

Community Conversation Scenario

Growing budget shortfalls in your community and throughout the state have prompted discussion about essential versus non-essential services. Some services, such as police and fire protection, are almost always mentioned as essential services. Some services, such as public health, are often mentioned as essential services, although there is some disagreement regarding how much and what types of public health services are essential. Other services, such as public art and early childhood education, are considered essential by their advocates but are often mentioned as non-essential services by their opponents.

A recent editorial in your local newspaper raised questions about the costs of early childhood education, why government should be involved in what many see as a parental responsibility, and who benefits other than providers who receive funding. At a recent professional meeting, you and a small group of advocates and providers talked informally about this editorial. It prompted concerns among yourselves about how much your community knew about early childhood education and how much support existed in your community. You came away with more questions than answers.

You and your colleagues talked about the idea of a community conversation focusing on early childhood education. Most of the group liked the idea but members raised a number of questions. Why should we have such a conversation, what is our goal and purpose, what results do we want to achieve, who should be involved, how should it be conducted, who should sponsor and conduct this conversation and how should we move from conversation to action?

Although everyone in the group agrees early childhood education is important, some of your colleagues expressed concerns about spending too much time talking without doing anything. The group has scheduled a meeting to explore the idea of a community conversation. That meeting is starting now.