

# ENGAGING COMMUNITY VOICES

## FACILITATOR PLAYBOOK



 **PRICHARD COMMITTEE  
FOR ACADEMIC EXCELLENCE**

STUDY • INFORM • ENGAGE

**THE GROUNDWELL INITIATIVE**

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# INTRODUCTION

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Building local voices to advocate for public education, explore solutions to achievement gaps, and promote higher achievement at all levels will require deeper and sustained local engagement efforts. A key step in that process is for citizens to become more informed about student outcomes in local schools, along with other key data, and launch conversations about how to reach more students - in schools and outside classrooms and beyond the school day or school year.

To support citizen engagement through community conversation, the Prichard Committee is publishing new Community Profiles to put local data on educational progress directly in the hands of Kentucky citizens. Profiles are tailored by school district and available from the Prichard Committee to help parents, school leaders, and others initiate community conversations about areas that need increased focus.

The four-page profiles show how a local school district compares to state averages on a number of education measures, starting with kindergarten readiness and continuing through transition-readiness and postsecondary attainment. In addition, charts show the same data broken down by different student groups, helping to illustrate achievement gaps and trends over time. Finally, the profiles also highlight economic and health outcomes that are closely connected to education outcomes, as well as school expenditures and demographics.

Taken together, the Profiles provide a clear picture of educational, health, and economic performance at the local level. We hope this helps local Community Conversations identify education progress and priorities, which will lead to an improved quality of life for all.

# STARTING WITH *WHY*: PREPARING FOR THE COMMUNITY CONVERSATION



*The shift from good to great will require deep and sustained local engagement.*

**BRIGITTE BLOM RAMSEY**  
*EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR*  
*PRICHARD COMMITTEE FOR ACADEMIC EXCELLENCE*

The Community Profiles and Community Conversations effort is one piece of a larger community engagement effort on the part of the Prichard Committee for Academic Excellence. It is important to start this work by thinking about the why: Why should communities engage in conversations about education, health, and economic outcomes? What benefits might they realize as a result of these conversations?

It is our expectation that robust, well-planned community engagement of this nature can result in:

- Coordinated community response to increase student success.
- Greater public understanding of education issues and local priorities.
- Greater community commitment to equitable educational outcomes.
- Greater community ownership and investment in public schools.
- A common vision and shared commitment to pursue agreed upon action steps.
- Greater accountability for public funds.
- Increased quality of life for your community.

With these outcomes in mind we have developed this Facilitator Playbook to help interested community leaders, like you, prepare and execute your own community conversations about the Community Profile for your county or region.

## What does this Facilitator Playbook offer?

The Community Profiles Facilitator Playbook lays out an inquiry method you can use to talk with community members about your Community Profile. However, this is your conversation. Feel free to improvise or make any adjustments necessary to ensure a successful conversation within your community.

# PLANNING FOR COMMUNITY CONVERSATIONS

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Structured community conversations provide the opportunity for participants to discuss and weigh in on issues that matter to you and your community. When done well, the process can result in greater clarity about the issues at hand and potential solutions to seemingly intractable problems. Some practical considerations when designing community conversations about your Community Profile might include:

- Establishing an Organizational Team to meet and develop initial plans for your first Community Conversation session.
- As you plan, you and your team should spend time thinking about your expectations for the experience. What would a successful Community Conversation look like for you? What do you want your participants to know and do as a result of the Conversation? Our hope would be that each community will establish one viable action step as a result of your Conversation. What that step is will be up to you and your participants to decide together. This process is entirely community-owned and community-driven.
- Being inclusive when recruiting participants. Actively recruiting participants who reflect the community's diversity in ethnicity, culture, perspectives, gender, and age results in a richer dialogue.
- Identifying a meeting date, time, and location that will allow for the generation of new ideas and spirited debate about issues highlighted by the Community Profile.
- Establishing clear roles and responsibilities for participants, including the designation of a facilitator who has worked through this Playbook (in advance of the meeting) and a recorder who will take notes for the group.
- Using the Question Formulation Technique (QFT) as described in this Facilitator Guide, Section VI, as the foundation for inquiry and engagement.

## Consider...

- What would a successful Community Conversation look like to our community?
- What do I want my participants to know and do as a result of the conversation?
- How can we ensure that diverse voices from the community are included and invited?
- When is the best time, and where is the best location, to have this conversation?

# RECRUITING PARTICIPANTS & IDENTIFYING A LOCATION

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The members of your Community Conversation may range from multiple community stakeholders representing different constituencies to more specific groups such as business leaders, civic groups, educators, or community leaders. We recommend that organizers:

- Strive for diversity in opinion, ethnicity, race, gender, and age that reflects the makeup of your community.
- Avoid inviting only the usual suspects; instead, ask your planning team to reach out to members of the faith-based community, school family resource/youth service center (FRYSC) personnel, families of school-aged children, and other parties who have a vested interest in the children and youth of your community.
- Start recruitment efforts early.
- Make personal contact, if possible, when inviting participants. The planning team might want to think about dividing up the list and each member contacting those invitees they know best.



An inviting and easily accessible location sets the right tone for your Community Conversation. Consider more relaxed locations where participants will be comfortable and are less likely to feel intimidated. Good options might include a conference room in a library or community center, a large room at a neighborhood restaurant, or a meeting space at a local school or business.

The room setup should include a focal point to welcome participants, wall space for flip chart notes and plenty of room for participants to sit comfortably in smaller table groups. The Facilitator should also come prepared with the QFT materials including chart paper and markers.

# DOCUMENT THE CONVERSATION

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Designate a recorder who will capture the essence of the Conversation including:

- A list of participants, their email addresses, and the groups they represent, e.g., business, education, community leaders.
- Your “top priority” questions generated from the QFT process.
- A summary of key themes you discussed.
- Agreed upon action step(s).
- Concerns and/or powerful quotes from participants.

We also recommend that the facilitator and/or recorder send a brief follow-up note to all participants, thanking them for their participation and including a short reminder of the bulleted list above.

We would love for you to share the outcome of your conversation. The Prichard Committee would love to lift and elevate your Community's story and be a resource as you move to your next step. Put your community on the map.

## Key Elements of a Community Conversation

- Strive for diversity in opinion, ethnicity, race, gender, and age that reflects the makeup of your community.
- Start recruitment efforts early.
- Consider relaxed locations where participants will be comfortable.
- Have extra copies (digital and paper) of the Community Profile available for guests.
- Make sure that someone records the Conversation.
- Follow up with participants and include a thank you with agreed upon action steps.

# ASKING THE RIGHT QUESTION

## *THE QUESTION FORMULATION TECHNIQUE*

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The Question Formulation Technique (QFT) is a simple, yet robust step-by-step process, developed and made available by the Right Question Institute, that can help everyone improve their ability to formulate, work with, and use their own questions. The following procedure was adapted specifically for use with the Community Conversations. By learning to ask better questions, communities can more effectively support education progress and identify priorities to improve the quality of life for an entire community. For access to complete QFT resources and more information about the work of the Right Question Institute, please visit their website at [www.rightquestion.org](http://www.rightquestion.org).

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### Strengths and Benefits of Using the QFT

- Easy to learn and use
- Clarify specific information
- Allow participants to feel ownership of the conversation agenda
- Helps participants identify and address what they would still like to know
- Clarifies clear action steps

### What You Need to Facilitate the QFT with the Community

- 45 to 60 minutes
- Large chart paper
- Markers
- Paper for individuals to write questions
- Pens/pencils
- Sticker dots (to help determine priority questions, optional)



# QFT FACILITATOR'S INSTRUCTIONS

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## **Purpose:**

To engage Community Groups with their own Community Profiles that will yield a local plan to spark individual and collective action

## **Set up:**

Participants should be divided into groups of 4 to 6, depending on the number of participants at the event.

## **Phase I:**

Timing for each Phase is completely up to the group. Don't feel that you have to rush it. This phase will typically last 10 to 15 minutes.

In this first phase, welcome participants and make them aware you will be working together in a new way for the first few minutes of your meeting. Participants will each receive a copy of your Community Profile and spend time reviewing and thinking about their Community Profile. Session Facilitator will ask participants to consider the following questions, using a Think-Pair-Share model:

- 1 *What information on your Profile surprises you the most? Why?*
- 2 *What thrills you about the information on the Profile? Why?*
- 3 *What challenges you about the information on the Profile? Why?*

**Think:** Have participants "think" about the questions silently for a few minutes.

**Pair:** Each participant should discuss their thoughts with a partner in a couple of minutes.

**Share:** Participants should share their thinking in a whole-group discussion.

## **Don't forget to...**

- Have people introduce themselves at the beginning
- Ensure that each person has a copy of the Community Profile
- Establish who is *facilitating* and who is *recording* the conversation

# QFT FACILITATOR'S INSTRUCTIONS

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## **Phase II:**

### **1. Present the Question Focus.**

A Question Focus (QFocus) is brief statement, a problem or concern that serves as a “focus” to jumpstart the production of questions. For the purpose of these Community Conversations, we recommend that your QFocus be the Community Profile itself. Your Community Profile provides the basis for the questions that will be developed during your time together.

### **2. Introduce the rules for producing questions.**

Ask as many questions as you can about Your Community Profile.

Do not stop to try to answer or judge the questions.

Write each question exactly as it comes to mind.

Change any thoughts or statements into questions.

### **3. Produce questions.**

At this point, instruct participants to write as many questions as possible about the QFocus (Your Community Profile), to follow the rules, and number the questions. This is done individually.

### **4. Improve questions.**

The facilitator will now help participants analyze their questions. Have each individual take a moment to reflect upon their initial list of questions. Consider which ones are closed questions and which ones are open-ended questions, as each type of question produces different answers.

Also, consider grouping together questions that have a similar focus. For example, questions related to equity and achievement gaps might be grouped together.

# QFT FACILITATOR'S INSTRUCTIONS

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## **Phase II:**

### **5. Prioritize questions.**

Instruct participants to review their lists and choose three priority questions they want to know about your QFocus, marking them with an X. Be prepared to share the reasons why you chose those three.

### **6. Share priority questions.**

The recorder will capture the questions on the chart paper. If a participant's question is already on the list, there is no need to record it a second time.

### **7. Select group priority questions.**

After the group shares their individual priority questions, have a discussion which 3 to 5 questions are the most important. If it is easier for the group, you can have each person vote for 3 questions to see which are most valued by the group.

*(Optional for Conversations involving multiple small groups)*

Have all small groups share out their top 3 to 5 questions. The facilitator can then help guide an entire group vote (using the sticker dots) to determine the 3 to 5 questions that will be the focus of future action steps.

# QFT FACILITATOR'S INSTRUCTIONS

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## **Phase II:**

### **8. Strategizing next steps.**

Using the QFT as an inquiry method does not yield a set of “answers;” instead, it is the process that causes participants to better frame and understand the challenges uncovered in your Community Profile. It is up to the group to determine what you might do with the questions you have chosen as your priority questions.

Work with participants to develop a plan on what to do with the questions:

*What other information might they need?*

*How will they go about getting it?*

*Who might help find the answers to the questions?*

*What actions should be taken to continue forward progress?*

The recorder should capture the group’s plans on a chart paper to inform next steps in the process.

### **9. Reflections.**

As you bring your meeting to a close, ask participants to reflect upon what they learned and how they plan to use it.

# REFERENCE

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The Engaging Community Voices Facilitator Playbook represents a continuation of the Prichard Committee's commitment to increasing community engagement to impact education quality and student success. The Playbook provides guidance for carrying out highly effective community conversations based on local Community Profiles in support of Kentucky public schools.

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The Right Question Institute - [www.rightquestion.org](http://www.rightquestion.org)