How Opening Your Doors Can Open New Doors: Empowering Stakeholders to Engage Communities In Dialogue

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View our poster in the AEA eLibrary: http://comm.eval.org/viewdocument/how-opening-your-doors-can-open-new

What Is a Community Dialogue?

Based on elements of the American Library Association's Libraries Transforming Communities model, a *Community Dialogue* is a loosely facilitated discussion that provides the opportunity for stakeholders to discuss community-based challenges or aspirations with community leaders or members.

What Types of Topics Can Community Dialogues Help Stakeholders Explore?

Although the *Community Dialogue* approach was originally designed to help libraries address STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Math) topics with their communities, the strategy can be applied to help stakeholders address any challenging issue that requires community engagement to solve.

Some ways that *Community Dialogues* have been utilized by public libraries in our projects include:

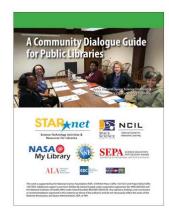
- Expanding library staffs' understanding of patrons' feelings about their local library and its programs, including programming related to STEM
- ☑ Obtaining meaningful feedback from the community on who visits the library and why
- Having a conversation about how the library can better serve ethnically, economically, and geographically underserved and underrepresented audiences
- ✓ Improving connections with local organizations and potential future partners that have shared interests with the library and community

How Can Evaluators Support Stakeholders?

As evaluators, we often use focus groups as a way to gather data and can use our experience to support stakeholders wishing to solicit feedback from their community through productive and meaningful conversations. Through our support of *Community Dialogues*, we learned library staff have many questions about hosting these types of conversations, such as:

- **?** How do you identify and reach your audience?
- How do you ask good questions?
- What facilitation techniques authentically engage audiences?
- Once you've facilitated a dialogue, what comes next?

To address these questions and help community-based organizations like public libraries implement their own *Community Dialogue*, we developed a *Community Dialogue Guide* which includes tips and resources for planning and hosting a dialogue. The guide also includes reflection questions for use by library staff to support follow-up after a dialogue. As we continue to learn from library staff implementing *Community Dialogues*, we expect these tools will continue to grow and improve.



Check out the *Community Dialogue Guide* at the following link for tips and resources: http://www.starnetlibraries.org/resources/community-dialogues/









