



Climate Choices Discussion Guide

Welcome to the Climate Dialogues

Concern about the disruption of the global climate has increased and society is now beginning to respond. We face serious choices, and some say grave consequences, if we don't respond effectively. The complexity of the issues, together with the global reach and long time frame of this problem present unique challenges for our political, social, and business institutions. Your informed civic participation is essential and will promote smart policy-making. It will help us make choices that are up to the challenge and that reflect our collective vision for the future.

You're part of a process bringing the whole community together to learn about and wrestle with the choices we face. First, in small groups, and then at the Citizen's Climate Summit, you'll have the opportunity to share your views, listen to others, and engage directly with elected officials.

This briefing is the first step in that process. It presents the facts of this issue and also points out where the uncertainties are. It has been reviewed by climate scientists and economists to ensure that it is a fair and accurate representation of our current knowledge.

Regardless of your perspective on what our course of action should be, there is no doubt that your participation is vital. The choices we face are unprecedented in size and scope, as are the associated risks and opportunities.

Why a dialogue about the climate?

Talk is cheap, good decisions priceless. We start with small group conversations, because we believe that respectful, inclusive dialogue, grounded in scientific fact and informed by diverse perspectives, is the key to effective decision making in a democracy. We have partnered with two world-class climate science institutes to ensure that the study guide we're using is accurate, unbiased, and up-to-date.



This is not a conversation you want to miss. We hold extremely important decisions in our hands at this moment in history. How we choose to act now will affect not only the stability of the Earth's climate but also the natural and social systems that depend upon it – and ultimately, the type of future we will leave to our children and grandchildren. The proposed solution -- fundamentally changing the way we produce and use energy -- is too vast an undertaking to leave up to business-as-usual. Regardless of where you stand, this is not a conversation you want to miss.

Talk, then act. The Dialogues start with talk and lead to action. Participating in a small group is the first step in a process leading to a climate summit with elected officials, and beyond. We're building a network of concerned citizens committed to solving the problem of global climate change.

Because the kind of future we'll pass on to our kids is being decided right now.

Here's how it works

A study circle is a simple, effective way for a small group to learn and dialogue together. It's a little more structured than just "sitting around talking," but flexible and easy to do. At the start, you'll agree on some basic ground rules, and one person will serve as facilitator. She (or he) keeps you on time and on track, making sure that everyone gets to participate. The facilitator is not "the teacher," and doesn't participate in the discussion other than to facilitate. (More information for facilitators is available on the Climate Dialogues web site.) For each session, one person serves as notetaker.

There are many ways to use these study materials. Here's one suggested outline. The times and discussion questions are only suggestions. Each session lasts about two hours.

Sample guidelines that groups may adopt.

- 1 Each person gets a chance to talk.
- 2 One person talks at a time. No interrupting.
- 3 It's okay to disagree. Be respectful.
- 4 If you are offended or upset, say so, and say why.
- 5 Everyone helps the facilitator keep us moving and on track.
- 6 Personal stories stay "in the circle" unless otherwise agreed.

Session One: Does climate change matter?

Preparation: Read sections I & II (What's happening to the climate? and How serious is it?)

Opening (20 min.): Go around the circle, say your name and one (brief) thing about yourself. Go around again, say why you're here. Agree on ground rules.

Discussion (90 min.): Start with questions about the reading. What parts didn't make sense or weren't clear? (Be sure to write these down.)

- What's one thing you learned that was new to you?
- What matters most to you? How does global warming relate to what matters to you?

Closing (10 min.): Go around the circle, closing thoughts.

Session Two: Understanding the options

Preparation: Read sections III & IV (What are the solutions? and What are our choices?)

Opening (10 min.): Go around the circle, say another (brief) thing about yourself.

Discussion (100 min.): Start with questions about the reading. What parts didn't make sense or weren't clear? (Be sure to write these down.)

- What's one thing you learned that was new to you?
- Building on session one (what matters to you?), how do each of the four options relate to what matters to you?
- Do you need more information in order to choose an option? Can the group get this information before the next session?

Closing (10 min.): Go around the circle, closing thoughts.

Session Three: Making choices

Preparation: Review sections I-IV

Opening (10 min.): Go around the circle, say a word or phrase that describes how you're feeling at this moment.

Discussion (100 min.): Even though there's no new reading, there may be new questions about the reading. What parts didn't make sense or weren't clear? (Be sure to write these down.)

- How do the uncertainties of this issue relate to each of the four options?
- Which option would you choose, and why?
- As a society, we need to choose a course of action. Can your group do so? If not, why not?

Closing (10 min.): Go around the circle, say one thing you learned from today's discussion.

Session Four: Taking action

Preparation: Read section, "From talk to action".

Opening (10 min.): Go around the circle, say one thing that stands out for you from the past three sessions.

Discussion (90 min.): Start with questions about the reading. What parts didn't make sense or weren't clear? (Be sure to write these down.)

- Who's responsible to fix a global problem like climate change?
- How do you, as individuals and as a group, want to get involved? Use the pledge sheet to record commitments. Who wants to continue to meet?
- What strengths and resources does this group have?

Closing (20 min.): Go around the circle, final wrap-up and thanks.



From Talk to Action

The Climate Dialogues are not just about talk. As we've seen, society now faces decisions that will have indelible consequences. The global reach and long time frame of this problem make it a challenge for everyone from our political and civic leaders, to business people, to heads of household. In the 15 years since we signed the first international climate protection treaty, emissions have increased rather than decreased, and the rate of increase of the most important greenhouse gas, carbon dioxide, is rising.[†]

We invite you to be involved in shaping these critical decisions, and we encourage each study circle to submit an action statement (see below). Your action statements will help others see and learn from what you are doing and will enable Climate Dialogues staff and volunteers to support your efforts with additional resources and connections. Our actions will be more powerful if we work together. Here are some suggested ways to get involved:

1. Spread the Dialogues

To really tackle this problem, we need to get the whole community involved. Who do you know who should participate?

- Encourage people you know to be part of a study circle
- Volunteer to facilitate a study circle
- Get your business or organization involved
- Join our team of outreach volunteers

2. Share What You Learned

Despite its importance, most people — including many leaders — have not had time yet to study this issue. It's up to us to brief our leaders, and help them step into the leadership that we need from them. We encourage you to do this as a group — it has more impact, and it's more fun.

- Meet with elected officials, candidates, and community leaders.
- Write letters to the editor
- Write and call your representatives when specific decisions are being made
- Share what you're doing, and stay connected to other Climate Dialogues groups

3. Walk the Talk

Even while we're working to achieve policy change, we can be reducing the global warming impact of our own lives immediately.

- Lower your home's carbon footprint
- Make your transportation choices climate-friendly
- Buy green power

Remember, we're here to help you with all of the above actions. We have coalition partners that are expert in each of the above areas. You can get more information and link to partners at www.ClimateDialogues.org. Please download a study circle action form and let us know what your group is up to. We're here to support your efforts and make sure we all stay connected!

[†] The treaty is the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (1992), <http://unfccc.int>. For trends in greenhouse gas emissions, see IPCC 4AR FR III, Chapter 1, Section 1.3.1 "Last three decades review".

