I have a conversation group at Plymouth that I've been running for a year now.  This is how it started:

Way back in 2008, we had an ESL festival for learners and tutors in cooperation with the Literacy Council, the main purpose of which was to find out what that community needed both from the library and the Literacy Council.  The biggest thing that came out of that for the library was that the ESL people wanted a conversation group.  The Council said that such a group needed to meet weekly to be really useful, and as I only work part-time and we couldn't find any volunteers to run it, we put it off. 

Finally last year I decided that the time had come and I would just run the group at the level that I was able to myself, even if it wasn't ideal. That means monthly.  We meet for an hour and a half in the mornings in our meeting rooms, and I serve green tea.  I tried more refreshments, but nobody wanted them at 10 am; I also advertise that we have toys available for young children, but I've only once had a child old enough to play come.  (I make sure it's not scheduled at the same time as our Baby Time, so I can just grab one of the big tubs of baby toys if we do need it.) We've had small but steady attendance for the past year, usually 6-10 people.  Usually that's split between literacy tutors and language learners. The tutors have said they'd like to move to twice a month, but so far, I haven't been able to get a hard enough commitment from them to run it themselves to do that.  They did run the group for the July meeting when I was on vacation, though.    
  
At first, we just talked about whatever we felt like.  Then the tutors started bringing things in, and also I took a literacy tutor training course myself.  Now we start off with open conversation, do a couple of more serious topics - reading articles from the News for You newspaper, doing a worksheet, discussing an upcoming holiday, etc. - followed by time for something fun.  We've done crossword puzzles, again copied from News for You, or played Scrabble or Bananagrams.  I'm trying to talk them into playing a cooperative board game like Forbidden Island, which isn't word-related, but, being cooperative, involves everyone discussing their next moves with each other.  Outside of the program itself, I spend about 15 minutes planning and photocopying, and then 15 minutes more bringing up tea cups, making tea, and putting the tea cups in the dishwasher afterwards, so it's not a huge time commitment outside of the actual program.   
  
I hope this helps!  Let me know if you have any questions.    
    
Katy Kramp  
Librarian  
Plymouth District Library  
[734-453-0750](tel:7344530750) x259

Canton Public Library has had ELL Conversation Groups since 2011 which are hosted by the library but facilitated by volunteer [Plymouth Canton Community Literacy Council](http://www.plymouthcantonliteracy.org/) tutors.  The group was started by one tutor who had learned of conversation groups at a Washtenaw Literacy training program and was eager to start one here.   Currently the group meets twice a week, Thursday and Friday 9:30 to 11am.  Participation varies from week to week.  Thursday sessions can have 10 or so participants, and Friday can be as high as 30 to 40 participants.  Initially, my involvement was minimal, just scheduling, blogging/sign creation/etc., setting up/breaking down the room, tracking, and making copies.  Now, there are about 15 or more tutors and my involvement has grown.

If you want a similar set-up to Canton, I suggestion you contact [Oakland Literacy](http://www.oaklandliteracy.com/) for potential volunteers to conduct the conversation group.   I know there are also librarians that host and conduct the ELL Conversation Group meetings.  Perhaps you will hear from those folks as well.

I stuck to just answering the questions you posed in the Michlib email below.  There is much more I can tell you if you are interested.  Please feel free to contact me if anything is unclear.

Ellen Pare, Information Services Librarian

Canton Public Library

I cannot relate the history of the WPL ESL group. I can say it is an established conversation group, has been meeting for at least 6 years, weekly, and up until approximately one year ago, a Librarian facilitated the group. The Librarian prepared a topic and accompanying materials, and set up coffee and tea. About one year ago the Librarian retired and was replaced by a real, live volunteer ESL teacher/host. We provide the beverages and sometimes set up the room if the host is running late. I believe the host covers topics at the weekly meetings. They are popular.

Karla Gibson  
Adult Services Librarian  
Wixom Public Library  
49015 Pontiac Trail  
Wixom, MI 48393  
[248-624-2512](tel:2486242512)

Our ESL group is so popular we started a second group because we didn't want to move to the big program room.. Unfortunately none of them are Commerce residents, they are all from Novi and West Bloomfield. Connie

Connie Jo Ozinga  
Library Director  
Commerce Township Community Library  
2869 N Pontiac Trail  
Commerce, MI 48390  
[(248) 669-8108](tel:2486698108) x101  
[www.commercelibrary.info](http://www.commercelibrary.info)

I saw your request recently about starting an ESL group. I thought I would let you know about the group we started a couple years ago. We saw a need for a group, so we decided to establish one called ESL Conversation Circle. This is more of an informal group, where people can meet and just talk. This gives people a lot of experience, and the participants seem to really enjoy it. We have 2 sessions a week (we used to have 3 but have recently lost a couple of staff members, so we had to cut it back a little.) We do have volunteers who act as “talk buddies”, and staff do it occasionally. In the sessions, people can:

* Learn vocabulary
* Develop confidence
* Make new friends
* Practice speaking English in real life situations

We have a wide variety of languages that are represented. There is no registration required, and people can stay for the full time, or however long they choose. It is on-going, and we want to maintain it throughout the year. The talk buddies do incorporate music and games in the sessions. We do get a very useful publication called News for You that is great to use with the groups. It incorporates easy language in a newspaper format. I think it is an affordable product, and the people seem to get a lot of useful information from it.

This has been a very successful endeavor for us here. Once the initial setup was done, and the word got out, it really caught on. Every week we get a lot of people at both sessions. We do have one in the afternoon and one in the evening, to accommodate different schedules.

Please feel free to contact me at any time if you have further questions.

Thank you.

Patty Podzikowski

Adult Services Supervisor

Henry Ford Centennial Library

16301 Michigan Avenue

Dearborn, MI 48126

[(313) 943-2817](tel:3139432817)

As Michelle Wisniewski mentioned, I had been facilitating the ELL Groups here at the Rochester Hills Public Library for over ten years. I continued using the format she created when she began the group after visiting Seattle for PLA.

The purpose of our group is not to teach English but to give everyone a safe and friendly place to practice speaking English. The group consisted of 25 participants with 4 volunteers and facilitator. The volunteers were good at keeping the conversation going and making sure everyone at their table got a chance to talk. The group is a lot of fun and the volunteers as well as myself ended up learning a lot from the students too.

I divided the group among 4 tables with one volunteer sitting at each. I provided a topic of conversation for each week along with discussion questions and vocabulary. I would begin each group introducing the topic of the day to the group. I would then answer any questions or concerns the students had about that topic or anything else they may have questions about as well. Then we would split into small groups and they would then work on the discussion questions and vocabulary I gave them. Sometimes they would start talking about other things but I didn't mind because the worksheet was just to help them keep the conversation flowing.

The students love to show and tell so I would ask them to bring something in that went along with the topic for that day. For example, when we would talk about Hobbies they would bring in their guitars, knitting, art work, photography, games to share with the group. On the last day of our Fall and Spring sessions we have a potluck luncheon and they enjoy bringing in a dish from their country.

We used to only meet on Tuesday mornings from 10-11:30 a.m. However the group became so popular we then opened two more sessions on Thursday evenings and Saturday mornings. Over the past few years I would say our numbers have fluctuated. Often the first few sessions would be packed with people but as the time went on fewer people would show up. So we went from having 25 people sometimes to now maybe 10-17 each week.

Each session meets for 10 weeks. We have a Fall, Winter and Spring session. This summer we offered a shorter session during the month of June and July for the first time. I think we had maybe 10-15 people attend every week. Registration has just begun for the Fall and I noticed that each session is full. 25 for Tuesday and Saturday and 10 for Thursday. I no longer facilitate the group. But the person that does says he thinks maybe 15 people will actually show up. I don't think he has any volunteers helping him anymore. I think its just him along with the group. If you would like to see how he runs the group his name is Mariano Cadiz [voxsav1@gmail.com](mailto:voxsav1@gmail.com). He was one of my volunteers. He also volunteers with the Oakland Literacy Council.

I am sending you a copy of topics we had for a session and one of our discussion questions worksheets.

Let me know if you need any more information!

Thanks,

Kari St. Dennis

Outreach & Bookmobile Services Librarian

Rochester Hills Public Library

500 Olde Towne Road

Rochester, MI 48307

[248-650-7155](tel:248-650-7155)

I began our ELL classes many years ago after attending PLA in Seattle. They were pioneers in ELL conversation groups called, "Talk Time" I believe. When we began, our groups were completely full with waiting lists and this with only advertising in our library newsletter. Over time, our numbers have leveled off but we have many more groups offered now. I have copied Kari St. Dennis on the email as she has coordinated the groups for many years since I assumed a different role here at the library. Kari can give you some of the logistics, if you are interested. She is no longer directly involved but knows the history and basic structure of the groups.

Michelle

Our library has a program called Talk Time. We were able to recruit 2 volunteer tutors to run the program every Saturday from 10:15-12. We have had a marvelous response as we have many residents looking to brush up on their English language skills. The group discusses varies topics based on the tutors lesson plan for that day. It very relaxed and informal so the participants can come and go as needed but usually stay on for a good length of time. It is advertised as registration available but we do accept walk-ins We of course provide the venue and make it available winter, spring, summer and fall. I am the coordinator of the program and my job is to make sure tutors have a schedule for each quarter, get the supplies they need, the publicity, and take care of any wrinkles in the operation. Please feel free to contact me with any questions you might have.

Sincerely,

Donna Garbarino, Adult Services Talk Time Coordinator troy

[248-524-3534](tel:2485243534)

Jill here at the East Lansing Public Library.  We have had a Practice Your English program for many years now (at least 7, maybe 8) and it's very successful.

Being a college town, we get a lot of people (especially family members of students and faculty) associated with MSU.

Our program is fairly laid-back.  We do not require registration and it takes place year-round every Wednesday night from 7-8:30pm.

Usually, there is a theme for discussion (holidays, American customs, pets, etc) and if there are a lot of people we break into smaller groups.  There are a couple people that come to assist that are native English speakers.

If you have any additional questions please do not hesitate to contact me.

Sincerely,

Jill

Jill Abood

East Lansing Public Library

Head of Programs and Outreach Services

Phone Number:  517.319.6939

[jabood@cityofeastlansing.com](mailto:jabood@cityofeastlansing.com)

The Ann Arbor District Library began hosting ESL conversation groups about 8 years ago. It was my duty to get them off the ground. Our library had a partnership with

Washtenaw Literacy, our local literacy-advocate agency. They already had ESL groups in place around the county, so when we brought the idea to them that we'd like to host ESL groups at AADL they welcomed the invitation.

From there it was a matter of identifying the best branch location (convenience of bus line, offering a location that is under served, etc). As time progressed, we have been able to add more groups at different times & locations.

This past May we've added two more groups to our programs, making that 5 different conversation groups at 3 branch locations. The groups are 1.5 hours and do not require registration. They are all on a drop-in basis.

There is a lot of communication between the Washtenaw Literacy staff and me, and I do pop in to the groups when possible. I make a point to be there when a group has its initial meeting. But the real work, the facilitation of tutoring and organizing volunteers, is all done by out partner agency, Washtenaw Literacy. We provide space, room set up, promote the groups on our website and monthly brochures.

Please let me know if you'd like additional information-

Sincerely,

Beth A. Manuel   
Outreach & Neighborhood Services   
Ann Arbor District Library | 343 S. Fifth Avenue   
Ann Arbor, MI 48104 | [734-327-8333](tel:7343278333) | aadl.org   
Washtenaw Library for the Blind & Physically Disabled | wlbpd.aadl.org

I’ll try and answer your questions, but you may call me anytime and I can fill you in on more information if you’d like.

I started our group about 8 years ago with one volunteer (who volunteered with Oakland Literacy) and about 6-10 ESL learners.  We’ve grown a lot since then and now I use 5-6 volunteers each week and host about 25 – 40 ESL learners.  I’ve found it is the nature of ESL patrons to go to more than one conversation group each week, so libraries see the same patrons who make the rounds to area libraries each week.  Several years ago when my group started getting larger I tried to get more literacy volunteers from Oakland Literacy, but they didn’t really support conversation groups at that time.  I don’t know if they do now.  I put out signs in our ESL collection area asking for volunteers and I had several positive responses.  (If you should do this, beware of the ESL tutor who offers to volunteer for your conversation group as a means to get more students for their business.)  I’ve had several of the same volunteers for years and others come and go.  One thing I did to get educated in how to run a conversation group was contact the Washtenaw Literacy Council and attend their training for conversation group volunteers.  (Washtenaw Literacy Council runs the conversation groups in all the Ann Arbor area libraries.)  The training I received from them was excellent and gave me a model for my group that I still use.   Our numbers grow every year and usually in the fall I have to turn away people.  I could easily host another group each week, but my volunteers are only interested in coming once a week.

During a typical meeting each of my volunteers hosts a table with up to 7 ESL learners.  I prepare and print out a lesson for them each week. (See samples attached.)  There are several websites and books I use to prepare these.  I email the lesson to my volunteers a few days ahead of time so they can take a look at it and feel prepared.   I have always hosted a table, too, but find it difficult to host a table and then need to hop up to greet latecomers.  I just got another volunteer to host a table so this year I will only be a sub.

About twice a year we have a meeting where we just play games and I always have a potluck lunch each year.  I try to be really good to my wonderful volunteers, too!  I couldn’t do this without them!

If you ever want to visit us and observe, or if you have questions, please don’t hesitate to call me at [248-869-7223](tel:2488697223).

Sincerely,

Mary Storch