Connecting Your Community Through Conversation

Colorado State Library
Living Room Conversations is a recognized leader in the bridge-building movement with expertise in crafting effective and accessible tools for dialogue.

We work extensively with libraries across the country to help them engage their community members in conversation.
We connect people across divides—politics, age, gender, race, nationality, and more—through guided conversations proven to build understanding and transform communities.
Connecting Your Community Through Conversation

**WHY NOW**
- Increased polarization in communities
- Need for connection post-pandemic
- Potential to expand community impact & connect people back to shared humanity

**WHY LRC**
- Dedicated to bridging divides & transforming communities
- Pre-built & easy-to-implement library program
- Engage communities in civil dialogue & build resiliency

**WHY LIBRARIES**
- Most democratic & accessible public institutions
- Neutral ground
- Power to bring people from all walks of life together
- Include marginalized voices
- Community convener
## Resources

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Our Conversation Guides

Our core offering is our library of conversation guides on over 150 topics that are timely and responsive to local needs.

We’ve developed rapid response resources for COVID, political polarization, race & ethnicity, and mental health.
Living Room Conversations Model

- Simple, open source format
- 4-6 people
- 60-90 minutes
- Host participates
- Simple structure with 3 rounds of conversation
- Draws out personal stories
- Build understanding, not debate or change minds
Conversation Format

- Introductions: Why We're Here
- Conversation Agreements: How We'll Engage
- Question Rounds: What We’ll Talk About
  1. Getting to Know Each Other
  2. Topic Questions
  3. Reflecting on the Conversation
- Closing
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 learn 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.
We are…

- Rooted in building trust, connection, and understanding
- Focused on drawing out personal experiences and stories
- Topical and timely
- Inclusive of all kinds of differences, perspectives, and backgrounds

We are Not…

- A platform for debate or persuasion
- A platform for deliberation
- A fact checker or media platform
- Partisan
Proven, effective model

In 2019, we partnered with Fetzer Institute on an 18-month study that found our conversations have immediate and longer term impact both for in-person and video conversations:

- Improved mindset
- Improved listening skills
- Increased interest in systemic issues
- Better understanding of other perspectives
Language gives us the power to change ourselves and others by communicating our experiences, helping us to define what we know and find a common sense of meaning.”

— Bessel van der Kolk

Improves our personal health and well-being

Strengthen and deepen relationships, including with those closest to us

Improves performance and success at school and work

Reduce violence and increase safety

Supports good, effective government

Greater Good Science Center, Berkeley
Libraries are core community leaders and agents of change. Our library community is made up of libraries across the country that are bringing their community members together to connect and participate in civil dialogue with one another.
Community Conversations

**Estes Valley Library**
Partnered with the Estes Valley Restorative Justice Partnership. Collaboration earned them the 2019 Colorado Library Community Partnership Award.

**Boston Public Library**
Conversations on Abortion in response to overturning of Roe v. Wade

**Longmont Public Library**
Series of monthly conversations on *Talking About Race*
Our Library Partners

BOSTON PUBLIC LIBRARY

ESTES VALLEY LIBRARY

EAST HARTFORD Connecticut

Barrington PUBLIC LIBRARY

Where you belong
“The conversations were wonderful!”
- Laurel Cannon, Boston Public Library

“It was inclusive. I felt like part of the community, part of something bigger”
- Estes Valley Library Patron
1. Introductions
   a. Name
   b. Where you live

2. Living Room Conversation Question (Answer 1)
   a. How do you define belonging and how do you experience it? Where do you feel you belong and why?
   b. Thinking of your own experiences, what fosters or inhibits a sense of belonging?
   c. Where do you want to feel a greater sense of belonging, yet haven’t and why?
   d. Which spaces do you make an effort to welcome others and create a sense of belonging?
   e. When you think about belonging, what hopes do you have for your community or your country?
How to Organize & Host Your Own Living Room Conversations
HOSTING A LIVING ROOM CONVERSATION

Three easy steps

1. Choose a topic
2. Choose a location
3. Invite guests
1. Choose a Topic

- What topics are you passionate about?
- What is relevant for your community? What should they be talking about?
- Trending topics from our website:
  - Women, Leadership, and Power
  - Mental Health
  - Race & Ethnicity
- Other conversation offerings and resources:
  - Conversation Pathways
  - Good Questions for Great Gatherings
  - Racial Equity, Coronavirus, and Politics
- We have more than 150 topic guides for you to choose from
2. Choose a Location

● Online
  ○ Which platform will you use?
  ○ Zoom
    ■ Familiarity
    ■ Breakout rooms
    ■ Request a Zoom line
  ○ Kazm
    ■ All-in-one platform
    ■ Conversation Guide embedded
    ■ Built in timer

● In-Person
  ○ What room is most accessible?
  ○ Do you want the location to reflect the topic?
  ○ Will you have refreshments for patrons?
Exploring the Topic

One volunteer can read this paragraph:

Trust is a critical component of building and maintaining healthy families, communities, institutions and countries. This trust is built over time and can be challenged by people with different views or backgrounds as well as events that call into question the intent of our institutions and media. This conversation is designed to encourage reflection on.

Move on?
0 of 5 are ready

Justine
3. Invite Guests

- *What voices and experiences do you need in the room?*
- Be intentional with your outreach and the degree of diversity
  - Diversity of thought, religion, race, culture, gender, sexual orientation and identity, accessibility needs, economic access
- **Partnerships**
  - Local Democrat & Republican groups, spiritual communities, NAACP chapter, Chamber of Commerce, LGBTQIA+ groups, Rotary, Historical Society, League of Women Voters, YWCA & YMCA, local chapter of the National Federation of the Blind, organizations assisting individuals in insecure housing situations, schools
- **Accessibility**
  - Advertise in places that are accessible to many, such as community centers
  - Online marketing materials accessible to those who use adaptive technology software, such as screen readers
Prepare for your conversation

Review the Conversation Guide (with co-host):

- Brief explanation of Living Room Conversations
- Conversation Agreements
- Round 1: Getting to know each other
- Round 2: Exploring the topic
- Round 3: Reflecting on the conversation
- Closing: Ways to connect with us, feedback

Pay particular attention to the blue italicized instructions - these are your hosting instructions and they are in every single conversation guide!
Round 2 Decision Points

- Speaking order vs. speak when you feel ready
- Same question vs. different questions
  - How many questions will you get through? (Plan for 2-3 “go-rounds”)
- Remind everyone to avoid questions and cross talk until everyone has had a chance to answer a question in each round, uninterrupted
- You can invite guests to take notes around new understandings, the different ways we use language, follow up questions. You can also note when you start making assumptions
Helpful Tips

● **Lead out in vulnerability:** You can set the standard with what you’re willing to share

● **Over talkers and cross talkers:** Acknowledge contribution and open it back up to the group

● **Reinforce personal experience:** Invite speaker to reframe statement or attach an experience to sweeping statements or opinions

● **Timing:** Set aside 10 minutes for Round 3 and Closing

● **Your role as a host:** It’s OK to laugh, make mistakes, and show your personality. Be aware of your own contributions and how often you speak
Reminders

● The Conversation Agreements are the Secret Sauce, spend some time with them
● Look at Host Toolkit and think through your conversation
● Tell us about your conversation
  ○ We love learning how resources are being used and it provides metrics for funders
● Additional training and services:
  ○ Join our Host Certification Program
  ○ Free How to Host a Conversation about Race monthly trainings
  ○ Customized trainings & conversation guides
  ○ Professional hosting
  ○ Sign up for email list
Why Hold Living Room Conversations?

- A way for community members to connect with each other and gain understanding
- Safe container for folks to discuss topics that can otherwise be tense to talk about
- Get at the heart of why people believe what they do & what we share in common with one another
- Bridge differences
- Strengthen community
“In every community, there is work to be done. In every nation, there are wounds to heal. In every heart, there is the power to do it.”

– Marianne Williamson
Resources

- Canva Template for Flyer
- Communications Plan
- Hosting Best Practices
- Unpacking Conversation Agreements
- Press Release
www.livingroomconversations.org

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