

Marcellus EASE

PENNSTATE



COMMUNITY CONVERSATIONS

→ Telling Local Stories



Throughout the project, the scripted elements of Community Conversations were

based on actual descriptions of issues related to shale gas development from people in the communities served by Marcellus EASE. By drawing on the lived experiences of community members, the team sought to introduce dialogue as an authentic opportunity to discuss community concerns.

→ Finding Balance



In the early stages of the program, performances were first perceived as

emphasizing emotion to the detriment of teaching scientific facts, then, after modifications, as emphasizing scientific facts to the detriment of emotional investment. Team members responded by restructuring their approach to blend communities' emotional touchstones with local commentary that emphasized uncertainty, not misconceptions.

→ Communication and Connection



The team behind Community Conversations also contributed

their expertise in community outreach, science communication, and public speaking to support the other work of the project. In addition to contributing to the CSV course's discussions of communication, personnel led a team communication workshop, adapted a script for one of the MarcellusByDesign games, and participated in Penn State's Gallery Conversations.



Public performance and dialogue events

Marcellus Matters: Engaging Adults in Science and Energy (EASE) was a multidisciplinary initiative that provided adults in rural Pennsylvania with opportunities to increase their knowledge of science and energy systems and engage in scientific inquiry and investigation through the lens of natural gas development. The Community Conversations program was a series of events about natural gas development and the Marcellus Shale gas play, and it featured theatrical performances, expert scientists, and public discussion. Delivered five times over the course of two years, Community Conversations communicated science content, used art to highlight the complexity of shale gas development, fostered openness to civil dialogue, and demonstrated balance between engagement with art and with science.

After each event, participants were invited to share their feedback and team members completed written reflections on the structure and reception of performances, as well as the quality of the dialogue. Community Conversations aimed to broaden the idea of what communication is, emphasize the power of personal storytelling in science, provide a level playing field for the community and scientists to engage, and create a supportive space for open and ongoing dialogue. By honoring community narratives, Community Conversations worked to ensure that local concerns were voiced and valued, with a larger goal of finding common ground and opportunities to connect with science.



Key Findings from Evaluation

- ➔ Audience data suggest that while the specific circumstances of each event varied, the overall program structure was mostly successful in supporting space for positive dialogue.
- ➔ After participating in Community Conversations, respondents indicated strong agreement with statements valuing others' views; meanwhile, their ratings were lowest for statements related to sharing their own perspectives.
- ➔ Team reflections identified risk, competing perspectives, and trust or uncertainty as themes that seemed to resonate most with audiences.

After the events, audiences agreed most with statements about valuing others' views.

