

Convivial Research

Convivial Research, named for the fun and social atmosphere in which it is carried out, is a structured activity designed for a large group of community members (20 to 60+).

Beforehand, develop a list of questions that you would find most interesting and helpful to pose to fellow community members. If you could see inside their minds, understand their particular perspectives and experiences with regard to your community, what would you like to know? (*See p. 2 for sample questions.*) Develop one question for every two people in the group.

Next, print one Community Research Response Form (p.3) for every two members of the group, then glue or write a different question in the space on each form. The more colorful and decorative you make the forms, the more convivial this exercise will seem, which is good for getting the creative juices flowing. (For large groups, you may need an extra page of just gridlines.)

Gather the group and explain that they are going to be conducting important research about the special features of your community. You have arranged an opportunity for them to interview notable experts on the subject – each other! Following the interviews, they will be collating and interpreting the data to present to the rest of the group.

Break the group into pairs, and give each pair one form. Instruct them to circulate through the room and pose the question on their form to all the other pairs, recording succinct answers. (They should not answer their own question.) They should answer other groups' questions in return. Encourage all pairs to keep moving, spending no more than a few minutes with each other. All pairs may not get fully around the room, but they should hit as many others as they can. Try to allow at least 20-30 minutes for these interviews.

At this point, you can choose to wrap up the exercise in one of three ways depending on your goals and the amount of time available.

1. **CREATE POSTERS.** If you have 45 minutes and you want to build a sense of community and buy-in to the project, give each pair a large sheet of paper and some markers or crayons. Instruct them to take 20 minutes to create a poster that graphically depicts their findings (make sure they include their question on the poster). Tape posters up around the room as they are completed, and lead a "gallery tour". Let each group visit all of the posters, studying them and raising questions. Ask each pair to briefly share two highlights of their findings.
2. **GENERATE FUTURE NEWSPAPER HEADLINES.** If you have less time, conclude the interviews by holding up a newspaper and saying that it is an edition of your local paper from five years in the future. The lead story on the front page is related to their particular question: what is the headline? Give each pair a couple of minutes to develop a headline, then sweep around the room and ask each pair to read their headline.
3. **REPORT OUT.** Simply give each pair a moment to read over their findings, then ask them to share something that surprised them from this exercise.

No matter which concluding exercise you choose, be sure to gather the sheets to serve as a data bank. You may want to type the notes and distribute them to everyone so each participant can continue to add to it, or you might find a partner group (or a class of middle school students) to edit and publish this Community Resource Directory.

Sample Questions for Convivial Research

- What was something you did as a child that helped to make the world a better place?
- Excluding classroom teachers, who was your most important teacher as a child or youth, and what is one thing you learned from him or her?
- What is one special place in your community that every local person should visit at least once?
- What are two service projects or organizations in your community that would benefit from kid power and provide a valuable learning experience for students?
- Vision 2020: If you could look in a crystal ball and ask it one question about what your community will be like in the year 2020, what would you ask?
- Which groups in your community tend to be very involved in community affairs? Which tend not to be very involved?
- What are the biggest barriers to open communication among various groups in your community (including youth) about dreams for the community's future?
- How do local culture and traditions get passed down to younger people in your community?
- What are two opportunities for leadership roles in your community, both formal and informal? What preparation would youth need to fill them?
- What are three ways that people in your community do or could demonstrate their respect for young people?
- What are three ways that parents and other community members could help in our school beyond what they're doing now?
- How does our community's story connect to the "bigger stories" of the region? nation? world?
- What are the two most magical, attractive and fascinating places in our community for kids?
- Name one way you could use local public lands to teach a part of your present curriculum?
- What are three organizations in our community that might be interested in co-sponsoring an educational activity that benefits the community?
- Do you know of any unusual sources for interesting facts or photos about our community's heritage or natural history?
- If you could bring a small group of children to spend an afternoon talking with one of our community's residents, who would you choose? Why?
- What two places would you bring a group of students to if you wanted to demonstrate to them the driving forces behind the community's economy?
- What are three ways that members of the Conservation Commission could help you in your teaching?
- What are two valuable learning experiences that your class could have that could make some nearby public lands a better place?
- What do kids do after school in our community?
- If you were to create the perfect place for people in our community to gather, name three features it would include?
- If you could look in a crystal ball and ask it one question about the ways kids would be learning in our community in the year 2020, what would you ask?
- What are two businesses in our community that would make good field trip destinations? Why?

Community Research Response Form

Circulate through the room and pose the question below to other pairs of people, recording succinct answers. (Do not answer your own question.) Answer other groups' questions in return. Keep moving, spending no more than a few minutes with each other. You may not get fully around the room in the time allotted, but try to hit as many other pairs you can.

| QUESTION: | |
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| NAMES | ANSWERS |
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