



# **GUIDE:** **FIGHTING LONELINESS THROUGH CONVERSATIONS ON BELONGING**

How to host local conversations and call for  
a National Strategy for Belonging



# GUIDE | FIGHTING LONELINESS THROUGH CONVERSATIONS ON BELONGING

## How to host local conversations and call for a National Strategy for Belonging

By [Heather Keam](#)

This guide was developed to help communities, changemakers, volunteers, municipalities, and everyday people alike to begin the conversation on belonging. It will help you facilitate local conversations, include diverse voices, and more.

### Using this guide:

Refer to the appendices in Section 2 for tools and resources you can print off and use in your community.

### Background

Over the past decade, Canada, like many Western countries, has seen an increase in [loneliness and social disconnection](#). Even though technology keeps us more connected than ever, many people across the country feel increasingly disconnected and lonely. This loneliness can have serious effects – [research shows](#) that feeling lonely is as bad for your health as smoking 15 cigarettes a day.

To address this growing issue, the [Tamarack Institute](#) introduced the idea of creating a nationwide "[Belonging Strategy](#)" at their [2023 Asset-Based Community Development](#) event. The idea is to support local communities – focusing on residents and community groups – to create and implement solutions that reflect the needs and voices of their own neighborhoods. This [Canada wide strategy](#) would also ensure there are ongoing resources (federal and provincial) dedicated to supporting those who work in and care for our communities.

### We want a strategy that:

1. **Engages Communities:** Involve residents, organizations, and local leaders from different regions across Canada to understand their specific needs and challenges.
2. **Develops Local Solutions:** Encourage communities to design their own plans that reflect the voices of Indigenous, Black, and other racialized groups; people with low incomes, disabilities, or who identify as

2SLGBTQ+; newcomers; youth; and people with multiple identities.

3. **Secures Local Funding:** Ensure steady funding and resources are available to support those who care for their communities and sustain these local efforts.
4. **Builds Partnerships:** Foster collaboration across different sectors to unite individuals, associations, and organizations so that they share resources and expertise.
5. **Monitors and Evaluates:** Track the progress of these initiatives to identify successful efforts, scale them, and refine the strategy to improve its effectiveness.
6. **Sustains Local Efforts:** Ensure long-term commitment by securing ongoing support from all levels of government and other key partners.

To build this strategy, we need to start with conversations within communities across Canada to learn what is strong, what we already have, and what we need to inform the federal government on how to shape the strategy. Your communities' voices, ideas, and participation are crucial to this process.

## WE ARE PUTTING **LOCAL** INTO A FEDERAL STRATEGY

### Purpose of Community Conversations:

To get a local perspective on how belonging is showing in your communities, what is already happening, what are some challenges and solutions, and help define roles for different players.

### Timeline:

October, 2024 – December, 2024

### How you can help:

We are going to utilize our partners, members and networks to organize and host conversations. This does not have to be a formal event. It can be kitchen conversations, adding to your groups agenda or talking with your neighbours. We are hoping to get 100,000 voices from all provinces and territories in Canada to contribute to the strategy. Tamarack and our partners will then synthesize the data and put together recommendations and present them to the Federal government (2025).

Have you already done a conversation around belonging? *Let us know!*  
Contact Jorge at [jorge@tamarackcommunity.ca](mailto:jorge@tamarackcommunity.ca).

#### Helpful Links:

- [Communities Building Belonging](#)
- Article| [Community Belonging: A Way to End Poverty in Canada](#)
- Reporting: Use this guide digitally or by printing
- Draft Invitation: See appendix #3

Thank you for supporting the [National Belonging Strategy](#). We have put together this guide to assist you in organizing conversations around belonging in your community. If you have any questions, please reach out to Jorge Garza at [jorge@tamarackcommunity.ca](mailto:jorge@tamarackcommunity.ca).

Yours in Conversation,

Tamarack Institute and Partners

**CALL TO ACTION**  
**A NATIONAL STRATEGY FOR**  
**BELONGING**  
**TAKE ACTION AND FIGHT**  
**LONELINESS TODAY!**



# THE CONVERSATION GUIDE

## Section #1: Getting Started

We are looking to hear from diverse backgrounds, voices, lived experiences and cultures as this will add depth to the conversations. Hosting a conversation does not have to be a lot of work. Here are a few ideas and considerations when planning for your conversations:

- Who have you already met with? Do you have committees or groups that are already meeting that you can add this to the agenda?
- What groups and clubs do your kids participate in? Would they be willing to add this to the list of activities for the kids?
- Are you a teacher? Can this be part of your curriculum?
- Does your workplace host lunch and learns? Can you organize a conversation at a staff meeting?
- Are you part of a club or association that you can ask to put this on the agenda?
- Do your neighbours have block parties? Can you host a block party conversation?

## Decide on what kind of conversation you want to have

You can do the traditional way of hosting a conversation, where people are seated in a room, and you lead the group through the conversation. Think about who will be attending and what is the best way of gathering input. You know your community the best, have fun with it!

- [How to host a Conversation Café](#) – set up tables with food and drinks and the tables use the questions for discussion
- [How to host open space conversations](#)– post the questions around the room and people move from question to question and write their responses
- [Graffiti wall](#)– use words or drawings to answer the questions



## **Choose a space that invites conversation**

- Somewhere relatively quiet and free from distractions and interruptions
- Somewhere familiar and accessible to all who want to participate
- Somewhere comfortable with enough room for everyone to sit in one big circle

## **Make it welcoming!**

- Be sure to greet and welcome people
- Introduce people to each other
- Thank them for coming
- Make it celebratory – flowers, snacks and music all help create a sense of joy and fun
- Share accessibility considerations ahead of time (for in person and online events). For example, if the space has a set of staircases, if bathrooms are universal, if participants need high-speed internet, etc.

## **Logistics and supplies**

- The conversations last approximately one hour depending on the number of questions you want to add to the core list of questions
- Print off the Appendices (see below p. 8 or refer to the quick links on p.1)
- Bring along markers, paper and pens in case people want to take notes or draw pictures to represent their answers
- Ask people to sign a consent form with their name and email so that we can share any of the information that was provided
- You will need someone who can take notes directly into the conversation form, or you can take notes and enter them later

## Create a Safe Container “to Hold” the Conversation

The goal of a great conversation is to help people to think together. To achieve this, it is often helpful to outline – and get agreement on -- guidelines for the conversation. These can include:

- Turn off cell phones
- Listen with attention
- Be comfortable with silence
- Speak with intention
- Ask questions
- Be open to new ideas and possibilities
- Be tolerant and willing to shift your opinion
- Attend to the well-being of the group
  - Make it clear how long the session will last, where bathrooms are, how/when people can take breaks
- Let people know, ahead of time, what you are planning to do with the info they share AND who will have access to the info shared
- Have fun!

**Remember that there is no wrong way to have a conversation.**



## Section #2: The Conversation Agenda

Topic & Time	Guiding Questions	Notes
Setting the Context	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Lead with meaningful land acknowledgement, and if possible, follow protocol to invite local Indigenous rights holders to open the session.</li> </ul> <p>Take a few moments at the start to outline the purpose for the conversation:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Explain why and how you personally decided to get involved</li> <li>Let people know that the ideas they share today will be combined with those generated by many other conversations like this one happening throughout Canada in the next three months to help inform a national belonging strategy that centres community.</li> <li>We are looking to go beyond individual/personal belonging and think about a sense of community belonging – what is needed in the places we live in (e.g., access to green space), built environment (front porch, meeting rooms, libraries, schools) and policies (e.g., all clubs who serve the community should get free spaces)</li> </ul> <p>Think about the spaces in your community that help you to meet people (new and different), participate in social life/civic life and rules/regulations/policies that support you to belong that are not in your direct neighbourhood.</p>	You can google land acknowledgement and your town to get started.
Getting warmed up (20 min)	<p><b>Discussion #1:</b> Ask people to form into groups of three (or if it is a small group, go around the room) and share their answers the following question (10 minutes)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Share a story of a powerful experience of belonging that you've had. What made it powerful?</li> </ul> <p><b>Discussion #2:</b> In the same groups discuss the following question (10 Min)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Given the stories we've shared, what do we see as the benefits of belonging in our community?</li> </ul> <p><i>As a large group share the benefits and document them.</i></p>	Capture the answers to what made it powerful (on flip chart or on paper).



<p><b>Diving into Community Belonging</b></p>	<p><b>Discussion #3:</b> In a large group or it can be done in small groups- Ask people to share their answers the following questions</p> <p><b>Q#1:</b> What is strong in our community that enhances belonging?  <i>Prompting question:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Who is doing belonging work in our community?</i></li> </ul> <p><b>Q#2:</b> What are the main factors negatively impacting belonging in our community?  <i>Prompting question:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What are challenges/barriers are stopping people from connecting in your community?</li> <li>• What challenges / barriers exist to improving belonging work in our community?</li> </ul> <p>Think about events that have happened in your community. Did they have an impact on your sense of belonging and trust?</p> <p><b>Q#3:</b> What are some things that community organizations / government are doing that are contributing to belonging?</p>	<p>Document the answers to each question.</p>
<p><b>Who is in the room?</b></p> <p>(5 min)</p>	<p>We want to get to know who is part of this conversation, so that we can recognize the diversity of conversations.</p> <p>Pass out the postcards so that everyone has one/they can share and tell them to use there phone to scan the QR code to fill in a very short questionnaire.</p> <p><i>Give people time to fill it in before wrap-up.</i></p>	<p>Print off the postcards (Appendix #4)</p> <p>You can also print off the questionnaire and have paper copies, and then enter the data electronically.</p>
<p><b>Wrap-up</b></p> <p>(5 min)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Thank and acknowledge your host and participants</li> <li>• Thank everyone for coming to the conversation</li> <li>• Remind them to finish the survey before they leave</li> <li>• Don't forget to remind participants that this conversation today is part of the conversation project that will be used to build consensus around a national belonging strategy</li> <li>• Check in with your note taker to review the conversation. Capture any themes that you have heard/found</li> </ul>	

# NATIONAL STRATEGY FOR BELONGING

## Community conversations toolkit

### Appendix #1: Reporting and Note-taking Template

[View the form](#)

Note Taker Name / Organization Leading the Conversation	Who is in the Room? Demographics, not personal information here (number of attendees, etc.)

Please ensure your participants know that all questions are optional and that their responses will be anonymous and confidential. Responses from community conversations will be compiled and analyzed as a group to help support recommendations for a National Strategy on Belonging.

### Questions and Comments

(Summarize / Paraphrase Comments / Verbatim Quotes)

Questions	Comments / Questions / Themes
<b>Discussion #1</b> What made it powerful?	
<b>Discussion #2</b> What are the main benefits of belonging in our community?	

### Discussion #3

<b>What is strong in our community that advances belonging?</b>  Who is doing belonging work in our community?	
<b>What are some things that community organizations / government are doing that is contributing to belonging?</b>	
<b>What are the main factors negatively impacting belonging in our community?</b>  What are challenges you and your family face?	
<b>What challenges / barriers exist to improving belonging work in our community?</b>	

### Post-Event Summary

<b>Theming</b>	
Please write down any key themes that emerged during the conversations:  Consider recurring questions / comments, points of agreement, points of disagreement and any shifts in opinions during the discussion.	

## Appendix # 2: Questionnaire

[Access the online questionnaire](#)

**Who is part of the conversation:** We are working hard to hear from diverse voices from across Canada to contribute to the development of a Canada wide Belonging Strategy. This questionnaire should not take more than five minutes to complete and will only be used by Tamarack to support recommendations for the belonging strategy.

We understand that the categories provided below may not adequately capture your identity and we will have a space for you to add in any details you would like to add. The categories below will help us to make sure that we are getting a good understanding of those who live in Canada

1. Who was your host\_\_\_\_\_

2. Tell us what Province/Territory you are from:

- ☐ Newfoundland and Labrador
- ☐ Prince Edward Island
- ☐ Nova Scotia
- ☐ New Brunswick
- ☐ Quebec
- ☐ Ontario
- ☐ Manitoba
- ☐ Saskatchewan
- ☐ Alberta
- ☐ British Columbia
- ☐ Northwest Territories
- ☐ Nunavut
- ☐ Yukon

3. Tell us about where you live:

- ☐ Large urban centres, with a population of 100,000 or more.
- ☐ Medium centres, with a population between 30,000 and 99,999
- ☐ Small centres, with a population between 1,000 and 29,999
- ☐ Rural area, with a population under 999

4. What is your age group?

- ☐ 0-17
- ☐ 18-24
- ☐ 25-54
- ☐ 55-64
- ☐ 65 +

5. What best describes your gender?

- ☐ Man
- ☐ Woman
- ☐ Non-binary or Gender Fluid
- ☐ Intersex
- ☐ I prefer not to answer
- ☐ Other: \_\_\_\_\_

6. Are you an Indigenous person? (Select all that apply)

- ☐ First Nation
- ☐ Inuit
- ☐ Métis
- ☐ Other: \_\_\_\_\_
- ☐ I do not identify as Indigenous
- ☐ I prefer not to answer

7. Which of the following best describes your racial identity? (Select all that apply)

- ☐ White, European descent
- ☐ Racialized, person of colour, or similar term
- ☐ Biracial, multiracial, mixed race or similar term
- ☐ I prefer not to answer
- ☐ Other \_\_\_\_\_

8. Do you identify as having one or more disabilities? (Radio boxes)

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No
- ☐ I prefer not to answer

9. To what extent do you feel the things you do in your life are worthwhile?  
Answer using a scale of 0 to 10, where 0 means "Not at all" and 10 means "Completely".

Not at all

Completely

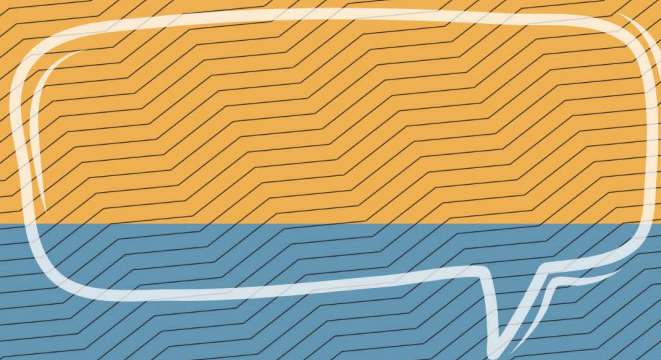
1      2      3      4      5      6      7      8      9      10

10. How would you describe your sense of belonging to your local community?

- ☐ Very strong
- ☐ Somewhat strong
- ☐ Somewhat weak
- ☐ Very weak
- ☐ No opinion

11. How do you participate in creating change in your community? (Select all that apply)

- ☐ I don't participate
- ☐ I am part of a club/group
- ☐ I organize activities in my neighbourhood
- ☐ I talk to my local council rep about issues
- ☐ I have attended/presented at council meeting
- ☐ Other: \_\_\_\_\_





## Appendix #3 Sample Invitation



Over the past decade, Canada, like many Western countries, has seen an increase in loneliness and social disconnection. Our community [insert statistics or local issues]. Even though technology keeps us more connected than ever, many people across the country feel increasingly disconnected and lonely.

Join [insert who is hosting] for a conversation on belonging in our [insert group, neighbourhood, community etc.]

Host:  
Date:  
Time:  
Location:  
Contact:

We want to talk about how belonging is showing up in our communities and possible solutions. This conversation will contribute to the development of a nationwide belonging strategy.

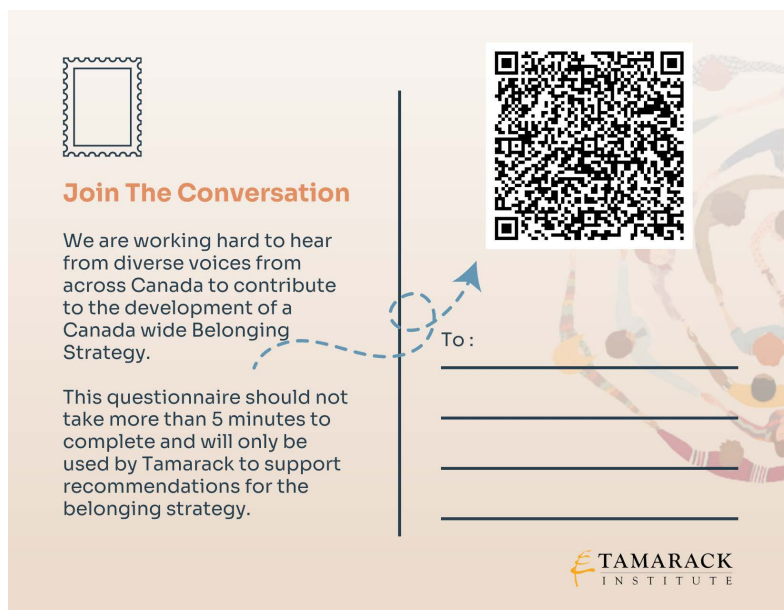


Scan the QR code with your phone to learn more about a Nationwide Belonging Strategy

## Appendix #4: Postcard

Print off this postcard so that everyone has a copy that they can use.

[Alternative Link](#) (Canva)  
[Download PDF for printing](#)





Turtle Island (North America) is the ancestral home of Indigenous peoples of First Nation, Métis, and Inuit descent. Manitoba, Canada was originally inhabited by various Indigenous nations, including the Anishinaabe, Cree, and Dakota peoples.

We recognize that across this land Indigenous rights holders have endured historical oppression and continue to experience inequities that have resulted from the widespread colonialist systems and ideologies that perpetuate harm to Indigenous peoples to this day.

[View our Land Acknowledgement Guide](#)