



Tips for Hosting a Conversation

Invite people into the conversation. They may be family members, neighbors you know, neighbors you'd like to get to know, friends, colleagues, or other Coastsiders who share your interests. Aim for 5-7 people to keep the conversation manageable. Where, when, and how long you meet is up to you. You can invite people over for coffee, lunch, a bbq, or drinks on the deck. Meet at a local café or brew pub or restaurant. Comfortable seating and some sort of writing surface are recommended. The most fruitful conversations will last 45-90 minutes.

Encourage your guests to come prepared. In your invitation, include the page URL where they can download the [Topic Background](#) materials from the Coastside Conversations website. The website also links to external resources for more information.

Set the scene and tone for respectful, open discussions. First and foremost, each person who chooses to participate in the conversation must feel comfortable enough to ask questions, state opinions, propose ideas, and express contrary or unusual points of view. As host, you may wish to start by reviewing some basic [Conversation Etiquette](#) so that each person knows what is expected. Feel free to have fun with this – you can give “gold stars” or extra cookies to gracious guests, and give “yellow cards” to guests who may need a gentle reminder of the rules.

Prime the discussion and keep it going. Refer to the list of [Icebreaker Questions](#) for some easy ways to start the conversation and allow guests to get to know each other. Then move into the **Suggested Questions** for this topic, or springboard off guests' questions and comments. Focus on what is possible, not on who's to blame or how it got that way. The outcome of the conversation should be many answers to the questions “*What do we want our Coastside to become? What do we value? How can we make it happen?*”

Take notes to capture the key ideas, answers, and outcomes. Use the [Host Feedback Form](#) to help summarize the main discussion, especially any creative ideas relating to the selected topic. Include all points of view -- you are not trying to create consensus. If possible, indicate how strongly people felt about a particular solution or item. Also be sure to write down any questions that the topic materials did not answer. Knowing what people don't know, or are confused about, is great feedback for local agencies and policymakers.

(Optional) You can make this step easier --- and unleash some creative juices – by supplying your guests with a variety of writing implements and paper: markers, pens, pencils, your kids' old box of Crayolas, copy paper, newsprint, cocktail napkins, brown paper bags. Have them jot down their ideas and sketch designs, then take photos of each with a smartphone and send them to feedback@coastsideconversations.com.

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Wrap-up on a positive note. Be mindful of the time you've allotted, give each guest the opportunity to contribute one final thought, and thank them for joining in. You may also wish to give out the optional **Participant Evaluation Form** for guests to submit their own feedback.

Send in the Feedback Form. It's essential that every host submit a Feedback Form for each discussion, so that each quarter's results can be collected and presented to policymakers and other community members. Every voice counts.

Conversation Etiquette

Thank you for participating in a Coastside Conversation. Here are just a few guidelines to ensure that everyone has a chance to be heard.

- **Everyone speaks.** Share your honest thoughts and opinions. Be mindful of the difference between opinion and fact.
- **Everyone listens.** All ideas are valid. Ask clarifying questions and encourage each person to voice their thoughts and concerns.
- **Everyone can questions, and everyone has something to learn.** Each participant should feel comfortable asking any question, no matter how basic. Most likely, there will be at least one question no one in the room can answer.
- **No one has the "right" answers.** Avoid using declarative or absolute phrases. There are many layers to each discussion topic, and many possibilities to explore.
- **Respect the host's leadership.** The host serves as the moderator and guide. He or she has ultimate authority to manage the conversation so that all participants have an equal opportunity to speak and present their ideas.
- **Respect participants' rights to hold differing points of view.** In any group, there will (and should be) vastly different perspectives and approaches. Celebrate these differences while also exploring common ground.

Icebreaker Questions

To help participants warm up to a friendly discussion, start with one or two open-ended questions, such as those below:

- What brought you to the Coastside?
- What do you like most about living here?
- What's special or unique about the neighborhood where you live (or work)?
- What are you hoping to learn from this Conversation?