The Harwood Institute makes a distinction between "expert knowledge" and "public knowledge." Both are important, but far too often expert knowledge crowds out public knowledge. Being Turned Outward requires us to make room public knowledge.

UNDERSTANDING PUBLIC VS. EXPERT KNOWLEDGE

EXPERT KNOWLEDGE

Expert knowledge comes from expert or professional analysis. It often includes data, demographic and market studies, evidence-based decision making and best practices

It is usually presented in expert or professional language

PUBLIC KNOWLEDGE

Public knowledge comes only from engaging in conversation with people in a community. Only the people within the community themselves can tell us their aspirations, concerns and how they see different facets of their community

It is usually in plain language that everyone can understand

WHAT PUBLIC KNOWLEDGE HELPS YOU DO

When you help a community generate public knowledge, you and others in the community can:

- Understand the context of people's lives

- Root your work and decisions in what matters to people

- Identify key issues of concern to people in language that people themselves use

- Uncover and generate a sense of common purpose for action in the community

- Set realistic goals for moving ahead and making change

- Make one's work more relevant and more impactful within the community

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STARTING POINT: PEOPLE'S SHARED ASPIRATIONS

Starting with people's shared aspirations is central to Turning Outward. But it's not how most conversations in communities are started or framed. Here are two conventional ways that many conversations in communities start (and stall), and how using people's shared aspirations produces a more productive path forward.

STARTING POINT	WHAT WE GET	WHAT IT CREATES
Identify "the problems"	Rooted in complaints Private demands on public resources Finger pointing, blame Solution wars	Long list of problems A sense that the community is full of problems, deficits and people to blame No shared sense of where the community wants to go
Visioning exercises	"Wish lists" Conversations disconnected from present reality	False hope A document or set of ideas that people will not fight for because it's not rooted in their reality "Vision" documents relegated to desk drawers and collecting dust
Aspirations	A conversation based on reality and a sense of possibility Shifts conversation from the individual or organization to the community Conversation about what people value, where they wish to go and why	A sense of shared aspirations that roots our work in something uniquely public The possibility for building public will A set of ideas that people will go to bat for

STEP 4: UNDERSTAND WHAT I AM LEARNING AND HOW TO LISTEN

Each of the questions in the Community Conversation Guide have a purpose. They each help you generate an important piece of public knowledge. Together they help to produce a deep understanding of the community.

Here is an annotated version of the discussion guide. In addition to the role of each question, note how you will need to listen to people's responses in order to help you make sense of what they are saying.

ANNOTATED COMMUNITY CONVERSATION GUIDE

Give people plenty of time here. You don't have to hear from everyone, but don't let one or two people dominate.

Steer people away from only talking about complaints or problems. Keep focused on the kind of community they want.

1. **What kind of a community do you want?**
   - Why is this important?
   - How is that different from the way things are now?

This is where people will start to name their aspirations. They'll also tell you why this matters and the words they use to describe the community.

When people draw connections between concerns they will tend to broaden, not narrow the discussion. Let them. Note the connections between the concerns. These webs of concerns are critical to know.

2. **Given what we just said, what are the 2-3 most important issues or concerns when it comes to the community?**
   - Decide which issue is most important for the group to use, and use it for the balance of the conversation.
   - If you are going to test a specific issue, introduce it here. How does it fit with what we are talking about? What concerns do you have about that?

Give people room to tell their story.

Keep the conversation focused on the issue. For example, if the concern is education, don't slip into talking only about schools.

3. **What concerns do you have about this issue? Why?**
   - Does it seem like things are getting better or worse? What makes you say that?
   - How do you think the issue/concern came about?

You can learn a lot here about how people talk about the issue. What words are they using?

Don't let anyone dominate here. Make room for different opinions. Ask, "Is this how everyone sees it?"

Listen here for emotions in people's comments. You'll want to draw these out later.

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Listen for how people relate to the issue. Sometimes people will gain context by asking "What's in it for me?" But they also become attached through broader context/beyond their own self-interest. This happens through 1st hand experiences, the experiences of others, what they can imagine.

Throughout the session keep track of "turning points" – those words, questions, or ideas that unlock the issues for people and cause them to rethink or engage more deeply.

Keep an eye out for disconnections or gaps in people's stories: important parts that are missing, whether it's a historical perspective, key fact or frame of reference. DO NOT try to fix these "gaps."

4. **How do the issues we're talking about affect you personally?**
   - What personal experiences have you had?
   - How about people around you – family, friends, coworkers, neighbors – what do you see them experiencing?
   - Are some people affected more than others? Who? In what ways? Why?

For the first two-thirds of the conversation you want to keep opening things up rather than closing them down. Give people room to tell their story. Don't ask questions that box them in or push them to offer solutions before they are able to explore each other's concerns and points of view.

As people start to tell stories you'll begin to see the context that they use to understand their concerns.

People want to feel a sense of possibility for action on their concerns. Throughout the conversation listen for when people think action is possible. You may also hear the lack of possibility people experience.

People feel a range of emotions on the issue but may be hesitant to express these in public. Bringing out emotions makes the conversation more dynamic, helping people discover why they care and what they are looking for.

Listen here for ambivalence or people struggling to reconcile competing values or beliefs. Engage these voices; don't let more certain people cut them off.

5. **When you think about these issues, how do you feel about what's going on?**
   - Why do you feel this way?
   - How do you think other people feel about this?

You may start to hear how people can connect their private concerns to the concerns of others moving from the private to public sphere.

Describing how others feel helps people consider other points of view and opens up the possibility for finding common ground.

Notice if emotion freezes anyone. Does fear or insecurity prompt people to shut down?

6. **What do you think is keeping us from making the progress we want?**
   - Why do you say that?
   - How do you think things got to be this way?

Listen here for both ideas and conditions people are expressing and the extent to which they believe change is possible.

Pay close attention to whether people see themselves as potential actors. Listen for their sense of possibility. Also pay attention to whom they trust to engage them and act.

7. **When you think about what we've talked about, what are the kinds of things that could be done that would make a difference?**
   - What do you think these things might accomplish?
   - What are the kinds of things that individuals can do to make a difference?
   - What do you make of what other people say should be done?
   - What's important for us to keep in mind when we think about moving forward?

8. **Thinking back over the conversation who do you trust to take action on the issues you've been talking about?**
   - Why them and not others?

9. **If we came back together in 6 months or a year, what might you see that would tell you the things we talked about were starting to happen?**
   - Why would that suggest things are changing?

10. **Now that we've talked about this issue a bit, what questions do you have about it?**
    - What do you feel you'd like to know about that would help you make better sense of what's going on and what should be done?
    - What kind of follow-up would you like out of this discussion?

It may take some people a while to respond. Give them time. Some may say they don't know because they are not experts. Remind them you only want to know what they think, that they don't have to be an expert.

You want to see what people believe are early wins. Taking action on these things will build a sense of hope and confidence that meaningful change is possible.

This gives you an opening to keep people engaged. Invite them to provide contact information.