Building
a
Culture of Health

A toolkit to help facilitate community conversations about health

"Extension in the future must have the vision and the commitment to do for the nation's health what it did for American agriculture."
(Henning, Buchholz, Steele, Ramaswamy, 2014)

We have found ourselves living in a time when we can no longer expect that American children will live a life longer than their parents (CDC, 2018). Despite spending more money than any other country on health care, the United States has some of the worst documented health outcomes of any developed nation in the world (Organization for Economic Co-Operation and Development, 2018). The country is also experiencing extreme deficits in individual, family, and community health, and to reverse the trends, we must all work together to identify and implement effective strategies to improve the nation's health. Cooperative Extension's grassroots presence in all 50 states and territories provides a unique opportunity to influence change across the country, beginning at the local level.

Change must begin with:

- Building a foundational understanding of what unique challenges communities face
- Determining what resources are currently in place
- Identifying key stakeholders
- Working with communities to identify and implement health-improvement initiatives

Then, Cooperative Extension at the local level can identify crucial efforts that align with our scope and capabilities, choose effective policies and programs, act on what is important, and evaluate actions (Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, 2018).

In talking about health, though, we must take a holistic and broad approach. Research has consistently shown that only 25% of health outcomes are due to genes and the health behaviors that we practice across our lifespan; 75% of our health outcomes, rather, are due to the social and environmental determinants of health, such as poverty, inequities among races and ethnicities, access to quality health care and education, and physical environments (CDC, 2014). Hence, strategies to improve community health must include individual and family-level interventions, and even more importantly, community-level interventions.

One of the ways in which Extension can foster community involvement in addressing health challenges is through facilitation of community conversations. This toolkit will serve as a resource for local professionals to plan for community-wide conversations. It will help you engage your community to examine health broadly then plan and implement strategies that address health issues specific to your community.

Building relationships within communities is critical to improving policies, systems, and environments (PSE) for individuals, families, and communities to thrive. While the materials in this toolkit will guide Extension professionals in hosting critical conversations, you are encouraged to tailor the recommendations to the unique goals of your community, and to the goals of the partners invited to these conversations.

Objectives of Hosting a Community Conversation

The purpose of community conversations is to convene community stakeholders and laypersons to initiate a dialogue about health in local communities. In this context, both *health* and *community* are defined broadly, and local Extension professionals and their key stakeholders are free to define those terms to best fit their needs. The primary objectives of the community conversations are to:

- Engage in a robust discussion about current community health needs

- Gain a shared understanding of the current resources in the community that help to address these needs

- Consider what educational programs and community-based initiatives need to be piloted or implemented in the community in order to improve overall health outcomes

- Identify the key stakeholders in the community that should be included in further dialogue and collaboration to implement select initiatives

- Plan for further collaboration and dialogue among key community stakeholders improving overall community health

1. Build a Leadership Team

Identify the necessary individual(s) you will need to help make your conversation(s) successful. Invite people you have worked well with in the past to be a part of the leadership team. If you brought collaborators with you to the statewide meetings on March 26 or 27, 2018, they would be some logical partners to have on the leadership team. A team approach will help to build ownership and divide the responsibilities. If your team feels the need for better facilitation skills, Extension will provide an opportunity for you to gain those skills. Alternatively, you could invite an effective facilitator to be a part of your leadership team.

2. Understand your Role

The Leadership Team will:

- Identify a location for the event
- Identify and invite people to attend the conversation
- Set-up the room and provide necessary support materials
- Facilitate the community discussion or identify an individual to do so
- Follow-up with the attendees on results of the conversation
- Prioritize the community needs addressed by the attendees
- Work to create targeted, local efforts that align with Extension's scope and capabilities, or that of our partners

Supporting materials to help you plan and execute your event have been developed and are available for your use. The following materials can be accessed online: http://www.k-state.edu/fcs/cutureofhealth.html

- Recruitment material: email/letter, social media post, and a flyer
- Scripted PowerPoint
- *Ground Rules for Public Discussion* handout and poster
- Kansas Data Sources

3. Determine your Goals and Agenda

The design of your community conversation should reflect your community's history, strengths, and assets. If community conversations on health have recently taken place in your community, perhaps your goal would be to deepen existing work and reflect on lessons learned. Others may want to focus more narrowly on Extension's role and identify resources, expertise, and initiatives that the community feels would be most impactful. Work to understand what has already been done in your community and use that information to build the goals and scope of your community conversation.

It is suggested that conversations last at least 90 minutes, but they might last up to 4 hours. The agenda should include the following components:

- Welcome and introduction
- Guided discussion
- Discoveries and insights
- High-fives and thanks

4. Determine Your Conversation Questions

The amount of time allowed for this opportunity will determine the number of questions you will be able to ask your participants (or vice versa). It is recommended that each question be allotted *at least* 20 minutes for discussion.

Although you may use your judgement in determining the questions you ask during your conversation, it is suggested that you ask the following:

1. **What are the biggest health concerns in our community today? How do we know this?**
2. **What resources does our community currently have to address these needs?**
3. **What resources, programs, and initiatives does our community need to help address our biggest health concerns?**
4. **What educational and outreach initiatives can K-State Research and Extension provide to help our community move forward in improving health?**

5. Build a Planning Timeline

Timelines will likely vary, however, a sample event planning and execution timelines is offered below:

2 – 3 months prior:

☐ Select date

☐ Reserve location

☐ Build invitation list

☐ Send out invitations

1 month prior:

☐ Obtain necessary materials

☐ Arrange for tokens of appreciation, if funds allow

2 weeks prior:

☐ Send out reminder invitations

☐ Arrange for catering/refreshments, if funds allow

1 week post-event:

☐ Send out thank you cards/emails

6. Pick a Conversation Venue

Ideally, all community conversations should take place in a safe, centrally located, easy-to-access venue for all attendees. A public library, Extension office, or school may be a viable option for some communities. Having access to Wi-Fi is also preferred so that you and/or your participants can access data, if needed.

7. Determine Your Audience and Invite Them

Community conversations are intended to be open dialogues that initiate conversations regarding how to improve health in community. For that reason, the backgrounds and expertise of participants needs to vary widely. A community conversation can range from 5 to 500 people, depending on how your dialogue is designed, your unique goals, and the amount of time you and your planning team dedicate to this event. Regardless, we suggest the invitation list be representative of the local community and include a variety of stakeholders, including both professional community stakeholders and the public. When considering what stakeholders to invite, consider:

- Who would be most beneficial to attend?
- Who could offer important insights?
- Who could open doors to new partnerships and/or opportunities?
- Who is actively working to improve health in our community?
- Who is underrepresented?
- Who is not actively involved in community health, public health, or health care that I should invite?
- Who are the consumers of preventative information in our community?
- Who are the consumers of health interventions in our community?

Be sure to consider these specific entities or individuals:

- County/city commissions and other local elected officials
- School board member(s)
- Extension board member(s)
- Police, fire, or EMS representative(s)
- Leaders and/or members of prominent coalition(s)
- Purchasers, large employers, and local businesses
- Consumer group representatives
- Community stakeholders representing chamber of commerce, banking/finance, and educational institutions
- Social service organizations (YMCA, mental health clinics, health centers, etc.)
- Social, recreational, and service club leaders
- Health care stakeholders (medical societies, long-term care and home health, rehabilitation facilities, etc.)
- Older 4-H youth or youth from other organizations
- Underrepresented individuals and concerned residents

Sample invitations that can be sent via social media, email, or traditional mail as well as a recruitment flyer are available online: http://www.k-state.edu/fcs/cutureofhealth.html . It is strongly encouraged to utilize your own unique logo on these materials and to personalize them as necessary.

8. Create an Inviting and Comfortable Space

The set-up of the room can be flexible and can fit the constraints of the location. An ideal location would have several round tables with chairs. It would also be appropriate to bunch square/rectangular tables together to create several conversational groupings. It would be ideal to have no more than 5 participants per table. If adequate tables are not available, groups may hang their flip chart paper on the walls. However, you should ensure that chairs are available for those who may need them.

The following materials are required to host your conversation:

- Flip chart paper, butcher-block paper to cover the tables, or chalkboards/whiteboards
- Markers or chalk
- Computer, projector, and screen or white wall
- *Ground Rules for Public Discussion* poster and/or handouts
- Name tags for all participants and facilitators
- Microphone
- Parking permits (if required by the venue)

The following materials are strongly encouraged:

- Printed agendas
- Recognizing that participants are committing a significant amount of time to participate, it is suggested to provide healthy refreshments
- Tokens of appreciation, if funds allow (examples might include gift cards to local grocery store, water bottles, etc.)
- Kansas Data Sources

9. Facilitate Your Conversation

Community conversations should be just that – conversations with the attendees and not solely a presentation of challenges or ideas from the conveners. For that reason, all introductory and concluding remarks should be purposeful and kept to a minimum in order to allow for ample conversing. However, it is important to set the stage and to provide feedback with how their information will be used. A sample scripted PowerPoint has been provided for your use. The PowerPoint can be accessed online: http://www.k-state.edu/fcs/cutureofhealth.html.

In addition to setting the stage, the facilitator(s) should also:

- Welcome participants as they arrive
- Explain the purpose of the conversation
- Explain the *Ground Rules for Public Discussion*
- Explain the facilitation method (e.g., World Café) and other logistics
- Pose the questions during each round
- Move around the tables during the conversation
- Encourage everyone to participate
- Remind participants to note key ideas, doodle, and draw
- Keep time and inform participants when it is time to move onto the next question
- Make sure key insights are gathered and recorded
- Be creative in utilizing the chosen facilitation method to meet the unique needs of the community
- Verbally summarize the conversation and open the floor to discussion and insights

When concluding the community conversation, it is important to thank the group for their time and remind them that by contributing their ideas and values, they have made an important impact on their community's health. **At the end, you may ask the group to consider some action steps, though they should not feel obligated to do something together. For motivated groups, you might suggest identifying a meeting time to discuss action planning and next steps.**

10. Evaluate your Conversation

Though a formal evaluation will not be utilized for discussion participants, please report that your community conversation has taken place by entering it into PEARS as "Critical Community Conversations for a Healthy [insert county/district]". If you would like to create an evaluation for your community conversation to include with your reporting, you are free to do so.

11. Determine Next Steps and Follow Up

Make your conversation count by sending a summary to your participants within two weeks of your conversation. You might also consider sending the summary to relevant organizations, agencies, local government, and other key stakeholders.

Developing healthy communities is a long-term endeavor that must consistently be reevaluated and retuned to keep up with the ever-changing environment. Despite being challenging, working to improve community health can be invigorating since even the smallest changes to a community's culture can substantially impact quality-of-life. Nevertheless, this work cannot be done alone. Leadership within a community should come from all corners, and represent a variety of stakeholders, agencies, and community members. No one organization can do it alone, and we must work together to influence change. By initiating critical dialogue around community health, we can start to bring together the many voices in our communities that will propel future successes.

Questions?

If you have questions about the Critical Conversation process or the contents of this toolkit, please contact Dr. Erin Yelland, erinyelland@ksu.edu, or 785-532-1905, or Dr. Paula Peters, ppeters@ksu.edu, 785-532-1562.

Support materials are located on the website:

http://www.k-state.edu/fcs/cutureofhealth.html

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