



## ***Building Community Interest Tools for Community Dialogue***

If citizens are to become truly engaged in a community issue, they must have opportunities to flush out and articulate their own beliefs and understanding of the topic and develop an appreciation for other perspectives. The process of having a dialogue can deepen participants' commitment to an issue, raise the expectations for community change, and lay the groundwork for developing a set of shared goals.

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### **Study Circles**

Study circles are an informal way to engage residents in a public issue. They are “small group, democratic and highly participatory” discussions, ranging in size from 5 to 15 people who agree to meet over a period of months to explore a specific issue(s). Groups decide how frequently they would like to meet, but generally discussions are held over a series of four two-hour sessions. Discussion leaders, acting as facilitators, guide the discussion by asking questions, identifying key points and managing the group process. Complex issues are broken down into manageable sub-divisions, and controversial topics are dealt with in depth.

Resource: Study Circles Resource Center. [www.studycircles.org](http://www.studycircles.org)

### **Conversation Cafes**

Conversation cafes are structured, but informal, hosted conversations, held in a public settings (like a café), where people come together to talk about “issues that matter”. The exact format for a café varies, some last one hour with 12 people, others over two hours with over 1200 people, but the common theme across all cafes is an emphasis is to stimulate thinking on a topic with a diverse group of people. Cafes are a great way to build community, explore an issue without the burden of finding the “right answer”, and see an issue through the eyes of others.

Resources: Conversation Café. [www.conversationcafe.org](http://www.conversationcafe.org), The World Café. [www.theworldcafe.com](http://www.theworldcafe.com)

### **Town Meeting Framework**

The Town Meeting Framework, developed by Public Agenda, is sponsored by local community groups, organized to include diverse participants in small, moderated group discussions of about 15 people. The discussions are centered on understanding different perspectives and exchanging points of view, not on advocating preexisting opinions and platforms.

Resources: Public Agenda. [www.publicagenda.org](http://www.publicagenda.org)



## ***Building Conditions for Success*** *Tools for Community Planning & Decision-Making*

There are plenty of techniques around to assist collaborations consult with communities when developing community plans or make choices about how to address an issue. There are too few planning and decision-making techniques, however, that collaborations can use to plan and make decisions in a way that “engages” communities in an issue, improves their understanding of alternatives, and deepens their ownership of plans and decisions once they are made. Here are a few engaging techniques.

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### **Citizens Jury**

This process allows collaboration decision-makers to hear thoughtful citizen input from a group of that is both informed and representative of the public. In a citizen’s jury, a randomly selected and demographically representative panel of people meets for four or five days to carefully examine an issue of public significance. The jury – usually consist ting up to 18 individuals – hears from a variety of expert witnesses and deliberates on an issue. N the final day of their moderated hearings, the members of the citizen’s jury present their recommendations to the public and policy makers.

Resource: The Jefferson Center. [www.jefferson-center.org](http://www.jefferson-center.org)

### **Future Search Conference**

A Future Search Conference is a 2 ½ day planning meeting that helps large, diverse groups (organizations or communities) discover values, purposes and projects they hold in common and enables participants to create a desired future together and act in pursuit of it. The conference brings the “whole system” into the room to work on a task-focused agenda to find common goals and to develop actions to help meet those goals.

Resource: Resources for Human Development Inc. [www.futuresearch.net](http://www.futuresearch.net)

### **Citizens Choicework**

Public Agenda’s Citizen Choicework is a process to assist communities tackle hard issues – such as the environment, health care, or childcare – in a way that engages citizens who are normally uninvolved, ensure advocates and experts do not “hijack” the conversation, build partnerships, and assist them make “real-world choices”. The technique is designed to develop three or four different points of view on a community issue, based on what the public and experts say, each with arguments for and against, and a description of costs and tradeoffs for each option. The choices are meant to be conversation starters – a way to clarify alternatives and promote discussion.

Resource: Public Agenda. [www.publicagenda.org/pubengage/pubengage.cfm](http://www.publicagenda.org/pubengage/pubengage.cfm)