

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.

