

A Community Table: Democracy Edition

Conversation Guide

DU Grand Challenges is thrilled you will be hosting an important civic dialogue about recent events. For more details about A Community Table, facilitation tips, free resources, invitation templates, and more, please visit the complete [Host Handbook](#) found in the “Host Materials” section of the website.



Opening the Conversation:

First, welcome everyone and introduce yourself and the event.

- Share your name, background, and why you decided to host A Community Table conversation.
- Share a bit about DU Grand Challenges. Information is available at grandchallenges.du.edu and in the [handbook](#).
- We love to see and hear how the conversations are going! Tag us on social media - @CCESL (Facebook and Twitter)/ @du_ccels (Instagram) and use #ACommunityTable and #DUGrandChallenges.
- Remind everyone of today’s goal: Explore our topic and generate ideas to increase local civic life (involvement) around it.

Second, invite your participants to introduce themselves and briefly share what brought them to A Community Table. If you want to do a virtual icebreaker, do that now!

Third, set out some conversation guidelines to support *everyone’s* participation. We suggest:

- One speaker at a time
- Share to increase understanding and invite others in
- Listen to understand; listen harder when you disagree
- Speak from *personal experience* (“I” statements) and avoid generalizations
- Be attentive to the space you’re taking up
- What’s said in the group stays; what’s learned, leaves (confidentiality)
- Decide on a way to signal (hand gesture, raise hand feature on Zoom, etc.) for jargon or words you might not know

Facilitation Tips

- Support everyone's focus on goals, roles, and rules (guidelines above)
- Encourage everyone to participate, making space for all to do so.
- Invite guests to follow up and expand on ideas. (open-ended questions)
- It's okay to model sharing if folks seem stuck on a question or to redirect the conversation if necessary. That said, don't share to just fill the silence. A little silence is OK!
- You got this!! You're hosting a conversation that matters. Take time to enjoy the process.

Conversation Don'ts & Reminders

- Don't micromanage the conversation; let it flow freely, helping with 3 O's:
 - On Topic, On Time, Opportunity for All to Participate
- Don't promote or allow argument or unproductive debate.
- Don't judge or dismiss any person's comments or ideas. Do redirect if they are off-goal/rules.
- Don't be afraid to *not* know something or to ask if you have questions.
- Do name that you aren't meant to be the content expert but are here to guide the process.
 - Even if you are a content expert, the role of a host is to guide the process. Don't omit your voice from the conversation all together, but do not center it either.

Conversation Prompt Options

There are four groups of questions below. We have provided several variations/options for each set of prompts so that you can select the path that feels like the best fit for your group.

We encourage you to provide the questions you ultimately choose to your participants in advance. One way to do so is to drop them into the chat function of your meeting platform or you can send them to your participants via email.

1. THE HEART: Making space for participants to share any emotions or reactions that are bubbling up for them.

Many folks have strong feelings or opinions right now. Some feel that they are not being heard or that they are not safe to express themselves. There is power in being listened to.

Invite each person to take three minutes to speak uninterrupted, responding to the question you selected from the list below. Be sure that others don't try to offer advice or 'fix' anything for that person, their role is simply to listen, actively. They can take notes or doodle if it helps them concentrate on the speaker.¹ And if folks choose to pass and not share, that's OK too.

1. Reflecting on the different emotions you may have felt after [*insert name of recent events*], what is weighing on your heart now?²
2. What did you do – and what are you doing now – to take care of your heart and respond to your emotions?³
3. As you processed [*insert name of recent events*], what thoughts or feelings surfaced for you? What were you wondering about or pondering? How did you make space for yourself as you navigated your own reactions to recent events?

2. THE HEAD: Going deeper to connect what we know and what we are still processing.

We encourage you to select a few question that will allow you and your participants to dig deeper, making connection to what you know, what you are questioning, and what you are still processing. This will help your group make sense of the information they have and serve as an entry into the next set of questions moving toward action.

¹ Adapted from <https://www.tolerance.org/magazine/leading-conversations-after-crisis>

² Adapted from Adapted from: <https://www.facinghistory.org/educator-resources/current-events/responding-insurrection-us-capitol>

³ Adapted from <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/01/06/learning/what-are-your-reactions-to-the-storming-of-the-capitol-by-a-pro-trump-mob.html>

1. What connections, if any, do you see to other events, whether historical or more recent? What, if anything, have you talked to friends or family members about regarding recent events?⁴
2. How are [*insert name of recent events*] affecting your view of American democracy?
3. How does your own social positionality (such as your race, class, gender, sexuality, ability-status) inform your perspectives and reactions to [*insert name of recent events*]?⁵
4. What questions about right and wrong, fairness or injustice, have [*insert name of recent events*] raised for you? How should individuals or politicians act in order to protect our democratic institutions?⁶
5. How do different people or groups of people represent and express their power? What does a just use of power look like? What basic freedoms are required by a just society? When might one person's freedom violate another's?⁷
6. How did you feel while listening to leaders – whether local or national – talk about [*insert name of recent events*]? What was inspirational? What was concerning to you? What topics and issues were covered, and what was left out?⁸
7. What are your hopes and fears for the months and years ahead? What are the most important issues to you that you think should be addressed by government leaders? By community leaders?⁹

⁴ _____.

⁵ Adapted from suggestions from Alyssa Hadley Dunn's work on "Teaching on Days After," more here:

<https://beyondthetoplight.com/2021/01/06/resources-for-teachers-on-the-days-after-the-attack-on-the-u-s-capitol/>

⁶ Adapted from: <https://www.facinghistory.org/educator-resources/current-events/responding-insurrection-us-capitol>

⁷ Adapted from <https://www.tolerance.org/magazine/leading-conversations-after-crisis>

⁸ adapted from ADL: <https://www.adl.org/sites/default/files/documents/7-ideas-for-teaching-about-the-presidential-inauguration.pdf>

⁹ _____.

3. SELF-CARE: Ensuring participants have a plan for taking care of their head and heart during challenging times.

1. As the news continues to unfold in the coming weeks and months, how will you:
 - a. Practice self-care? What do you need most right now?
 - b. Curate your media consumption and ensure you turn to reliable sources?
 - c. Engage with others or share on social media with intention?

4. COMMUNITY ACTION: How might our conversation today lead us toward action?

1. What actions do you want to take based on what you've learned from *[insert name of recent events]*? What actions do you hope others will take?
2. What do you need in order to be able to work in community for the public good in the aftermath of *[insert name of recent events]*?
3. In her book, *Emergent Strategy*, adrienne maree brown says, "How we are at the small scale is how we are at the large scale. The patterns of the universe repeat at scale. There is a structural echo that suggests two things: one, that there are shapes and patterns fundamental to our universe, and two, that what we practice at a small scale can reverberate to the largest scale." What is one action you can commit to on a small scale to work for change? What actions do you hope others will take?

Closing & Next Steps

Offer a quick summary of the actions that the group identified, and check to make sure what you've heard is accurate. Be sure to share your ideas, insight, and inspiration using #DUGrandChallenges and #ACommunityTable and tag us @CCESL (Twitter) or @du_ccesl (Instagram). For more about how to find us on social media, see the social media download in the "[Conversation Tools](#)" section of our website or in the handbook.

Please also share the link to the participant survey, http://bit.ly/EN_ACommunityTableParticipant, with your guests, and let them know that it will take less than five minutes to complete. You can share the link in the chat function of your web platform and follow up by sending the link in an email.

Thank you guests for their participation. After the conversation closes, please complete the host survey. You can find it at http://bit.ly/EN_ACommunityTableHost.

And you're done! Congratulations on facilitating A Community Table!

Democracy Edition Sponsors

The University of Denver A Community Table process and materials were developed by DU Grand Challenges and DU Dialogues. We are ever grateful to the Chicago Community Trust and their On The Table event after which A Community Table is modeled. Additional sponsors for the Democracy Edition include the Community + Values Initiative and the Office of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion.



For more information about the sponsors, visit their websites:

- www.grandchallenges.du.edu
- www.du.edu/studentlife/ie-education
- www.du.edu/community-values
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