

Introduction

When you think about Napa, what comes to mind? Is it the rolling hills and numerous grapevines? Or perhaps you think of the river gliding through the heart of downtown. Napa is a beautiful place, rich in agriculture and gastronomy. However, for the typical Napa local, what is the ideal Napa? Do the aspirations of Napa's citizens, those who live and work in the valley, match the current direction that our community seems to be heading?

Napa County Library, using the Harwood Method*, set out to discover the aspirations of our community. Over the course of one year, staff at the library have conducted several Community Conversations—kitchen-table talks that are meant to learn what Napa's people want in a positive, forward-thinking way. The library used the Harwood Method to begin a conversation in the community, to start to understand the aspirations of the people who live here. The next steps forward are up to the community as a whole.

Our mission statement at the library is “Enriching lives through books and information,” and conducting these conversations has given us information that was previously missing from our public discourse. What we have learned from these conversations is what the heart of Napa's community strives to be and achieve. Using what we have learned, we can further enrich people's lives by sharing and proactively reacting to the community's goals and aspirations for Napa.

Who we talked to

The information shared in this report is the result of 17 Community Conversations and several smaller interviews. In just under a year, we have talked to over 200 people to identify Napa's aspirations. To get a wide variety of responses, we expanded beyond the library and went out into the community. There were several conversations held within the homes of Napa locals, a few held with high school students, and some conducted with organizations and non-profits in the valley. We heard from Napa's seniors, Napa's youth, Napa's LGBTQ community, and from local non-profits and philanthropic groups. We attempted to get a thorough cross-section of Napa's community and will continue to host conversations in order to pursue an even more inclusive span of public knowledge. Some groups that we hope to interact with soon include our Spanish speaking population and homeless population.

What we learned

This is the beginning of an ongoing conversation; it does not capture all of the passion, commitment, concern and compassion expressed by our community. As we worked with several diverse groups that spanned across age and socioeconomic brackets, common themes and aspirations quickly emerged. These had different levels of significance to the various groups, but certain ideas were repeated in nearly every conversation. While we cannot capture exact phrases or ideas, we hope to convey the spirit of the conversations. Ultimately, we learned that Napa's people want a **diverse, safe, and inclusive** community.

*The Harwood Method, created by Richard C. Harwood, focuses on five key areas to help organizations shape communities. The five areas are being turned outward, having a deep understanding of our community, developing the conditions necessary for change, deciding on the right path, and making an agreement with ourselves about what we value and staying true to that. Napa Library staff underwent thorough training in this practice and have continually worked with Harwood coaches to ensure that we are staying true to our goals.

Inclusivity

Having an inclusive community was a common thread that wound through all of our conversations. Like what was shared about diversity, people want to feel like they belong and want others to feel like they belong as well. A common concern was an imbalance in the focus on the needs of tourists versus the needs of locals. Many feel that Napa caters to tourists, providing many costly and commonly inaccessible events or venues for them, while Napa locals struggle to find opportunities for community gatherings or affordable locations. The teen groups we met with mentioned Bottlerock as a prime example of this problem: wealthy tourists can afford to attend this event, but the locals who have a desire to go and are greatly impacted by the event, cannot afford it.

Inclusivity resonated specifically with our teens and LGBTQ groups; however, many of the conversations acknowledged the lack of teen-centric events and venues. One participant stated that they felt “accepted but not included.” Another mentioned that adults often plan events for teens without consulting teens, and still expect them to help facilitate and attend the event. While they felt Napa does a great job of making everyone feel welcome, there is a need to address specific groups and ensure that they feel included in decision-making.

Many people also mentioned missing Chef’s Market as an event for locals that all ages and economic levels could attend. There were comments from a high school conversation that they enjoyed meeting other students from different schools in a noncompetitive environment, like that of a sporting event. People talked about using Chef’s Market as a place for family gatherings, that was multicultural, multi-generational, was free and a place where they genuinely felt community and belonging. The community deeply feels the loss of Chef’s Market and people would love to see something similar come back in the future.

Another concern was a lack of affordable housing. Napa teens who leave to go to college often cannot afford to move back afterwards, unless they live with their parents. Likewise, senior citizens who have homes in the valley have children who live some distance away in an area they can afford. Napa residents do not want to feel separated from their families or have expensive housing be a barrier to keeping families close together. They want Napa to be a place where they can raise their families and have generations afterwards continue to be born here, go to school here, come back and age in place here with family. We found that there is a tension between wanting to be able to afford to live here and the cost of what it takes to make Napa the place it is. People appreciate the growing tourism industry, but desire a small-town feel as well.

These concerns echo concerns about diversity and safety. They sound similar because Napa’s people want to be heard and acknowledged in these concerns. Inclusivity implies taking everything into account, and our citizens want their concerns taken into account when decisions are made. They want to feel like Napa supports a diverse climate and that Napa is a safe place to be for everyone who lives or visits here. Locals want to feel included in decision-making, in event planning, and in Napa’s community overall. We heard that people want to be involved and informed, but just don’t know where to start. Many times they find out about issues or events too late, and do not feel included. They want to be involved but do not know how to make their voices heard.

What's Next?

The library intends to make this report available to the public and to other local agencies in order to help them decide where they can make a difference. Hearing from so many people in the community has inspired library staff to continue to be turned outwards and look for ways that we can contribute to Napa's aspirations.

Using our findings, we have started the process of writing our new strategic plan. Four specific service areas were chosen based on our mission statement and what we heard directly from the community. They include:

Be an Informed Citizen, Know your Community: Residents will have the information they need to support and promote democracy, to fulfill their civic responsibilities, and to participate in their community.

Celebrate Diversity, Promote Cultural Awareness: Residents will have programs and services that foster appreciation, understanding, and inclusivity within our diverse community including cultures, genders, sexual orientation, ethnic and religious backgrounds, ages, abilities, and viewpoints.

Satisfy Curiosity, Lifelong Learning: Residents will have the resources they need to explore topics of personal interest and continue to learn throughout their lives.

Stimulate Imagination, Reading, Viewing and Listening for Pleasure: Residents who want materials to enhance their leisure time will find what they want when and where they want them and will have the help they need to make choices from among the options.

These four pillars of our strategic plan will help us in designing programs and events that are meaningful and impactful for the community. We look forward to working with others as Napa turns outward and reaches the aspirations and goals of our citizens.



If you have any questions or comments, you can contact us at (707) 253-4242 or on the web at www.napalibrary.org