

Guidelines for Hosting Vital Conversations

WHAT IS A VITAL CONVERSATION?

A Vital Conversation is a facilitated conversation with members of your community. A Vital Conversation can be used as a tool to:

- Explore an emerging issue in your community
- Learn about the lived experiences of specific demographics (i.e. youth, seniors, newcomers, or a specific neighbourhood)
- Identify pressing community issues and co-create next steps for potential solutions
- Generate qualitative data and paint the picture of issues and trends in your community
- Inspire a call to action.

Vital Conversations can collect insight and data from the community that can be used to guide future granting priorities, to guide conversations with new donors, or to raise awareness of your community foundation and its leadership. Vital Conversations are also an effective tool to bolster community engagement, as an opportunity to connect local organizations and resources and build new relationships.

TIPS FOR ORGANIZING VITAL CONVERSATION

The following are key tips for organizing Vital Conversations, both in connection with the RBC Future Launch Community Challenge and for other community convening efforts.

Be clear with your intentions: What is your why?

It is important to identify the intended outcome or goal of the event in the early stages of planning. Consider what the foundation intends to learn, develop or facilitate as an outcome of the Vital Conversation. This will inform strategic planning for your engagement strategy, facilitation style and invitations to participate.

Send invitations and promote your event

Be sure to send a save the date, or an invitation with RSVP information to key partners, stakeholders, and potential participants to help with planning.

Consider inviting a wide range of community members, including 'unusual suspects'. Think about your audience when issuing invitations. For example, youth are active on social media and may frequent specific community spaces – social media posts or posters may be strong tactics. Seniors can also be reached at community centres and old age homes. Partner with other organizations to help spread the word.

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Tell your story: Invite local media and use social media

Your community radio station or newspaper may be interested in attending your Vital Conversation. If you decide to have media present at the event, consider the impact that this may have on the dynamics of the conversation. Ensure that participants agree to either be quoted and recorded or that the media stories will not include identifiable quotes.

Social media can be used before, during and after your Vital Conversation to promote the event, share the story of the Vital Conversation, and highlight the impact of any learnings and next steps.

Select a facilitation technique to guide your conversation

When it comes to facilitation, you have many options. You can choose to facilitate the conversation yourself or you can contract with a professional facilitator.

The facilitator's role is to assist the group to have a good conversation, while staying on track to meet the overall objectives.

Key roles of the facilitator include:

- Assisting the group to ensure everyone has a chance to be part of the conversation
- Staying on schedule
- Serving as connector if your own background can provide context to the discussion
- Using a 'Parking Lot' for ideas outside the scope of the discussion

There are a wide range of strategic facilitation techniques available. Some ideas are listed below:

- [The World Café](#): Using seven design principles and a simple method, the World Café is a powerful social technology for engaging people in conversations that matter, offering an effective antidote to the fast-paced fragmentation and lack of connection in today's world.
- [The Art of Powerful Questions](#): This technique relies on using questions for dialogue, discovery and action.
- [A Field Guide to Convening Dialogue](#): This question-based guide is designed for anyone who plans to host a dialogue gathering – whether for a brief afternoon or an extended series of meetings over time.

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Pick a Venue

The character of the conversation and the facilitation style will guide the venue requirements.

Things to consider:

- What type of space do you need to accommodate your facilitation style? Will it be a World Café? An intimate conversation?
- How many people are you expecting?
- Will you be including a reception or meal during the Vital Conversation?
- When during the day and the week will the conversation take place?
- Can you partner with another local organization to offset the cost?
- Will you have someone available to live tweet, or can you live stream the event to make it accessible to those who were unable to attend?

Post-conversation: Incorporate your learnings for lasting community impact

Be sure to have at least one note-taker present so that you can capture the insight and data from community members. These learnings can be used to future granting priorities, to guide conversations with new donors, or to raise awareness of your community foundation and its leadership — all important ways to deepen your impact and grow the benefits for your community.

VITAL CONVERSATIONS: CONNECT WITH *VITAL SIGNS*

VitalSigns®

Vital Conversations are one way to get involved in *Vital Signs*. *Vital Signs* is a community check-up conducted by community foundations across Canada that measures the vitality of our communities and identifies significant trends in a range of areas critical to quality of life. *Vital Signs* is coordinated nationally by Community Foundations of Canada.

For more information about the broader *Vital Signs* program, contact Alison Sidney, Manager, Strategic Initiatives, at asidney@communityfoundations.ca.