

FACILITATOR’S GUIDE

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INTRODUCTION

The Mayor’s Advisory Panel on Poverty offers you our sincere thanks for hosting a conversation on gaps, barriers and solutions to poverty in London. These partner-hosted conversations are an integral part of the panel’s engagement strategy, allowing us to hear from as many voices as possible so that the panel’s recommendations are truly reflective of the community.

We acknowledge the work involved in hosting a conversation and appreciate your support in making this process effective. We have provided this facilitator’s guide and other resources to make your role as easy as possible. Should you have any questions about this guide or other content, please contact povertypanel@london.ca.

Sincerely,

The Mayor’s Advisory Panel on Poverty

PLANNING YOUR CONVERSATION

CHOOSING A FORMAT

The Mayor’s Advisory Panel on Poverty wants to hear from anyone who wishes to participate. Usually, a conversation will include frontline staff members and/or people with lived experience.

The conversation-in-a-box is designed to allow different formats for conversation and input. You know your audience best. Depending on the people in the room, you may wish to use individual or group approaches. No approach is wrong – it’s about finding what works best for the group. The following table can assist you in choosing a format. It is intended as a guide only:

	PROVIDING RESPONSES TO THE QUESTIONS	
REVIEWING THE QUESTIONS:	Individual	Group
Individual	Possible approach: Step 1: Individual review of conversation guide Step 2: individual completion of feedback forms; facilitator able to answer questions	Possible approach: Step 1: Individual review of conversation guide Step 2: sticky note wall to share and discuss individual responses
Group	Possible approach: Step 1: Table discussion on conversation guide contents Step 2: individual completion of feedback forms	Possible approach: Step 1: Table discussion on conversation guide contents Step 2: sticky note wall to collect feedback

Note 1: The “sticky note wall” is a technique to collect feedback in which participants write their answers on individual sticky notes – one per note – and then post them on the wall under the appropriate question label (provided in the conversation-in-a-box). The sticky notes are then collected and organized by question for submission to the panel. Alternatively, you can take a digital photo of the sticky notes and email it to povertypanel@london.ca as part of the submission.

Note 2: if participants have barriers to providing written input, you will need someone to serve as note taker; this could be an additional staff support or another conversation participant (it's best if you are free to facilitate).

SCHEDULING

Once you have decided on an audience and format, you'll need to set the date and venue. You will want to give as much notice as possible to participants and consider any potential barriers to participation when planning.

If hosting a conversation for residents with lived experience, it is a good idea, where possible, to use existing opportunities where residents are already gathering, are comfortable and have made arrangements for transportation, child-minding, etc.

Depending on the format chosen and liveliness of the conversation, you can expect the conversation to take between 45 and 90 minutes. Of course, you are free to go longer!

Once you have scheduled the event, email povertypanel@london.ca as soon as possible, outlining the date, venue and participants for your conversation, and whether you would like us to try to schedule a panel member to attend.

RECRUITING PARTICIPANTS

Invite early and remind often! This conversation-in-a-box includes a poster you are free to adapt to your needs.

If this is a conversation with residents with lived experience, particularly if it is not part of an existing meeting or program, you will want to get the word out as soon as possible and ask staff to draw attention to the opportunity.

PREPARING PARTICIPANTS

Once participants are confirmed, provide them with a print or electronic version of the engagement guide to review prior to the meeting, if possible.

Remind participants that the focus of the conversation is to:

- review the panel's current understanding of poverty in London; and
- identify gaps, barriers and solutions to poverty in London.

If participants are not able to attend the meeting but want to provide feedback, you can provide them with a feedback form and include it in the final submission.

PREPARING YOURSELF

As a facilitator, your role is to help the group feel comfortable discussing a set of questions designed to get participants input. Below are some tips that will assist you in your conversation:

- | | |
|---|----------------------------|
| ✓ Listen and observe | ✓ Get people excited |
| ✓ Ask probing questions | ✓ Resolve conflict |
| ✓ Be sensitive to individuals' feelings | ✓ Paraphrase and summarize |

See Appendix 1 for more tips.

DAY OF THE MEETING

PREPARING THE SPACE

You know what will work best for your participants. In general, make sure: the space is comfortable; water or other refreshments are available; and you have enough engagement guides, feedback forms and pens for each participant (including yourself!).

If using the “sticky note wall” technique, have the question signs printed and on the wall, with plenty of space, and have sticky notes and markers laid out on the table.

LAUNCHING THE MEETING

Once everyone has arrived and you have had a chance to meet and chat with everyone, make sure to cover the following “welcome” items before you begin your discussion:

- ✓ Introduce yourself, the note taker (if present) and any other members of your “hosting team”
- ✓ Talk to participants, in a general and brief manner, about the purpose of the conversation
- ✓ Remind participants of the length of the session
- ✓ Emphasize the importance of honest, respectful participation and welcome all contributions to the discussion
- ✓ Make sure they are aware they can end their participation at any time if they become uncomfortable with the questions or the discussion environment

GUIDELINES FOR GREAT CONVERSATIONS

You may wish to remind people of the following guidelines for great conversations:

Focus on Task and Results	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Get it done and be aware of time ● Stay on topic ● Everyone is prepared to contribute ● Meetings have a specific goal ● Be clear and keep comments focused
Listen, Support and Encourage	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Listen carefully to one another ● Everyone has the opportunity to be heard ● Everyone’s contributions are valued ● Everyone listens as one person speaks ● No interrupting or speaking over someone else ● Be an active listener and a thoughtful speaker
Treat Each Other with Respect	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Maintain respect and honour differences in opinion and experience ● Respect differences, embrace similarities ● Respectful dialogue

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Value all opinions, no judgement – even (and especially) when you don’t agree • Mutual respect for abilities, backgrounds and experiences
Create an Inclusive and Collaborative Process	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Variety of ideas from all people involved • Everyone contributes and works together • Be responsive to other people’s contributions • Everyone has the opportunity to contribute • There are no bad ideas • Everyone has an equal voice • No one takes over the conversation
Keep an Open Mind	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Seek to understand • See different perspectives and ideas • Be open to different ideas, opinions and suggestions • Allow yourself to be educated by others’ experiences • Leave personal agendas at the door

CONVERSATION GUIDE AND QUESTIONS

After welcoming the participants and reminding them of the purpose and timing for the conversation, it’s time to start talking!

Participant Guide

Begin by going through the Participant Guide, reminding participants that this provides the background information for the conversation and questions. Depending on the format you selected, you will either take participants through the conversation guide or let them review it quietly on their own.

Encourage questions and dialogue as participants review the contents of the Participant Guide. Ask participants (or the note taker) to capture anything from this conversation in the “Notes” section of the feedback forms or sticky note wall.

Stop at each question to give participants the opportunity to read the question, ask any clarifying questions themselves, discuss the question (if using group conversation), and provide their responses.

Facilitator note: probes and clarifying questions

Probes and clarifying questions are important techniques for gaining meaningful input from group members. By probing and clarifying, you avoid making assumptions about what a participant has said and gain greater insight into their perspectives and experiences.

If participants give incomplete or off-topic answers, you can probe to see if you can get fuller, clearer responses. A few suggested techniques include:

- **Repeat the question** – Repetition sometimes gives participants more time to think about their response
- **Pause for the answer** – Sometimes simply waiting for a minute while participants gather their thoughts in a quiet moment will produce more interesting responses. A thoughtful nod or expectant look can convey that

you're looking for a fuller answer or more information.

- **Repeat the reply** – Repeating the key message from a participant's answer not only probes to see if you have understood their answer correctly, but it can also stimulate conversation
- **Ask "W" questions (when, what, where, which, who, and how)** – These questions provide more detailed information by asking for specific details. Be careful with "why" questions because they can put people on the defensive and make participants uncomfortable
- **Use neutral questions** – Ask neutral follow-up questions to encourage participants to elaborate and/or stimulate more discussion. (Use phrases like: "Anything else?", "Please tell me (more) about that...", "Could you explain what you mean by...", "Can you give me an example?", "Does anyone have anything else to add?")

CLOSING THE CONVERSATION

At the end of the time-period allowed or once the group's goals have been achieved, the facilitator:

- ✓ Summarizes the highlights of the conversation
- ✓ Thanks everyone for their participation and stresses the value and importance of their input
- ✓ Reminds people of next steps
- ✓ Collects all written documentation
- ✓ Completes the Facilitator's Tracking Form

WHAT TO DO WHEN YOU DON'T KNOW WHAT TO DO

If the conversation doesn't seem to be working, be flexible. Don't let concerns about the process overwhelm the purpose: above all else, the Mayor's Advisory Panel on Poverty wants to hear from Londoners on what this community needs to address poverty more effectively.

AFTER THE MEETING

Do not throw away any papers or documentation related to the conversation.

Email povertypanel@london.ca advising that the results of the conversation are ready to be collected. Arrangements will be made to pick up all the written documents.

If you have completed the feedback forms digitally, you can email them to povertypanel@london.ca.

THANK YOU

APPENDIX 1: HANDLING DIFFICULT CONVERSATIONS

Difficult situations, tension and conflict may arise during your conversation. The following are examples of common difficult situations and tips and techniques you can use to problem-solve in these cases.

IS A PARTICIPANT TAKING OVER THE CONVERSATION?

If one person is doing a lot of the talking, this may prevent other group members from contributing their thoughts, limiting the productivity of the group. It is important to *notice when this is happening* and do what you can to make sure that *all group members have an opportunity to contribute*. Try to draw out quiet participants and get members to voice their thoughts in their own words as much as possible.

You might want to try responding to a dominant participant by *respectfully acknowledging their contribution, thanking them* ("I really appreciate your comments) and following up by saying "I'm very interested in hearing how other people feel about this issue," or something to that effect.

IS THERE LITTLE DISCUSSION? OR IS NO ONE RESPONDING TO A QUESTION?

When an idea is adopted without any general discussion or disagreement, more than likely the group is experiencing pressure to conform to a dominant viewpoint. To minimize this unproductive dynamic, try to probe for alternative views. Consider raising a similar issue or say something like "We have had an interesting discussion, but let's explore other ideas or points of view. Has anyone had a different experience that they wish to share?"

When no one responds to a question, even after probing or providing clarification, it is helpful to try to understand why people are not responding. Consider the following:

DID YOU ASK A QUESTION THAT WAS DIFFICULT FOR PARTICIPANTS TO UNDERSTAND?

If this might be the case, try asking the question in a different way – so that all the important issues are still explored, but participants can more easily understand what is being asked of them.

IS THE QUESTION CONTROVERSIAL OR SENSITIVE? WOULD PEOPLE FEEL UNCOMFORTABLE ANSWERING THIS QUESTION IN A GROUP OF THEIR PEERS?

Here again, it might be useful to simply rephrase the question or approach the topic from a less sensitive or controversial stance. Remember that by creating an open, honest and safe environment, participants are more likely to feel comfortable providing genuine input.

ARE PEOPLE TIRED OF TALKING ABOUT THE TOPIC? HAVE YOU EXHAUSTED ALL POSSIBLE CONVERSATION ON THE CURRENT ISSUE? IS IT TIME TO MOVE ON?

In this case, consider whether the group has covered the issue already. It might be helpful to ask "Is there anything else you would like to share?" and pause for input before moving on to another question. Don't try to force more conversation, but remind the group that there is an opportunity to contribute important information by using probes or clarifying questions. Try to make links to other topics covered and encourage participation through connections between issues.

IS THE GROUP IS GETTING OFF TRACK?

Sometimes the conversation will veer away from the goals of the group working session or the topics to be covered by the group. When this happens, you might pause to thank participants for the interesting idea or discussion – pointing to a potential opportunity to discuss the idea or issue later – before reminding the group of the focus of the current working session and asking their consent to move on to another item. Another strategy is to remind the group, periodically, about the time remaining in the working session.

ARE SOME PARTICIPANTS HAVING SIDE CONVERSATIONS?

If people are having side conversations while the broader group is talking or while an individual is providing input, it can disrupt the focus of the group, make members uncomfortable, make it difficult for people to hear what is being said, and make it difficult for the Facilitator and note-taker to concentrate on what is being said.

One of the best strategies for handling this issue is to address it before the working session begins by setting ground rules for participation. Stress that it is *critical* not to have side conversations because it interferes with individual's full participation and also creates challenges for the note-taker in making accurate notes of the session.

If side conversations do occur, do not stop the conversation abruptly. Respectfully remind the group of the ground rules and ask that people finish their conversations and rejoin the larger group discussion taking place. Side conversations may signal that the group needs to take a break, and it may be useful to take a 5 minute rest when you notice persistent side conversations.

ARE PARTICIPANTS OFFERING INFORMATION TO A FUTURE QUESTION OR SKIPPING AHEAD OF THE PROCESS?

At times, participants may skip topics, move ahead of where you are in your questions, or move backwards. You will want to use probes and clarifying questions to get detailed and useful information from them on the topic at-hand and then respectfully and gently return them to the topic of interest. Try to keep the working session flowing organically while also ensuring that all questions are fully discussed and answered.

ARE PARTICIPANTS EXPRESSING DISCOMFORT ABOUT A PARTICULAR QUESTION?

An individual participant may not feel comfortable answering a particular question for a variety of reasons. This must be honored.

At the beginning of the working session, clearly inform participants that they may decline to answer a question or choose to stop their participation at any time. If this happens, say “thank you,” acknowledge and appreciate their honesty, and ask them if it okay for you to move on to the rest of your questions.