

Civility Speaks

Lesson Plan: General Format

Length: 1 ½ - 2 hours for full discussion

Materials needed: Name tags, flipchart paper or newspaper end rolls, painters tape to hang papers on walls, water-based markers to write on large paper, note paper for suggestions, evaluation forms

Introduction and Icebreaker

Icebreakers offer an opportunity for participants to create trust and get to know each other in a nonthreatening way. These introductory activities

encourage participants to share their background or interest in

the event, and open the discussion on a light note. Select icebreakers appropriate to the group and the event – icebreakers can be fun and relate to the activity at hand. Be sure to involve all participants, as this is the chance to start building trust within the group.

Ease participants into discussion. A friendly greeter at the entrance and light snacks before the event help participants warm up with chit-chat and sets the stage for further discussion.

Establish Guidelines

Establishing a list of expected behaviors or discussion guidelines as a group is important because the rules created for the discussion space may be different from the rules people follow in other spaces. Solicit input from participants and write ideas so all can see the compiled list. All participants need to have an opportunity to give input to the guidelines. All participants should agree to the guidelines before moving on. Post the guidelines during the meeting to serve as a reminder of how participants have agreed to behave; the facilitator or other participants can refer to the posted guidelines if someone violates them.

Ask questions like these to generate a list of expectations:

What does a civil conversation look like?

What are your expectations for how we treat one another and behave when we're talking about highly charged, difficult, complex topics?

Once a set of guidelines is created, the facilitator asks the group:

Are these expectations guidelines that we can live with and follow for our conversation this evening?

As your facilitator, do you give me permission to bring it to attention if we don't follow these expectations?

Goal

The goal of this general format guide is to understand the elements of facilitating and hosting a discussion.

Facilitator

A facilitator is an individual whose job is to help to manage a process of information exchange. While an expert's role is to offer advice, particularly about the content of a discussion, the facilitator's role is to help with *how* the discussion is proceeding. In short, the facilitator's responsibility is to address the journey, rather than the destination.

IAF, www.iaf-world.org

Conversation Café

A Conversation Café is a one-and-a-half hour hosted conversation, held in a public setting like a café, where anyone is welcome to join. A simple format helps people feel at ease and gives everyone who wants it a chance to speak. At Conversation Cafés, everyone is “the talk show” - and it's also fine for people to simply listen. Conversation Cafés are not used instead of action. They are before action - a place to gather your thoughts, find your natural allies, discover your blind spots and open your heart to the heart of “the other.”

<http://www.conversationcafe.org/>

Facilitation

Facilitation is believing that people coming together can lead to thoughtful, fair decisions and actions.

*University of Minnesota Extension,
Facilitation Resource booklets*

Resources and Issue Guides

The National Issues Forum Institute publishes and distributes an ongoing series of Issue Guides and videos for thoughtful discussion of many of today's thorniest problems. Moderators and conveners find the resources indispensable in organizing, leading and advertising their forums for public deliberation. www.nifi.org

The National Coalition for Dialogue & Deliberation is a network of thousands of innovators who bring people together across divides to tackle today's toughest challenges. NCDD serves as a gathering place, a resource clearinghouse, a news source, and a facilitative leader for this extraordinary community. www.ncdd.org

The Community Tool Box is a service of the Center for Community Health and Development at the University of Kansas. Chapter 16, Group Facilitation and Problem-Solving, "Developing Facilitation Skills" explains how to plan for a good facilitation process and create an environment conducive for conversation. <http://ctb.ku.edu/>

Extension-Based Resources for Promoting Civility and Civil Discourse is a four-page PDF of links to federal and Extension resources promoting civility including articles, workbooks, handouts, and online modules. <https://www.extension.iastate.edu/localfoods/wp-content/uploads/2016/12/NIFA-Extension-Civility-Resources-11-16.pdf>

Everyday Democracy has designed six highly useful, customizable flyer templates that can be used by anyone holding dialogue and deliberation events. The templates can be downloaded here: <https://www.everyday-democracy.org/resources/flyer-templates>

Libraries Transforming Communities (LTC): Models for Change is an initiative of the American Library Association (ALA) and National Coalition for Dialogue & Deliberation (NCDD) that seeks to introduce libraries to various dialogue and deliberation approaches, enabling libraries to foster conversation and lead change in their communities. <http://www.ala.org/tools/librariestransform/libraries-transforming-communities/ltc-models-for-change>

Closure and Evaluation

Closure is important to wrap up the event, thank participants for participating, and encourage ongoing conversation beyond the confines of the space you're leaving.

Possible questions to ask for reflection:

What are some reasons it is important to talk about this in our community?

What gives you courage about this discussion?

What would you need to feel comfortable talking about this topic with friends or family?

Listen, learn, and adapt. There is no single approach for all topics or all groups. Groups, like individual people, have personality, and the facilitator will need to adapt to each.

Post-discussion written evaluations can help you design more discussion sessions and learn more about what participants got out of the discussion. Some issue guides include evaluations. Sample evaluation questions or prompts include:

In a few sentences, what might you do differently now that you've participated in this?

What surprised you about the conversation?

How will you reach out to learn more from people of different opinions?

Please explain in a few sentences one thing you learned about your own perspective.