AL

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

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,

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.

BEFORE YOU START: PLANNING A CONVERSATION PROGRAM AND PREPARING TO FACILITATE

IDENTIFYING YOUR GOAL

In each conversation, there is a goal or purpose. What are you aiming to accomplish? Generally, conversations have a few common goals:

- **Exploration:** Provides an opportunity to learn more about a topic and/or gain understanding of others' experiences. This builds connections and shared understanding.
- **Decision-making:** Participants are responsible for making a decision together. The conversation will generate ideas, explore options, and ultimately end with a decision or next steps.
- **Collaborative action:** Participants make decisions and determine appropriate action.

In your regular library programming, you may find that a goal of exploration is most common—that's great! When we hold library programs, we're exploring ideas and sparking conversations—opening people's minds as well as providing an opportunity to experience conversational literacy.

Admittedly, decision-making and collaborative action goals come with a bit more work; as facilitator, you will help participants get to these decisions and next steps. With careful planning, you can establish an agenda and questions that will help guide participants.

CHOOSING A DISCUSSION TOPIC

You may have a clear topic that needs to be discussed. In board meetings, for instance, you'll likely have some set topics that were decided on at the last meeting. But when you're thinking about engaging with the community, you may have to choose a topic for a conversation. How do you do that?

→

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 with people who are like you or those whom you are comfortable with.
- **Reach out to community organizations.** Which topics are they working on? What are they hearing most about? What issues do they see as needing discussion?
- **Explore data about your community.** Census data, for example, will give you a snapshot of your community's demographics, including race, income, education, and veteran status.

FRAMING YOUR TOPIC

Once you have chosen a topic, there is one more consideration to make before announcing it: how will you frame it?

Framing refers to how we interpret information. Individuals use our experiences, anecdotes, and even stereotypes to understand and respond to information. In framing a topic, you are considering how to make it accessible for all participants. This means removing any assumptions from the topic's wording to make it universally recognizable, rather than o -putting.

For instance, if you want to talk about privacy, you may wish to avoid incendiary phrases; for example, naming a program "Big Brother is Watching!" or "Mass Surveillance and the Police State" is likely to frame the issue as threatening. Playing up the underlying issues of safety, personal privacy, and access is more likely to elicit a nuanced (and noncombative) conversation. Alternatively, consider the program title "Protecting Your Privacy: Information Access and Safety in the Digital Age." This more inclusive framing also leaves the conversation open for multiple perspectives to feel welcome.

To get started, write several potential descriptions of your topic and run them by people who can o er varied perspectives. Do they understand what will be discussed? Do they feel welcome in that conversation? Do they feel that others with di erent views will feel welcome? Test this out with community partners and others to get a good cross-section of the community.

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.

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.

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.**

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!

Conversation Cafe Agreements (conversationcafe.org)

Living Room Conversations Ground Rules (

ETTING AN AGENDA

eating an agenda helps you in your role as facilitator. It outlines what u hope to accomplish, what questions you will pose, outputs you hope 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.

PRO TIP

Provide drinks and snacks and make time for people to mingle before the conversation starts. If people don't know each other, make introductions.

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

Examples

➜

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

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.

PRO TIP **If you have a chance, discuss the topic with a few folks before the meeting so you can begin thinking about follow-up questions. This is a good way to kick-start a stalled conversation or to engage active participation from one who hasn't spoken up (e.g., "Rick, you shared with me the other day that you thought the ___ idea would work, can you share your ideas with the group?"**

- **To start a conversation when people are chatting:** "Shall we begin?"
- **To stop side conversations:** "The group at Table 2 seem to have some ideas—do we want to bring them to the floor for group discussion?"
- **When participants are deviating from the agenda:** "What did you hope to walk away with by the end of the meeting?"
- **When discussion turns to an item not on the agenda:** "Shall we add that topic to the agenda for next time?"
- **To keep things on track and determine what might need to be discussed later:** "Do we need to decide this in order to decide that?"
- **To bring topics or the meeting to closure:** "Is there anything else before we move on?"; "What are our next steps?"

PROMPTS FOR DEEPER CONVERSATION

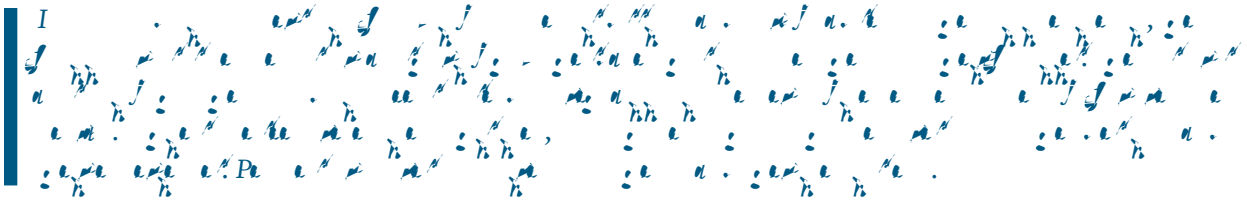
As you work your way through your list of prepared questions, there may come a point where you will want to help participants dig a little deeper into the conversation. This may look like examining options for addressing an issue, deciding how they would like to respond, or reflecting on what they have heard from one another in the conversation so far.

Here are some examples of questions you might use to help your participants get deeper into the conversation:

- "What have you learned in discussing this topic today?"
- "How might we address the concerns raised in the conversation so far?"
- "What possible actions might we take?"
- "How has our conversation today changed your thinking about this topic?"

- **Refocus the conversation** (e.g., "It sounds like you have a good historical perspective on this, but right now we need to focus on the topic at hand.")
- **Invite others to contribute** (e.g., "It is clear you have a strong idea of what you think we should do. I'd like to see what others think should be done.")

FIXERS



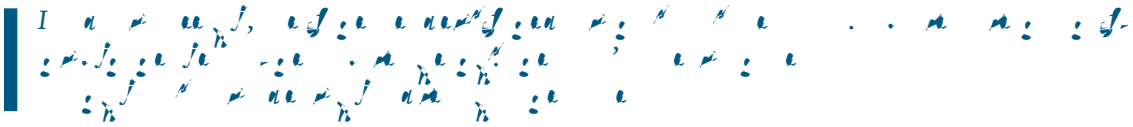
You may observe participants who just want to fix the problems—whether the problem is the topic being discussed or the problems other participants share from their own experience. These individuals may feel they are being helpful but can frustrate others who just want to be heard, and they can be disruptive when a collaborative solution is needed.

How to address a fixer:

- **Acknowledge them and redirect** (e.g., "It seems that you really want to help solve this issue. I'm sure others may have some ideas as well.")
- **Re-state the purpose of the meeting** (e.g., "Today's conversation is about hearing people's experiences. Let's give people the space they need to share.")
- **Point to the agenda** (e.g., "I understand you have some ideas for resolving this, but we're still working through identifying the issues.")

How you address the fixer may depend upon the type of conversation you are having (whether you are seeking ideas or just sharing experiences) and the point in the conversation you find the group in. Use the ideas for addressing the fixer above in the appropriate context of your conversation.

RESERVED



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.

Tips for using the dot exercise:

- Decide in advance or discuss in the group whether you will be deciding on one action or several.
- Provide everyone with a set number of dots each—one per person if one option is being chosen, several if not. Generally, three dots are su cient.
- This can be a useful exercise for narrowing down options as well. If the group has identified a lot of possibilities, use this exercise to narrow down to the ones with the most support. Take away any that do not receive votes or select the top five or so.
- Consider using this exercise to vote for a book selection or topic for a future event.
- You can also use this exercise as an opener for a conversation. Ask a simple question with pre-populated answers around the room and have people respond by adding the dots. It helps people get moving and can serve as an icebreaker.

GALLERY WALK

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

When a conversation has been going on for over an hour and you as facilitator wish to transition to discussing common ground, workable solutions, or takeaways, it can be helpful to take a brief break and encourage participants to do gallery walk.

The gallery walk asks participants to walk around the room and review the meeting's recordings, which are posted on the walls. As the facilitator, ask participants to review the recordings and think about the next step for the conversation. You may wish to share with them the next question you would like to pose so they can consider it while reviewing the recordings.

Note that the gallery walk only works when the recordings can be posted in large print on large sheets of paper around the room. It does not work well when notes are taken on a computer. Gallery Walks can be coupled with a refreshment break.

RECONVENING BREAKOUT GROUPS

When facilitating a large group, you may choose to break participants into smaller groups for their conversations. Once the main questions or topics have been discussed, you will want to reconvene the whole group for your closing. This can be done multiple ways.

- Ask people to share their reflections on their conversation.
- Have each group share one idea or takeaway from their conversation.
- Use easel paper for the groups to take notes. Have them post them and do a gallery walk.

What you choose to do may depend upon your goals and how you'd like to wrap up. The next section can o er additional guidance.

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.

LEADING VIRTUAL CONVERSATIONS IN SMALL AND RURAL LIBRARIES

Leading conversations online is, in many ways, similar to leading them in person. The concepts we have been

The “host” of a virtual conversation has control of the administrative capabilities in the room, including the technical features noted below. Oftentimes the facilitator also serves as the host. However, if you are new to facilitating online, or if you have a large group, you may want a helper to handle the host duties, such as muting and unmuting participants, helping with tech issues, or triggering breakout rooms.

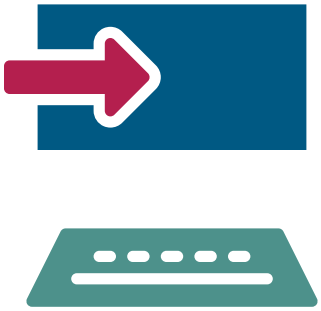
As you prepare for your video-conference, you should familiarize yourself with the following technical features:

Recording: Most platforms allow for recording of an event (sometimes with a fee). If you are recording a session you should say so at the beginning of the meeting in case anyone would like to opt out of participating. In addition to informing participants, share how the recording will be used and/or if it will be shared with participants or anywhere else. Noting this ahead of time, in the invitation, is ideal.

Muting: All platforms include muting capabilities, which can be managed by the host, participants, or both. Read up on the options and how to change the settings. In small conversations it may work to have everyone unmuted, but as the conversation gets larger you may wish to set a “question-and-answer” mode that mutes all participants but gives them the ability to unmute when they wish to speak. This avoids background noises while others are speaking. Make sure to go over the process of muting and unmuting at the start of your meeting.

Chat: The chat function allows for another communication method. This tool is helpful for sharing information or instructions with participants, including ground rules, questions, or 6Mirfk6.1 (.)3 (n tan)Tb

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES FOR FURTHER SKILLS-BUILDING



American Library Association's Libraries Transforming Communities Initiative

www.ala.org/LTC

Since 2014, ALA's Libraries Transforming Communities initiative has reimagined the role libraries play in supporting communities. The LTC website contains free resources and webinars from several conversation models, including the Harwood Institute for Public Innovation, Conversation Café, Everyday Democracy, and more.

NCDD Resource Center, Beginners Guide

www.ncdd.org/rc/beginners-guide/

The National Coalition for Dialogue & Deliberation's resource center includes more than 3,100 resources from the field of dialogue and deliberation. The best starting point for new facilitators is the Beginners Guide, which features the very best resources for those getting started.

NCDD Resource Center, Engagement Streams Framework

www.ncdd.org/streams

The Engagement Steams Framework helps you navigate the range of dialogue and deliberation approaches available so you can select the right one for your situation. This reference includes a chart of approaches with information on the time needed, number of participants, expected outcomes, and more.

World Café, Art of Powerful Questions

www.theworldcafe.com/tools-store/store/

This comprehensive guide written by Eric Vogt, Juanita Brown, and David Isaacs explores the three dimensions of a powerful question—construction, scope, and assumptions—and o ers sample questions for focusing collective attention, finding deeper insight, and creating forward movement.

NCDD Resource Center, Manuals & Guides

www.ncdd.org/rc/?category_name=manuals-guides&tag=highly-recommended

NCDD has collected some of the best how-to manuals and guidebooks for various topics. Not sure where to start in planning for a conversation? Peruse these materials to explore your options.

THE EYE OF SPIRIT
We can foster
public
to guide public

•••