

National Week of Conversation
Bridging the Political Divide
One on One Conversation Guide

Participants greet each other and, if they haven't met before, introduce themselves to each other.

The conversation takes between 30-60 minutes but participants can determine exactly how much time they want to spend together. Before the conversation begins, there should be a reminder of why the conversation is taking place. One of the participants should read this statement of purpose:

The purpose of this conversation---and others held during National Week of Conversation--is to bring together people with different views so they can talk about the state of the country and how we can bridge the divides that make it harder to solve our most pressing problems. A secondary purpose is to collect ideas and suggestions from these conversations, so people can reflect on actions they may want to take.

Next, one participant should read the agreements or guidelines to follow during the conversation:

- Do not try to change each other's views on any subject. The goal is to learn from each other and look for common ground--not to convert each other.
- While conversations involve both talking and listening, the primary emphasis in these conversations is on active listening.
- Be respectful during the conversation and try to keep from judging the other person's views.
- Take turns talking and share time equitably.
- Try to keep the discussion focused on the questions and don't get bogged down in talking about specific political leaders, like the President or Members of Congress.
- Whenever you can, identify and note areas of agreement that emerge in the conversation.

Participants should affirm they understand and agree with the guidelines before moving on to the conversation.

Next, take a few minutes to share some personal information about yourselves.

Questions you may want to ask each other can include:

- Tell me a little about your family--do you have children or siblings?
- Tell me a little about your work--what do you do and what do you like most about it?
- How long have you lived in the community and what are some ways you are involved?
- Is there a particular sense of purpose, mission or duty that guides your life?
- What would someone who knows you well say about what "makes you tick"?

After you have had a few minutes to share some personal information, turn the conversation to a discussion of the five questions. Quickly review the five questions so you can see what the conversation will cover.

Five Questions for Americans:

Below are five questions that it is important for Americans to discuss. Two of these have to do with our feelings about the country, one has to do with the deep divisions we currently experience, and two have to do with what we can do to bridge divisions and change the tone of our politics.

1. What do you appreciate most about living in America?
2. Are there ways in which you think our country is headed in the wrong direction? If so, in what ways?
3. How do you feel about our deep political divisions and the impact they are having on us as people and as a nation?
4. What do you think needs to happen for us to heal the divides in our country and work together more effectively?
5. What specific actions can individuals, candidates and members of the media take to help create a more positive tone in this year's elections?

After reviewing all of the questions, begin to discuss them one by one. Spend a few minutes talking about each question and then move on to the next one. Make sure to allocate your time so that you can have a conversation about each of the five questions.

Question #1: What do you appreciate most about living in America?

After each person has responded to this question, you may want to expand the conversation by asking other questions such as:

- What are you most proud of in our nation's history?
- What are some things we take for granted as Americans that we wouldn't have in most other countries on earth?
- Have your views about what you like about America changed through the years or not?

Question #2: Are there ways in which you think our country is headed in the wrong direction? If so, in what ways?

Some other questions you could ask to follow up on this one are:

- Why does this change worry you more than others?
- Have you had particular experiences that caused you to have this concern or is it more things you have observed?

Question #3: How do you feel about our deep political divisions and the impact they are having on us as people and as a nation?

Examples of the many things you could ask to follow up on this question are:

- Why do you think our country is so bitterly divided at this time?
- How do you feel about our community--do we seem more or less divided than other parts of the country?
- In what ways do people on different sides of the political divide stereotype each other? Do you ever feel stereotyped by those you disagree with on issues?
- What would it feel like if we were more united?

Question #4: What do you think needs to happen for us to heal the divides in our country and work together more effectively?

Some other questions you can ask to follow up on this question are:

- In spite of political differences, what do you think are some important things that a majority of people in our community agree on?
- Who in our community needs to be involved in efforts to revive civility and respect?
- What would a united America look like?

Question #5: What specific actions can individuals, candidates and members of the media take to help create a more positive tone in this year's elections?

Some follow up questions might include:

- How can changing individual behavior impact on the tone of a campaign?
- Are there things you have seen media do in the past that can help to improve the tone of campaigns?
- How do we hold candidates accountable so that they don't focus on personal attacks and negativity?
- Would it help to have a code of conduct for candidates or get them to sign some sort of pledge?

Reflection on the Conversation

After you have discussed each of the five questions, take a few minutes to reflect briefly on your conversation. You may want to answer questions such as:

- What was most interesting or valuable to you about this conversation?
- Is there a next step you'd like to take based on the conversation you just had?
- Are there others in your community you want to reach out to and engage in a similar conversation?

Reporting on the Conversation

As you end the conversation, agree on which person(s) will give feedback about what you discussed via webform (<https://www.revivecivility.org/NWOC-Form>).

Sharing the experience on social media can help spread civility and respect too, for example snap a selfie and/or a picture of your conversation partner(s) and share it on social media using **#ListenFirst**, **#NWOC** and **#revivecivility**.