



# The Conversation Guide

## A Guide to Help You Host *The Big Table* Conversation

*Connect Knox* is a community-centered initiative that connects people who have ideas and energies to invest in our community with others who are equally passionate about making big, new ideas happen.

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### GUIDING YOUR CONVERSATION

We hope *The Big Table* generates open, thoughtful conversations that will spark new relationships and new ways for working together by deepening our understanding of each other and what the community needs. *Emphasis is not on defining issues and finding immediate solutions, but rather on creating authentic human connection through conversation.*

#### How can we work together to build a better community?

We know that there's no single way to get there. It will take the involvement of individuals, families, businesses, governments, and nonprofits. All ideas are welcome, and all voices will be heard.

This conversation can focus on any topic. We recommend *against* choosing the topic for your conversation. While you may put together a group that quickly and naturally settle on a shared interest, it is best if the topic develops organically as the group shares their voices. The conversation should be open and natural, which may mean multiple topics are discussed.

**Below are a few tips on how to get started.**

#### ORGANIZING THE CONVERSATION

1. Introduce yourself. Share your name, background, and why you decided to be a host for *The Big Table*. Perhaps add a quick fun fact about yourself to further break the ice.
2. Invite your guests to introduce themselves and talk about what brings them to the table. Ask them to share a similar fun fact.
3. Urge guests to stay focused during the conversation. Ask them to put their cell phones and other distractions away until the conversation has ended.
4. Encourage guests to share their thoughts about the community and their ideas for working together to make the community better.

## **GETTING THE MOST OF YOUR CONVERSATION**

1. The fundamental question – how can we work together to build a better community? – is intentionally left open-ended. Think creatively and productively. Encourage guests to reflect on possibilities rather than dwell on already identified challenges.
2. Warm up the guests. Consider asking guests to identify their favorite thing about our community. Or, perhaps you may ask the guests to share what they'd most like to change. This helps everyone get into the conversation while providing focus.
3. Consider the conversation as a journey where the process is as important as the destination. Be willing and prepared to take detours along the way. Help your guests reflect on what they value most and consider the choices and tradeoffs related to their ideas.
4. It is important to remind guests that conversations are as much about listening as they are about talking. Make sure all ideas are invited and all voices are heard.

## **CONVERSATION PROMPTS**

For your reference, we've compiled a list of prompts that you may want to use to kick off and guide your conversations. You do not have to use these. They are simply ideas that may help you steer your group in a productive direction.

1. What brought you to the table?
2. What are the best things about our community and how can we use them to build a strong and connected community?
3. What can we do to spread more kindness in our community?
4. What would you like to learn from the others in this conversation?
5. What commitment can we make, big or small, to better our community?
6. Share one important thing we've accomplished here. What is the one next step you would like to take, either individually or collectively, based on our conversation?

## **QUICK TIPS FOR YOUR CONVERSATION**

### **DO:**

- Host the event at a comfortable, inviting place where all guests feel welcome.
- Encourage everyone to participate by talking, listening, and learning from each other.
- Promote creative and productive dialogue, rather than focus on negativity.
- Invite guests to expand on their ideas.
- Take notes and encourage others to do the same.
- Share your ideas, photos, and topics on social media using #TheBigTableKnoxville.
- Exchange contact information so your group can keep in touch in the future.

### **DON'T:**

- Demand that your group focus on a topic that you chose ahead of time; be open to what your guests think is most important to discuss.
- Micromanage the conversation; let it flow freely.
- Be judgmental or dismissive of any person's comments or ideas.
- Promote complaints, arguments, or unproductive debates; these conversations should not dwell on what is wrong but rather what will make us better.
- Be afraid to ask questions.
- Be nervous; conversations should be casual, comfortable, and fun.
- Stop sharing when your conversation ends; keep discussing your ideas with colleagues, friends, and neighbors, or on social media using #TheBigTableKnoxville.

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### **AFTER THE CONVERSATION**

In today's world, coming together has never been more important. We hope *The Big Table* conversation connects you, your guests, and our larger community in a new way. Talking and listening to each other is an important first step toward creating a better community.

As a host, it is critical that you share your feedback about *The Big Table* conversation. Please take notes during your conversation and share your thoughts afterwards. After *The Big Table* has ended, you will receive a brief survey from Connect Knox to assist you in providing your feedback. Please make every effort to respond to this survey in a timely manner. Additionally, feel free to share any additional information not requested by the survey via email to [info@connectknox.com](mailto:info@connectknox.com).

Before your guests leave, please encourage them to participate in a brief survey about their *The Big Table* experience. This toolkit includes a Guest List that you can use to capture your guests' contact information and then distribute the survey to them. You will be provided the survey link to share with those guests who are willing to participate. Or, if your guests are willing to share their email addresses with Connect Knox, we will be happy to forward the survey to them on your behalf. Please send their email addresses or a copy of the Guest list to [info@connectknox.com](mailto:info@connectknox.com).

Honest feedback from you and your guests about *The Big Table* will not only inform the Connect Knox initiative on the priorities and ideas of the community but will also be shared with our partners as we work toward a better community.

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## KEEP IN TOUCH

We hope *The Big Table* is only a starting point in sparking conversations, and that you and your guests continue to talk and listen to each other about how to make our community better. Please don't forget to thank your guests for participating in *The Big Table*. By talking, listening, and learning from each other, they are giving our community a great gift. We also encourage you to stay in contact with your guests and continue the conversations by setting up additional get-togethers or talking with others who may be interested in the ideas your group shares. This is a day focused on community-building but *The Big Table* is always open for conversation and connections.

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## ABOUT CONNECT KNOX

*Connect Knox* is a community-centered initiative that connects people who have ideas and energies to invest in our community with others who are equally passionate about making big, new ideas happen.

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## QUESTIONS?

Contact us at [info@connectknox.com](mailto:info@connectknox.com) or visit [www.connectknox.com/the-big-table](http://www.connectknox.com/the-big-table).