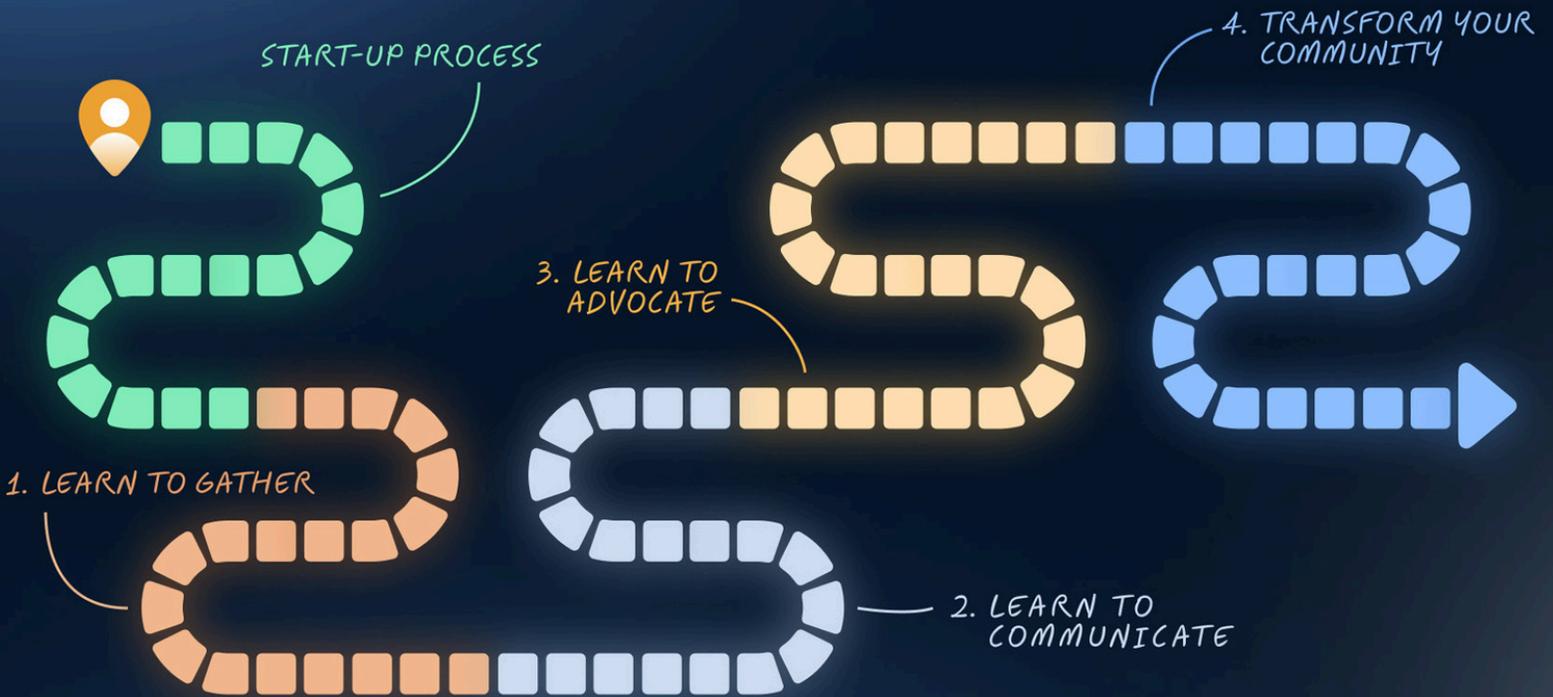


Local Conversations Process

Version 2.0: Updated February 2025





Start-Up Process

Step 1: [Sign up](#) to start the group formation process at strongtowns.org/local.

Step 2: Complete an [onboarding call](#) with Strong Towns staff.

Step 3: Complete the online [Local Conversation Leadership Course](#).

Step 4: Read and sign the [Local Conversation Leader's Agreement](#) (the "Don't Be a Jerk Agreement").

Step 5: Meet at least once with at least two other people.

Step 6: Ensure that at least one Local Conversation member is a [Strong Towns member](#) at the Movement Builder level (\$100 per year or \$10 per month) or above.

Step 7: Alert Strong Towns staff that you've completed these steps by [filling out this form](#) to let us know the name of your new Local Conversation and give us the group's contact information to share with the world!

Note: Most new groups will follow this general start-up journey. It's not necessary to do the steps in this order.



Stage 1 — Learn To Gather

STARTING WITH:

1+ Local Conversation leaders

3+ group members

1+ Strong Towns members at the Movement Builder level

Benefits

- Strong Towns adds your group and contact information to the Local Conversations map.
- Strong Towns emails subscribers in your area to announce the group and share contact info.
- Strong Towns makes a new group announcement in the monthly Local Conversations email and the Strong Towns site announcement bar.
- You get an invitation to the Local Conversations leaders Discord.
- You get an invitation to monthly Stage 1 Zoom meetings.

Academy Training:

- [Working Across Differences](#).

Leadership Development:

- Add at least one more Local Conversation leader.

Group Activities:

- Complete a Learning Activity (pick from the provided list or suggest your own).

To Advance:

- Complete training, leadership development and group activity requirements.
- Minimum number of Local Conversation members: 5.
- Minimum number of Strong Towns members at the Movement Builder level: 2.
- Once you've met all the requirements, fill out the '[Level Up to Stage 2](#)' form.





Stage 2 — Learn To Communicate

STARTING WITH:

- 2+ Local Conversation leaders
- 5+ group members
- 2+ Strong Towns members at the Movement Builder level

Benefits

- Strong Towns follows your group on social media.
- You get a communications coaching/strategy session with Strong Towns experts.
- You get invitations to monthly Stage 2 Zoom meetings with Strong Towns communications experts to strengthen your local organizing efforts.

Academy Training:

- [The Strong Towns Approach to Messaging](#).

Leadership Development:

- Add at least one more Local Conversation leader.

Group Activities:

- Complete a messaging-focused Movement Building Activity (see below for ideas).
- Complete a second Learning Activity (see below for ideas).

To Advance:

- Complete training, leadership development and group activity requirements.
- Create a group communications strategy.
- Minimum number of Local Conversation members: 7.
- Minimum number of Strong Towns members at the Movement Builder level: 3.
- Once you've met all the requirements, fill out the '[Level Up to Stage 3](#)' form.



Stage 3 — Learn To Advocate

STARTING WITH:

- 3+ Local Conversation leaders
- 7+ group members
- 3+ Strong Towns members at the Movement Builder level

Benefits

- You get free passes for Local-Motive and Academy courses.
- You get an invitation to monthly Stage 3 Zoom meetings.
- You get your group's email subscribe link shared with the Strong Towns email subscribers in your area.

Academy Training:

- [The Strong Towns 4-Step Process for Public Investment](#).

Leadership Development:

- No additional requirements.

Group Activities:

- Complete an Organizing Activity (see below for ideas).
- Complete a third Learning Activity (see below for ideas).

To Advance:

- Complete training, leadership development and group activity requirements.
- Identify focus areas, especially those aligned with Strong Towns' five core campaigns.
- Minimum number of Local Conversation members: 9.
- Once you've met all the requirements, fill out the '[Level Up to Stage 4](#)' form.





Stage 4 — Transform Your Community

STARTING WITH:

- 3+ Local Conversation leaders
- 9+ group members
- 3+ Strong Towns members at the Movement Builder level

Benefits

- Your group gets invitations for up to four leaders to attend the annual Leadership Summit.
- Your group gets up to four passes to attend the annual [National Gathering](#).
- You get free passes for Local-Motive sessions.
- You get an invitation to monthly Stage 4 Zoom meetings.
- You get priority access to Strong Towns staff.
- You get coaching on priority campaign implementation.

Additional Benefits at All Stages:

- You get Monthly Local Conversations resource emails.
- You get invitations to be featured in Strong Towns content (articles, podcasts, videos) and the annual Local Conversations Week.
- You get to attend monthly Leadership Exchange sessions, where you can learn about and discuss core Strong Towns topics, gaining insights and strategies to strengthen your local impact.

Definitions:

Local Conversation Leader:

Someone who is taking an active role in leading the group, has taken the required training courses, has signed the Local Conversation Leaders' Agreement and is on our Local Conversations leader email list. You can register additional group leaders [here](#).

Local Conversation Member:

Someone who is an active and regular participant of the Local Conversation.

Strong Towns member:

Someone who is [contributing financially](#) to Strong Towns at any level. At each level of the Local Conversations process, we ask that groups have a certain number of Strong Towns members who are supporting Strong Towns at the Movement Builder level (\$10 per month or \$100 per year) or higher.

Organizing Activities

In time, your Local Conversation will be ready to organize your advocacy efforts and take action together in the community. There is a virtuous cycle to taking action — your group and your town are strengthened together — which is why we ask Local Conversations to complete at least one organizing activity while on their Local Conversation journey.

There are a lot of different ways your group can take action together. To help inspire you, we've included this list of organizing activities. As with the learning and movement building activities, these are drawn from the work of existing local Strong Towns groups. When we have created articles, podcasts, and videos about these Local Conversations, I have included a link. As always, if you have your own idea for an organizing activity, let us know by emailing our Community Builder, John Pattison, at john@strongtowns.org.

One final note: many of these items are also the subjects of one-hour Local-Motive sessions. If you want to pursue one of those activities, don't buy the Local-Motive session. Just be in touch and we will get it to you for free.

Examples:

- Do a tactical urbanism project — for example, [build bus benches](#), [make an intersection safer](#), [create a crosswalk](#), and [more](#).
- Host a Q&A event for candidates for local office. [Use these 10 questions as a guide](#). (Example: [Strong Towns Steubenville](#))
- Organize a trash pickup event. (Example: [Bloomington Revivalists](#))
- Clean up a local park. (Example: [ReForm Shreveport](#))
- Create a bike valet program for a local event. (Example: [Strong Towns Grand Rapids](#))
- Organize a community bike ride. (Example: [Many of them](#))
- Create your own version of the Billion Bollards Club. (Example: [Strong Towns PDX](#))
- Do something fun and useful with your city's excess parking. (Example: [Stronger Denton](#))
- Host a Citizen Taco event. (Example: [Strong Towns Sioux Falls](#))
- Host a neighborhood walk. (Example: [Charlotte Urbanists](#))
- Help one or more Local Conversation leaders [get elected to local office](#) or appointed to local commissions. (Example: [Bothellites for People-Oriented Places](#))
- Build up your city's tree canopy by planting more street trees. (Example: [Charlotte Rising](#))
- Create a campaign around an issue facing your community right now. (Example: [Strong Towns Happy Valley](#))
- Look at the 40+ [How-To Guides](#) we have created or collected. Find one that is right for your group and do it!
- Create or support public art.
- Get mobilized for [Black Friday Parking](#).
- Nominate your town or city for the [Strongest Town Contest](#).
- Host your own [Crash Analysis Studio](#).
- Go on a group walk in your neighborhood and run through the [Strong Towns 4-Step Process](#): **Step 1:** Humbly observe where people around you are struggling. **Step 2:** Identify the next smallest thing you can do to address that struggle. **Step 3:** Do that thing. Do it right now. **Step 4:** Repeat the process, again and again.

Learning Activities

Right from the start, Local Conversation members should be learning together. Not only does this deepen the group's knowledge, it gives members shared language and shared ideas as a foundation from which to begin your advocacy. It also puts the "conversation" in Local Conversation, providing opportunities for your group to practice talking well with one another—sometimes across differences and disagreements. This is why we ask Local Conversations to complete a few learning activities in the early stages of their Local Conversation journey.

Below you will find a list of suggested learning activities. These are based on what we have seen other Local Conversations do with success. You don't have to choose from this list, but it should give you plenty of options to choose from...or inspiration to create your own. If you'd like to create your own learning activity, get in touch with John Pattison, the Strong Towns community builder, at john@strongtowns.org to let us know what you want to do. We'll offer whatever help and encouragement we can!

Examples:

- Go through the free [Strong Towns 101 course](#) (separately or by watching all together). Discuss as a group.
- Watch one or more of the [Not Just Bikes + Strong Towns videos](#), using the discussion guides as a way to facilitate conversation.
- Watch the [Curbside Chat video series](#). It's a few years old now but it still holds up. Discuss.
- Host a book club on [one of the Strong Towns books](#), one of our [free ebooks](#), one of the books Chuck Marohn recommends in [The Essential Reading List for the Strong Towns Thinker](#), or another book on Strong Towns themes. This book club can be just for your members or you can open it up to the broader public.
- Watch a [Strong Towns Local Motive session](#) as a group. (There are 30 topics to choose from, with more being added every year.) Contact John to let us know the one you want to watch. We'll get it to you for free.
- Read a [Strong Towns article](#) together that is relevant to what is happening in your town or city. If not an article, listen to a [podcast episode](#), watch a [webcast](#) or [Office Hours recording](#), or a [Strong Towns YouTube video](#). Discuss.
- As a group, attend a [Strong Towns event](#) near you.
- Invite a local leader to attend your group meeting. This might be an elected official, city or county staff person, a member of a nonprofit in your area doing relevant work, or some other local leader you want to learn from. Respectfully ask them about the work they do. In that meeting, or in a later meeting, brainstorm ways your group can be of service to your guest's work.
- Attend a city council meeting together. Talk later: what issues did you hear being discussed that touch on the Strong Towns conversation?
- Do you have people in your group who love research, local history, and PowerPoint? Have someone do a presentation on the history of your town's development. Before and after photos contrasting the traditional development pattern can be an impactful part of the presentation. One Local Conversation did a public presentation on the history of its town's subdivisions, which garnered some local media attention as well.
- Consider creating your own short series of presentations on key Strong Towns ideas, like the [Strong Towns approach](#), the [6 principles for building a Strong Town](#), or [other key concepts](#). You can start your research in [this section of the Action Lab](#).
- Peruse the [Action Lab](#). Find a resource you can turn into a learning activity and discussion.

Movement Building Activities

As your Local Conversation develops, you will want to start sharing your group's message with the broader community. What is that message? At minimum, your message is what your group stands for, what you are doing, and how the Strong Towns approach applies to the challenges and opportunities facing your town or city.

In Stage 2 of the Local Conversations Journey, we ask Local Conversations to complete at least one movement building activity with a messaging focus. Below, we have provided a number of activities to choose from. These are activities we have seen other Local Conversations do with success. (Some of them have been the inspiration for articles and podcasts, which I've included as links.) But your Local Conversation isn't required to choose from this list. You can also use these ideas as inspiration for creating a messaging activity that fits your group and your community. We encourage you to email John Pattison, Strong Towns community builder, in advance, to see how Strong Towns can contribute to what you have planned. You can reach John at john@strongtowns.org.

Examples:

- As a group, write and submit a letter to the editor of your local paper, on a conversation that is happening in your community right now. (Example: [Strong Towns Baltimore](#))
- Organize a letter writing campaign. (Examples: [Strong Towns Grand Rapids](#) and [Alabama Urbanists](#))
- Use a video conferencing platform — like Zoom, Microsoft Teams, etc. — to host open discussions on issues facing your community, pivoting the conversation towards a Strong Towns approach to building stronger and resilient places. (Example: [Strong Towns Langley](#))
- Get one or more of your members as a guest on a TV or radio program, a podcast, or as a guest writer on a local blog or publication. (Example: [Bloomington Revivalists](#))
- Get your group on an outward-facing social platform, such as Facebook or Instagram (Example: [So many, many of whom you can find here](#))
- If your group has the interest and energy, you can create your own blog, podcast, or YouTube channel. (Examples: [Allendale Strong](#), [Strong Towns Nanaimo](#), and many others)
- Create a newsletter that will go out to people on your email list. (Example: [Strong Towns Santa Barbara](#))
- Create a website. (Example: [Fortify Richmond](#))
- Host a public screening of a documentary. (Example: [Vermonters for People-Oriented Places](#))
- Do a talk or presentation for a local club, a kindred spirit organization, neighborhood association, etc. (Example: [Deltans for People-Oriented Places](#))
- Do one of the learning activities — host a book club, watch a video, etc. — but open it up to the public.
- Have one or more of your members speak up at a city council meeting or planning commission meeting.
- Meet in person with city officials, small business owners, or other local leaders to talk about what your Local Conversation is all about. Be on the lookout for ways your group can help the person you're visiting be successful in something they're working on.
- Organize an in-person or virtual event featuring a Strong Towns staff member or even a member of your group with a talent for public speaking and communicating Strong Towns ideas.
- Create and distribute collateral that summarizes who your group is and what you're about.
- Set up an information table at a local event.