

CASE STUDY: WIDER HORIZONS— ONE SMALL STEP COMMUNITY PROJECT

Overview

[Wider Horizons](#) is a member-led “village” of older adults living independently in Central Seattle. The organization supports connection, mutual aid, and shared learning among its members. In 2023, retired volunteer and community member Judie Messier introduced One Small Step (OSS) to Wider Horizons after seeing a 60 Minutes feature on the project.

What began as an informational presentation evolved into a community-based conversation program focused on strengthening listening skills, building understanding across difference, and supporting thoughtful dialogue among members and, gradually, with people outside the village.

Judie and a co-facilitator completed the OSS DIY Partner course, downloaded OSS conversation materials, and adapted the tools to fit the needs and interests of the Wider Horizons community.

Approach

Wider Horizons designed a conversation-centered OSS program that emphasized participation and skill-building rather than recording. Conversations followed OSS structures, including shared bios, interview steps, and the conversation roadmap, but were adapted to feel accessible and low-pressure.

The program initially focused on internal participation, inviting Wider Horizons members to take part before expanding outreach more selectively. Recruitment relied on word of mouth, one-on-one invitations, and ongoing community discussions rather than broad public promotion.

Judie co-facilitated conversations with a partner, which helped distribute responsibility and supported program sustainability. Over time, the program also explored external outreach, including early collaboration with Braver Angels (Seattle) and conversations with KUOW about potential participant recruitment.

Key Insights & Lessons Learned

Wider Horizons found that recording was not necessary to meet their goals. Removing the expectation of recording lowered barriers for participation and made conversations feel more approachable for many members.

Recruiting participants outside the village required time and relationship-building, particularly when seeking people with different political perspectives. The team also observed that local context mattered. In Washington state, geographic and cultural differences, such as east-west divides, were often more relevant than traditional partisan labels.

Participants reported that practicing conversation skills was as meaningful as the topic itself. OSS structures helped participants listen more carefully, express disagreement respectfully, and stay grounded during challenging moments. Having clear structure supported balanced participation and helped prevent conversations from becoming confrontational.

Notable Outcomes and Key Takeaways

As of December 2023, Wider Horizons had facilitated 41 OSS conversations, with approximately 30 percent of members participating. Conversations led to new connections within the village and with participants outside the community, including individuals with red-leaning viewpoints.

Participants frequently cited improvements in listening and communication skills, describing them as valuable beyond the conversations themselves. Prompts such as, *“Have I said anything you’ve disagreed with and can still respect?”* consistently deepened discussion and helped build trust.

Wider Horizons’ experience suggests that a non-recorded, conversation-first model can be effective for communities focused on skill-building and relationship development. The program’s growth depended on patience, consistent facilitation, and attention to local context rather than rapid expansion.