


COMMUNITY CONVERSATION LEADER GUIDE

A CALL TO CONVERSATION

A photograph of two students walking away from the camera on a paved path through a wooded area. The student on the left is wearing a dark jacket and blue jeans, carrying a black backpack. The student on the right is wearing a grey hoodie and dark pants, also carrying a backpack. The path is flanked by trees with green and yellowing leaves, suggesting an autumn setting. A brick pillar is visible on the left side of the path. The background is filled with dense foliage and sunlight filtering through the trees.

*“For a place like Wake Forest,
conversation is at the heart of
what we do because it combines
ideas and human interaction, the
intellectual and the personal...
Leaders have to know how to
break out of the bubble of their
own preoccupations and manifest
real interest and empathy
in others, in a community
larger than themselves.”*

— PRESIDENT NATHAN O. HATCH,
“THE ART OF CONVERSATION”

As the Conversation Leader, you will invite members of your community group to participate, coordinate event logistics and lightly guide the conversation. The desired outcome is for participants to value the experience enough to seek out more conversations – with each other and within their communities.

Your “to do” list

CHOOSE A VENUE AND RESERVE A TABLE FOR YOUR GROUP. We recommend a group size of 6–8 people, which includes you and a spouse or guest, if applicable. Consider food service, noise level, potential competing events, parking and accessibility. In certain cities, you may also want to confirm that your desired venue will allow guests to pay from separate checks.

SELECT A TOPIC AND PROMPT FOR YOUR CONVERSATION. The C2C topic is the broader theme, and the prompt provides an entry point that allows participants to share a story about themselves. Take a look at our list of topics and prompts and select what resonates with you. You can also choose a unique topic and prompt that relates to the purpose or interests of your community group.

INVITE YOUR COMMUNITY GROUP: Specify the date, time, venue and the C2C topic and prompt on your invitation. We recommend asking for RSVPs to manage group size. Request each guest’s cell number or email address to confirm attendance in advance and to share the group photo afterward.

SEND A REMINDER TEXT OR EMAIL TO EVERYONE THE DAY BEFORE YOUR C2C. Identify yourself, remind them of the time and place of the conversation, and ask them to confirm attendance or let you know if their plans have changed.

GATHER THE MATERIALS FOR YOUR C2C. Name tags are recommended unless the members of your group know each other well. Bring a marker and blank tags, plus a few extras for unexpected guests. Note-taking is encouraged, so consider providing notepaper or notecards and a pen for each guest. Also, print enough discussion guides for everyone. Be sure to type in the topic and prompt before printing or write them in on each one. Confirm that you have all your materials before you leave for your venue.

PREP THE TABLE AND WELCOME C2C PARTICIPANTS:

- Arrive about 15 minutes early to check in with the venue host (if applicable), organize your table and confirm that seating is arranged so everyone can see and hear each other.
- Introduce yourself to the waitstaff who will be assisting with your meal and set expectations for the evening. Let the server know that guests will be paying from separate checks.
- Place notepaper or notecards, pens and the discussion guides at each seat. Put out blank name tags and a marker.
- Greet participants as they arrive and ask them to prepare a name tag, if applicable.
- Once everyone has arrived, remind guests that this is a pay-your-own-way event and invite interested guests to place their orders for food and/or beverage before beginning the Call to Conversation. If guests are more comfortable not ordering anything, that’s also fine.
- It’s possible that some guests may cancel at the last minute or attend without registering. If your group is smaller than expected, we suggest you carry on as planned.

How to lead the conversation

OFFER SOME BACKGROUND:

The Call to Conversation concept was inspired by dinners that Thomas Jefferson hosted at Monticello and the White House. Jefferson's dinner guests were often political rivals or from different social backgrounds. The intent was for his guests to discover their common humanity.

The opportunity to connect through face-to-face conversation is especially appealing in today's polarized climate, where we often see each other

as stances, opinions or positions. The Call to Conversation program brings people together in a unique and powerful way.

The Call to Conversation movement began at Wake Forest University in 2017 and has since reached thousands of alumni, parents, students, faculty and staff. It has also inspired many similar gatherings in communities and organizations across the country.



SHARE THESE GUIDELINES WITH THE GROUP:

A C2C IS A SINGLE CONVERSATION. It's important that only one person speaks at a time while the rest of the table listens. Ask attendees to be present, give others their full attention and avoid chatting with people seated next to them.

DIRECT THOUGHTS AND QUESTIONS TO EACH OTHER. Participants are encouraged to react to and build on ideas as they arise in the conversation.

TAKE NOTES. Advise attendees to use the notecards or notepaper to jot down thoughts or questions as they occur to them and bring them up when the opportunity presents itself.

AVOID OFF-TOPIC TANGENTS AND LONG STRETCHES WHEN ONLY ONE PERSON IS TALKING. Ask the group to help you keep the discussion on track and make sure everyone has a chance to speak. When things go astray, you should politely steer the conversation back on course. As Conversation Leader, you may notice some participants aren't joining in. Try using material they shared earlier to draw them into the conversation.

EXPECT DELIBERATE TRANSITIONS IN THE CONVERSATION. Remind attendees that this is a three-part conversation as noted in the provided discussion guide and that you will keep an eye on timing (approximate times on page 6). Everyone should be ready to change gears as you lead transitions from the discussion prompt responses to free-flowing conversation to the wrap-up.



LIGHTLY GUIDE THE CONVERSATION. A C2C HAS THREE PARTS, EACH WITH A PURPOSE.

REVEAL: Introductions and discussion prompt responses (about 20 minutes) – Ask everyone to introduce themselves (with name and connection to the group). Read the discussion prompt and ask participants to respond one at a time by sharing a personal experience.

CONNECT: Free-flowing discussion (about 30 minutes) – Indicate it’s time to explore the broader topic. Draw connections between stories and pose follow-up questions. (Examples: What themes or connections are we hearing? What differences have surfaced? What has been surprising?)

EMPOWER: Wrap-up (about 10 minutes) – Let the group know it’s time to close the conversation. Thank participants for sharing. Then ask everyone what they will take away from this experience and what they will do with it.

BEFORE EVERYONE LEAVES:

Ask the group to respond to the question on the back of their discussion guide. Encourage them to share a photo of their response on social media.

If guests don’t interact regularly as members of the group, suggest that they exchange contact information so they can connect later and continue to build the relationships they’ve started.

Remind guests to take home their conversation guide as a memento of an evening shared among friends.

Take a group photo and share on social media. Consider sharing the photo with your group the same way that you confirmed attendance prior to the event.





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