

CASE STUDY: TESTING CONVERSATION TOOLS IN BROOKLYN, ONE SMALL STEP AT BPL

Overview

Brooklyn Public Library (BPL) is one of the largest public library systems in the country, serving a highly diverse population across neighborhoods, ages, and learning contexts. Rather than launching a new standalone One Small Step program, BPL approached OSS as a set of practical tools to test within existing adult learning and teen programs.

In 2024, BPL joined the One Small Step Libraries initiative as an advisor library. Staff focused on understanding how OSS conversation tools could support reflection, connection, and dialogue in programs that were already active and well attended.



“In our social media world it’s refreshing to come together to talk with neighbors face to face.”

-Participant, Brooklyn Public Library crochet club at New Utrecht



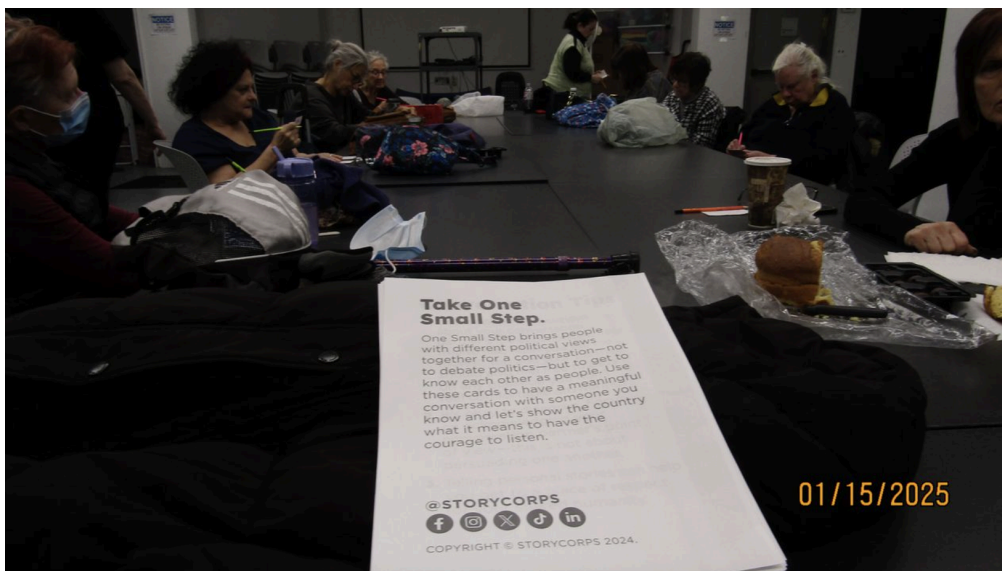
Approach

BPL embedded One Small Step conversation card decks into ongoing adult learning groups and teen programs across several branches. These included literacy programs, peer conversation groups, and hands-on creative clubs with teens.

Facilitators introduced the cards as a simple prompt based activity. Participants selected a card, took time to reflect, and shared responses with the group. Questions ranged from personal to reflective, including prompts about

hope, influence, and moments of feeling misunderstood.

Rather than prescribing a single facilitation model, BPL allowed staff to adapt the activity to the tone and needs of each group. To support consistency, staff printed their own card



decks and paired them with a one page tip sheet and light framing about listening and respectful sharing.

This pilot did not include recording conversations. The emphasis was on participation, reflection, and exchange within familiar program settings.

Key Insights & Lessons Learned



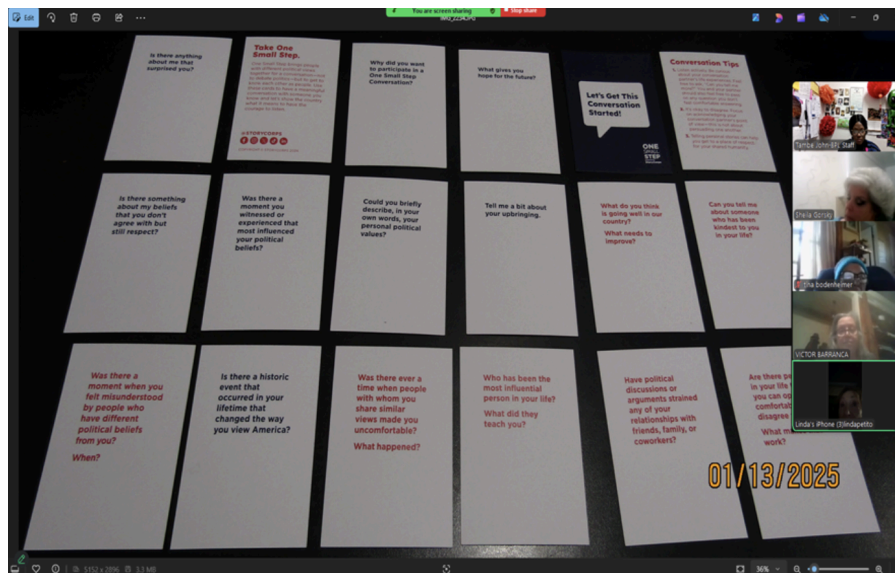
BPL found that embedding OSS tools into existing programs lowered barriers to participation. Because the activity took place within familiar groups, participants were more willing to engage.

The conversation cards themselves proved effective across age groups. Staff noted the value of having ready made prompts that could be used flexibly without extensive preparation.

At the same time, facilitation varied depending on staff experience and comfort. While this meant less uniformity, it also allowed facilitators to adapt the activity to their group and make it their own.

Notable Outcomes and Key Takeaways

BPL demonstrated that One Small Step tools can be used effectively without launching a new



program or training structure. By integrating conversation cards into programs that already worked, the library tested OSS as a modular resource rather than a fixed model.

Staff shared their experience at the 2025 LibLearnX conference, offering other libraries examples of how OSS tools can be adapted across formats, age groups, and facilitation styles.

As Director of Community Engagement Mike Feini noted, the project was about helping people rethink what conversation can be. Not debate, but discovery.

This case study highlights programs adapted from One Small Step toolkits. Visit diy.takeonesmallstep.org to explore the tools.