

Facilitation Guide for Hosting a Community Conversation

This is a **Stage 1 resource in the Groundswell Framework (Learning & Talking)**. It's designed for anyone starting solo, forming a group, or already working with a team.

Purpose: *This guide is designed to give you directions as you get started exploring information and bringing collaborators together in conversation. Your role isn't to have all the answers, it's to create a welcoming space, ask thoughtful questions, and ensure diverse voices are present, especially those most directly impacted by the issue. We distinguish where you start based on the type of conversation you're hosting and if you already have a team you are working with:*

- **Listening & Learning:** Building shared understanding and strengthening common ground.
- **Action-Oriented:** Generating commitments and taking steps that move education forward.

Determine Your Starting Point (Situation-Focused)

- **Working solo / just getting started:**
 - Explore the issue on your own. Ask questions, reflect, and learn about the context.
 - Use the Community Profiles and **Asset Map** to identify **people, organizations, or programs** that might be interested in joining a team later.
- **Forming a group:**
 - Start talking with people who have a stake in the issue or relevant expertise.
 - Use the **Asset Map and Community Profiles** to explore **local assets, priority issues, and potential partners** together.
- **Team already formed / priorities selected:**
 - Review your current focus areas and plan how to explore causes, assets, and strategies.

No matter your starting point, the goal is to **learn, listen, and talk** while using these tools to clarify focus areas, identify assets, and connect with the right people.

Early-Stage Steps and Prep

1. Explore the Issue and Context

- Identify the problem to address (e.g., “Chronic absenteeism in our local schools is higher than the state average; we want to understand why.”)
- Review the **Community Profiles** for context, trends, and service gaps
- Reflect personally: what do you know, what patterns do you see, what questions arise?

2. Generate Questions (Using Question Formulation Technique)

- **Ask Questions**—Produce as many questions as you can without stopping to judge or answer
- Identify **open-ended** (exploratory) and **closed-ended** (fact-finding) questions
- Prioritize 5–10 top questions to guide learning conversations
- Closed: “How many students missed 10+ days last year?”

3. Review the Asset Map

- Examine the **Groundswell Asset MAP** to explore local people, programs, places, and practices that are assets to your community
- Reflect on gaps or missing voices
- Identify who to involve in future conversations or outreach

4. Build the Host Team (Optional)

- Consider assembling 1–5 people to help host the first conversation:
 - School/organizational lead
 - Family/community members
 - Community partner (nonprofit connector)
 - Business partner
 - Optional youth voice
- Assign informal roles: Facilitator, Logistics Coordinator, Greeter, Scribe, Recruiter

5. Plan Logistics

- Decide date, time, location, format
- Ensure supports for participation (food, childcare, transportation, translation)
- Prepare materials: Asset Map, Community Profiles, reflection prompts, QFT questions, note-taking templates

6. Invite Participants

- Explain: purpose, importance of participant voice, focus on learning/conversation
- Follow up with calendar invites, reminders, and easy RSVP

Sample Invite:

“We are forming a group to explore chronic absenteeism in our local schools. This is important because our district has some of the highest rates in the state. Join us on {date} at {location}. Dinner provided. At this first meeting, we’ll get to know each other, review local resources, and start exploring solutions. Please RSVP, and feel free to invite others who might want to join the conversation.”

7. Supplies Needed:

- Groundswell Asset MAP
- **Community Profiles** handouts
- Pens/markers
- Sticky notes or index cards
- Flip chart or large paper for capturing ideas
- Tables and chairs arranged for discussion
- Name tags (optional but helpful)
- Notebook or paper for participants
- Water/snacks for comfort

Sample Meeting Agendas and Goals

Meeting 1 – Setting a Shared Vision

Goal: Learn from each other, align on priority issues, review the pre-built Asset Map

Checklist:

- Welcome & restate vision / 1–3 issues
- Establish Group Norms or Agreements for Discussion
- Introductions with reflection prompt: *“How have these issues touched your life or work?”*
- Review Asset Map: identify gaps or missing leaders, programs, places, practices
- Decide how to bring in more voices; assign outreach tasks
- Assign roles for next meeting

Deliverables:

- Shared understanding of the Asset Map
- Recruitment plan
- Meeting 2 purpose confirmed

Meeting 2 – Asking “Why?”

Tool: Community Profiles, Asset Map

Goal: Identify root causes through learning and discussion

Checklist:

- Recap Meeting 1 vision, issues, and Asset Map insights
- Review group norms or agreements
- Use QFT (open ended questions) to dig into causes
- Capture knowns and unknowns from conversations, data, observations
- Assign fact-finding tasks and roles for next meeting

Deliverables:

- 1–3 root causes identified
- List of possible strategies
- Fact-finding assignments
- Meeting 3 purpose confirmed

Meeting 3 – Moving to Solutions & Metrics

Goal: Generate solutions and define measures based on learning

Checklist:

- Recap prior meetings and fact-finding insights
 - Review group norms or agreements
 - Brainstorm solutions building on Asset Map insights and strategies
 - Prioritize 2–5 realistic, measurable strategies
 - Draft measures of success (quantity, quality, impact)
 - Assign leads, next steps, and roles for next meeting
 - Preview Groundswell Assessment for Meeting 4 prep
- [Groundswell – Prichard Committee for Academic Excellence](#)

Deliverables:

- 2–5 strategies to try
- Action plan with leads and metrics
- Meeting 4 purpose confirmed

For Meeting 4: Groundswell Team Assessment – Start Where You Are:

At meeting four, your team will complete this Prichard Committee tool to track collaboration progress. Most groups begin at Level 1 (that’s okay—there’s no finish line). The goal is to spark meaningful conversations, identify strengths, set goals, and take small steps forward. Completing it twice a year will help your team see growth and ensure families, students, and the community benefit from your Partnership efforts.

[Groundswell – Prichard Committee for Academic Excellence](#)

Key Principles Throughout

- Start with curiosity, learning, and conversation
- Use Community Profiles for context and Asset Map to understand existing assets
- Capture insights from listening, reflection, and discussion
- Include diverse voices, even if solo at first
- Iterate—revisit questions, priorities, and strategies as learning grows