

NC STATE UNIVERSITY

INSTITUTE *for* EMERGING ISSUES

# **Creative Conversations: Community Discussion Guide**

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CREATING INC

## **ABOUT THE INSTITUTE FOR EMERGING ISSUES**

Housed at NC State University, the Institute for Emerging Issues (IEI) is a public policy, think-and-do tank that convenes leaders from business, nonprofit organizations, government and higher education to tackle some of the biggest issues facing North Carolina's future growth and prosperity. Through research, ideas, debate and action, we prepare leaders to address North Carolina's future challenges and opportunities.

To learn more about the Institute for Emerging Issues, visit [www.emergingissues.org](http://www.emergingissues.org).

## **ACKNOWLEDGMENTS**

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## GUIDE OVERVIEW

**Purpose:** With a mission to support an enduring capacity for innovation in North Carolina, the Institute for Emerging Issues hopes this Community Discussion Guide will help communities to understand the importance of creativity to their economies, see ways to build on local assets in place to foster creativity, and provide clear steps to further enhance and harness creativity for economic development.

This Guide's use will vary from community to community, depending upon community readiness, commitment and time available for leaders to do the work. Communities should view the Guide as a starting place for facilitating a discussion in a structured and systematic way. However, they must draw heavily on their own unique history, culture and assets if the discussion is to have relevance.

Not all communities will be able to make use of this Guide. If your community has already had discussions about its assets and strategies to build on those assets, then this Guide may be too elementary. This Guide is intended for places where:

- The community is just beginning a discussion on using creativity to create new local opportunities;
- The community is committed to change;
- The community has the capacity to determine what change is needed; and
- The community can organize itself to move forward with a change initiative.

## KEY CREATIVITY TERMS

The following terms are used throughout this Guide. A brief definition is provided for each term according to its use in this document.

**Automation:** Replacement of workers with technology. Examples include products such as Turbo Tax, which allows individuals to file their own taxes rather than use an accountant.

**Creative Network:** The collaborative system of people, places, processes and policies that fuel creative thinking.

**Creativity:** Generating ideas that can be used to solve problems or invent new products and services. Creativity fuels innovation and innovation can lead to a competitive advantage for a community or region.

**Creativity Economy:** Refers to today's economy where more and more jobs depend on the complex and creative "right brained" skills – including problem solving, communications, entrepreneurship and collaboration.

**Creative Assets:** The recognition of arts, cultural amenities, and other factors as contributors to quality of life in a particular place and, more importantly, as economic drivers for a community or region.

**Outsourcing:** The contracting out of a business function to someone overseas at a lower price.

## IMPORTANCE OF CREATIVITY IN YOUR COMMUNITY

As ideas become the new foundation of the economy, forward-thinking communities and regions are assembling networks of people, organizations and activities to foster creativity and economic value. Your community can too. A community's economic development success will be determined by the ability to create new products, re-imagine old ideas, see unlikely connections, and develop novel solutions to complex problems.

Communities across North Carolina have witnessed global forces undermine agriculture, textiles, electronics and manufacturing industries. Creativity is a counterbalance to those disruptive economic forces. Traditionally, a community's economic strength has come from location, business assets, and economic climate. But in the global economy, creative people who develop businesses unaffected by automation and outsourcing are the new engines for growth and development. Economic growth today is largely being generated by small, young, entrepreneurial businesses.

Creativity is also a way to draw people to an area through tourism, cultural offerings or businesses that produce or sell arts and crafts. Communities that focus on their downtown, celebrate their heritage, or provide venues for culture and entertainment all create conditions that attract people and enhance the quality of life for its residents.

Developing your community's creative workforce can draw the kinds of jobs your community needs: jobs that pay well, expand fast when times are good and prove resilient in the face of recession. This creative workforce does not just include artists, architects, fashion designers or photographers. It also includes teachers, marketers, medical researchers, geographers, chemists and many others generating new knowledge and new ideas.

A community has to create the conditions that attract and support talented people, help them connect to others, and be a place where they want to live, work and play. Developing creativity can help.

## CRITICAL QUESTIONS

Community discussions will benefit from a broad participation of community residents on how to develop creative individuals, creative businesses, and cultivate your community's cultural assets. Here are three questions to help you get started:

1. If your community is voted the most creative place for its size in 2020, what would it look like?
2. What are the assets and strategies that would get your community to that end point?
3. Who are the groups that would need to be included to realize that vision, and how can you engage them in this effort?

## STRATEGIES

IEI's Working Group on Creativity, which convened in the fall of 2009, was charged with determining how best to cultivate a rich climate of creativity in North Carolina. The Working Group identified four strategies as critical to moving forward the environment for creativity. Each community will have strengths and weaknesses in these areas. Based on that assessment, your community can then develop action steps for catalyzing creativity. The four strategies developed by IEI's Working Group on Creativity are:

- **foster connectivity** to encourage the exchange of ideas, increase efficiency, and build important partnerships;
- **enhance education** to infuse creative practices into core curricula as well as offer greater opportunities for cross-disciplinary collaboration;
- **transfer ideas to market** through an established process designed to transform creative ideas into marketable products, processes or services; and
- **cultivate creative assets** and gain broad-based public awareness and support of creative culture to promote and sustain positive economic and community development in both urban and rural areas.

All four strategies are important to developing your community's creativity economy and the collaborative network of people, places, and processes that fuel creative thinking.

## EXAMPLES OF ACTION ITEMS

The Institute for Emerging Issues visited several communities throughout the state to identify opportunities for improving the creative network within North Carolina. In the process, IEI catalogued some of the specific actions communities have already taken to develop their creativity economies.

We have included a few examples to jumpstart your thinking as your community develops its own set of action items:

1. Develop venture capital for small business and entrepreneurs (i.e., rather than measured, institutional fundraising, more project financing) and accessible business services.
2. Create incentives for development of downtown as a place for creative individuals and businesses including tax credits for renovation of historic buildings and other ways to redevelop vacant properties.
3. Develop incubator space for creative entrepreneurs to practice their trade.
4. Enhance access to high speed internet so that residents can work and connect with others.
5. Educate local business leaders on the benefits of investing locally.
6. Develop mentorship opportunities for new entrepreneurs to learn from successful creative industry leaders.

Differences in community approaches are dependent on factors such as the presence or absence of natural amenities, the industries which are clustered in the region and the presence or absence of leadership to move a community forward to take advantage of emerging opportunities.

This is just a starting point for your community discussion. There are other tools in the Guide that will help. These include a moderator's guide, a letter to community participants outlining your planned approach, a pre-Creativity Discussion questionnaire, a community flyer to advertise the discussion, and an evaluation form.



## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

1. New Thinking, New Jobs, Institute for Emerging Issues, January 2010. A copy of the four page report can be found at <http://ncsu.edu/iei/documents/newthinking.pdf>
2. IEI held creativity focus groups across North Carolina to glean the commonalities and differences among communities across the state and identify the opportunities for North Carolina to improve its creative culture. For more information about the learnings and takeaways from these discussions visit: <http://ncsu.edu/iei/programs/creativity/issue/focusgroups/>
3. For specific rural creative strategies see The Creativity of Rural America, Dan Broun, Main Street Economics, May 5, 2009 at <http://www.dailyyonder.com/creativity-rural-america/2009/05/07/2108>.
4. For impacts of the national recession on communities see How the Crash Will Reshape America, Richard Florida, Atlantic Magazine, March 2009 (<http://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2009/03/how-the-crash-will-reshape-america/7293/>) and Community Innovation: How Social Innovators Are Transforming America's Communities, Pete Plastrik and Theodore Staton, <http://www.nupolis.com/public/blog/222271>
5. For more discussion about the factors leading to an emphasis on the "right brain," see Revenge of the Right Brain, Dan Pink, Wired, February 2005. <http://www.wired.com/wired/archive/13.02/brain.html>

# MODERATORS GUIDE

What should your community do to begin its discussion on creativity? How can you consider your community's assets and develop action steps? This Moderator's Guide is designed to help plan and facilitate a discussion to answer those questions.

## Meeting Preparation

### 1. Meeting Location and Room Set Up

The right location and set up are important factors in hosting an inclusive and effective discussion. Hold your meeting in a neutral location such as a community college, university, government office building or some other public space. Set up the meeting room in rounds of six or eight, depending on the number of participants. Provide necessary supplies at the center of each table – paper, pens and pencils and evaluations forms. Have flip charts and easels readily available. Place a podium at the front of the room, along with a projector stand for PowerPoint slides. If a slide advance remote is not available with the projector provided, rearrange the podium and the projector stand so that manual advancement of slides is effortless and unobtrusive for the speaker.

### 2. Issuing Invitations

Once a venue has been established, make a list of key stakeholder groups that should be in attendance (nonprofit leaders, community development corporations, community leaders in government, business, etc.). Using any electronic means available, issue invitations to all participants in these key groups and request their registration (through email or a meeting software platform such as Eventbrite or Evite). The return on “sample

## What is the Moderator's Role?

- Prepare in advance.
  - Know why the dialogue is being held
  - Determine who should attend, is likely to attend, and who is not going to be there but should be
  - Set an agenda
  - Handle logistics
- Plan and distribute the agenda.
- Greet attendees.
- State objectives at the beginning of the dialogue.
- Establish ground rules.
- Guide the group in presenting and sharing information.
- Keep the discussion focused on the specific content.
- Handle conflict in a sensitive and appropriate manner.
- Direct questions, misperceptions, or misinformation to the right people.
- Paraphrase and synthesize ideas and summarize the discussion.
- Provide closure and reiterate action items.
- Solicit feedback on community meetings and events.

population” invitations is a 75:25 ratio – 75% of invitees will not attend. For more select groups, the ratio is significantly higher.

Two weeks prior to the event, place personal phone calls to key decision makers and stakeholders to solidify their participation. One week ahead of time, send a reminder e-mail to all the participants with final instructions.

### **3. Developing the Discussion’s Focus**

It will help your attendance if the right people in your community understand why you are hosting the discussion, and will help you, as the moderator, to design a discussion that responds to the particular interests and priorities of your community.

This can be done in a variety of ways:

- Arrange a meeting with representatives of participant groups ahead of time to share your vision and discuss the needs, interests and expectations of the group. Have participants complete a Pre-Creativity Discussion Questionnaire that identifies their interests and expectations about the discussion. A sample of such a questionnaire is provided in the Appendix.
- Send a fax, e-mail or letter to the participants outlining your planned approach to the discussion. Ask them to provide feedback on the objectives and agenda. A sample of such a letter is in the Appendix. Additional information, which you may need to send out to participants, could be easily integrated into the text of this letter.

By seeking out the interests, priorities and expectations of participants, you will be in a better position to design the workshop and choose the most appropriate exercises for use during the session. You will also have created a sense of investment among others, which will result in better attendance at the event and commitment to action thereafter.

### **4. Press and Publicity About the Discussion**

Create a flyer to advertise the event, including date, location and time it will be held. Make sure to provide a name and contact information for more information about the discussion. An example flyer is in the Appendix. If your event is open to the public, contact your local paper to add the event to its community calendar.

### **5. Equipment and Supplies Needed**

- A Discussion Evaluation Form for each participant
- An Attendance Sheet
- Pens and pencils for completing the evaluation sheet
- Easel, flip chart and markers to record community discussion
- Masking tape
- Post-it notes or stickers for exercises

# SUGGESTED FORMAT FOR COMMUNITY DISCUSSION

(Two Hours)

## Welcome

Timeframe: 10 minutes

Objective: To introduce the goals of the meeting and briefly explain the importance of the creativity economy to participants.

Advance Preparation: None

Introduce yourself and tell participants about the organization hosting the discussion. Give a brief overview about what participants can expect in the following two hours and share the goals of the meeting.

Many participants will be unfamiliar with the creativity economy, so take this time to explain its importance either verbally or through a brief set of power point slides. Emphasize that today's economic growth largely depends on innovation, the development and adoption of new products, processes and business models. The source of innovation is creative people, but each community must create the conditions that attract and support talented people through cultural offerings, amenities and access to networks.

Dan Pink illustrates this point well in *A Whole New Mind*: "In a world where more and more average work can be done by a computer, robot or talented overseas worker faster, cheaper and just as well vanilla doesn't cut it anymore. It's all about the chocolate sauce, whipped cream and cherry you can put on top – entrepreneurship, innovation and creativity."

After providing this background, explain that today's initial discussion will focus on the things your community can do to encourage creativity. The results will be shared with others across the state as they develop their own creative communities, as collaboration is an important factor in developing any creative network.

Following this overview, lead a brief exercise to introduce yourself and have the participants introduce themselves to one another.

## Introductions

Timeframe: 15 minutes

Objective: To introduce yourself and have the participants introduce themselves to each other.

Advance Preparation: None

Introduce yourself to the workshop participants.

Have the participants introduce themselves to you and to one another.

This exercise will provide you with some understanding of the dynamics of the group.

Don't assume that everyone knows each other well. You may choose to use a fun icebreaker if you wish but, ideally, it should (a) reflect some of the principles or concepts of creativity and/or (b) help make clear why people have chosen to participate in the discussion. For example, the moderator might ask each participant to tell everyone their name and then in one word describe the creativity economy in their community.

## Ground Rules

Timeframe: 5 minutes

Objective: To introduce meeting ground rules to participants.

Advance Preparation: Write the ground rules listed below on a flip chart or poster.

Review ground rules with participants before beginning the discussion. Make clear that this meeting is not a debate. Stress that there is work to do to make plans for developing the community's creative talent. The work will be done through deliberation.

The moderator should guide the discussion yet remain neutral. Make sure that:

- Everyone understands the purpose of the meeting
- Everyone is encouraged to participate
- No one or two individuals dominate the discussion
- Every viewpoint is considered fully
- An atmosphere for questioning and clarification is maintained
- Participants listen to one another

The moderator should ask the group if they agree with those rules and ask if others should be added to the list.

## **Review Workshop Objectives**

Timeframe: 5 minutes

Objective: To clearly outline workshop objectives.

Advance Preparation: Write the workshop objectives listed below on a flip chart or poster.

Briefly review the meeting objectives: (1) to identify the benefits of the community's creativity economy; (2) to identify the community's strengths and weaknesses; and (3) to create an action plan for moving forward. Ask for feedback and amend objectives if required. Ask participants to express any expectations that are not covered by the workshop objectives. Be sure to record participant's comments and refer to them as needed. Review the agenda for the workshop explaining, if necessary and/or appropriate, that it is quite general.

## **Benefits of Creativity**

Timeframe: 15 minutes

Objective: To get participants thinking about the topic of creativity and how it can benefit the community.

Advance Preparation: None

Begin the community discussion by asking how your community could benefit from creativity. Ask each person to write their ideas on a sticky note. Have each person give their sticky note to the moderator who should read each note aloud and put them all on a wall chart. This exercise is meant to get participants to think about how creativity can benefit their community. These ideas can be used to generate shared thinking or points of further discussion.

## **Community Strengths and Weaknesses**

Timeframe: 25 minutes

Objective: To learn participants' vision for their community in the future as a creative place to live, work and play. To identify what assets their community still needs to realize this vision.

Advance Preparation: Write the two questions for the open-ended discussion below on a flip chart or poster.

Send out a Pre-Creativity Discussion Questionnaire a few weeks before the community discussion. A copy can be found in the Appendix. Have participants fax or e-mail their answers back to a designated person and score the results. Begin this portion of the agenda by going over the results of the questionnaire. Consider framing the report back around the following questions:

- (1) If your community is voted the most creative place for its size in 2020, what would it look like?
- (2) What are the assets that would get your community to that end point?

Moderator should record participants' answers to these two questions on separate flip charts. Areas of weakness will be identified by considering the vision and the lack of assets needed to realize that vision.

## **Reviewing the Four Strategies**

Timeframe: 25 minutes

Objective: To identify where the community should focus efforts.

Advance Preparation: Write the four strategies (fostering connectivity, enhancing education, transferring ideas to market and cultivating creative assets) on separate flip chart paper or poster board.

The previous brainstorming session provides a vision for where participants see their community in the future and the assets that the community has to realize that vision. This portion of the agenda determines where the community should focus its efforts, using four strategies necessary to bolster a community's creativity economy: fostering connectivity, enhancing education, transferring ideas to market, and cultivating creative assets.

The moderator should review the main themes with the audience based on previous discussion and brainstorm with the participants on the action steps necessary to get there. A few questions may help lead the discussion:

- (1) Should the community focus on making one of its strengths even stronger?
- (2) Should the community try to focus its work in a weak area?

## **Ending the Meeting**

Timeframe: 15 minutes

Objective: To summarize what has been accomplished and identify next steps.

Advance Preparation: None

Before ending the meeting, take a few minutes to reflect on what has been accomplished.



Questions like the following may be useful:

Individual Reflection: Did you hear anything that surprised you? What can you personally be able to help take action on?

Group Reflection: What remains unsolved? Can we identify any shared sense of direction? What do we still need to talk about? What groups need to be included to move forward?

Next Steps: Where do we go from here? Is there anyone missing from the discussion we need to include?

### **Discussion Evaluation Form**

Distribute the Discussion Evaluation Form found in the Appendix and ask participants to respond before leaving the meeting.

Timeframe: 5 minutes

Objective: To receive feedback on the creativity workshop from participants.

Advance Preparation: Bring copies of the Discussion Evaluation Form found in the Appendix for all participants. Ensure that someone is prepared to collect all of the questionnaires upon the discussion's conclusion.

### **Next Steps**

After the discussion has ended and participants leave, the moderator should ensure the following tasks are done:

- (1) Type up the notes from the community discussion;
- (2) Fill out the moderator's evaluation sheet found in the Appendix and send the document back to IEI;
- (3) Identify who will continue to serve as a single point of contact for the participants and community generally going forward; and
- (4) Identify any action items and "to dos" from the discussion along with the appropriate person or organization responsible for its implementation.



# Appendix

## Sample Letter

Dear Mr. Smith:

I am delighted that you are going to join us for a creativity discussion on XXX date in XXX place. The purpose of this e-mail/letter is to outline our planned approach for that discussion and ask for your feedback.

The goal of the discussion is to talk about the importance of creativity to our economy, see how to build upon the local assets we have, and provide action steps to harness creativity for economic development.

We will have a two-hour discussion on how we can develop creative individuals, creative businesses, and cultivate our community's cultural assets. To help make the best use of our time, I would like each participant to fill out a Pre-Creativity Discussion Questionnaire which is attached.

These questions will get you to think about the components of a creativity economy and how our community fares in issues of opportunity, services and connectivity, leadership, values and aesthetics.

When we are through with our community discussion we want to have a process in place for developing action steps. It is my sincere hope that you will come fully prepared to engage in this dialogue.

Sincerely,

XXXX

# Bring Creativity to Our Community!



Creativity is important -- it can be developed, harnessed and directed to realize economic value. It can cushion economic downturns and enhance the quality of life in our community.

We need to get started. And we need your help.

What are the assets that our community has that we can build upon? How can you help our community think about how to develop and bolster our creativity? Where do we start?

**It starts here. Join the conversation.**

Name of Discussion

Date & time

Location

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Join other community residents in an open discussion on how to develop our creative industries to position our community for economic success in the future.

For more information, contact (your name)

(123) 456 - 7890 [email@address.com](mailto:email@address.com)

## Pre-Creativity Discussion Questionnaire

The following questions are designed to get you to think about the characteristics of what makes a creative community. They are organized around five main themes: **opportunity**, which includes economic sectors that are important to your community, and networks those sectors provide; **services and connectivity** which includes knowledge assets such as educational institutions and basic services such as affordable housing; **community leadership** which includes interest in the community from elected leaders and visionary problem solving; **values** which include trust and atmosphere of a community; and finally, **aesthetics** which includes everything from natural amenities to cultural offerings.

Rate each category on a 1-5 scale where 1 is the lowest and 5 is the highest or answer the question “yes” or “no.” Once you have scored your questions, please send them back to:

**Contact Name:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Phone:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Fax:** \_\_\_\_\_

**E-Mail:** \_\_\_\_\_

### Opportunity

How are overall economic conditions in your community?

1   2   3   4   5

Does the place offer good jobs and good salaries in your field?

1   2   3   4   5

How available are the professional development resources you need in life and career?

1   2   3   4   5

### Services and Connectivity

Does the community offer educational options that meet the needs of you and your family?

1   2   3   4   5

Does the community have housing that you like at a price you can afford?

1   2   3   4   5

Is the community connected digitally in the ways that matter most to you?

1   2   3   4   5

## **Leadership**

Do political leaders inspire your trust and confidence?

1   2   3   4   5

Are local business leaders the type you admire and have confidence in?

1   2   3   4   5

Is community leadership diverse?

1   2   3   4   5

How open and inclusive is the decision making process?

1   2   3   4   5

## **Values**

How are people of different races, ethnicities, and lifestyles treated?

1   2   3   4   5

Do people generally trust one another?

1   2   3   4   5

Can you be yourself there?

1   2   3   4   5

## **Aesthetics**

How do you rate the physical and natural beauty of the community?

1   2   3   4   5

Does the community have a unique character?

1   2   3   4   5

Does the community have the arts, lifestyle, and recreational amenities you want?

1   2   3   4   5

How does the “energy” of the place match yours?

1   2   3   4   5

## **Discussion Evaluation Form**

### **Creativity in Your Community**

**Date • Location**

Please agree or disagree with the following statements (circle your answer).

1. The goals of the community discussion were clearly expressed at the beginning of the event.
  - a. Strongly agree
  - b. Agree
  - c. Disagree
  - d. Strongly disagree
  - e. Don't know

The attendees were appropriately diverse in ways that contributed positively to meeting the discussion's goals.

- f. Strongly agree
  - g. Agree
  - h. Disagree
  - i. Strongly disagree
  - j. Don't know
2. The discussion was successful at increasing my awareness of what actions can be taken in my community to bolster our creative industries.
  - a. Strongly agree
  - b. Agree
  - c. Disagree
  - d. Strongly disagree
  - e. Don't know
3. The discussion was successful at increasing my awareness of what actions can be taken in my community to bolster our creativity economy.
  - a. Strongly agree
  - b. Agree
  - c. Disagree
  - d. Strongly disagree
  - e. No prior experience to compare to this discussion.
4. Please share any additional thoughts about this discussion on the reverse side of this evaluation.

## **Moderator Evaluation Form**

### **Creativity in Your Community**

Moderator Contact Information:

Name:

Organization/Affiliation:

Address:

Phone Number:

E-mail address:

Date of Community Discussion: \_\_\_\_\_

Location: \_\_\_\_\_

Number of Participants: \_\_\_\_\_

What key thoughts about creativity emerged from your community discussion?

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What are the next steps your community is taking to continue the discussion?

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The background materials provided by the Institute for Emerging Issues were helpful assets in leading the creativity discussion in my community.

- a. Strongly agree
- b. Agree
- c. Disagree
- d. Strongly disagree
- e. Don't know

Are there any ways to make these materials more helpful or ways to make this facilitation packet more useful for future moderators?

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Please share any other thoughts about the discussion you would like us to know.

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Please fax back to Diane Cherry at the Institute for Emerging Issues at (919) 515-7535 or email it at [diane\\_cherry@ncsu.edu](mailto:diane_cherry@ncsu.edu).



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