

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 a Vital Conversation

The following are key tips for organizing Vital Conversations, both in connection with the *Vital Conversations Powered by Leith Wheeler* 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.

Determine your health and safety protocol

Consider all safety precautions related to COVID-19 as you plan your event. Review the guidelines released by your local health authority when determining whether to host the event virtually or in-person. If you decide to proceed with hosting an in-person event, be sure to abide by the recommendations of health authorities for the duration of your activities.

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.

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. Leith Wheeler is also committed to helping grantees succeed in promoting and hosting their events, and are willing to use their social media channels to help get the word out.

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.

Pick a Venue or a Platform

First determine whether the event will be held in-person, or virtually. The character of the conversation and the facilitation style will guide the venue requirements.

Things to consider:

- Is it possible to host an in-person event safely?
 - If not, it will be necessary to host the event virtually
 - If so, what precautions will need to be in place?

- What type of space do you need to accommodate your facilitation style?
- What type of technology can help to facilitate a flawless virtual event? Will you need [Breakout Rooms](#) to break the room into smaller groups? [A virtual collaborative whiteboard](#)? [A virtual platform for a sticky note exercise](#)?
- Will it be a World Café? An intimate conversation?
- How many people are you expecting?
- If the event is in person, 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?
- Is the event accessible to all community members?

Hosting a Virtual Event

If you decide to move forward with hosting a virtual event, there are some additional virtual hosting needs and techniques to think about. When planning a virtual event, it is important to consider:

- Creating a welcoming space
 - Provide opportunities for participants to get to know one another
 - Develop a shared experience as well as a feeling of clarity around the purpose of the gathering, agenda, and anticipated outcomes
- [Zoom fatigue](#) - long meetings without breaks, or a requirement to stay 'on camera' is mentally taxing for participants
- [Equity for all participants](#) - is everyone getting a chance to speak?
- Accessibility needs:
 - Is it easy for someone to actively participate in the event via smartphone rather than through a laptop?
 - Is it possible for someone without internet access to participate by calling in toll-free? Is there any funding available to support the costs of a participant facing a cost barrier to internet access, if it is required?
 - Consider providing closed captioning, translation services, and any other accessibility needs participants may have (this can be asked in advance)
 - Keep the technology simple - it's best to use 1 or 2 platforms for a virtual meeting than switching between two many applications
- Asking for help with facilitation. Relying on technology adds another layer of complexity to event hosting. It is best practice to have a point person that can navigate the technology to create and manage breakout rooms, produce relevant links as needed, manage and host the chat function, ensure participants are recognized if they raise a hand or ask questions using the chat function, etc.
- Keep it simple - remember that working virtually is a totally different experience than working in person, and that's okay! Lean into the virtual experience and try not to focus on re-creating what would have worked in an in-person context.
- Security concerns - consider best practices when it comes to virtual meetings. Check out [this article](#) for tips on how to avoid 'Zoom bombing'.



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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 Powered by Leith Wheeler

CFC and Leith Wheeler Investment Counsel are asking each community foundation that has received funding to get in contact with a Leith Wheeler representative to coordinate Leith Wheeler participation in the Vital Conversation event. Please get in touch with Alison Sidney at asidney@communityfoundations.ca to be connected to the Leith Wheeler representative in your region.

Content/Agenda

For the each event funded by the Vital Conversation Powered by Leith Wheeler granting program, each community foundation is asked to ensure that the Vital Conversation is at least 1 hour, and includes the following elements:

- A welcome from the community foundation
- Acknowledgement of Leith Wheeler as the Vital Conversation event sponsor, and national sponsor of Vital Signs
- A welcome from the Leith Wheeler representative of up to three-minutes
- A dialogue (as a group or in small groups) to learn about and explore community needs

Acknowledgement

When hosting the event and conducting communications about the event, please remember to follow the [Acknowledgement Guidelines](#) associated with the grant.

Logo

Please use the Leith Wheeler Investment Counsel and Vital Signs logo (below) on all material related to the Vital Conversations Powered by Leith Wheeler funded event.



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Vital Conversations: Connect with Vital Signs

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.