

# The How and Why of a Knowledge Exchange Event



## Why:

The purpose of a knowledge exchange is for community members and organizations/ institutions to learn about each other's realities/perspectives on a given subject. It can be used to make sense of data, to explore a topic together or as a foundation for co-creating a complex project. The key to a successful knowledge exchange is to surface understanding of your topic from multiple perspectives, all of which are honoured with equal importance.

Knowledge exchange is often confused with other forms of gathering; while the event may look remarkably similar, the difference is the purpose. Examples of other similar events with different purposes are:

<b>Town Hall</b>	Purpose: for community members to ask questions of people in positions of formal authority
<b>Focus Group</b>	Purpose: for community members to provide their thoughts to researchers on a given subject
<b>Community Speak</b>	Purpose: for community members to work together to explore issues and solutions.

## How:

Knowledge exchanges can take various shapes and forms. The following are some ideas that can be adopted and adapted to your own context.

### Participants:

- The number of participants will depend on who you want to better understand each other. They can be small (10-20 people) or large (100+).
- Critically there should be a balance between the various constituent groups (for example a balance between residents, organizational representatives, institutional representatives etc)



## Prepping for a knowledge exchange

- Be clear about the purpose of the knowledge exchange and articulate that purpose to each of your constituent groups in ways that will make sense for them
- One of the challenges with knowledge exchange is that the paid professionals in the group will be tempted to make it about imparting their expert knowledge to residents. Your facilitation will be required to make sure that the knowledge of residents, as experts of their own context, is every bit as valued.
- Special effort should be placed on making sure that people who are often on the margins at formal events (for example, Indigenous, Black, people of colour) are honoured for their wisdom and ways of knowing, especially because it can be different from what people in formalized positions of power might be used to or comfortable with.

## Venue:

- Knowledge exchanges can be held physically or virtually. While physical locations allow for lots of creativity and movement, virtual knowledge exchanges may be more accessible.
- Whatever venue you choose, you will need to have the capacity for people to sit together in small groups
- There is usually a short presentation involved in a knowledge exchange, so it is important that the facilitator can be heard. Depending on the size of the venue, you might want to consider a microphone.
- The venue can be anywhere from a church hall to an event venue. Wherever the venue, it should be set up in such a way that people feel that they are participating in something special.

- To adapt to a virtual format, make sure that you keep the original intent in mind, using mostly small groups and jamboards rather than bigger format discussions.
- You can also host your event in two or more parts. In one example where a knowledge exchange was exploring opportunities for a network to address racism, small virtual groups were convened virtually to explore what was already being done in this space prior to a larger (80 person) in person event.

## Format:

A knowledge exchange can be anywhere from 2–6 hours long depending on the depth of understanding you are trying to achieve. Like with so many Connected Communities processes, there is a light, medium and heavy version:

**Light:** likely focusing on sense making of specific data from multiple perspectives (what)

**Medium:** like light with additional emphasis on the implications for community building (what, so what)

**Heavy:** exploring various perspectives on a systemic issue, digging deeply into the implications for community building and making recommendations for a collective solution (what, so what, what now)

However long your knowledge exchange is, the idea is to make it fun and engaging and to help the participants to explore multiple ways of knowing and understanding your topic.

There are many creative ways to help people to understand each other's perspectives on a given topic. Here are some ideas and examples:

- Have your small groups work through some kind of puzzle together. For example in a workforce development knowledge exchange, pieces of an employment pathway were put on the table and the group were asked to put it together in a way they thought it would work.
- Have people tell each other stories about their involvement in finding solutions to a similar problem. For example, in a climate action knowledge exchange dealing with extreme heat, people were asked to talk about what they did during the last heat wave.
- Use infographics to illustrate a specific point from research and ask people to tell each other stories of what this data means to them. For example in a knowledge exchange about youth leadership, people were given data about youth access to services and each told their own story about their experiences with services delivery (provider, funder, participant etc).
- Put people in the same or similar constituent group in a group together and ask them to document and present to the larger group 3 things that they think the larger group should know about their reality. This is an especially powerful approach when the knowledge exchange is intended to lead to a co-designed cross sector strategy.

- Use a giant sheet of paper or whiteboard and have people physically draw lines between themselves and the people they know (you can use different colours to track how well people know each other – see network mapping resources for ideas on how to do this)

### Follow up:

The purpose of a Knowledge Exchange is for people to learn about an issue or idea from multiple different perspectives. It can be used effectively to lay the groundwork for complex project co-design. Whatever the topic, whatever the format, honouring people and their contributions to community building should be at the core.

Following up with participants is an important way to honour their participation and to lay the groundwork for whatever is next. Follow up can include:

- Thank you notes
- Summarized (easily accessible) learnings from the event
- Information about what you, as convener plan to do with the learnings
- Opportunities to continue the discussion, help co-create a project or have more involvement/input on the project.