



LIBRARIES
TRANSFORMING
COMMUNITIES

ACCESSIBLE SMALL AND
RURAL COMMUNITIES



ACCESSIBLE CONVERSATIONS

IN SMALL AND RURAL LIBRARIES

FACILITATION GUIDE



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Introduction

Quality community conversations require libraries to engage the whole community. What actions can libraries take to best ensure that you are engaging a broad representation of the community? In order for community conversations to be inclusive and equitable, accessibility must be considered at the start of planning and throughout the entire process to ensure maximum participation.

In this guide you will learn how to hold quality community conversations and improve accessibility of your events. You will learn to address barriers to engagement and explore considerations to make when planning and convening community conversations so that all individuals feel included. In addition, you will learn strategies for planning and facilitating conversations before actually holding your events, address the logistical considerations that need to be made, and build a conversation structure for discussing accessibility.

This guide is meant to support you to hold conversations on the topic of accessibility, as well as to serve as a framework to ensure that conversations on any topic are more accessible.

This resource will equip you with tools and engagement best practices to create events which allow the whole community to participate. It will provide you with a deeper understanding of how you can engage your community even more inclusively and provide a welcoming space for all.

This Guide's Purpose

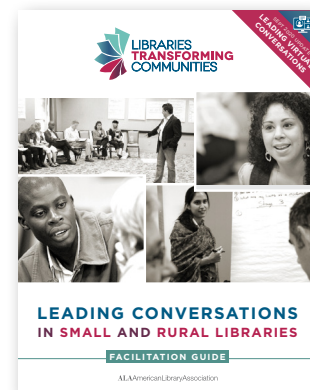
This guide for facilitating conversations on accessibility has been created to help you navigate the process of planning for and facilitating conversations. This is a supplement to the *Libraries Transforming Communities: Leading Conversations in Small and Rural Libraries Facilitation Guide*, and offers a more detailed approach to the considerations to be made in creating more inclusive community conversations about accessibility.

This guide is intended to help you carry out conversations that are inclusive of all populations; especially members of the disability, neurodivergent, older adult, immigrant, unhoused, veteran, caregivers, and other communities that frequently face barriers when it comes to accessing or making the most of the library.

The guide will cover tangible details in planning and carrying out conversations on accessibility issues that matter to the community, and are offered in a manner and format that all people can access and participate in fully.

Our hope is to provide you with the tools and guidelines for creating more accessible conversations, and to help you feel empowered to host engaging community events.

Check out the **Libraries Transforming Communities: Leading Conversations in Small and Rural Libraries Facilitation Guide** for a comprehensive look at conversation planning and facilitation skills!



Accessibility: What Do We Mean?

What do we mean when we talk about creating inclusive and equitable community conversations by prioritizing accessibility?

By emphasizing accessibility, you can create community spaces and events that are inclusive of all people. Historically, our social systems have been created by and benefited non-disabled, neurotypical, and privileged people, and this has shaped our community spaces and events to the point where people with different needs or abilities have been marginalized or excluded. Accessibility is not automatic; it must be intentional, and it must be designed for.

Accessibility refers to “a site or facility, work environment, service or program that is easy to approach, enter, operate, participate in and or use safely and with dignity by a person with a disability”.¹ Often, institutions look to the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) for guidance on how to create accessible spaces. However, just because something is technically ADA compliant does not mean that it is actually able to be accessed. ADA compliance often addresses only minimum accessibility needs. To create accessible community engagement opportunities, we must go beyond ADA compliance and take into consideration

Accessibility & Accommodation



We often see the words accessibility and accommodation used seemingly interchangeably. But, they are in fact different.

- **Accessibility** is proactive and strives to remove barriers during the design stage of an event, program, or service.
- **Accommodation** is reactive and strives to remove barriers caused by inaccessible design. This ensures people with disabilities have the same access as people without disabilities.

¹ District of Columbia Office of Disability Rights, <https://odr.dc.gov/book/ada-101-ada-glossary-legal-and-practical-terms/ada-101-ada-glossary-legal-and-practical-terms-b#:~:text=Accessible%3A%20Refers%20to%20a%20site,a%20person%20with%20a%20disability>

the multiple additional impacts on a participant's experience, such as physical and social logistics.

Why Accessible Spaces Are Important

Designing accessible environments goes beyond brick and mortar. You must also take into consideration how you communicate with library patrons, website and digital accessibility, programmatic accessibility, resources and tools.

The Americans with Disabilities Act outlines the benefits of accessibility, much of which applies to libraries:

"Some of the most frequently cited qualitative benefits of increased access are the increase in one's personal sense of dignity that arises from increased access and the decrease in possibly humiliating incidents due to accessibility barriers. Struggling to join classmates on a stage, to use a bathroom with too little clearance, or to enter a swimming pool all negatively affect a person's sense of independence and can lead to humiliating accidents, derisive comments, or embarrassment. These humiliations, together with feelings of being stigmatized as different or inferior from being relegated to use other, less comfortable or pleasant elements of a facility (such as a bathroom instead of a kitchen sink for rinsing a coffee mug at work), all have a negative effect on persons with disabilities."²

Universal Design

Universal Design is the design and composition of an environment so that it can be accessed, understood and used to the greatest extent possible by all people regardless of their age, size, ability, or disability. An environment (or any building, product, or service in that environment) should be designed to meet the needs of all people who wish to use it. This is not a special requirement for the benefit of only a minority of the population. It is a fundamental condition of good design. If an environment is accessible, usable, convenient, and a pleasure to use, everyone benefits.



2 Americans with Disabilities Act, Title III Regulations, <https://www.ada.gov/law-and-regs/title-iii-regulations/>

Accessibility to the Greatest Extent Possible

Universal Design principles allow for more people to access spaces and participate fully. By utilizing Universal Design principles, we can take into consideration the diverse abilities and needs of people within our communities to design better community conversations and environments. Accessible community engagement strives towards using Universal Design.

Genuine accessibility allows for the full participation of every individual with dignity, with planning considerations given to various intersections of identity. Intersectionality, the term coined by Kimberlé Crenshaw J.D., is the analytical framework to understand how various demographic factors impact a person's experience of discrimination and or oppression (e.g., gender, race, class, sexual orientation, physical ability, etc.).³ These factors impact how we can show up in spaces and how we can engage in community conversations. Designing accessible and inclusive community engagement experiences allows libraries to continue to serve as vital hubs for community building.

3 On Intersectionality: The Essential Writings of Kimberle Crenshaw. 2019, The New Press.

Improving Accessibility Requires Community Involvement

Addressing and improving the accessibility of your library space, resources, tools, and programs improves the library for all community members. To do this most effectively, the populations who will benefit from these improvements need to be a part of the planning up front. Without their involvement and input, the library may be making assumptions about what is needed or wanted, or how to best serve the community.⁴ This could lead to tools or services that are not utilized because they do not best meet the needs of the community.

"Nothing About Us Without Us"

A term coined by disability rights activists highlighting the need for full and authentic engagement with all members of the community.



The best way to address accessibility in your library is to engage the population you would like to reach, ask which of their needs or desires would be best served by the library, and explore together how you may address these opportunities. Through these conversations you can identify how to make the most of the library while creating new community relationships.

Libraries are well suited for this work because they are often seen as one of the more accessible or welcoming spaces for your community. By creating an environment that is accessible, this allows greater participation in community building and more opportunities to connect with those individuals who were previously disconnected. It provides an opportunity to think creatively about how to make the library more accessible, more supportive, and more fun for everyone. And by creating more accessible spaces at the library, you will help strengthen the community, as well as the library's ability to serve the whole community.

4 "Nothing about us without us," James Charlton, 1998. <https://www.ucpress.edu/book/9780520224810/nothing-about-us-without-us>

Foundations for Community Conversations

Co-Creation with the Community

One of the key foundations of community conversations is to co-create engagement efforts WITH the community. As part of the library's commitment to making itself more accessible, it needs to actively include community members who will be directly impacted by those programs or measures.

Co-creation allows the whole community to determine its needs and how to address them. While the library may be in a position to implement, the community can help to determine the most effective approach to implementation. The community might also know of other resources or other organizations that can partner with the library. What starts as a conversation can open doors to further dialogue and greater access to and use of the library. More information about co-creation is included in the following pages and in the Additional Resources section.

What Does Co-Creation Look Like?

- Genuinely building on-going relationships with diverse people and groups within the community (not just created for the sake of planning an event).
- Working with community organizations and institutions currently serving the disabled, aging, unhoused, neurodivergent, and or other historically marginalized populations to plan your event and boost attendance/participation.
- Working directly with disabled, aging, unhoused, neurodivergent, and/or other historically marginalized community members to help shape the conversation you are wanting to have.
- Working with all of the above populations in identifying the needs of the community, and generating ideas for how to best address these needs.
- Collaboratively working on next action items, getting feedback on actions taken, and more.



Taking a Trauma-Informed Approach

Another foundational consideration is taking a trauma-informed approach to planning community conversations.⁵ It is helpful to understand and be cognizant of the fact that people do have trauma in their lives, significant trauma in some instances, and that can impact how people show up and participate.⁶ By taking a trauma-informed approach, you take this into consideration during planning and engagement efforts, and in pursuit of wider community building.

Engaging community members around conversations of accessibility, and the potential lack thereof, can bring to the surface experiences of discrimination, humiliation, and pain. In community conversations, you may be working with participants who may have been harmed in the past, including being excluded, discriminated against, and or verbally or physically attacked. Bearing witness to these experiences can be challenging yet important. You can be sensitive to these realities when working with the public in your conversations, and ensure further harm is not unintentionally inflicted. More information about taking a trauma-informed approach is included in the Additional Resources section.

Addressing Biases and Assumptions

In addition to being mindful of trauma, it is also helpful to be aware of your own biases and assumptions and how those may show up. Addressing biases and these forms of oppression at the individual, organizational, and systemic level are essential to addressing accessibility fully. Otherwise, you may be working to resolve only one piece of the whole puzzle.

Society contains multiple systems of power and privilege, and people are partially shaped by how those systems impact us. As a human being, you form biases and assumptions based on your lived experiences and socialization; every single person has them. Yet, you can do the personal

5 Programming Librarian, A Trauma-Informed Approach to Community Engagement, <https://programminglibrarian.org/blog/trauma-informed-approach-community-engagement>

6 Trauma-sensitive development & aid, https://emu.edu/cjp/star/docs/Yoder-Trauma-Sensitive_Development_and_Aid.pdf

work to understand those assumptions and how they can influence your work with the community.

It is important to recognize the unconscious assumptions you make about others or biases you hold and how they may lead you to exclude, cause harm, or simply not do your best public-facing work. You can take action to get a better understanding of your own biases and be proactive in addressing how they manifest.

Consider the biases that are designed into your organization, unintentionally or intentionally. Organizations are created and maintained by people, and so their structures reflect human biases. Consider how the structure, culture, or history of your organization(s) have resulted in inequitable outcomes, and work to proactively mitigate those impacts.

As library staff looking to convene the community and explore accessibility, it is important that you identify biases and assumptions in language and facilitation practice to create a welcoming and safe environment. It is important to be more mindful as you work to build a more accessible library and ultimately a more inclusive community.

Be Wary of the “isms...”

- **Racism:** the systemic oppression of a racial group to the social, economic, and political advantage of another.
- **Sexism:** prejudice or discrimination based on sex.
- **Ableism:** discrimination or prejudice against individuals with disabilities.
- **Ageism:** prejudice or discrimination against a particular age-group and especially the elderly.
- **Classism:** the systemic oppression of the lower class and middle class to the advantage of the upper class.

Be mindful that these forms of oppression show up in a lot of ways. As you work on your community conversations, ask yourself whether these are showing up in your language, logistical choices, outreach, etc. Be mindful of ways to ensure everyone has the opportunity to participate, and is not being excluded.

**definitions from Merriam-Webster*

Things to consider regarding biases and assumptions...

- Be aware of your personal biases and work to address them in your planning and facilitation. Commit to treating all community members fairly and including everyone fully in the conversation.
- Ask who is currently part of your planning efforts, and who is missing? Sometimes we forget to consider certain groups because we have not historically engaged with that population.
- Is the language being used in written and verbal communications inclusive? Is it available in languages other than English and in the appropriate alternative formats (microphone/s for speakers, plain language, large print, braille)? In order to avoid outdated or harmful terms, look for and adopt the language a community uses to describe itself, and ask about preferences when speaking with individuals. Further guidance on this is provided in the Important Considerations section below and in the Additional Resources section.
- How will you make sure participants are accommodated? Ask about accommodation needs in event registration, and work with community members and partner organizations to determine what needs to be incorporated into the event for full participation of all.
- “We don’t know what we don’t know.” Learn more about biases and assumptions and consider exploring bias habit-breaking training for staff. See Additional Resources for more information.

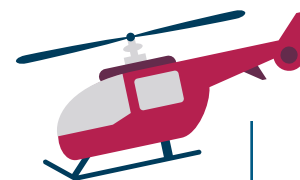
Important Considerations

Budget

Community conversations can be held at a relatively low cost. Consider what you need to spend money on, such as food, outreach, and access service providers (Sign Language Interpreters, real-time captions, etc). Consider which of these you can accomplish with the help of others. You may be able to work with community partners to reach out to the community, or bring in community members to help facilitate the conversation, to help make this a community effort at a reasonable cost to the library.

Helicoptering

Be wary to not participate in “helicoptering” into a community space. Similar to how a helicopter can swoop in and out, you do not want to drop into a space or fleetingly engage with a certain population and then leave. This damages trust with the community and can cause long-lasting harm to relationships. Ideally, you want to create a culture of ongoing engagement with these community conversations.



Timing

When scheduling a conversation, be sure to consider days of the week and times that can work well for as many people as possible. You may want to consider holding multiple conversations to allow for people to join at a time most convenient for them. Or, consider alternative means of participating, including asynchronous participation via survey, Facebook group, Discord, or other platforms.

Location

Hold your conversations where people will be most comfortable and feel safe to attend, such as community spaces where people already convene (whether that is the library or another location). Consider the accessibility of the space, for example: does the building have ramps, elevators, automatic doors; accessible bathrooms that are functional and spacious enough for wheelchair users or other mobility device users; bathroom handlebars at user-appropriate levels? Are there gender-neutral bathrooms (sometimes called “family bathrooms”) available for individuals who feel safer using non-gendered facilities? Are there bathrooms with changing tables, ideally adult-sized changing tables which can be utilized for all ages? Can you allow for some social distancing in the space you select?

Partners

What community leaders, trusted community-based groups, and or local organizations, such as schools, churches, service groups, patrons or other supporters, can help you out? Consider who already has relationships with the population(s) you are hoping to reach and contact them to discuss partnership. It may be helpful to learn from them how best to reach community members, as well as to learn what work they are already doing. This may provide the opportunity to support one another’s efforts and avoid any unnecessary duplication of effort.

Learn more about what building community partnerships can look like:



<https://programminglibrarian.org/blog/3-ways-build-partnerships-your-small-library>

Equipment

What additional equipment may you need? Will you need microphones, visual aids? Interpretation equipment, for instance, will help with allowing for multilingual conversations. Check that interpretation equipment is regularly tested to confirm it is functioning properly, and have extra batteries available as backup for your event.

Language Access

Is there language translation for materials and or events, and interpretation provided for monolingual speakers? In multilingual settings, are monolingual English speakers given access to interpretation equipment so that non-English speakers are not singled out? When translating materials, best practice is to vet translated materials with people who are confident in the language, particularly if it is their first language. You may find it most helpful to pay for translation services.

Have considerations been given for American Sign Language (ASL) or providing real-time captioning? While ASL is the predominant language for the deaf or hard of hearing, do not assume that all people who are deaf or hard of hearing are fluent in ASL. People have varying levels of disability and how they relate and interact in the world. Best practice is to ask people what will help them to participate fully.

Are written materials presented at 8th grade reading level? Using language that is too technical or jargon heavy can be confusing and frustrating. Best practice is to create materials and conversation opportunities where participants can engage in the language and communication level that they use at home. Double check that materials are screen-reader accessible for those participants who are Blind or low vision. See the Logistics section for more.

Be mindful of language and changing connotations. Some words are considered slurs and should be avoided. For example, use people with disabilities instead of "handicapped" or older adults instead of "seniors". Another example of inclusive language considerations: Using ground rules like "move up, move back" instead of "step up, step back" because it is more inclusive of mobility device users. Even a term like "citizen" can often exclude individuals who are not currently holding legal documentation status.

Cultural considerations can and should be given to the language used to describe populations you are working with. Use the language people use themselves to self-identify. For example, regarding what racial/ethnic identity terms to use: some individuals prefer to identify as Hispanic,

or Latino/a, or Latinx, or Chicano/a/x (someone specifically of Mexican descent). If you are unsure how a person identifies racially or ethnically, consider politely asking what the most appropriate word(s) would be to use.

A note on utilizing person-first or identity-first language: Person-first language is a way to emphasize the person and view the disorder, disease, condition, or disability as only one part of the whole person. This framing describes what the person “has” rather than what the person “is”. Person-first language avoids using labels or adjectives to define someone, e.g., a “person with a disability” not “the disabled”. Some communities, however, prefer identity-first language because they consider some characteristics as inseparable parts of their identity. The deaf and autistic communities, for example, often show a strong preference for identity-first language. When possible, ask if a person or group uses identity-first language (deaf students) or person-first language (students who are deaf). If the preference is not known, err on the side of person-first language.

By being thoughtful to the language you use when planning and hosting community conversations, you can foster a safer and more respectful environment, which subsequently can allow for more robust engagement and foster greater trust with community members.

Components of Planning a Conversation on Accessibility

WHY: Identify your purpose

Before the conversation can happen, you need to be clear about what you are hoping to do and who you need to talk to. Explore the intention of the community conversation—Is there a particular area of accessibility you are looking to address? Are there real needs to be addressed to improve physical access at the library? Or to ensure you are providing programs, materials, or services that neurodivergent individuals can feel comfortable accessing?

Once you are clear on the intention of the event and who needs to be included in planning, it is time to identify the goals of the conversation with community members. Clarify the information you need to gather and what might be helpful to know before the conversation itself (e.g. pricing for potential equipment or programs, information about potential needs in the community from other organizations, etc.). Finally, consider if there are people who can provide helpful feedback on your plans.

Planning Your Conversation



Check out the **Accessible Conversation Planning Tool** on page 27 for prompts to help you start your conversation planning.

WHO: Recruit for inclusive engagement

Once you are clear on why you are convening a conversation, it is time to begin identifying and recruiting partners and participants. Ask, “who are we trying to reach and how do we reach them?” Whichever population you are looking to engage with, you will have to determine how to best reach that community.

Outreach to organizations and institutions that are connected to the people you are trying to reach. Explore current library connections and patrons you have been working with. Think about what methods you have for reaching patrons more broadly, and provide a way for people to self-identify or express interest in the conversation. Include multiple means of reaching people, including website, newsletter, local newspapers or radio stations, and social media announcements, as well as making connections through your partners, board, volunteers, and patrons. Ensure that your channels of communications have been designed from the start to be as accessible as possible.

WHAT: Co-create conversations

Connect with your initial intention to identify what you want to ask participants. Identify topics for conversation by consulting with disabled, aging, unhoused, neurodivergent, and other communities, among others. Work together on how you will frame the conversation so that your target population feels welcomed and understands the goal(s) of the conversation. That way, when you bring people together in conversation, you will be better positioned to both identify the needs and solutions that the community sees, and some of the greater possibilities.

Targeted Universalism



From the Othering & Belonging Institute at UC Berkeley: “Targeted universalism means setting universal goals pursued by targeted processes to achieve those goals. Within a targeted universalism framework, universal goals are established for all groups concerned. The strategies developed to achieve those goals are targeted, based upon how different groups are situated within structures, culture, and across geographies to obtain the universal goal.”

You may need to “create the table” with the community where they are, as opposed to the traditional idea of the community coming to the table. Especially around conversations of accessibility, some populations have been historically excluded from conversations around access, so there is a greater distrust. Bring the effort TO the community and do not expect people to come to you, especially if access may be an issue in the first place. See the Additional Resources section for more information about Targeted Universalism, an approach which helps to address this dynamic.

Examples of a few potential questions:

- How can we make the library more accessible for our community?
- How can we best address accessibility in the library’s physical spaces?
- How can we improve library programming for our elder patrons?
Neurodivergent patrons?

Conversation Structure

Good conversation structure includes a series of questions which help participants explore the topic and identify potential actions to take. Most conversations are structured around a core 3-4 questions, as well as additional questions as needed for clarity or follow-up. Appreciative Inquiry questions can be a helpful place to start and allow participants to explore their experience of the library from a non-combative place. More information about Appreciative Inquiry is provided in the Additional Resources section.

Below is a description of the types of questions asked in community conversations, with some specific examples for an accessibility conversation. A deeper examination of question generation is included in the original LTC Facilitation Guide.

Appreciative Inquiry

Appreciative Inquiry is a change method that encourages stakeholders to explore the best of the past and present in their organizations and communities. Appreciative Inquiry involves, in a central way, the art and practice of asking questions that strengthen a system's capacity to apprehend, anticipate, and heighten positive potential.



Questions for Opening the Conversation

A good opening question asks participants to share their initial thoughts or experiences on the topic. It is a welcoming question which everyone can feel generally comfortable answering from their own perspective and experience, and can be built upon in the subsequent questions.

Examples:

- What has been your experience using the library?
- What do you appreciate most about the library?
- What services or programs do you use most often at the library?

Questions to Follow Up

Good follow-up questions transition naturally from the opening question and help participants explore the topic and get more specific.

Examples:

- What limitations, if any, have you experienced using the library?
- How might we make the library more accessible for all?
- What would you like to see at the library? Any particular services or programs?

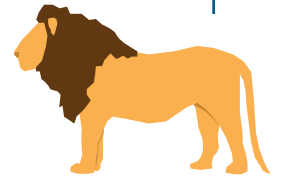
Questions to Go Deeper

Questions that dig deeper help participants get into the details of the subject. They examine a topic from all sides, explore limitations to preferred actions, and unearth perspectives that may be absent from the conversation.

Examples:

- Whose perspective may be missing from this conversation?
- What might we be overlooking in our possible next moves?
- Is there anything else you wish to share about your experience at the library that can help to improve your ability to access and use the space?

Especially as we go deeper, **have courage** in these conversations. It can be challenging to hear our limitations, and we can only get better by acknowledging where we can improve.



Questions to Identify Action Items and Wrap Up

As you reach the end of the conversation, it can be important to gain clarity on the outcomes of the conversation, reflections, and any actions or next moves which have been identified. These questions will help to bring closure to the conversation.

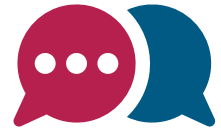
Examples:

- What surprised you, enlightened you, or was otherwise memorable/notable for you?
- What have you learned in discussing this topic?
- How might we prioritize the actions identified?
- What are our action items?
- In what ways would you like to continue to be involved in action items moving forward?

Logistics

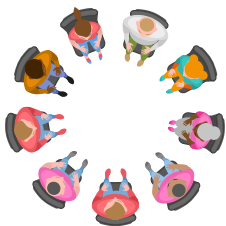
In thinking about logistics, you want to consider how to make the conversation as accessible as possible. The format and the location of these conversations will play a large role, which is why it is important to learn how to integrate innovative approaches to community conversations that best increase accessibility for as many people as possible.

Conversation Logistics



Check out the **Accessible Conversation Planning Tool** on page 27 for prompts to help you make a plan for addressing accessibility in your conversation logistics.

There is an image that typically comes to mind regarding “traditional” community conversations of people sitting in a room together at the same time. The potential problem with that singular method of community conversation is that it may not work well for everybody. It might be an issue of people being able to physically access the space, or being able to move comfortably and participate with dignity. Can participants sit comfortably for the expected meeting duration? What can be done to make participation as easy as possible?

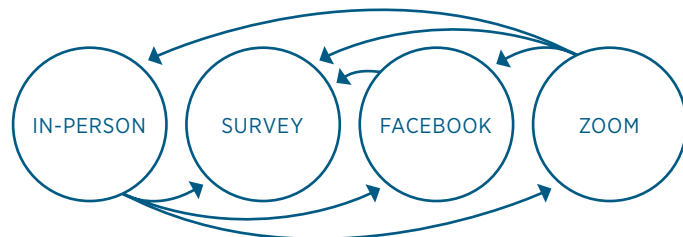


Traditional Model of Community Conversations

In-person, people seated in a circle, talking together at one time. There may be a series of conversations, but often each conversation is isolated from the others.

Multi-modal Model of Community Conversations

Conversations are happening both synchronous and asynchronously, with opportunities for participants to review input and respond.



Consider what is going to be the best format(s) for the community. Have considerations for in-person engagement been made so people may attend and participate fully? In addition, what alternative models for conversation can supplement in person engagement to broaden participation? This may include surveys, online discussion threads, messaging apps, or more.

Consider planning for asynchronous conversation, where people can respond to one another over a period of time. Offering multiple methods of engagement, such as in person or virtual live conversation, as well as an asynchronous conversation or a survey, allows people to participate in a way that is helpful and meaningful to them. Consider passive as well as active participation opportunities, as many people who are neurodivergent prefer more passive ways of contributing to a conversation.

Whatever is the most user friendly and accessible platform is best. Keep things simple so more people can use and engage in the process. Tools for engagement that people are already familiar with can be especially good options to use, such as:

- Zoom, Google Meet, Microsoft Teams
- Discord, Slack
- Survey Monkey, Google Forms
- Social Media—Facebook Groups, Instagram Live, LinkedIn Groups
- Google Jamboard, Miro, Mural

Avoid making assumptions about which tools are the most accessible. If you are not sure, ask!



Look at the broad spectrum of tools that are available to use at the library and how you can utilize them, and familiarize yourself with the accessibility features of all used platforms beforehand.

A note about using multiple modes of conversation—if possible, try to create opportunities for an exchange of ideas, or for input to be reviewed, reflected on, and or responded to. This may include sharing notes with participants and asking follow-up questions or a brief survey. Imagine this back-and-forth as you would a live conversation, providing opportunities for sharing input with one another, and then posing the next question. This allows for a richer conversation and will help create richer outcomes.

Accessibility of materials

As you prepare materials, both for outreach and for your event, be mindful of the accessibility of those materials. PDF documents, for instance, are often less accessible for those who use screen-readers, unless you adjust settings for accessibility. Microsoft Word and PowerPoint have accessibility checks built into their software and can help you to make your materials more accessible. There are also resources to help you navigate web and print material accessibility. [Webaim.org](https://webaim.org/) is one such resource, with trainings and materials for helping you think about how to make your content more accessible.⁷ In addition, you may have organizations in your area who may be able to offer you suggestions or support in making sure materials are accessible.

⁷ WebAIM, <https://webaim.org/>

Follow-Up

Having these conversations with the community cannot be a one-time event. Do not have the conversation, thank people for their time, and then go about your business. You need to keep in touch with the community, to let them know what you have heard and what you are going to do. This creates immediate feedback—“thank you for participating, we have heard this, and so therefore, the library is going to do XYZ”. This follow-up practice also creates a communication loop between the library and community members going forward.

It is important to create the feedback loop within a conversation, particularly if the conversation is not happening live and synchronously. Think about ways to share what you have heard with the community, so that people can understand how their input was utilized and what potential action items you are exploring. Keeping the community informed about the impact of their input and any outcomes helps to build a sense of trust.

This process can allow the library to receive helpful input and feedback to help create new programs or services, and improve current offerings; lending to a mutually beneficial relationship. Ongoing engagement with the community helps to keep the dialogue open and explore how things evolve. Consistency of library presence in a community increases the predictability of the space for community use. By creating a culture of ongoing engagement, this helps to build deeper relationships and greater trust with the community. This work will also set up the library as a vital hub and leader for community building.

Planning your Follow-up



Check out the **Accessible Conversation Planning Tool** on page 27 for prompts to help you map out your follow-up from your community conversations.

Conclusion

Prioritizing accessibility for all in your community engagement efforts allows everyone to feel welcome and able to participate with dignity.

This guide has explored what we mean by accessibility and how to design community conversations that are inclusive of all populations. We've provided practical ways to enhance inclusivity and improve accessibility of community engagement efforts from start to finish. By creating opportunities to engage with your community in accessible and inclusive ways, you will further create a welcoming space for all at the library. This will in turn strengthen the library's ability even more to serve the whole community and allow libraries to continue to be vital community hubs for all people.

The following pages provide prompts to help you in planning your community conversations on accessibility, followed by additional resources to help you learn about some of the terms and practices mentioned in this guide, as well as read stories about libraries who have done the work.

Accessible Conversations Planning Tool

Planning Checklist

Use the following checklist to help you move through your conversation planning, keeping in mind the key points along the way.

Before

- Identify your target audience for your conversation
- Identify your goal for your conversation
- Identify partners to support your conversation—input, outreach, etc.
- Structure your conversation—what questions you will ask
- Determine your conversation format(s)—where will the conversation take place? In person or online, synchronous or asynchronous?
- Plan for accommodations—what will you need to do to make the conversation accessible? Think about materials, as well as logistics.
- Develop your outreach plan for reaching your target audience
- Conduct outreach for the conversation

During

- Hold your conversation(s)
- Facilitate discussion
- Take notes, capture input, or record conversations to help track action items and ideas
- Keep participants aware of ongoing conversations, information from other conversations or asynchronous conversations, additional opportunities to provide input, etc.
- Synthesize input, identify outcomes or action items coming from the conversation(s)

After

- Thank participants
- Share notes, outcomes, action items
- Carry out action items, plans identified in the process
- Follow-up about work that has been done, opportunities to make use of new tools, programs, features, etc.

Planning your conversation

Use the following prompts to help you plan for your conversation on accessibility.

1. Write down the population(s) you are aiming to reach in your conversation about accessibility.

2. **What are the goals of this conversation?** Write down what you are looking to accomplish by talking with community members.

3. **Is there information you need to gather? What might be helpful to know before the conversation itself—pricing for potential equipment or programs, information about potential needs in the community from other organizations, etc.?** List them here.

4. How will you frame the conversation, so that your target community feels welcomed and understands the goal of the conversation? Draft your language here.

5. Is there someone who can provide helpful feedback about your plans? Folks working with the community you are reaching out to, members of the community you are looking to engage with, etc.? List them here and what they might be able to contribute.

Conversation logistics

Use the following prompts to map out how you will make your community conversation accessible.

1. How will you ensure the conversation is accessible? Write down the actions you will take to make sure all can participate in the conversation.

2. What format will your conversation take? Will it be in person or virtual? Synchronous or asynchronous? Consider what option(s) will help people participate.

3. What platforms or tools will you use to support participation? Will you use a social media platform, survey tool, video conferencing, etc.? Consider what accessibility features they offer and what you will need.

4. What do you need to learn before using these platforms or tools? What features do you need to learn? What testing might be helpful in advance? Outline what you will need to do before your event to make sure you are prepared and comfortable with the tools chosen.

2. How will you report back to participants? Do you plan to share the notes from the conversation? Will you send information on the outcomes or decisions coming from your conversations? Outline a communication plan below for what you will share, how, and your timeline for each touchpoint.

3. What is your follow-up plan with any identified partners? How will you share notes, discuss action items, or other follow-up? Outline your plans and timing for each touchpoint.

4. Do you want to plan future conversations? How will you keep people involved or in the loop? What future communication will you plan? How will you get people involved? Write your plans below.

Additional Resources

The following resources provide additional materials for conversations about related topics and information for addressing accessibility.

Stories of Libraries Addressing Accessibility

Programming Librarian, Fighting for Accessibility in Small and Rural Libraries

<https://programminglibrarian.org/articles/fighting-accessibility-small-and-rural-libraries>

Parker Memorial Library in Sulphur, Oklahoma, was a 2-time grant recipient of the Libraries Transforming Communities: Focus on Small and Rural Libraries Initiative. The library used the grant opportunity to address accessibility needs in library programming, with a particular focus on the deaf community in the area. This serves as a wonderful example of what can be done with community engagement around accessibility needs.

Programming Librarian, On Location: Risks and Rewards of Taking Your Programs Outside

<https://programminglibrarian.org/blog/location-risks-and-rewards-taking-your-programs-outside>

The Palos Verdes Library District in California found that in order to succeed in their health and wellness series for older adults, they would need to try programming outside of the library. In this article the staff outline how they did this, as well as the benefits and drawbacks to this approach. This provides some helpful considerations in planning your conversations in spaces outside the library.

Programming Librarian, Community Needs: Anything You Want, You Got It

<https://programminglibrarian.org/blog/community-needs-anything-you-want-you-got-it>

Related to the article above, the Palos Verdes Library District also shared their approach to starting this program for older adults—a needs assessment. This provides a helpful template to model for those interested in designing your own community needs assessment.

Programming Librarian, A Trauma-Informed Approach to Community Engagement

<https://programminglibrarian.org/blog/trauma-informed-approach-community-engagement>

The Free Library of Philadelphia (PA), as part of Cohort 1 for the Skills for Community Centered Libraries training, gained a better understanding of the power of the library “as a historical institution, a public service agency, and an entity with resources.” The article describes the ways staff became more aware of their institution’s power and took action to share that power, with a trauma-informed approach. This is a helpful resource for libraries in examining how this looks in practice.

Resources for Exploring Conversation Models

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.

Living Room Conversations, Conversation Guide on Disability and Ableism

<https://livingroomconversations.org/topics/disability-and-ableism/>

Living Room Conversations is a model which allows for thoughtful exploration of various topics across perspectives. This guide focuses on participant experiences with disability and supporting the needs of the disabled community. It is structured as a 90 minute conversation. They also offer a guide about Aging and Ageism (<https://livingroomconversations.org/topics/aging-and-ageism/>) and Mental Health (https://livingroomconversations.org/topics/mental_health/), among others.

Appreciative Inquiry

<https://appreciativeinquiry.champlain.edu/learn/appreciative-inquiry-introduction/>

Appreciative Inquiry (AI) is a change method that encourages stakeholders to explore the best of the past and present in their organizations and communities. It offers a positive framing for the questions we ask in community conversations—asking us to imagine what we aspire to, or what we would like to see for our collective future. The AI Commons website provides helpful information about the principles and applications of AI for those who want to learn more and apply it to their conversation process.

Conversation Cafe

www.conversationcafe.org

Conversation Cafe is a model for open, hosted conversation in small groups (6-8 people). It is an elegantly simple and open-source model—all materials for how to host are shared on the website. This model may be helpful to those who feel they need a more specific structure for their conversation. There are resources for virtual conversations, as well.

Resources for Increasing Accessibility

Programming Librarian, 7 Ways to Make Your Virtual Programs More Accessible to Patrons with Disabilities

<https://programminglibrarian.org/articles/7-ways-make-your-virtual-programs-more-accessible-patrons-disabilities>

This article provides tips on how to create online spaces that are welcoming for everyone, from Christena Gunther, founder and president of the Chicago Cultural Accessibility Consortium (CCAC).

American Psychological Association, Inclusive Language Guidelines

<https://www.apa.org/about/apa/equity-diversity-inclusion/language-guidelines>

An excerpt from the Foreword: “As we strive to further infuse principles of equity, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) into the fabric of society, those committed to effecting change must acknowledge language as a powerful tool that can draw us closer together or drive us further apart. Simply put, words matter. The words we use are key to creating psychologically safe, inclusive, respectful, and welcoming environments.” This page provides helpful guidelines about inclusive word choice which can help with preparing materials and in talking with your community.

Changing the Narrative: Ending Ageism Together

<https://changingthenarrativeco.org/>

Changing the Narrative is a strategic communications and awareness campaign to increase understanding of ageism and to change how people think, talk, and act about aging and ageism.

Inequity Agents of Change, The Habit-Breaking Training

<https://www.biashabit.com/research>

This bias habit-breaking training is one of the only shown to reduce long-term reductions in bias. The website contains information on the training, as well as helpful videos from Dr. William Cox, PhD, outlining how to reduce bias through breaking habits.

Institute for Human Centered Design

<https://www.humancentereddesign.org>

Dedicated to enhancing the experiences of people of all ages, abilities, and cultures through excellence in design.

National Civic League, Site Selection Checklist

https://drive.google.com/file/d/1vuSxeijwccrYAihRCfbrx92OTFfng6Hi/view?usp=share_link

This checklist is a helpful resource for thinking about where to conduct community conversations. It has several accessibility considerations listed, as well as other barriers to participation.

National Civic Review, Take a Seat at Oregon's Kitchen Table: Adapting Targeted Universalism for Broad and Deep Civic Engagement

<https://docs.google.com/document/d/13tDWWHJWkBQzRo1ncCBnvYcdKtjtS3H7IEE/pq5mFUFE/edit?usp=sharing>

In addition to the resource above, this article from the National Civic Review provides helpful considerations for community engagement, as well as examples of Targeted Universalism in action.

National Institutes of Health, Understanding Racial Terms and Differences

<https://www.edi.nih.gov/blog/communities/understanding-racial-terms-and-differences>

“Often, words commonly used in a discussion of race can be easily confused or misconstrued. A shared understanding is necessary to achieve some quality of conversation to reach mutual understanding. This list of terms has been compiled to focus on the concepts and terminology used in minority, ethnic and racial groups studies. The composed list provides some widely accepted definitions derived from multiple sources.” Learn more and explore the provided hyperlinked resources provided at the bottom of the article above.

Othering & Belonging Institute, Targeted Universalism

<https://belonging.berkeley.edu/targeted-universalism>

“Targeted universalism is a platform to operationalize programs that move all groups toward the universal policy goal as well as a way of communicating and publicly marketing such programs in an inclusive, bridging manner.” This website, from the Othering & Belonging Institute at UC Berkeley, is THE primer on this approach, with materials and videos to help understand how to implement it. This approach provides good tips for co-creating efforts with the community.

Strategies for Trauma Awareness & Resilience (STAR) Resources

<https://emu.edu/cjp/star/>

“Strategies for Trauma Awareness and Resilience’s (STAR) framework integrates material from: trauma and resilience studies, restorative justice, conflict transformation, human security, and spirituality.” This program is housed at the Eastern Mennonite University’s Center for Justice and Peacebuilding and has ample resources on trauma-informed work.

The Little Book of Trauma Healing by Carolyn Yoder

<https://www.amazon.com/Little-Book-Trauma-Healing-Peacebuilding/dp/1680996037/>

An overview of individual and collective trauma, common responses to trauma, and how to break the cycles of unhealed, unaddressed trauma. For everyone who works with trauma, whether the everyday variety, or with those affected by terrorism, tsunamis, current conflicts or historical wounds.

Resources from Information Boxes

Accessibility vs. Accommodation

<https://accessible.wisc.edu/guides/accessibility-vs-accommodation/#:~:text=Accessibility%20is%20proactive%20and%20strives,access%20as%20people%20without%20disabilities>

The Centre for Excellence in Universal Design

<https://universaldesign.ie/what-is-universal-design/>

“Nothing About Us Without Us”

1. <https://www.ndi.org/our-stories/nothing-about-us-without-us-nothing-without-us#:~:text=First%20invoked%20by%20the%20South,over%20decisions%20affecting%20their%20lives>
2. <https://www.futurelearn.com/info/courses/global-disability/0/steps/37575#:~:text=The%20nothing%2Dabout%2Dus%2D,sector%2C%20industry%20and%20community%20worldwide>

Building Community Partnerships

<https://programminglibrarian.org/blog/3-ways-build-partnerships-your-small-library>

Resources from Footnotes

1. District of Columbia Office of Disability Rights, <https://odr.dc.gov/book/ada-101-ada-glossary-legal-and-practical-terms/ada-101-ada-glossary-legal-and-practical-terms-b#:~:text=Accessible%3A%20Refers%20to%20a%20site,a%20person%20with%20a%20disability>
2. Americans with Disabilities Act, Title III Regulations, <https://www.ada.gov/law-and-regs/title-iii-regulations/>
3. On Intersectionality: The Essential Writings of Kimberle Crenshaw. 2019, The New Press.
4. "Nothing about us without us," James Charlton, 1998. <https://www.ucpress.edu/book/9780520224810/nothing-about-us-without-us>
5. Programming Librarian, A Trauma-Informed Approach to Community Engagement—listed in first section "Stories of Libraries Addressing Accessibility".
6. Trauma-sensitive development & aid, https://emu.edu/cjp/star/docs/Yoder-Trauma-Sensitive_Development_and_Aid.pdf
7. WebAIM, <https://webaim.org/>

About the Authors

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