

## Tackling Gnarly Problems: What We Learned From A Generative Conversation About Homelessness

An evaluation of Mobilizing Creativity, Compassion, and  
Community to Solve Homelessness | October 18, 2019

Prepared for Journalism That Matters by Praxis Associates

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# Summary

## Background

On October 26-27, 2018, with support from Journalism That Matters, The Evergrey, Real Change, and Facing Homelessness, Impact Hub Seattle brought together 135 participants (89 on Friday only, 25 on Saturday only, and 21 on both days), including some with lived experience of homelessness, people from community organizations, government, business, neighborhood associations and media, artists and others who don't usually meet to talk together about homelessness. Friday evening was held in a [World Cafe](#) asking 1) About a time when housing made a difference in your life; 2) What does being at home mean to you? and 3) What moves you now? Saturday used [Open Space](#), with topics such as: "What can I learn about homelessness in a 5 minute walk around Impact Hub?" The Open Space session notes and photos of graphic recordings of the event can be found in the [post-event report](#).

## Can gatherings like M3Cs help communities more deeply understand and address "gnarly problems"?

This evaluation was conducted six months after the event to understand the influence of gatherings like M3Cs. A survey, to which 20 participants (15%) responded, focused on personal experience of homelessness, prior involvement on the issue and actions they took as a result of M3Cs. In-depth interviews with 10 participants (7.5%) focused on personal impact of M3Cs, how the event influenced actions they took afterwards and what would improve the event.

### *What impacts did the event have?*

M3Cs helped individuals challenge their own assumptions and understand the "gnarly problem" of homelessness in Seattle more deeply, compassionately and complexly. It increased their compassion and sense of urgency and gravity. Though no people with lived experience of homelessness were involved in the design or hosting, most we spoke with said they felt heard and glad to be of service in educating others. It led an evanescent group of people to begin to articulate some new narratives for "cracking the code of homelessness."

It led 18 of the 20 survey respondents to take action. On average, respondents took four actions influenced by the event, totaling 57 small scale and interpersonal actions, and 22 actions to shift policy or public discourse. Respondents with prior involvement in the issue reported feeling validated and strengthened. Those new to the issue were more likely to have their actions influenced by the event, but also reported they felt overwhelmed and unclear on strategic ways to help. Actions were primarily independent, not connected to a larger strategy.

*Did it move the needle?*

Probably, if change happens through incremental shifts in consciousness, interpersonal relations, and independent acts of advocacy. Probably not, if small innovations, learning and networking, or coordinated strategy are necessary. Possibly, in that the evaluation revealed how gatherings and journalism – together – might support change.

## **A roadmap for journalism in a civic communications ecosystem**

**Route 1. Participate.** How do journalists make complexity visible, advance strategic thinking, support and illuminate innovation, and foster trusting relationships? What if journalists try suggestions from this report? How might that help communities solve gnarly problems?

**Route 2. Increase capacity.** Some niches in a civic communications ecosystem are journalism’s traditional strengths. Some are not. This evaluation suggests JTM can make a difference by training, coaching and partnering with news organizations to host conversations. Additionally, facilitating post-event debriefs with reporters and their newsrooms might build capacity for follow-up, per recommendations below.

**Route 3. Make the case.** This report speaks of the value to communities when journalists support civic discourse. Time spent cultivating relationships or approaching a story without knowing its specifics requires believing that there’s something in it for the news organization. How might JTM support journalists to make that case in their organizations? Or collaborate with others to educate and advocate for engaged journalism?

## **Recommendations**

The interviews revealed opportunities and recommendations for strengthening gatherings. These recommendations echo findings from JTM’s [Experience and Elevate Engagement gatherings](#) -- journalism as part of a “thriving, resilient ecosystem, where communication goes beyond ‘reporting’ what is happening... to providing robust information and inclusive dialogue, fostering generative collaborative action that achieves community goals.” The table below lists recommendations for strengthening gatherings like M3Cs and roles for journalism to support communities struggling with gnarly problems.

# Recommendations

## Strengthening Gatherings

## Roles for Journalism

To deepen generativity and make complexity visible

1. Curate attendance to ensure diverse views.
2. Design for surfacing divergent perspectives.
3. Help participants synthesize the conversation.

1. Bring complexity into focus through seeking, telling and synthesizing different stories.
2. Convene conversations or partner to do so

To support individual and collective action that is empowering and accountable

1. Invite participants to declare commitments.
2. Design a way for people to stay connected to continue the conversation and organize.
3. Invite homeless people to lead, design, and host.

1. Follow up or dig into ideas that come up at the event.
2. Illuminate what moves the needle.

To support innovation

1. Design events where innovators can learn from each other; where small experiments around the city can connect, share learning, and investigate collective impact.

1. Seek out and tell stories of small, local experiments.
2. Draw connections across the city to show patterns, commonalities, linkages and gaps.

To support cohesion and resilience and build trusting, reciprocal relationships

1. Provide for ongoing deep listening and interaction, in places that are most impacted by the problem.
2. Design for reciprocity, where everyone gives and receives, people know and support each other, and have fun together.

1. Don't over prepare – let conversations and relationships guide the story you decide to tell.
2. Spend time getting to know people and building trust before doing any reporting.
3. Once trust is built, respect it.
4. Bust stereotypes – share stories of people Experiencing homelessness who are agents of change, community builders, self-advocates.
5. Share your skills by teaching individuals and communities to tell their stories powerfully.

# Introduction

As in many cities, Seattle's homelessness crisis has been slowly growing in size and complexity. Peggy Holman, co-founder of Journalism That Matters, was looking for a way to contribute to ending it. Then Peggy read an editorial by Norm Rice, former Seattle mayor, in which he calls for a summit to tackle the issue. She thought "summit. I can do that." So, with sponsorship from Journalism that Matter (JTM), Impact Hub Seattle, The Evergrey, RealChange, and Facing Homelessness, the idea emerged for a multi-gathering design, including convenings around King County with a periodic Proaction Café bringing together people from across the area to shape, share and coordinate actions. It's an idea that may still have merit, but because of organizational transitions and funding limitations, the design was scaled back to just one event. Mobilizing Creativity, Compassion, and Community to Solve Homelessness took place on October 26 and 27, 2018. Other events may follow, but what if that was the only one? Was it worth it? Is there anything we can learn from such a one-off event?

JTM has been "bringing together diverse stakeholders to imagine and build inclusive civic communications systems that foster vibrant democracy and thriving communities" since 2001. In 2015, JTM started evaluating its gatherings to understand what was emerging and how to grow it. Out of that evaluation came the concept of the "civic communications ecosystem," where journalism is not the central driver of storytelling and content creation but rather a part of civic conversation that aims to move the needle on solving "gnarly problems." What exactly that means is still emerging, with a growing interest from journalists in engaging communities. One outgrowth is the **Gather** community of "engaged journalists" who put community first and involve community in all aspects of the journalistic process.

The *Mobilizing Creativity, Compassion, and Community to Solve Homelessness event* (M3Cs) offers an opportunity to learn about the potential of generative, inclusive community dialogue and to consider how journalists can effectively engage with these kinds of conversations.

This evaluation seeks to illuminate the potential for gatherings like Mob 3Cs to help communities more deeply understand and address "gnarly problems" and the ways that journalism participates in that process.

## The Event

**Mobilizing Creativity, Compassion, and Community to Solve Homelessness** (Mobilizing the Three Cs, or M3Cs), was a two-day conversation on how Seattle-area residents can compassionately and creatively mobilize to end homelessness.<sup>2</sup> It was held on October 27 and 28, 2018 at The Impact Hub, a co-working space in Seattle's Pioneer Square. There are a number of services for people experiencing homelessness in the blocks immediately around the Impact Hub, and the Hub often reaches out to befriend its many neighbors who seek safety in the doorways and emergency shelters of the neighborhood.

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1 Journalism That Matters website, retrieved September 23, 2019 from <http://journalismthatmatters.org>.

2 Shortly after M3Cs, Greta Anderson, one of the participants, volunteered to compile a report on the event. Open Space session note, the graphic recordings and additional background can be found in that report, at <https://medium.com/journalismthatmatters/what-we-learned-mobilizing-creativity-compassion-and-community-to-end-homelessness-ad40da508195>

The event was designed by Peggy Holman, Mark Jones of Sunyata Group, Graphic Facilitator Steven Wright, and Sarah Studer and Rachelle Mee Chapman of the Impact Hub. Yve Susskind of Praxis Associates provided input on designing the event for evaluability. It was facilitated by Peggy and Mark, with graphic recording by Steve.



From the Friday World Café Event

Their design principles were to: design for simplicity and repeatability; use primarily conversation-based activities; be inclusive and welcoming to everyone; and involve the “whole system” (people experiencing homelessness and their families, nonprofits, government, business, philanthropy, media, artists, technologists). The organizers’ goal was to bring that whole system of “community organizations, government, business, homeless people, neighborhood associations, media, artists - people from different sectors who aren’t usually in conversation with one another – into conversation, rather than a lecture or panel.”

The team of facilitators used The World Café method for the three-hour event on Friday evening, and Open Space Technology for the full-day event on Saturday.<sup>3</sup>

**At M3Cs, the questions for the rounds of World Café were:**

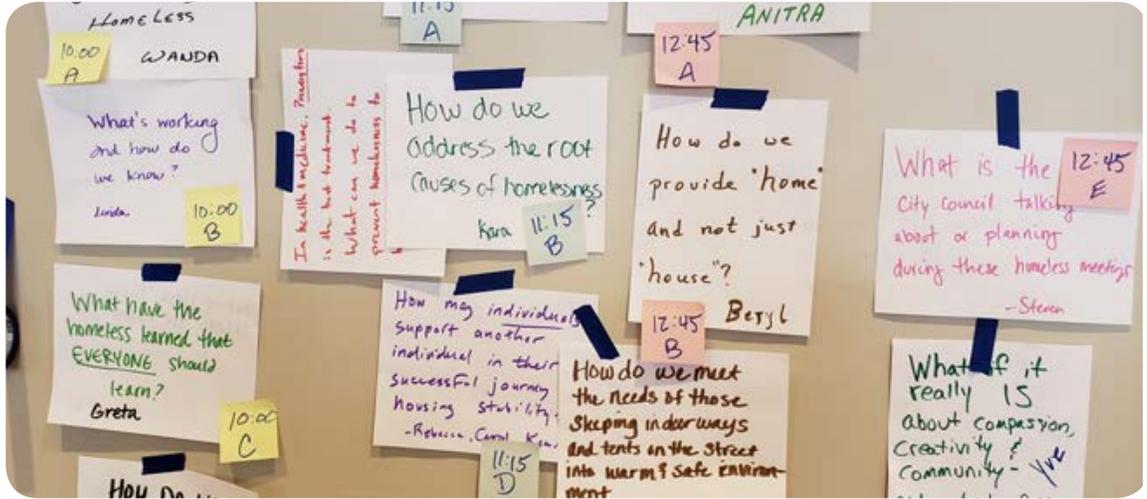
1. Tell me about a time when housing made a difference in your life.
2. What does being at home mean to you?
3. What moves you now?

**There were three rounds of Open Space sessions on the Saturday of M3Cs. Examples of some of the topics were:**

- Vision: What would it look like if everyone was cared for?
- What can I learn about homelessness in a 5 minute walk around Impact Hub?
- What are the root causes of homelessness and what we can do to prevent them?
- What have the homeless learned that EVERYONE should learn?
- What if it is about creativity, community, and compassion? And what if it is us?
- What’s working and how do we know?

<sup>3</sup> Descriptions of The World Café and Open Space Technology can be found in the Appendix.

- How do we bring “anti-homeless” organizers into spaces talking about solutions?
- How do we share belonging with our friends outside?
- How might individuals support someone successfully toward housing stability?

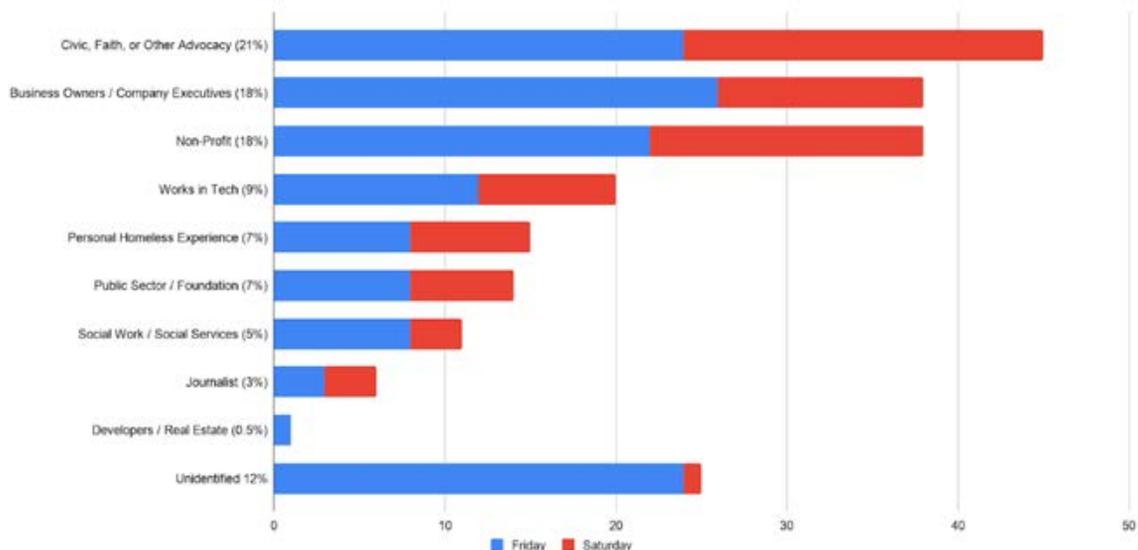


The agenda from the Saturday Open Space Event. Generated by participants.

## Who Attended

- 135 people attended over the course of the two events (89 on Friday only, 25 on Saturday only, and 21 both days).
- 7% of attendees indicated that they had experienced homelessness personally, and another 13% had friends or family who were homeless.
- People representing a variety of sectors of the community were present, as shown in the chart below. Particularly well-represented were civic, faith, advocacy and nonprofit organizations; and business owners or company executives. There was only one landlord and no developers, policy makers or elected officials.

Chart 1. Representation of Sectors at M3Cs



# The Evaluation

Three evaluation questions guided our inquiry:

1. What made the gathering generative?
2. What impact did the event have?
3. What else can we learn about how community conversation can help solve gnarly problems?

Answering these questions provided insight into the two purposes of the evaluation:

- a. Illuminating the potential for gatherings like Mobilizing 3Cs to help communities more deeply understand and address “gnarly problems” and
- b. Providing a roadmap for journalism to play a meaningful role in that process, and what JTM can do to catalyze it.

## Methods

The evaluation was conducted six months after the event to understand the influence of gatherings like M3Cs. The data draw primarily from interviews and a six-month follow-up survey, with some input shared by participants on an immediate post-event survey. We also reviewed the Open Space session notes and content produced after the event by two participants.

The survey, to which 20 people responded (15% of the participants), focused on personal experience of homelessness, prior involvement on the issue and actions they took as a result of M3Cs. In-depth interviews with 10 participants (7.5%) focused on personal impact of M3Cs, how the event influenced actions they took afterwards and what would improve the event. The Appendix includes additional information on the methodology.

# What We Learned

This section presents the answers to the three evaluation questions. The Appendix presents a more detailed narrative of the themes from which these answers were distilled, as well as additional illustrative quotes.

## Evaluation Question 1: What made the gathering generative?

The intention of M3Cs was to engage a group broadly representative of the “whole system” affected by Seattle’s housing crisis in generative conversations, where they look at a critical problem in new ways to catalyze movement. Settings that foster generative conversation create the conditions where people can expand what they see as possible so that they can envision a more appealing future. “When our discourse is generative, we learn and adapt because our interactions influence and expand our sense of the possible. It’s that exciting feeling of discovering a new way of relating to others and the world around us. When we feel stuck in habits that aren’t serving us well, generative discourse helps us discover new ideas. That is what we design for when we engage for emergence.”<sup>4</sup>

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4 Holman, Peggy. 2019. Engaging Emergence: Designing Conversations That Work. Retrieved September 23, 2019 from <http://peggyholman.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/08/Holman-Engaging-Emergence-Chapter.pdf>.

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*"There's so much [of] this very fervent activism in Seattle and it can be scary or rattle you sometimes... You get called 'the homeless hater.' It can be hard to know if it's worth it to put yourself out there to it, to ask questions and try and raise dialogue. I think people feel like it's an emergency so we just have to be revolutionary and take no prisoners."*

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*"I am deeply interested in the issue of homelessness, I think we often ask questions that are "like how do we get people off the streets" or "how do we make sure services are available" and those funnel us into predictable answers. But the way that the questions were framed at the event was like, "What does home mean to you." Coming at it from that way really transformed the discussion and opened up possibilities that I have never thought of and I thought of this issue in a totally different way."*

The interviews revealed a clear need in Seattle for more generative conversations. Half the people we interviewed described public meetings and conversations on homelessness in Seattle as highly conflictual and even bullying, where people are either polarized and dogmatic or "trying to find the Goldilocks solution and are willing to have misery until they find the perfect solution." So, there is a need for conversations that are holistic, nuanced and complex, that invite and even draw out different opinions and perspectives without dogmatic positions getting in the way of progress and alienating people who are willing to compromise, be creative, try the less than perfect. We asked people about their experiences at the event so that we could find out if the conversation could be characterized as:

1. Generative:
  - Looking at a critical problem in new ways
  - Expanding the sense of the possible
  - Catalyzing movement
2. Broadly representative of the "whole system," with its myriad opinions and perspectives.
3. Not dominated by conflict.

## Summary of Findings for Question 1

In Seattle, where meetings around homelessness often devolve into yelling matches and bullying, M3Cs was a rare non-conflictual opportunity for people across sectors to hear firsthand from people who are homeless.

Participants looked at homelessness in new ways and stayed open to emergent solutions.

But,

Not all perspectives were present (no developers, policy makers or elected officials)

Time was short so not all ideas or perspectives received airtime or had the opportunity to arise. Some people might not have spoken up.

At the conclusion of the event, some people still didn't know what to do next.

*Ultimately it felt like a room of people that all agreed with each other. Maybe there wasn't a lot diverse lines of the spectrum of the 'sides' of the conversation. We rarely get to look each other in the eye, and genuinely connect as real people, outside the 'issue'. Conversations are valuable, but need to be more than diverse, also a diversity of opinions.*

## Evaluation Question 2: What Impact Did The Event Have?

The approach of this evaluation is often referred to as “goal-free evaluation,” where there are not predetermined outcomes to be assessed. Instead, evidence is gathered to find out what took place as a result of the activity. Stakeholders of different perspectives can then weigh in on the value or worth of those results based on their priorities, philosophies and theories of change.

The evaluation uncovered impacts that were internal and interpersonal (related to attitudes, understanding and narratives of homelessness) and those that were more behavioral (related to what people did after the event).

## Summary of Findings for Question 2

### 1. Attitudes/understanding/narratives

M3Cs helped individuals challenge their own assumptions and understand the “gnarly problem” of homelessness in Seattle more deeply, compassionately and complexly. It increased their compassion and sense of urgency and gravity.

It led an evanescent group of people to begin to articulate some new narratives for “cracking the code of homelessness”:

- *Focus on what makes people feel fulfilled and resilient, not just on housing, and*
- *Cultural shift and social change start with human connection.*

Most of the people we spoke with who had lived experience of homelessness said they felt heard and glad to be of service in educating others. One told us she felt more confident to speak about her experience.

*But,*

The event was designed and led without involvement by those with lived experience of homelessness, and at least one person with lived experience was disappointed and felt that nothing of substance happened.

### 2. Behavior/action

It led 18 of the 20 survey respondents to take action. On average, respondents took four actions influenced by the event, totaling 57 small scale and interpersonal actions, and 22 actions to shift policy or public discourse (see chart 2 on page 31).

Respondents with prior involvement in the issue reported feeling validated and strengthened.

Those new to the issue were more likely to have their actions influenced by the event, and some felt emboldened to have conversations with people experiencing homelessness.

*But,*

Those with less prior involvement tended to feel overwhelmed and unclear on a strategic way to help.

Actions were taken primarily independently, not connected to a larger emergent strategy.

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*The goal stops being to be in a house and have a stable job because it's not possible to have a stable life when you're poor. The goal becomes finding meaning because that creates stability and resilience. What does it mean for a society when people's best options for survival are going to jail or acting crazy? If you get your shit together all you'll be aware of is how bad things really are and can't get better. There has to be creative solutions to homelessness because the traditional shelter model doesn't work, we have exhausted the logical and rational solutions. Some agencies think that they can fix people and put on a bandaid. You can't put people in a BMW and say that you have solved the problem.*

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*The event could have been... like "check it off, I [did] my thing...with interesting conversations and now I am on my way to not doing very much." But I think that the event really helped leverage my momentum and exploded it. Whatever I had that was a nascent energy around it, this event really helped it to develop.*

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*I need to figure out what my relationship is to the problem. Like helping someone a person or individual it is just a long-term problem. So I don't know if it's like chipping in on one thing once a year like helping at St Mary's place or doing furniture delivery. But it's not a problem that will go away anytime soon. I haven't figured out if it's a money problem, or if we need to convince more people to do something. But it's not clear to me yet.*

### **Evaluation Question 3: What Else Did We Learn About How Community Conversation Can Help Solve Gnarly Problems?**

Some of the people that we spoke with have extensive experience in addressing homelessness. Some with lived experience of homelessness and their allies have been working on compassionate, relationship-based solutions for years. Others have been volunteering to provide direct support and aid. Some have been attending city meetings and advocating for change through local government. The insights these folks shared illuminated lessons for civic conversation and engagement.

## **Summary of Findings for Question 3**

Practical action and accountability can be antidotes to the burn-out and trauma that long-time activists feel, and can provide a sense of direction in the face of the confusion experienced by newly activated people.

But not just action for action's (or healing's) sake –people also want to see impact.

Don't try to solve it all at once with a Goldilocks solution. Support and learn from small experiments, especially local efforts by those most impacted.

What these innovators, some of whom are traumatized and vulnerable, often need most is support to innovate, especially investment in the resilience and cohesion of their communities.

Resilience, cohesion, taking risks to try new solutions – these all depend on human connection and trusting, reciprocal relationships.

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*There needs to be more attention to impacts and outcomes not just political slogans or planning and pragmatism like in Ballard.*

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*Build social cohesion and make those [who are] homeless become the principles of development of the project and build resilient community from within... Help them to design projects that they want to establish.*

## **Recommendations: How – Together – Can Conversations And Journalism Help Communities Understand And Transform Gnarly Problems?**

The interviews revealed opportunities and recommendations for strengthening gatherings. These recommendations echo findings from [JTM's Experience and Elevate Engagement gatherings](#) that re-imagine journalism as part of a "thriving, resilient ecosystem, where communication goes beyond 'reporting' what is happening... to providing robust information and inclusive dialogue, fostering generative collaborative action that achieves community goals." Below are listed recommendations for strengthening gatherings like M3Cs and roles for journalism to support communities struggling with gnarly problems. A simplified list of these recommendations showing their relationship to the themes from the three evaluation questions is in the Appendix.

## **Recommendations to deepen generativity and make complexity visible**

### ***To strengthen gatherings:***

- Curate attendance to ensure diverse views, especially those perspectives that often clash in other settings.
- Design events to draw out divergence and make it visible. Sometimes, people need more time to figure out what they need to say and to feel safe doing so. These voices are needed for a fuller, more comprehensive understanding of the gnarly problem.
- Help participants synthesize the conversation. At Open Space and related types of gatherings, participants are often split among different sessions. It can be difficult to see what might be emerging in the collective. If notes are taken, spend time after the event analyzing and synthesizing the ideas and send this synthesis out along with the session notes.

### ***For journalism:***

- Bring complexity into focus through seeking and telling different stories. Journalists have the skills to see patterns among stories that can dispel false dichotomies and make an emerging complex picture comprehensible.
- Convene conversations, using the power of journalism to bring in different players – government officials and others with influence. Partnering with other kinds of organization (e.g., those skilled in the arts of hosting, those trusted by marginalized populations) can build everyone's skills in holding such conversations and can help ensure that more voices are present.

## Recommendations to support empowering and accountable individual and collective action

### *To strengthen gatherings:*

- Don't rush through the generative mode; it's a fruitful time for building complexity that can lead to more transformative change. However, do help people envision and plan what action they might take. For example:
  - Invite participants to declare commitments individually or collaboratively and share contact info.
  - Design a way for people to stay connected to continue the conversation and organize afterwards.
- To ensure that people experiencing homelessness are not there primarily to educate housed people, design events in partnership with them, in their spaces, with them as hosts. Provide training in hosting.

### *For journalism:*

- Follow up or dig in to ideas that come up at the event.
- Illuminate what moves the needle. Journalists don't need to advocate for particular actions or responses, but to report on the impact of what individuals, neighborhoods and government are doing. This investigative role is one of the things journalists are best equipped to do.

## Recommendations to support innovation

### *To strengthen gatherings:*

- Design events where innovators can learn from each other; where small experiments around the city can connect, share learning, and investigate collective impact.
- Ensure those with power and influence (government, policy makers) are also there to learn along with the grassroots innovators.

### *For journalism:*

- Seek out and tell stories of small, quiet, local experiments.
- Draw connections across the city to show patterns, commonalities, linkages and gaps.
- Support innovators' efforts to stay true to their own goals by helping them uncover unintended and negative outcomes as well as unexpected positive ones.

## Recommendations to support cohesion and resilience and build trusting, reciprocal relationships

### *To strengthen gatherings:*

- Provide for ongoing deep listening and interaction, in places that are most impacted by the problem. Cohesion and resilience are built on trust and relationships. Rather than distinct events with brief rounds of sharing, go for deep listening and ongoing interaction, ideally on the turf of those experiencing homelessness. Relationships help people get past polarization that often happens around gnarly problems, especially in the highly impacted places.
- Design for reciprocity, where everyone gives and receives, people know and support each other, and have fun together. Reciprocity helps to balance power and builds social cohesion across sectors. Social cohesion creates resilience in the face of gnarly problems.

### *For journalism:*

- Don't over prepare – let conversations and relationships guide the story you decide to tell.
- Spend time getting to know people and building trust before doing any reporting. Stay in relationship long enough to see more deeply.
- Once trust is built, respect it. Often those who are most vulnerable are heard in shards and fragments, their voices amplified selectively (with the selection made by someone else). This is how trust is lost, which can make people more reluctant to share. So, once trust is built, respect it. For example, consider power dynamics and how "coverage" can harm those who are more vulnerable. Whose story is it and what's the purpose in telling it?
- Bust stereotypes – share stories of people experiencing homelessness who are agents of change, community builders, self-advocates.
- Share your skills by teaching individuals and communities to tell their stories powerfully.

## What Are The Implications For Civic Engagement, Journalism and JTM?

This report is certainly not the first piece of research to make the case that generative conversation can be transformative. Work on this topic has taken place through numerous civic organizations. Among them: the [Kettering Foundation](#), the [National Coalition for Dialogue and Deliberation](#), the [Art of Hosting Community](#), and [The Harwood Institute](#). Because we often don't have the resources for a long-term endeavor, we were curious to know what the potential of a one-off generative conversation might be to help communities more deeply understand and address "gnarly problems" such as homelessness. In other words, *what is the potential of one generative conversation to support civic engagement?*

We also wanted to see what we could learn about the opportunities for journalism to be a partner in civic engagement. In other words, *what is the role of journalism in a civic communications ecosystem and needs to happen to support that role?*

## Can Gatherings Like M3Cs Help Communities More Deeply Understand and Address "Gnarly Problems?"

### Summary of the event's impacts:

M3Cs helped individuals challenge their own assumptions and understand the "gnarly problem" of homelessness in Seattle more deeply, compassionately and complexly. It increased their compassion and sense of urgency and gravity. Most of the people we spoke with who had lived experience of homelessness said they felt heard and glad to be of service in educating others. It led an evanescent group of people to begin to articulate some new narratives for "cracking the code of homelessness."

It led to some action taking. Eighteen of the 20 survey respondents took action. On average, respondents took four actions influenced by the event, totaling 57 small scale and interpersonal actions, and 22 actions to shift policy or public discourse.<sup>5</sup>

Respondents with prior involvement in the issue reported feeling validated and strengthened. Those new to the issue were more likely to have their actions influenced by the event, but also reported they felt overwhelmed and unclear on strategic ways to help. Actions were primarily independent, not connected to a larger strategy.

### Did M3Cs move the needle?

Probably, if change happens through incremental shifts in consciousness, interpersonal relations, and independent acts of advocacy. Probably not, if small innovations, learning and networking, or coordinated strategy are necessary. Possibly, in that the evaluation revealed how gatherings and journalism – together – might support change.

<sup>5</sup> Approximately 135 people attended one or both days of M3Cs. Of those, 20 (15%) responded to the survey and ten (7%) were interviewed. Because they are not a random sample, we are not able to extrapolate to the whole group. In other words, the finding that 90% of the survey respondents took some kind of action that was influenced by the event does not mean that 90% of the 135 participants did so, or that in general, 90% of people who attend events like this will take action. We also cannot say that we have documented all or most of the impacts of the event. We know that M3Cs resulted in at least 57 lower level and 22 higher level actions, but we don't know what other impacts there might have been, either positive or negative.

If the value of a gathering is measured by whether it (or what people did afterwards) contributes to change in policies, programs, services for homeless people in Seattle, in the number of unhoused people, or in their quality of life, it's too soon to tell, and is not covered by this evaluation. Should a more extensive civic engagement effort that incorporates some of the recommendations of this evaluation be initiated, it may be worthwhile to plan an evaluation that can follow the ripples further.

## **A Roadmap For Journalism In A Civic Communications Ecosystem**

There was a reporter at M3Cs who attended not to write a story on the event, but to listen and be part of the conversation (as per the invitation from the hosts), though she did document the event on Instagram. During M3Cs, and afterwards with her news team and in our interview, she mulled over how her news organization could meaningfully bring people who have disagreements around an issue into conversation where they don't just get angry and yell at each other. Surprising herself, she led an Open Space session on the topic and was happy that she could do something beyond being an observer. After M3Cs, she raised the question with her news team: "what would REAL conversation look like, our ideal conversation" where people would "move from seeing homelessness as *their* problem to homelessness is *our* problem... Our small [news] team doesn't have the resources to reach out and host that space where people have safety. It would need to have been in partnership with a group or the city or a neighborhood...Partnership with JTM would [make] a difference." **How, they were pondering, do newsrooms help make these kinds of conversations happen?**

She also saw that being part of conversations could be important for her reporting. "I wish I did this event *before* I started journalism on this, so that I could have had a more nuanced view." And it gave her insight into a better, more newsworthy story to tell: "city meetings are just a lot of yelling...but yelling at each other doesn't create a good story...we need to really connect with different [parts] of the story. It would be more newsworthy if that happened. As a reporter, a person that has an 'anti-homelessness' opinion having an actual conversation would [be] compelling." But at least as of the date of our interview six months after M3Cs, neither she nor her team had made use of her more nuanced view or her sense of a more newsworthy story. **Perhaps they needed some help imagining the possibilities for what reporters can do besides cover events.**

**They may have also needed to see more evidence of the value to their organization to doing so.** It seems that the case to be part of these kinds of conversations, has yet to be fully made in Seattle, especially for the larger, more mainstream news outlets.<sup>6</sup>

The tale of this reporter at M3Cs illustrates three opportunities to enhance the role of journalism in the civic communications ecosystem:

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<sup>6</sup> The M3Cs hosts had invited six Seattle news organizations to co-sponsor, which entailed spreading the word and sending attendees. Three participated and three did not (the Everygrey and Real Change partnered and each sent at least one reporter. The Seattle Weekly did not sponsor, but did send a reporter. Someone from the Solutions Journalism Network attended on their own. The Seattle Globalist, KUOW and Seattle Times did not participate.

**Route 1. Participate.** How do journalists make complexity visible, advance strategic thinking, support and illuminate innovation, and foster trusting relationships? What if journalists try suggestions from this report? How might that help communities solve gnarly problems? These questions are directed toward both journalists, and the institutions that support, study and advocate for their work. In the same way that the recommendations above suggest journalists can help communities identify patterns and impacts of innovation and share those across the civic engagement ecosystem, the institutions of journalism can make visible the patterns and results of the myriad ways journalists are engaging with communities.

**Route 2. Increase capacity.** Some niches in a civic communications ecosystem are journalism's traditional strengths. Some are not. This evaluation suggests JTM can make a difference by training, coaching and partnering with news organizations to host conversations.<sup>7</sup> Additionally, JTM could facilitate post-event debriefs with participating journalists on what they learned, how it might impact their reporting and sources, and to plan collaborative media creation. Coaching from JTM in news rooms after events, to plan what to do next.

**Route 3. Make the case.** This report speaks of the value to communities when journalists support civic discourse. Time spent cultivating relationships or approaching a story without knowing its specifics requires believing that there's something in it for the news organization. How might JTM support journalists to make that case in their organizations? Or collaborate with others who are educating and advocating for engaged journalism?

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<sup>7</sup> And it's not just the journalists who wanted to learn how to host generative conversations. Several respondents said they were impressed with the quality of the facilitation and its power to create a different non-conflictual kind of interaction, and some expressed an interest in learning how to hold these kinds of conversations so that they could do so in their neighborhoods and organizations.

# Appendix

## The World Café And Open Space Technology

**The World Café** is flexible format for hosting large group dialogue. Participants are seated in groups of about six, at small tables covered with poster paper and colored markers. The process entails three conversation rounds of 20-30 minutes each. There is a focus question for each round and participants are invited to write or draw on the poster paper as they talk. At the end of each twenty minute round, everyone gets up and moves to a different table. After the third round, everyone is invited to share insights or other results from their conversations. Graphic recording is often used to harvest and visually represent the reflections.

**Open Space Technology**, used for facilitation on Saturday, is a method for people together around important and inspiring themes. In Open Space gatherings, participants create their own agenda of parallel working sessions. Participants propose and select sessions to attend based on what they care about and want to take responsibility for. Four principles guide the process: 1) Whoever comes is the right people; 2) Whatever happens is the only thing that could have; 3) Whenever it starts is the right time; 4) When it's over, it's over. The Law of Two Feet, means you take responsibility for what you care about -- standing up for that and using your own two feet to move to whatever place you can best contribute and/or learn. Each session is responsible for producing a set of notes that are shared with everyone else. Open Space sessions are often interspersed with all-participant reflection activities.

# Methodology

## Survey

The six-month follow-up survey was distributed to all participants via email. Twenty participants (15%) completed the survey.

A 10 question, 5-minute survey was designed and piloted internally among team members. We used an online software tool called Survey Monkey to distribute the survey by email and text messages to all M3Cs participants. The original Impact Hub partners were no longer working at the Hub when the research study began, and so the first survey reminder was sent on the research team's behalf, by Impact Hub Director, Heather Staples. Additional survey reminders were sent from Greta Anderson's personal email and phone. The survey link was live and available for 10 days from April 16th, 2019 to April 26th, 2019. Total survey participation was 21 people, which was ~25% of event attendees.

### **Closed ended survey questions focused on:**

- Facts about their attendance (e.g., which days they had attended, prior experience with World Café or Open Space)
- Their personal experience of homelessness
- Their prior involvement on the issue of homelessness
- Actions they took as a result of their experience at M3Cs

Open ended questions asked for detail about the experiences, successes, and challenges with the actions they took and how M3Cs influenced those actions. We also asked them to share any links or documentation of media they created about the event and to provide contact information if they were willing to be contacted to that we could learn more about their story.

### **In-depth interviews**

Thirteen of the survey respondents stated that they were willing to be contacted for further follow-up, and we reached out all of them by telephone and email. We also contacted several people who had attended the event but had not completed the survey in order to fill some gaps in perspectives (people experiencing homelessness, journalists, and experienced homeless advocates). We were able to reach and interview 10 participants, 7 of whom had attended Friday, 2 on Saturday, and 1 on both days. Three of the interviewees had lived experience of homelessness. Each interviewee was offered a \$50 stipend for their time.

Most of the interviews were conducted by a pair of researchers, one as primary questioner and the other as note-taker and secondary prompter. Three interviews were conducted by one researcher. The interviews were transcribed and analyzed for themes within and then across interviews. The evaluation team met with Peggy Holman to review the themes and distill big "take-aways." They then went back to the data to check themes for congruence between the "take-aways" and the data to prevent confirmation bias and blind spots and ensure that divergent views were represented.

### **The in-depth interviews (six with individuals and two with pairs) focused on:**

- Their most significant or memorable moments at M3Cs
- The impact M3Cs had on them
- What, if anything, they had done around homelessness since the event, and what, if any, connection they could trace between M3Cs and those actions

- Feedback on the event
- Anything else they wanted to bring up.

### **Who was interviewed**

1. Recent law studies graduate, Seattle native returning home.
2. Massage therapist, living in North Seattle.
3. Works in tech, active in civic and faith organizing, lives in International District.
4. Previously homeless, worked as an engineer and likes documentaries, lives in Tacoma area.
5. Works in tech, recently moved to Seattle, lives in White Center.
6. Founder of a highly collaborative non profit, supporting many groups and individuals to reduce the severity of homelessness. Long time Seattle resident, lives in U District.
7. Long time Seattle resident, homeowner, and landlord living in Ballard.
8. Journalist, employed at a local community-based online newsletter.
- 9 & 10 Homeless for the past 6 years. Tiny house village residents and community leaders.

### **Study Retrospective**

#### **Study Weak Points**

- Data were collected 6 months after the event, so it was difficult for participants to remember all that happened at the event and how it directly connected to their actions.
- Had unreliable numbers of attendance and demographics at each event.
- Conducted research with a limited number of participants. (~25% took the survey, ~10% had an interview).
- We are only studying this off of one event, and not multiple one-time events.

#### **Study Strengths**

- Sufficient time passed after the event to observe behavioral results (actions)
- Mixed methods of data collection.
- Tried to speak to diverse viewpoints represented.
- Two people present during most interviews, to help debrief and balance some biases.

## Survey Questions

### Part 1: Assessing norms of event attendance

1. Which part(s) of Mobilizing 3 Cs did you attend?

- » Friday, 10/26/18 World Cafe
- » Saturday, 10/27/18 Open Space
- » Both
- » Neither

2. Mark the appropriate response for each statement.

- » Friday was my first time at a World Cafe (True, False, Did not attend)
- » Saturday was my first time at an Open Space (True, False, Did not attend)
- » It was my first time attending an event at the Impact Hub (True, False, Did not attend)
- » It was my first time attending a community event about homelessness. (True, False, Did not attend)

3. On average, how often do you attend community events or workshops?

- » Rarely
- » A few times a year
- » About once a month
- » A few times a month
- » A few times a week

### Part 2: Assessing connectedness to the homelessness issue.

4. What is your personal experience with homelessness?

- » Very little
- » Some interaction
- » Regular interaction
- » I have friends/family who are homeless
- » I have experienced homelessness

5. How involved were you on the issue of homelessness before attending Mobilizing 3 Cs?

- » Not involved
- » Learning about the issue
- » Taking some action
- » Taking action regularly
- » Leading an initiative

### Part 3: Assessing actions and impact of Mobilizing 3Cs attendance.

» 6. Which actions did you take as a result of your experience at Mobilizing 3Cs? (Check all that apply)

- » I talked with my friend(s), family, or co-workers
- » I contacted/stayed in touch with someone that I met at the event
- » I changed my vocabulary when I talk about homelessness
- » I contacted a government official or other policy maker
- » I discussed with community leaders
- » I intervened when I heard someone stereotype people who experience homelessness
- » I discussed with a social service worker
- » I changed my interactions with those that may be experiencing homelessness
- » I contacted the media
- » I created and shared content on social media
- » I volunteered with an organization that assists those experiencing homelessness
- » I started a direct-service initiative
- » I went to a rally or protest
- » I wrote a letter to the editor
- » I brought ideas to my faith community or civic group
- » I sought out more information
- » None
- » Other

7. Share your experiences, successes, and challenges with the actions you took. How did Mobilizing 3 Cs influence those actions?

8. Did you influence others to take action? What happened as a result of your actions?

9. Add any links or documentation of media you may have created or posted. (This can include: Facebook, Instagram, or other social media posts, correspondence, articles, blogs, podcasts/radio, etc.)

### Part 4: Follow up for potential interview and story collection.

10. May we contact you to learn more about your story?

# Interview guide

## Introductions

### Grounding

1. Which parts of Mob3Cs did you attend?
2. Thinking back to your experience at Mobilizing 3 Cs, what were one or two of the most significant or memorable moments to you?

### Stories

1. What impact did the Mobilizing 3Cs have on you?
2. What, if anything, have you done around homelessness since the end of October?
3. What happened/when/where/who
4. Why was it significant? Or different for you from things you usually do/would have done?
5. Can you trace any connection between the Mob3Cs event and those actions? How did Mob3C inform it?
6. Do you know of any changes your actions or words led to ?

### Event Feedback

Do you have any thoughts or suggestions on ways that conversations like this can have greater impact in moving the needle on homelessness?

*If they are a journalist/media producer*

What was it like being a participant, rather than "covering" the event?

### Other questions:

1. What were your intentions in attending the event?
2. Were these met?
3. What surprised you?

# Themes Narrative

## Findings Related To The Generativity Of The Event

### Participants looked at homelessness in new ways

The folks we interviewed found it noteworthy that there were participants with lived experience of homelessness. Those who did not have lived experience of homelessness said that hearing personal stories was revealing and moving. They described seeing homelessness and people who experience it differently than they had previously. Some of Saturday's Open Space session titles and notes also seem to call people to see through an unconventional lens (for example, "What would it look like if everyone was cared for?" "What have the homeless learned that EVERYONE should learn?" "What if it is about creativity, community, and compassion? And what if it is us?" "What can I learn about homelessness in a 5 minute walk around Impact Hub?" "How do we share belonging with our friends outside?").

### Discussions stayed open to emergent solutions

Listening to stories and keeping a broad perspective was not only personally revelatory, but also helped participants not narrow too quickly on predictable solutions.

*"I had this moment [during M3Cs] where I was thinking, "if we take one step back from this problem, and we look at the situation, there are thousands of people sleeping on the street without shelter tonight and for the foreseeable future, cold or rainy, whatever the weather is, they are going to be outside." And that just seems like a humanitarian crisis. The enormity of that amount of suffering is kind of unbelievable. But then the moment we begin to go in one step, we all of a sudden start talking about 'policy proposals,' 'tent cities,' 'palette houses.' And so quickly we lose the urgency and severity of the problem."*

*"I am deeply interested in the issue of homelessness, I think we often ask questions that are 'like how do we get people off the streets' or 'how do we make sure services are available' and those funnel us into predictable answers. But the way that the questions were framed at the event was like, 'What does home mean to you. Coming at it from that way really transformed the discussion and opened up possibilities that I have never thought of and I thought of this issue in a totally different way."*

### Different sectors and perspectives were represented, with some gaps

Participants in M3Cs did represent different relationships to the issue of homelessness. As seen in Chart 1 on page 5, there was strong representation by sectors that typically serve, advocate for, or are homeless people. About half of participants identified as being in civic, faith, advocacy and nonprofit organizations (40%); working in social work or social services (5%) or with lived experience of homelessness (7%). There was less representation of sectors that represent interests that are often at odds in more conventional policy debates with those of low income and poor residents struggling to find housing (18% of participants identified as business owners or company executives, and 9% as working for large and tech companies). There were some gaps in representation. Notably, there was only one person from the developer or real estate sector (0.5%) and there were no policy makers or elected officials present. Discussion was non-conflictual, but possibly not all views came up

The mixed success with representation aligns with varied perceptions by the people we interviewed. Some experienced M3Cs as a rare non-conflictual opportunity for people across sectors to hear first hand from people who are homeless.

*"On Friday my initial assumption was a lot of people there were housed and affluent, it might have been like an echo chamber. But once the first unhoused person spoke, that really took me by surprise. And that, at least for me, [gave] a better understanding of what the situation was."*

*"What I liked about [the M3Cs] event was that there were homeless people...present face to face with all these different sectors of the community, business owners, journalists, social workers, non profit board members, the general public, homeowners, possible drug addicts in or out of recovery, so it's more real-time and somehow didn't erupt in chaos."*

**Others thought that there was a lack of diversity of opinions and so no opportunity for conflict.**

*"Ultimately it felt like a room of people that all agreed with each other. Maybe there wasn't a lot diverse lines of the spectrum of the 'sides' of the conversation. We rarely get to look each other in the eye, and genuinely connect as real people, outside the 'issue'. Conversations are valuable, but need to be more than diverse, also a diversity of opinions."*

**Some suggested that there wasn't sufficient time and depth of sharing to allow differences of viewpoints to surface and interact with each other.**

*"Mobilizing the 3Cs was a good step towards something, not sure where it was really going. [In another event] we unveiled the strategy about the uncomfortable nature of working with vulnerable communities...The gnarly topics require a chance to go deep in listening to each other. To go deep on topics where you are in opposition. You have to somehow demonstrate that everyone is free to tell their truth."*

*"It didn't open any new doors for me. I can say candidly that it did seem shallow in terms of the short time that limited the ability for depth deep conversation. It was noisy at times. But the intention, commitment and seriousness of the event to learn about the issue was very positive." Two interviewees who have extensive experience of those high-conflict meetings in Seattle told us they sensed that there were people in the room who weren't speaking up.*

*"I had a sense that there were still people who had ideas but didn't fully feel like they could say them and that some of those people might be more data oriented people or "devil's advocate" people. It feels like such an emotional topic that people don't overstep their bounds and say something that might feel too practical or pragmatic or were more 'nut's and bolts,' I felt like some of that wasn't said, I could hear little glimpses of talk about systems and other ways we could approach things or other populations to reach. I feel like it gets tricky when Seattle is kind of an echo chamber. I think people are very delicate about stepping on people's toes, especially when you have marginalized people participating."*

There are probably multiple reasons for the absence of conflict, including the design and facilitation, the brevity of the event and the somewhat limited diversity of perspectives. On Friday, the focus was on personal story telling and not solutions or policy ideas (so differences of opinion were just not relevant), and Saturday the Open Space format drew people into discussions on common interests where diversity becomes not conflictual but generative (so people did not recognize differences of opinion when it didn't feel like conflict; the non-conflictual nature of the conversation masked the diversity of opinion that was in the room). On the other hand, time was short and certainly not all ideas or perspectives received airtime or had the opportunity to arise. And some people may have been gun-shy and remained silent if they had experienced the bullying orthodoxy in other settings.

The event might not have been long enough for some people to sense a comprehensible bigger picture. Some people we interviewed left with a sense of still not knowing what to do next. They were confused and overwhelmed by the complexity of the problem.

*"There's no way for people to really sink into it; you know people get involved through non-profit or volunteer through church or school, but it's so disorganized that there's no feedback about what is the most effective, and how can we share lessons learned laterally. Also there is a polarized societal judgment right now, and there's so much energy getting put into labeling people and judging their intentions, and no effort in looking at how we can move forward together."*

Open Space Technology holds space for different things to be true, and draws out difference and nuance, so moving into Open Space after storytelling was a powerful design. However, a longer or ongoing engagement might generate deeper and more complex understanding, where previously conflicting concepts, outliers and divergent ideas can be woven into a more integrated whole so that what seemed like uncrossable divides become bridges and webs.

Additionally, one day in Open Space, time did not allow a full catalyzing of action.

*"On Friday it was easier to talk to people on Saturday it was a lot more like workshoppy but I haven't really followed up with anyone to do something. Saturday was a lot of brainstorming without a lot of constrain[s] but it is a lot harder in reality where there is a lot of constraints. And that makes it harder to actually help people out. Saturday was a fun exercise but without those follow-up meetings it just wasn't very useful."*

*"A call to action would be good. I can't remember if we were encouraged to do anything."*

## **Findings Related To Impacts**

It humanized narratives around the issue for participants without lived experience of homelessness. For those who had not personally experienced homelessness, M3Cs challenged their assumptions and added nuance and complexity to their understanding of the causes and realities of the myriad experiences of being unhoused.

*"An eye-opening moment for me was [to] have people who actually have experienced homelessness tell me more about it. One of the things someone missed...was their conveniences. I mean for me, living in a home I never have to think about running water or the cost to store my belongings. It's just these little conveniences that you take for granted because it is easily there. When you're living out in a tent it is really hard to get running water or heat, or to feel safe in this space."*

*"The...thing that stuck out to me was that somebody was describing the problem as a bunch of strings tied together in a knot poured in concrete and it's a very difficult problem to tease apart."*

Some participants told us that the opportunity to hear directly from people who are or have experienced homelessness was the key to their deepened understanding of the gravity and complexity of the problem. They felt an emotional impact and increased sense of compassion.

### **New narratives emerged**

- Focus on what makes people feel fulfilled and resilient, not just on housing
- Among the new emerging narratives, two stood out. A view expressed in at least four interviews

was that to effectively support people experiencing homelessness, the focus should be on what makes people feel fulfilled as humans, not just on housing.

*"When we know that someone is out there camping, we ask, do we know where he is? We care about him. It is hard to trust others and themselves, greater society has told people that they are not worth anything."*

*"It is different when people [feel safe enough to] come and confess that they are messing up, and [then] they are shocked that they are not being seen as the problem. That there is compassion to say, 'What do you need right now?' That is the difference. When people are seen as people and not as case numbers, they respond differently to one another, and themselves."*

Community, belonging, relationship and collective responsibility make people whole, give them a sense of identity and value, and create real stability for individuals and resilience for communities. Housing alone is just one piece, and doesn't in itself result in whole people, long-term stability or resilient communities. For the two interviewees who were living in a tiny house village, resilient, loving community is more important than housing, and starting with the goal of solving homelessness per se only leads to a complicated morass. If you focus on resilience and wholeness, the housing issue may more easily fall into place in a variety of different ways for different people.

*"The goal stops being to be in a house and have a stable job because it's not possible to have a stable life when you're poor. The goal becomes finding meaning because that creates stability and resilience. What does it mean for a society when people's best options for survival are going to jail or acting crazy? If you get your shit together all you'll be aware of is how bad things really are and can't get better. There has to be creative solutions to homelessness because the traditional shelter model doesn't work, we have exhausted the logical and rational solutions. Some agencies think that they can fix people and put on a bandaid. You can't put people in a BMW and say that you have solved the problem."*

### Cultural shift and social change start with human connection

The second narrative showed up in the media content created out of the event, which focused on the importance of human connection and humanizing attitude shifts. Two reflective pieces were written after the event – one on Instagram and one in a blog post on a website for young professionals in the Seattle area.



Instagram post from one of the participants after Saturday's Open Space event.

These pieces were humanizing, mentioning strengths and aspirations of the people they met not related to their homelessness. They also mentioned some of the varied ways people became unhoused. They gave statistics and information on the causes of homelessness (e.g., rising rents due to population increase, privatization of human services, stigma and discrimination, poverty, lack of community and powerful corporate interests that control local policy such as Amazon's opposition to the head tax). Both writers shared their personal revelation that cultural shift and change starts with human connection. They called on readers to take action by bringing people together to learn and build human connection. They urged readers to humanize those experiencing homelessness by reconsidering one's own housing privilege and shifting attitudes towards those who are homeless from blame and fear to connection and kindness.

**It provided an opportunity for people with lived experience of homelessness to feel heard and educate others, which was meaningful for some**

One person who was homeless at the time of the event led an Open Space session and reported that she loved the event and learned that there are people in Seattle willing to listen. Another said that she "realized the validity of my experience and the value that it has to influence and advocate. This is a big deal for me...I chang[ed] people's attitudes and opinions about people who are homeless." Some others with lived experience of homelessness shared that though it was "absolutely good" to be there to tell their stories and provide education, and critical to the success of the event that homeless people were well-represented, they weren't deeply impacted by the event.

**It emboldened people to connect and continue the conversation**

Some who had little direct experience with homelessness felt braver about having conversations with people experiencing homelessness.

*"I think this event emboldened me to feel more comfortable meeting people regardless of what it looks like their situation might or might not be. I had such a great experience meeting the friends that did come and having really open connecting conversations. I've gotten to know people on my way to work a little bit more, which I just have this bus route and I talk to people I see everyday, and I think it just makes me feel more at home where I live [whether they are homeless or not]."*

Some also had more confidence to continue listening, learning and conversing about the issue. Similarly, one person who was experiencing homelessness at the time of the event said that it "gave me more confidence to speak and create art from my experience." At least one person reached out to continue building friendships with people met at the event.

**It wasn't meaningful for everyone**

One person who was homeless at the time said on their survey that "nothing meaningful or of substance happened" and so they couldn't recommend or imagine why others would want to attend. The event was an opportunity to share, be heard, and educate housed people – which felt personally meaningful for some. That this sharing educated housed people was, to at least one unhoused participant, not a satisfactory outcome.

**Plan in partnership with people experiencing homelessness and invite them to co-host**

Although the person who was not satisfied with the event is an outlier among those we heard from, the point they raise might be important. In anti-oppression movements such as Black Lives Matter, #MeToo and others, people are pushing against the idea that it is the responsibility of the oppressed to educate the oppressors. A suggestion made by a long-time and trusted advocate in the homeless community might be one way to design the event so that it has value for people experiencing homelessness beyond the opportunity to educate others. He suggested that future events be planned in partnership with people experiencing homelessness, holding it in their space (such as a tent encampment or other trusted location), and that they be co-hosts and initial spokespeople.

**It influenced participants to take action, especially of a more personal and small-scale nature**

In all, 18 of 20 people responding to the survey took actions as a result of the event. As shown in chart 2 on page 31, most of the actions people told us about on the survey tended to be oriented toward self or one other person (light teal) rather than actions that had the potential to impact many people (dark teal). The most common actions were talking with friends, family or co-workers; intervening when hearing stereotyping; and changing vocabulary.

There are many possible reasons that action-taking would be of a more personal nature. In general, it is easier to talk with friends than to lobby a politician or write a blog post or letter. There are many more opportunities in a six-month period for small personal actions such as changing one’s language or intervening against a stereotype than there are for participating in organized actions or public meetings. The personal actions are also consistent with the centrality of personal connection and storytelling that took place on Friday, the only day that two thirds of survey respondents attended. And on Saturday, the design did not include practical next step action planning. So it seems significant that so many participants did attribute actions they took to the event and that so many people acted in multiple ways (on average, people took four actions that they feel were influenced by the event).

**Impact on individual action taking varied depending on how involved the participant had been before the event.**

**Those with less prior involvement were more likely to take new action**

On the survey, we asked people about their prior level of involvement in the issue of homelessness. While 65% (13) of respondents had low levels of involvement before the event they took 76% of the actions taken as a result of the event. Those with a higher prior level of involvement, representing 35% of respondents accounted for only 24% of the actions taken. In other words, of the people we surveyed, those who had less prior involvement in the issue of homelessness were more likely to take new action as a result of the event than were people who had already been more involved.

	<b>Actions</b>
Total actions taken by people with lower level of prior involvement (13, or 65% of the respondents) [1]	60 (76%)
Total actions taken by people with higher level of prior involvement (7, or 35% of the respondents) [2]	19 (24%)

[1] Survey respondents who said that prior to M3Cs they were “Learning about the issue” or “taking some action.”

[2] Survey respondents who said that prior to M3Cs they were “taking action regularly.”

**Those with more prior involvement felt validated and strengthened**

On the other hand, the more experienced participants tended to say that the event clarified, validated and reinforced their pre-existing action taking, adding context, and an infusion of energy to continue their direction.

*“I can’t say the specific event led me to any different actions, as I was already motivated in many directions prior to attending.”*

*“The event could have been... like ‘check it off, I [did] my thing...with interesting conversations and now I am on my way to not doing very much.’ But I think that the event really helped leverage my momentum and exploded it. Whatever I had that was a nascent energy around it, this event really helped it to develop.”*

### **Those with less prior involvement felt more overwhelmed**

While those with a lower prior level of involvement were responsible for most of the new action taking resulting from the event, that wasn't the whole story. We also heard that some who'd taken some new personal actions and felt motivated to do more, also felt more bewildered and overwhelmed about how to make an impact on the issue than they had before the event. They felt compassion – and even a greater comfort and willingness to engage in conversation with people who were experiencing homelessness – but not the hope or affirmation that comes when one knows one's actions are part of a strategy or a movement.

*"I need to figure out what my relationship is to the problem. Like helping someone a person or individual it is just a long-term problem. So I don't know if it's like chipping in on one thing once a year like helping at St Mary's place or doing furniture delivery. But it's not a problem that will go away anytime soon. I haven't figured out if it's a money problem, or if we need to convince more people to do something. But it's not clear to me yet."*

*"I don't want to like try to save the world and everything. I'm really working on my boundaries right now so it's like this issue [of homelessness]—I don't know if my bleeding heart can take anymore."*

## **Findings To Related To How Community Conversation Can Help Solve Gnarly Problems**

### **Hearing stories and supporting relationships can be draining – Practical action and accountability can be an antidote.**

Experiencing homelessness, and being an ally are both traumatic. This somewhat burnt out interviewee also emphasized the importance of practical action and government accountability as something of an antidote.

*"When you're serving you can definitely get burnt out. Personal stories help, but...I have no idea how you can keep people's spirits up because it's emotionally draining. People should have homes. I am a little burnt out. I need to figure out what my relationship is to the problem is."*

Taking action in collaboration with others can heal the trauma that people experience from being homeless as well as the pain of witnessing and being in relationship with people who face that trauma.]

### **But not just action for action's (or healing's) sake –people also want to see impact.**

True comfort comes when you can see progress. Justice also requires that government take action and be accountable for its results. Three of the people we interviewed talked about the importance of following the money, and looking at the evidence of impact.

*"There needs to be more attention to impacts and outcomes not just political slogans or planning and pragmatism like in Ballard."*

*"I haven't figured out if it's a money problem, or if we need to convince more people to do something. It's not clear to me yet."*

*"I am feeling some hope that there's a big group of people that are...thinking about it in this way. That does give me some hope. [But] I wish next time that Jenny Durkan was there or some City Council members or someone with some real answers about what the fuck is going on over there with the money."*

**Don't try to solve it all at once with a Goldilocks solution. Support and learn from small experiments, especially local efforts by those most impacted**

At the end of the second day of M3Cs, one participant said that he surprised himself by letting go of his typical drive to find solutions. In his interview, he also spoke about the paralysis – personally and politically – that results from trying to seek the perfect solution.

As an alternative to waiting for the one perfect solution or the evidence that will point to a complete theory of how to fix homelessness, discussion in the Open Space sessions and the interviews pointed out that people who are experiencing a gnarly problem the most deeply often figure out creative and effective local solutions. Sometimes what is most needed is to support people to find their own way.

*"Human connection leads to valuing the worth of each person, which leads to self-led solutions."*

**Support means investing in resilience and cohesion**

What these innovators, some of whom are traumatized and vulnerable, often need most is support to innovate, especially investment in the resilience and cohesion of their communities.

In two of the interviews – one which was with a longtime advocate and ally for people experiencing homelessness, and the other with a pair of residents of a tiny house village – this principle was described as supporting those most deeply experiencing the gnarly problem as the innovators. This doesn't necessarily mean that policy makers are off the hook to invest resources and expertise, but that we have much to learn from the small-scale ways that people solve their own problems in community.

*"Build social cohesion and make those [who are] homeless become the principles of development of the project and build resilient community from within...Help them to design projects that they want to establish."*

Following this guideline might entail investing in the resilience and cohesion within, for example, a tent city, and bolstering that community's capacity to learn through experimentation, share with other tent cities, and amplify and replicate their successes. The two people we interviewed who live and gave us a tour of the tiny house village told us that the tiny house village is a success that needs to be known and amplified. Its success is not housing people, but creating a community where people take responsibility, take care of each other and feel safe and that they belong. Rather than rules there are relationships; love and knowing each other rather than efficiency, standardization of procedures.

*"Seattle doesn't want the tiny house village because we are successfully being un-housed. We're too high functioning," which puts the lie to the idea that only the down and out and losers end up homeless.*

**Resilience, cohesion, taking risks to try new solutions – these all depend on human connection and trusting relationships.**

**Build trust, and the relationships that protect trust**

Rather than planning distinct events, go for deep, regular sharing, where people most impacted by the gnarly problem can share their stories in an uninterrupted way, in places they feel safest and that they most belong (such as tent camps, tiny home villages). So often, those who are most vulnerable (children, poor people, people with disabilities or mental illness, non-English speakers) are only heard in shards and fragments, and their voices amplified selectively (with the selection made by someone else). This is how trust is lost, which only makes people want to be less visible. Deep, ongoing listening on the turf

and the terms of those experiencing homelessness changes the balance of power, allowing trust to grow. It also allows deeper relationships to form, which can protect that trust from being abused.

### **Build reciprocal relationships for social cohesion and resilience**

Aim for reciprocity in relationships, where everyone has the privilege of sharing what they have, everyone has the opportunity to listen and learn, and housed and unhoused neighbors get to know each other (not just housed people learning about the experience of homelessness).

When something more extensive than a single event is possible, the design can aim for greater reciprocity. Reciprocity allows everyone to feel that they are contributing, further equalizes power and builds social cohesion across sectors. Social cohesion creates resilience in the face of gnarly problems and strengthens commitment to action.

Relationships help people get past polarization that often happens around gnarly problems, especially in places that are most impacted.

*"Compassionate cities are not comfortable cities. A compassionate city does not rest if there are children without food, youth without training and education, families without shelter, etc. Focus on uncomfortable areas...[with] continuous engagement."*

Beginning the work in the places that are most impacted, and starting by building relationships and reciprocity and having fun together can create ease that allows everyone to feel heard and solutions to emerge. The joy of working together for change with people you like is incentivizing, supporting resilience for people who may be experiencing burnout or trauma from working in the field of homelessness.

### **Connect and learn from the small experiments around the city**

Another aspect of learning from the small experiments came up in four of the interviews. The idea here was to connect the small experiments around the city to each other to share and investigate the impacts of these innovations; to learn how each experiment is succeeding (or not) in its particular context, how that can (or can't) be spread to other neighborhoods, and seeing how small local experiments might connect together into a larger whole. Not only would such learning contribute to innovative solutions, but it would also give people a sense of peace that their small actions in their neighborhood was actually part of a larger strategy, even if that larger strategy is still exploratory and doesn't yet have all the answers.

*"I started getting so focused on this because so many of these issues are playing out in Ballard, it's a microcosm of all the income inequality and population growth, and we don't have good media coverage, we have no local newspaper. People are wondering what's going on, and had a city council member who wasn't focusing on the neighborhood but tossing services our way, and using lots of catchphrases [like] 'Just say hello!' but no one holistically trying to tie it all together at a neighborhood level."*

*"It does make me feel excited about the amount of resources and talents in the city. [If] we could harness it well and be a beacon of a positive thing, [it could] make it possible for everyone to live well in the city. General mission statement: Tap into the innovation and talent to increase the well being of the city."*

# List Of Recommendations In Relation To Themes

## Findings related to generativity

It was a rare non-conflictual opportunity for people across sectors to hear from people who are homeless

Participants looked at homelessness in new ways and stayed open to emergent solutions

*But,*

Not all perspectives were present

Time was short so not all ideas or perspectives received airtime

Some people didn't know what to do next

## Recommendations to deepen generativity and make complexity visible

### *To strengthen gatherings:*

- Curate attendance to ensure diverse views.
- Design for surfacing divergent perspectives.
- Help participants synthesize the conversation.

### *For journalism:*

- Bring complexity into focus through seeking and telling different stories.
- Convene conversations or partner to do so.

## **Findings related to impacts for understanding/narratives and action-taking**

Challenged assumptions and led to a more nuanced, compassionate and complex understanding

New narratives began to emerge

Some felt heard and glad to be of service in educating others; some validated and strengthened in their activism; some felt braver to have conversations

It led to some action, mostly small scale and interpersonal

*But,*

The event was designed and led without involvement by those with lived experience of homelessness; one was disappointed and felt that nothing of substance happened.

Some felt overwhelmed and unclear on a strategic way to help

Actions were taken primarily independently, not connected to a larger emergent strategy

*So,*

Practical action and accountability can be antidotes to the burn-out and overwhelm

But not just action for action's (or healing's) sake—people also want to see impact.

## **Recommendations To Support Empowering, Accountable Individual And Collective Action**

### ***To strengthen gatherings:***

- Curate attendance to ensure diverse views.
- Design for surfacing divergent perspectives.
- Help participants synthesize the conversation.

### ***For journalism:***

- Bring complexity into focus through seeking and telling different stories.
- Convene conversations or partner to do so.

## **Other findings related to how community conversation can help solve gnarly problems**

Support and learn from small experiments, especially local efforts by those most impacted

Support involves investment in the resilience and cohesion of their communities.

Resilience and cohesion depend on human connection and trusting, reciprocal relationships.

### **Recommendations To Support Innovation**

#### ***To strengthen gatherings:***

- Design events where innovators can learn from each other; where small experiments around the city can connect, share learning, and investigate collective impact.

#### ***For journalism:***

- Seek out and tell stories of small, quiet, local experiments.
- Draw connections across the city to show patterns, commonalities, linkages and gaps.

### **Recommendations To Support Cohesion & Resilience And Build Trusting, Reciprocal Relationships**

#### ***To strengthen gatherings:***

- Provide for ongoing deep listening and interaction, in places that are most impacted by the problem.
- Design for reciprocity, where everyone gives and receives, people know and support each other, and have fun together.

#### ***For journalism:***

- Don't over prepare – let conversations and relationships guide the story you decide to tell.
- Spend time getting to know people and building trust before doing any reporting. Stay in relationship long enough to see more deeply.
- Once trust is built, respect it.
- Bust stereotypes – share stories of people experiencing homelessness who are agents of change, community builders, self-advocates.
- Share your skills by teaching individuals and communities to tell their stories powerfully.

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To learn how to host events like Mobilizing Creativity, Compassion, and Community, or to find out more about Journalism That Matters' programs and services, contact [Support@JournalismThatMatters.org](mailto:Support@JournalismThatMatters.org).