Example Format for Community Dialogue
Topic: Misinformation and Polarization

In the "Good Talks 2024" series, we are working in partnership in and beyond Middlebury College to design good conversations about politics in the run-up to the 2024 general election. Community conversations can be opportunities to identify priorities, generate new ideas, build stronger civic relationships, and discuss pros and cons of different policies. However, not all discussions in the public sphere invite those sorts of engagements.

Carefully designing a conversation, with attention to who is in the room, is critical for constructive engagement. Below, we describe a format we are using at Middlebury College.

Build a Foundation

1. *Provide an article, podcast, or video for participants to review.* Everyone will come in with different backgrounds and experiences. That is wonderful, and it can also help to have a shared starting point. At Middlebury, we are starting with short talks (~20 minutes). On 3/29, Adam Davidson will provide an overview and we'll post the recording here.
2. *Small Group Introductions:* if you have more than 6-8 participants, breaking up into smaller groups will offer more opportunities for dialogue. Have people introduce themselves with a light question – a suggested list is here.
3. *Discuss Guidelines for Engagement*: to remind folks that our habits of public dialogue are not always constructive, you can suggest some guidelines and then ask participants to add their own. Some ideas: (1) take turns, (2) don't interrupt, (3) assume goodwill, (4) listen to understand, not to persuade or respond.

Provide Open Discussion Questions

A good question can transform dialogue, promoting curiosity and complexity and preventing personal attacks or debate. Below, we provide some questions we will use, and would love to hear other examples! These could be provided to small groups one at a time or all at once.

1. What was one thing that surprised you about Adam's talk? What is one thing you still have a question about?
2. Share a story of a time when you and another person had a fundamentally different perception of an issue or event. How did you engage with the other person? What happened?
3. What is a source of information you rely on to learn about politics? Why do you trust it?
4. Have you seen information that you later learned was untrue? What emotions and thoughts stay with you from that experience?

Reconvene as a Group

Invite participants to share any new insights, identify information that they still need, or suggest steps for engaging the community or civic leaders.