

Community Conversations

Building Better Tomorrows Together

Host and Resource Guide



Great ideas begin with a conversation.

CONNECTICUT COMMUNITY FOUNDATION



LET'S BUILD TOMORROW TOGETHER!





“There is no power for change greater than a community discovering what it cares about.” – *Margaret J. Wheatley*

As Connecticut Community Foundation reflects on 100 years of community giving and impact, we are finding inspiration in the incredible people, programs, and places in Greater Waterbury and the Litchfield Hills as we look toward a second century of partnership, giving, and service.

Community Conversations are an opportunity to bring people together to celebrate our community and dream together for a better tomorrow. Conversations will take place in a variety of spaces and places across Greater Waterbury and the Litchfield Hills—in homes, meeting rooms, fellowship halls, and in a variety of community settings.

We’re inviting everyone to participate and connect within our many communities of friends, neighbors, colleagues, fellow congregants, club members and more. We hope that community members who join a conversation will feel inspired as they take the opportunity to listen, understand new perspectives, and learn from one another’s experiences.

And, we’re inviting you to help by hosting or co-hosting a conversation! This resource guide is designed to provide information to set up a *Community Conversation* event, spark conversation, and support follow-up action.

We invite you to host, cohost, or join a conversation starting in July 2023, and lend your voice to help build a collective vision for our community’s future!



About Community Conversations

Community Conversations offer a forum in which community members gather over a meal to build and expand connections and to explore how we can work together to build a better tomorrow, making our community more equitable, inclusive, just, and vibrant.

When?

Starting in July 2023

Community Conversations will take place on multiple dates and at different times, as determined by hosts.

Where?

Community Conversations will take place in homes, in community spaces, at businesses or restaurants, or virtually. Hosts and co-hosts are welcome to invite and gather with any community members in their networks using this resource guide.

In addition to conversations hosted by community members, Connecticut Community Foundation will host three dinners around the region:

- August 30 @ Naugatuck Valley Community College
- September TBD
- October 18 @ Litchfield Community Center

We envision many more *Community Conversations* will be planned as hosts look to their circles—including their friends, families, neighbors, colleagues, fellow congregants, club members, and more—to invite people to the table for conversation and community-building.

Who?

Anyone and everyone is welcome to join in. We all have conversations every day, but

Community Conversations provide a chance to step back from our day-to-day shuffle for a deeper conversation with our community.

Why?

Community Conversations will bring people from diverse backgrounds together to explore how we can strengthen our communities to make people's lives better. When we come together—face-to-face—to find common ground and common cause on community issues and challenges that matter to people, powerful things can happen.

Host a Table

Host a table at your home, a community space, your workplace, a local restaurant, or online. If you are part of a nonprofit organization that serves the community, consider hosting a meal to connect with and hear from those you serve. Or, co-host a table at one of our community-hosted dinners.

Hosts and co-hosts volunteer to:

- Invite people from their networks (or beyond their networks) to gather for a meal and conversation.
- Hosts extend invitations, share resources, arrange food and beverages, facilitate discussion, and share feedback.
- Co-hosts extend invitations, share resources, help with setup and cleanup, facilitate discussion, and share feedback.



Planning the Conversation

Planning to Host

Let us know if you are interested in hosting! Consider the following before committing to host a community conversation:

- What is the purpose? (Read on for some discussion guidelines and hosting tools.)
- Who are you inviting and why are you asking them to participate in this conversation?
- When is the right time for this conversation?

If a *Community Conversation* is right for you and your community, please note that conversations can take place on any day between July 15 and December 31, 2023.

Reach out to us at info@conncf.org or register your event through our [Community Conversation Host Sign-up Form](#).

Plan a Meal

We suggest the conversation be paired with a meal to help foster connection. You can provide a meal or invite your guests to bring potluck. We encourage you to think through your plans and allow 60 – 90 minutes for conversation.

Your Guests

The invite list is up to you! Start with people you know—friends, family, colleagues and neighbors—or expand your circle.

Consider inviting people from your network that don't already know each other—you may partner with a local nonprofit or simply ask each of your guests to invite someone new to the group.

The Numbers

Up to 10 guests per table is recommended. *Community Conversations* are about giving everyone a chance to speak and be heard.

If you host more than 10 people, consider breakout conversations, and allow time for each to discuss and report back to the larger group.

Support for the Conversation

The Foundation understands there are a variety of costs associated with hosting a *Community Conversation*. Limited stipends will be made available to help offset costs of the event for those individuals and community groups who complete the request through the [Community Conversation Host Sign-up Form](#).



Suggested Community Conversation Plan

Welcome

The host/facilitator welcomes everyone and shares what guests can anticipate for the conversation.

Purpose of Conversation

It is important to state or remind guests of the purpose of the conversation. Communicate that you have gathered to talk about your community—to share ideas and perspectives and find common ground or new understanding in the spirit of building a better tomorrow together. While the conversation will be loosely guided, there is no end goal for the conversation other than to engage with and potentially inspire new ideas or new actions for the individuals gathered. Hosts, co-hosts and participants will be invited to share high-level feedback at the end of the conversation. Feedback will be shared with Connecticut Community Foundation and may be aggregated with other feedback to be shared with local nonprofits, municipalities, or the community at-large.

Introductions

We'd love for hosts to share a little bit about Connecticut Community Foundation and note that we have encouraged these conversations as part of our 100th anniversary. We've included some details below and we'll be glad to furnish you with some information you can share with your guests.

Connecticut Community Foundation was created in 1923 by and for the people of Greater Waterbury and the Litchfield Hills. By encouraging community philanthropy, providing grants and scholarships, and

engaging in community leadership, the Foundation works to address the community's critical issues, funds programs benefiting local residents and supports efforts to improve systems to foster more equitable outcomes for residents. The Foundation strengthens local organizations through learning and outreach, and works with individuals, families and corporations to steward charitable and scholarship funds. This work is for the community, and would not be possible without the community.

Please also provide an opportunity for guests to introduce themselves. Consider providing a prompt in order to break the ice and bring everyone into the conversation. (See icebreaker ideas on page 6.)

Guiding the Conversation

We encourage you to set a positive tone for your conversation.

We suggest hosts ask their guests to consider a set of conversation guidelines like the one below as a starting place, offer any suggested adjustments needed for a safe and productive conversation, and ultimately agree to the guidelines at the outset of the conversation.

Sample guidelines:

1. All views and opinions should be respected
2. All questions are worthwhile and deserve to be addressed appropriately
3. Listen to understand
4. Be mindful of and share time
5. Everyone's story and lived experience is valid
6. Pay attention to group dynamics to ensure that everyone has opportunities to contribute



Suggested Community Conversation Plan (cont.)

Open the Conversation

Invite guests to consider and respond to your choice of an opening question from the prompts below. For the first round of conversation, ask the group to allow each person to take a turn sharing their own thoughts, without responding to each other. We suggest allowing about 2-3 minutes for each person to share initially.

- As you explored the resources shared for the conversation, what stood out to you? Did you learn anything? Did anything surprise you or challenge your perspective?
- What does “community” mean to you? Has your definition of community changed over time?
- What opportunities and/or challenges in our community stand out to you?
- What opportunities do you see to promote equity, belonging, and prosperity in our community?

Deepen the Conversation

Invite further conversation after everyone has a chance to share. Use additional prompts from the previous list, the list below and/or invite the group to share other questions for the group to consider.

- How do we capture the power of today to build real and sustainable change for the future?
- What can we do individually and collectively to address the challenges or embrace the opportunities for our community?

Close the Conversation

- Thank everyone for contributing to the conversation.
- Distribute community-minded personal action sheets (see page 9) and review prompts with attendees. Invite attendees to reflect on the conversation further and consider their own follow-up actions.
- Invite everyone to briefly share a take-away, a new understanding/learning, or a next step they plan to take with the group. A next step may include another conversation, learning more about a topic, or exploring opportunities to get involved. Some people may need more time to reflect on the conversation.
- Let attendees know that the Foundation staff will distribute a participant feedback form to all attendees via email and collect any missing contact information.

Next Steps

Hosts and participants are invited to take the following next steps:

- Jot down ideas for your own community-minded actions.
- Exchange contact information with fellow guests to keep the conversation going.

In addition, we ask that hosts provide an attendee list and complete a host feedback form to be shared with Connecticut Community Foundation. The Foundation staff will distribute a participant feedback form to all attendees via email.



Tips for Success

Consider your audience. Attendees may appreciate having information about icebreakers, conversation agreements and conversation prompts in advance.

Icebreaker Suggestions

Here are a few light icebreaker suggestions for introductions.

1. Share a favorite summertime treat and why you love it.
2. If you could have a superpower, what would it be?
3. What movie do you wish you could watch again for the first time?
4. What's your favorite time of day (morning, afternoon, or nighttime)? Why?

Facilitation Tips

Facilitating conversations can be challenging at times. Providing information about the flow of the conversation and agreeing to conversation guidelines can go a long way to help avoid difficulties.

In addition, here are a few ideas and phrases to keep on hand:

- If you notice some attendees have not had a chance to speak, remind the group of the intention to share the time and hear all voices. Say something like, "I'd like to make sure everyone has an opportunity to participate. If you haven't had a chance to share much, we'd love to hear your thoughts."
- If you notice there are interruptions, ask the group to wait until the person speaking has completed sharing.
- If you notice there are a variety of opinions and/or tension around different perspectives, say something like, "Let's remember there are some great opportunities to learn from our different perspectives in this conversation." You can also ask for a temperature check (i.e. "How are we feeling right now? Is the conversation too hot or are we ok to keep discussing?"). Consider resetting with another icebreaker or revisiting the conversation agreement.
- If you notice time is passing and you'd like to move the conversation along, say something like, "I want to make sure we have time to wrap up our discussion." You might add, "let's table that for the end if we have time," or "are we ready to move on to the next part of our conversation?"
- If you notice the conversation feels off track, say something like, "While this is an interesting conversation, I'd like to bring us back on track to our conversation for this evening."



Tips for Success (continued)

Virtual Experiences

While we hope that many of these *Community Conversations* will take place in person, we recognize that may not always be feasible. If your conversation will take place virtually, here are some tips for a smooth technical experience.

Practice before hosting. Consider your background, your camera and your microphone. Think about enhancing your conversation by sharing your screen or using breakout rooms.

Consider inviting a co-host to help with a virtual experience.

This is a list of some free, virtual meeting software you may want to use for a virtual *Community Conversation* experience:

- [Zoom](#)
- [Google Meet](#)
- [Facebook](#)
- [Skype](#)
- [What's App](#)
- [Google Hangouts](#)
- [Duo](#)
- [FaceTime](#)

Please note: Virtual meeting software may have time restrictions or other restrictions based on your account.



Community Conversations Participant Contact List

Hosts: Please share this list with participants.

Participants: Please provide names, email addresses and phone numbers so you can share feedback about this experience. A feedback form will be shared with you via email.

Name	Email	Phone	Town of Residence



Community-Minded Personal Actions

Hosts: Please print a copy for each participant or contact the Foundation at info@conncf.org to request copies.

Participants: The prompts below are invitations for you to reflect on the conversation and consider personal actions you want to take. This is yours to keep and to use as you wish.

Have you learned something new or heard a different perspective?

What is sticking with you as you leave this conversation?

What would you like to learn more about or consider further?

With whom would you like to continue this or another conversation? *(Please be mindful that this feeling may not be mutual. Please ask about continuing the conversation and ensure you are not making assumptions about other people's interests.)*

What perspective, skills and experience are you currently sharing with the community? Are there other ways you think you would like to help build a better tomorrow for our community?



Resources

We've compiled a small selection of resources with information about our community to help guide and inform your conversation. We've also listed some other potential topics you may want to explore with your conversation. Before the *Community Conversation*, hosts may direct participants to focus on one or more of the resources or topics or invite participants to select one or more resources of their choice. Hosts may also share other resources on topics not reflected below.

Local Community Data and Reports

Community Reports for Greater Waterbury and Litchfield Hills:

- [2023-2026 Greater Waterbury Community Wellbeing Profile](#), Greater Waterbury Health Partnership
- [2022 Valley Community Index Report](#), Valley Community Foundation and DataHaven
- [Equity Profile for Greater Waterbury](#), DataHaven
- [Community Health Needs Assessment for Greater Waterbury, Summary Report](#), Greater Waterbury Health Partnership

Healthy Aging Data Reports for CT:

- [Overview Infographic of Older Adult Health in CT](#)
- [2021 CT Healthy Aging Data Report Highlights](#)
- [Healthy Aging Community Profiles, view by city or town](#)

The Healthy Aging Data Reports are funded by Tufts Health Plan Foundation with research and analysis by the Gerontology Institute of the John W. McCormack Graduate School of Policy and Global Studies at the University of Massachusetts Boston.

Asset Limited Income Constrained Employed (ALICE) Reports, Connecticut United Ways:

- [Western CT 2020 ALICE Report Highlights](#)
- [2020 ALICE Report Executive Summary](#)
- [ALICE Toolkit](#)
- [Additional ALICE Reports](#)

Additional State-wide Research and Reports:

- [The Case and Policy Options for Improving CT's FY 2024-2025 Budget](#), Connecticut Voices for Children
- [2023 Employment Snapshot in CT](#), Connecticut Voices for Children



Resources (continued)

Additional Potential Topics

The following is a list of some additional topics you may want to explore during your *Community Conversation*. Topics reflect the Foundation's strategic priorities, general community building topics, and current issues facing our community, and/or trending in the social sector.

You can search for articles, videos, podcasts, etc. to share with your participants. If you would like assistance finding a resource on one of the topics below, please contact the Foundation staff at info@conncf.org.

- Building Equitable Opportunity
- Community Violence
- Cultural and Racial Literacy
- Economic Security and Mobility
- Educational Opportunity
- Environmental Justice
- Eviction Crisis
- Exploring Reparations
- Fostering Belonging
- Generational Giving
- Grassroots and Grasstops Leadership
- Health and Environmental Justice
- Healthy Communities
- Housing Insecurity and Homelessness
- LGBTQ+ Rights
- Local and State Land Use Policies
- Nonracist vs. Anti-racism
- Organizational Development
- Public Health
- Sustainable Communities
- Strengthening Nonprofits
- Values Aligned Giving
- Workforce Development