

What does it take to organize a local dialogue on community accessibility?

This piece is the first in SPARC BC's new series of short, practical articles on ways to support and increase accessibility and social inclusion in our communities.

THE FORMAL DIALOGUE PROCESS can be used in any community—urban or rural, big or small—to foster discussion on accessibility, build knowledge, and improve local services, resources, and participation.

Initiating a dialogue process in your community will require the sponsorship of a host agency or group of individuals who recognize the need for such an event. The community or host agency will need to coordinate the necessary resources, processes, and structure and be able to follow the project to completion.

When planning a dialogue consider three main questions: What is the goal and why should participants care? Who is going to attend and have we included everyone? What will participants be expected to do? Once those questions are answered and work gets underway on inviting attendees and finding an accessible venue, a host will still need to:

- Select and organize a diverse advisory committee, who in turn will help develop the agenda content, have specific input into format, and serve as expert consultants to the process.
- Find a dialogue moderator whose responsibility is to guide the overall dialogue process.
- Engage facilitators and note-takers to assist

the small-group work that takes place throughout the day.

- Select several attendees to be 'weavers': individuals who can accurately interpret and summarize the discussions that take place and identify the ideas generated throughout the dialogue. Weavers can present their insights and observations to the entire group so that everyone benefits from all of the discussions and to ensure that the most important aspects of the dialogue.

Naturally, to organize a dialogue event, you will need financial resources along with human resources. Your local community might be able to help. You will find that businesses, local services providers, community organizations, clubs, and private individuals are all concerned with and have an interest in making their communities accessible to the benefit of everyone. Ask them. Form partnerships. Share costs. Together, build an inclusive and inspiring project that everyone can get excited about. ■

For further information on how to develop a dialogue on community accessibility in your community, please contact us at (604) 718-7733 or info@sparc.bc.ca.

SPARC BC is hosting a dialogue event for the World Urban Forum in June. See the back cover for details.