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COMMUNITY CONVERSATION GUIDE

# Background

One in seven Californians face hunger. In Sacramento County, more than 245,000 people don't know where their next meal is coming from.

Who are these people? How do they feed themselves and their families in difficult times? How does hunger impact our schools, businesses and healthcare system? What are we doing to address this community problem?



To find out, Capital Public Radio's documentary team went to places where people grappling with food insecurity go: our region's food banks and community clinics. In collaboration with community partners—the American Academy of Pediatrics Northern California Chapter, Grow Sacramento, Sacramento Region Food System Collaborative, and Sacramento Hunger Coalition—we set up a mobile storybooth and invited people to share their stories. Nearly 50 people shared their experiences with hunger. Some of these storytellers are students in your schools. Others are seniors in your community. They are your neighbors, co-workers, and friends. Their stories reveal the interrelated issues of transportation, housing, unemployment, health and stigma. They show us a hidden landscape of hunger.

You can explore these stories on the **Hidden Hunger: Storybooth** ([hiddenhungerstorybooth.com](http://hiddenhungerstorybooth.com)), an interactive website to help raise awareness and engage the public in exploring local issues and creative solutions.

# Background



Being hungry changes a person’s quality of life, health, and ability to work. It impairs children’s ability to learn—lowering test scores, contributing to behavioral issues, and increasing dropout rates. It causes childhood malnutrition and creates even bigger health problems in adulthood. Low-income people dealing with hunger are especially vulnerable to obesity. These health issues cause increased healthcare costs and reduced productivity, issues that everyone pays for. Hunger impacts us all.

Capital Public Radio produced **Hidden Hunger Storybooth** as part of the multimedia documentary series **The View From Here**. CapRadio is committed to raising the voices of everyday people responding to change in their lives and the challenges of our times. Community engagement is how we discover and report the powerful stories that connect us to each other and help build stronger communities.

**The View From Here: Hidden Hunger** explores the daily struggles of children, adults and seniors in Sacramento, where lack of transportation limits access to affordable, healthy fresh food and the stigma of poverty and hunger is high. The project raises awareness of the challenges facing those who live in these food deserts and examines local solutions to alleviate hunger. You can listen to the one-hour public radio documentary, view the Storybooth, see photos, video, maps and find links to resources to learn more and take action on our website: [capradio.org/hiddenhunger](http://capradio.org/hiddenhunger).

# Getting Started



## Agenda At-A-Glance

### **WELCOME** (15 min)

Meet each other, introduce the topic, and review goals, activities, and ground rules.

### **SPEAKERS & STORIES** (20 min)

Diverse speakers (or facilitator) play a selection of audio stories and talk about why the stories resonate with them.

### **CONVERSATIONS** (30 min)

Facilitators engage group in discussing the stories.

### **DEBRIEF** (10 min)

Group identifies key ideas and topics. Participants reflect on what they can do to help alleviate hunger in their communities.

### **CLOSING** (15 min)

Discuss next steps and share final thoughts.

### **ABOUT**

This guide will help you facilitate a community conversation session to raise awareness about food insecurity and the interwoven issues that result in hunger in California. It is designed to help you to lead an engaging session that benefits your organization and community.

### **DURATION**

The community conversations are designed to be 90 minutes, though they can be longer or shorter. It's best to have a range of speakers who will introduce a story from the Hidden Hunger Storybooth website (*HiddenHungerStorybooth.com*), play the audio and then talk about what that story means to them. After hearing the stories, participants will have a chance to share their responses and experiences at small table conversations.

### **MATERIALS AND EQUIPMENT**

You will need the following items for each Hidden Hunger Community Conversation:

- Computer with Internet access and external speakers
- Projector and screen—optional
- Healthy snacks and drinks
- Name tags
- Sign in sheets\* and clipboard
- Pens
- Table Conversation Guide\* (1 copy for each table facilitator)
- Reflection/Action sheets\* (enough for all participants)
- Resource List\* (enough for all participants)

\* Download these at [capradio.org/hiddenhunger](http://capradio.org/hiddenhunger).

# Getting Started

## BEFORE THE EVENT

Every conversation is different. You'll want to consider:

- How will this conversation support your organization's goals?
- Who is your audience and what is motivating them to attend this event?
- How much time do you have for the conversation? (90 minutes is ideal)
- Will you need someone to translate the audio stories or group discussion?
- Look at *HiddenHungerStorybooth.com*. What themes do you want to explore? Which stories do you want to play? Who will select and talk about the stories—guest speakers or the facilitator?



## TIPS

- Plan your conversation as part of a meeting, get together, or activity that is already scheduled through your organization.
- Reach out to community members you'd like to get more involved in thinking about food insecurity.
- Identify an event organizer who will review this guide, coordinate speakers (if desired), handle logistics and facilitate the conversation activities.
- After a community conversation, participants tend to feel fired up. So it's good to be prepared with specific suggestions about next steps, either through your organization or other community initiatives (see downloadable Resource List).

# Getting Started

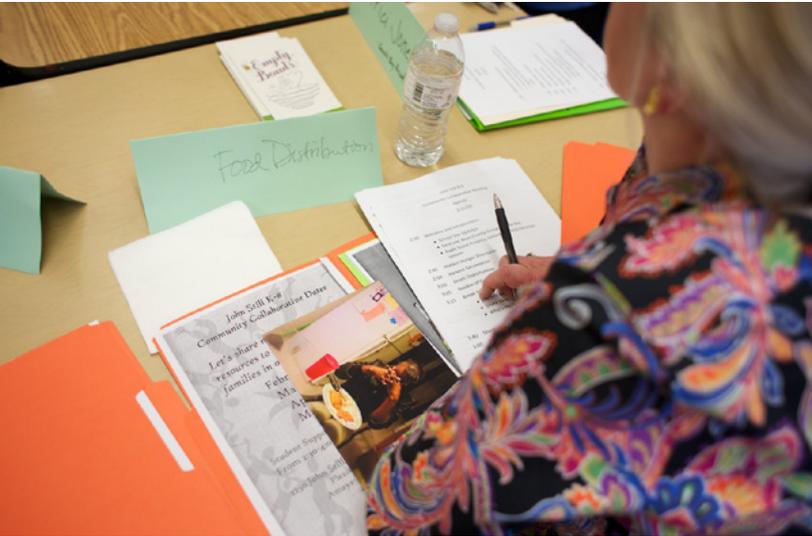


## LINING UP SPEAKERS & STORIES

- Identify 3 – 5 people from your community who can speak to different issues and realities associated with hunger and food insecurity.
- Ask each speaker to select a story from *HiddenHungerStorybooth.com* that they would like play and talk about with the group.
- Coordinate with speakers so that they each pick different stories. You'll want to play diverse stories to illustrate a range of people, experiences, and issues.
- Ask speakers to prepare brief remarks (3 minutes) about why they selected their story; for example what they appreciate about the story, what it tells us about hunger that people might not know, or why it resonates so strongly for them.
- Encourage them to use their personal experiences to give context to the story and why they feel the story they selected is important to hear and talk about.
- Instead of lining up different speaker, you can also have one person (guest speaker or you as the facilitator) select and play stories.

# Facilitation

Playing and discussing stories about hunger and food insecurity may generate a wide range of opinions, beliefs, experiences, and emotions. As the facilitator, you'll want to create a space in which people feel comfortable sharing and listening to each other's stories, feedback, and ideas. Here are some tips:



## PREPARE YOURSELF

You don't need to be an expert on food insecurity and hunger but it is useful to be able to state why you (or your organization) are hosting the conversation and point people to the downloadable Resource Guide where they can get more information about the issues raised in the stories you play.

It's also a good idea to prepare in advance by listening to the stories you plan to share, process your own reactions, read through this guide and gather basic information about the themes and issues raised in media pieces you play. See page 13 for some fast facts on hunger.

Be prepared to deal with tense or emotional moments. When discussing sensitive issues or difficult topics, it is possible that some participants will get angry or upset. If this happens, remain calm and try to turn it into a learning experience. It is important to remember that each participant comes from a unique background and has had different experiences. Don't avoid the issue, but do defer it until you make a plan for dealing with it if necessary.

# Facilitation

## PREPARE THE GROUP

During group discussion, it's important that people feel safe to speak their minds. It can help to engage the group in laying down some ground rules for the session. Here are some examples, but feel free to work with the group to create your own:

- We'll show each other mutual respect and kindness. We recognize that everyone is exploring important but potentially challenging ideas.
- We'll avoid generalizations about groups of people: My experience is not everyone else's experience.
- We'll use "I" statements (I feel...I think...I believe...I hear...) as a way of avoiding saying something that will devalue someone else's perspective.
- If someone else's beliefs make us uncomfortable, we'll say so, but in a respectful and thoughtful way. We'll challenge the ideas and not the person.
- We'll show empathy toward one another—we are here to make our community a better and healthier place for everyone.
- We'll use "one mic" which means when one person is talking, give them your attention by not interrupting. Listen attentively.
- We'll keep what's said in the room confidential to encourage honest discussion.

Remember to have fun and enjoy getting to know your neighbors. Sometimes people get wrapped up in emotion and the conversation can get heated, but that usually means someone cares deeply about the issue. Take a moment to acknowledge the experiences in the room that make this an important discussion for everyone and remind participants of the ground rules and goals (on page 10). Then, begin again.



# Facilitation

## TIPS

- Encourage everyone to participate. Factors like age, ethnicity, income levels, language and familiarity with a topic can influence how comfortable people feel about sharing their reactions. Keep this in mind and actively engage everyone!
- Pay attention not only to what the speaker is saying but also to the emotions behind their words and to what may be most important for them.
- If a lot of people show up, you may want to break people into smaller groups to discuss the stories they've heard and what it means to them. Make sure they report out their thoughts to the full group.
- Talk about the difference between "dialogue" and "debate." In a debate, participants try to convince others that they are right. In a dialogue, participants try to understand each other and expand their thinking by sharing viewpoints and actively listening to each other.



- Be prepared for participants who might strongly disagree with each other. This can be a great opportunity for people to hear different viewpoints, but you should help keep the conversation on track and make sure everyone stays positive and respectful. (You can remind folks of the ground rules and goals again).
- Stay neutral. Your job is to guide a group's conversation without taking sides.

# Conversation

Ok. Ready to go? Here is our suggested sequence of activities for conducting the conversations. We've listed a suggested time for each activity so that the session is a total of 90-minutes (not counting set up and clean up). Feel free to adapt wording, exercises, or timing!



## SET UP

Arrive, set up chairs and tables, set out food and materials, test equipment (laptop, Internet, and sound), and do any other preparations for the conversation.

## WELCOME & INTRODUCTIONS – 15 MINUTES

Once people are seated and ready to start, welcome them to the Hidden Hunger Community Conversation. Introduce yourself, say something about the organization you are with, and what motivated you to organize this community conversation on hunger and food insecurity. Then lead a brief icebreaker exercise so people can get a sense of who is in the room. For example, have people go around the room and:

- Say their name and one sentence on why hunger is an important issue to them.
- Say their name and what motivated them to come to a conversation on hunger.

Share the goals for the conversation. You may want to have them on a flipchart.

- To raise awareness about the causes and impacts of hunger.
- To build understanding and empathy for those experiencing hunger.
- To listen and learn from one another's experiences.
- To identify steps we can take to address the issue and create opportunities for people to get involved.

After that, give the group an overview of the activities you'll be doing in the session to achieve the goals. Share some ground rules for the group conversation so that it remains comfortable and respectful (see *Prepare the Group* on page 8 for ideas!).

# Conversation

## **SPEAKERS & STORIES – 20 MINUTES**

Pass out the Reflection/Action sheets and pens. Explain that they can use the side that says: “What do these stories get you thinking about?” to jot down ideas while listening to the audio clips. Invite the 3 – 5 presenters you’ve lined up to play a story and then talk briefly about why that story resonates with them, pointing out key ideas or experiences they feel are important. Alternately, simply play a series of stories and share a few key ideas about why you’ve picked this selection of stories. Note that the idea here is to play a range of stories quickly to seed the conversation.

## **GROUP CONVERSATION**

Use the following questions to engage the group in sharing their responses to the stories. Let participants know they can refer to the notes they jotted down on the Reflection/Action sheet and add to them.

- What stood out to you about these stories?
- How do these stories relate to your own experience?
- How does hearing these stories impact how you think about hunger?
- Why is this problem so hard to solve?
- What might we do to help alleviate hunger in our community?

## **REFLECTION & DEBRIEF – 10 MINUTES**

Use the following questions to engage the group in thinking about what they heard and said during the conversation.

- What are you taking away from the stories and conversations we’ve had?
- What do we want to do next?



# Conversation

## NEXT STEPS – 15 MINUTES

Ask the group to turn the Reflection/Action sheet to the side that says “Here is one thing I will do to alleviate hunger”. Invite them write down something they could do to address the issues you’ve discussed. Give examples to spark their thinking:

- I will be friendlier to people on my street who are struggling with hunger.
- I will lead a conversation like this with my friends and networks.
- I will volunteer with a program that addresses hunger in my community.
- I will get involved in a school or community garden initiative.



Ask a few people to share one thing they plan to do to alleviate hunger. Summarize any main points and share why you think this conversation has made a difference. Pass out the Resource List to participants who would like to learn more about addressing hunger. Alternately, set up a follow-up gathering to continue the conversation and plan further action. Thank the group for their time and attention. Adjourn.

## CLEAN UP

- Consider what went well and what you’d change for the next community conversation.
- Rearrange chairs and tables as needed and clean the room.
- Celebrate!

# Fast Facts

Sources: USDA, Hunger in America 2014

# 6.2 MILLION

Number of Californians living in households without access to a consistent source of food.

# 15.6 PERCENT

Percentage of people in California who struggle to put enough food on the table.

# 1 IN 7 PEOPLE

The number of Californians facing hunger, including your neighbors, friends, coworkers and family members.

# 24 PERCENT

Among those under 18 years of age, the percentage living below the poverty level.

# 33<sup>RD</sup> PLACE

California's food insecurity rate is higher than in 32 other states, including New York and Florida.

# 17 PERCENT

The percentage of Californians living below the poverty line (\$22,113 for a family of four).

# 175,200 PEOPLE

in Sacramento County turn to emergency food providers to feed themselves and their families each year.

## HOW IS THEIR HEALTH?

**22%** of households report no health insurance of any kind.

**31%** of households report at least one member with diabetes.

**51%** of households report at least one member with high blood pressure.

**66%** of households report choosing between paying for food and paying for medicine or medical care at least once in the last 12 months.

## WHO ARE THEY?

**23%** are children

**25%** are seniors (age 60 and older)

**42%** are households with someone working or had worked in the last 12 months.

**66%** of households report falling at or below the federal poverty level.

## WHAT IS THEIR LEVEL OF EDUCATION?

An estimated **80%** of all clients had attained a high school degree or GED.

An estimated **45%** of all clients had post high school education (including license or certification, some college, or a four-year degree.)

# CREDITS

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