

## Example Format for Community Dialogue

### Topic: Environmental Policy

In the “Good Talks 2024” series, we are working to design good conversations about politics in the run-up to the 2024 general election. The goal is a dialogue – not an adversarial debate, and not an unstructured discussion. Careful scaffolding and planning enables meaningful conversation across difference. This document captures some of our design choices to inspire your own.

#### Build a Foundation

- *Provide an article, podcast, or video for participants to review:* everyone comes with different backgrounds and experiences. At Middlebury, we are starting with short (~15 minute talks to introduce an issue. On 10/1, professor Chris Klyza 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), and (5) be present (no phones).

#### Provide Open Discussion Questions

A good question can transform dialogue, promoting curiosity and complexity and preventing personal attacks or debate. Below are the four questions we will use on October 1:

1. Share what you consider to be “the environment.” How do you interact with it in your daily life and how is it important to you?
2. How do environmental issues impact you in your life? How do you see them impact the lives of others? Reflecting on your own background and experiences, how have you felt the impacts of pollution, climate change, or another environmental issue?
3. What role do you think the government should play in addressing environmental issues? Are there other parties, like ordinary people, schools, or companies, that should be working to address them?
4. What do you make of generational divides in opinions about environmental policy? How well do democracies handle addressing long-term, global challenges?
5. How should environmental policies balance economic growth and environmental protection?

#### 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.

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#### Additional Resources

Living Room Conversations, *Environment and Pollution Conversation Guide* ([link](#)).  
“Americans’ views of climate change,” *Pew Research Center*, August 9, 2023 ([link](#)).