



Building a Movement to Deepen Community | Insights and Learnings from the 1,000 Conversations Campaign

Derek Alton

Introduction

We wanted to unpack these experiences, and dig deep into what they meant to people. We also wanted to dream together. To learn about Canadians' visions for community and understand their thoughts on how to get there. Through this work, we hoped to raise the profile of community in the minds of people across the country and gain insights regarding the policies, programs and practices that support neighbourhood resilience and the building of social capital. Our assumption underpinning this work is that strengthening and deepening people's experience in community, will enable us to better respond to challenges and build a better future together.

Tamarack created the *1,000 Conversations* Campaign as a structured way to undertake this work. The idea was simple: get people together to have conversations with each other about community and then document and share the insights generated from these conversations.

The *1,000 Conversations* campaign was a first phase of Tamarack's work in exploring the meaning and possibility of community. The learnings from the *1,000 Conversations Campaign* have now evolved to a new phase: *Local Deepening Community Initiatives*.

Specifically, the Campaign served two purposes:

- 1. It taught us a lot about people's experiences and insights on community; and,*
- 2. It gave people a chance to connect with one another and experience community.*

Through this work, Tamarack developed an initial model for hosting community conversations that:

- . Raised people's awareness of their community;*
- . Improved their knowledge of and feeling of connection to each other; and,*
- . Increased their interest and knowledge about becoming involved in their community.*

From 2014 – 2017 Tamarack is committed to partnering with 3-5 local communities each year who are interested in leading local *Deepening Community* Initiatives within their own communities. These initiatives are simultaneously highly aspirational and profoundly practical projects. Our partnerships with a variety of local communities across Canada is one of the ways in which Tamarack is committed to supporting a national movement of community builders interested in deepening our collective understanding of the power and possibility of community and identifying the programs, policies, and practices that are demonstrating effectiveness in building and sustain strong, engaged communities.



Executive Summary

This report highlights the significant insights generated from the *1,000 Conversations* Campaign. These insights are drawn from the stories people shared and the resulting community conversations they generated.

This report has two sections. The first section, **Content Learning**, profiles insights drawn from the community conversations held and documented as blog posts. This section is divided into the three parts. The first part, *Key Patterns*, presents a circle model illustrating patterns in people’s experience of community. This model suggests the need to reframe traditional approaches to community building; outlines the five paradoxes that emerged consistently throughout the conversations; and, explores their implications for how we understand and build community.

The second part of the **Content Learning** section examines the challenges and barriers that stand in the way of people’s natural tendency to build community and how they can be reframed or removed.

The final part of the **Content Learning** section highlights a range of habits and specific actions that were shared during the campaign to help people, neighbourhoods, faith groups and organizations deepen and strengthen their sense of community.

The Report’s second section profiles the learning journey of Tamarack staff as we went through several iterations of this campaign. This section shares our team’s reflections in championing this campaign.

1,000 Conversations by the Numbers

Category	Total
Blogs posted*	207
People engaged	**2,408
Blog Post Theme Breakdown~	
Youth	86
Seniors	45
Arts/Culture	16/20
Government	14
Business	19
Faith groups	87
Community benefit	63

*The insights from every community conversations were collected and shared in the form of blog posts on www.seekingcommunity.ca. Some conversations that were particularly rich lead to the creation of two blog posts.
 **This number is an approximation as some of the larger and more informal conversations did not track attendees
 ~Some blogs had multiple themes

Communities involved	Number of blogs posted
Guelph, ON	61
Waterloo Region, ON	48
Hamilton, ON	15
Halton Region, ON	27
Delburne, AB	21
Vancouver, BC	3
Grey and Bruce Counties, ON	4*
Other~	28

* Partnership still underway with more conversations being collected over the next four months
 ~This includes individual conversations with groups outside of the communities mentioned above, including conversations at the national level



1,000 Conversations Campaign Content Learnings

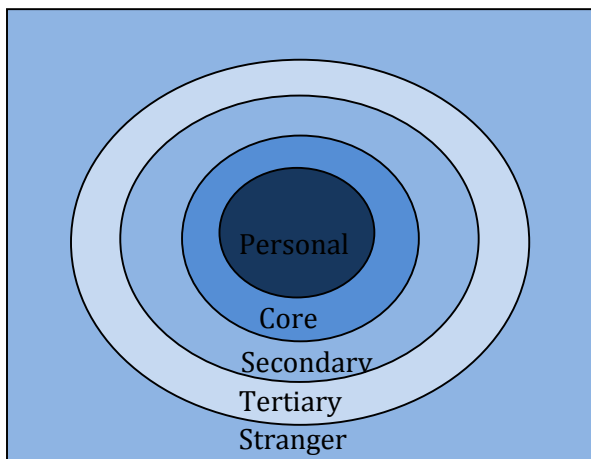
From its inception, the *1,000 Conversations* Campaign focused on learning about community. The hope was to find patterns in people’s stories that shed insight on how people’s experience of community could be strengthened and deepened. As the campaign unfolded it became a shared learning journey between participants, community champions and Tamarack staff as together we worked to find patterns and generate insights from what we were hearing. The result of this two-year journey is a rich and diverse archive. The insights gleaned from this work have been shared in a series of four Campaign e-newsletters that were shared with campaign participants and are included in the appendix of this report.

Emerging Patterns of Community

By documenting and synthesizing the process and results of the conversations, patterns, paradoxes, barriers and challenges in people’s experience of community emerged. The following section illustrates these findings.

PATTERN ONE: Layers of Community

Throughout the *1,000 Conversation* Campaign people shared a variety of different experiences of community. Over time, patterns started to emerge within these conversations. A larger picture emerged when these patterns were viewed in their entirety. The following model was created as a tool to understand people’s experiences of community. This section is dedicated to unpacking this model and its implications for community building.



Called the circle model, it shows how people experience community at different layers with each layer having a different level of influence on a person. Each layer, and the interplay between them, shapes a person’s experience of community. There are five distinct layers of community experience that emerged through the Campaign:

The Personal layer refers to a person’s relationship with him or herself. It includes how the person sees him or herself, and how they process their emotions and ideas.



The Core layer includes a person's primary community, the people with whom the person has their deepest relationships. This layer can include a group, a single person or a collection of independent people. For many the core layer is made up of a small number of people, rarely more than ten, and usually includes their family and a couple close friends.

The Secondary layer refers to groups that people identify as being a part of and have relationships with. It can include neighbourhoods, faith groups, book clubs, sports teams and other communities of common interest. Often people have multiple secondary communities that they identify with.

The Tertiary layer refers to communities that a person identifies with despite not having a personal relationship with. Examples include a town or a country (Canada), a sports team (Leaf Nation) or common sub culture (bikers).

The Stranger layer refers to people and groups that a person does not identify with. This layer still influences a person's identity, often as something to contrast or react to. This layer does not nurture a person's sense of belonging whereas all the other layers do.

All layers of this model influence a person's identity, how they see themselves and the world and how they interact with it. However, the closer to the middle the layer the higher the level of influence. For example, a stranger carries very little influence on what a person wears while a partner or close friend will have a high influence. A person's relationship with themselves has a huge influence on how they interact with every other layer of community depicted in the model.

The *1,000 Conversations* campaign revealed that the majority of formal community building occurs at the "secondary community" level: strengthening neighbourhoods, faith groups, workplaces and interest-based communities. Individuals also focused on secondary communities. When people shared their most memorable experience of community, it was common for them to talk about a group in their secondary layer. Part of this appears to be because people do not often identify their core group and personal relationship as their community. Instead they would use terms implying a closer level of intimacy such as family. This pattern was particularly pronounced among close-knit faith groups.

A popular term in the social space is the concept of swimming upstream on issues. The idea is to focus on the sources of a dynamic as opposed to the symptoms. In the case of community building, as this model suggests, the source of people's capacity to build community starts with their relationship with themselves and their core community. This means that those intent on deepening and strengthening community should consider having a major focus on the personal and core spheres as all relationships and people's capacity to build and be in community flow



out from them. This could mean, creating a campaign on healthy families (the most identified core community) or a campaign on personal practices like meditation and yoga.

Lesson: A shift in focus to the *personal* and *core* requires a new set of tools.

There is a growing push among community builders to put a greater focus on self-care. Forward thinking organizations are encouraging the development of communities of support and mentorship. Both represent a shift in focus to the personal and core layers of relationship. Often though as people get busy this is the first thing that gets dropped, as it is not seen as pressing as the work at hand. As this model shows, in the long term taking time and energy away from nurturing the personal and core can have significant consequences on community building (more on this in the section on barriers).

<u>Influence Chart</u>	
Level	Influence
Personal	Highest
Core	High
Secondary	Medium
Tertiary	Low
Stranger	Lowest

Lesson: The major influence on people’s experience of community stems from their relationship to themselves and their core community

Because of the closeness of the personal and core levels of relationship to an individual, there is a higher degree of risk and vulnerability. It is a messier, more unpredictable and also more authentic space. As a result people talked about a new set of tools being required to ensure success and avoid causing people harm. Specifically they referred to having higher levels of skill in active listening and rudimentary counseling training. The danger is that without this new set of tools, the community builder can bring their own baggage into the space, leading to more damage than good.

Lesson: Self-care is incredibly important for effective community building. Not just for the community builder but for all those within the community.



Going into the *core* and *personal* is challenging. Because it is an intimate space where people feel a high level of vulnerability. People can also feel like they are starting to invade other people's personal space. Though this space is difficult to navigate, the personal and core are the most influential and important spheres to building community, therefore it is important to focus on them.

PATTERN TWO: Paradoxes

Paradox: a seemingly self-contradictory statement that points to a deeper truth

From the first conversation, groups were wrestling with paradoxes. Understanding these paradoxes is important because they underpin many of the struggles that communities are currently facing. They also give a glimpse into how to build deeper and stronger communities. There were five main paradoxes that Tamarack identified through the community conversations, these are:

1. Individual and Communal
2. Same and Different
3. Organic and Formal
4. Depth and Breadth
5. Efficiency and Relationship

In this section each paradox will be examined, highlighting gifts, traps and the deeper possibility underneath.

Individual and Communal

Through this campaign it emerged that humans want to feel unique and special. They want to have the autonomy to control their own destiny and express their uniqueness and creativity. At the same time, people want to be part of something bigger than themselves. They crave the love and support that comes from being part of a group. If people wish to fully submerge themselves in a community, they are often challenged to either give up part of their autonomy or lay some of their values to the side for the good of the group, which can

Recommendations:

Individuals:

- Discover and develop a personal practice. Turn it into a daily/weekly ritual.
- Identify ones core community and then nurture it. Carve out space and time for those people. This might mean stepping back from some secondary communities (clubs, committee's, etc.) or other commitments to make space.

Organizations:

- Set family and self-care as a company priority (paste it on the wall for everyone to see.)
- Have more defined work start and end times (9pm-5pm) and discourage employees from taking work home with them.
- Develop a personal development strategy for employee's and support them finding mentors.

Community Builders:

- Do not just focus on secondary communities; also create a focus on the core and personal.



create tension. In today's individualistic society, groups lamented that people are more likely to follow through on their individual desires and thus, communities struggle to maintain cohesion and deep commitment. This tension is best highlighted in the book "[Becoming Human](#)" by [Jean Vanier](#). Each side of this paradox has gifts and traps.

	Individualism	Communalism
Gifts	Creativity, individual rights and freedom, uniqueness	Strength, diversity, belonging, support
Traps	Isolation, loneliness, vulnerability	Rigidity, ostracized, conformity

Ultimately it is important for people to have a balance of both. If one has individualism and no communalism they feel lonely and struggle to handle the challenges that life often brings. At the same time if they are only communal with no sense of self then they lose space for their creative expression and innovation. Communities are stronger when they create room for individual expression and individuals are stronger when they join a community.

Same and Different

Tamarack found through this campaign that people naturally are drawn to others like themselves. Groups form around common interests and experiences. At the same time humans value diversity for it creates new experiences and expands their mind. This paradox was given voice in a couple community conversations. The CJ Munford group talked about how skin colour formed a starting point for their community. In contrast Harold wrote, "(t)he way to objectivity is by adding more subjectivity. Having two eyes enables 3D vision. Adopting multiple perspectives, enables a deeper more objective understanding of the world we inhabit." In today's individualistic society and with the advent of the internet, it is now easier for humans to form communities of like-minded people. While societies become increasingly interconnected, diversity is becoming more crucial for the resiliency and adaptability of communities. These countervailing forces are causing tension in communities across the country and beyond.

	Same	Different
Gifts	Stability, predictability, inside jokes, comfort	Flexible, diverse, easy to join, adaptable
Traps	Conformity, inflexibility, hard to change/adapt, hard to join	Unstable, unpredictable, stressful(energy intensive)

Ultimately it is important people have a balance of both. If one was always surrounded by the same kind of people they would never grow and learn new things while at the same time if they



were only surrounded by difference they would become overwhelmed and burnt out. Connecting with those who are the same allows a person to recharge and strengthen their identity while connecting with new and different people allows them to grow and expand their perspectives.

Organic and Formal

It has become common procedure to use formal structures and practices to help foster space for community to grow and sustain itself. This allows for predictable and scalable actions usually grounded in solid research. At the same time there is a beauty that people recognize when a community organically comes together to create something. This tension was first highlighted through many of the cultural groups who noted that in more communal societies, community just happens organically. People show up and come together when it is needed or wanted. This ranges from grabbing a drink with some friends, to helping a neighbour patch up their house. Contrastingly, when they came to Canada, many of these people noticed that this spontaneous communal experience is less common. Instead community is much more formalized through institutions, governments and programs. This may be a by-product of today’s busy pace and lack of leisure time. Everything is scheduled including people’s community building time. This was also debated by a group of pastors in Oakville around building community in youth groups. Ultimately the group was split on whether formal practices like ice breakers, or informal get-togethers were most important in fostering community. Some felt that if left to develop organically community may never emerge while others felt that the formal games often squashed the community that was starting to develop. Ultimately they concluded that it was likely a balance of the two.

	Organic	Formal
Gifts	dynamic, natural, grassroots, emergent	predictable, replicable, scalable, well researched
Traps	unstable, unpredictable, inconsistent, risky	rigid, fake, cold, meeting fatigue

Ultimately it is important to have a balance of both to nurture and sustain community. If life is only formal and structured then there is no space for the spontaneity of relationships to emerge. However, structure can foster common experience that is one of the pillars that nurtures community. In the end one needs to know when to bring in structure to foster to community and when to let it go and let something form organically.



Depth and Breadth

This tension has been written on extensively by Paul Born in his recent book, “Deepening Community.” It focuses on people’s desire to have large networks of friends, to be part of many different groups while at the same time their desire to have a deep connection, to be truly known by someone. Many people talked about how today’s society nurturers a desire to expand peoples social networks. Facebook, LinkedIn, and Twitter are all about how many friends, contacts or followers one has. Status, success and even survival are often equated with the size and quality of one’s networks (“who you know”). To paraphrase Paul Born, shallow community has become the norm. Maintaining all these networks takes a lot of time and energy, leaving little for anything else.

Despite this interconnectedness people are describing a feeling of something missing, a loneliness for a greater intimacy. This however takes time, energy and vulnerability to create. If people are too focused on one type of community then they cannot build the other.

	Depth	Breadth
Gifts	deep meaningful connection, support, authenticity, greater influence	diversity, low risk, greater reach
Traps	lack of diversity, higher risk for pain, energy intensive	a lack of depth, not dependable, fake

Ultimately it is important people have a balance of both. If one has breadth without depth they will feel stretched and yet never fully known or supported. This is often experienced as a deep sense of loneliness. At the same time if one has depth but no breadth they can become cloistered, and miss out on new ideas and perspectives.

Efficiency and Relationship

Efficiency: Increasing output while maintaining or decreasing input

On the one hand Western society prizes efficiency, getting things done as quickly as possible using as few resource’s as possible. We are constantly trying to figure out how to work more effectively, ‘trim the fat’, ‘cut the waste’, and ‘stop the gravy train’. Tamarack talks about how to systematize processes to help save time and energy. This is valuable, it allows increased effectiveness and capacity to build community and create positive change.

On the other hand people are social creatures and yearn for authentic relationships with others. To be in relationship with people is to create space for emergence and spontaneity. There does

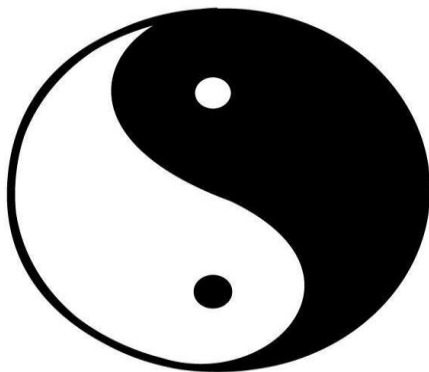


not need to be any goal or objective other than the relationship itself. In that sense relationships are inherently inefficient. This leads to challenges for groups who build relationships as their key mode of operation.

	Relationship	Efficiency
Gifts	Belonging, support, human connection	Productive, saves energy and time, scalable
Traps	Time and energy intensive, not productive	Cold, lonely, lacking relationship

Ultimately it is important people have a balance of both. If one has only efficiency and no relationship they become lonely and depressed which ultimately hurts their ability to be productive. At the same time if someone only has relationship without any efficiency than their ability to produce and contribute to society is hugely limited. There are times when it is important to get things done and there are times when people need to stop focusing on doing and just be with each other. A balance of both creates a healthy person and a healthy community.

Lesson: Both sides of the paradox are important, the challenge is to find the balance that brings in the gifts of both.



As is highlighted above a paradox creates a tension that reveals a deeper truth. In the case of all five paradoxes listed the deeper truth is that both sides are important in nurturing and fostering strong community. The danger is in how easy it can be to fall out of balance. Much of life can be spent swinging back in forth between the two sides. The challenge of community is to transcend that and find the best of both.

Recommendation:

Community Builders:

- Develop a personality test tool that will help individuals and groups evaluate their tendencies around each of these paradoxes.



These paradoxes all influence people and communities in their day-to-day interactions. They usually play on behind the scenes without the recognition of either the individual or group. The purpose of a tool like the one mentioned above is to bring awareness to these dynamics and through this foster understanding. A community who uses this tool can then have a discussion about where there is and is not balance and then take steps to shift where necessary. It can also be very affirming to see alignment within a community and intriguing to see diversity. Most importantly a tool like this will help shift people from a win-lose to a win-win perspective. It can be easy to romanticize one side and discard the other. This may be particularly common when the community is far out of balance. A tool that helps communities understand where they sit within these paradoxes helps them learn, grow and strengthen themselves.

CHALLENGES AND BARRIERS

Many barriers and challenges were mentioned throughout the 1000 Conversations Campaign. Several people talked about community as a natural tendency but that society places barriers in the way, which hold people back from expressing this desire. Therefore, one of the best ways to build community is to remove barriers that stand in the way. In particular there were three barriers that were mentioned regularly: busyness, movement and technology. This section will unpack each of these barriers and their impact on people's ability to build and strengthen their communities.

Busyness Narrative

The most common barrier that was mentioned was a feeling of busyness. Community was something that people described as an important desire they had but that they did not have the time, energy or capacity to live it out.

Lesson: To be in community more, people need to do less.

As this became a common theme, Tamarack reflected it back to people and asked for their assessment. Everyone agreed that busyness was a common problem and stated that how we use our time is a reflection of our priorities. Therefore logically one can say that though people state that community is a priority, their actions show that it is not as important priority as other things that fill their time. As people wrestled with this they raised a couple questions:

1. Who dictates priorities?

Some people when pushed on the above point responded that they felt many of their priorities were thrust on them by societal norms. A parent feels pressure to put their kids into several different after school programs so they can be with their friends and find happiness and success



in life. An outcome of this is they then spend time shuffling them from one place to the next and work longer hours to make the money needed to pay for them.

Other priorities are set by survival. People need enough money to cover the cost of life; therefore they organize their life around ensuring this income through work. With salaries not keeping up with the cost of living people are working longer hours and more jobs. Due to the shifting labour marketing encouraging skill specialization people described themselves as often traveling farther for work (or having to move often thus hindering their ability to lay down roots). All this leads to less time and energy. Societal norms are now built on speed, as people rush from one agenda item to the next. This combined with the constant bombardment of information leads to people feeling overwhelmed and not in a position to build relationships.

2. How many priorities are people expected to have?

On top of feeling like they have less control over their priorities, people talked about feeling like they had more priorities to manage than ever before. As a result they expressed feeling a lack of time or energy to succeed well at any of their priorities, including building community. This led to people having inconsistent efforts because they were putting energy in when they could spare a moment then moving to another priority. This experience of inconsistent commitment and energy resonated with the experience of many people who actively work on building community.

The Overwhelm Trap

An important outcome of this was experienced by one Tamarack staff member. Relationship building and the all the social skills required for community depend on a certain level of awareness and energy. When people get in an overwhelmed state, as is common in today's society due to the above mentioned pressures, a person's capacity to be in relationships diminishes. Often this happens without the person's awareness as they are so focused on keeping their head above the piling list of priorities. When people are well rested and do not feel overwhelmed they describe themselves as more compassionate, empathetic and better able to be in relationship with each other. Another way to view this is through the efficiency and relationship paradox presented earlier. Societal pressures push people towards the efficiency side of the equation to the point where it undermines their ability to be in relationship.

Lesson: When a person is overwhelmed it is really hard to be in relationship and therefore even more difficult to build community.



Recommendations:

Individuals:

- Create a chart to calculate where time is being spent on a daily and weekly basis. After a week evaluate time use and compare with the identified priorities.
- Establish clear boundaries around work time (i.e. try not to bring work home with you)
- Make a list of all the groups, associations and other commitments. Ask; is it important to be a part of this group? What is being sacrificed to be a part of this group?

The Movement Challenge

Most commonly brought up by seniors was the challenge of movement. Part of this was, as described above, the frenetic feel of our society today that keeps us moving so fast that we do not have time to sit and be in relationship with people.

More specifically though people talked about how it was difficult to foster a sense of community when they would be moving to a new location in only a couple years. It takes time for people to lay down roots, foster and deepen relationships and build cultural norms that allow them to feel like they belong to a space or a group. This is true whether it is a neighbourhood, faith group or a club. Today's society is becoming more and more transient as people move for work, school and lifestyles. The idea of staying in one place for any length of time beyond five years can be perceived as being stuck in a rut. People are encouraged to spend their vacation time traveling and exploring new places. Several groups talked about this leading to a weakening of community. It is hard to build a sense of belonging when people are constantly on the move. If people want to build a deep sense of community it is important to reconsider society's priorities around movement.

Lesson: Staying put and laying down roots helps foster a sense of community.



Recommendations:

Individuals:

- Instead of traveling abroad for a vacation, consider doing a stay-cation. Use it as an opportunity to build a deeper understanding and appreciation for the local community.
- Try to stay rooted in the same place. This might mean renovating instead of buying a newer, bigger home, or it could mean looking inside ones community for career opportunities that do not involve relocating. These choices help people live out community as a core value.

Groups:

- Put a focus on organizing, attending and supporting local gatherings.
- Instead of turning to outside expertise focus within to build local capacity.
- Celebrate those who stay long term in a community. This both reinforces their feeling of value and desire to stay while at the same time puts it up as a model for others to follow.

The Technology Challenge

Technology was a popular topic in many of the community conversations because it has changed how people interact and build community. One person stated, “Technology is now the medium through which we communicate and build community.” With this transition come many gifts including the expansion of human ability to empathize with a broader range of cultures and personalities. It also increases a community’s capacity to act collectively; to reach out and care across borders and oceans. Many though expressed fears that this online space was replacing face-to-face interactions. In one conversation there was a discussion about how the streets were becoming silent as children were opting to stay indoors and connect through online gaming. This fostered fear that there was a loss of social skills important to nurturing relationships.

Another frustration with technology is that it is primarily built around the shallow connection. It allows people to interact with each other on a surface level and/or around an idea or theme. However, technology in its current form is not designed to foster and nourish deep connections. At best it is a temporary supplement and at worst it is an inhibitor for deep and meaningful relationships.

Lesson: Technology can support community but in its current form it is questionable whether it can nurture deep and meaningful connections.



Finally, some people shared how technology is contributing to today's frenetic culture by allowing people to take their work home with them. This is now becoming a normal and socially sanctioned behaviour. The instant notifications also create. Checking email and Facebook has become an addiction, distracting from meaningful connection in the moment. In a couple conversations people shared their concern about seeing people constantly plugged into technology and how this created a bubble that separated them from reality.

Lesson: Technology can separate people from living in the moment and being present, both of which are important to fostering authentic connection.

Recommendations:

Individuals:

- Put boundaries around technology use.
 - Have designated times for checking emails and then turn off notifications for the remainder of the day.
 - Keep technology off during meals, driving and meetings

Groups:

- Push program developers and tech companies to explore how technology can develop and foster deep relationships

DISRUPTIVE NARRATIVE

The narratives and stories people tell themselves and others reinforce the way they see the world and the identities they build. This is why storytelling is such an important part of identity building. A disruptive narrative is a story that challenges the dominant narrative that is being told. In this sense disruptive narratives are important for innovation and change. They open a crack to a new possibility, a new way for people to see themselves and the world creating a new way of being.

Groups shared how, in today's society, the dominant narrative is one of individualism and scarcity. This narrative is so pervasive it influences people at all levels from the individual all the way up to society. This dominant narrative undermines people's ability to build and strengthen their communities.

Community is therefore a very disruptive narrative. The *1000 Conversations Campaign* was designed to plug into this disruptive narrative, to understand and help spread it.



So how does one nurture and strengthen a disruptive narrative?

STEP ONE: Identify the disruptive narrative

Help a community/group/person identify the disruptive narrative within themselves. There is a huge pride that comes from identifying this positive outlier. To do this in the community conversations, Tamarack asked: what is a powerful experience of community for you? Through answering this question people were able to identify and share a time when they embodied a reality based on relationship that was different from the individualistic story that society often shares.

STEP TWO: Ask people to share their story

To reinforce this narrative people found it important to have an opportunity to tell their story to others. As people tell their story it not only empowers and reinforces them, it also resonates in others and helps them get in touch with their own story.

STEP THREE: Retell the story

To help reinforce this kind of behavior and help deepening community move from a disruptive narrative to a normal way of behaving it is important to highlight the stories about where it is already happening. This means retelling the story often, both to oneself and the larger group. With time the story becomes the normal way of thinking and acting.

A disruptive narrative creates a sense of discomfort, as one feels disconnected between it and the dominant narrative. To remove this discomfort either the person changes their personal narrative to match the dominant narrative or the dominant narrative shifts to match the disruptive story. Therefore it is important to keep telling these stories and support others who are doing the same.

A great metaphor for this is shown in Derek Sivers famous Ted Talk "[How to start a movement.](#)" The video starts with a man dancing by himself at a music concert. Here the disruptive narrative is dancing while the dominant narrative is sitting. Being the only one dancing is uncomfortable and without support, with time the man will likely stop dancing. Soon he is joined by another person, and then a few more. Though they are all dancing, they are not following the first dancer but rather finding the dance within themselves and letting it out. By joining the dance they are supporting each other and reinforcing the disruptive narrative which makes it easier for others to join. Soon more join and then more and eventually the concert reaches the tipping point where dancing becomes the dominant narrative. Now it is more awkward to sit than it is to dance. As this metaphor highlights, a movement occurs when a



group of people congregating and mobilizing around a common disruptive narrative. In this case the deepening community movement is about creating space for people to congregate around the deepening community narrative.

Like the dancer, everyone's specific deepening community story will be unique to them. The consistent thread is that of deeper and stronger relationships with each other.



Photo by Shelli Harrison

Shot of James Young Dr. in Georgetown South after it was partially cleaned up. Photographer Shelli Harrison posted this photo using Wifi at Tim Hortons because her home was without power. <http://www.theifp.ca/news/timeline-of-the-ice-storm-of-2013/>

Many people shared that there was often some type of disruptive event that awakened them to a new possibility. One of the most powerful examples of this was the community of Halton Hills, Ontario. On Dec. 19th 2013, freezing rain started to fall on the region of Halton. It continued for another three days leaving the community under 33mm of ice that knocked down numerous trees and hydro towers blocking roads and leaving everyone without electricity. The real power of the story though is in how the community responded. People immediately reached out to each other, sharing food, blankets and power

generators. Neighbours regularly checked up on each other with deliveries of hot coffee and soup. The region was overwhelmed by offers from residents to help with the cleanup. It seemed like everyone had a story of someone reaching out to help them. To capture this the Halton Hills Library created a Facebook page entitled: "Halton Ice Storm 2013". The stories around this event came up in several of the community conversations that were done in the region.

Lesson: It is important for the narrative to come from within a person or community and not from the outside.



Lesson: A single telling of the disruptive narrative will not be enough. It will be dismissed and ignored. The story should be retold and shared, inspiring others to find their own disruptive narrative.

Recommendations:

Personal:

- Help spread the inspiring stories from the local community by telling them to others.
- Ask: What is a memorable experience of community for me? Share your story with someone else. Write it up and share it on www.seekingcommunity.ca

Groups:

- Profile the stories of members who are helping build community
- Identify your groups own inspiring stories of community and share them

HABITS AND RITUALS

When Tamarack explored with groups how to build and deepen community we found that people focused less on large scale actions and instead talked about more regular habits and rituals. This section is made up of some of the more popular ideas from the campaign with a couple added by the Tamarack staff.

Lesson: Building community is about the small actions built into regular routines.

Personal

Personal practices (meditation, yoga, journaling, walking)

- ✓ It could just be ten minutes every day but these daily rituals help maintain a healthy mindset important to allowing people to be present with themselves and others; an important precondition for healthy relationships.

Core

Carve out regular times for community

- ✓ Set aside a regular time every week to call a family member or to write a friend a letter. Get in the habit of inviting a neighbor over for coffee once a month. Have a house movie or games night. These little actions are the life blood of community.



Eat meals together

- ✓ Many people talked about the important ritual of eating meals together as a home. Here people turned off their technology and came together for thirty minutes or more every day in the evening to check in with each other's day and just be together. In
- ✓ Today's busy world it is hard to hold dinner so some have adjusted by eating breakfast together in the morning.

Create house projects

- ✓ Many people described community as an action word. By creating house or group projects it helps build a strong sense of community and also creates something at the same time. This could be a garden, a home renovation or a "murder mystery" party for Halloween.

Secondary – Neighbourhoods

Potlucks/ BBQ's

- ✓ Food is a great way to bring people together. During the summer make it a BBQ. Not only do people get fed, they can also exchange recipes and try new kinds of food. Since everyone is already coming together, add in a road hockey game or invite people to bring musical instruments. Many healthy neighbourhoods have weekly or monthly potlucks.

Newsletters, Facebook Groups and List serves

- ✓ Building a way to keep in contact with each other allows people to easily share interesting projects they are working on or fun events that are coming up. It makes a neighbourhood feel more homey and welcoming.

Parties on key dates (July 1st, Halloween, Christmas)

- ✓ There are certain days every year where people are in a festive spirit. Use this as an opportunity to bring the neighbourhood together. This can be fireworks on Canada Day, a costume party on Halloween or a merry get together for the December Holiday season.

Common interest groups (music jamming, sports teams)

- ✓ Using the neighbourhood newsletter or Facebook group, find common interest areas. Create a neighbourhood ultimate Frisbee team or a Wednesday Jam Night for local musicians, or a book club on the last Sunday of every month.



Get a dog

- ✓ It was incredible how many people cited their dog as being the way they got connected to the neighbourhood. Dogs create the opportunity for people to walk regularly in their neighbourhoods. Dogs being incredibly social, immediately want to connect with fellow dogs which give their owners a chance to connect as well. For those without dogs, get into the habit of going for regular walks in your neighbourhood.

Neighbourhood projects (building a park, changing a bylaw)

- ✓ Like having a house project, a neighbourhood project creates a reason to get together with those on the block. Many popular projects include building a park or ice rink, or pushing the city for a bylaw change or traffic calming.

Use the front of your house

- ✓ It is easy to retreat into the backyard or the shelter of the home but this does not create an opportunity to connect with neighbours. Many people shared the importance of front porches and how it made the neighbourhood feel friendlier. Alternatively, utilize an open garage for a similar impact.

Fences and gates

- ✓ Fences create privacy but they also serve to separate people. In Toronto a group of volunteers have created a collective who help neighbours take down their fences so they can connect with each other. A neighbourhood in Guelph has installed gates on their fences allowing the kids to move easily between backyards while keeping the dogs in their own yard.

Secondary - Work

Drinks after work or morning breakfast

- ✓ Popular in many communal cultures around the world, this practice allows colleagues to connect and build relationships in a casual setting outside of work. Some people cite this as when their best ideas and collaborations occur.

Build in a daily coffee break

- ✓ Businesses often talk about the importance of water cooler talks in helping build the community of a work place. Some incubator spaces are using a regular daily coffee break as an opportunity to build relationships and foster collaborations.

Throw parties on major holidays

- ✓ A long time popular practice is having work parties to celebrate major holidays. This serves as a chance for colleagues to connect outside of the work setting and connect on a relational level. Encourage people invite their families and see what potential connections emerge.



Have a company community board

- ✓ People wear many hats outside of work. A company community board invites people to share other parts of their life with each other. This can be a place to advertise the upcoming concert for the band made up of colleagues, invite people to join a bowling team, or advertise that couch someone is trying to get rid of.

Encourage carpooling

- ✓ Becoming a more common practice, carpooling is good for the environment and creates a casual space for people to connect regularly. Some larger companies have even got in the habit of having a shuttle bus. Use a company community board as a way to help organize carpools.

Have the leaders in the business role model positive behavior

- ✓ Leadership is very important. The leaders of any company set the culture for the whole organization. Therefore it is important for them to role-model community building behavior. This can include showing their vulnerabilities and sharing other aspects of their life outside of their work hat. It also includes taking the lead on implementing all the ideas above.

Secondary – Faith Groups

Yearly retreat

- ✓ Retreats give people a chance to spend time eating and playing together outside of the usual worship space. Several people shared their church retreat as the time when they felt the greatest sense of belonging.

Potlucks and games nights

- ✓ Paul Born talks about the power of enjoying one another to help strengthen and deepen community. Potlucks and games nights allow a congregation to see a side of each other that might not come out at worship.

Develop small groups of support and encourage them to socialize

- ✓ In the beginning of the campaign Tamarack engaged eight pastors across Kitchener-Waterloo in a conversation about community. They shared the challenge of maintaining a sense of community as their congregation grew. The solution that many of them had come to was creating small groups who got together regularly outside of worship. These groups served as study groups as well as support groups and helped foster a deep sense of community.



Tertiary – Municipalities

Streamline process for neighbourhood activities

- ✓ Many neighbourhood groups talked with great frustration about the red tape of city hall that makes it hard for them to do community events. If the municipality makes it easy for a group to close their road or utilize a public parking lot, they will organize more neighbourhood parties and community events.

Provide materials that can be rented

- ✓ The City of Guelph has materials like a popcorn machine and projector screen that neighbourhood groups can borrow for community events. These are items that most neighbourhood groups would never be able to access on their own.

Promote the positive outlier stories from communities

- ✓ Earlier in this report there was a section dedicated to the importance of sharing positive stories of community. The municipality has an important role to play in highlighting neighbourhoods and community groups that are doing great things. This also includes making it easier for other groups to follow in their footsteps.

Representation from city hall at neighbourhood events

- ✓ One of the easiest ways to show support for a neighbourhood project is to have representation from city hall. This could be the mayor, a city councilor or chief of police. This simple action carries significant symbolic meaning.

Provide micro-neighbourhood grants

- ✓ Most community projects are small in scale but might require some financial support for food and promotion. Currently there are few funding options for groups trying to organize such events. The Vancouver Foundation has come up with an innovative solution. Called [Neighbourhood Small Grants](#), they range in size from \$50-\$200, can be accessed without the need of a charity number, and require little paperwork. The outcome is that now groups can access the funding they need to pull off the neighbourhood party or park movie screening they had hoped for

Design for people not cars

- ✓ Designing for people is all about walkability and creating common spaces where people can connect and socialize. It can be as simple as putting up a bench and as large as closing the downtown to car traffic on weekends. This means moving away from car focused design that can be dangerous to pedestrians. To learn more about human focused design we recommend the documentary "[Human Scale](#)".



1,000 Conversations CAMPAIGN PROCESS LEARNINGS

One of the goals of the 1000 Conversations Campaign was to learn about people’s experience of community. This is the focus of Part One of this report. Part Two focuses on the second goal of the campaign, to explore ways of deepening and strengthening community using community conversations.

From the beginning Tamarack took an experimental approach to this campaign, constantly developing new iterations that built upon lessons from the last one. This allowed for a large amount of learning around process design to be extracted. Collaborative learning is an important value to Tamarack so we want to share six of our most significant learnings in this report:

1. Questions
2. Learning Journey
3. Reinventing the Wheel
4. Framing
5. Community Celebration
6. Local Leadership

Questions

In his book *Community: The Structure of Belonging* Peter Block talks about how conversations centered on questions are more transformative than conversations focused on answers. Inspired by the work of Peter Block and by the work of Tamarack’s own Paul Born on community conversations, Tamarack put a large focus on the type of questions we wanted to be the drivers of this campaign. Looking back, it is clear to see the evolution of this campaign is greatly tied to the evolution of the questions that were asked.

Phase One: What does community mean to you?

When doing a study on a topic, usually it makes sense to have a clear definition of the subject. Tamarack however felt it was important to have people define what community meant to them

Special Thanks

It is important to note that the majority of our learning was inspired by all the many community leaders who worked with us on this campaign. Without their support and guidance we would not have been able to succeed with this work.

Tamarack wants to especially thank the following people for helping shape and inspire us:

- Trudy Beaulne
- Niki Stevenson
- Martin de Groot
- Leon Kehl
- Risha Burke
- Joey Edwardh
- Ted Hildebrandt
- John Lord
- Al Etmanski
- Gord Tulloch
- Joe Erpenbeck
- Nora Smith
- Scott Cameron
- Michelle Knoll
- Pat Gushe
- Alex Hilson
- Vanessa Box-Jones
- Gord Alton
- David Roche
- Jessie Sutherland



instead of defining it for them. That way they were the drivers of the conversation and we were the curious listeners and learners.

Nonetheless, to give ourselves some grounding leading up to the official launch of the 1000 Conversations Campaign we interviewed 100 people asking what community meant to them.

Ultimately this question was removed as we felt understanding the experience of community was more important than a concrete definition of the word. The goal was to move from the head to the heart.

Lesson: Let go of the need for a definition, let people define it for themselves

Phase Two: What is a powerful experience of community for you?

Paul Born provided leadership in the first iteration of questions that we used for this campaign. One insight that he brought was the importance of the first question in setting the table for the whole conversation to follow. Paul realized that the most transformative conversations are the ones grounded in people's hearts not their heads. Because of this Tamarack started our conversation with the question: What is a powerful/memorable experience of community for you?

This conversation was instrumental in the campaign. It both distinguished this approach from other community dialogues and also led to the creation of an intimate and very human space with all the conversations that were held.

This focus on the heart also served to help create a deep connection quickly among all the participants and led the conversations in general to be powerful, memorable and ultimately inspiring for those who took part.

We would later add the follow up question: what made this experience so powerful/memorable? This served to allow the conversation to go deeper and really help unpack the importance and patterns of deep community experiences.

Lesson: If the goal is transformation: ground conversations in the heart.



Phase Three: What do you want this community to look like in 10 years?

After several months of using the first set of questions, we found success in having deep and powerful conversations that people really enjoyed being a part of. There were a lot of lessons about people's most powerful experiences of community, their strengths and even some of the challenges that stood in people's way. Ultimately Tamarack wanted to learn more about how people thought we could deepen their experiences of community. As a result a new section was added that got them to dream about the community they wanted to see.

This question evolved quickly. We found that it had the greatest impact when grounded in the context of the group that was having the community conversation. It was for this reason we added of the phrase "this community." To help strengthen this experience we moved to the senses, asking people to close their eyes and imagine the sights, sounds and smells of this dream community. People sometimes struggled to put words to their vision so we turned to art, giving people paper and crayons to draw out their vision. This first started as an individual exercise, and then had them share as a full group. We found that people quickly moved to the process of bringing their visions together into a common vision. As we welcomed this step we found it made the process even more powerful.

Lesson: Ground the conversation in the context of the group.

Lesson: Art can be a powerful tool to allow people to use express themselves.

Phase Four: What is the job of community?

This next insight stemmed from the release of Paul Born's new book *Deepening Community: Finding Joy in Chaotic Times* this 2014. Specifically, in the forward, Peter Block introduces the idea of community as an action word. This was a revelation to the whole Tamarack team and we were eager to incorporate it into the *1000 Conversations Campaign*.

This question was met with mixed reviews. Some people immediately jumped on to the possibilities of community as an action, others struggled seeing community more as an experience and emotional connection. Ultimately it served as a way to get people thinking about community in a new way which is the power of questions.

Lesson: Reframing a key word can create a new way of thinking and change the direction of the conversation.



Phase Five: What can you do to make this vision a reality?

One of the key goals of this campaign was to collect learnings that could inform policy, program and practices that nurture and strengthen deep community. It was this desire that pushed much of the innovation with the community conversation questions. It was only in the final months of the campaign that question that served as the most productive towards this goal was discovered.

By inviting people into action, this question became the logical concluding step to the visioning stage of the conversation. Tamarack quickly found that the framing of this question was particularly important. One of the aspirations of this process was to build individual and group ownership over the task of deepening community. When we first started asking this question people immediately went to large and abstract responses, focusing on issues of culture and system norms. Accurate and insightful as this was, it did not serve to build personal ownership. It was common in this space for people to be eager to generate ideas and then be quick to pass them on to others to put into action (ex. government, not for profits, funders). Community is a project that involves everyone and is driven at the grassroots. We therefore reframed the question around the actions that could be taken immediately by the people in the conversation. Sometimes the facilitator had to remind the group of this focus.

The result was that people switched from large scale conceptual ideas to more small scale practical actions. Through this many started to realize their own potential as community builders, which was really exciting to see.

The final piece we added was for each person to make a commitment to themselves and the whole group to take on one of the actions that came up during the conversation. This combined with the mutual accountability of the group increased the likelihood that the action would be implemented and ultimately help the vision people created come to fruition.

This newest question was a very exciting revelation and will be a key addition to the community conversation model.

Lesson: Build ownership into the conversation.

Learning Journey

The 1000 Conversations Campaign was a large learning journey for all the people involved as we learned together about people's experience of community and how they could be deepened and strengthened. Each of the community conversations was also learning journeys, as a group



grew together through a series of facilitated questions. Looking back, patterns start to emerge that exist both within the community conversations and the larger campaign. One of the most interesting patterns is the role of different levels of interaction in fostering a powerful learning journey. This section is focused on these patterns and the lessons they inspired.

As Tamarack designed the community conversation process we were intentional to include three different levels of interaction: personal reflection, triads and full group.

Personal Reflection: This is where a question is asked and each person is given a chance to reflect on it privately.

Pros:

- Allows everyone to participate
- Allows/challenges each person to ground this conversation in their own experience, personalizing the question
- Causes them to dig deep into the question

Cons:

- Does not introduce them to any new ideas or experiences
- The mind can easily wander
- It is a low energy exercise

Triads: Here people are put into groups of three to discuss the question together. We found that triads were more effective at eliciting engaging dialogue than diads (two). This was because of a greater diversity of voices and perspectives.

Pros:

- Fosters strong empathy and re-enforcement of experiences
- Creates space for everyone to speak (lower barrier to entry)
- Allows for the easy mixing of ideas and experiences

Cons:

- People are often quick to harmonize (great for building empathy, limits diversity and growth)
- If the group is struggling with the question they can disengage

Full group: Here the full group is brought together for a discussion. As the group gets bigger, there is an increased diversity but lower engagement. The most engaging conversations happened with groups of between 9-12 people.

Pros:

- Great diversity of ideas and experiences
- Greater power for action and change (harmonization at this level can be powerful)



- Fosters empathy and unity within the group
- Cons:
- Can be intimidating for people to speak up (high barrier to entry)
 - Can be hard to go deep as people jump from one idea to the next

Map of different level of interaction

	Energy	New Ideas	Engagement	Depth of Dialogue	Empathy	Barrier to Entry	Power to Create Change
Personal	Low	Low	High	High	Low	Low	Low
Triad	High	Medium	High	Medium	High	Medium	Medium
Full Group	Medium	High	Medium	Low	Medium	High	High

Ultimately the most effective conversations were the ones that used all three levels. There was a flow, like a wave, as conversations drifted between all levels. It was difficult to jump straight from individual reflection to full group discussion, so triads were used as a great lubricant between the two spaces.

Lesson: Each level of interaction has a purpose and a place. Conversations are richest when all three are used in tandem.

An important insight from the *1000 Conversations Campaign* was the discovery that this pattern also existed for the campaign as a whole. Unintentionally four levels of interaction had been generated: group conversations, individual reflection, community celebrations, and small group discussion.

Group Conversations: These were the community conversations and were the major driver of insights and stories for the campaign. Though these conversations introduced the theme’s they were just an introduction, the real depth of what was being shared only came out later through deeper reflection. Later in the newsletters the stories from these conversations would help bring the deeper themes to life.

Individual reflection: This was done by the Tamarack staff on a regular basis as we sat with the insights from the conversations, looking for patterns and learnings both in the content and process. It was during this deep thinking that most of the patterns were discovered.



Community Celebrations: Inspired by the local community champions, celebrations were organized that brought the community back together and created space for the deeper insights to be shared. This served as a chance for the community to hear their own stories reflected back within the larger context of their community. This gave their stories greater meaning. It also served as a chance to check the patterns to make sure they rang true for the community. It was here that these patterns were taken from the conceptual level and grounded back in reality.

Small group discussion: One of the biggest learnings was the power and importance of small scale discussions (diads and triads) with other explorers in this space. Whether it was parents, representatives from the local leadership teams or community groups like Community Development Halton, these conversations served to help hone the insights and models. When the hypothesis and brainstorm were shared with these people they often quickly resonated and built upon them with their own experiences. This led to a richness of learning that would not have otherwise been possible. This came about unintentionally as in our excitement we started to share our half-baked ideas with those we were working closely with. We quickly discovered the value of these conversations and began to actively seek them out at times when doing deeper dives in the data.

Lesson: Learning journeys are richest when they incorporate all levels of interaction.

When stepping back and looking at the *1000 Conversations campaign* in its entirety a similar wave pattern emerges. Moving forward it will be valuable for groups to intentionally build this pattern into their learning processes. This pattern has been a key part of building the deepening community movement and would be useful in other situations as well.

Recommendation:

Individuals:

- Be intentional about creating space for all levels of interaction within personal learning journeys.

Community Builders

- When developing any learning process or community dialogue be aware of the importance of all levels of interaction and intentionally build them into the roadmap for the project.



Reinvent the Wheel or Not?

One of the incredible things about community building is that it is vibrant; everywhere there are people who are working to build and strengthen their communities. In some cases they have been working on it for their whole lives and in many cases the work is incredibly innovative and unique to their specific context. The *1000 Conversations Campaign* involved several communities in Ontario and one in Alberta, and engaged several others. None of these spaces were dormant; they were full of energy and initiatives. In some cases there were projects that have been done in the past (ex. Destiny Milton) others are ongoing (ex. Festival of Neighbourhoods) and some are just starting (ex. Vision Georgetown). There are also lots of organizations that play in this space including: municipal governments, not-for-profits, funders, community leadership teams and many more. This means that a project to understand community is often entering crowded space. One of the big learnings for the 1000 Conversations Campaign was how to navigate this space in a way that did not step on anyone's toes and contributed both to the local community and the larger goals of the campaign.

In this regard there were many bumps and missteps along the way. Keys to the campaigns success were the mentors and local champions who provided support, advice and feedback. Through this a couple important lessons bubbled to the surface.

Lesson: Do an environment scan before delving deep into the community.

Before starting a community project take the time to learn what is already going on within the community. Ask questions like:

- Who is doing what?
- How are they doing it?
- What has happened in the past?

A great way to find this research is to locate key community champions and ask them. Good places to start include: Volunteer Centers, Social Planning Councils and Municipal Community Divisions, funders like the United Way and Community Foundation also have their finger on the pulse of the community. The key here is to be incredibly curious, ask lots of questions and do a lot of listening. This serves a bunch of purposes:

1. It helps to create a good understand of the environment: where there is a lot of energy, where you can help build upon great work and where there are gaps that you can help fill.
2. It helps foster learning from the innovations and great initiatives within the community which can inspire and shape new work



3. It helps develop understanding of who the key people and organizations are within the community (it is different in every community). These people can be champions and supporters of new projects.

No matter how experienced in community building one is, or how familiar they might be with their community, there is always more that can be learned.

Often reinventing the wheel is seen as negative because it is a waste of resources, inefficient and can lead to conflict and bad politics. All of this is true but there are also upsides to reinventing the wheel.

Lesson: Sometimes it is ok to reinvent the wheel as long as new lessons are extracted.

Every time one reinvents something they learn something new by seeing it from a different perspective. There might have been a community consultation done four years ago for example but a lot can change in four years. Different questions can lead to new insights; engaging different groups can release new energy and people.

Fear of re-inventing or creating redundancies can be paralyzing. Sometimes the best way forward is to just do it and learn through experience. The key with all of this is to come with curiosity, humility and adaptability. Another reality to watch out for is that key people might feel conversation'ed or burnt out. Tamarack ran into this often with the 1000 Conversations Campaign. Our response was to break away from the usual suspects to find groups that had not been engaged the first time.

Lesson: Build upon what is already happening.

When bringing forward a community project it is important to recognize what has already occurred or is currently forming and be intentional about building upon it. Part of this is coming with a cooperative mindset and not a competitive one. Also consider how this project adds to the work that is already happening.

It's All About Framing

Building a community initiative involves getting others excited and engaged with the project. To be successful one must learn how to best explain the concept so that it resonates deeply with other people. This is called framing and is an important tool for any community builder. It is easy to learn how to frame to one particular demographic but often social change involves reaching out to a high diversity of groups. Learning how to frame a concept to multiple different groups can be difficult.



Through the *1000 Conversations Campaign* the Tamarack team learned a lot about how to frame this project. This journey helped us learn more about ourselves, others and develop a deeper understanding of what we were doing with the *1000 Conversations Campaign*. Here are three of the key lessons from this experience:

Lesson: The less you say, the more you listen, the farther you will get.

Often times when meeting a person or group for the first time, the temptation is to do the majority of the talking. After all, the main agenda item for the conversation is the project. However, it is important to first know the context to best understand how to frame the conversation. Some of this work can be done ahead of time through researching the group and their values. Ultimately though Tamarack found that the more we spent the first part of the conversation asking them about their work and their passions, the more excited the group/person would get. Then we would know how to frame what we were doing so it spoke to their passion and context. Through this curiosity based approach we also learned a lot about what was already happening (environment scan) and this inspired and shaped the campaign. In the end, the best results came when we listened first and asked questions second and then last shared what we were doing and how it tied into their passion.

Lesson: To best understand how to frame something for another person involves being in relationship with them. This reframes it from how can I sell this to you, to how can we build this together into a win-win for both of us.

Tamarack started this campaign with a sales approach. We created a pitch and did cold calling, all with the goal of getting people to agree to have a community conversation. In this sense it became very transactional. The person on the other end of the phone was a means to an end. Research was done ahead of time to understand their perspective but framing done in this manner is like using a rusty or oversized tool. It was sloppy and inefficient. Naturally we moved away from this approach and to one much more focused around relationships. This shift made framing easier and more natural. We became more interested in them, what they were doing and how the community conversations could help them. This approach proved to be more successful and also much more rewarding. For this approach to work it was important to be flexible, adaptive and to create room for the other group to shape the process.

Lesson: By being able to frame what you are doing from multiple perspectives helps deepen your own understanding and passion for what you are doing.



A surprising outcome from all this framing, relationships and adaptability was a deeper understanding of what we were trying to do with the *1000 Conversations Campaign* and also why it's important work. This was most pronounced when working with groups like businesses that come from an often very different paradigm. It was because one needed to have both a deep understanding of what they were doing and why, as well as a strong empathy to other perspectives. This allows a person to transcend the silos that people build and get to the common human needs and desires that are universal. By getting to this deep and intimate level it really helped us grasp the power, passion and importance of community.

Adding the Community Celebration

One of the biggest breakthroughs of the *1000 Conversations Campaign* was the addition of the community celebration. Like most of the best ideas with this campaign, it was inspired by our local community partners. The introduction of the community celebration served as a turning point in two ways. First, it led to the development of local leadership teams (more on this in the next section) since having a local team makes it easier to organize a gathering. Second, it shifted the campaign from a research exercise to being an experiment in how we can build community together.

Lesson: Framing something as a celebration makes it more exciting to plan and more desirable to attend. Everyone likes a good party.

One of the many insights from the Halton leadership team was the importance of framing the community gathering as a celebration. It became a great advertising tool; people are more likely to want to come to a celebration than a gathering. This reframe also put the focus on the positives of the community and sharing them together. Finally, it made the planning process itself more fun, as there was a playfulness to it.

Lesson: It is important to create space to share your learnings with the larger community. They will let you know if you got it right.

The celebration pushed the Tamarack team to synthesize the patterns from the community and find digestible ways to share them. It also served as an avenue to share with the community the insights they had revealed. This proved to be empowering and helped connect them with other activities that were going on in their community. The celebration proved to be a real affirming process. First, for the community members to see the strengths of their community and how this was inspiring a national campaign. Second, for us to be able to share the patterns we saw and have them resonate and be supported by everyone. In this way it served as a feedback mechanism.



Local Leadership Teams

From the perspective of developing a process to build and deepen community the single biggest insight was the development of the local leadership teams. Originally created to help organize the community celebration, we quickly realized the incredible potential they had to shape the local campaign from start to finish. By the time Tamarack finished the campaign, the development of the local leadership team had become the primary focus. We worked to help organize a diverse and multi-stakeholder team and then focused on giving them tools to develop and implement an effective community engagement strategy.

Lesson: Finding local champions builds the capacity and credibility of the project.

In the early stages of the campaign, the Tamarack staff served as the builders and implementers of the *1000 Conversations Campaign*. This worked at first because we started in our home communities where we already had relationships in the community. However as the campaign shifted out to other communities the need for local champions became clear. Originally Tamarack had approached them as door openers to help us enter into the community. They lent us their networks and some of their credibility allowing us to run the campaign in their community. This was the approach that was used in Hamilton. By the time the campaign reached Halton we realized that there was an opportunity for the local leadership to play a bigger role. To make this request we had to be able to strongly tie the campaign into their vision and plans. This required flexibility but the result was a much greater local community buy-in and a better campaign.

Lesson: By building the capacity of local champions it increase the likelihood of the sustainability and longevity for the project.

In both Kitchener-Waterloo and Halton Tamarack was pushed on what role we hoped to play by some of the local community champions. Their biggest concern was the long term impact of this work. We began to recognize that our role as the national arbiter for this campaign was only temporary in the local context. Therefore to make sure that the impacts from the campaign would carry forward we realized the need for more local ownership and leadership. This also meant it would be important for us to step back and play more of a supportive role. This was difficult, since we felt tied to the work and also because of hesitancy at the local level to take on more responsibility. Ultimately, we found the greatest success when we either tied it into the work of a local group or engaged new people who had previously not had such a large leadership role in their community. By the time the campaign spread to Delburne and Grey-Bruce, we were being invited in as a support to help build the capacity and lay out a process for an already established group. This proved to be the most effective model.



Lesson: We work so often in niches, building a multi-sector leadership team is revolutionary and people are eager to engage in this new form of leadership.

Building multi-stakeholder teams came very naturally to the Tamarack team. As an organization that focuses on system level change it is a necessary way of functioning. We were surprised that for many community builders this was an innovative approach. Most communities proved to be a very siloed, dominated by community benefit organizations and governments. With a few exceptions schools, faith organizations, arts and cultural groups and businesses were left to the outside, pulled in as a resource on a case-by-case basis. The campaigns multi-stakeholder approach was innovative to many but most people were eager to implement it. This could be due to community building groups are made up of people from many different sectors, who are doing this work in their personal time. Many are not connecting the dots to their other roles, at least not in a formal sense. In this way there is tons of latent potential for these multi-stakeholder teams to pop up quickly.

Lesson: Building a local leadership team helps create effective feedback loops for the process. Provide guidelines but whenever possible let them drive and innovate.

The local leadership teams quickly became the major drivers of the innovation within the 1000 Conversations Campaign as they took more ownership of the process. They brought with them a wealth of experience from a diversity of perspectives as well as a deep understanding of the local context. They served as an important feedback loop for us to ensure we were doing more good than harm. The key was to establish a culture of learning. This meant being open and quick to implement feedback which, helped build trust. As the campaign developed the local leadership team became the major drivers of the process. We set the starting point and provided some advice and feedback along the way but they were the ones that made the campaign work for their local context. A great example of this is Delburne where the local leadership team combined the *1000 Conversations Campaign* with the Belonging photo project that involved taking pictures of people with an object that represented a sense of belonging for them. By adding this feature it made the whole process more meaningful for everyone and served as a powerful learning experience of the power of photography for Tamarack as well.

1,000 Conversations CONCLUSION: BUILDING A MOVEMENT

Closing Thoughts:

The last two years have been filled with challenges and triumphs as together with over two thousand people we have explored the experiences of community in Canada.

Community is not an easy subject; it is confusing, messy, and painful at times but it is also beautiful, inspiring, fun and memorable. It helps to bring out both the best and worst in people.

As this report highlights, community is full of paradoxes. Beyond all this complexity, the last two years have been inspirational. To have the passion and energy of over two thousand people sharing some of their most intimate and important experiences is both humbling and exhilarating. It has challenged us at Tamarack to be more, and it is from a desire to meet this challenge that the Deepening Community Movement has grown.

As the report highlights, there have been many insights that have emerged from these dialogues. There are two in particular that are relevant for this closing.

Community is about showing up.

One of the most powerful and important insights from the campaign came near the beginning. It was best highlighted during a small conversation with a group of students at the University of Guelph. One was an exchange student from central Africa who grew up in a village where community was the norm, until it was shattered by conflict. We asked him how we could deepen our experience of community here in Canada. He looked somewhat confused at first by the question. After a long pause he said. "In my home village people didn't try to build community, you simply showed up and community is what happened."

Many people talked about how community is something that humans naturally do when we have the opportunity. The journey towards

deepening community is therefore about trying to create space to show up in a society that is full of distractions and barriers. Whether this is a greater focus on self-care, as the "circle model of community" suggests or setting boundaries around work and technology as is mentioned in the barriers section, the end goal is simply to learn how to be present for each other and let community organically bubble up.

In a world focused on the individual, being in community is countercultural

Many people expressed a feeling of going against the current as they tried to find community in their lives. People described constant distractions from Facebook notifications to work deadlines that pulled them away from spending time in relationship. This report has highlighted many of these challenges. Despite all the barriers, people most often spoke of community with hope and excitement. The story of deep and meaningful community is one that people are drawn to. It is a disruptive narrative that is gaining momentum. For a disruptive narrative to move away from the fringes and start to change society, it needs to be spread and shared. Like the dancing man discussed in the section on disruptive narratives people need to come together and support each other in being disruptive to help the movement grow and reach a tipping point.

Paul Born often talks about how the key is not more community but deeper community. He discusses how we need to move beyond shallow community and to start nurturing a movement for deepening community. This idea resonated loudly throughout the 1000 Conversations Campaign. When people shared stories of their most powerful experiences of connection, they were telling stories of deep community. When people created their visions for the neighbourhood, school or church they wanted to see, they were drawing visions of deep community.

What the 1000 Conversations Campaign has done is invite people to create a space for this

new narrative of deep community to emerge. The next step is to create a rallying point for people to come and be inspired, hear each other's stories, share their own, help support each other and work together to create a new way of being. This is what the Deepening Community Movement is all about. The above section highlights a bunch of different ways to become part of the growing movement.

We invite you to join with us as we learn and grow together and through this build a movement for deepening community.

1,000 Conversations Wrap-Up: Where to From Here?

Tamarack's *1000 Conversations* Campaign was originally created to help us reflect on and deepen our shared understanding of community across Canada and beyond to help us spark a *Deepening Community* movement. It has succeeded in doing this. Now with over 8,000 copies of Paul Born's book *Deepening Community: Finding Joy in Chaotic Times* sold, we are moving into the next phase of this movement. As such we have brought the *1000 Conversations Campaign* to a close. The learnings from all these conversations have been captured in the form of blogs and newsletters, which can be found at <http://deepeningcommunity.ca/library-topics/conversations>

At the Neighbours: Policies & Programs 2015 gathering, we announced the launch of the next phase of the *1000 Conversations* campaign entitled [Local Deepening Community Initiative](#), where Tamarack is committed to partnering with 3-5 local communities who are interested in leading local *Deepening Community* Initiative projects. This work is part of our commitment to build a national movement of community builders interested in deepening our collective understanding of the power and possibility of

community and identifying the programs, policies, and practices that are demonstrating effectiveness in building and sustain strong, engaged communities.

Tamarack is now looking for communities across Canada who are interested in collaborating with us to undertake their own *Deepening Community* Project. If you are interested in learning more, please contact Christie Nash at christie@tamarackcommunity.ca.