

Voices of Naugatuck

A Community Conversation: Where residents have a space to share their story and have a voice in shaping the future of Naugatuck.

This issue guide was created in collaboration with the Naugatuck Cultural Council and the help of the Issue Guide Exchange at www.Everyday-Democracy.org/Exchange.

March 2012

Introduction 30 minutes

Thank you for joining together today with your fellow neighbors to participate in these community conversations. We are looking forward to getting to know you and thinking about ways to work together to make Naugatuck a more vibrant community.

What is today about? 15 minutes

- Our Community:

Naugatuck is an ever changing community with demographics that reflect a growth in first generation families, many languages spoken other than English in our households and a mosaic of cultural heritages that make up a very diverse community. Our government leaders do not reflect the diversity within our community, participation in educational decision-making consists of a small percentage of the population and there continue to be achievement gaps between students with different backgrounds in our schools. What can this community do together to help everyone feel included, and to inspire everyone to make an investment in bringing about personal connections and positive changes?

- The Purpose of Community Conversations:

We want to learn about the many views of our residents, create relationships and become comfortable as we communicate with one another about our community challenges and strengths. We'll ask ourselves: In Naugatuck, are all groups included? Is Naugatuck a welcoming community? What are the experiences of the people in this community when moving here or when remaining here year after year?

- Creating a Shared Vision for What Naugatuck Can Be:

Our vision is to engage residents and supporters in creating projects and activities that are inclusive to all, build and grow leadership at all levels in the community and embrace our cultural strengths. We will brainstorm some action ideas to help make those things happen.

Activity **15 minutes**

Form a group with three or four people you've never met before or don't know very well. Each person will take a turn answering this question:

What is your favorite cultural or ethnic tradition, or favorite holiday, or favorite family celebration or tradition?

After everyone has a chance to answer the question, we'll gather back together as one big group. The moderator will ask for a few volunteers to answer this question:

What did you learn about your own culture or traditions and those of the people around you? Did you notice any similarities or differences?

Session One

Getting to Know One Another 45 minutes

Introduction

In this session, we will get to know one another, talk about what is important to us, what brings us together and see how we want to work together.

Part One: Setting ground rules **5 minutes**

We need to create some ground rules to help our discussion work well. Here are some ideas. Are there rules you would like to add?

1. Listen to one another. Treat each other with respect.
2. Each person gets a chance to talk.
3. One person talks at a time. Don't cut people off.
4. Speak for yourself. Don't try to speak for "your group."
5. It's OK to disagree. If you feel hurt, say so and say why.
6. Stick to the issue. No name-calling.
7. If you talk about people who are not here, don't say their names.
8. Some of the things we talk about will be very personal. We will not tell these stories to other people, unless we all say it is OK.
9. Help the facilitator keep things on track.

Part Two: What is my connection to Naugatuck? **15 minutes**

Each person will answer these questions:

1. Introduce yourself. Tell the group a little bit about where you live in Naugatuck. Did you come to live there by choice or by chance?
2. When you think of your "community," or "the community of Naugatuck" what comes to mind?
3. What makes you feel connected to Naugatuck? Can you tell a story about a time when you did not feel connected to Naugatuck?
4. What brings you here today?
5. What are your hopes for this effort?

Part Three: How do you see the diver in Naugatuck affecting you and your family? 20 minutes

1. What kind of changes are you aware of that have occurred over the years in Naugatuck with regards to diversity?
2. How does your own experience with diversity affect your views and attitudes about the community?
3. Why do you think it is important to talk about these changes in Naugatuck ?
4. What worries you the most about more diversity in Naugatuck?

Wrap-Up 5 minutes

1. What did you learn in this session?
2. What stories touched you or surprised you?
3. What do you hope we can accomplish together?

Session Two

Thinking About Diversity In Our Community

45 minutes

Introduction

In Session One, we talked about our personal connection to the community of Naugatuck. In this session, we will talk about what diversity looks like in our community. We will also discuss a range of views to help us explore what becoming a more diverse community means to Naugatuck. This will help us develop action ideas in later sessions.

Facilitator tip: Post the notes from Session One and quickly sum up the main ideas from that discussion.

Part One: Exploring Naugatuck's Diversity

40 minutes

Naugatuck is a changing community. Different kinds of people call this place home or work here. People have different ideas about what it means when a community like ours becomes more diverse than it was before. One view cannot tell the whole story. We may agree with each other on some points, and disagree on others. That is OK.

Each view stated here is in the voice of a person who thinks that their view is a very important idea. As you read the views, think about these questions.

- Which views come closest to your own way of thinking? Why?
- Is there a view you would like to add?
- Do some of these views surprise you?
- Is there anything that you don't agree with?
- What issues and challenges might community members who are not in this discussion identify?

Views

1. **People need to feel that their voices are being heard.**

We should empower people who have been excluded in the past. You can't create a strong sense of community if some people feel that they're not being treated fairly. People need to feel that their voices are being heard, whether they are renters or homeowners, young people or senior citizens, Latinos or Asians or African-Americans or whites. We must make sure that the leadership of the neighborhood reflects the diversity of the people who live here. And we should make every effort to see that every group of people has a say in the important decisions.

2. Create projects where different kinds of people can work together toward common goals.

We should create projects where different kinds of people can work together toward common goals. The best way to unify people is to get them working together on community projects. When they are working toward a common goal, people will begin to understand each other and try harder to get along. We need to find projects that appeal to all parts of the neighborhood, like building a playground, planting a community garden, or creating a new activity for young people. When we cooperate on things that concern all of us, we are doing the kind of work that builds a feeling of community.

3. We should encourage people to take pride in their own cultures and identities.

It is natural and okay for us to spend most of our time with people in the neighborhood who are like us. People in the same racial, ethnic, or religious group enjoy the same things, and face the same problems, so it makes sense that we associate often with each other. There is no need for African-Americans, Latinos, gays and lesbians, and people from different religious traditions to blend in with other cultures. Belonging to these smaller groups within the community gives people a sense of pride, solidarity, and strength. We should encourage people to focus on their own traditions and culture.

4. We should insist on a basic level of respect and courtesy from everyone.

Good fences make good neighbors. We should be polite and friendly to our neighbors. At the same time, we should respect one another's privacy. We should avoid doing things that offend our neighbors, like playing loud music, honking our car horns, or letting our dogs run unleashed. People should say hello when they meet, and look out for children in the neighborhood, without intruding in one another's private lives. This kind of respect is the glue which holds neighborhoods together. Our differences shouldn't matter as long as we can get along.

5. We should give people a chance to talk about race and other differences.

We need to talk face-to-face about our differences. Prejudice on the basis of race, religion, or sexual orientation affects the way we behave toward one another, but we usually think this is too hard to talk about. We need to bring these feelings into the open in honest and respectful ways. We can start by bringing different kinds of people together at block parties and events that celebrate the diversity of the

neighborhood. Discussions that help people work through race and other differences are even better. Once people begin to understand one another, they usually find out that they have a lot in common.

6. Our country has always been a melting pot. We shouldn't pay too much attention to what particular groups want.

Our nation is made up of people from different backgrounds who give up some of their difference to *become* American. They do everything they can to fit in. We have always been a nation of immigrants. What makes the United States great is that people have come here in search of equality, freedom, opportunity, and individual rights. Americans are not supposed to care about people's different physical traits or backgrounds. Really, we shouldn't pay too much attention to particular groups and what they want. I think we should forget about things like multicultural history. Instead, we should promote and learn about traditional values that made America what it is today.

7. Diversity is a politically correct word; it gives special status to people of different backgrounds.

Diversity is a politically correct word; it gives special status to people of different races, to women, to people with disabilities and to LGBT people. That's not right. I worry that, in the name of diversity, people are lowering their standards. America is about people working hard enough to succeed. Human beings should be judged based on how they perform, on merit. I should be able to decide who to spend time with, and who to hire or fire. And I'll base my choices on what people are inside- on their values, their character, that kind of thing- not on what they are on the outside or on the claims they make.

8. The ideal America is one of shared values and commitment, although we're not there yet.

The ideal America is one of shared values and commitment that can build on cultural differences. Coming together as a country is a long-term healing process, and it requires learning about all cultures that make up our nation. I want my kids to learn about different cultures as part of the American experience. For that to happen, we will have to discuss and compare our experiences honestly. Of course we'll disagree on some things, but we'll probably find out we're committed to a core set of values- freedom, equality, and democracy. And we must incorporate our new accounts into the larger story of our nation, instead of treating them as exotic alternative histories.

Wrap-Up 5 minutes

Turn to your neighbor. Discuss the following:

- How did this session go?
- What views do we agree about? What are things we disagree about?
- What themes keep coming up in our discussion?

Session Three: Thinking about the Future of Naugatuck: Moving From Conversation To Action. What Can We Do?

80 minutes

Introduction

In this session, we will move to action. First, we will look at the assets we have; next, we will brainstorm action ideas; we will then connect our action ideas with our assets; and, finally, we will set priorities for action.

Facilitator tip: Post the notes from Session Three and quickly sum up the main ideas from that discussion.

Part One: Community Assets Brainstorm 20 minutes

Every town or city has strengths or assets. Assets can be people, places, or organizations. Whatever makes our community a better place is an asset.

"Brainstorming" is a creative way for a group to come up with lots of ideas in a short amount of time. Build on one another's ideas. All ideas are OK. Don't stop to discuss or judge them. The facilitator will write down every idea. Use these headings as a guide:

COMMUNITY ASSETS				
People	Places	Institutions/ Organizations	Funding Sources	Other

Use these questions to help people start the brainstorm:

1. Who has talents and skills that they might offer?
2. What groups in the community can help us out?
3. What sources of funding do we have in our community?
4. What groups do you belong to? How can they help?
5. Can you think of anything else?

Part Two: Brainstorm Action Ideas **25 minutes**

Think about the different ideas we have spoken about today. Try to come up with specific actions that fit with these ideas and views. How many different ideas can we come up with?

Make a list of action ideas in the following categories:

- Things that you can do on your own
- Things you can do with other small groups of people
- New partnerships, collaborations, or projects
- New policies
- Institutional change

Part Three: Connect Action Ideas with Assets **20 minutes**

Post list of action ideas beside the assets, and talk about which ones can be linked. Keep these connections in mind as we prioritize our action ideas.

Part Four: Set Priorities for Action **15 minutes**

Look at our list of ideas for action. Now we are going to narrow it down to a few ideas to take to the action forum where people from all the discussion groups will meet to share their ideas.

These questions will help you set priorities for action:

- Which ideas are easiest to get done?
- Who would work with us on these ideas?
- Which ideas might do the most good?
- Which ideas might have a long-term impact?

As a group, choose two ideas that are important and doable. Then, consider the following questions:

- What would it take to make this happen?
- What community assets could we use to move this idea forward?
- What kind of support do we need to take these steps? Who else could we link up with?
- How do we begin?

Write the top two ideas on a flip chart labeled Priority Action Ideas. Someone should volunteer to be the leader for each action idea. They will be responsible for setting up the first meeting for the team of people that chooses to support that action idea.

The group will choose someone to present their top two ideas at the action forum.

Action Forum 40 minutes

Community conversation like the one we experienced today can lead to action in many ways. One way to do this is through an Action Forum. Now we will all meet together in one big group to talk about the action ideas each circle has identified.

To move these ideas forward, people can form action groups or task forces. Some people may join these action groups. Some may choose to help in other ways.

Part One: Reports From the Dialogues 25 minutes

- A representative from each circle speaks for a few minutes about that circle's top two action ideas.
- Be sure to include vision and community assets.

Part Two: Moving to Action 10 minutes

- Moderator identifies the most common themes for action from all dialogues, and invites participants to sign up for an action group or task force.
- People choose action groups, and sign up.
- Leader for each action group collects names and sets a date for the first meeting.

Part Three: Closing remarks 5 minutes

- How will the action efforts will be tracked and tied to further organizing?
- Next steps: including plans for another round of dialogues and action team planning.

ABOUT THE NAUGATUCK CULTURAL COUNCIL:

The Naugatuck Cultural Council seeks to recognize and celebrate the numerous heritages that comprise the American Experience in the Borough of Naugatuck. The Council seeks to promote equal opportunity and better government, education, economic development and quality of life for all Naugatuck residents.

The Naugatuck Cultural Council is an open committee which allows anyone interested to participate. We are currently attempting to identify stakeholders from new and emerging populations in Naugatuck to welcome to the Council. If you or someone you know are interested, please contact us by email at bob@bobmezzo.com.

ABOUT EVERYDAY DEMOCRACY:

A national leader in the field of civic participation and community change, Everyday Democracy helps people of different backgrounds and views talk and work together to solve problems and create communities that work for everyone.

Using innovative, participatory approaches, Everyday Democracy works with neighborhoods, cities and towns, regions, and states. We place particular emphasis on the connection between complex public issues and structural racism. Issues addressed include: poverty and economic development; education reform; racial equity; early childhood development; police-community relations; youth and neighborhood concerns.

Everyday Democracy was created as the Study Circles Resource Center in 1989 by The Paul J. Aicher Foundation, a national, nonpartisan, nonprofit organization. Since 1989, we have worked with more than 600 communities across the United States.