

Example Format for Community Dialogue

Topic: Immigration

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 10/29, professor Phani Wunnava 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 29:

1. Please share a story from your personal experience that will help other people in your group understand your perspective on immigration policy.
2. How should the United States balance domestic interests and global responsibilities? In your view, what are the domestic and international interests that should inform immigration policy?
3. What do you think of the current immigration system in the U.S.? How well do you think it is working and why? What would you change or keep the same?
4. How important is immigration to the national identity of the United States in your view? How does this national identity connect to your own history and values?
5. Immigration is a central issue in the 2024 election. How important is it to you? Will immigration influence your decisions on the ballot? Why or why not?

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.

Additional Resources

Living Room Conversations, *The Politics of Immigration Conversation Guide* ([link](#)).
Chris Hayes, Jennifer Meroll, Karthick Ramakrishnan, *Framing Immigrants* (2016) ([link](#)).
“Border Security and Enforcement,” *Pew Research Center*, February 14, 2024 ([link](#)).