



CIVIL DISCOURSE FACILITATOR GUIDEBOOK

**A guide to bringing people together for
civil discussions on issues that matter**

Prepared by the League of Women Voters of Orange Coast (CA)

Revive Civility > Our Democracy Depends On It



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INTRODUCTION

Welcome to training on facilitating civil conversations.

We know there's an uneasy feeling that things are broken in our country; disrespect is on the rise and we're tearing each other apart. A large number of Americans have a feeling of dislike, distrust, and even contempt for many of their fellow Americans. This is largely because they hold different political views. The Pew Research Center surveyed voters in 2017; their report of the results is entitled "The Partisan Divide on Political Values. They state: "The divisions between Republicans and Democrats on fundamental political values – on government, race, immigration, national security, environmental protection and other areas – reached record levels during Barack Obama's presidency. In Donald Trump's first year as president, these gaps have grown even larger."

We also know that many want to do something about this and are seeking to come together around things that unite us rather than things that divide us. The good news is this can be achieved by connecting around some of our common values of freedom, liberty, fairness, equality, safety, family, faith and opportunity.

We thank you for wanting to participate in the effort to revive civil discourse and respect in your community. One way to do this is to facilitate conversations that focus on listening with respect to others who may hold different views. Keep in mind that learning how to be a skilled facilitator is similar to learning how to be a skilled athlete. You can quickly learn the process and rules of the game and begin to play; but to play well you need practice. This training is just the beginning.

Definition of Civil Discourse

"Civil discourse is the free and respectful exchange of different ideas. It entails questioning and disputing, but doing so in a way that respects and affirms all persons, even while critiquing their arguments." (Source: *National Institute for Civil Discourse*)

Types of Civil Discourse

There are two main types of public civil discourse:

- The decision making/deliberative dialogue model: This is a more formal discussion on a specific topic. There is much research and preparation for this discussion; materials provide information and options that the participants will discuss. In this model the participants weigh the benefits and trade-offs of different options/courses of action. A decision is made and potential actions are discussed.
- The structured conversation/conversation café model: This is a less formal conversation on a specific topic. Usually specific questions are provided to guide the discussion. In this model there is no decision made or actions planned. The focus is on listening to others and sharing your views in a positive manner. This facilitator training is for this type of civil discourse

GUIDELINES FOR A CIVIL DISCUSSION

It is important to begin any civil discussion with guidelines as to how each participant should participate. You should remind the participants that the goal of the conversation is not to convince or persuade others of their position, but to share their views and better understand differing opinions. Conversation is as much about active listening as it is about talking. The facilitator (or event host) presents the guidelines and the groups discuss and agree to them. The participants can also suggest additional rules to include. Here are the guidelines we will use:

Respectful Participation:

- All opinions are welcome and encouraged
- One voice at a time (no interruptions)
- Be present
- Share the floor / Keep comments brief
- What is shared during the conversation stays in the room

Active Listening:

- Be open to learning. Be curious
 - Ask clarifying questions
 - Use “I” statements (share personal experiences and viewpoints)
 - No name calling, arguing, or being dismissive
 - Assume best intentions
 - Agree to disagree
- (Source: *NICD: Revive Civility*)

For your own education, here are the guidelines from another organization:

- Be curious and open to learning
 - Conversation is as much about active listening as it is about talking. Enjoy hearing all points of view. Seek to understand rather than persuade.
- Show respect and suspend judgment
 - Human beings tend to judge one another; do your best not to. Setting judgments aside opens you to learning from others and makes them feel respected and appreciated.
- Find common ground and note differences
 - Look for a common ground you can agree on; take an interest in the differing beliefs and opinions of others. Question assumptions and look for new insights.
- 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.
- Be purposeful and to the point
 - Notice if what you are conveying is or is not pertinent to the topic at hand. Go for honesty and depth but don’t go on and on.
- Own and guide the conversations
 - Take responsibility for the quality of your participation and that of the conversations. Be proactive in getting yourself and others back on track if needed.

(Source: *Living Room Conversations*)

ROLE AND RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE FACILITATOR

The overall role of the facilitator is to make sure that the conversation goes smoothly and that everyone has an opportunity to speak. . Usually the facilitator does NOT participate in the conversation and voice his or her opinions or experiences. However, the facilitator may ask additional questions to deepen the conversation or handle potential conflicts. If there is no note-taker, then the facilitator may also capture key points made.

Overview of Facilitation Tasks

| Step | Stage | What happens |
|------|-----------------------------|---|
| 1 | Welcome | Facilitator (or host) introduces the program. |
| 2 | Guidelines | Facilitator (or host) presents the guidelines. At each table, everyone discusses and agrees to the guidelines; additional rules may be added. |
| 3 | Introductions | Facilitator asks participants state their name, city, (optional: occupation) and share a brief, personal experience related to the issue [or why this topic is of interest to them]. |
| 4 | Discussion of Key Questions | Facilitator ask the questions (one at a time) provided on the topic and calls on participants to answer. Facilitator may ask additional questions to clarify a point, deepen the conversation, or handle a potential conflict. Note: The Facilitator, or another person, takes notes of key points made during this conversation. |
| 5 | Summary | Notes of key points are read. Facilitator leads a group discussion to select points (usually 3) to be shared with the larger group. The facilitator, or a participant, shares the group's key points with the larger group (if there is one). |
| 6 | Reflection & Closure | Facilitator asks each participant to reflect on this conversation and to briefly tell the group what they got out of this civil conversation. Facilitator thanks all participants and encourages them to continue participating in civil conversations on issues that matter. |

Basic Facilitation Principles

- Do not take on an “expert” role with the subject matter.
- Keep the deliberation focused on the topic.
- Listen for values that motivate participants’ comments.
- Intervene as necessary.
- Ask clarifying questions if necessary.
- Encourage everyone to join in the conversation.
- Ask thoughtful and probing questions to surface costs & consequences.
- Help participants find common ground.
- Encourage deeper reflection.

Key Facilitator Skills

| | |
|---------------------------------------|--|
| Reflecting & Clarifying | Feeding back or restating an idea or thought to make it clearer. “Let me see if I’m hearing you correctly. . .” |
| Summarizing | Briefly stating the main thoughts. “It sounds to me as if we have a few major themes.” |
| Shifting Focus | Moving from one speaker or topic to another. |
| Asking Probing or Follow-up Questions | Using questions to help people explore disagreements, understand multiple perspectives & uncover common ground. “What are the key points here? What would someone with a different point of view say?” |
| Managing Conflict | Helping conflict & disagreement be productive. “Let’s refer to our ground rules.” “What do others think?” |
| Using Silence | Allowing time & space for reflection by pausing between comments. |
| Non-Verbal Signals | Recognizing & understanding how people communicate without words. |

ROLE AND RESPONSIBILITIES OF NOTE TAKER

The note taker can be one specific person at a table or the facilitator. Or alternately, all participants can take notes on paper, placements, or a paper tablecloth.

The purpose of taking notes is to:

- Remind participants of their comments and key points of agreement and difference.
- Help establish that what the participants say is valued and being listened to.
- Support the importance of equality and inclusion.
- Share key points with the larger group.

STEP-BY-STEP INSTRUCTIONS

Set-Up Instructions

- Greet participants as they arrive; make them feel welcome.
- Provide tables for 4-8 participants (preferably round), plus the facilitator. Don't have more than 8 participants.
- Have a sheet (or flip chart and markers) at each table on which to capture key points; if possible, have another person take notes.
- If there is a speaker, any media requirements must be set up (e.g. screen, projector, microphone).

Host: Opening the Conversation

- The host will welcome the participants and explain the overall agenda and process.
- The host will very briefly explain the topic for the event.
- If there is a speaker, the host introduces the speaker. The speaker should take no more than 30 minutes, including questions.
- Optional: The host can go over the guidelines; but each table should review them and possibly add to them.

(Timing: 5 minutes + 30 minutes for speaker)

Facilitator: Leading the Conversation

Reminder: Keep track of the time; avoid going over the allotted time for each part.

| # | Step | Time | Instructions |
|-------------------|-------------|------------|---|
| 1 - Welcome | Say | | <i>"Thank you for coming today. We're going to talk about the important elements of civility and respect, and how we can hold civil conversations with people who think differently than we do."</i> Note: If you are using these instructions for a conversation on another topic, make the appropriate changes in what you say. |
| 2 - Introductions | Say | | <i>"We'll begin with introductions. Take about 20 seconds to introduce yourself. State your name, where you live, [optional: occupation] and why this topic interests you - and how has it affected you personally."</i> |
| | Demonstrate | 20 seconds | Introduce yourself, modeling the 20 second intro. |
| | Group | 3 minutes | Have each participant introduce himself/herself, while gently but firmly keeping to the time limit. |

| # | Step | Time | Instructions |
|------------------------------|------------|-----------|--|
| 3 –Guidelines & Ground Rules | Say | 2 minutes | <p><i>“Next, let’s talk about guidelines. What questions do you have about them? Do you agree to follow them?”</i></p> <p>Note: If the host has not reviewed the guidelines, then you do this. See list on page 4]</p> <p><i>Are there any additional ground rules you would add today?” [You may suggest some; see list on page 4]</i></p> |
| | Write Down | | Write down any changes or additions from the group. |
| 4- Civility | Say | 1 minute | <p><i>“Before we talk about civility, let’s define it! Here is one definition: Civility is showing mutual respect. When practicing civility, you don’t have to agree; but when you do disagree you are doing so without behavior or words that are intentionally hurtful or disrespectful.”</i></p> |
| | Say | | <i>What does civility mean to you? What does it look like within your organization, community, or family?”</i> |
| | Group | 5 minutes | Have each participant answer. |
| 5 – Discussion Question (1) | Say | 1 minute | <p><i>“We are now going to use our civil discourse skills to discuss two (or three) questions. We will take 20 minutes [adjust if necessary] for each question. Each person should speak at least once.”</i></p> <p>Note: If there is a note-taker, ask that person to jot down key points heard; if there is no note-taker, tell the group that you will be taking notes. Or ask each person to take notes. Especially write down if someone says something that they want to later discuss.</p> <p><i>“The Topic for today’s discussion is [state topic].</i></p> <p><i>“The question is: [state question]”</i></p> |
| | Say | 1 minute | <p><i>In Round 1 you will share your answer(s) to this question. Explain why you feel that way. Share any personal experiences that support your view.</i></p> <p><i>In Round 2 – you will respond to what others have said demonstrating your civil discourse skills.</i></p> |
| | Group | 8 minutes | Round 1 (about 1 minute per person): Each person answers the question. Make sure he or she is not interrupted. But watch the time. |

| # | Step | Time | Instructions |
|----------------------------------|-------------------------------|--------------------|--|
| | Group | 8 minutes | <p>Round 2 (about 1 minute per person): Participants respond to what others have said – demonstrating civil discourse skills. If they don't have questions, you ask a question. See list of questions on pages 11-12.</p> <p>Note: If you have a like minded group, then ask a question that reflects a contrasting view. For example: "What would you say to a person who believes.....? Or "What might someone of a different view say about this" Or call on a participant to act as a devil's advocate and take on the opposing view.</p> |
| | Say & Group Write Down | 2 minutes | <p><i>"What are some key points from this discussion that we want to share later with the entire group?"</i></p> <p>Write those down; discuss if needed</p> |
| 6- Discussion Question 2 | | 20 minutes | <p>Repeat step 5</p> <p>Note: If overtime, reduce discussion to 10-15 minutes – or eliminate the 3rd question.</p> |
| 7- Discussion Question 3 | | 20 minutes | Repeat Step 5 (omit if only 2 discussion questions) |
| 8 - Summary | Group | 3 minutes | <p>Discuss the key points noted for each question. Select the top 3 for each question to share with the larger, entire group.</p> <p>Note: If time is limited, or there is no larger group, then just note the group's key points.</p> <p>Select a person to share those key points to the larger group [if applicable].</p> |
| 9- Closure/ Reflection | Say | | <i>Very briefly (in one or two sentences) share what was most meaningful/valuable to you in this civil conversation experience. Has it changed any of your views?</i> |
| | Group | 6 minutes | Each person quickly reflects and shares about the impact of this event on them. |
| | | | Note: If there is no Host, then complete Host tasks listed below. |
| 10- Presentation to Entire Group | Individual | 1 minute per table | The selected person shares the table group's key points [if applicable]. |

(Timing: 80 minutes)

Host: Closing the Conversation

- Call on each table to present their key points.**
- Make some closing remarks and **thank** all the participants and facilitators for participating in this example of Civil Discourse. If there were sponsors, be sure and thank them.
- **Say:** Please fill out the feedback form to help us improve these civil discourse events.
- Optional: Remind everyone of upcoming events or materials available on a table.
- Optional: Encourage the use of the resources listed in their handout (if applicable).
- Optional: Tell them who or how to contact if they would like to have a similar event for another group.

(Timing: 10 minutes)

****Alternative Ideas**

- You could collect the sheets with the key points from each table and post them on a wall; participants can read as they leave.
- You could put all the key points into a handout and email to the participants afterwards.

TOTAL ESTIMATED TIME: 90 MINUTES

SAMPLE QUESTIONS TO ASK

Questions to stimulate discussion

- Tell me more about ...
- This is what I heard you say ... is it what you meant?
- Could you share a story to illustrate that point?
- How does this topic effect your life? How does it affect the people, places, and ideas that are most important to you?
- What happened that led you to this point of view?
- How may your ideas affect other people?
- What about this issue bothers you?
- I understand you do not like that view/position, but what do you think people who favor it deeply care about?
- How would someone make a case against this view?
- What is there about this topic/issue that you just cannot accept?
- Can someone suggest areas that we seem to have in common?
- What values might people hold who support this position?
- Would someone identify the values that seem to be clashing?
- Who should we include in this discussion that is not already represented?
- How might people who have other life experiences see this option?

Questions or statements about another point of view

- I'd like to offer another point of view...
- What led you to this point of view?
- I'm curious, can you say more about this?
- I respectfully disagree because...

Questions to deal with participants who dominate the discussion:

- What do others think about this?
- What ideas have not been expressed?
- How would anyone else in the group respond to the concerns just expressed?
- Could someone tell us a story to illustrate that point?
- For those who hold that position, what do they/you care deeply about?

Questions to handle misinformation from a participant:

- Does anyone have a different perspective on that?
- Would you give us an example?

Techniques to deal with a difficult participant:

- Gradually escalate your response.
- Use body language (move close to the person).
- Gradually use more assertive verbal techniques such as interrupting to capture the points stated so far.
- Refer to the guidelines (everyone participates—no one monopolizes the conversation.)
- Redirect the conversation by saying, “Thank you. What do others think about that? Or “Let’s hear from those of you who have been quieter. Someone else?”

RESOURCES

We would like to thank the following resources for the information and support they have provided. We encourage you to further explore these organizations and the resources they provide.

Conversation Café: a hosting manual, videos, training webinar, and a long list of topics and questions

- www.ConversationCafe.org

Living Room Conversations: Discussion guides for many topics, videos, and other resources

- www.livingroomconversations.org

National Institute for Civil Discourse/Revive Civility: Discussion Guides for One on One or Small Group discussions, a “Training and Skills Building Guide”, and additional materials

- www.nicd.arizona.edu
- www.nicd.arizona.edu/revivecivility

National Issues Forum: Resources for facilitating, guidebooks on specific issues, and questions to support discussion and deliberation

- www.nifi.org

Southern Poverty Law Center: “Speak Up Handbook” which contains suggestions on how to handle a wide variety of difficult conversations

- www.splcenter.org

The League of Women Voters: The guidebook “Citizens Building Communities: The ABCs of Public Dialogue”

- <http://forum.lwv.org/member-resources/article/citizens-building-communities-abcs-public-dialogue>

The League of Women Voters of North County San Diego (CA): The “Facilitation Training Handbook”

- www.lwvncsd.org

World Café: Resources for hosting conversations that matter, including the World Café Hosting Toolkit and a book on World Cafe

- www.theworldcafe.com