

Kitchen Table Conversations

*a guide for sustaining
our democratic culture*



by Mary Crooks AO and Leah McPherson

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**VICTORIAN
WOMEN'S TRUST**

We recognise the Australian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples of this nation as the traditional custodians of this land and its waterways. We acknowledge the privilege of conducting our work on these lands, where sovereignty was never ceded, and we pay our deepest respects to ancestors and Elders. We especially want to pay tribute to the might and resilience of Indigenous women, who have endured and persisted in the face of unimaginable difficulty. We hope that our work helps to ensure dignity and empowerment for the girls and women of the First Nations Peoples of Australia, who face very different challenges in the same society, as part of our commitment to all Australian women and girls.



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Foreword

In the 1990s I was an active supporter of the Victorian Women's Trust, admiring its work and appreciating, as a rural woman, the benefits of its outreach across the state.

The Trust's Purple Sage Project then pulled me closer, such was the exciting opportunity that Kitchen Table Conversations provided for people everywhere to become involved.

I was living overseas when the results of the 1999 state election reached me. It made me realise how pivotal the Purple Sage Project had been in reinvigorating democracy and enabling people to claim a much-needed voice. Having already spent eighteen years participating in building the rural women's movement in Australia, I knew the power of people-led action for change—democracy in action.

By the time the Trust's *Watermark* Australia project was designed in 2002, I was committed to its Kitchen Table Conversations model as a way of creating an opportunity to everyone, from all walks of life, to engage in discussing issues that were important to them in a safe, respectful and inclusive environment.

Water was becoming increasingly politicised and the idea of facilitating widespread water literacy and informed discussion gave me hope for the future. I had no hesitation in joining this important project on the ground.

It is not surprising then, having seen the model in action twice, that I was one of a small group of citizens in the super-safe federal electorate of Indi who came together in 2012 to do something about what we saw as an increasingly unaccountable political culture.



Much like the Purple Sage Project, the formation of what was to become known as Voices for Indi was an expression of action by the people for our times.

The overarching purpose was to rebuild the relationship between our political representatives and the people in order to create a new standard for politics in Australia. Logically, this led us to approach Mary Crooks, Executive Director of the Trust, to explore whether the Trust's Kitchen Table Conversations model could be adapted across an electorate. We met with her in October 2012, after which followed a six-month period of Mary working closely with us in adapting the Trust's model to our huge and sprawling federal electorate.

The subsequent engagement process, from November 2012 to May 2013, kicked off an amazing citizen-led democratic response. So much so that in the 2013 election, Indi defied the national trend by achieving a 9% swing against the sitting member, and resulted in the election, for the first time in a century, of an independent member of parliament. Six years later, in 2019, Indi made further political history as the first electorate to see a handover from one independent to another independent MP.

This is the potential and power of the Kitchen Table Conversations process—to provide an opportunity for ordinary folk to claim a rightful democratic voice regardless of their personal backgrounds and circumstances.

It is written that the Purple Sage story began in tumultuous times. It is almost as though history is repeating itself, as we witness an assault on our liberal democracy, a worrying drift in the quality of representation and an erosion of public trust in the institution of Parliament. It is not surprising that the idea of 'Kitchen Table Conversations' has now become part of the lexicon, increasingly used in communities and electorates.



But it is also important to appreciate that the strength and power of the Trust’s model has huge applicability beyond electorate matters. It is a great starting place when people want to bring people together; to support safe and serious dialogue on matters which are of interest or concern; and to build bases from which people can take action to improve their workplaces, organisations and communities.

I am so pleased that the Trust has now brought its experience and practice to bear in developing this guide for others.

It offers clear and valuable support for people everywhere to start their own constructive and purposeful applications.

Alana Johnson AM

Chair, Victorian Women’s Trust



Introduction

It was the winter of our discontent.

Late in 1996, I met my friends—Sandra Hart and Angela Munro—for lunch at a little café in Clifton Hill, The Red Sage Café, in Melbourne’s inner-north. Despite the Kennett government being re-elected for a second term, we sensed a groundswell of community unease across Victoria, which had gone largely unnoticed by a cheerleader media and a dispirited Opposition.

We vented our despair over lunch, concerned by Kennett’s attempted dismantling of democratic institutions, the closure of hundreds of public schools, the winding back of support for community services, and the warm embrace of a reckless privatisation agenda.

What were we to do?

We agreed to go away, think about possibilities for action, and reconvene in a few weeks.

I was running late for our follow-up lunch at the same café. Sandra and Angela were in discussion already, when I arrived waving around a job advertisement for the position of Executive Director of The Victorian Women’s Trust. My friends roared their approval. We knew that the Kennett agenda was impacting negatively on women, we knew that women had no voice of any substance in the government of the day. A position with the Victorian Women’s Trust would provide a platform for a much-needed citizen voice.

Having landed the job, I proceeded to draft a project proposal for the Board. With the working title of the Red Sage Project, the project’s centrepiece would be our kitchen table model for conversations.



Utilising women’s capacity for local leadership, we sought to bring as many people as possible into a serious dialogue about their interests, concerns, and ideas. We wanted people to explore, and feel empowered, to act within their communities, and as citizens, on issues they felt were critical. Conversations would take place around Victoria: in towns, hamlets, and suburbs. Our Board was very receptive and gave the green light to this new and exciting initiative.

We secured early support from two generous and passionate private women donors to cover the project costs. We knew using the colour red in the project name would open us up to all sorts of weird attacks by the Murdoch press, such as ‘reds under the beds.’ So, we settled on the colour purple instead. The play of purple, white and green gave us the colours of the suffragists—we thought this was a nice touch. And the herb sage was renowned, we were told, for warding off evil which seemed appropriate under the circumstances!

The Purple Sage Project: From the wisdom of the people, action for our times.

So much hard work went into the logistics of the project, much more than people would realise and too much to capture here.

In short, we created:

- A small, highly capable secretariat with Liz McAloon, Wayne Chamley, Klara Blazevic, Nicky Friedman, Anna Lottkowitz, Lerna Avakian and Trish Pinto
- A small pool of equally talented volunteers—Beryl Evans, Jacinda Forster Margaret James and Kate Kantor
- A Project Management Group
- Partnerships with five other respected organisations
- Several information sessions to let people know who we were, what we were on about, and to build trust and credibility in the process



Once this key project infrastructure was in place, we sent out an invitation to people to participate in our project, to come on board as group leaders and in doing so, commit to bringing a further eight or nine other people into the conversations. In the end, we secured the support of some 600 group leaders from around Victoria, which means approximately 6000 people participated in the process. Over one third of group leaders came from regional Victoria. Three quarters were female. Thirty-nine languages were listed as the main dialect spoken at home.

Each of these groups met at least twice in the process. In the first meeting, people identified their concerns, articulated their preferred vision for the future, and started to think about their power to act on issues of concern. Group leaders fed back reports from these meetings to the Project Management Group. Then, we held a series of brainstorming sessions to digest all the feedback. At this stage, we also drew on the voluntary assistance of many specialists, such as political scientists with expertise on democratic governance.

After everything was collated from the two sets of dialogue, we produced a final document in 2000, a few months after the Kennett Government lost the seemingly unlosable election in October 1999.

You can access the full document [here](#), or via vwt.org.au/projects/purple-sage

They called it the Purple Sage Project, an attempt to tap the inchoate unease they believed Victoria was experiencing about the Kennett Revolution. Directed by Ms Crooks, it was to become a massive exercise in participatory democracy ... While the Kennett Government scored on economic grounds, it appears to have been brought undone by the development of resistance to threats to communities, especially in the country.

- Paul Heinrichs, *Sunday Age*, 24 October 1999 p.12



The Purple Sage Project was implemented over a long and tiring couple of years, demanding a huge amount of creative imagination, hard work and determination from those of us closely involved. But it was worth every bit of effort for we knew we had created a model of extraordinary civic power.

It was not so long after that Liz, Wayne and I had a reflective conversation about this massive first experience of rolling out our Kitchen Table Conversations model. We ventured that if we (somewhat sadistically) wanted to run a similar process again, we wanted to put it to work on a specific issue, something deliberately complex because we knew the process had the capacity to handle it.

We asked ourselves what the issue would be. It was a no-brainer: water. From people's participation in the Purple Sage Project, it was clear to us that many sensed intuitively what the climate science was reporting. They were uneasy. So far, however, from government, there was limited synthesis, public policy coherence or broad-based understandings of what ought to be the best way forward.

We felt that bold, creative leadership was needed to bring about the deep cultural change to achieve necessary sustainable water and energy futures. New processes needed to successfully integrate scientific knowledge with community wisdom and policy interests.

This was the only way to provide a strong and democratic basis for responses in the medium to longer term. Without such a focus, public goodwill and capacity to act on climate change risked being squandered, leaving next generations short-changed.

And so off we went, aiming to apply the same Kitchen Table Conversations model to the question of water management and reform in Australia. No pressure!



Our water mark: Australians making a difference in water reform.

We designed and implemented the *Watermark* Australia project from 2001-2007. Initially, funding was provided by The Myer Foundation to enable us to develop the project in more detail: we conducted research, designed and planned the project logistics; and undertook an extensive and thorough environmental scan. In our view, private funding for this project was critical for ensuring independence from real or perceived government and/or business agendas.

The late Professor Peter Cullen refereed our project in 2002 to help secure private funds:

I have examined the proposal for the Watermark project with considerable excitement. There seems little chance of us moving forward to sustainable land and water management without raising the water literacy of the Australian community, and the Watermark project offers an innovative and exciting way of doing this. Governments come under a lot of pressure from various interests to give them special access to the public water resource. It is my belief that there is widespread public concern that some interests take much more of the water than is necessary, and cause degradation that diminishes the resource for the rest of us. Many in the community do not know much about where their water comes from, or where it goes once used, so they are not readily able to take part in public debates. This project offers a way of empowering large numbers in our community to take an interest and get engaged with the critical debates facing our nation on land and water management.



Over the next four years of the project's life, eight women donors contributed close to \$1.2 million to enable the process to be rolled out over most of Victoria and in many interstate locations.

The small and talented staff group—Wayne and Liz along with volunteers—repeated many of the same logistical processes as we had for the Purple Sage Project. We set up a Reference Group and established many project partners, including several from the water sector.

However, we did add some important elements to this new project. In the first instance, we commissioned a leading pollster, Irving Saulwick and Associates, to conduct a formal telephone poll exploring people's 'water literacy' so that we had a reference point on community perceptions and understandings. We also established, and supported, a group of twenty-two 'Champions' from all walks of life to help us spread the word and help in practical ways.

We established the technical and scientific integrity of our work by enlisting the pro bono assistance of four eminent land and water scientists: Professor Sam Lake, Professor John Langford, Emeritus Professor Nancy Millis, and Professor John Williams.

In a significant departure from the Purple Sage Project, we decided to do a 'mini' curriculum, requiring groups to meet on at least eight occasions. This enabled conversation groups ample time to focus on a range of content matters, including the values we attach to water, the national context, country and town relationships, the emerging crisis, water efficiency, key issues, and constitutional and institutional arrangements on water.

Our Kitchen Table Conversations model underpinned the process but this time we also used it to build a three-way collaboration between scientists, the project team and the several hundred group convenors who had brought many others into small discussion groups.



This three-way deliberative model is captured in the following diagram:



All three parts worked in a tight, symbiotic relationship. The small VWT project team undertook relevant background research on water use and management; designed session notes to support the small group 'kitchen table conversation' groups; and ensured all project logistics and resourcing were handled smoothly.

Our four distinguished land and water scientists ensured that session notes supplied to participants had scientific and technical integrity. They also assisted the *Watermark* team to process the material coming in from groups and merge it into the resulting public document, *Our Water Mark*. The final crucial component lay in the recruitment of several hundred small group leaders who responded to the call made by the project team through many community networks. These three crucial elements were successfully brought together in this project to form a powerful meld, something we felt was missing from so much of the public policy efforts around our nation.

The six years of research, dialogue processes and scientific validation created a high level of water literacy amongst participants which, in turn, resulted in a clear vision, national goal, guiding principles and a coherent set of actions on water for every level and sector of society.

The project culminated in the publication of *Our Water Mark: Australians making a Difference in Water Reform* (2007).

You can download a copy of this report [here](#), or via vwt.org.au/projects/watermark

Once again, with significant assistance from a private donor, we were able to produce 37,000 copies of the document free of charge which enabled us to share the report for maximum reach and impact.

By now, we had built a considerable appreciation of, and confidence in, the power of the VWT Kitchen Table Conversations model. We were in furious agreement with Jeffrey Stout when we read his book, *Blessed Are the Organised: Grassroots Democracy in America* (2010):

The imbalance of power between ordinary citizens and the new ruling class has reached crisis proportions. The crisis will not be resolved happily unless many more institutions and communities commit themselves to getting democratically organised and unless effective vehicles of accountability are constructed at many levels of social complexity.

The VWT model of community dialogue and action had made its mark. Others have followed, reaching out to us at the VWT for a chance to learn the model and adapt it to their own needs and particular set of social and political circumstances.



Different applications of our Kitchen Table Conversations Model.

In the many years since, we have taken up invitations (within limits on our time and energy!) to train and mentor people keen to apply a similar process.

The following applications of our model provide a good feel for the level and sphere of use, from a one-off application within the Carlton Football Club and an engagement process across the federal electorate of Indi:

- 2001** Listening and Learning in Goldstein (Kristen Stegley)
- 2007** CSIRO Energymark Program
- 2010** Federal seat of Indi (Voices for Indi)
- 2014** Latrobe Valley First (Shaun Murray)
- 2014** State seat of Richmond (Kathleen Maltzahn)
- 2014** ACT See-Change (Professor Bob Douglas)
- 2016** Carlton Listens to Women (Carlton Football Club)
- 2016** Good to Great Schools, Cape York
- 2017** Training session with staff, Good Shepherd Melbourne
- 2018** AFL Fans Association (Debbie Hall)
- 2019** Voices for Cowper (James Tonson)
- 2019** Early conversations with founding members of Voices for Boothby (Paul Manuel)
- 2021** Voices for the Hunter (Brynnie Goodwill)



The good news is that there are many, many people across the country who can, with the right intention, right values, and right behaviour, establish credible processes which build directly from VWT's formative experience, enabling them to run similar endeavours very successfully within their own domains.

We wish people well in doing so. Our hope is that this guide will help many others from now on.

In the face of corrosive forces which work against respect, civility, social cohesion and democratic culture, it is ever more critical that there are constant affirmations of the values and qualities which underpin our Kitchen Table Conversations model: trust, honesty, deep listening, the recognition of people's wisdom, working to people's best sides, being constructive, inclusive and providing safe places to come together and talk with one another in seeking a fair and equal world.

Mary Crooks AO

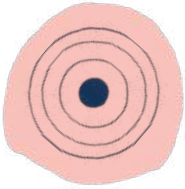
Executive Director,
Victorian Women's Trust



The KTC Model

Overview
of practical
steps.





1. Getting your Core Group together.

An engine house to power your process, clarify values and act as a single coherent group.



2. Identify your focus, tasks and timeline.

Clarify the focus for the conversations, plan the process, agree on timeframes and allocate tasks to specific people.



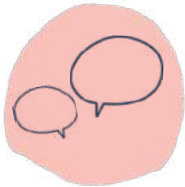
3. Craft your best communications.

Develop your essential communications which will invite people to come and join you.



4. Invite people to participate.

Run community information sessions where people learn more about your process. Your Core Group speaks with one voice and invites other people to join.



5. Conversations get underway.

Volunteer hosts bring together small groups of people for purposeful conversations. Ground rules and conversation starters are provided.



6. Processing conversation notes.

Your Core Group receives all conversation notes and processes them in accordance with three important principles: comprehensiveness, traceability and faithfulness.



7. Sharing what people said.

Your Core Group shares the summary report with all participants as well as others who you want to read the report.



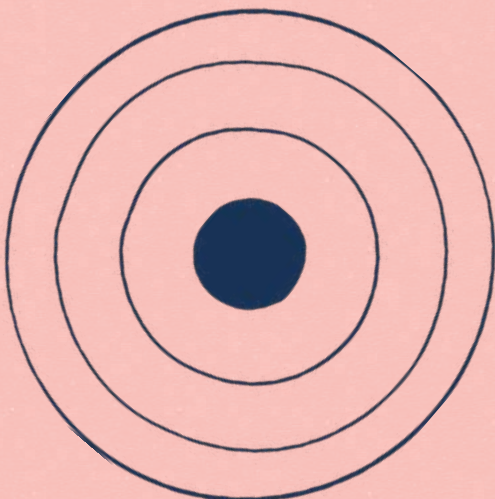
8. Core Group takes a break.

Decide whether it is "mission accomplished" and time to disband the Core Group, or whether there is a new phase to think about and enter.

Step 1

Getting your Core Group together.

An engine house to power your process, clarify values and act as a single coherent group.



Your Core Group.

All of us have degrees of power and some choice about how we exercise it, whether as individuals, neighbours, parents, people in small business, or employees. Sometimes, exercising our individual power can feel exhilarating. At other times, we may feel isolated, vulnerable, and incapable of generating change.

Central to the Kitchen Table Conversations (KTC) model is the formation of a Core Group. Ideally, between eight and twelve like-minded people will come together and combine their collective energy. This all-important Core Group becomes the engine house that powers the KTC process.

Your Core Group needs to work together effectively from the very beginning. It needs to be on the same page in terms of common interests and concerns.

As a group, you will need to:

- > **establish a good internal process of operation**
- > **be open with one another and not have hidden agendas**
- > **use your time together efficiently and productively**
- > **plan the practical steps that lie ahead**
- > **be prepared to roll up your sleeves and do the required work**



Strong Bond. Clear Commitment.

The first conversations of your group are not about getting the KTC process going, they are about getting to know each other and understanding what you have in common.

Don't assume that the simple act of coming together is enough to make you work well as a group. Don't assume your shared common interest means you're all thinking the same way.

These first conversations with one another are crucial. Set aside the time to discuss your motivations for doing this work, what you hope to achieve, where common interests overlap and importantly, where they don't, and the strengths and interests each person brings to the group.

Your Core Group needs to commit to completing the KTC process. To do otherwise is to potentially erode public confidence in this process as a form of democratic engagement.

Good, basic internal organisation.

First up, your Core Group needs someone to take on the role of convenor: someone who is prepared to call your meetings, help the group set its broad agenda, keep the group on task, ensure relevant timeframes are set and met, and contact details for group members are shared and kept up to date.

Remember that the Core Group is taking on the responsibility of conducting a broader conversation process involving many others across the community. This process does not, of itself, require a formal or complicated organisational structure, it does not automatically necessitate drawing up constitutions or charters, nor assigning formal roles such as Chair, Secretary and Treasurer.



Second, your Core Group needs to focus on the practical steps that lie ahead:

- > **Clarifying the key values the group will operate by**
- > **Identifying the focus of the Kitchen Table Conversations**
- > **Developing the communications involved**
- > **Setting up the information sessions by which people can decide whether to join the conversation process**
- > **Undertaking the compilation of all the conversations that take place**
- > **Providing a report back to all participants as well as others outside the conversation process**



Clarify key values.

Once your Core Group is in place and committed to running a KTC process, early agreement needs to be reached about the values your group will work and stand by. 'Clarifying values' may sound intimidating, but it is simply a way of communicating the beliefs and behaviours your group decides will govern its actions and practice.

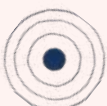
Doing this work upfront is crucial because it underpins your group's operations from now on. It will also help your group's cohesion and your communication with others every step of the way. It signals to others the way your group intends to operate, and what people can expect to see and feel if they choose to participate.

The process of discussing, refining and finalising key values will help your group members generate trust amongst themselves and a productive working dynamic. Of course, there are bound to be disagreements from time to time, and the way your Core Group manages and ultimately resolves differences between members should be seen as an opportunity to build confidence in the groups' ability to manage complex situations.

Your group should settle on a small number of key values—somewhere between four and six.

Values are there in all of us and they are usually implicit – we tend to know what they are instinctively. You need to be deliberate in drawing them out, so you feel confident they are represented in your group and understood by all members in the same way.

To tease out these values, it can help if you pose some questions to your group members. Some suggested starting points for beginning conversations about values are included in the table overleaf.



KEY VALUE	QUESTIONS TO ASK YOURSELVES	WHAT THIS WOULD MEAN IN PRACTICE
Respect	What do you think 'respect' means? How do you give it? Is it earned? Can you respect someone and still disagree with them?	You don't engage in gossip. You don't say things, in public or private, that are likely to cause harm and offence to others. You don't use disrespectful language in describing others, no matter who they are. You listen, even if you disagree with the view being expressed.
Transparency (being open)	How can people see what you're doing? How do you talk about why you're doing this process? How can you make the process clear so that it is understood by people outside the Core Group?	The identities of your group members are known – you are not faceless people. There are no mysterious or secretive figures in your group. Your communications are open, honest and clear every step of the way. You are open about why you are doing this process. What you say is what you do. Your Core Group makes available a point of contact for the public to get in touch with you, and your group commits to responding to all genuine enquiries.
Independence	Do Core Group members have internal party-political biases and allegiances that you need to deal with?	If anyone from your Core Group is a member of a political party, you may need to think about pausing the membership or at least being up front about it. The report you compile at the end of the KTC process must be available to everyone and not used to serve the interests of a few.
Accountability	How much work are you prepared to do? How long are you prepared to commit to this process? Are you prepared to work efficiently and get on with tasks? Are you ready to listen hard and hear everyone? Are you ready to report back honestly and transparently? Are you prepared to do the best job by people?	You commit to seeing this process through to its completion. You pace yourselves properly and don't rush things or get ahead of tasks. You are prepared to do the menial, small tasks that other people likely won't see because you understand they all add up to making the process welcoming and valuable. You will accurately report on what people say. You will do the best job you can.



Communicating your values.

Once your Core Group feels confident about its set of key values, it is important they are written up plainly and embodied in all communications that take place beyond your group.

example

Here is an example from *LaTrobe Valley 1st* of how key values were expressed.

LaTrobe Valley 1st: our values

We are committed to being honest and respectful, to being well-informed, and to referring to reputable sources when making statements.

example

Another example is from *Voices of Mackellar*, who expressed their values in a different way.

OUR VALUES

Inclusivity Respect Integrity

The guiding values of Voices of Mackellar emphasise inclusivity, respect and integrity.

We welcome and encourage participation by all people, irrespective of political allegiance, age, or gender and provide safe supportive processes to ensure a diversity of opinions are listened to, respected and heard.

We encourage collaborative, respectful discussion.

We empower people to speak up for what they believe in, and acknowledge the courage it takes to do so.

We respect the privacy of our participants by collecting data anonymously.

We act with integrity and ensure that our behaviour is ethical, accountable, transparent, honest and respectful.



Resourcing the KTC process.

Kitchen Table Conversations can be done with minimal cash resources. The process does not require much money. Possibly you may need to pay for some printing, a website hosting fee or the hire of a venue. Your group needs to have a think about some ways it can raise a modest amount at the outset, either by people pledging you some early support, or you yourselves being prepared to put your hands in your own pockets.

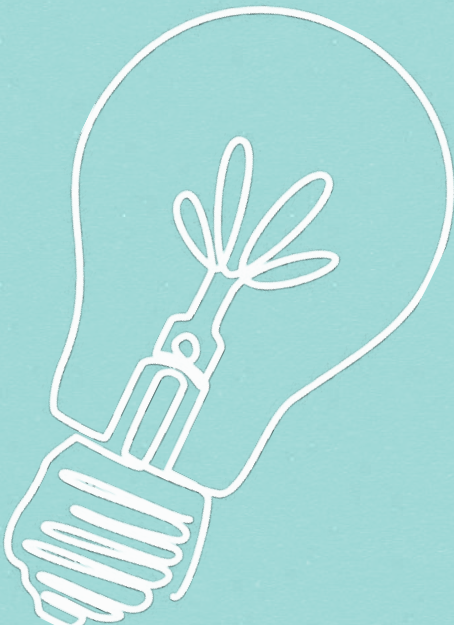
You will need to ensure, however, you have truckloads of goodwill and volunteering capacity from family, friends, and other members of the community. Efficiently deploying the goodwill and resources of volunteers will help your Core Group to develop a reputation for being effective. This, in turn, will spark the interest of more people to become involved.



Step 2

Identifying your Core Group's focus, tasks and timeline.

Clarify the focus for the conversations, plan the process, agree on timeframes and allocate tasks to specific people.



Determining the KTC focus.

The Kitchen Table Conversations are not talk-fests. People want more than this. They will appreciate your focus on building something constructive and addressing their interests and concerns in ways which lead to positive action.

Your Core Group needs to identify the rationale and focus for its KTC process. For example, in the Victorian Women's Trust Purple Sage Project, the starting motivation was that the Victorian government at the time was riding rough shod over communities around the state and implementing a policy agenda which was hurting people, especially women. The project sought to reinvigorate the relationship between citizens and their government, and to make the case for putting people's needs and aspirations at the heart of public policy.

In a subsequent project, *Watermark Australia*, the Victorian Women's Trust, conscious of climate change indicators and Australia's scarce water resources, sought to find a way in which ordinary Australians could come on board and make a difference in water reform.

In the case of the federal electorate of Indi, the Core Group (Voices for Indi) believed the quality of democratic representation in its electorate had fallen away. They wanted to enhance people's democratic participation and make the case for stronger political representation.

With these examples in mind, your Core Group needs now to define what it sees as its motivating force and what the focus of the small group conversations will be on.

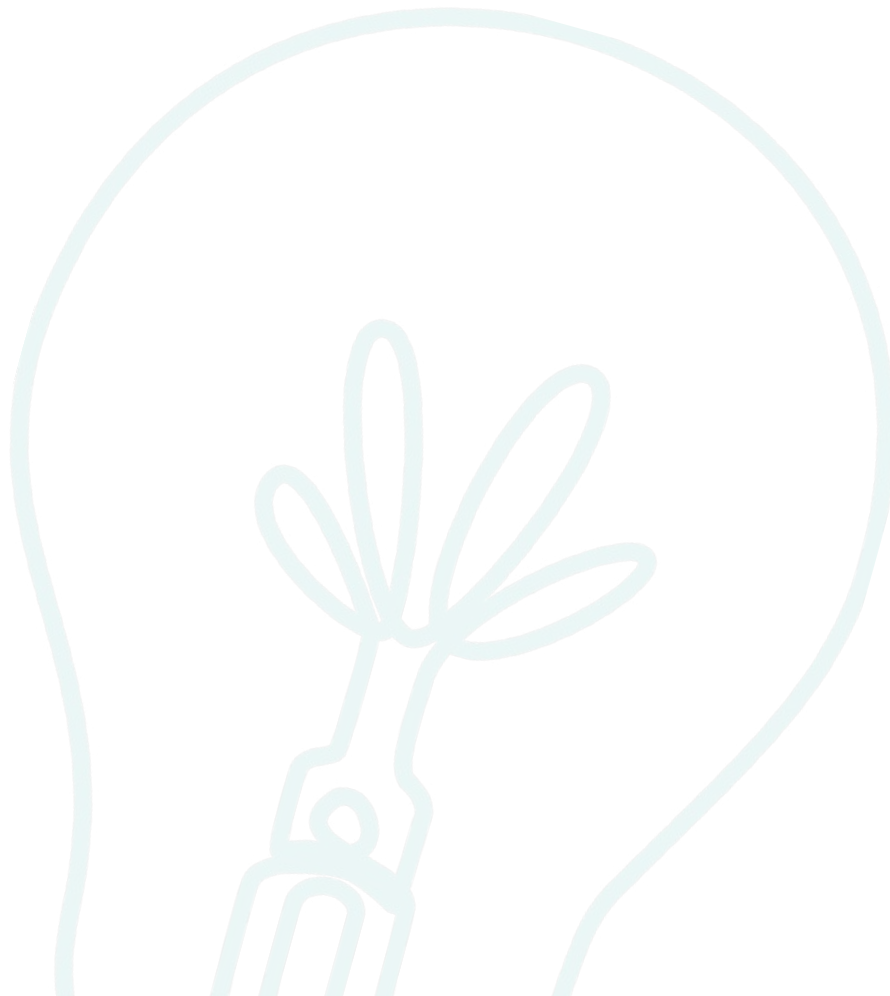


We recommend you take a conservative approach to the timeline. If possible, schedule in more time than you initially think is necessary to complete tasks and move through the steps properly. While you do need to keep momentum and focus, you also need to be realistic about the other demands on your time and allow space to course-correct if some things take longer than you plan.

As you identify each task, make sure to allocate responsibility for its completion to a named individual by an agreed date. Quite quickly, you will begin to see where your Core Group will need additional people to help.

You'll also see when you need to locate and use other resources such as a venue, photocopying, and tea and coffee. For example, Step 2 requires nothing more than the brainpower of your Core Group members to craft communications. However, Step 3 will require the use of a venue, chairs, projector, printing and refreshments for the public information sessions.

To illustrate these points, we have constructed an indicative task and timeline.



Establishing a timeline of tasks.

Your Core Group now turns its attention to practical and detailed matters. You need to develop a realistic timeline for the KTC process and allocate tasks and responsibilities to named people.

Your success as a group relies on having a simple and effective plan. The essence of a good plan is to break your overall goal into small, manageable tasks while not losing site of your end point. Without a good plan, your group risks having one of the steps blow out of proportion and your end goal falling away.

To begin, you will need to identify your end point. For groups seeking to improve political debate and local representation, the end point might be a looming election. For other groups who wish to increase the diversity of voices around decision-making tables, you may need to agree between yourselves an end date for the process, so it doesn't go on indefinitely.

Once the end date is agreed, you can begin to define specific steps, manageable tasks and allocate a time period for each one. Think through the sequence of tasks. There will be some tasks that need to be completed before other things can happen. Equally, there will be tasks that can be worked on simultaneously by members of your Core Group. Your group's ability to work in a coordinated and highly effective way relies on you putting together the most detailed and realistic plan possible, so take your time with this task and timeline.

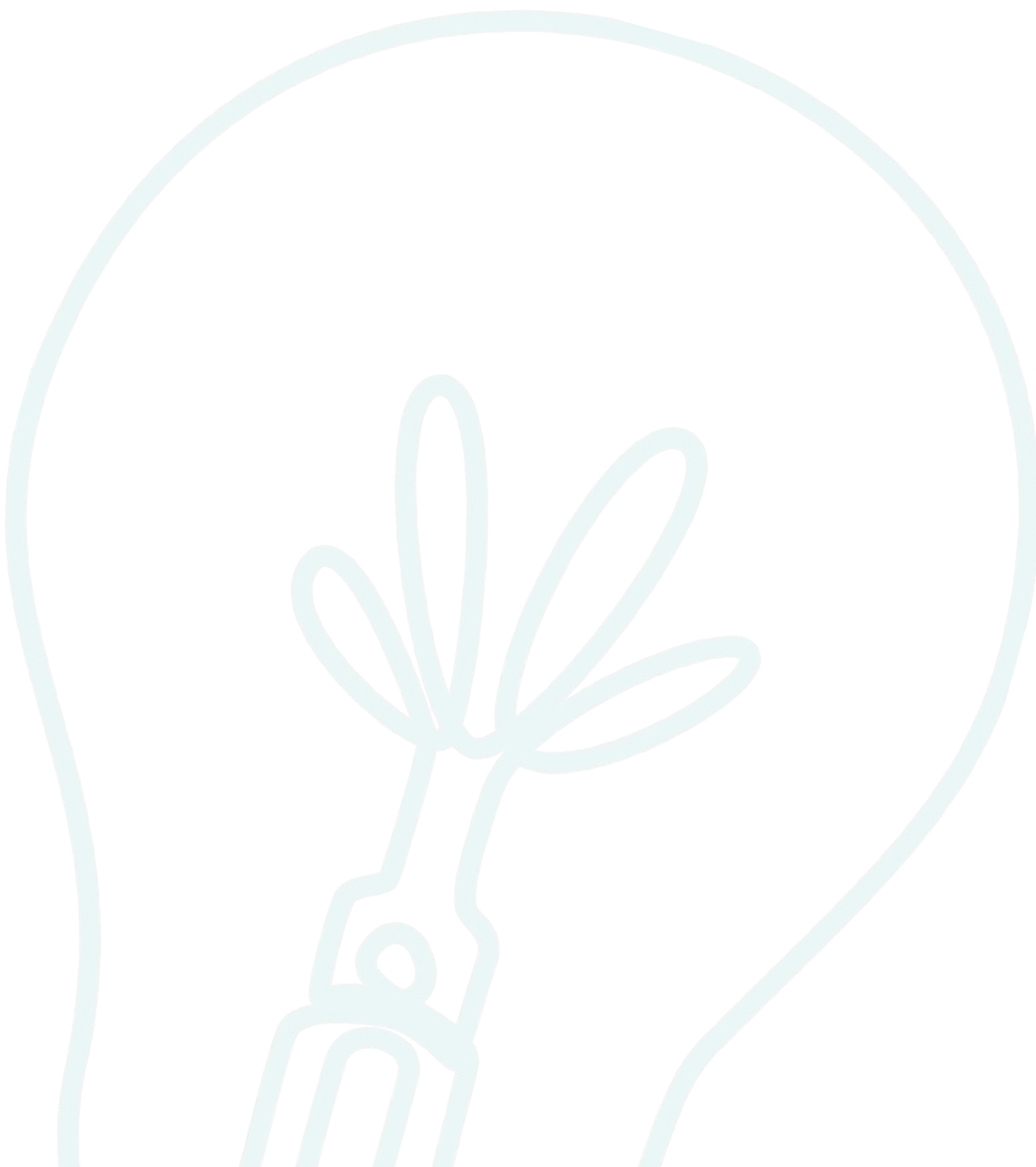


An indicative timeline for your KTC process.



Obviously, it's up to you as a group to modify it for your own purpose and context. We strongly suggest your final plan is put down on paper, copied and shared with every member of your Core Group—it will become your bible, your map for completing the KTC process.

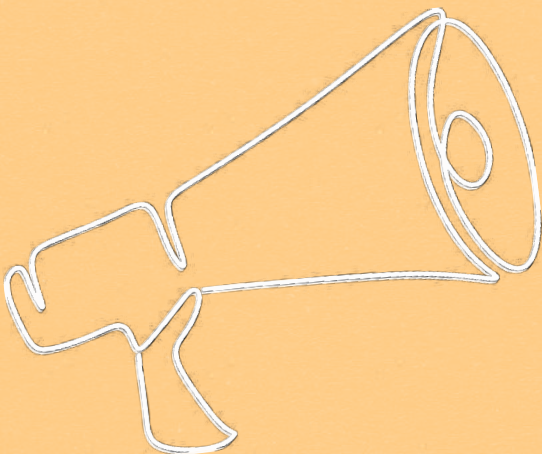
As you work your way through the KTC process, your task list and timeline will also be used as a diagnostic tool. You will be able to pinpoint where things aren't going to plan, what tasks and steps are taking less or more time than scheduled, and where you may be struggling to get access to the resources and volunteers you need. By being clear about where the plan is coming unstuck, you're in a strong position to make informed and realistic changes whilst keeping focused on your overall goal.



Step 3

Craft your best standalone communications.

Develop your essential communications which will invite people to come and join you.



Spark some interest.

The success of your KTC process depends on being able to spark the interest of people to the extent they want some form of involvement: possibly to volunteer to host a conversation, or to become part of a group, or simply to be kept informed.

The communication needs to stand alone and talk to each possible level of involvement in the process. To do this, the communication you put out into the world must be crystal clear and convey who you are, what you hope to achieve and how people can get involved.

This communication is your first opportunity to show people who you are, what values you hold and how you intend to work—together and with others. Make your communication shine!



Contents.

Your communication needs to include:

- > **The names of your Core Group members and possibly a few sentences about each person**
- > **A brief summary of the challenge or problem you are tackling, written from the perspective of your Core Group**
- > **The purpose of the KTC process and what you hope to achieve**
- > **How the process will work, including relevant timeframes**
- > **A clear and simple call to action for people to volunteer as conversation hosts**
- > **Contact details for your Core Group**



example

Voices for The Hunter have done a great job of creating a website with a minimalist design that acts as the Core Group's standalone communications.

When people arrive at the landing page, www.voicesforthehunter.org, they immediately see the contents of the communications and can quickly access essential information.



Essential qualities.

Confidence, clarity and plain language are essential for your communication to have an impact. Keep it simple and direct. Pay close attention to make sure no flowery language, academic language, vague words or phrases are used.

This document will take careful crafting and it's not the sort of thing you can do in one sitting, nor should you try. It's not something to rush. It would be advantageous if you got one or two people outside of your Core Group to read it and test that it meets the qualities of being simple, direct, clarifying and inviting.



Conversation starters.

Develop a set of questions for small conversation groups to discuss. The best questions set people at ease, help them to relax into the group gathering, are brief, and are meaningful to everyone. People will be able to understand how to respond to the question without any further information or explanation from the host and can draw on their own lived experiences to offer an answer.

The best questions enable everyone to feel they can contribute meaningfully, regardless of education levels, professional experience, age, culture, ability or gender. They put everyone on a level playing field. These questions will also help hosts maintain people's focus.

example

In our work with the *Voices for Indi* group, we helped identify and write the following conversation starters, which we have included here to get you thinking on the right track.

1. Theme: Living in the Indi community

- What makes for a strong community?
- What are the best things about living in Indi?
- Are there any particular issues or concerns that you feel should be brought to the attention of your elected representatives?

2. Theme: Political representation

- What do think makes for a really good political representative?
- Do you feel you have an adequate voice to date in the way you are represented? If not, why not?
- What would make for a stronger relationship between people and elected representatives?

3. Theme: Issues and concerns

- Are there particular issues or concerns in Indi that you feel strongly about?
- Are there particular issues *within* the Indi electorate that you feel should be focused on in the run up to the federal election on 14 September 2013?
- Are there issues *beyond* the Indi electorate that you think should be focused on in the run up to the 2013 Federal election?
- Any ideas as to what you think could be done that might deal with these issues effectively?



Each small group conversation is likely to last between one and two hours. We recommend having three to five key theme areas or questions.

There needs to be enough time to discuss each question in a way that people feel the conversation has been handled well and everyone has been able to have their say and feel listened to.

Depending on your purpose and what you hope to achieve using the KTC process, decide how many times your small groups will meet. Once or twice is a realistic amount and will generate useful information for your Core Group to compile. Any more than this and the process becomes overly cumbersome for people participating.



What makes a good conversation?

Conversation is a normal and regular part of our everyday lives. We converse with people all the time: on the street with our neighbours, in the schoolyard with other parents, at work with our colleagues, at home with our families, and when we catch up with our friends.

So, what makes for a good conversation?

To start with, as people gather, they will be set at ease and made to feel comfortable by other people they are meeting.

Part of this has to do with where you are: you may be in someone's home, a park, a cafe, or at work. The important thing is that the place is comfortable for everyone.

Another part of becoming comfortable is being made to feel welcome. This can be done by way of simple, genuine greetings such as "good to see you" or "how are you today?"

Really good conversation happens when we can give people our full attention.

Regular interruptions, such as responding to requests from our children or having our phones ring and ping, get in the way of our thoughts and our ability to concentrate on what others are saying.

For example, swapping pleasantries with your neighbour over the fence one afternoon could develop into a conversation about the benefits of a neighbourhood composting scheme.

Or chatting to a colleague after work could become a discussion on the merits of staff having a secure place to lock their bikes.

Many times, new ideas will be thought of during a good conversation because we have sparked off other people's energy and perspective. We feel excited when this happens.

At the end of a good conversation, we can feel that our view on an issue has changed. We may have broadened our thinking to include the experiences of others, or we may have learnt something new and incorporated that into our understanding.

We thank the people for their time and leave with a spring in our step.

Some good working examples.

01. Voices for Indi

The initial communication with members of the public is a hugely significant starting point. Because of our working relationship with *Voices for Indi*, their example is close to our hearts.

What works about this communication is that it captures the content and essential qualities really well. It welcomes the reader to *Voices for Indi*, it outlines the key values guiding the process, it talks to people about how they can become part of this initiative, it describes the task of becoming a host and provides handy tips for hosting a conversation, it outlines some simple and effective ground rules for running conversations and, importantly, it identifies a series of discussion starters.

The communication ends by providing contact details so people can contact *Voices for Indi* and provides a participant profile to record the range of people who might be involved in your process.

example

We have included the complete *Voices for Indi* document in the 'Further Reading' section of this guide.



02. Voices of Mackellar

Another more recent example is *Voices of Mackellar*. Their simple website clearly sets out who they are, their motivations for coming together to run the KTC process, what they hope to achieve, and their values. On every page of the website, there is a direct and clear invitation for people to join them and become involved.

A 'Contact' page provides a range of ways to get in touch with the Core Group are provided. People can choose to complete the online form with their details and message, send a direct email, or make a phone call. If people are interested in volunteering with Voices of Mackellar, a code of conduct immediately pops up listing key values and behaviours for people to read and agree to. This is a great use of a simple website and speaks to people interested in a range of levels of engagement in the KTC process.

example

You can explore the *Voices of Mackellar* website at
<https://www.voicesofmackellar.org.au>



03. Voices of The Hunter

A third and final example is *Voices of The Hunter*, who have put together a simple, accessible website using plain and persuasive language. At the time of writing, they were recruiting volunteers to host conversations, and the way they have expressed their motivations for coming together to run the KTC process is clear, compelling, hopeful and energising.

With the huge challenges ahead: a global pandemic, changing climate, economic uncertainty, we believe that there is a huge unlocked potential in the voices of people wherever they live, with diverse backgrounds, experiences, stories and wisdom.

Voices for The Hunter provides the space for people to share what they value in their community – to explore its strengths and assets, and to consider how they may be able to contribute to help it thrive into the future.

We believe that the power and spirit of people coming together – sharing ideas, knowledge, wisdom and aspirations – strengthens our communities, our democracy, and our capacity to build an enduring future for everyone.

Voices of The Hunter have also crafted clear information to explain how the KTC process works, the timeframes involved, the role of hosts and scribes, and key questions for discussion. This gives people very clear information so they can decide if they wish to become involved. Also, on the 'How It Works' page, is a clear ask for people to volunteer to become a host or to join a conversation.

example

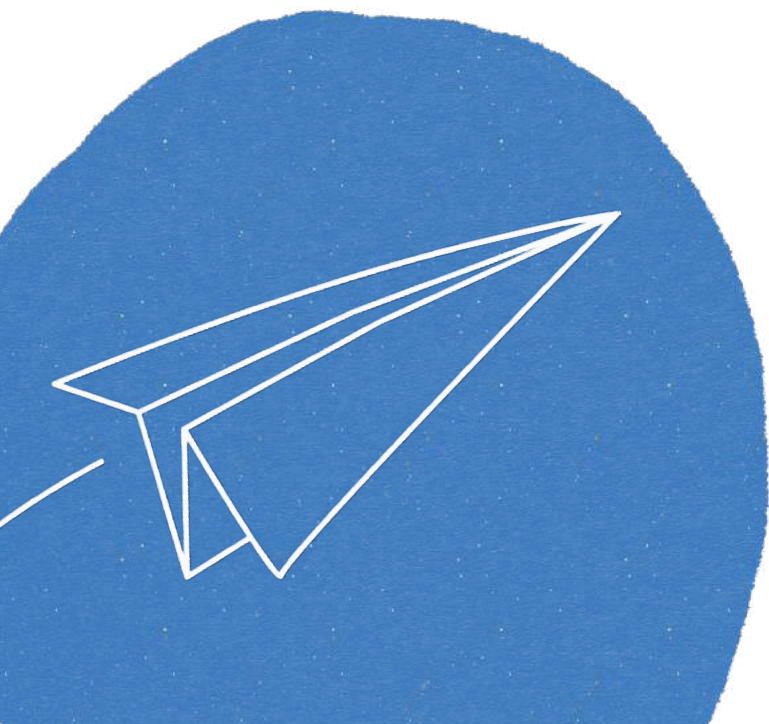
You can explore the *Voices for the Hunter* website at www.voicesforthehunter.org.



Step 4

Invite people to participate.

Run community information sessions where people learn more about your process. Your Core Group speaks with one voice and invites other people to join.



The power of the numbers.

It's time now for your Core Group to invite other people to participate in the KTC process. This step is important because the success of the whole process depends on people being willing to join with you and to participate as fully as they can in a conversation.

Remember, for every person who volunteers to host a conversation, they will bring up to nine other people into your process. So, if you recruit three conversation hosts, you will have approximately thirty people participating. If fifteen people volunteer as hosts, you will have one hundred and fifty people participating.

This is the power of the numbers and how people at the grassroots level can make it happen!

Getting the word out.

Your Core Group has a range of options open to it for spreading the word. For instance, you could put a flyer in letterboxes, put a poster on community noticeboards, or inserts into local newsletters.

However, from our experience, the best approach is to organise a set of community information sessions in public places such as libraries, local halls, community centres, neighbourhood houses or sports club rooms. We say this because it brings you to people in the community: they can see who you are, they can size you up, and they can establish whether you are a credible outfit to become involved with.



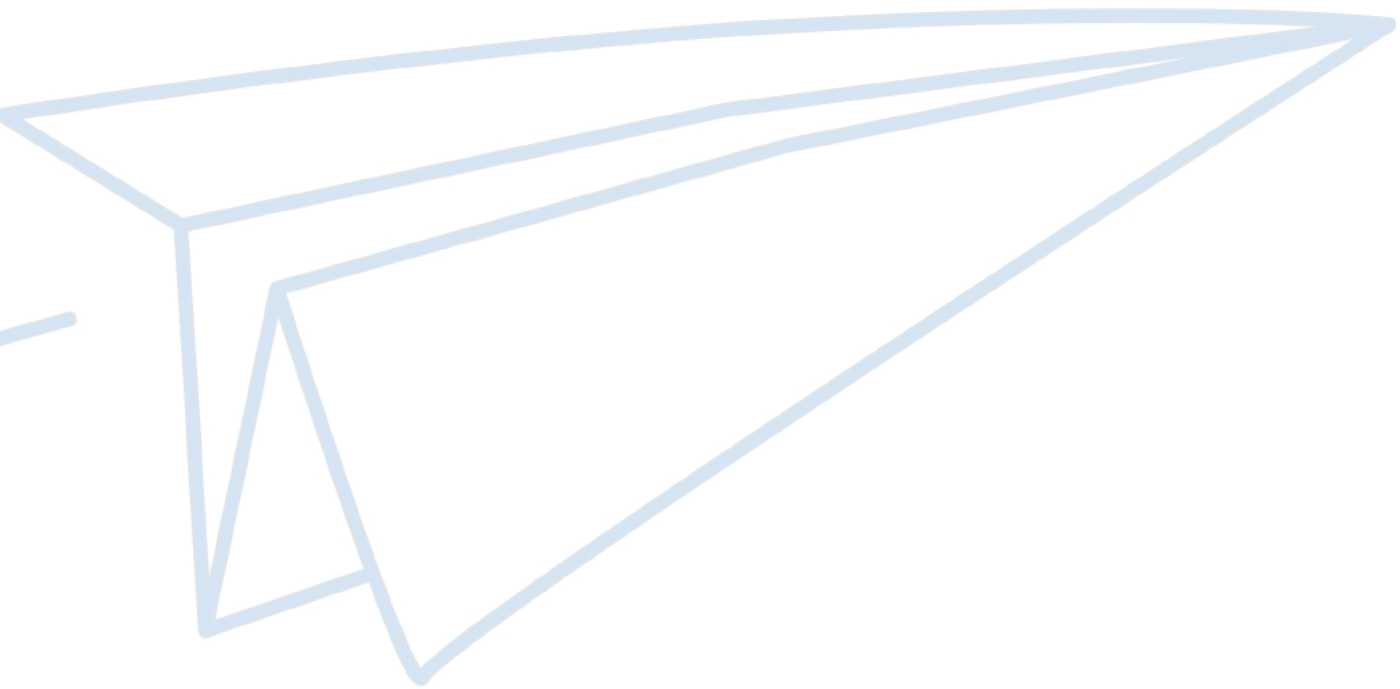
If you take this approach, there are some simple steps you need to follow to organise your event:

- > **Carefully consider the day of the week and time of the day that will suit the largest number of people. If you choose to run several public information sessions, you can schedule them for different times of the day to suit a range of lifestyles and commitments**
- > **Book a venue, keeping in mind it needs to be free or low cost, clean, safe and welcoming. In much the same way as scheduling, if you run a few information sessions, book venues in different geographical areas of your community**
- > **Create a flyer that lists the date, time and venue. Pin this on to community noticeboards, put it in people's letterboxes and share online. Don't underestimate the power of talking excitedly to everyone about the prospect of becoming involved in your process.**



Your Core Group members should consider whether they have options to speak at community gatherings about the process, such as local playgroups, Neighbourhood Watch meetings, Rotary Club events, church gatherings, sports and creative clubs, and cultural centres.

Since the 2020 pandemic, we have all had increasing experience and exposure to online events and tools. Social media, email newsletters and community messaging groups are a great way to spread the word about your information sessions. You may even wish to run a small number of information sessions using online meeting platforms such as Zoom, Jitsi or Google Meet.



Running an information session.

Whichever way you choose to spread the word, interested people will want to hear more about your Core Group, its purpose and ambition for the process, as well as ask questions. Your Core Group presentation must be clear, accurate, warm and engaging—so choose wisely who stands at the front of a room to speak!

Your aim here is to recruit people to host a conversation and to do this, you need to clearly ask. Be clear about the call to action: you are requesting volunteers to bring together a small group of up to nine other people to host a conversation.

Your Core Group needs to take people through the process clearly, answer questions and give people a copy of your group's standalone communications. Give people enough information that despite their busy lives and possibly their growing political apathy, there is enough credibility, purpose and hope in your process that they put their hands up to be involved.

It is unlikely you will know how many people will turn up to each information session so be prepared to talk with any number of people.

Give yourselves plenty of time to arrange things at the venue so it is organised and comfortable when people arrive. Put signs up so people know they have arrived at the correct place, turn on all the lights as well as heating or cooling if necessary.

You'll need to decide where your group members will stand while they present, and set up a table and chairs for them so they have everything they need: notes, laptop, water, and copies of your standalone communications to hand out. Next, lay out chairs so that people can take a seat during the information session whilst clearly being able to see the speakers.



It's a really good idea to offer simple drinks and a light snack (for example, tea, coffee and biscuits) at the end of the information session so people can chat afterwards to each other and members of your Core Group about what they've heard. Set up a space, within the same room if possible, and lay out everything you'll need for refreshments. Don't forget rubbish and recycling bins!

Now you'll need to allocate jobs to your group members so the information session runs smoothly. Identify three or four group members to welcome people as they arrive and show them to seats, one or two people to hand out copies of your communications at the appropriate time, two or three people to offer refreshments at the end of the session.

You will already have decided which of your Core Group members are best suited to speak in a warm, engaging and clear way and you may choose to share this amongst a few group members. Perhaps one person will open the session, do an acknowledgement of country and introduce each member of your Core Group, another person will speak about the process and call for volunteers to host conversations, and a third person will answer questions.

The most critical part of this, which cannot be overstated, is that all members of your Core Group speak with one voice, and it is clear to the people gathered that you share the same understanding of your key values, approach and timeframes.

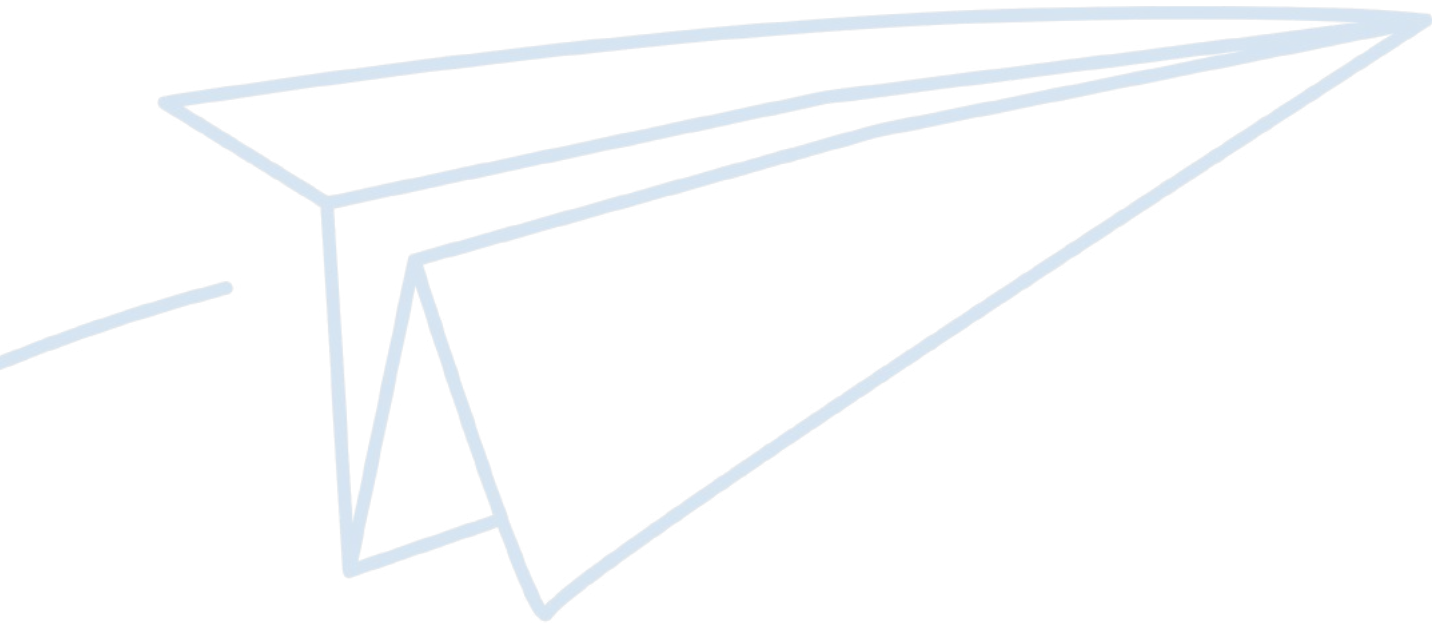


People may decide at the information session that they are happy to volunteer to host a conversation, other people may want to think about it for a few days, and there will be a few who want to be involved but not host.

Make sure you provide a clear point of contact so people can get in touch with you. One member of your group will have responsibility for compiling and maintaining a list of confirmed conversation hosts that includes names, email addresses and phone contact details. This list will become crucial for keeping hosts updated with information as your process unfolds.

At the end of the information session, you will notice some real energy has started to build around your goal and process. People who attended the information sessions will begin talking to their friends, family members, neighbours and colleagues about what they've heard.

Remember, people will respond in equal measure to the positive, transparent and inclusive energy of your Core Group as they will to the purpose of the process.



We've created an indicative run sheet for an information session so you can see how to allocate time and tasks.

TIME REQUIRED	TASK	RESPONSIBLE PERSON
60 mins	Set up the space: Open doors, turn on lights, put out seating, lay out refreshments and set up table for speakers to hold notes, laptop, water and other things they may need.	Judith, Rana, Anna, Mohammed
15 mins	People arrive: Let them know they have arrived in the correct place, introduce yourself by name, show them to a seat, let them know how long until the session starts, and set them at ease.	Judith, Mohammed,
10 mins	Begin the session: Welcome people, acknowledge the traditional owners of the land you are meeting on, introduce yourself and other members of your Core Group.	Presenter #1 Rana
20 mins	Process and ask: Talk about your groups motivation for coming together, what you hope to achieve, the process you will be undertaking, relevant timeframes and clear call to action—you are requesting volunteers to bring together a small group of up to nine other people to host a conversation. A printed copy of your communications will be handed out to people during this part of the session.	Presenter #2 Viv Mohammed
20 mins	Question and answer: Time for people to ask their questions and for your Core Group to provide honest and direct answers.	Presenter #3 Sam
10 mins	Session wrap-up: Thank people for their time and interest, remind them how they can contact your Core Group and volunteer to host a conversation, invite people to stick around for a drink and a chat.	Presenter #1 Rana
30 mins	Mingling: A chance for people to reflect on what they've heard, all group members are to circulate and introduce themselves, continue to answer questions and remind people how to volunteer to host a session or get involved.	All Core Group members
40 mins	Pack up: Return the venue to its original clean state, fold up chairs, dispose of rubbish and recycling, remove paper and take down posters, turn off heating or cooling. Your group can take this opportunity to look through the list of people volunteering to become involved, and quickly capture reflections on what worked well and what can be improved for the next information session.	All Core Group members Sam to compile and maintain list of volunteers

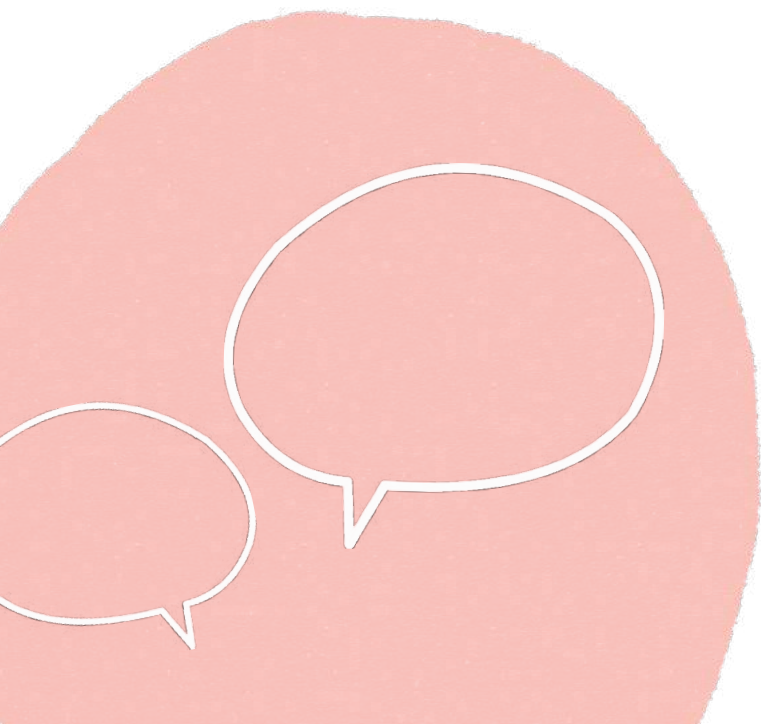


Step 5

Conversations get underway.

Volunteer hosts bring together small groups of people for purposeful conversations.

Ground rules and conversation starters are provided by your Core Group.



Calling people together.

By now, you have a pretty good list of people who are prepared to host a conversation and you're in a strong position to email them the information they require to call their group together.

A couple of important points before starting.

From time-to-time, people have asked us whether these small conversation groups require expert or professional facilitators. We say no! Ordinary people have a great capacity for conversing with one another, they know how to do it respectfully and productively. From our experience, people are best served by being supported and empowered by your Core Group to run the conversations themselves. We'll show you how to give conversation hosts all the tools and support they'll need.

One last note before we delve into the detail of hosting conversations: in our experience, the vast majority of people who will volunteer to host conversation groups will be women. This speaks to the collaborative and networked approach preferred by many women and an environment where every person feels able, safe and validated to share their experience. Rejoice when the same happens in your KTC process—you're obviously creating an inclusive environment where a range of people feel willing to participate!



Information for conversation hosts.

Your Core Group will get in touch with conversation hosts to let them know the date by which all conversations are to be completed. We recommend allowing six to eight weeks for this part of the KTC process.

Let hosts know it is time to decide where and when they will hold their conversation. We recommend hosts hold it in their home, or possibly a friend's home. If this doesn't suit, hosts can look to organise it in a local café, room in a public library, meeting room at work, or anywhere else that feels comfortable, safe and easy for people to get to.

Hosts will need to provide some drinks and light snacks. This may be as simple as tea, coffee, and a packet of biscuits.

A couple of days before the conversation, your Core Group will send hosts a document to hand out to their group participants. The document will provide some context for the conversations, information on the process, ground rules for the conversation, key questions to start conversations, and your Core Group's contact details. Keep this document to no more than two A4 pages so that if hosts are required to print it themselves, they will need to print twenty pages. This is the upper limit of what is a realistic ask without becoming burdensome.



Conducting a conversation.

The role of a host is to bring together a small group, no more than nine other people, for a purposeful and engaging conversation.

As people arrive at the hosts home, or another suitable venue, the host welcomes them, makes introductions to the other people in the room, and sets them at ease. Hosts will encourage people to speak with each other while the group waits for everyone to arrive. At this point, hosts will give each person a copy of the document sent through by your Core Group with the context, ground rules and key questions.

As people take a seat to get started, the host may choose to do an acknowledgement of country to the traditional custodians of the land you have gathered on.

The host moves on to explain that they will manage the impending discussion so that each conversation starter, or key question, your Core Group has sent through will be covered within the appointed time. We suggest conversations go for two hours or less.

The host will speak briefly, no more than five minutes, about why they decided to assemble everyone, the legitimacy of the project as they see it, and the credibility of the members of your Core Group.



The host will then introduce a small number of ground rules to the group. The ground rules set out how the conversation will be conducted and a standard of behaviour for each person to uphold. We developed a set of ground rules that have worked really well for a range of groups using the KTC process.

We have included them here for you to use, should you wish.

- 1. We accept that everyone is entitled to have a say**
- 2. We will make the effort to listen to one another**
- 3. We respect people's right to their opinion even if we disagree**
- 4. We will try at all times to be constructive**
- 5. We will try to stay on track**
- 6. We will acknowledge and thank each other for contributing during the discussion and afterward**

It is critical that hosts read out each ground rule and people acknowledge they understand and accept it. A lengthy discussion of the ground rules is not required, however people do need to take a moment to properly appreciate the way they are being asked to behave during the conversation.

In the rare occurrence the conversation goes off track, the host can gently draw attention to the ground rules accepted by the group at the beginning.



The host will ask people to complete a Participant Profile Form so your Core Group can get a general sense of who has participated in the process. It is not necessary for your Core Group to know people’s names and contact details.

GENDER	AGE							
Male / Female / Non-binary	<18	18 - 24	25 - 34	35 - 44	45 - 54	55 - 64	65 - 74	75+

Before posing the first conversation starter, hosts may wish to begin with an icebreaker to set people at ease and help them relax. Good icebreakers enable people to quickly find common ground with each other, such as “what’s your earliest memory of this neighbourhood?”

Once people are comfortable, the host will move on and ask the group to discuss the first key question. At this point, the hosts’ role is to ensure each person has space and time to speak, the group listens respectfully, no single person dominates, and each person’s contribution is acknowledged. If some people are quiet and slow to speak, the host may try to draw them in saying something like “Sally, is there anything you’d like to add at this point?”

Remember, the conversation group is not trying to reach consensus, people do not need to persuade others or justify their view.



As you can see, the role of being a host is important and can be performed very successfully by ordinary people. We have included a summary description of the hosts role for you to share with people.

Before the Conversation

- > Set a meeting date, time and venue
- > Invite up to nine friends, family, colleagues, or neighbours to your home or another suitable venue for a couple of hours of discussion
- > Organise some drinks and light snacks
- > Carefully read the document provided by your Core Group (and print off copies for your conversation group if required)
- > Appoint a scribe who is able to track the discussion and capture it in as much detail as is practically and reasonably possible. It is important that your scribe accepts the need to try and represent the conversation fairly and in as much detail as possible and not be selective

At the Beginning of the Conversation

- > Welcome everyone to the conversation and acknowledge the traditional custodians of the land you are gathered on
- > Encourage quick introductions around the table
- > Draw attention to the ground rules and get agreement from people that they will follow them. Throughout the conversation, you can refer back to the ground rules if you feel that they aren't being followed
- > Collect demographic information of conversation participant
- > Do a short icebreaker activity then pose key questions to the group for discussion



Throughout the Conversation

- The role of host is to facilitate and moderate the conversation, and to make sure that all of the discussion questions are focussed on. This does not have to be done in order.
- Ensure inclusiveness. All participants should get to have their say and feel included, valued and respected by the host and each other
- Encourage everyone to bring their "best selves." There's no room for nastiness or disrespect towards others
- Ensure the conversation is flowing, wide-ranging and honest
- The group does not have to reach consensus! What is important is that people feel as though they have been able to contribute their ideas and opinions—and for these to be recorded faithfully
- Make sure you allocate enough time for each of the key questions or conversation starters
- Judge the energy of the group. If you can sense that a question has been well and truly covered and energy is starting to wane, move the conversation on to another area
- The conversation can go into other areas, but you should balance how far away from the questions the discussion can drift before bringing it back under control
- Don't be afraid to call people into the conversation. For example, "Pam, what do you think?"
- Invite participants to become further involved in the process by providing details of your Core Group
- Create a positive ripple - suggest that participants talk about their discussions and the ideas that emerged with other people at work, home and in their community
- Thank everyone for their time and their contributions

After the Conversation

- Sit down with your scribe straight after the meeting and flesh out the meeting's content as much as you can while you both have it foremost in your minds. Then, develop the written summary by referring to the discussion questions. Naturally, if there happened to be additional discussion beyond the agreed discussion questions, it is important to capture this as well
- As soon as possible after the conversation ends (we recommend immediately but no longer than 24 hours) the host should reflect on the conversation and make some notes on their observations and takeaways, including the context, the process, the issues that arose, the atmosphere and any other insights.
- Send your notes to the project lead within 48 hours of the conversation



Capturing the conversation.

Hosts will also need to ask someone from their group to act as a scribe a few days before the conversation is due to happen. Importantly, scribes do not join the conversation, so hosts will need to make this clear to the person they are asking. However, scribes can join a group at another time in order to participate in the conversation, just not at the same time as they are scribing!

The role of scribe is to capture an accurate and comprehensive record of what was said by people during the discussion. They focus on capturing, in shorthand, the essence of each point made. No judgement is made about whether a view is valid or important - scribes capture everything. If the same point is made multiple times by different people, scribes make a note of this too.

Scribes do not attribute names next to specific remarks. Nor do scribes need to concern themselves with adding context or interpreting meaning to expressed views.

It's easiest if scribes make notes using a laptop or tablet because notes can be finalised and simply emailed to your Core Group for processing.

We've included a role description for scribes which we recommend you share so people can remind themselves of the important parts of the task at hand.



During the Conversation

- > The role of scribe is to capture an accurate and comprehensive record of what was said by participants during the conversation
- > You will not be able to write every single word that is said, but you should capture the essence in shorthand. After the conversation, you will have time to return to your notes and make them legible
- > If you're taking notes by hand, leave every second line blank. This will make it easier for you to go back and annotate/clarify your notes
- > Capture all the points that are made, not just the parts that you think are important
- > Scribes are not expected to join the conversation, but rather to focus and concentrate hard on capturing points made
- > Scribes cannot afford for their attention to drift
- > The accuracy and comprehensiveness of the conversation notes depends on the scribes listening as hard as you can

After the Conversation

- > Allow time to sit quietly and return to your notes. You may wish to do this with the conversation host. Flesh out your shorthand writing, rewrite and clarify parts so that they will be clear to the external readers who will do the processing and compilation
- > Send your notes to your Core Group within 48 hours of the conversation occurring
- > Put your name and contact details on your notes, in case your Core Group needs further clarification of what you have written



Wrapping up conversations.

At the end of a conversation, the host thanks their group and reminds them of where they can go for more information, or to get further involved. The host encourages people to talk about this process to others if they found it positive and useful.

As soon as practical after the conversation ends, the host and scribe come together to flesh out the notes while they both have it fresh in their minds. This may be immediately after the conversation, or it may be the following day or evening. The notes need to be accurate, but they do not need to be voluminous.

example

We have included an example of conversation notes taken during The Trust's Purple Sage Project to give you an idea of how to capture what was said without writing down every single word.

Question: What does a good society look like?

Answers:

- People matter more than economics
- A community working together
- A greater level of co-operation between elected parliamentarians
- Accountability
- Citizens, not clients or customers
- Ability to express dissatisfaction



It is also important for the host and scribe to record their individual reflections about the small group experience. This need only be a short paragraph that captures things that went well, suggested improvements, effectiveness of questions, the atmosphere amongst the group, recurring themes and any other insights.

Once the conversation notes and reflections are completed, the hosts send them to your Core Group by the agreed date, making sure that the host and scribe names are on the notes in case your group needs something clarified during the processing phase.



Voice for Indi: Against the Odds

Going into the 2013 federal election, there was no safer Liberal seat in Australia than Indi. In fact, Indi had been represented by conservative politicians for all but four terms since Federation in 1901!

The Liberal Party at the time was confident they would continue to win Indi for the foreseeable future. However, many of us living in the electorate were feeling taken for granted, unrepresented by our current Member of Parliament, and overlooked when budget and resource decisions were made. People were openly asking, “what’s the point of voting? Nothing is going to change.” Such was the level of disillusionment and despair that young people had begun to question the value of enrolling to vote at all.

In June 2012, a group of twelve like-minded people gathered discreetly in the Wangaratta library. We wanted to find a way to stand up, to speak out and create some hope for the younger generation but were concerned that in our small, tight-knit rural communities, we could face personal and professional repercussions if we were seen to openly oppose the sitting Liberal member.

As a group, we met weekly for months, debating what was possible and how we could create change. We knew that success could take many forms.



It could be a change of political representation, perhaps our current MP would be forced to represent more fully the priorities of local people, or the electorate could become classified as 'marginal' at future elections, which in turn would prompt other political parties to field higher-quality candidates and have Indi allocated a greater share of national resources.

As our group continued to explore what we could achieve, two different approaches became apparent: standing an independent candidate at the next election, or empowering ordinary people by building participation and activism in our democracy.

Our group decided to first engage the electorate by developing a process that would give people a voice, a cause and some hope. Voice for Indi was born.

Voice for Indi agreed that to be effective, all people in the electorate, regardless of party preference, should be included and heard as this was the foundation of democracy. We also knew that if people could come together around the common good and treat each other with respect, regardless of party politics, then Indi could model a higher standard of behaviour that was sorely lacking in our federal political system.

Some years before, I had been involved in the Purple Sage Project run by the Victorian Women's Trust, and later, their *Watermark* Australia project. Central to these initiatives was the Kitchen Table Conversations (KTC) model, and I proposed this could provide a process in Indi to sidestep party politics and bring people together to use their voices constructively.



case study

Subsequently, Voice for Indi asked Mary Crooks, VWT's Executive Director, to guide us in applying the KTC process across the Indi electorate. In November 2012, Mary accepted our invitation to come to Indi to assist our group understand the KTC process and tailor it to our purpose. She also helped us clarify the reasons for, and wisdom of, facilitating a KTC process before possibly considering an independent candidate to contest the election.

Between November 2012 and February 2013, Voice for Indi developed our KTC project with Mary teaching and supporting the group as we went along. Collaborative drafting ensured the document we used to invite people across the electorate to join our project was simple, elegant and informative.

Reflecting our understanding of VWT's KTC process and how to roll it out, in mid-February 2013, the Voice for Indi group activated our diverse networks to invite people interested in hosting a conversation to a briefing session.

Careful consideration was given to briefing the potential hosts. We wanted people to understand they were volunteering for more than just afternoon tea with their friends. People were being asked to actively and deliberately reach out to a diversity of people in their communities.

There was a potential that hosts would have people in their conversation groups who disagreed strongly with each other. Hosts needed to understand that a KTC was about welcoming all views as long as they were offered with respect, listening to others, seeking to understand others, and not about seeking to be heard or to prosecuting a view.



Hosts received ground rules, guidance on how to structure the conversation and key discussion starters. Buoyed by this support, the fun began! Hosts held fifty-five conversations across the electorate in March and April. Four hundred and forty people participated, ranging in age from under 18 to over 90. Groups met in a people's homes, some met for coffee, others for a birthday lunch, after yoga, at the pub, for dinner, at work, at the health centre, and the list goes on.

The conversation starters were constructed around three themes: what makes it good to live in Indi, what makes for good political representation, and what were the issues and concerns within and beyond the electorate.

Questions were purposefully crafted so that people were first able to cultivate common ground among themselves before moving into more critical discussion about issues of concern and political representation. Fortunately, early worry about people strongly disagreeing with each other and what that could mean for small, tight-knit communities, didn't materialise. People had seen such bad behaviour in parliament that they were ready to reassert basic goodwill and constructive discussion. More than anything, people enjoyed being together. They told us what a gift it is to be listened to. They thanked us for the opportunity.

By the end of April 2013, the faithfully scribed notes from the KTCs had been received by Voice for Indi and our challenge was to find a way to process these and compile a summary report that honoured and acknowledged everyone's input. Mary returned to Wangaratta in late April 2013 to help process all the input from people from all the groups and develop a template for reporting back to everyone.



case study

Using this template, a small number of group members got to work over the following days to bring people's input into the Voice for Indi report.

Despite a crushing three-week deadline, the report was finished in time for its launch on the afternoon of 19th May 2013 in Wodonga. Almost three hundred people attended the launch, an amazing response considering the size of the electorate and the distances some people travelled to be there.

The Voice for Indi organising group saw ourselves as facilitators and credited our community with the success of the KTC process and everything in the report. The Voice for Indi report was truly the people's report. Our next task was to provide a copy of the report to the sitting member for Indi, Sophie Mirabella, to assist her to hear the voice of the people in her electorate.

The KTCs made it abundantly clear that people in Indi wanted better political representation, they wanted someone who would put the electorate first and not their party. Voices for Indi turned our attention to identifying an independent candidate to run at the 2013 federal election.

Cathy McGowan, a founding member of Voice for Indi, and seen to be a proven community leader, stepped up to the task. By harnessing the deep wisdom residing in ordinary citizens across Indi, Cathy and the campaign team were able to develop a coherent and strong policy platform. Hundreds of trusted supporters, buoyed by their participation in the conversations, were also now willing to support and campaign for her.



At the election on 7th September 2013, Cathy won the seat by just under 400 votes with a swing of 9.2%, a swing that went against the national trend. She and her team of 600 volunteers had run a superb campaign, but the KTC process, which ran from November 2012 to May 2013, had laid crucial foundations for her electoral success.

The Kitchen Table Conversation process was like throwing a stone in a pond and creating ripples that fanned out over the 28,000 square kilometres of the electorate of Indi. It fundamentally changed how the electorate thinks and acts politically. Cathy McGowan won the next election in 2016 and upon retirement ushered in the election of Helen Haines. Indi is the first ever electorate in Australia to have consecutive independent members of parliament.

NOTE: after the 2013 electoral success, Voice for Indi became Voices for Indi, indicative of a community movement that belongs to everyone.

(This case study was developed following on a personal interview with Alana Johnson, founding member and past president (2014-2015) of Voices for Indi).



Step 6

Processing conversation notes.

Your Core Group receives all conversation notes and processes them in accordance with three important principles: comprehensiveness, traceability and faithfulness.



Time to get to it.

Referring to the task and timeline developed in Step 2, your Core Group will have a few weeks set aside to process conversation notes, so this is no time to twiddle your thumbs!

Three key principles.

There are three key principles that should be followed for your Core Group to produce a report from the conversations that genuinely captures and reflects the many voices of the people involved:

- 1. Comprehensiveness:** All input from people to conversation questions must be recorded and included in the summary report. Your Core Group must not censor or make judgements about what to include—everything goes in!
- 2. Traceability:** This means people can see that their contribution has been heard and accounted for. This is not about individuals being credited with specific words.
- 3. Faithfulness:** When responses need to be distilled into some form of summary, this must be done with accuracy and meaning, and reported using plain language.

We will show you how these principles are woven through this final, important phase.



Processing conversation notes.

It is your Core Groups responsibility to record and compile what people said. This is an awesome responsibility to be taken seriously and given due time. You will need at least a few weeks here.

Members of your Core Group are expected to join with one another on this task and depending on how many conversations have been had, additional volunteers may need to be recruited and briefed accordingly.

Each set of conversation notes from hosts needs to be read by at least two people. Readers will put their own initials or markings on each set of notes once they have finished reading. During this task, we encourage readers to make notes to themselves about things that seem important. For example, themes, concerns and ideas that people keep repeating and returning to during conversations.

Once all the conversation notes submitted by hosts and scribes have been read, your Core Group will turn its attention to presenting the themes and ideas which have run across the conversation groups.



Capturing the essence across all conversations.

It was during the time when the Trust was advising Voices for Indi in 2013, that we came up with what we think is a dependable method for presenting what people said. Our suggested report template does two things: it comprehensively accounts for every response gathered during conversations, and faithfully distils themes and conclusions in a way that readers of the report can get to grips quite quickly with what people said.

The first step is for two members of your Core Group to take several days to work together. For each question posed to conversation groups, one person will read the notes aloud and the other person will type, removing all unnecessary words along the way.

If some responses are the same, put these in bold. Run the responses along the page, from left to right. This will ensure each participant can trace their own contributions and every view is comprehensively accounted for.

Where the same point is made by multiple people across multiple conversation groups, it is highlighted. This can be done effectively using bold or different coloured text.

After all the responses to a key question are recorded, it will be possible to distil all of them into a paragraph or two and draw out common themes. This distillation needs to be faithful to what was recorded in the conversation notes.



example

A good example of our report template working well, is from the *Voices for Indi* report published in 2013. As you can see, the key question is prominent and underneath it, every response is accounted for and run from left to right across the page.

Responses that were heard multiple times across multiple conversation groups are highlighted in orange text.

What makes a strong community?

good relationships • respect • manners • leadership • trust • innovation • different interest groups • **passionate people who love where they live and look after each other** • equal distribution of wealth • affordability • social cohesion • **everyone feels able to contribute** • good infrastructure and services • **social connectedness** • encouragement for local people to lead solutions and projects • acceptance • **diversity** • tolerance • community hubs that pull people together • events and festivals • **shared values** • infrastructure parks/roads • schools • folk festival • community owned enterprises • means for participation • sporting opportunities • **employment opportunities** • honesty • security • caring • a commitment to the longer term and future generations • a community that recognises and celebrates its diversity and is able to work with this diversity • **working to achieve greater understanding and consensus** • ensures all parts of the community are provided with information about what's going on • **strong communities have a shared vision about how they want to be with each other, how they want to interact and their vision for now, the middle and longer term** • education • benevolence • love and care • underlying value of goodwill • a balance of financial and environmental economies • values

In the original report, you'll see that people's responses to this first key question run across two full A4 pages. All responses are listed and accounted for, and if they want to, participants can find their contributions in this text.



In order to make people’s voices accessible and quickly understandable in your summary report, distil what you heard into one or two paragraphs for each key question.

example

The *Voices for Indi* group distilled people’s answers to the question of “what makes a strong community” in the following way:

A strong community is where people feel they belong and have a sense of purpose, connection with others, and the ability to be safe and supported as well as contribute – one where people pull together and help each other. Diversity, acceptance and tolerance are highly valued.

Participants also told us that a strong community looks to the future and has the services, infrastructure, education, jobs and opportunities for now as well as thinking of future generations.

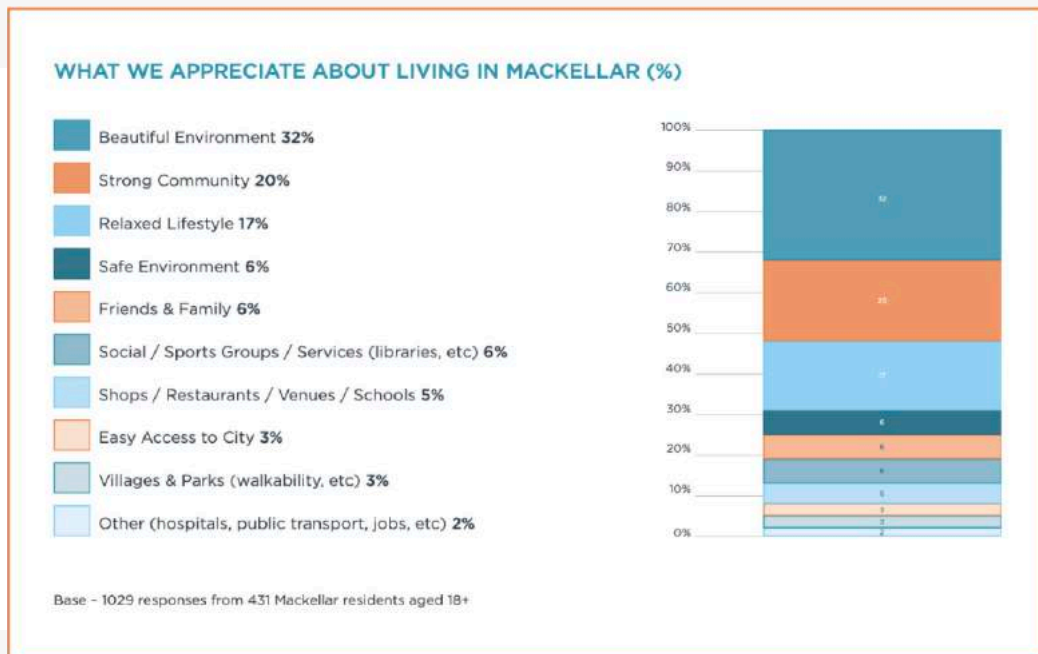
You can access the full *Voices of Indi* report at
<https://voicesforindi.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/V4I-Report.pdf>



example

More recently, in 2021, we've seen the same principles at play in the 'Mackellar Matters Report' produced by *Voices of Mackellar*. All responses from people participating in conversations have been comprehensively recorded and accounted for. We can see the points made repeatedly by people as represented in the graph and corresponding percentage.

This detail is contained in the Appendix of the report.



Source: 'Mackellar Matters Report,' July 2021

https://bf373fee-a59f-4551-b608-88a2382d7a1d.filesusr.com/ugd/53b11b_e7e92fe666084a1fa95c72d47902439e.pdf



example

The main body of the 'Mackellar Matters Report' faithfully distils what was heard from people into a summary of common themes for each conversation question. Voices of Mackellar have chosen to bring the summaries to life by including anonymised quotes.

In answer to the question: 'What do you value about living in Mackellar?' it was clear residents had a high appreciation of the environment and community in which they live. Almost a third of responses mentioned the beautiful Northern Beaches environment, specifically the beaches, national parks, lagoons and wetlands, tree canopies and parks.

Lucky to live here!

Proximity of friends and family is also seen to be important, together with the existence of a large number of community sporting, social and council funded support groups and services.

Nature, beaches, villages, laid back feel of the place. Not uptight, very relaxed and friendly.

The community, people and ocean. The community is truly special - people are so friendly and supportive; people care about the place.

After the environment, almost half of the responses highlighted an appreciation of the strong and safe communities which exist in what is described as "the villages of Mackellar", as well as a love of the area's relaxed beach lifestyle.

I live here to get away from the hustle of Sydney but close enough to enjoy it.

Schools, sporting and other clubs are the backbone of a strong community.

The electorate's wide choice of shops, restaurants and other venues is also seen to be important together with the "walkable" nature of Mackellar's many "villages". Additionally, the work and social benefits of being close to the centre of Sydney are valued.

Now that you understand the underlying principles for processing conversation notes and can see how the report template organises and highlights people's voices, your group can get going on this very important task.

Repeat the process of accounting for and capturing all responses, and distilling the essence of what was heard, for each key question your Core Group asked people to discuss.



Compiling your report so it's ready to share.

Now that you have processed all the conversation notes and the body of your report is in place, there are a few extra things it needs before it can be shared.

The beginning of the report will explain the context, the process that was undertaken, provide key statistics such as how many people participated, the number of conversations conducted, and the age range and gender of participants.

If you have drawn on this Victorian Women's Trust guide, or the experience of other groups to complete the KTC process, now is the time to acknowledge their support and their contributions.

At the end of the report, once all key questions have been addressed, you may wish to list possible next steps or things people can think about doing. No doubt, people will have shared ideas and suggestions in their conversations. You can pull these out and cluster them together on the final page of the report. Actions are not necessarily for your Core Group to take, but rather encouragement and direction for all participants to keep engaged and focused on creating change.



Step 7

Sharing what people said.

Your Core Group shares the summary report with all participants as well as others who did not take part in the KTC process.



Time to share.

Your Core Group has completed its summary report and now it is time to share it. In thinking about its distribution, you need to have two audiences in mind: all the people who participated in your conversation process, and those who didn't.

Reporting back to your participants.

You may wish to organise a public event where all participants and the broader community are invited along. If this is the case, the event will need to be organised in the same way your original community information sessions were: well publicised, welcoming, clean and accessible venue, with light snacks and drinks provided. Printed copies of your groups report can be handed out at the event.

Alternatively, you may choose to share the report electronically. Your Core Group will send conversation hosts a digital version of the report—we recommend doing this as a PDF. It then becomes the responsibility of individual hosts to get in touch with the small number of people they personally brought together for a conversation, to share the report and thank them for their time and contributions.

Regardless of how you choose to circulate the report, all conversation hosts need to receive a printed copy of the report. This also gives you a chance to thank them again for facilitating the process.

If you have constructed a website, please upload the summary report so it is publicly available.



Reporting more widely.

Based on the motivation behind and focus of the KTC process, your Core Group will be clear about who, in the wider community, you want reading the report and hearing the voice of the people. It may be every local candidate in an upcoming election, local and regional media, local council and government ministers.

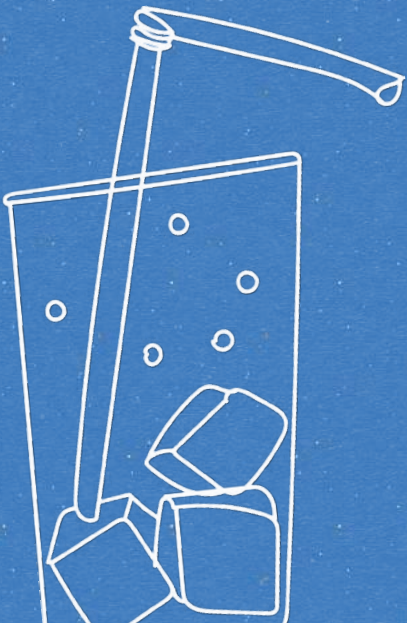
Write a one-page letter or press release and attach it to printed copies of the summary report. Feel free to take a photograph of your group having a discussion (with people's permission, of course!) as this is a great image to use for promotional purposes and will capture people's attention. Deliver these to the people the people you want reading the report, along with the name and contact details of a member of your group who is willing to respond to enquiries and answer questions.



Step 8

Core Group takes a break.

Decide whether it is “mission accomplished” and time to disband the Core Group, or whether there is a new phase to think about and enter.



You made it!

Phew. You made it! You have completed the KTC process.

You have worked collegially with other members of your Core Group, you've invited other people to join, you have carefully listened and acknowledged all that people shared during conversations, and you've shared the results with participants and the wider community.

This is a big achievement, and we hope you feel proud. Take some time to mark this moment with your Core Group. You may wish to organise a lunch or dinner together, share a drink at the pub or café, or enjoy a peaceful walk to decompress.

If you feel that you have achieved your goal through this process, then congratulations. This may be a good time to disband your Core Group.

Perhaps your group feels that there is still more work to be done. You will need to clarify the focus and objective for the next phase. Perhaps it is selecting and supporting an independent candidate in an election campaign, it may be lobbying the council to build a new park, or you may want to be involved in planning how your community transitions to a low carbon economy over the next five years.

Some of your group members may choose to change their level of involvement for the next phase. You may need to form a new Core Group that becomes the engine house for whatever you plan next. Whatever way you choose to move forward, you do so with a profound understanding of what is important to people, and a community who are more engaged, hopeful and energised to create positive change.

Well done. Democratic culture is all the better for it.



Templates

The following pages provide you with templates for a few, key resources that, in our experience, remain largely the same between different Core Groups running the KTC process.

The templates are provided for you to print and share with conversation hosts, scribes and participants.

- a) Host: Role Description
- b) Scribe: Role Description
- c) Ground Rules for Conversations
- d) Participant Profile Form



Host: Role Description

Before the Conversation

- > Set a meeting date, time and venue
- > Invite up to nine friends, family, colleagues, or neighbours to your home or another suitable venue for a couple of hours of discussion
- > Organise some drinks and light snacks
- > Carefully read the document provided by your Core Group (and print off copies for your conversation group if required)
- > Appoint a scribe who is able to track the discussion and capture it in as much detail as is practically and reasonably possible. It is important that your scribe accepts the need to try and represent the conversation fairly and in as much detail as possible and not be selective

At the Beginning of the Conversation

- > Welcome everyone to the conversation and acknowledge the traditional custodians of the land you are gathered on
- > Encourage quick introductions around the table
- > Draw attention to the ground rules and get agreement from people that they will follow them. Throughout the conversation, you can refer back to the ground rules if you feel that they aren't being followed
- > Collect demographic information of conversation participant
- > Do a short icebreaker activity then pose key questions to the group for discussion

Kitchen Table Conversations

Throughout the Conversation

- > The role of host is to facilitate and moderate the conversation, and to make sure that all of the discussion questions are focussed on. This does not have to be done in order.
- > Ensure inclusiveness. All participants should get to have their say and feel included, valued and respected by the host and each other
- > Encourage everyone to bring their “best selves.” There’s no room for nastiness or disrespect towards others
- > Ensure the conversation is flowing, wide-ranging and honest
- > The group does not have to reach consensus! What is important is that people feel as though they have been able to contribute their ideas and opinions - and for these to be recorded faithfully
- > Make sure you allocate enough time for each of the key questions or conversation starters
- > Judge the energy of the group. If you can sense that a question has been well and truly covered and energy is starting to wane, move the conversation on to another area
- > The conversation can go into other areas, but you should balance how far away from the questions the discussion can drift before bringing it back under control
- > Don’t be afraid to call people into the conversation. For example, “Pam, what do you think?”
- > Invite participants to become further involved in the process by providing details of your Core Group
- > Create a positive ripple—suggest that participants talk about their discussions and the ideas that emerged with other people at work, home and in their community
- > Thank everyone for their time and their contributions

After the Conversation

- > Sit down with your scribe straight after the meeting and flesh out the meeting’s content as much as you can while you both have it foremost in your minds. Then, develop the written summary by referring to the discussion questions. Naturally, if there happened to be additional discussion beyond the agreed discussion questions, it is important to capture this as well
- > As soon as possible after the conversation ends (we recommend immediately, but no longer than 24 hours) the host should reflect on the conversation and make some notes on their observations and takeaways, including the context, the process, the issues that arose, the atmosphere and any other insights.
- > Send your notes to the project lead within 48 hours of the conversation

Scribe: Role Description

During the Conversation

- > The role of scribe is to capture an accurate and comprehensive record of what was said by participants during the conversation
- > You will not be able to write every single word that is said, but you should capture the essence in shorthand. After the conversation, you will have time to return to your notes and make them legible
- > If you're taking notes by hand, leave every second line blank. This will make it easier for you to go back and annotate/clarify your notes
- > Capture all the points that are made, not just the parts that you think are important
- > Scribes are not expected to join the conversation, but rather to focus and concentrate hard on capturing points made
- > Scribes cannot afford for their attention to drift
- > The accuracy and comprehensiveness of the conversation notes depends on the scribes listening as hard as you can

After the Conversation

- > Allow time to sit quietly and return to your notes. You may wish to do this with the conversation host. Flesh out your shorthand writing, rewrite and clarify parts so that they will be clear to the external readers who will do the processing and compilation
- > Send your notes to your Core Group within 48 hours of the conversation occurring
- > Put your name and contact details on your notes, in case your Core Group needs further clarification of what you have written

Ground Rules for Conversations

1. We accept that everyone is entitled to have a say
2. We will make the effort to listen to one another
3. We respect people's right to their opinion even if we disagree
4. We will try at all times to be constructive
5. We will try to stay on track
6. We will acknowledge and thank each other for contributing during the discussion and afterward

Further Reading

- [The Purple Sage Project](#)

vwt.org.au/projects/purple-sage

- [Watermark Australia](#)

vwt.org.au/projects/watermark/

- [Voices of Mackellar](#)

voicesofmackellar.org.au

- [Voices for the Hunter](#)

voicesforthehunter.org

- [Voices for Indi](#)

voicesforindi.com

- Voices for Indi Communications (over page)



Kitchen Table Conversations

INFORMATION FOR HOSTS

The relationship between the one hundred and fifty Federal MPs and by extension their communities is the foundation block of our national system of democracy - not tabloid owners or other powerful interest groups or individuals. But for this relationship to work properly, MPs and their constituents need to engage with one another constructively and respectfully (A Switch in Time, Mary Crooks, 2012, p.53).

Welcome to *Voice for Indi*

Many people across the Indi electorate are disappointed with the current political process and what it says about our democracy.

Rather than sliding into despair, we believe that each one of us can play a constructive part in lifting standards of behaviour, focusing on ideas and policies and strengthening the way we are represented.

The Voice for Indi (**V4i**) committee was set up by 12 people in Indi to provide a simple and effective process by which people across the electorate can give voice – where their interests, concerns and ideas are heard, respected and taken up by candidates presenting for election.

Such a process will help to create an electorate with a range of strong and competitive candidates; and develop leadership with vision that truly represents and delivers for the people of Indi.

Key values guiding this process

The people on the **V4i** committee have no party political allegiance.

We are committed to being honest and respectful, to being well-informed, and to referring to reputable sources when making statements.

We are also motivated by what we see as some really important values and commitments. We want to see:

- An enriched political conversation in our electorate;
- Simple and effective activities which encourage and support others to participate in our democracy;
- A diversity of voices and opinion and participation in electoral processes;
- An electorate where people's voices are heard, respected and represented at national level and regional levels.



Find out more about the committee on the **V4i** website: <http://www.voiceforindi.com>
Cathy McGowan (Chair), Rowan O'Hagan, Alana Johnson, Tony Lane, Anne Shaw, Diane Shepheard, Denis Ginnivan, Ben McGowan, Phil Haines, John Mahony, Susan Benedyka

You can become part of this refreshing initiative...

'Democracy is the conversation amongst equals to determine what constitutes good life and the good society' (J. Rutherford and H. Shah, *The Good Society* 2006).

During March and April 2013, across the Indi electorate from Marysville to the Tallangatta valley, groups of people will meet for 'kitchen table conversations'. The responses from all of these conversations will be compiled into a document called *The Voice for Indi*.

The idea is simple and powerful.

Everyone is welcome to participate. But the key to this happening is for a number of people to step forward and agree to host a 'kitchen table conversation'. These people then bring together small groups of up to nine others. These might be friends, neighbours, family, workmates, or people they know from community networks. They meet around the kitchen table or their workplace or wherever is easiest for them.

The hosts facilitate a conversation for a couple of hours focused on the three themes include in this pack. Participants' ideas and thoughts will be collated by the hosts and forwarded to the **V4i** team for processing and integrating with all other kitchen table conversations across the Indi electorate.

The task of being a Host

As one of the enthusiastic hosts enabling and leading a 'kitchen table conversation,' you would be expected to:

- set a meeting date
- invite up to nine friends / family/ colleagues/ neighbours / community members to your home **or** other suitable venue for a couple hours of discussion
- collect contact details for the group (on the form provided in this pack)
- facilitate the discussion
- ensure there is a summary of the opinions and ideas of your group and that it is forwarded to the **V4i** committee at voiceforindi@voiceforindi.com or **P.O. Box 851 Wangaratta 3676 by April 19th**
- invite participants to register on the **V4i** website if they are interested in becoming even further involved
- *create a positive ripple* – suggest that participants talk about their discussions and the ideas that emerged with other people at work or home or in their community.



Handy tips for hosting the ‘kitchen table conversation

- explain **V4i**, the community conversation process and the reporting back to **V4i**
- ask participants to introduce themselves and say briefly why they have come to be part of the conversation
- appoint a scribe – someone from the group who is able to track the discussion and capture it in as much detail as is practically and reasonably possible
- It is important that your scribe accepts the need to try and represent the conversation fairly and in as much detail as possible and not be selective
- The group does not have to reach consensus! What is important is that people feel as though they have been able to contribute their ideas and opinions – and for these to be recorded faithfully
- make sure you allocate enough time for each of the suggested conversation starters
- sit down with your scribe straight after the meeting and flesh out the meeting’s content as much as you can while you both have it foremost in your minds – and then develop the written summary by referring to the Discussion Starters that are listed in the next section. Naturally, if there happened to be additional discussion beyond these Discussion Starters, it is important that this is captured as well

Some simple but effective ground rules for running the meeting

Meetings full of people with good intent can still come unstuck. A simple and balanced set of ground rules will go a long way to achieving a productive meeting.

It is important the Host establishes the ground rules as soon as introductions are over. The following five such rules are tried and well-tested:

- We accept that everyone is entitled to have a say
- We will make the effort to listen to one another
- We respect people’s right to their opinions even if we disagree
- We will try at all times to be constructive
- We will try to stay on track

It is important that people at the meeting are provided with the chance to hear these suggested ground rules; and that they indicate their willingness to adhere to them during the course of the discussion. If necessary, the Host can draw people’s attention back to them all or some in particular.



Kitchen Table Conversation: Discussion Starters

Any discussion requires something to kick start it!

Voice for Indi is about establishing a reliable and accurate view of what people think and feel about their electorate, their political representation and what they see as issues and concerns that can be addressed through the political process.

The following discussion starters will help to keep this focus, guide the meeting; and provide the basis for capturing and writing up the meetings so they can be all compiled and integrated with some real coherence.

1. Theme: Living in the Indi community

- What makes for a strong community?
- What are the best things about living in Indi?
- Are there any particular issues or concerns that you feel should be brought to the attention of your elected representatives?

2. Theme: Political representation

- What do think makes for a really good political representative?
- Do you feel you have an adequate voice to date in the way you are represented? If not, why not?
- What would make for a stronger relationship between people and elected representatives?

3. Theme: Issues and concerns

- Are there particular issues or concerns in Indi that you feel strongly about?
- Are there particular issues *within* the Indi electorate that you feel should be focused on in the run up to the federal election on 14 September 2013?
- Are there issues *beyond* the Indi electorate that you think should be focused on in the run up to the 2013 Federal election?
- Any ideas as to what you think could be done that might deal with these issues effectively?

The V4i Committee acknowledge the contribution of the Victorian Women's Trust in preparation of this information.





**VICTORIAN
WOMEN'S TRUST**

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