

*Some Questions and Answers about*

## The Conversation

*A community-wide inquiry into Madison's future health and wellness*

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What could Madison look like in ten years? Twenty years? What if we chose to pursue strategies that were widely shared and aimed at the highest level of health and wellness? What would it look like and what are important strategies?

This inquiry is in part prompted by the widespread feeling that public issues are approached in an increasingly combative manner; that closed-minded argument dominates media and interpersonal communication. Multiplying media channels exacerbate this circumstance by developing partisan audiences dulled with high-decibel posture matches masquerading as debate or education. How can we resist this global trend dumbing down our capacity for civic conversation and establish a working alternative model?

Possible answers will be explored in an ongoing, community-wide series of conversations among thinking citizens. You are invited.

*Q. What are the main goals of The Conversation?*

A. The main goal of The Conversation is to increase the capacity of Madison area residents to improve their and their community's health and wellness. And thereby create possibilities that are not currently considered or, without the changes inherent in this process, even possible. This can happen primarily in three ways. The first is to increase the quantity and quality of civic interaction. This will primarily occur during the preparation for and the experiencing of the *specific communication methods* used during the individual organized Conversations. The second types of improvement will emerge as a result of the *raised expectations and new ideas* resulting from visioning and imagining of an improved future that will be the formal focus of the Conversations. Lastly, it is expected that many persons will be inspired to undertake *projects* in collaboration with others.

The main goals involve, therefore, minds, hearts and hands. It involves shifting the way we think and engage each other to another level.

*Q. Who is the sponsor of The Conversation?*

A. The project is sponsored in part by the Madison Quality Improvement Network (MAQIN), the Madison Sesquicentennial Commission, XXX, YYYY and ZZZZ.

*Q. How will The Conversation be organized?*

A. The critical organizational unit of The Conversation will be the individual dialogue group. A number of these groups will gather throughout Madison, on an ongoing basis, to

actually carry out The Conversation, thus furthering the aims of the effort. Beyond that, there will be a loose structure to assist the various groups in working toward their goals, and to help them in keeping in touch with each other. There will be no controlling headquarters raising large sums of money and deciding what individual Conversations should do.

*Q. What will the actual Conversation groups look like?*

A. They will consist of anywhere from four to a dozen or more people who are willing to engage in spirited discussion, to share ideas and vision, and to listen to others. These groups may be spun off from existing groups—a book club, e.g., or a church or office group, even a sports team. Discussions will be held in every part of Madison, and beyond its borders.

*Q. The Conversation sounds like a traditional town meeting. How will it be different?*

A. For one, The Conversation will be an ongoing process, one of shared inquiry and discovery. For another, the purpose of The Conversation is not to advance individual ideologies or political agendas, as may be appropriate at a town meeting, but to listen, to share ideas, and, through the process of collective thought, gain common insights that would be unattainable by ordinary adversarial debate or discussion.

There will be a few, simple ground rules that will guide the conversation that are different from typical office, committee and political discussion. They include [I will check the literature for better summaries – this is a placeholder.]

- Suspending judgment
- Assumption Identification
- Deep listening
- Speaking only when moved
- Speaking only to the whole group
- Letting go of making a decision

*Q. What can the individual hope to gain by participating in The Conversation?*

A. First, the individual gains a new way of exploring ideas and learning about underlying beliefs and hopes. This new way of engaging themselves and others can be used in many other circumstances with benefits to relationships and ongoing endeavors. Also, with a new sense of creative thinking, of opening up to new ideas, new visions of community weal is likely to emerge.

*Q. How will the various groups share their ideas with each other?*

A. Reporting to a searchable site on the internet. There may also be a newsletter, or larger follow-up meetings of a number of groups. This, like many aspects of The Conversation, will grow organically, through practice and experience. It is anticipated that once common goals are identified and offers to undertake activity are made (outside of the formal Conversations), there will be easy ways to connect with others of a similar interests.

*Q. What is the ultimate goal of The Conversation?*

A. To improve the mental, spiritual, and physical health of the Madison community, to make Madison a better place in which to live and work, to improve the lives of all its citizens. Also, to potentially be a laboratory for other community's practical and spiritual development.

*Q. How can I take part in The Conversation?*

A. There are several possible ways to enter this ongoing process. General information is available at the Sesquicentennial web site [www.madison150.org](http://www.madison150.org). Participation is free. Preparation for an individual Conversation involves reading a few background pages and agreeing to certain ground rules for the meeting.

*Q. What is the background for the ground rules and how are they distinguished from typical meeting formats?*

A. [Much more development here.] The ground rules are a relatively recent formulation of the practices of many ancient cultures and traditions. It is estimated that humankind used these methods to interact for 99% of our existence. They are based on the belief that every voice has equal value, following the flow of the meaning is more important than debate or advocacy, and that in a respectful process new ways of seeing things and finding common purpose are likely but not necessary outcomes. There is often more listening and silence than in traditional meeting interaction. For a list of sources for additional information and research, see the end of this section.

[David Bohm, Glenna Gerard, Peter Senge, Society of Friends, Leadership and the New Science, etc.]