

Vital Conversations

Report on The Vital Conversation

Appendix 2: Participant Evaluations

Evaluation Request: The Five Questions

Three days after the event, an evaluation request emailed to all participants. It asked these five questions:

1. Was the Vital Conversation worthwhile for you personally?
2. If more conversations were to be organized, would you recommend them to others? Would you want to attend?
3. What could have been done differently to make the morning better for you?
4. Was there anything you would have liked to say but didn't get the opportunity?
5. Any other general comments?

About 50% of participants replied to the request. Their comments are discussed and sampled below.

1. Was the Vital Conversation worthwhile for you personally?

The answer, universally, is "yes". Many added highly enthusiastic comments, expressing appreciation for the opportunity to be involved in a "respectful, well-designed dialogue about community priorities," as one respondent put it.

Others praised the diversity among the participants and the chance to talk to people outside one's usual circles. Some said they were uplifted by the positive tone. Of note for future event planning, one participant praised the food provided and found it symbolic of the healthy, caring community we were gathered to talk about.

Here are some responses to Question 1. (Excerpts have been edited for length.)

- People felt HEARD.
- Encouraging to see so many people engaged in positive, solution-finding conversations.
- The younger people whom I listened to reminded me there is more than one way to look at any situation.
- You invited people with a wide variety of opinions and experiences, but not, it seems, the most strident and intractable people who usually succeed in drowning out discussion.

- Inspiring, and made me hopeful that we can move forward on some vital issues.

2. If more conversations were to be organized, would you recommend them to others? Would you want to attend?

All evaluators said “Yes.” Comments were, once again, almost totally positive. (One evaluator commented that none of the ideas presented were new.) Respondents tended to emphasize that future Vital Conversations should be as diverse, and should lead to action. Three respondents felt the group was not sufficiently diverse, lacking in youth, young people with families, and seniors.

3. What could have be done differently to make the morning better for you?

Most evaluators did not suggest changes. Several, however, reported problems with the noise level and/or pace of the event, Surrounded by eight other table conversations at full throttle, they often struggled to hear and/or keep up. But many others praised the speed as “refreshing and stimulating”. Specific improvement suggestions include: more youth and young adult participation, better note-taking strategies, more opportunities to “network” — and water glasses and pitchers to reduce waste.

These comments are representative of those received:

- Great to move quickly and accomplish what we did in just over 3 hours.
- I felt pressured... and had trouble hearing some of the discussion.
- The facilitators were a little uneven in their ability to listen and accurately paraphrase what was said.
- Our conversations may have been even more fruitful if we had had a broader cross-section of islanders attending.
- I quite liked being kept on task.

4. Was there anything you would have liked to say but didn't get the opportunity? Please tell us.

Respondents offered commentary on a variety of topics; for example:

- While I understand the reasons [for making the conversation apolitical] ... I don't think that should have precluded some discussion of the political context when that context is absolutely relevant to potential solutions.
- A community centre could be a very important achievement but some of the reasoning did not sit well with me. For example, it is likely that only the people who participate in events or organized programs ... will benefit and therefore it would not be an obvious

gathering place for just socializing and connecting... So I am cautious about the reasoning behind the “gathering place.

- I was somewhat alarmed by the lack of knowledge of some recent island initiatives; for example, there was a considerable discussion about transportation but no mention of the LIFT program.
- I'm quite content with living on Bowen. We connect with different groups so don't particularly need a gathering place. And everyone loves coming here — they don't mention the weathered/worn entrance to Snug Cove. They love the forest, friendly people, wonderful cafes and shops, incredible views and ferry ride. At the same time, I support a Seniors Aging in Place initiative, more access for kids to BICS gym, and building a Health Care Centre.
- I hope you (BICF) are able to continue the conversation and become the Island expert on consensus decision-making, as was suggested.
- Individuals are possibly unaware of how to move a project forward in a community. I wonder if that is why we become polarized and stuck, unable to make things happen. ... A workshop on community development might give residents skills to move ideas forward and decrease polarization.
- The environment on Bowen needs to be addressed in a formal way. Many meetings went into the park development, let's look at the notes as a beginning to protect the island that we love. Bowen is rudderless when it comes to the environment, yet it is why we are all living here. And we need to support the Howe sound ecosystem.
- We need to help this community move forward with what they have identified and find a way to actually achieve some of the goals/issues/problems identified.

5. General Comments

Responses were almost entirely thank-you's for the Vital Conversation. Many once again commented favourably on the event, its purpose and agenda, the “constructive” atmosphere, and how well it was conducted. Here is a sample:

- Thank you, it was brilliant. A great idea, well facilitated. Essential to repairing our split community.
- Having this be a half day is genius — a full day agenda packed into a 3-hour space.
- This morning's conversations have given me a sense of renewed hope for healing for all the various divisions and harsh polarizations.
- The process reminded me of the very first OCP - where we spent months on a topic and had a facilitator who guided us along and, although, it took us eight months to come to consensus, we did and felt good about it. Moving, shifting and consensus take time.