, thank the person and invite someone else to speak.
- Interrupt if the person carries on. Be gentle, but firm. (e.g., "Bruce, I'm sorry to interrupt, but you have shared quite a lot with us tonight while others have not had a chance to speak. Would you be willing to allow a few others to share first?")
- Review time limits and/or ground rules with the whole group.
- After the meeting, ask the person if there is anything you can do to support them. Let them know that you appreciate their participation, but want to make sure others are able to contribute equally. Ask them if there is any way you can help them with sharing space with others.

EXPERTS

> *In a c-nve-,a-i-n ab- - add-é,,ing c-mm ni, im ac-, f-m clima-e change, Angela ,-a-e, -ha- all -he c-mm ni, need, -- d- i, ,-- ea-ing mea- in --de-,-- clima-e change. She, --e, ,- die, ab- --he am- n- -f a-e-,ed -- -ái,e ca--le and -ce,, mea-, and ,ha-é, g -é,-n -he im ac- -ha- ill ha-e. O-he-, in -he g-- incl de a l-cal -anche-, h- l--k, -á-he- nc-mf--able and ha, ,-- ed c-n--ib -ing -- -he c-nve-,a-i-n.*

Some participants may be experts on a topic. Others may just act as if they are experts about everything.

These contributions can feel challenging because they can shut down other participants who don't feel as knowledgeable. Sometimes this behavior can come about because someone is not feeling valued by the group, or they may have a personal agenda.

How to address an expert:

- **Share your observation** (e.g., "It seems you have a lot of information on this particular topic. Perhaps we could find another time to discuss this further.")
- **Invite the contribution in another format** (e.g., "It sounds like you have several ideas about this. Would you be willing to write up a brief summary for us?")

How you can address reserved people:

- Invite contributions: “Is there anyone who hasn’t had a chance to speak who would like to?”
- Speak to reserved people individually during a break to ask how you can support their participation.
- Consider reserved individuals in your planning. O er options for participation aside from speaking in front of a large group. This may include breaking into one-on-one conversations for a time, allowing people to respond to prompts on paper, giving them the option to draw ideas, or collecting thoughts that can be shared with the group anonymously. These are all valid ways to contribute to a conversation and make the shy or introverted individuals feel welcomed and able to participate.

MANAGING MICROAGGRESSIONS AND HATE SPEECH

In community conversations you may observe microaggressions or hate speech directed toward some participants. As a facilitator, you are responsible for responding to comments or actions that may shut down others, particularly hate speech. Name it and ask the person to recognize what they have said and the impact on others.

FACILITATING CONVERSATIONS ON DIVISIVE TOPICS

At times, you will find yourself facilitating a divisive conversation. It’s natural for members of our community to have di erent views, and when topics feel personal or threatening, conflict can arise.

Your job as facilitator is to name those conflicts and remind participants of the ground rules and agreements. Acknowledge that people will have di erent ideas for how to address an issue and that, through conversation, we can start to understand each other’s perspectives and values and work toward a mutually beneficial approach.

Encourage participants to name disagreements and look for areas of commonality. This will assist the participants in starting to look past sound bites and name-calling and to examine options for how the community can work together.

TOOLS FOR CONVERSATION, CONSENSUS-BUILDING, AND DECISION-MAKING

As you grow in your facilitation practice, you may look for additional tools and techniques for improving conversations and helping participants reach decisions or actions. The following tips are more intermediate-level tools that can help.

THE PARKING LOT

- **Supplies:** Easel and paper, tape, markers

WRAPPING UP AND LOOKING FORWARD

CLOSING THE CONVERSATION

You've made it to the end. How do you close your conversation? This depends on your original goal.

- **Exploration:** If your conversation is exploratory in nature, end with a period of reflection. Ask participants to share something they learned, something that surprised them or that they might explore deeper after the meeting, or what common themes they heard in the conversation.
- **Decision-making:** When a conversation needs to end in a decision, the closing should surface this decision. Ask participants to reflect on the conversation and use one of the tools described in the previous section to help come to a decision.
- **Collaborative action:** As in a decision-making conversation, the closing of this conversation should surface a decision and identify actions and the people responsible. Make time at the end to identify who will be responsible for which actions so the conversation closes with clear next steps and responsible parties.

Once the above closing actions have been achieved, don't forget to thank your participants for their participation and let them know about any other next steps or additional conversations.

SO YOU'VE LED A CONVERSATION. NOW WHAT?

Congratulations! You've led your first conversation. What should you do now?

- **Reflect on the experience.** We learn best by practicing, so take a few minutes after your event to consider how it went, how you may improve your facilitation skills, and any adjustments you might want to make to the structure or questions for future conversations. This will set you up for success in the future.

- **Consider your next steps.** If the group is continuing to meet, what will the next conversation need to cover? If they are looking to take action, follow up with notes and any next steps they identified (and who will lead them). If this was a one-time event, is it something you would like to o er at the library again? What might the topic be for next time?

- **Thank people for their time.** If you facilitated a recurring meeting, send a follow-up email of thanks and any information they need.

- **Plan for the next conversation.** What do people want to talk about next? What is going on in the community that needs to be addressed? Start the process again and plan your next opportunity to facilitate.

ADDITIONAL


public
wisdom