

Example Format for Community Dialogue

Topic: Abortion Access and Reproductive Policy

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, for who is in the room, is critical for constructive engagement.

Build a Foundation

- *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 4/29, Professor Caitlin Myers will offer an overview – we will [post the recording here](#).
- *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](#).
- *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 on 4/29 with Myers:

1. Think about a time when you had a chance to talk about abortion and you chose not to. How does that experience influence the way you approach this conversation?
2. In a Senate Budget Committee hearing in February, Senator Charles Grassley responded to Professor Myers’ remarks by saying “Abortion is above all a moral and legal issue. It’s not an issue that lends itself to being looked at solely through an economic lens. After all, life is priceless.” What role can and should social science play in the abortion issue? What questions can and cannot be answered?
3. Advocates for abortion bans often frame their arguments in terms of the sanctity of human life, while advocates for legal access to abortion often frame theirs in terms of the autonomy of women. Is there any common ground here? Are there any policies that both “sides” might support?
4. Many healthcare policies are decided at the state level. What do you see as benefits and costs of local healthcare policy?

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.