LEARNING CONVERSATIONS

Definition:

Learning Conversations are purposeful conversations with residents designed to discover the gifts of the residents that they are willing to share related to their passion.

Key points:

- **Healthy, safe and strong communities are places filled with care.** Care is what residents of a neighborhood offer when they become engage and involved in the life of their neighborhood. Engaged residents might go next door to offer a meal to a homebound senior, read a book to a child down the street, or organize with great creativity around issues affecting their lives.

- **We cannot build strong, caring neighborhoods without unlocking the potential of the residents.**

- **In doing our work, we must understand that everyone in the neighborhood has something to offer (their gifts) and everyone cares about something (their passions)** and that, to be successful we need the residents of a neighborhood to become involved and share their gifts, based on their passion.

- **However, care can remain invisible** without intentional conversations to discover what people have to offer and what they are passionate about.

- **One of the most effective ways to unlock the power of the people** in the neighborhood is through Learning Conversations.

GOALS of a LEARNING CONVERSATION:

- ✳ *Build trust and establish a relationship*
- ✳ *Discover gifts and passions*
- ✳ *Explore mutual interests and clarify possible action steps*
- ✳ *Find more prospects*

What people care about, what they are passionate about is their motivation to act; to become involved and engaged; to share their gifts.

Passion = Motivation to Act:
"What I will go out the door and do something about?"

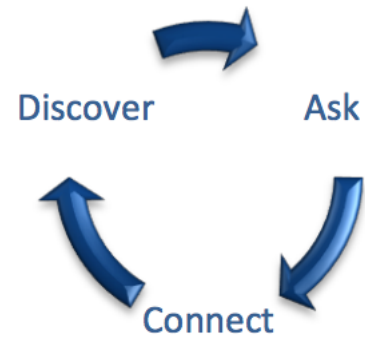|		
CONCERNS	–	"What I do not what to happen"
DREAMS	–	"What I want to create"
GIFTS	–	"What I want the opportunity to give"

3 The three elements of effective learning conversations:

1. Identify the gifts and passions of the residents in a neighborhood.
2. Ask the residents to become involved and share their gifts based on the passions.
3. Connect, people with the same passions to act collectively.

Discover   Ask

Connect

CAUTION: The goal of a Learning Conversation is to identify what people care about enough to act and what they can contribute ("I will; I can"). It is <u>not</u> to determine what they just have opinions about ("Someone ought to").

hint:

To build stronger relationships and trust: Whenever possible, if you are not a resident of the neighborhood, connect with people through a resident you know who is willing to introduce you.

PRINCIPLES:

of effective Learning Conversations:

- **Ask Questions** - do not give answers
- **Ask "what can you contribute?"** not "What do you need?"
- **Invite next steps** - ask people to become involved
- **To grow the circle,** always ask "Who else do you know that I should speak to?

POTENTIAL QUESTIONS to ask in a Learning Conversation:

- *What 2 gifts, talents or skills do you have that make you a valuable family member and friend?*
- *What 2 skills make you especially good at your paid or volunteer work?*
- *What talent do you have that not many people know about?*
- *What is something that you love to do so much that you get lost in it for hours without getting board?*
- *What are your 2-3 favorite hobbies?*
- *What are your gifts, capacities & skills you are willing to contribute?*
- *What do you care about? (Issues and concerns you want to work on?)*
- *Concerns? What should we do that you would work on?*
- *What associations and institutions do you have strong relationships with?*
- *What would your possible roles be?*
- *Who else do you know we should contact? (Would you be willing to introduce us to them?)*

Learning Conversations

Excerpt from "When People Care Enough to Act"
by Mike Green

A learning conversation is an opportunity to build a relationship by seeking to discover motivation to act: the care that generates connection and action. Each citizen has personal motivations to act and each citizen association or congregation has shared motivations to act. What an association cares about at a particular moment may or may not be captured in its official mission statement –in many associations, formal statements may not have caught up with members' developing concerns and purposes. The listener works first to understand what the person or association cares about enough to act. Then the listener asks him or herself...

- *How does this person's or association's motivation to act weave them into the tapestry of our community partnership?*
- *What assets could they bring?*
- *Who else shares or compliments what they care about enough to act?*

Elements of a learning conversation

Opportunities for good learning conversations grow like strawberry vines. The first conversations among members of the connector-leader's group builds an initial list of prospects that grows as those who converse identify others who care about some aspect of the group's organizing interest. A good prospect for early learning conversations will be a leader (someone who has a following) in an association (which already gathers and supports capacity to act) who demonstrates motivation to act and has a potential interest in common with the community partnership.

Good manners make for good learning conversations. Meet people at times and in places that are comfortable and convenient, Be on time and take no more than the 30-60 minutes the person agreed to. Treat people respectfully and listen carefully.

Conduct the conversation singly or in a pair of inquirers. After several learn- ing conversations, gather with other interviewers to share, summarize, reflect on what you are learning, and revise the process if necessary.

Effective learning conversations begin with clear answers to two important questions:

1. Who are we? A good answer to this question establishes your credentials as a representative of a group worth taking seriously. It avoids the person who asks for the learning conversation being perceived as "somebody nobody sent."

> *"We're from _____ Organizing, a group of eleven neighborhood associations who are working together to develop good jobs for youth in our community. Your pastor, Rev. Smith suggested that we meet with you."*

2. Why are we meeting with you? This is a simple direct statement of the interest that brings your group together. The purpose statement raises a question of concern to the community and leaves the person room to express her or his concerns and ideas. It does not try to sell an answer.

> *"We are working together to create good jobs for young people in our com- munity. We want to hear your thoughts on the issue and see what you think of the ideas we've had so far."*

After answering these two questions, the learning conversation proceeds.

3. Introduction. This allows a warm-up so that those in the conversation can acknowledge the relationship they have or recognize common interests or connections.

4. Identify motivation to act. This question – ***"What do you care about enough to act?"*** – is the heart of the learning conversation. It invites the person to talk about motivation to act. Discover as much as possible about the person's concerns, dreams, and gifts. A good conversation lets the person talk about overall motivation to act as well as the specific concerns, dreams and gifts that link the person to the community partnerships' purpose.

5. Invite next steps. This question – ***"What do you want to do?"*** – offers the person a connection to the community partnership. Some people will be ready to take action based on the learning conversation. It's important to offer a next step that they can take to become more involved. It may be a meeting of people who share an interest in some aspect of the issue, for ex- ample, the people who care about how congregations can help create youth jobs. It may be an invitation to join in publicity or research activities.

6. Seek others. Who else should we invite for learning conversations. This question – ***"Who else do you know that might work with us?"*** – continues to grow the network.

After talking to a few people, connector-leaders gather to assess how the conversations are going, talk about any problems, revise the questions based on responses, and discuss what's been found –both people to involve and is- sues people think are important for action.

1-1 Learning Conversation Notes (Example)

Name   Date

Address

Phone   e-mail   Fax

Occupation

Who suggested the contact?

1. Gifts, capacities, & skills to contribute?

2. Issues and concerns you want to work on?

3. What about (issue of concern to the ABCD community partnership)? Concerns? What should we do that you would work on?

4. Strong relationships with others (associations and institutions)

5. Possible roles in ABCD community partnership?

6. Further contacts for us to see (name and phone)?