

Community Heat Stories CONVERSATION GUIDE

Sweltering Cities is hosting the first National Community Heat Summit in February 2027. Ahead of the Summit, you're invited to join the hundreds of people and organisations across the country having thousands of conversations about how people feel the heat and the solutions they need. This guide will help you have conversations about extreme heat ensure your community is represented in the solutions we identify together.

Our Goals

- To understand the real stories of heat across the country, rather than technical jargon or science
- Listen to understand, and not convince.
- Heat is a collective issue: Individual struggles (health, high energy bills) stem from the systems we live in. We can change this together.



Stay curious, there are no wrong answers here!

Where can you have a heat conversation?

- **1-on-1 conversations:** A direct conversation with someone you know, such as a friend, family member, neighbour, or colleague. Keep it personal and casual. Can take place over coffee or lunch.
- **Kitchen table talks:** A small group chat in a comfortable location like a cafe, living room, workplace, or online. Guide the discussion and let participants build on each other's ideas to uncover shared issues.
- **Community events & stalls:** Host a local event, integrate heat conversations into an existing event, or set up a stall at local markets and community centres. Use interactive visuals (e.g. a poster asking "How does heat impact you in our suburb?" with sticky notes). You can use the Listening Worksheet to jot down quick notes, or contact summit@swelteringcities.org for event materials and inspiration.

When to have your conversations

- You don't need to wait for a heatwave!
- **On hot days:** Connect directly to how people are feeling in the moment.
- **On cooler days:** Encourage reflections on past summers ("Remember that heatwave last January?") or invite people to imagine the upcoming summer and future record-breaking weather.



Tips on how to structure your conversation



Lead with a personal story and why you care: E.g. I'm taking part in a national community listening project with Sweltering Cities leading up to the National Heat Summit. I'm doing this because ... how have hot summer days been impacting you lately?

Core Listening Questions

Heat Impacts

- How are you impacted by extreme heat?
- How do you think you'll be impacted by heat and rising temperatures in the future?



Prompts to keep in mind: physical & mental health, power bills, daily routines, work, and people most at risk

Heat Solutions

- What changes would help keep you and the people you care about safe and cool in the future?
- What does your community need to stay safe and cool during extreme heat?
- What does Australia need to do to make sure everyone can stay safe and cool?



Prompts to keep in mind: changes to homes, neighbourhoods, workplaces, transport, services, infrastructure, support, or government action

Closing

Thank you so much for sharing your story! I'm feeding these insights directly into the National Community Heat Summit listening project. It will build a unique picture of heat impacts across Australia to guide our agenda and demand real policy changes. For more info and ways to take action, check out Sweltering Cities

How to log your conversations



Scan the QR code after your chats. This is our main tool to collect stories and ensure we get a national picture of heat impacts and solutions. Submit as many times as you want.

You don't need exact transcripts or statistics! We are looking for key community themes, any vivid quotes, and how many people you spoke to.

Get in touch with us at summit@swelteringcities.org for any questions or feedback

 **Who in your life has a story about heat that needs to be heard at the Summit?**



Handling Tricky Conversations

“Australia has always been a hot country, we just need to get on with it”

It has always been hot, but heatwaves are being longer, hotter, and more dangerous. Heatwaves are already Australia's deadliest environmental disaster. Our homes and streets weren't built for those extremes. Think about kids waiting at unshaded bus stops or older neighbours, how are they coping when it gets over 35°C?

“I'm not affected by the heat, I just turn on the AC”

AC is great if you can afford the energy bills or are allowed to install it in your home, but what about outdoor workers, renters, or people managing health conditions, pregnancy, or caring for little kids?

“There's nothing we can do about this”

Better housing standards, planning for cooler streets and public spaces, investment in health and community services, and cutting climate pollution are all actions that can help keep us safer in extreme heat. That's why we're building community power through the Heat Summit to push for these systemic solutions together, rather than carrying the burden alone.

Facilitator Tips

Focus on the WHAT, not the WHY: We might not all agree on climate science, but almost everyone agrees on extreme weather realities. If someone gets caught up in debate, you can say: “Regardless of why it's happening, we can all agree that extremely hot days and nights are a huge challenge and we want our community prepared.”

Perspective Shift: If someone feels unaffected by extreme heat, shift the focus to the wider neighbourhood to open up the conversation. Prompt: “Who on our street or in our community do you worry about most on dangerously hot days? How do you think renters, tradies, or people moving around outside manage around here?”

Validate Local Knowledge: Acknowledging local expertise builds trust and respect. For example, you can say: “You've lived here a long time. Based on your experience, what do newcomers need to know about staying safe in summer here?”

Find the Quiet Voices (For Kitchen Table Talks): The loudest people aren't always the ones with the most experience. You can say: “We haven't heard from everyone yet, and I'm really curious to get your perspective.”

Use the 'Park It' Method (For Groups & Stalls): If a discussion gets stuck on a massive issue out of your direct control (like national energy policy or global politics), write it down on a board or notepad so the participant feels heard, then pivot back to local action. You can say: “That is a huge point. Let's write it down so it's recorded for the Heat Summit, and bring our focus back to our neighbourhood.”

