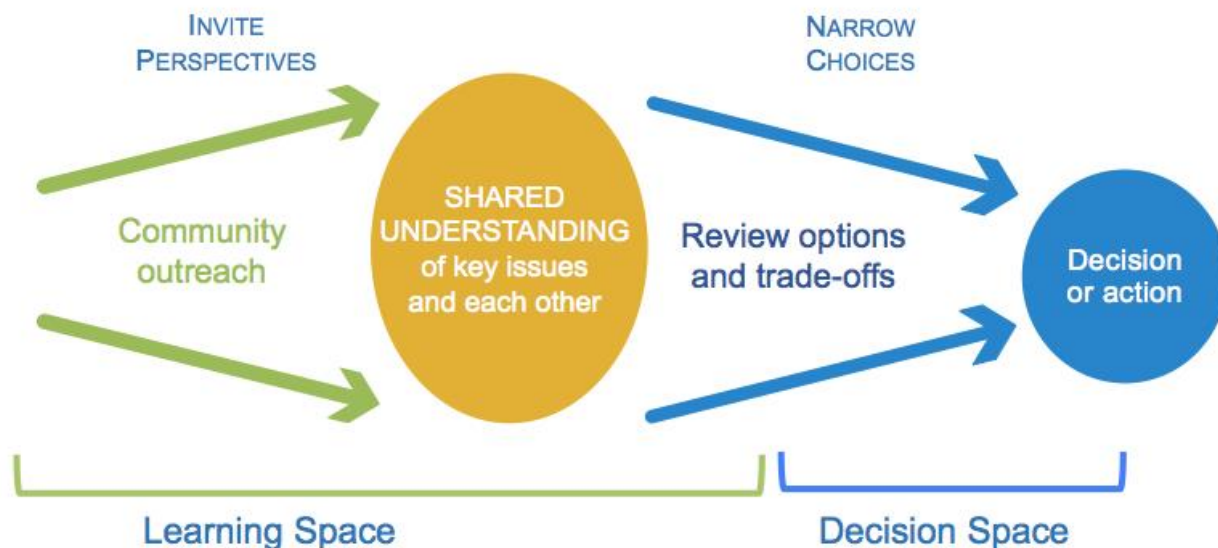CommonKnowledgePlus

The CLEAR Community Conversation

The CLEAR (Collaborative Learning Experience and Reflection) Conversation helps local agencies engage the community in a way that develops **mutual understanding** and **shared language** about multi-dimensional topics. It is a particularly useful approach for addressing issues that are perceived as "fraught," when trust levels are low and/or there are unproductive or lopsided patterns of interaction that may be deepening divisions.

The process to plan and implement this kind of community conversation sets learning objectives for the community (those newer to the issue, as well as advocates) and for the agency (elected officials and staff). By making meaning together of current conditions, the CLEAR Conversation increases the likelihood of broadly supported policies and effective collective action.

THE COLLABORATIVE LEARNING EXPERIENCE

Create conditions that **support inclusive participation**

Some elements of the CLEAR conversation are familiar to many agencies. The process starts by creating conditions that support <u>inclusive participation:</u>

- A neutral setting away from settings associated with debate or contention
- A welcoming and accessible environment – e.g., food, childcare, translation
- Starting "upstream" from any policy decision to reduce the stress of rushing to judgment
- Table level discussion with trained facilitators
- Presentation and handouts that support the discussion
- Feedback forms

Design dialogue that supports **mutual learning**, **a sense of connection** and **a desire to stay engaged**

CLEAR Conversations also add specific elements to help an agency and its community build shared understanding, interconnectedness, a sense of collaboration and community momentum:

- Get past unhelpful habits of thought by framing for how *we* can help improve *our community*
- Proactive recruitment of a diverse cross-section of the community across sectors and education, income and professions, intentionally providing the experience of interacting with "other" people
- Blend key facts and dialogue, allowing participants to arrive at their own sense of the situation and possible options
- Sequence questions and information: moving from simple to complex, from me to us
- Explore options together to create a felt sense of interdependence and shared narrative of possibility

SUPPORTING REFLECTION

Learning happens through the **exchange of new information** and the **experience of participating** in a different type of conversation. After the CLEAR conversation, the agency and community **pause to reflect** on what they learned as a prelude to developing more specific options for action. This is a summary of what learning has emerged to date in the pilot cities.

Content Learning	Experiential Insights
New information and shared understanding	The experience of in-person dialogue

Content Learning
New information and shared understanding

Community members are learning:
- Many solutions are needed; no single solution will suffice
- Multiple entities are addressing housing needs; no one group can do it alone (including local governments)
- Many actions have already been taken to address housing, others are underway
- I can be part of different solutions

City staff and elected officials are learning:
- Housing affects everyone in the community; stakeholders are not limited to a few groups or constituencies
- Community members can be a source of helpful attitudes and useful knowledge
- People are ready to understand that the city cannot do it alone
- I am thanked for listening for values and information needs before policy specifics

Experiential Insights
The experience of in-person dialogue

Community members are feeling:
- I'm not alone. More people care about housing than I realize
  - *Replacing fatalism with a sense of hopefulness*
  - *Setting the stage for future collective action*
- Other people affected by this situation share some of the same values I do
  - *Reduced fear of "other"*
  - *Expanded sense of shared values*
- The city is really listening to the community; my perspective and experience are valuable
- My feedback can help the city communicate more clearly
  - *Increasing trust with government*
  - *Encouraging further participation*

* The next phase of the pilot projects will determine how this learning is applied to develop community momentum for housing.