2026

From Residents To Neighbors

An Evaluation of Community Conversations in the Franklin Park Neighborhood

Cohesion

Acknowledgements

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Executive Summary

Community Conversations are a central component of Cohesion Network's neighborhood development work in the Franklin Park neighborhood of Allentown, PA. This evaluation explores how these monthly gatherings are experienced by participants and what impact they may be having over time, with a particular focus on social capital and relational infrastructure. This evaluation draws on six semi-structured interviews with frequent participants, one resident focus group, and survey data collected following Community Conversations held in January, March, and April 2026.

Key findings include:

- Community Conversations function as a consistent, relationship-centered space where trust is built over time.
- Participants experience a strong sense of belonging, often identifying connection as primary outcomes of the gatherings.
- Residents are beginning to see themselves and be recognized by others as leaders within the neighborhood.
- Participation is influenced by access, perception, and visibility, with barriers such as language and familiarity affecting attendance.
- As trust deepens, participants are increasingly looking for visible signs of progress to sustain engagement.

Overall, findings suggest that Community Conversations are successfully building the relational foundation necessary for long-term community engagement. As the work continues to evolve, balancing this relational approach with small, visible signs of progress may be important for sustaining trust and momentum over time. Recommendations are outlined at the conclusion of this report.

About This Evaluation

Purpose

This evaluation was conducted to better understand how Community Conversations are experienced by participants and what impact they may be having over time within the Franklin Park neighborhood. The goal was to capture both participant perspectives and observable patterns in engagement to inform Cohesion Network's ongoing work.

What Was Studied

Cohesion Network is a nonprofit organization based in Allentown, PA that focuses on youth development and neighborhood development through relationship-centered community engagement. In the Franklin Park neighborhood, Cohesion Network serves as a lead partner in Our Franklin Park, a collaborative neighborhood initiative grounded in neighbor-centered engagement and cross-sector partnership. The initiative emphasizes resident voice, relationship-building, and shared responsibility in strengthening the conditions that support neighborhood well-being and community thriving.

Community Conversations are recurring monthly gatherings convened by Cohesion Network in the Franklin Park neighborhood of Allentown, PA. These meetings bring together residents, community members, and organizational partners to build relationships, share experiences, and engage in solutions-oriented dialogue about the neighborhood. The gatherings are designed to be consistent, relational, and accessible to participants over time.

Methods Overview

This evaluation draws on multiple sources of data, including six semi-structured interviews with frequent participants, one resident focus group, and survey responses collected following Community Conversations held in January, March, and April 2026. These methods were used to capture both in-depth participant perspectives and broader patterns across the data. Interview and focus group participants were recruited based on frequent participation in Community Conversations, defined as attending at least six neighborhood meetings. Participants were identified through review of Cohesion Network's monthly attendance logs. Interviews and focus group discussions were conducted in informal community settings, including coffee shops, community centers, and home visits, to encourage reflection and open dialogue.

Neighborhood Context

The Franklin Park neighborhood (Census Tract 20) is located adjacent to Downtown Allentown's Neighborhood Improvement Zone (NIZ), which has directed significant public investment into redevelopment projects. Since 2012, over $1.2 billion in redevelopment has occurred in Downtown Allentown through the NIZ. Despite substantial economic growth in the city's downtown core, many surrounding neighborhoods, including Franklin Park, continue to experience concentrated poverty, housing instability, and barriers to health and economic opportunity. Franklin Park spans from West Street (west) to 12th Street (east), and from Gordon Street (north) to Hamilton Street (south). The neighborhood has a population of 5,889 residents, with 30% under the age of 18 and 62% between the ages of 18 and 64. The neighborhood includes approximately 2,100 households, 872 of which have children. Overall, 24% of residents live at or below the poverty line. Housing is predominantly rent-

er-occupied, with 76% of units rented and 24% owner-occupied. Additionally, approximately 40% of residents are uninsured. Franklin Park is a majority Hispanic or Latino neighborhood (66%), with 23% of residents identifying as White and 13% as Black or African American. These demographics and economic conditions provide important context for understanding Community Conversations, particularly in relation to access, participation, and the importance of building trust and connection within the neighborhood.

Census Tract 20
Population
5,889

Population Under 18
30% (1,748)

Population Age 18-64
62% (3,670)

Population Age 65+
8% (471)

Male
51% (2,986)

Female
49% (2,903)

Living In Poverty

Overall
24% (1,396)

Population Under 18
26% (453)

Population Age 25+
25% (862)

Population Age 65+
26% (120)

Households

Number of Households
2,100

Households with Children
42% (872)

Education Attainment

Education Attainment for Adults 25+ (3,471)

No Degree	27%
High School	36%
Associate	25%
Bachelors +	12%

Employment

Labor Force
Number of People Employed
Number of People Unemployed
Unemployment Rate

Health

Primary Care Visit	76% (3,147)
Dental Visit	45% (1,863)
No Health Insurance, Employed	18%
No Health Insurance, Unemployed	40%

Health Behavior, Adults 18+ (Population: 4,141)

Binge Drinking	16% (663)	Current Smokers	22% (911)

Health Outcome, Adults 18+ (Population: 4,141)

Asthma	12% (497)	Poor Mental Health	21% (870)
High Blood Pressure	33% (1,367)	Diabetes	15% (621)
High Cholesterol	30% (1,242)	Obesity Rate (Age 20+)	()

Race and Ethnicity

White	23% (1,341)
Black or African American	13% (761)
Asian	0% (0)
Hispanic or Latino	66% (3,912)

Housing

Owner-Occupied Housing Units	24% (506)
Renter-Occupied Housing Units	76% (1,594)
Severely Cost Burdened Households (Housing Costs Exceed 50% of Income)	34% (713)

Data sources: U.S. Census Bureau (American Community Survey, 2020–2024); Bureau of Labor Statistics (2024); Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (2020–2023); Neighborhood Improvement Zone Development Authority. Available at: https://allentownniz.com/

Key Findings

Theme 1: Community Conversations as Trust Infrastructure

Community Conversations function as a consistent, relationship-centered space where trust is built over time. Participants described the gatherings as predictable, welcoming, and grounded in repeated interaction, allowing familiarity and comfort to grow across meetings. Participants frequently referenced the relational nature of the space, with some describing a sense of ease or "dropping their guard" upon entering. Others noted that trust extended beyond the meetings themselves, reflected in everyday interactions within the neighborhood. This suggests that trust-building is not a byproduct of Community Conversations, but it is a central function. The consistency and relational design of the gatherings appear to create a foundation for deeper engagement over time.

Theme 2: Belonging as the Primary Outcome

In addition to building trust among participants, Community Conversations foster an environment where a strong sense of belonging is a primary outcome. Participants consistently described connection, warmth, and belonging as the main reason for attending meetings. Participants also noted that relationships formed in these spaces often continue beyond the meetings themselves. One participant described the experience as feeling like a "family getting together," highlighting the relational nature of the space. These experiences are often independent of tangible outputs or formal outcomes from the meetings. This suggests that belonging is not a precursor to action, but rather a meaningful outcome in itself. The relational environment is a core value of the space and should not be treated as secondary to productivity.

Theme 3: Resident Leadership Emerges Through Participation

Community Conversations create space for residents to see themselves, and be recognized by others, as leaders within the neighborhood. Participants described residents stepping into increasingly visible roles both within meetings and across the broader community. Residents have increasingly contributed ideas for meeting topics, and participants expressed a desire for more resident-led facilitation. One participant described being known as "Pastor" and "Mayor," illustrating the evolution of an organic leadership role within the community. This suggests that leadership is emerging informally through participation and recognition, rather than through formal structures. Visibility and voice are key mechanisms through which leadership has developed.

Theme 4: Participation is Shaped by Access, Perception, and Presence

Community Conversations are consistently described as welcoming by participants. However, participants also widely recognized the structural barriers and perceptions of the meeting space that can influence attendance and participation. Meetings are primarily facilitated in English, despite the neighborhood's majority Hispanic population. The meeting location requires steps and does not include a ramp, which may limit accessibility for individuals with mobility challenges. Participants also described hesitation or uncertainty related to the church setting and perceived religious affiliation associated with the monthly gatherings. Additionally, work schedules, childcare concerns, and competing priorities were identified as barriers to broader participation. This suggests that welcoming intent does not always translate into accessible participation. Participation is shaped not only by logistics, but by familiarity, trust, and how the space is perceived by residents.

Theme 5: A Relational Network is Forming Across People and Organizations

Community Conversations bring together a mix of residents and representatives from community-based organizations connected to the Franklin Park neighborhood. Some participants are both residents and organizational leaders, while others participate either as residents or as representatives of organizations serving the community. Several participants described increased collaboration across organizations as a result of these meetings, creating new pathways for programming and partnership. Others highlighted the way in which relationships through Community Conversations extend beyond formal roles, with participants forming new connections with neighbors and recognizing one another through repeated interaction. This suggests that the meetings act as connective tissue, strengthening relationships across individuals and organizations. The depth of these relationships appears to be more important than the number of participants.

Theme 6: Sustaining Trust Requires Visible Progress

While participants expressed the value of Community Conversations' relational nature, there is a growing expectation for tangible, visible signs of progress to maintain trust and credibility. One participant noted that "actions speak louder than words," while others expressed a desire for small, visible wins, or incremental progress over time. Participants also suggested the need for accountability and follow-through mechanisms to demonstrate progress from meeting to meeting. Another participant emphasized the importance of leaving meetings with something actionable or useful that can be applied directly. This suggests that participants are not rejecting the relational approach, but rather seeking to build on it. As trust deepens, expectations naturally shift toward visible signs of progress, indicating that sustaining engagement may require pairing relational work with small, tangible outcomes that participants can see and experience over time.

Participant Survey Insights

Survey data collected from Community Conversations held in January, March, and April 2026 provides additional insight into participant experiences. Responses were analyzed across key indicators related to connection, understanding, voice, collaboration, and action. In each of the following four graphs, two trend lines are shown indicating community members' responses on a 5-point scale (Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Neutral, Agree, Strongly Agree). The red line in each graph indicates those who answered "Strongly Agree." The open blue line in each graph represents a combination of "Agree" or "Strongly Agree" to represent the total positive responses.

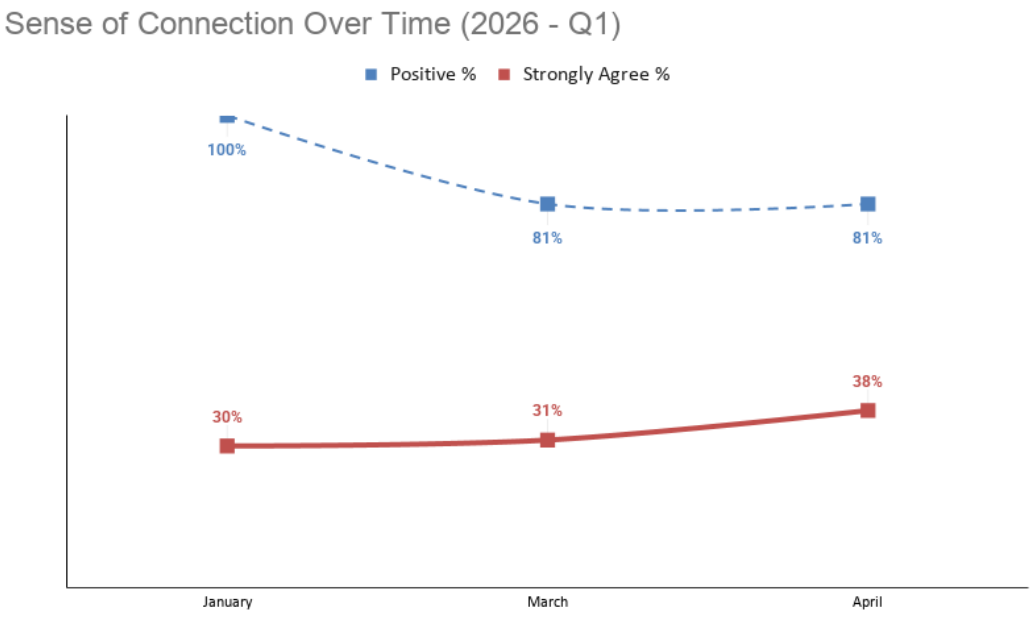

Figure 1.1

A strong majority of participants reported feeling connected to their neighborhood across all survey periods. While January responses (n=10) were uniformly positive, March (n=16) and April (n=16) responses remained consistently high, with over 80% of participants agreeing or strongly agreeing that they feel connected to the neighborhood. These findings reinforce qualitative insights that Community Conversations support relationship-building and a sense of belonging.

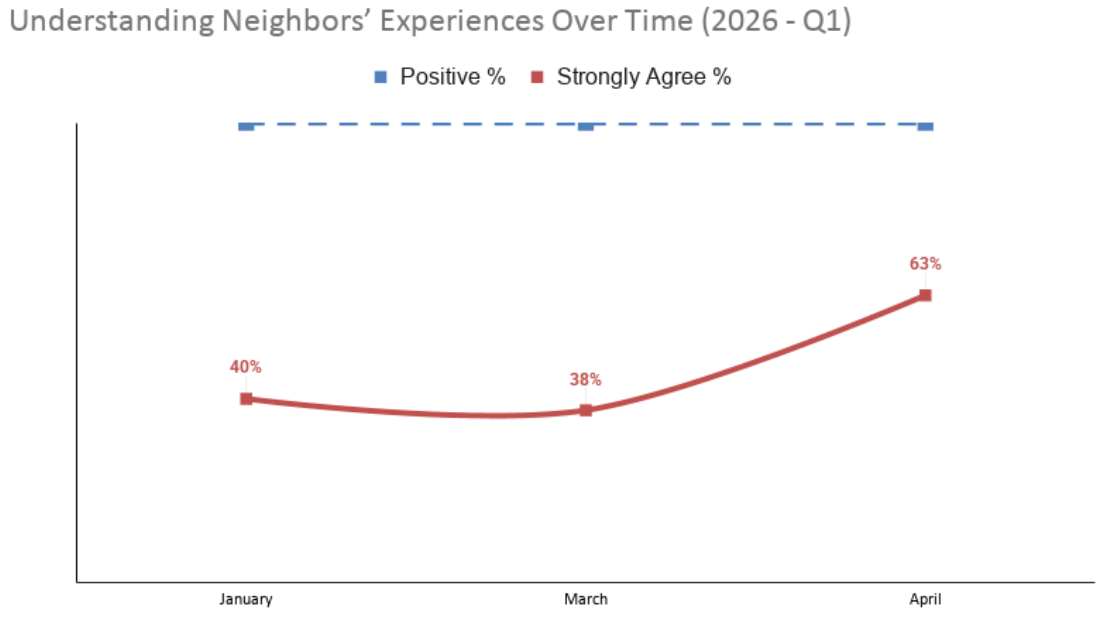

Figure 2.1

Participants consistently reported that Community Conversations helped them better understand the experiences and perspectives of others in the neighborhood. This suggests that the gatherings are not only fostering connection, but also deepening empathy and awareness across participants—an important component of building stronger, more cohesive communities.

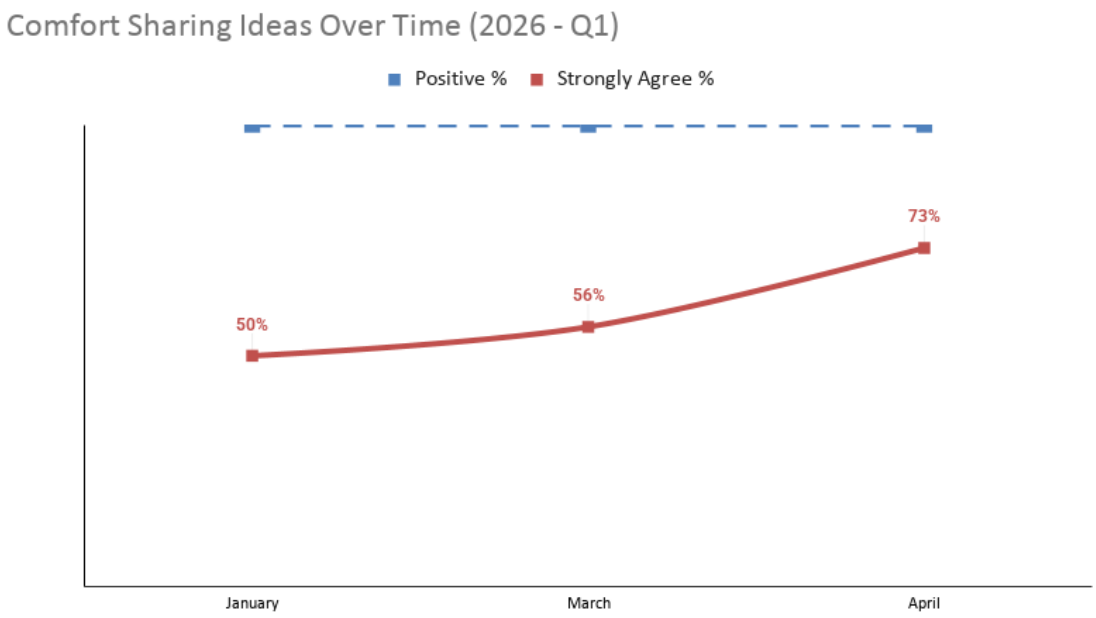

Figure 3.1

Survey responses indicate that participants feel comfortable sharing their ideas and concerns in Community Conversations. This aligns with qualitative findings that describe the space as welcoming and relational, suggesting that the gatherings foster a sense of comfort and trust that encourages open dialogue and participation.

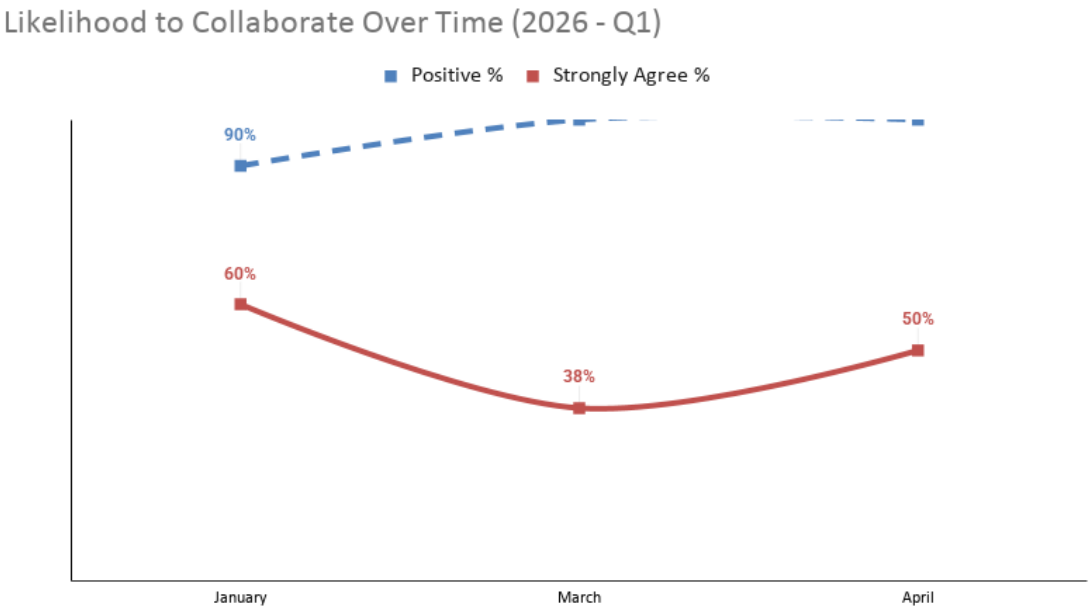

Figure 4.1

Many participants reported being more likely to collaborate with others they met through Community Conversations. This indicates that relationships formed through the gatherings may extend beyond conversation and contribute to deeper community engagement and collective activity over time.

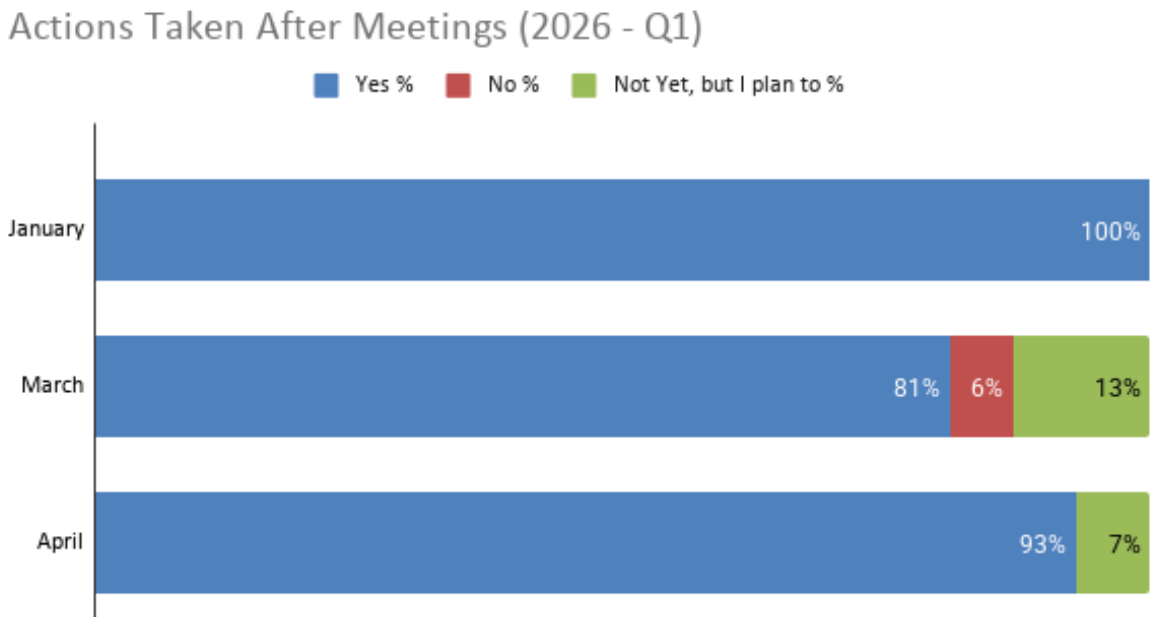

Figure 5.1

A majority of participants reported taking action after attending Community Conversations, while others indicated an intention to do so in the future. Across survey periods, very few participants selected "No," suggesting that the gatherings may contribute to continued engagement, relationship-building, and participation beyond the meetings themselves. Overall, survey findings reinforce qualitative themes identified throughout this evaluation, particularly related to trust-building, belonging, collaboration, and participation engagement over time.

Implications of Findings

Qualitative and quantitative findings from this evaluation suggest that Community Conversations are effectively building a strong relational foundation within the Franklin Park neighborhood. Through consistent gatherings, participants are developing trust, experiencing belonging, and reporting high levels of connection and comfort engaging with others. These outcomes appear to be interconnected, with trust enabling connection, and connection creating space for leadership to emerge. At the same time, participation is shaped by a range of structural and perceptual factors.

While the meetings are widely experienced as welcoming, barriers related to language, accessibility, and competing responsibilities continue to influence who is able to attend. Additionally, the mix of residents and organizational participants contributes to the development of a broader relational network, strengthening connections across individuals and institutions within the neighborhood.

As this relational foundation continues to strengthen, participant expectations appear to be evolving. While there is strong support for the relational nature of Community Conversations, there is also an increasing desire for visible signs of progress. This suggests that sustaining engagement over time may require balancing relational work with small, tangible outcomes that participants can see and experience.

Key Takeaways

- Community Conversations are effectively building trust and relational connection among participants within the Franklin Park neighborhood.
- A strong sense of belonging emerged as one of the most meaningful outcomes of participation, independent of formal programs or tangible outcomes.
- Resident leadership is developing organically through repeated participation, visibility, and relationship-building within the neighborhood.
- Participation is influenced by accessibility, language, perception of space, and competing life responsibilities, despite participants consistently describing the gatherings as welcoming.
- Relationships formed through Community Conversations are strengthening connections across residents, organizations, and neighborhood institutions.
- As trust and engagement deepen, participants are increasingly seeking visible signs of progress and tangible outcomes connected to the meetings.

Recommendations

1.) Continue Prioritizing Relational Engagement

Community Conversations appear to be most impactful when participants experience the gatherings as relational, welcoming, and consistent. Continuing to prioritize trust-building and relationship-centered facilitation may help sustain long-term engagement within the neighborhood.

2.) Increase Opportunities for Resident Leadership

Participants expressed interest in increased resident involvement and visibility within Community Conversations. Exploring additional opportunities for resident-led facilitation, topic selection, or storytelling may help strengthen ownership and participation over time.

3.) Increase Accessibility and Broaden Participation

Findings suggest that language accessibility, physical accessibility, and perceptions of the meeting space may influence participation in Community Conversations. Exploring strategies such as bilingual support, alternative or additional meeting spaces within the neighborhood, and continued reflection on how the meeting environment is experienced by residents may help broaden participation over time.

4.) Communicate Visible Signs of Progress

As participant trust deepens, expectations for visible progress and tangible outcomes appear to increase. Identifying and communicating small wins, follow-through efforts, or examples of neighborhood impact may help sustain momentum and credibility over time.

5.) Continue Strengthening Cross-Sector Relationships

Findings suggest that Community Conversations are contributing to stronger relationships across residents, organizations, and neighborhood institutions. Continuing to nurture these connections may support future collaboration and community-driven initiatives within Franklin Park.

Conclusions

Findings from this evaluation suggest that Community Conversations are contributing to the development of stronger relationships, increased trust, and deeper community engagement within the Franklin Park neighborhood. While participants identified opportunities to strengthen accessibility and demonstrate visible progress over time, the gatherings are widely experienced as meaningful, welcoming, and relationship-centered spaces. As Community Conversations continue to evolve, their long-term impact may lie not only in the programs or initiatives that emerge, but in the relational foundation being built among neighbors, residents, and community partners.

Appendix A: Evaluation Methods

Evaluation Design

This evaluation utilized a mixed-methods approach to better understand participant experiences and perceived impacts of Community Conversations within the Franklin Park neighborhood. Qualitative and quantitative data were collected between January and April 2026 to capture both in-depth participant perspectives and broader patterns across meeting attendees.

Interviews and Focus Groups

Six semi-structured interviews were conducted with frequent participants of Community Conversations. Interview participants included neighborhood residents, representatives of community-based organizations, and individuals who held both resident and organizational roles within the neighborhood. In addition to interviews, one resident focus group was conducted to further explore participant experiences, perceptions of the gatherings, and ideas related to neighborhood engagement and community change.

Participant Surveys

Participant surveys were administered following Community Conversations held in January, March, and April 2026. Survey questions focused on participant experiences related to neighborhood connection, understanding of others' experiences, comfort sharing ideas, collaboration, and actions taken following participation in the gatherings. Survey responses were analyzed descriptively to identify trends and patterns across meeting participants over time.

Data Analysis and Limitations

Interview and focus group transcripts were reviewed and coded using an iterative thematic analysis process. Themes were developed through repeated review of participant responses and refinement of recurring concepts across interviews, focus group discussions, and survey findings. Several limitations should be considered when interpreting the findings. Participation in interviews, focus groups, and surveys was voluntary and reflects the perspectives of individuals who were already engaged in Community Conversations. Additionally, survey sample sizes were relatively small and represent participant experiences at specific points in time rather than long-term causal outcomes.

Appendix B: Participant Survey Instrument

Section 1: Background (optional)

1.) What is your connection to Franklin Park or this Community Conversation?
(Select all that apply)
I live in Franklin Park
I work in Franklin Park
I represent a community organization or institution
I attend events or programs in the neighborhood
Other: _____

2.) How many Community Conversations have you attended before today?
This is my first one
2-5
6 or more

Section 2: Impact of Participation
Use a scale from 1 (Strongly disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree)

3.) I feel connected to my neighborhood.
If you don't live here, think about your connection to this community through your work or collaboration.
1 - Strongly disagree
2 - Disagree
3 - Neutral
4 - Agree
5 - Strongly agree

4.) This space has helped me better understand the experiences and perspectives of others in the community.
1 - Strongly disagree
2 - Disagree
3 - Neutral
4 - Agree
5 - Strongly agree

5.) I am more likely to collaborate with others I've met through Community Conversations.
1 - Strongly disagree
2 - Disagree
3 - Neutral
4 - Agree
5 - Strongly agree

6.) What is one thing you've taken away from your experience in these gatherings so far?
(Open-ended)

Section 3: Role in Neighborhood Change

7.) These gatherings have increased my awareness of efforts happening in and around Franklin Park.
1 - Strongly disagree
2 - Disagree
3 - Neutral
4 - Agree
5 - Strongly agree

8.) I feel more equipped to participate in shaping solutions or improvements in the neighborhood.
1 - Strongly disagree
2 - Disagree
3 - Neutral
4 - Agree
5 - Strongly agree

9.) I've been able to share my ideas or concerns in these spaces.
1 - Strongly disagree
2 - Disagree
3 - Neutral
4 - Agree
5 - Strongly agree

10.) Have you taken any actions (big or small) after attending these gatherings?
(Examples: met someone new, followed up with an organization, shared information, attended another event, made personal change, etc.)
Yes
No
Not yet, but I plan to

Section 4: Experience & Suggestions

11.) What has made this space feel meaningful to you?
(Open-ended)

12.) What ideas do you have to improve these gatherings or increase participation?
(Open-ended)

Appendix C: Interview and Focus Group Guides

Interview Guide

Background & Motivation
Objective: Understand the interviewee's connection to Franklin Park and reasons for attending the monthly gatherings

- How are you connected to the Franklin Park neighborhood?
- How did you first hear about the Community Conversations gatherings?
- What motivated you to attend or participate?
- What were you expecting going in?

Experience & Memorable Moments
Objective: Explore how participants experienced the gatherings, including key takeaways and emotional tone

- Can you describe what a typical meeting feels like for you?
- Was there a particular moment or story that stuck with you?
- Have any ideas emerged because of these meetings?
- Have any relationships and partnerships emerged because of these meetings?

Perceived Changes (Personal or Community-Level)
Objective: Identify changes in knowledge, relationships, confidence, or behavior – and perceptions of neighborhood shifts

- Has anything changed for you personally since participating in the monthly meetings?
- Have you noticed any changes in the neighborhood or among organizations involved?
- Do you think these gatherings have helped build trust, alignment, or momentum? Why or why not?

Barriers to Participation
Objective: Understand what makes participation easier or harder and how to make the gatherings more inclusive or effective

- Were there any challenges or hesitations in attending these gatherings?
- Are there people or groups who you think haven't been represented or included?
- What would make it easier for more residents or partners to attend in the future?

Aspirations for the Neighborhood
Objective: Gather hopes for Franklin Park and see how these conversations connect to longer-term visioning

- What do you hope to see in Franklin Park over the next few years?
- What role do you think community gatherings like this could play in achieving that vision?
- What would make future meetings feel even more meaningful or action-oriented?

Closing

- Is there anything else you want to share about your experience or hopes for this work?

Focus Group Guide

Opening Script:
Hello everyone and thank you so much for being here today.

This focus group is part of a larger effort to learn about how the Franklin Park Community Conversations, convened monthly by Cohesion Network, are showing up in people's lives. We want to learn more about what's changing in the neighborhood, what feels possible, and where we can grow together. Over the past few months, many of you have taken part in meetings where neighbors, community partners, and city officials have come together to talk about what matters most in Franklin Park.

We've also done surveys and interviewed with different participants. Now we want to bring it back to residents like you to check if the themes we're seeing really reflect your experiences, and to dig deeper into what you're noticing in your own lives, on your block, and across the neighborhood.

This conversations will last about 60-75 minutes. It's designed to be informal, comfortable, and centered on your voice. There are no right or wrong. We're here to listen, learn and reflect together.

Your comments today are anonymous in any reporting. That means we won't attribute any quotes to you by name. That said, we may share general insights or reflections with Cohesion Network for future planning.

We are incredibly grateful you're here. Your participation helps shape the future of how we work together in Franklin Park and what this kind of neighborhood-based collaboration can look like in other places too.

Opening Check-in (5-10 minutes)
Warm-up prompt

- What first brought you to the monthly Franklin Park Community Conversations meetings that are convened by Cohesion Network?
- What's one word to describe how you've felt about the gatherings?

Theme Reflections (10-15 minutes)
In interviews with other people connected to the meetings, a few patterns have come up. I'm curious if these resonate with you.

- Some people described the meetings as feeling warm or relational, almost like neighbors gathering rather than a formal meeting. Does that resonate with you?
- Some people said trust has grown over time because the meetings happen consistently. What have you noticed about trust in these spaces?

Experience and Participation (10-15 minutes)

- What stood out to you from the meetings you've attended?
- What kinds of topics or moments felt most meaningful?

Neighborhood Changes and Outcomes (15-20 minutes)

- Have you noticed any changes in the neighborhood or among your neighbors since these monthly meetings

started in 2021?
- Have the meetings helped you meet new people or build relationships you didn't have before?
- Have you ever followed up with someone after a meeting? (f/u)
- Did anything come out of those connections? (f/u)
- Have you seen residents taking more leadership or initiative in the neighborhood over time?
- What does that look like? (f/u)
- Do you feel residents have enough voice in the meetings? (f/u)

Barriers and Inclusivity (10-15 minutes)
- Are there people you think aren't attending who should be? Why do you think that is?
- What could be done to make gatherings more inclusive, helpful, or welcoming?

Future Aspirations (10-15 minutes)
- As the meetings grow, what do you think is important to protect or preserve about them?
- What would you love to see happen next in Franklin Park?

Closing (5 minutes)
- Any last thoughts or stories you want to share?

Appendix D: Quantitative Data Tables

I feel connected to my neighborhood.							
Month	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Positive %	Strongly Agree %
January	3	7	0	0	0	100.00%	30.00%
March	5	8	3	0	0	81.25%	31.25%
April	6	7	2	0	1	81.25%	37.50%

This space has helped me better understand the experiences and perspectives of others in the community.							
Month	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Positive %	Strongly Agree %
January	4	6	0	0	0	100.00%	40.00%
March	6	10	0	0	0	100.00%	37.50%
April	10	6	0	0	0	100.00%	62.50%

I've been able to share my ideas or concerns in these spaces.							
Month	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Positive %	Strongly Agree %
January	5	5	0	0	0	100.00%	50.00%
March	9	7	0	0	0	100.00%	56.25%
April	11	4	0	0	0	100.00%	73.33%

I'm more likely to collaborate with others that I've met through Community Conversations							
Month	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Positive %	Strongly Agree %
January	6	3	1	0	0	90.00%	60.00%
March	6	10	0	0	0	100.00%	37.50%
April	8	8	0	0	0	100.00%	50.00%

Have you taken any actions (big or small) after attending these gatherings?					
Month	Yes	No	Not yet, but I plan to	Yes %	Positive %
January	10	0	0	100.00%	100.00%
March	13	1	2	81.25%	93.75%
April	14	0	1	93.33%	100.00%

Appendix E: Qualitative Coding Framework

The following coding framework was developed through iterative review of interview and focus group transcripts. Codes were refined over time to reflect recurring concepts, participant experiences, and emerging themes identified throughout the evaluation process.

Code Name	Working Definition	Examples / Evidence
IDENTITY & ENTRY		
place_based_identity	Deep personal connection to Franklin Park shaped by relationships, memory, and belonging beyond geographic boundaries	"When people ask me where I live now, I want to say Franklin Park." One participant identified as a Franklin Park resident despite technically living just outside the census tract. One participant described feeling more connected to Franklin Park than her own neighborhood. "I associate with a lot of individuals in that area… I'm part of it."
pre_existing_networks	Prior relationships or invitations that serve as entry points into Community Conversations.	Pool Fellowship connections facilitated early engagement. Multiple participants referenced existing relationships with partners.
EARLY DYNAMICS		
initial_skepticism	Early uncertainty or caution toward new initiatives due to lack of trust or fear of external control.	"Excited, but probably a little suspicious… copy and paste." Multiple participants described early concern about organizational "takeover."
early_provider_dominance	Initial meetings were more	"Meetings with not very many

	heavily attended by organizations than residents.	residents… mostly providers.”
RELATIONAL ENVIRONMENT		
warm_welcoming_environment	Meetings are experienced as joyful, relational, and inclusive rather than formal or transactional.	“It feels like a reunion… joyful.” Participants emphasized the informal, flexible nature of meetings where honest conversations evolve. Participants described meetings as feeling like a “family get together.” “I’m a happy person… I saw people interested in making the neighborhood better.” - Luis
relationship_acceleration	Trust and relationship deepens quickly through repeated and meaningful interaction.	Previous work trip turned into a relational turning point for partnering organizations.
connection_over_action	Participants value relationship-building and connection as primary outcomes of meetings.	“People say they were coming for connection.” Participants emphasized that meaningful work happens between meetings. Participants noted meetings help maintain ongoing connection.
STRUCTURE & FUNCTION		
solutions_oriented	Meetings prioritize constructive problem-solving over complaint or deficit-based discussion.	“Problem solving, not fussing.” One participant emphasized focusing on solutions rather than complaints about neighborhood problems.
organizational_interweaving	Organizations become increasingly aligned,	“Part of the DNA of our organization.”

	relationally connected, and collaborative over time.	Participants noted increased alignment, shared responsibility across organizations, describing the relational coordination as becoming part of organizational culture. One participant noted deeper understanding of partners through reflection.
proximity_builds_trust	Physical and relational closeness strengthens collaboration and trust among participants.	“Proximity. It’s proximity.”
PARTICIPATION & ACCESS		
invitation_design	Meeting participation is shaped by outreach, visibility, accessibility, and intentional design elements.	Food, reminders, and personal invitations increase attendance. One participant noted structured agenda reduce intimidation One participant emphasized the need for outreach and visibility such as ID tags to build trust and recognition. Language accessibility noted as critical. “They need to be more out there.”
resident_underrepresentastion	Ongoing recognition that broader resident participation has not been fully achieved.	“We still want to see more neighbors.” “It’s hard to get people to come… we need to talk to homeowners/renters.”
religious_perception_barrier	Perception of the church setting as religious creates hesitation or confusion about	Questions about denomination or religious affiliation.

	participation.	Discomfort and misunderstanding about the church setting.
OUTCOMES & IMPACT		
activation_of_public_space	Increased use and activation of the park through events and community presence.	“Virtually every day…something happening.” Noted increased participation in events and festivals.
leadership_legitimization	Participants begin to see themselves (or others) as leaders within the community.	“They call me Mayor Luis… Pastor Luis.” Recognition by others reinforces leadership identity.
CHALLENGES		
growth_stewardship_tension	Tension between expanding participation and maintaining the relational integrity of the space.	“Balance between nurturing the space and gatekeeping.”
pace_of_change_concern	Concern that change is either too slow to be visible or too fast to be trusted.	Concern that moving too quickly could undermine resident trust. Aligning change with neighborhood readiness. Need for visible progress.
external_pressure_vs_neighborhood_pace	Tension between external expectations (e.g., funding timelines) and community-driven pacing.	Grant reporting vs. neighborhood rhythm
IMPORTANT EMERGING INSIGHT		
visible_progress_expectation	Desire for tangible, visible progress and consistent follow-through to reinforce trust, credibility, and continued engagement.	“At least something… so they can see something happening.” “Actions speak louder than words.” Participants expressed the need for visible

		follow-through to sustain trust. Participants suggested incorporating gentle accountability mechanisms to support follow-through without creating pressure or shame.
FORWARD LOOKING		
resident_led_governance	Aspiration for neighbors to increasingly lead decision-making and shape the direction of the work.	Neighbors planning events like Earth Day. Participants emphasized neighbor-centered leadership.
process_trust	Confidence in the group's collective ability to navigate challenges and evolve over time.	"I trust us to figure that out together." Participants noted confidence in the group's collective ability to navigate challenges together, reflecting trust in the process rather than predetermined outcomes. Participants linked engagement growth to trust-building.
resident_centered_foundation	Neighborhood work must be grounded in residents before organizational planning or action	"A neighborhood group was a prerequisite." Participants affirmed that residents should be "the center of everything," including park redesign and programming decisions.

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