

Conversation Guide: Public Officials and the Community

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 -- Public Officials and the Community (~40 min)

One participant can volunteer to read this paragraph.

Relationships are the foundation of our community, how we treat each other can strengthen or weaken the communities we live in. Public officials, whether elected or appointed, are able to influence their communities in significant ways, but also open themselves to public scrutiny. While significant differences of opinion between the public and its officials can be expected, conflict that becomes destructive or personal can have lasting effects on the community and individuals involved. When that happens, communities risk losing the participation of thoughtful and capable citizens who would otherwise be engaged. This conversation is an opportunity to explore shared values around how we want to treat public officials and what kind of relationship we expect or hope for.

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 "public service"? What does it mean to you?
- Have you or someone you know run for office? What was that like?
- What happens in our community when there is conflict with the public and those in office? Are there ways to engage productively?
- What are appropriate ways to support or oppose candidates running for office or already in office? What would you like to avoid?
- What are your hopes and concerns for the relationship between those in public office and the community? What, if any, are their responsibilities to one another?

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)

- Give us feedback! Use livingroomconversations.org/feedback-form/ or QR code
- Donate! Make more of these possible; give at livingroomconversations.org/donate/
- Join or host more conversations! With a) this group by exchanging your emails; b) others in person and/or by video call online. Get more involved or learn how to host at livingroomconversations.org/get-involved/



Thank you!