

Community Conversation Check List							
Done!	Action						
<input type="checkbox"/>	Gather the team						
<input type="checkbox"/>	Team members:						
<input type="checkbox"/>	Living Room Conversation:	Date:		Place:			
<input type="checkbox"/>	Purpose:						
<input type="checkbox"/>	Explore topics:	Ideas:					
<input type="checkbox"/>	Set the goal						
<input type="checkbox"/>	Date:						
<input type="checkbox"/>	Time:						
<input type="checkbox"/>	Check for conflicts						
<input type="checkbox"/>	Space reserve						
<input type="checkbox"/>	Furniture reserve						
<input type="checkbox"/>	Topic						
<input type="checkbox"/>	Team roles:						
<input type="checkbox"/>	Spread the word						
<input type="checkbox"/>	Written PR						
<input type="checkbox"/>	Newsletter						
<input type="checkbox"/>	Social media						
<input type="checkbox"/>	Verbal						
<input type="checkbox"/>	Template?						
<input type="checkbox"/>	Announcements						
<input type="checkbox"/>	Gather supplies and tools						
<input type="checkbox"/>	Topic copies: Two pages printed both sides						
<input type="checkbox"/>	Name badges, markers, pens						
<input type="checkbox"/>	Sign-in sheets						
<input type="checkbox"/>	Direction signs						
<input type="checkbox"/>	Conversation Agreement Table Tents						

<input type="checkbox"/>	Group seating (tables of 4-6)						
<input type="checkbox"/>	Refreshments						
<input type="checkbox"/>	Last minute preparation						
<input type="checkbox"/>	Check the check list!						
<input type="checkbox"/>	Team meeting						
<input type="checkbox"/>	Welcome table with name badges, markers, pens, sign-in sheets						
<input type="checkbox"/>	Review flow of the event						
<input type="checkbox"/>	Welcome participants						
<input type="checkbox"/>	Greet people and steer them to the sign-in table as well as to refreshments.						
<input type="checkbox"/>	Encourage people who arrive together to sit at different tables.						
<input type="checkbox"/>	Begin on time						
<input type="checkbox"/>	Assign team member to watch for and greet latecomers						
<input type="checkbox"/>	The Conversation						
<input type="checkbox"/>	Welcome						
<input type="checkbox"/>	Introduction of conversation						
<input type="checkbox"/>	Conversation agreements						
<input type="checkbox"/>	Timing	Round 1 - 10 minutes					
<input type="checkbox"/>		Round 2 - 50 minutes					
<input type="checkbox"/>		Round 5 - 10 minutes					
<input type="checkbox"/>	Join a group						
<input type="checkbox"/>		10-minute warning 30 minutes before the advertised stop time.					
<input type="checkbox"/>		Stop 20 minutes before end time.					
<input type="checkbox"/>		Feedback form					
<input type="checkbox"/>	Debrief with entire group-ask for a couple volunteers to share reflections on the conversation						
<input type="checkbox"/>	Take group photo of those who give permission						
<input type="checkbox"/>	Thank everyone						
<input type="checkbox"/>	Take a deep breath						

<input type="checkbox"/>	After the event						
<input type="checkbox"/>	Review feedback and note opportunities for improvement						
<input type="checkbox"/>	Send copies of paper feedback forms to address on form						
<input type="checkbox"/>	Start planning next Conversation!						
<input type="checkbox"/>	Write up the story--what happened? What did people comment? What was your experience? Share in your community and send to LRC						

LIVING ROOM CONVERSATIONS + LIBRARIES

Living Room Conversations works to heal society by connecting people across divides through guided conversations proven to build understanding and transform communities.

OUR MODEL

- Living Room Conversations (LRC) get at the heart of what we share in common with one another
- The backbone of a Living Room Conversation is a **conversational model developed by dialogue experts in order to facilitate connection between people despite their differences, & even identify areas of common ground & shared understanding**
- Within this model, we have developed over 150 conversation guides on all sorts of topics that can otherwise be tense to talk about

LIVING ROOM CONVERSATIONS AT YOUR LIBRARY

- To get started, check out our **Host Toolkit, free Hosting information & free online Host training**
- We invite you to browse our **Libraries Page** for stories of libraries using Living Room Conversations + helpful resources
- Living Room Conversations provide an easy to replicate format with questions for a variety of topics. Any interested library staff, Friends of the Library, or volunteers can host
- Living Room Conversations can provide customized training, topic guides, & implementation support for your library
- Living Room Conversations can help you with opportunities to partner & seek joint funding

SUCCESS STORIES

"[We] are grateful to have the Living Room Conversation model to guide & inspire future goals in bringing their residents together to learn from one another...& find common ground through meaningful dialogue."

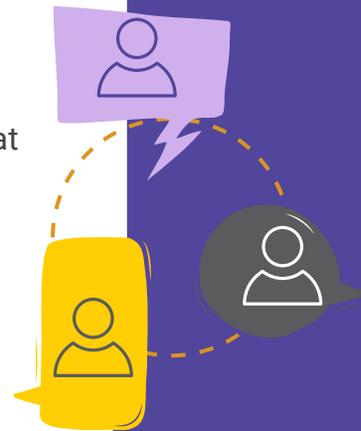
- Kurtis Kelley, Estes Valley Library

"Typically...people are discouraged from bringing up hot button topics. But [Living Room Conversations] at our Mt Pleasant branch promotes these discussions with people on all sides"

- Mayci Rechner, Charleston County Public Library

"The conversations were wonderful!"

- Laurel Cannon, Boston Public Library



Host & Participant Feedback Form

Turn in to your host or take pictures and email them to feedback@livingroomconversations.org

you may use my photo in materials for Living Room Conversations

Conversation type: in person video

Name: _____

Email: _____

Name of host: _____

Topic : _____

City: _____ State: _____

How would you classify yourself politically?

Social issues:

traditional progressive

Economic issues:

conservative liberal

Generally, how comfortable are you talking about politicized topics with people who are different from you?

Very Uncomfortable Very Comfortable

How comfortable did you feel discussing the topic of your Living Room Conversation with this group?

Very Uncomfortable Very Comfortable

Did you enjoy the Living Room Conversation experience?

I thought it was extremely valuable I do not think it was valuable

How likely are you to recommend your family/ friends engage with Living Room Conversations?

I will absolutely recommend I would not recommend this

What relationship do you feel towards the people in your conversation?

More understanding/appreciation Less understanding/appreciation

Did you learn or become aware of something valuable during the conversation

yes

no

What did you learn? What was valuable to you?

How do you feel about these kinds of conversations in the future?

I want to co-host my own

I would like to be a participant in another conversation

I would rather not have these kinds of conversations again

Can we follow up with you? Yes! Keep me updated on Living Room Conversations notices and research.

Additional comments:

Conversation Guide: Belonging

Living Room Conversations offers a simple, sociable and structured way to practice communicating across differences while building understanding and relationships. Typically, 4-7 people meet in person or by video call for about 90 minutes to listen to and be heard by others on one of our nearly 100 [topics](#). Rather than debating or convincing others, we take turns talking to share and learn, and be curious. No preparation is required, though background links with balanced views are available on some topic pages online. *Anyone can host using these italicized instructions. Hosts also participate.*

Introductions: Why We're Here (~10 minutes)

Each participant has 1 minute to introduce themselves.

- Share your name, where you live, what drew you here, and if this is your first conversation.

Conversation Agreements: How We'll Engage (~5 minutes)

These will set the tone of our conversation; participants may volunteer to take turns reading them aloud.

- **Be curious and listen to understand.** Conversation is as much about listening as it is about talking. You might enjoy exploring how others' experiences have shaped their values and perspectives.
- **Show respect and suspend judgment.** People tend to judge one another. Setting judgement aside opens you up to learning from others and makes them feel respected and appreciated. Try to truly listen, without interruption or crosstalk.
- **Note any common ground as well as any differences.** Look for areas of agreement or shared values that may arise and take an interest in the differing beliefs and opinions of others.
- **Be authentic and welcome that from others.** Share what's important to you. Speak from your experience. Be considerate of others who are doing the same.
- **Be purposeful and to the point.** Do your best to keep your comments concise and relevant to the question you are answering. Be conscious of sharing airtime with other participants.
- **Own and guide the conversation.** Take responsibility for the quality of your participation and the conversation as a whole. Be proactive in getting yourself and others back on track if needed. Use an agreed upon signal like the "time out" sign if you feel the agreements are not being honored.

Question Rounds: What We'll Talk About

Optional: a participant can keep track of time and gently let people know when their time has elapsed.

Round One: Getting to Know Each Other (~10 min)

Each participant can take 1-2 minutes to answer one of these questions:

- What are your hopes and concerns for your family, community and/or the country?
- What would your best friend say about who you are?
- What sense of purpose / mission / duty guides you in your life?

Round Two: Exploring the Topic -- Belonging (~40 min)

One participant can volunteer to read this paragraph.

Belonging is identified as a basic human need in Maslow's pyramid. Human beings are happier and healthier when they feel they belong and when that belonging lacks, it affects their self concept and ability to experience fulfillment. People experience belonging in families, clubs, neighborhoods, faith communities, interest groups, schools and so many more places. This guide invites you to explore where and how you feel a sense of belonging and what kind of impact that has.

Take ~2 minutes each to answer a question below without interruption or crosstalk. After everyone has answered, the group may take a few minutes for clarifying or follow up questions/responses. Continue exploring additional questions as time allows.

- How do you define belonging and how do you experience it?
- Where do you feel you belong and why?
- Thinking of your own experiences, what fosters or inhibits a sense of belonging?
- Where do you want to feel a greater sense of belonging, yet haven't and why?
- Which spaces do you make an effort to welcome others and create a sense of belonging?
- When you think about belonging, what hopes do you have for your community or your country?

Round Three: Reflecting on the Conversation (~15 min)

Take 2 minutes to answer one of the following questions:

- What was most meaningful / valuable to you in this Living Room Conversation?
- What learning, new understanding or common ground was found on the topic?
- How has this conversation changed your perception of anyone in this group, including yourself?
- Is there a next step you would like to take based upon the conversation you just had?

Closing (~5 min)

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Thank you!

Conversation Guide: Communicating with Care

Living Room Conversations offers a simple, sociable and structured way to practice communicating across differences while building understanding and relationships. Typically, 4-6 people meet in person or by video call for about 90 minutes to listen to and be heard by others on one of our nearly 100 [topics](#). Rather than debating or convincing others, we take turns talking to share, learn, and be curious. No preparation is required, though background links with balanced views are available on some topic pages online. Anyone can host using these italicized instructions. [Hosts also participate](#).

I. Introductions: Why We're Here (~10 minutes)

Each participant has 1 minute to introduce themselves.

- Share your name, where you live, what drew you here, and if this is your first conversation.

II. Conversation Agreements: How We'll Engage (~5 minutes)

These will set the tone of our conversation; participants may volunteer to take turns reading them aloud.

- **Be curious and listen to understand.** Conversation is as much about listening as it is about talking. You might enjoy exploring how others' experiences have shaped their values and perspectives.
- **Show respect and suspend judgment.** People tend to judge one another. Setting judgement aside opens you up to learning from others and makes them feel respected and appreciated. Try to truly listen, without interruption or crosstalk.
- **Note any common ground as well as any differences.** Look for areas of agreement or shared values that may arise and take an interest in the differing beliefs and opinions of others.
- **Be authentic and welcome that from others.** Share what's important to you. Speak from your experience. Be considerate of others who are doing the same.
- **Be purposeful and to the point.** Do your best to keep your comments concise and relevant to the question you are answering. Be conscious of sharing airtime with other participants.
- **Own and guide the conversation.** Take responsibility for the quality of your participation and the conversation as a whole. Be proactive in getting yourself and others back on track if needed. Use an agreed upon signal like the "time out" sign if you feel the agreements are not being honored.

III. Question Rounds: What We'll Talk About

Optional: a participant can keep track of time and gently let people know when their time has elapsed.

Round One: Getting to Know Each Other (~10 min)

Each participant can take 1-2 minutes to answer one of these questions:

- What are your hopes and concerns for your family, community and/or the country?
- What would your best friend say about who you are?
- What sense of purpose / mission / duty guides you in your life?

Round Two: Exploring the Topic -- Communicating with Care (~40 min)

One participant can volunteer to read this paragraph.

We may want to communicate with others in such a way that we gain knowledge and bridge divides, but those conversations don't always come naturally. Most of us struggle to self-evaluate our communication skills and we might be unaware of words and actions that shut down healthy dialogue when discussing divisive issues. In this conversation we will actively share and explore what works and what doesn't, and we will reflect on ways that we can improve our interactions with others.

Take ~2 minutes each to answer a question below without interruption or crosstalk. After everyone has answered, the group may take a few minutes for clarifying or follow up questions/responses. Continue exploring additional questions as time allows.

- What concerns, if any, do you have about engaging in—what are typically considered—difficult conversations (i.e. race, politics, religion, etc.)?
- In your experience, what words or actions have you or others used that:
 - made you feel heard and/or bridged a divide?
 - made you feel dismissed and/or shut down communication?
- How much grace (or courteous goodwill) are you willing to extend in communicating with others?

Round Three: Reflecting on the Conversation (~15 min)

Take 2 minutes to answer one of the following questions:

- What was most meaningful / valuable to you in this Living Room Conversation?
- What learning, new understanding or common ground was found on the topic?
- How has this conversation changed your perception of anyone in this group, including yourself?
- Is there a next step you would like to take based upon the conversation you just had?

Closing (~5 min)

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Thank you!

Conversation Guide: Empathy

Living Room Conversations offers a simple, sociable and structured way to practice communicating across differences while building understanding and relationships. Typically, 4-6 people meet in person or by video call for about 90 minutes to listen to and be heard by others on one of our nearly 100 [topics](#). Rather than debating or convincing others, we take turns talking to share, learn, and be curious. No preparation is required, though background links with balanced views are available on some topic pages online. Anyone can host using these italicized instructions. [Hosts also participate](#).

I. Introductions: Why We're Here (~10 minutes)

Each participant has 1 minute to introduce themselves.

- Share your name, where you live, what drew you here, and if this is your first conversation.

II. Conversation Agreements: How We'll Engage (~5 minutes)

These will set the tone of our conversation; participants may volunteer to take turns reading them aloud.

- **Be curious and listen to understand.** Conversation is as much about listening as it is about talking. You might enjoy exploring how others' experiences have shaped their values and perspectives.
- **Show respect and suspend judgment.** People tend to judge one another. Setting judgement aside opens you up to learning from others and makes them feel respected and appreciated. Try to truly listen, without interruption or crosstalk.
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III. Question Rounds: What We'll Talk About

Optional: a participant can keep track of time and gently let people know when their time has elapsed.

Round One: Getting to Know Each Other (~10 min)

Each participant can take 1-2 minutes to answer one of these questions:

- What are your hopes and concerns for your family, community and/or the country?
- What would your best friend say about who you are?
- What sense of purpose / mission / duty guides you in your life?

Round Two: Exploring the Topic -- Empathy (~40 min)

One participant can volunteer to read this paragraph.

Empathy goes beyond concern or sympathy. Empathy is stepping into the shoes of another with the intention to better understand and feel what they are experiencing. It is expressed in our choice to be fully present with someone and listen beyond their words for their feelings and unmet needs. Knowing that at least one other person “gets what I’m going through” is the gift of empathy. The power of empathy can bridge our “us vs. them” perceptions and lead to new solutions, improved relationships, better strategies for social change, reduction in loneliness, and realization of our shared human needs and oneness. This conversation is about sharing experiences giving, receiving, and observing empathy.

Take ~2 minutes each to answer a question below without interruption or crosstalk. After everyone has answered, the group may take a few minutes for clarifying or follow up questions/responses. Continue exploring additional questions as time allows.

- How do you feel when someone else truly understands what you are going through?
- How have you been able to tell that someone understands what you have experienced or felt?
- What helps you understand what someone else is experiencing or feeling? What gets in your way?
- How do you stay fully present and attentive when deeply listening to someone?
- In what ways has empathy for another person prompted you to take action? Explain.

Round Three: Reflecting on the Conversation (~15 min)

Take 2 minutes to answer one of the following questions:

- What was most meaningful / valuable to you in this Living Room Conversation?
- What learning, new understanding or common ground was found on the topic?
- How has this conversation changed your perception of anyone in this group, including yourself?
- Is there a next step you would like to take based upon the conversation you just had?

Closing (~5 min)

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Thank you!

Conversation Guide: Weave the Social Fabric

Living Room Conversations offers a simple, sociable and structured way to practice communicating across differences while building understanding and relationships. Typically, 4-7 people meet in person or by video call for about 90 minutes to listen to and be heard by others on one of our nearly 100 [topics](#). Rather than debating or convincing others, we take turns talking to share and learn. No preparation is required, though background links with balanced views are available on some topic pages online. *Anyone can host using these italicized instructions. Hosts also participate. Some hosts may offer a Q & A after Closing.*

I. Introductions: Why We're Here (~10 minutes)

Each participant has 1 minute to introduce themselves.

- Share your name, where you live, what drew you here, and if this is your first conversation.

II. Conversation Agreements: How We'll Engage (~5 minutes)

These will set the tone of our conversation; participants may volunteer to take turns reading them aloud.

- **Be curious and listen to understand.** Conversation is as much about listening as it is about talking. You might enjoy exploring how others' experiences have shaped their values and perspectives.
- **Show respect and suspend judgment.** People tend to judge one another. Setting judgement aside opens you up to learning from others and makes them feel respected and appreciated. Try to truly listen, without interruption or crosstalk.
- **Note any common ground as well as any differences.** Look for areas of agreement or shared values that may arise and take an interest in the differing beliefs and opinions of others.
- **Be authentic and welcome that from others.** Share what's important to you. Speak from your experience. Be considerate of others who are doing the same.
- **Be purposeful and to the point.** Do your best to keep your comments concise and relevant to the question you are answering. Be conscious of sharing airtime with other participants.
- **Own and guide the conversation.** Take responsibility for the quality of your participation and the conversation as a whole. Be proactive in getting yourself and others back on track if needed. Use an agreed upon signal like the "time out" sign if you feel the agreements are not being honored.

III. Question Rounds: What We'll Talk About

Optional: a participant can keep track of time and gently let people know when their time has elapsed.

Round One: Getting to Know Each Other (~10 min)

Each participant can take 1-2 minutes to answer the following question:

- What does community mean to you?

Round Two: Exploring the Topic -- Weaving a Strong Social Fabric (~40 min)

One participant can volunteer to read this paragraph.

Many people sense that something is broken in society. Surveys show about half of young adult Americans are lonely. Opioid addiction, suicide, gun violence, ethnic tension and depression have been rising. We face rapid change from a globalized economy, cell phones and social media, job-hopping, online dating, immigration, and uncertainty about our future health and wealth. Our social fabric seems to be shredding. Others observe that the social fabric of our communities and nation was never really woven to include everyone in the first place. Yet, there have been many times as a country when people looked past their surface differences and came together as neighbors to support each other.

We've come together today to get to know each other, share our experience of isolation and connection, and consider how we might work together to build connections that allow us to feel recognized, respected and valued. Living Room Conversations has partnered with the Aspen Institute's Weave Project and others to hold discussions across the country. Our aim is to explore what might be behind today's rising sense of isolation, loneliness and distrust and what each of us can do to weave a strong social fabric.

Take ~2 minutes each to answer a question below without interruption or crosstalk. The group may choose to have everyone answer: A) whichever question speaks to them individually or B) the same question with an option to pass. Once everyone has answered, the group may take a few minutes for any clarifying or follow up questions/responses. Continue exploring with other topic or related questions as time allows.

- Is it easy or hard for you to connect with others who were raised differently, or live and think differently than you? What have you seen getting in the way of that from happening?
- Are there people in your community you feel close to? What makes you feel close?
- Describe a time, if ever, when you saw your neighborhood come together to have fun or face a common challenge.
- What do you think could be done to help bring your community together?
- What connection, if any, do you see between what is happening in our nation and what is happening in our neighborhoods or communities?

Round Three: Reflecting on the Conversation (~15 min)

Take 2 minutes to answer one of the following questions:

- What was most meaningful / valuable to you in this Living Room Conversation?
- What learning, new understanding or common ground was found on the topic?
- Is there one change you will make in your life because of our discussion?

Closing (~5 min)

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Thank you!

Conversation Guide: Social Identity

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Introductions: Why We're Here (~10 minutes)

Each participant has 1 minute to introduce themselves.

- Share your name, where you live, what drew you here, and if this is your first conversation.

Conversation Agreements: How We'll Engage (~5 minutes)

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- **Be curious and listen to understand.** Conversation is as much about listening as it is about talking. You might enjoy exploring how others' experiences have shaped their values and perspectives.
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Question Rounds: What We'll Talk About

Optional: a participant can keep track of time and gently let people know when their time has elapsed.

Round One: Getting to Know Each Other (~10 min)

Each participant can take 1-2 minutes to answer one of these questions:

- What are your hopes and concerns for your family, community and/or the country?
- What would your best friend say about who you are?
- What sense of purpose / mission / duty guides you in your life?

Round Two: Exploring the Topic -- Social Identity (~40 min)

One participant can volunteer to read this paragraph.

Social identity refers to the part of self-concept you get from belonging to different social groups and can be used to explain intergroup behavior. We feel unique and complex as individuals, yet our group, social identities often lead to comparison, judgment, and avoidance of other groups. Apparent or assumed differences can be emphasized and overemphasized creating barriers to understanding and relationship with other perceived groups. This conversation is designed to explore our own social identities and the ways belonging to specific groups can influence interaction between people and affect divides in our society.

Take ~2 minutes each to answer a question below without interruption or crosstalk. After everyone has answered, the group may take a few minutes for clarifying or follow up questions/responses. Continue exploring additional questions as time allows.

- Which groups form your social identity? Which do you identify most with?
- Which groups have you joined by choice and to what groups you are ascribed by other people or society at large? How does this impact your self-concept?
- When have you benefited from belonging to a certain social group? When has it been a challenge for you?
- How does comparison of the groups that form your social identity with other groups help you feel more positive or negative about yourself?
- Which groups do you find yourself making assumptions or judgments about? Why do you think that is? Which groups do you wish you could understand more?

Round Three: Reflecting on the Conversation (~15 min)

Take 2 minutes to answer one of the following questions:

- What was most meaningful / valuable to you in this Living Room Conversation?
- What learning, new understanding or common ground was found on the topic?
- How has this conversation changed your perception of anyone in this group, including yourself?
- Is there a next step you would like to take based upon the conversation you just had?

Closing (~5 min)

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Thank you!

LivingRoom Conversations



**FREE
CONSULTATION
CALL!**

Email:

annie@livingroomconversations.org
to schedule yours

Mention CSL Conversation Kits

Planning a Community Living Room Conversation

Living Room Conversations (LRC) Guides are easy-to-use, self-contained and facilitator-free. All you really need are copies of the Conversation Guide for each person and a place for people to gather. Even so, when we're beginning a new journey, it's sometimes helpful to have a map created by those who have made the trip. The steps below are suggestions that may be helpful...and here's a [check-off list](#) to keep track of your progress. We'd love to hear what works best for you.

There are two models for getting started in a community: a small group of 4-6 people or a conference-style approach that gathers a larger number of people for multiple simultaneous small group conversations at tables or in sitting room areas.

The conference-style approach offers an opportunity to introduce a larger number of people to the Living Room Conversations practice. It requires a bit more preparation than the small group model but can give a jumpstart to shift the way people in a community relate to each other. Having Living Room Conversations as part of an event with another focus can also be a great way to introduce people to the practice. The conference or event approach can be an ongoing way to support conversations in the community and to encourage in depth conversation about an issue that the community is exploring. It can also encourage people to invite folks into their homes for a smaller gathering.

Gather the team

- The conference-style model works best when a team begins it. Gather 4-6 people, preferably people who represent diverse perspectives on the topics you'd like to explore.
- Have a Living Room Conversation with the team, if they haven't had an opportunity to participate in one. Having the experience will help you speak with confidence and credibility as you begin to invite people. You can also check out our [Events calendar](#) to participate in host trainings via Zoom. If you don't have a specific topic you'd like to explore, [Righteousness or Relationship](#) or topics shown [here](#) are good options to start.
- Identify your purpose for exploring Living Room Conversations. Do you want to increase community ability to communicate in general or is there a specific issue that needs conversation?
- Explore the topics available on the website. Living Room Conversations has over 60 topic-specific conversation guides developed, ready-made for great conversations. If there's something you'd like to work on that's not there, check out Create Your Own Topic on [the website](#). You can also let us know, and we'll help you with the design of a conversation.

Set the goal

- Select a date. Depending on the size of the group, give yourself three to six weeks lead-time to allow for communication and publicity.
- Select a time. Two hours will usually give you plenty of time to do a brief introduction and review of the conversation agreements, have a conversation with space that allows people to go as deep as they would like, and have a group checkout at the end of the conversations. Better to end a bit early than to feel pressure to rush through the conversation. You may discover that people wish they had more time for the conversation. They may linger following the event. These signs of engagement are indicators of success!
- Check in with community leadership to avoid scheduling conflicts.
- Find and reserve space, tables/chairs and any sound equipment you might need. Tables are optional unless you plan to serve a meal.
- Decide on a [topic](#).
- Consider agreements about team roles and responsibilities: program leaders, communications, materials, refreshments, greeters.

Spread the word

- Prepare written and verbal publicity about the Living Room Conversations event. Templates that you can adapt to your community's style are available...[just ask us](#). Remember to post on your social media.
- If announcements are acceptable practice in your community, begin those four weeks before the event.
- Encourage sign-up sheets and online reservations if that's your community practice, but also welcome walk-ins unless space is an issue.
- Talk with community leaders about ways they may be able to help communicate about the Living Room Conversation. Sample sermons are on the Faith Communities [webpage](#).

Gather supplies and tools

- Make copies of the Conversation Guide for more participants than you expect. If you decide to have a choice of topics for participants, make enough copies of each for all participants. Links to print-ready PDFs are available in the [topics](#) descriptions on the website. Please print the feedback forms that are included in the PDF. You can also provide participants with a [link](#) to the online Feedback Form.

- Gather name badges, markers and pens. Create sign-in sheets for names and contact information. Make signs if needed to direct people to the appropriate area.
- Develop a way to post suggested timing for each round (shown below) where everyone can see it: wall-chart, projection or whatever would work best for your environment.
- Put the keywords of the conversation agreements, e.g., *Be curious and open to learning*, on a chart pad and easel or on a projected on a screen so that they can serve as reminders during the conversation.
- Set up groups with no more than five chairs but have additional chairs close at hand. This leaves room in active conversations for latecomers and assists in putting folks who arrive together into separate groups.
- Plan for refreshments—at least a beverage. Conversation is always better when we break bread. Consider having some non-noisy snacks or a simple meal during the conversation.

Last minute preparation

- Check your cheat sheet to make sure you have all the supplies and tools.
- Team meeting to review responsibilities: Conversation introduction and instructions, greeters, refreshment hosts, timekeeper, clean-up, etc.
- Have name badges, markers, sign-in sheets for name and contact information and pens available at a table near the entrance.
- Review *Unpacking the Conversation Agreements* on the Faith Communities [page](#) for suggestions about introducing them to participants.

Welcome participants

- Greet people and steer them to the sign-in table as well as to refreshments.
- Encourage people who arrive together to sit at different tables. They will have more fun!
- Help people find the group which would give them the richest experience. If you have topic choices, have people indicate which they would prefer and separate the groups. If the topic is an issue for which there are strong positional poles, ask people to divide into sides, then count off to distribute evenly among the groups. If positions aren't as visible, have them count off to separate friends and partners so they can have conversation with people who they may know less well.
- Begin on time, and assign a team member to watch for and greet latecomers.

The Conversation

- Two team members—preferably of different views—introduce the event. Remind participants that our purpose is to build understanding, not to debate who’s right and who’s wrong. Introduce the conversation agreements.
- If possible, invite volunteers to read the Conversation Agreements—one agreement per person. Unpack the Agreements to help build mutual expectations. Remind everyone that there is no facilitator, that every small group is responsible for owning and guiding their own conversation.
- Encourage people to hold what others say in confidence. This promotes a sense of safe space and supports deeper sharing.
- Suggest that groups use a round-robin approach to conversation rather than as people feel moved to speak. There are three rounds of questions. One person starts the first round of questions by reading the questions, then answering. The person sitting next to the first speaker goes next and so on around the table. The second person begins the second round, and so on until the three rounds are completed. When people know that their turn to speak will come, they are less likely to jump in with cross-talk and are more likely to listen to others rather than formulate their response. This approach also reduces the possibility of debate emerging, so the conversation is easier for the group to manage without facilitator assistance.
- Suggest that people make note of their thoughts when the temptation to cross-talk arises. This serves to give a feeling of expressing the thoughts and also as a reminder that their turn will come.
- Some groups find it helpful to have a few moments of open conversation at the end of each round. This gives an opportunity for people to respond to what they’ve heard and to ask clarifying questions.
- Team members should participate in a group. Join groups that need an extra person or that you anticipate may need more assistance in self-management than others. It may help to mention that you are there as a participant, not as a facilitator.
- Some groups like having a schedule posted to help them manage their time. Some groups like having someone monitor the time. Remind people that these minutes should be shared evenly.
 - Round 1 - 10 minutes
 - Round 2 - 50 minutes
 - Round 5 - 10 minutes
- Timekeeper gives a ten-minute warning 30 minutes before the advertised stop time. Stop the conversations 20 minutes before the stop time and ask participants to complete the

feedback forms. Instead of using the paper form, participants can give feedback online at <https://www.livingroomconversations.org/feedback-form/>

- Point out that checking the **Yes!** square at the bottom of the feedback form is the only way for Living Room Conversations to send a weekly email to let folks know what's happening.
- After feedback forms are completed, two team members lead the large group in a feedback discussion. How was this for you? Would you like to do this again? What suggestions do you have?
- Thank folks for participating and invite them to find someone with whom they respectfully disagree to co-host a Living Room Conversation in their home or via computer video. If another large group event is planned, encourage folks to come back for another conversation and to invite friends to join them.
- Take a group picture, collect all the feedback forms as people leave, and take a deep breath.

After the event

- Review the feedback, make note of suggestions for improvement, and send copies of the feedback forms to the address on the form. Scanning is great if you have that capacity. Email the group picture if you have group permission. And please—tell us the story of your conversation experience.
- Start planning the next event. Consider making this a regular recurring event so that people know that it is ongoing and the circle of participants can expand.

SAMPLE COMMUNICATIONS PLAN			
DATE	ACTION	NOTES	PERSON IN CHARGE OF TASK
3 months-1 year prior	Initial planning, Organize event committee, Reserve location space		
2-3 months prior	Reach out to potential partners		
1-2 months prior	Send out save the dates to any VIPS		
6-8 weeks prior	Send press release to local media		
1 month prior	Hang flyers in public spaces		
2 weeks prior	Post on social media		
1 week out	Send reminders		
Day before	Final Reminder		
At the event	Take Photos, Feedback Form		

Take responsibility for the quality of your participation and the conversation as a whole. Be proactive in getting yourself and others back on track if needed. Use an agreed upon signal like the "time out" sign if you feel the agreements are not being honored.

Own and guide the conversation.

Do your best to keep your comments concise and relevant to the question you are answering. Be conscious of sharing airtime with other participants.

Be purposeful and to the point.

Share what's important to you. Speak from your experience. Be considerate of others who are doing the same.

Be authentic and welcome that from others.

Look for areas of agreement or shared values that may arise and take an interest in the differing beliefs and opinions of others.

Note any common ground as well as any differences.

People tend to judge one another. Setting judgement aside opens you up to learning from others and makes them feel respected and appreciated. Try to truly listen, without interruption or crosstalk.

Show respect and suspend judgment.

Conversation is as much about listening as it is about talking. You might enjoy exploring how others' experiences have shaped their values and perspectives.

Be curious and listen to understand.

Conversation Agreements

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Unpacking the Conversation Agreements

Sometimes it's helpful to unpack the conversation agreements, so that people can...

Be curious and open to learning.

Conversation is as much about listening as it is about talking. Listen and be open to hearing all points of view. Maintain an attitude of exploration and learning.

- Our purpose is not to reach consensus, convert someone to our own ways of thinking or believing, or win a debate.
- Marvel at all the different ways of looking at the issue.
- When we hear a perspective that is different from our own, we often want to respond with our own perspective. Your time to speak will come, so do your best to simply listen and wonder...perhaps imagine you're traveling in a strange land. "I wonder how they came to that understanding" is powerful self-talk that opens our curiosity.

Show respect and suspend judgment.

Human beings tend to judge one another; do your best not to. Setting judgments aside opens you up to learning from others and makes them feel respected and appreciated.

- It's helpful to describe what respectful listening looks like. Most of us are familiar with the need not to interrupt. Cross-talk is also a temptation. When someone says something that interests us, we sometimes feel the urge to say something like, "Yes! That's happened to me...." and begin a dialogue with the speaker. If we do that, it limits the other person's ability to speak. When you get that urge to jump in, try writing your comment down on your topic guide so that you can mention it when it's your turn to talk.
- You probably don't need this reminder, but some folks do...so, when it's your turn to speak, avoid cursing, yelling, blaming and other kinds of attack.
- Be aware of your own body language. Eye-rolling, head-shaking and snorting are not helpful.
- Judging is hard-wired in our brains. In less than a second after we meet people, we assess who they are, what they value and believe, and what we can expect from them. This built-in ability is critical to safety in some situations. If a lion pops out from behind a rock right in front of us, we need to recognize it instantly and take appropriate action, not hang around to wonder if the animal is a pet seeking a new home. There are no lions here. Really. Our instinctive judging capacity gets in the way of taking in new information, because it leads us to believe that we already know all we need to know about a person and that belief keeps us

from wondering and listening deeply. Just be aware of your judgment and put it to the side while you listen.

Find common ground and note differences.

Look for a common ground you can agree on and note the differences in the beliefs and opinions of others.

- If there is disagreement, actively listen for ways you agree with the person speaking.
- Curiosity really helps us to objectively identify differences in beliefs and opinions.

Be authentic and welcome that from others.

Share what's important to you. Speak authentically from your personal experience. Be considerate of others who are doing the same.

- Tell your story to the degree that it's comfortable for you. Think about how you have experienced the issue at hand.
- Each response or story is a gift of trust. Receive it in a trustworthy way.

Be purposeful and to the point.

Notice if what you are conveying is or is not pertinent to the topic at hand. Be cognizant of making the same point more than once.

- We all get distracted from our original point from time to time. Keep the question you're answering in front of you and try to avoid going down rabbit holes or circling around to say something in a different way.
- Remember that our purpose is to share and learn, not to convince or change others.

Own and guide the conversation.

Take responsibility for the quality of your participation and that of the conversation. Be proactive in getting yourself and others back on track if needed.

- Ownership doesn't simply give you permission to help each other out. Each participant has responsibility for the quality of the conversation. The agreements and the guide are the facilitator. Each group is in charge of their own conversation, and each person has the responsibility to monitor and direct what's happening.
- You may be tempted to abandon the topic guide and have free-floating conversation. That's the group's choice, but the result of that decision means more work for you—to make sure everyone gets equal airtime, to ensure that no

one's agenda takes over, to avoid the kind of messiness that happens when the debate-oriented relative comes to dinner.

- This conversation method is structured to help us practice listening—not talking. If you're strongly tempted to have free-floating conversation, consider how that's working for you in the rest of your life.
- Many groups decide to have a few minutes of open conversation, asking if anyone has clarifying questions or comments, at the end of each round. Knowing there will be a time for that helps people listen during the rounds.
- The topic guide will hold the process, and you'll have more fun if you follow it.

