

# BETTER TOGETHER COMMUNITY CONVERSATION TOOLKIT

Welcome to the Better Together Community Conversation Toolkit. Better Together is a citizen-led community planning process for the City of Decatur and it is focused on three action areas:

- **An Equitable and Inclusive City:** Cultivating relationships across differences and creating conditions for all community members to thrive and participate fully in city life. This includes applying an equity lens in matters of leadership and decision-making and conducting community outreach in culturally relevant ways.
- **Racially Just Community Policing:** Improving relationships between community members and law enforcement by addressing racism, bias and privilege to ensure all community members, especially people of color, are treated in a just way with equity and respect.
- **Diverse and Affordable Housing:** Preventing displacement of existing residents and supporting the development of a variety of housing types and prices.

These action areas were identified and refined by the Better Together Leadership Circle, a diverse group of volunteers who have been meeting monthly since December 2014. After defining the focus areas, the Leadership Circle developed a three-part process for engaging a broad spectrum of the community in this important conversation:

- The **Community Survey** – This 10-minute online survey for collecting input from individuals until September 30. As of late August, more than 600 people had participated (<https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/BTDecaturSurvey>).
- The **Community Action Planning Café Conversation** – On August 29, the Leadership Circle welcomed 200 people to a daylong community conversation at the Ebster Gym. Participants worked in small groups to imagine actions that could be taken by individuals, neighborhoods, the business community, organizations, faith communities, and local government.
- The **Community Conversation Toolkit** – This document, released on September 1, is a means for building on the conversation begun August 29 by taking it to homes, houses of worship, neighborhood associations, book clubs, PTAs, and other places and organizations that bring people together in the City of Decatur.

By the end of the year, input from all of these sources will have been collected, analyzed, and shaped into the Better Together Community Action Plan, a road map for implementing community change by clarifying what will be done, who will do it, and how it will be done. The community action plan will support the City's existing strategic plan by providing recommendations and suggestions for more specific actions that would help to deliver on Principle B of the 2010 strategic plan.



# MORE ABOUT THE TOOLKIT

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This toolkit is for anyone who has an interest in participating in the Better Together initiative by hosting or participating in a do-it-yourself conversation anytime during the month of September 2015. Depending on your interests, the size of your group, and the amount of time you have, you can use this resource in several ways. Here are a few things to consider as you begin making plans:

- **The Role of the Host** – The Host is responsible for setting a date, time, and location for the conversation; determining which of the three focus areas to cover during the discussion; and inviting participants. (A sample invitation is included at the end of this document.) The Host also recruits several people to help with the conversation and obtains all necessary supplies (details in the Community Conversation Checklist below). On the day of the conversation, the Host should plan on welcoming and, afterward, thanking them for participating. Following the conversation, Better Together organizers ask that the Host complete a brief online evaluation (<https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/BTHostEval>).
- **The Topics** – Better Together encompasses three distinct focus areas: an equitable and inclusive city; racially-just community policing; and diverse and affordable housing. Your group can tackle one, two, or all three of these focus areas.
- **Time** – Depending on how many focus areas your group decides to address, the Community Conversation should take from about an hour and a half to about two and a half hours.
  - 20 minutes for everyone to arrive and get settled
  - 25 minutes for introductions and reviewing the agenda and materials
  - 30 minutes per topic
  - 10 minutes for closing comments
- **The Participants** – Anyone with a strong interest in the City of Decatur's future can participate. Most participants will be Decatur residents, but people who work in the city and even frequent visitors are invited to weigh in also.
- **Group Size** – Five to 10 people make a good sized group. Groups with more than 10 people, can divide into two or more sub-groups. If you don't have time to get a group together or simply prefer to work on your own, that's okay too.
- **Outcomes** – Better Together is an action-focused initiative, and the outcomes of the community conversations will help shape a Community Action Plan. Please be sure your discussion concludes with specific recommendations for ways individuals, neighborhoods, businesses and institutions, and local government can work to achieve a more diverse and inclusive Decatur.

# COMMUNITY CONVERSATION CHECKLIST

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- A group of **people** – Five to 10 people is a good sized group. If your group is larger, consider breaking into smaller sub-groups.
- A **location** – Groups can meet in private homes, houses of worship, community centers, or even one of Decatur's excellent eating and drinking establishments. Anywhere participants can sit comfortably and hear each other will do.
- Better Together Participant Guides** – one copy for each participant. The guide is available for download at [www.decaturnext.com](http://www.decaturnext.com), and a limited number of print copies are available at City Hall.
- Better Together Conversation Toolkits** – copies for Host, Moderator, Scribe, and Timekeeper. The toolkit is available for download at [www.decaturnext.com](http://www.decaturnext.com), and a limited number of print copies are available at City Hall.
- Pens and pencils** – Make sure there are enough for everyone.
- Food and drink** – Don't go to a lot of trouble. You can provide drinks and snacks or ask everyone to bring something to share.
- A **moderator** – This person facilitates the conversation, making sure the group stays on topic

- and everyone has a chance to speak. This could be the host or someone else in the group. Make sure the moderator is identified before the group meets.
- A **scribe** – This person takes notes during the conversation and submits the group's report to the

Better Together Leadership Circle. This job may be shared by two people.

- A **timekeeper** – This person assists the moderator by keeping an eye on the clock so the group finishes on time.

## PRO TIPS

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### For Moderators

- Read the Better Together Participant Guide before your group meets. It is available for download at [www.decaturnext.com](http://www.decaturnext.com).
- Your job is to ensure the conversation keeps moving and stays on topic, so you should contribute very little as a participant.
- Make sure everyone has a chance to speak.
- Keep an eye on the scribe and slow the conversation down whenever he or she needs a moment to catch up on note-taking.

### For Scribes

- Take notes using a notebook, notecards, or a laptop computer – whatever works best for you.
- Don't feel like you have to capture every detail – just the highlights.
- Don't hesitate to ask participants to repeat or clarify something they've said.
- When the group discusses specific action items, make sure you note who would have responsibility for each item (individuals, neighborhoods, businesses and institutions, or local government). This will be an important part of the information you submit to Better Together.
- Complete the online response form (<https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/BTConvoReport>) within 24 hours of your group's discussion, so any important details will still be fresh in your mind. If you need a paper response form, please contact Olivia Jackson at 678-553-6540 or [Olivia.jackson@decaturga.com](mailto:Olivia.jackson@decaturga.com).

### For Timekeepers

- Use a kitchen timer or the timer feature on your cell phone so you can participate in the discussion without literally watching the clock.
- Give "two-minute warnings" to help everyone wrap up their thoughts and prepare to move on to the next discussion question.

### For Participants

- Read the Better Together Participant Guide before your group meets. It is available for download at [www.decaturnext.com](http://www.decaturnext.com).
- Make sure your remarks are on topic.
- Listen carefully to other participants.
- If you disagree with someone, do so respectfully.
- If someone disagrees with you, try to understand his or her position.
- If you tend to talk a lot in groups, be careful not to monopolize the conversation.
- If you tend to be quiet in groups, make an extra effort to contribute your opinions, questions and ideas.

# FINAL REMINDERS

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- Better Together Community Conversations should take place between September 1 and 30, 2015.
- Groups can discuss one, two, or all three focus areas.
- Participants should take a few minutes to read the Better Together Participant Guide before the group meets. It is available for download at [www.decaturnext.com](http://www.decaturnext.com).
- Group reports must be submitted online (<https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/BTConvoReport>) by 5 pm, Saturday, October 3. Groups submitting paper response forms may send them to Olivia Jackson/Better Together, City of Decatur, PO Box 220, Decatur GA 30031. Information submitted after October 3 will not be included in the Community Action Plan.

## WHAT'S NEXT FOR BETTER TOGETHER?

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In October and November the Better Together Leadership Circle will be working with a consulting team to analyze the community input collected from the survey, the community café event, and the independently hosted community conversations. This information will be the basis for the Better Together Community Action Plan that will be presented to the City Commission in December 2015 or January 2016.

Once the Community Action Plan is released, the City and the Leadership Circle will begin publicizing and supporting specific recommendations and activities from the plan that can be implemented by individuals, neighborhoods, businesses and institutions, and local government.

*\*Profane comments, personal attacks, and any other comments that would reasonably be considered inappropriate will not be included in the final report.*



### Sample Invitation

On [date], I will be hosting group discussion as part of the City of Decatur's Better Together initiative. Better Together is a citizen-led effort to develop a Community Action Plan for building a more diverse and inclusive city. It will be based entirely on input from people like us who are invested in the future of Decatur.

The specific focus areas we will address are [insert Focus Areas 1, 2, and/or 3 here]

I am excited about this opportunity and hope you will join me. Here are all of the details: [insert date, time, place, what to bring, RSVP] If you have any questions, please let me know. You might also want to visit [www.decaturnext.com](http://www.decaturnext.com) for more information on Better Together. Thanks and I look forward to hearing from you.

# THE BETTER TOGETHER DISCUSSION GUIDE

## SECTION 1. ABOUT YOUR GROUP

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*Moderator: Consult with the Host and/or the Scribe to answer the following questions before the conversation begins. After participants have introduced themselves, review this information with the full group and ask for any additional input they might have.*

*Scribe: Record responses on a separate sheet of paper so that you can enter them into the online form following today's conversation.*

*Timekeeper: No duties at this time.*

1. Group name (It can be anything, silly or serious. We just need a way to distinguish the groups in the Better Together final report.)
2. General description of your group. You might include gender and racial mix, age range, neighborhood(s), how long participants have lived in Decatur, whether they work in Decatur, etc.
3. Where did you meet? [Private home, house of worship, community building (e.g., library, rec center, etc.), public place (restaurant, bar)]
4. Is this an existing group (book club, supper club, Sunday school class, neighborhood association, etc.) or did you gather specifically for this discussion? If it is an existing group, please tell us what kind.
5. Is there anything else you want to tell us about your group?

## SECTION 2. INTRODUCTIONS AND GETTING STARTED

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*Moderator: Please ask each participant to share the following about themselves. After everyone is introduced, remind them of the Conversation Guidelines on page 5 of the Participant Guide and review the information from Section 1.*

*Scribe: No duties at this time.*

*Timekeeper: This part of the conversation should last about 25 minutes. If the group is moving too slowly, remind everyone of the time. If necessary, give a two-minute warning to help the moderator bring the discussion to a close.*

1. Name, neighborhood, or other affiliation
2. What do you love about Decatur?
3. Why did you choose to participate in today's community action planning conversation?

## SECTION 3. DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

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*Moderator: For each focus area there are two types of questions: General Discussion Questions and an Action Items Question. Depending on how much time you have, the size of your group, and how many topics you are covering choose one or two General Discussion Questions to encourage conversation. (You could also utilize one of the articles or videos listed in the Resources section of the Participant Guide as a conversation starter.) Once the group is warmed up, move on to the Action Items Question, which asks participants to come up with specific action items that could be included in the Better Together Community Action Plan. Make sure each action item includes who would be responsible for each and, if applicable, suggested timeline, funding, potential partners, etc.*

*Scribe: For each focus area there are two types of questions: General Discussion Questions and the Action Items Question. Focus on the responses to the Action Items Question, including who would be responsible for each and, if applicable, suggested timeline, funding, potential partners, etc. It is not necessary that you take notes on the responses to the General Discussion Questions.*

*Timekeeper: Allow about 10 minutes total for the General Discussion Questions, leaving the remaining 20 minutes for Action Items.*

## **Focus Area 1: An Equitable and Inclusive City**

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**General Discussion Questions:** What's working? What's needed? | Think of a time and place where you felt truly welcomed and included. What made you feel welcomed and included? | What are the conditions that help people feel welcomed and able to participate in city life? | Where in Decatur do people already connect across differences or share common experiences? | How can we individually create more opportunities to cultivate relationships across differences?

**Action Item Question:** Given our conversation, what actions can individuals, neighborhoods, the business community, organizations, faith communities, and local government take to make Decatur more welcoming and inclusive?

## **Focus Area 2: Racially Just Community Policing**

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**General Discussion Questions:** What's working? What's needed? | Do you know the police officer(s) that patrol your neighborhood? Why or why not? What steps can you take to bridge that gap? What steps can law enforcement take to bridge that gap? | What do you think is essential for individuals and law enforcement to pay attention to regarding respectful and equitable community policing? | What would help us achieve and maintain consistently respectful and equitable relationships between law enforcement and all segments of the community?

**Action Item Question:** Given our conversation, what actions can individuals, neighborhoods, the business community, organizations, faith communities, and local government take to support racially just community policing in Decatur?

## **Focus Area 3: Diverse and Affordable Housing**

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**General Discussion Questions:** What's working? What's needed? | Why is it important (or not important) to create a range of affordable housing options for individuals and families at all income levels? | What are some of the legal, ethical, and practical challenges of establishing policies and practices that support affordable and diverse housing? | What ideas do you have for creating a range of affordable housing options for individuals and families at all income levels?

**Action Item Question:** Given our conversation, what actions can individuals, neighborhoods, the business community, organizations, faith communities, and local government take to ensure Decatur builds, retains, and maintains a mix of diverse and affordable housing?

**THANK YOU** for participating in the Better Together Community Conversation. To ensure your input is included in the Better Together Community Action Plan, please submit your group's information online at <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/BTConvoReport> or by mail to Olivia Jackson/Better Together, City of Decatur, PO Box 220, Decatur GA 30031. **The deadline for submitting group information and action items is Saturday, October 3, 2015.**