



One Nation, Many Beliefs:

Talking About Religion
in a Diverse Democracy





One Nation, Many Beliefs: Talking About Religion in a Diverse Democracy

An earlier version of this discussion guide was developed in 2006 by LaGuardia Community College (LCC), in consultation with Everyday Democracy, as part of the Ford Foundation's national Difficult Dialogues initiative. The purpose of the LCC year-long initiative was to create neutral spaces on campus and off in which people could explore religious differences and the role of religion in American public life.

Getting Our Help

We want to help you work for long-term change in your community. Please see our website at www.everyday-democracy.org for information about how to create large-scale dialogue-to-change programs that engage hundreds (and sometimes thousands) of residents. Call us for help at 860-928-2616, or e-mail us at info@everyday-democracy.org.

The college provided an ideal setting for this work. Reflecting the diversity in the surrounding community, students come from over 160 countries and speak more than 100 languages. One faculty member described Queens, home to over 150 faith communities, as "arguably the most diverse place on the planet." The dialogues took place in several different locations: the campus, a Mormon Temple, an Islamic school, and a Catholic church. The more than 300 participants represented over 50 faiths, as well as nonreligious and "questioning" individuals. The college wrote an extensive report on both the process and the outcomes from it.

In 2011, Everyday Democracy revised and produced this updated version of the original guide for a national audience. The original guide is available through the Issue Guide Exchange on our website at www.everyday-democracy.org. Designed as a tool for dialogue-to-change programs, this guide can help communities make decisions about how they will address issues around religion. It is based on views and ideas that many different people hold and is a starting place for open and fair discussions.

Everyday Democracy, a national, nonpartisan, nonprofit organization, is the primary project of The Paul J. Aicher Foundation. We help people of different backgrounds and views think, talk and work together to solve problems and create communities that work for everyone.

One Nation, Many Beliefs is available in English on our website.

PILOT VERSION

Permissions Policy: Photocopying this guide for the purpose of organizing large-scale dialogue-to-change programs is permitted. Reproducing any portions of this guide for other purposes requires our written permission.

Lead Writer: Nancy Thomas, Senior Associate, Everyday Democracy
Managing Editor: Martha McCoy
Contributing Writers: Sarah Eisele-Dyrli and Valeriano Ramos
Production: Nick Connell
Cover Artwork: OmniStudio

© 2011 by The Paul J. Aicher Foundation

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

Why Should We Talk About the Role of Religion in U.S. Society?.....	1
Understanding This Approach	2
How This Guide Works.....	3
Where Can This Lead?	5
Overview of the Dialogue-to-Change Process	6

DISCUSSION SESSIONS

SESSION 1: Making Connections

1A:.....	7
----------	---

1B:.....	11
----------	----

SESSION 2: Creating a Vision	13
------------------------------------	----

SESSION 3: What is the Nature of the Challenges We're Facing?

3A: Why Are There Tensions Among Different Religious and Philosophical Groups?	17
-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------	----

3B: Why Are There Tensions Surrounding Religion When It Comes to Making Public Decisions?	22
----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------	----

SESSION 4: How Are We Doing?	26
------------------------------------	----

SESSION 5: How Can We Make Progress?.....	31
-------------------------------------------	----

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

The Action Forum	35
Facilitation Tips	36
About Everyday Democracy.....	40

INTRODUCTION

Why Should We Talk About the Role of Religion in U.S. Society?

The connection between religion and public life is important everywhere in the world. In the United States, we have always paid attention to this connection, because religious freedom has a special place in our history. The freedom of (and from) religion is even in our Constitution, and has always been a subject of much discussion.

This country includes people with many kinds of beliefs -- religious, spiritual and secular. And there is a greater diversity of beliefs than ever before. Often, stereotypes or lack of knowledge make it hard for people to understand and trust each other. Since many complex public problems have religious and philosophical aspects, it can be challenging to know how to work on those problems.

As a result of greater diversity, misunderstanding, and complex tensions, discussions about religion and public life are becoming more divisive, making it even harder to tackle important issues. More people are experiencing discrimination because of their beliefs. More communities are experiencing conflict and even violence about issues of religion and public life. That is what prompted us to write this guide.

Community tensions tend to fall into two separate but related categories. The first has to do with relationships among various faith groups and, at times, between faith groups and secular groups. The second has to do with the role that religion plays in public decisions, particularly at the community level. Both of these categories are reflected in this guide.

Democratic Dialogue for Change

In a democracy, it is essential for every person's voice to be respected and heard. It is the only way our country and our communities can resolve complex issues while respecting and honoring our freedoms and our differences. But this kind of democratic conversation doesn't just happen by chance – it has to be created.

Growing numbers of people around the country are creating opportunities for people to come together across their differences, to express themselves, to hear each other, to develop trust, and to find some areas of common ground. Where this happens, people do not come to full agreement, of course. But they begin to build relationships that can be the foundation for effective problem solving and healthy community life. They find creative ways to work together on complex public issues, work with their elected officials, and work with community institutions. They are making a difference in their communities, by listening to each other and creating changes based in their new understandings of the issue and their new understanding of each other.

We have created this guide to help you facilitate open and respectful conversations in your community. The sessions build on each other so that participants will:

- Look at what they have in common with people of different beliefs,
- Learn about the experiences of people of different religious or nonreligious groups in the community,
- Create a vision of a welcoming, respectful, religiously diverse society,
- Talk about the tensions that surround religion and public life,

- Consider different ideas about how to make decisions that honor religious and philosophical diversity and benefit the whole community,
- Consider what kinds of changes they may want to make -- as individuals, with others, in community institutions, and in public decisions.

For information about organizing large-scale dialogue-to-change programs – as well as tips and resources for convening dialogues on religion and public life – please go to our website, www.everyday-democracy.org. You can also call us for help. We can share what others have learned and done, and put you in touch with people who are organizing dialogue and change efforts on similar issues. We can offer help that fits the culture and needs of your community. We pay special attention to the ways racial and ethnic dynamics affect other issues, and can offer tools and advice to help you integrate that critical perspective into your efforts. We look forward to working with you.

Understanding This Approach

About Everyday Democracy and dialogue-to-change programs

Everyday Democracy in East Hartford, CT, is a nonpartisan, nonprofit organization operated by The Paul J. Aicher Foundation, whose mission is to advance deliberative democracy and improve the quality of public life in the United States. Everyday Democracy works to help communities find ways for all kinds of people to think, talk, and work together to solve problems. We work with neighborhoods, cities and towns, regions, and states, as well as nationally, and often with hundreds, and even thousands, of people. Through advice, training, how-to manuals, and discussion materials, we help communities design a large-scale process of dialogue and problem-solving that leads to action and change.

How the process works

Typically, a group of people – everyday members of a community, public officials, civic leaders, faith leaders, community organizers, teachers, corporate leaders – want to bring about a change in their community on an issue of common concern, but they want to avoid adversarial processes, political stalemates, and solutions identified by people who may be powerful or vocal but not necessarily the most likely to be affected by an action or outcome.

A Dialogue-to-Change Program...

- Is organized by a diverse group of people from the whole community.
- Involves a large number of people from all walks of life.
- Has easy-to-use, fair-minded discussion materials.
- Uses trained facilitators who reflect the community's diversity.
- Moves a community to action when the dialogues end.

Typically, communities convene many small groups of people who meet over a period of time. *Each small-group...*

- Is a diverse group of 8 to 12 people.
- Meets together for several, two-hour sessions.
- Sets its own ground rules and helps the facilitator keep things on track.
- Is led by a facilitator who does not take sides. He or she is not there to teach the group about the issue.

- Starts with personal stories, then helps the group look at a problem from many points of view.
- Explores solutions.
- Plans for action and change.

The process works because participants listen to each other, look at all sides of an issue, explore common concerns, come up with practical ways to address a problem, and share responsibility for effectuating change.

How This Guide Works

The process also works because all of the groups work from the same set of discussion materials. Everyday Democracy has been publishing issue guides since the early 1990s, and we've learned a lot about what works.

It will help you if you, as facilitator, understand and communicate to participants the two tensions addressed in this guide. Other organizations may publish discussion guides aimed at strengthening interfaith relationships or examining specific issues with religious implications (e.g., abortion, school prayer). This guide is designed to strengthen relationships and understanding across religious and philosophical perspectives *as a foundation for* talking about intergroup tensions *and* the role of religion in public decision making.

This guide is like other Everyday Democracy guides in that it helps facilitators help participants:

- Exchange personal stories and find what they have in common
- Learn about the experiences of with different religious and philosophical perspectives in their community.
- Talk about values and what it means to live in a religiously diverse society and community.
- Talk about any tensions surrounding religion and philosophical values and convictions in the public square.

In each session, you will find:

- A statement of the session's goals.
- Facilitator tips, set-up suggestions, and instructions for activities.
- A list of things you will want to prepare ahead of each session.
- Suggested discussion questions. You don't need to ask every question. Feel free to change the wording to fit your group.
- Tips on wrapping up each session.
- Recommendations for "homework" or things the participants can do for the next session.

Session-by-session review

As facilitators, you will want to have a solid understanding of each session's goals, how they fit together and build upon one another, and how they fit into the overall design of the dialogue. Each group will be unique, and you will want to adapt the sessions and activities to meet the specific needs of your group.

The goal of **Session 1** is to help participants build trusting relationships that will then serve as the foundation for their subsequent discussions. Participants do not talk about challenges or action. Instead, they exchange personal stories, establish guidelines for talking and working together, and get to know each other. We've divided this session into two parts, both two-hours. If your group has time, we recommend completing both 1A and 1B. If not, then review the exercises in 1A and 1B and select those that work best for your community.

In **Session 2**, participants start to develop an understanding of the complexity of this subject. This session becomes increasingly provocative as participants are asked to "take a stand" on specific issues. Toward the end of Session 2, they will examine the values guiding their perspectives as individuals and as members of a religiously diverse community and nation.

The goal of **Session 3** is to help participants explore the nature and scope of the issues. Like Session 1, Session 3 is divided into two, two-hour sections.

- Session 3A asks the question, *Why are there tensions among different religious and philosophical groups?*
- Session 3B considers, *Why are there tensions surrounding religion when it comes to making public decisions?*

In both sessions, participants read a set of "viewpoints" which then serve as the basis for their discussion. You will also consider some specific case studies, as well as the meaning of the First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution.

In **Session 4**, participants start to explore ways to create a community that reflects their common vision. They work from a community "report card" that will help them identify specific areas where they might want to make some changes. They will also engage in a brainstorm of ways to address areas of concern.

By the end of **Session 5**, your group should have an action plan that includes specific steps they will take to address areas that they identified in Session 4. Participants will prioritize ideas for action, identify next steps for the group, and discuss their personal commitments. In some cases, communities will choose to hold an action forum in which participants of all of the dialogue groups will come together and share their ideas and strategies.

The facilitator's role

Facilitators are not experts on the topic being discussed, but facilitators need to be prepared to guide the discussion. This means...

- Understanding the goals of the dialogue and of each session.
- Being familiar with the discussion guide.
- Working with a co-facilitator.
- Planning each session ahead, bringing the right supplies, and knowing what participants might need to do in between sessions.

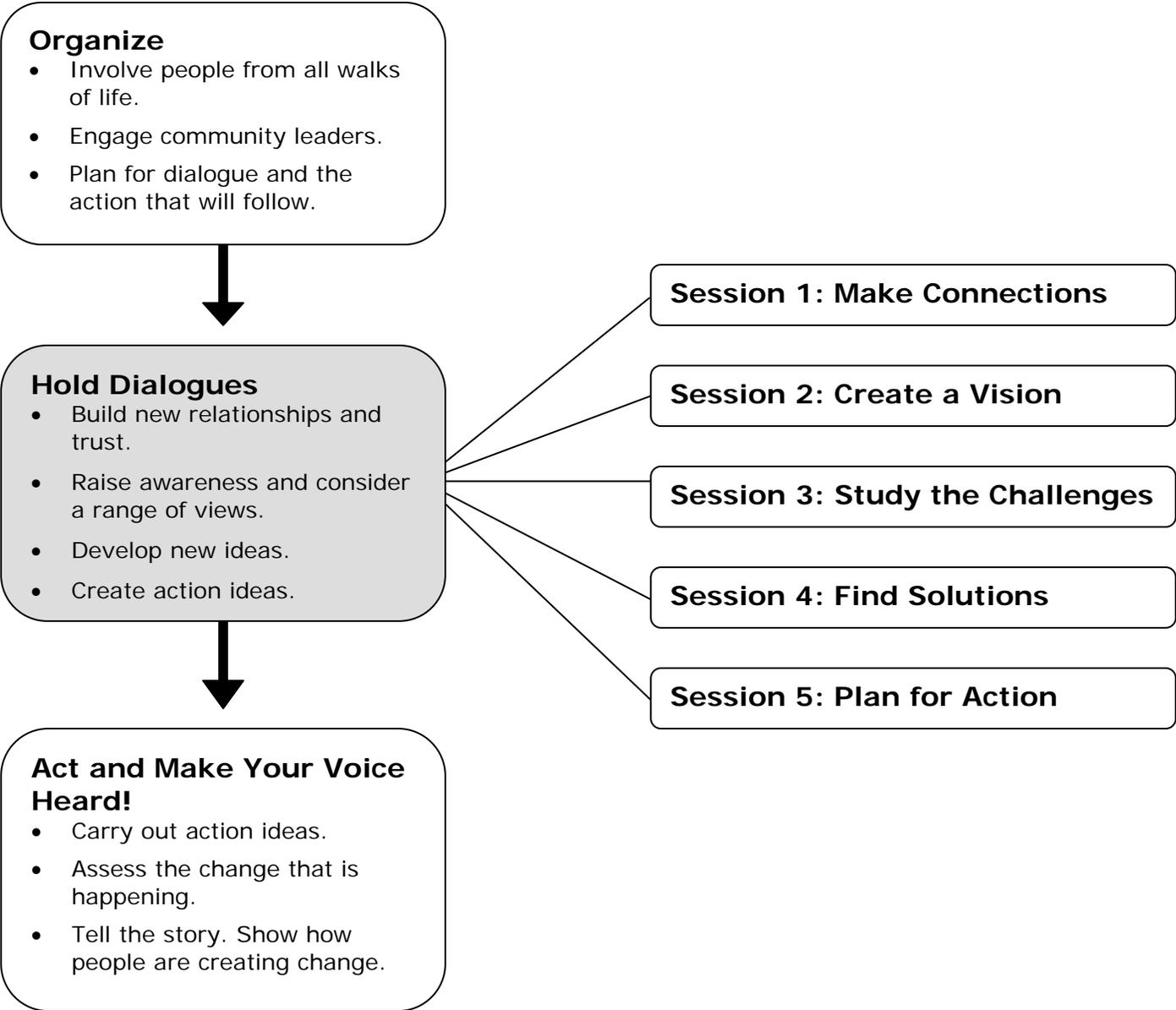
- Setting the tone for the dialogue.
- Encouraging everyone to participate.
- Managing conflict.
- Staying impartial, by making sure that everyone gets a fair hearing.

Where Can This Lead?

This approach leads to social and political changes in people, organizations, communities, and institutions. The specific outcomes vary from community to community, but most communities report that, as a result of this process, participants...

- Find new ways to work together.
- Establish trust and lasting relationships that serve as a solid foundation for action.
- Learn and gain understanding about a range of perspectives on an issue.
- Develop new ideas for addressing challenges.
- Collaboratively decide on and implement action.
- Work with public officials to create, change, and/or implement policies.

Overview of the Dialogue-to-Change Process



Session 1A Making Connections

Goals

- To help people get to know each another.
- To establish some guidelines for their discussion.
- Talk about how they are connected to the issues.

For facilitators

1. *Making Connections* takes 4 hours. If your group cannot take 4 hours, then review all of the exercises in 1A and 1B and choose the exercises that work best in your community.
2. As you and your co-facilitator prepare for these sessions, plan to use the amount of time suggested, but don't feel you have to complete every exercise or cover every question in the session.

Advance preparation

1. Meet with your co-facilitator ahead of time to prepare.
2. Create two "parking lots" on newsprint. Label one, **Action Idea Parking Lot**. Participants may come up with ideas about how to address the problems they identify early on. You won't discuss these until Session 4, but you want to make sure to preserve good ideas.
3. Label the second parking lot, **Terms Parking Lot**. Sometimes, language can be confusing or lead to misunderstanding. Keep a running list of terms that come up during the dialogue – terms that the group may want to define or explore in more detail (e.g., "secular," "orthodox," "fundamentalist," "proselytize," or the name of a religious sect). At the end of each give an optional "homework assignment" that invites participants to look up terms in between sessions.
 - a. If it is a multi-lingual group, create a parking lot in each language. *Do this for all lists that you post.*
 - b. Post the list where all can see it.
4. Arrive to the meeting space early.
5. Make sure there are enough chairs for each participant. Place them in a circle.
6. Hang signs on the door or in hallways so people know where to go.
7. Set up a table near the door with nametags and an attendance sheet.
8. Find out where bathrooms are and where child care will be.
9. Introduce yourself as people arrive.

Part 1: Getting started (25 minutes)

For facilitators

1. Start with short introductions.
2. Summarize the introduction, pointing out the two tensions: intergroup relationships and religion in public life. Describe the dialogue process. (Please see pages 2 and 6.)
3. Explain your role (page 4). You are not an expert on this subject. You do not take sides or give your opinions. Your job is to help the group talk and work together so that every voice is heard.
4. Explain the use of the phrase “religious and philosophical,” a phrase used to capture the idea that the dialogue is inclusive and all perspectives – religious, secular, spiritual, atheist, agnostic, ideological – are welcome.
5. Explain the **Terms Parking Lot**. Explain that participants might use terms that not everyone in the group understands. Tell the group to say when someone uses a term they need help understanding. If an explanation require a lot of time, add it to this parking lot and agree to look it up between sessions.
6. Explain the **Action Ideas Parking Lot**. Tell the group what is meant by “action idea.” Explain that you will talk more about action in Sessions 4 and 5.
7. Explain the goals for the session and give a brief overview of how this session will work.

Guidelines to Consider

- Be respectful.
- All voices and perspectives are given a fair hearing.
- Don’t feel the need to speak for your group, but if you do, let us know you are doing this.
- It’s OK to disagree.
- If you are offended, say so and say why.
- Share “air time.”
- Feel free to pass; silence is acceptable.
- Respect confidentiality; anything personal or about an identifiable person should stay in this room.
- Everyone helps the facilitator keep us moving and on track.

Discussion questions

- Who are you? Tell people a little about yourself.
- What brought you here? What about this topic made you want to commit to this dialogue? Why is this important to you?
- Where are you hoping this dialogue will lead?

Part 2: Establishing guidelines (20 minutes)

For facilitators

1. Here, you help group members make a list of guidelines (sometimes called “ground rules” or “agreements”) for how they will talk and work together. You can create

guidelines from scratch, or you can start with the list in the box and ask the group to discuss, edit, or adopt each guideline.

2. Some guidelines, such as “be respectful,” might require some clarification or discussion, particularly when considered in particular cultural or social contexts.
3. Participants may propose guidelines such as “No proselytizing or evangelizing,” or “Don’t repeat stereotypes.” If this type of guidelines is proposed, ask the person to explain what they mean. Help the group talk together about what everyone can agree upon for this type of guideline, one that doesn’t reinforce or create stereotypes about people.
4. Post these guidelines for every session.

Part 3: Looking at our connections with each other and to this issue (60 minutes)

For facilitators

1. This section is designed to help participants learn more about and establish relationships with each other.
2. It is not necessary for participants to answer all of the questions. Some groups prefer to have a deep discussion about one or two questions, while others may touch on many questions.
3. Consider breaking the group into smaller groups and then bringing the group together to share their discussion.
4. Stories capture the richness of people’s life experiences, and we encourage you to follow up with many questions below with a question such as, “Can you tell a story to illustrate this?” We are also aware, however, that stories can take more time. Consider bringing a talking stick or other symbolic item to the dialogues and asking participants to hold it while they talk. This way, they will be reminded to “share air time” with their fellow participants. If you’re using stories, set a time and ask a volunteer to be a time keeper.

Discussion questions

- What role does religion or your philosophical beliefs play in your life?
- Were you raised with religious or philosophical views, values, and traditions that remain important to you now? Which ones and why?
- Have you ever experienced a turning point in your life involving your religious or philosophical beliefs and values? What happened, and how did your life change?
- Have you ever had an experience or a time in your life when you felt like you did not belong in your community or in this country because of your religious or philosophical beliefs? Did you feel your race or ethnic origin was a factor?
- How have your religious or philosophical views influenced the values you hold as a member of your community and of this nation?
- What role do race and/or ethnic origin play in these different experiences?
- What role does gender play in these different experiences?

- If you did not grow up in the U.S., how did your religious or philosophical views influence what it meant to be a citizen or resident of your community or this nation?
- How have your religious and philosophical views intersected with the values you hold as a U.S. citizen or resident?

Questions to tie these experiences together

- What do you think these stories tell us?
- What do you think we have in common?

Part 4: Wrap-up (20 minutes)

For facilitators

1. Collect phone numbers, addresses, and emails. Confirm the best way to reach participants.
2. Thank people for coming and sharing.
3. Remind them to attend every session.

Discussion questions

- What have you heard or learned today that surprised you?
- How did it feel to participate in this conversation?
- How did this conversation go today? What worked well, and what would you like to change for the next session?

For next time

Return to **Terms Parking Lot** your group may have created during the discussion. If there are no terms, ask, Are there any terms that you can anticipate coming up in our dialogue that you might want to define?

Invite participants to divide up the list or take the entire list home. They can jot down their own definition or look it up in a dictionary. Ask participants to come to the next session prepared to discuss these terms.

If you are doing session 1B...

Ask participants to bring in an item to share with the group about their religious or philosophical beliefs or background. It can be a picture, an object, a poem, food, music, etc. It can tell a story about their views now, or it can tell a story about how they grew up.

Session 1B Making Connections

Part 5: Reconnecting (5 minutes)

For facilitators

1. Remind the group of how the Parking Lots work.
2. Remind the group of the session goals.

Discussion questions

- Let’s look at the guidelines we established when we first met. Do we need to change or add any?

Part 6: Terms (20 minutes)

For facilitators

1. Post the list of terms the group decided to talk about.
2. The goal of exploring terms and language is not to reach consensus or get general agreement about a term, but to exchange views so that there are no misunderstandings among participants.
3. Talk about each term. Encourage people to share their different perspectives
4. This exercise can take more time if the group creates a long list of terms to consider. You may need to skip some sections or carry this exercise over to Session 2.

Discussion questions

- Does anyone have any questions about a proposed definition?
- Does anyone want to propose a different definition for any term?
- Are there terms here that might cause a person to feel excluded or offended? Which ones, and why? How can we address this and prevent a problem?

Part 6: Cultural storytelling (45 minutes)

For facilitators

1. Do this exercise only if you asked people to bring in something to share at the end of the last session.
2. Ask participants to share their item with the group.

Discussion questions

- What did you bring that tells a story about your philosophical and religious heritage, journey, or views?
- Why did you choose that item? What does it say about your background and/or who you are today?

Part 7: Beware of labels (40 minutes)

For facilitators

1. In this part, participants will look at some of the stereotypes people have of different religious and philosophical views.
2. Hand out two post-it-notes to each participant.
 - a. On the first post-it, have participants write the religious or philosophical group they most closely identify with (or “none”), along with three words they would use to describe that “group.”
 - b. On the second post-it, have participants write their “group”, along with three words they believe others would use to describe the group.
3. When everyone has finished, go around the room and share what they wrote.

Discussion questions

- How did it make you feel to answer the questions and listen to others? Was it difficult? Why?
- Did anything in this conversation surprise you?
- What experiences seem common to the group?

Part 8: Wrap-up (10 minutes)

For facilitators

1. Thank people for coming and sharing.
2. Remind them to attend every session.
3. Remind them to look up any terms that might have come up today.

Discussion questions

- What have you heard or learned today that surprised you?
- How did it feel to participate in this conversation?
- How did this conversation go today? What worked well, and what would you like to change for the next session?

Session 2 Exploring Our Values

Goals

- Learn more about other people’s perspectives and experience with this issue.
- Talk about what we value about our community and about U.S. democracy.

Advance preparation

1. For Part 2, “Where Do You Stand” exercise you will need to set up the room in advance.
 - Bring masking tape, two 8x11 pieces of paper, and markers
 - You will need to rearrange the chairs and create an open space so people can walk back and forth across the room.
 - Divide the room in half by taping a line down the middle.
 - Post on opposite walls signs that say:
 - Strongly agree
 - Strongly disagree
 - Place chairs nearby for people who cannot stand for a long time.
2. For Part 3, create a sheet of newsprint entitled **Values** in the languages of your group.
3. Hang the **Action Ideas** and **Terms Parking Lots** and your group’s **Guidelines**.

Part 1: Reconnecting (10 minutes)

For facilitators

1. Remind the group of how the **Action Ideas Parking Lot** works.
2. Explain the session goals.

Discussion questions

- Let’s look at the guidelines we established when we first met. Do we need to change or add any?
- Does anyone have a reflection to share from last session?
- Have you seen anything in the news or had an experience that is relevant to our discussions and that you would like to share?

Part 2: “Where Do You Stand?” exercise (60 minutes)

For facilitators

1. Read the following statements aloud one at a time. Give people time to think before they move.
2. After you have read a statement and people have chosen a spot, ask one or two participants to share why they selected that position.
3. Some statements make more sense in pairs. In that case, ask questions after participants have selected their spot for the second statement.
4. Leave time to talk at the end of the exercise.
5. Record the major themes on newsprint.

Explain to the group:

- The purpose of this exercise is to help us think about our own perspectives and to learn a bit about the perspectives of others.
- I am going to read some statements, one at a time. For each, you should move to the wall that best reflects your own views.
- There are no right and wrong answers.
- If a statement doesn't apply or someone prefers to “opt out” of that question, then come and stand next to the facilitators

Statements to read aloud:

- I am comfortable with my level of knowledge and understanding of my own philosophical and religious traditions and beliefs.
- I know the traditions and principles of at least one religion or philosophical perspective other than my own.
- I am comfortable talking with people who have religious or philosophical beliefs that are different from my own.
- I am uncomfortable with people who doubt or are unsure of the existence of God.
- People who do not believe in God can be just as moral as people who do.
- I am uncomfortable with people who try to convince me to believe in or agree with their religious or philosophical perspective.
- People make assumptions about my religious or philosophical beliefs because of the color of my skin or the way I dress.
- Concerns by others about my religion or philosophical perspective are connected to stereotypes about my race.
- Some religious traditions foster unequal treatment of women.
- People misunderstand my faith's complex relationship to issues of gender equality.
- Christian values and traditions dominate the culture in the U.S.
- Christian values and traditions *should* dominate the culture in the U.S.
- I want a secular public square – I want religion to stay out of politics.

- I believe that religious and philosophical values should shape politics and public policy making.
- Someone who shares my religious or philosophical perspective could never be elected to public office.
- Strong religious beliefs have caused hatred and violence in the world.
- Strong religious beliefs have caused compassion and peace in the world.

At the end of the exercise, discuss the following questions:

1. What did you think as you moved around?
2. Did anything surprise you?
3. What issues emerged that we will want to discuss more in upcoming sessions?

Part 3: Exploring our values (30 minutes)

For facilitators

1. Post the sheet of newsprint on the wall titled **Values**.
2. The purpose of this exercise is to help explore how their philosophical and religious values shape their personal choices and affect their community and the nation. It is also to start thinking about the many values they actually hold in common.
3. In this exercise, participants will create a list of the values that are important to them as members of a religiously and philosophically diverse nation and community. They will be drawing from the observations they made as they moved around the room in the *Where We Stand* exercise.
4. Introduce this exercise: In the *Where We Stand* exercise, we started to explore some perspectives about religion and U.S. society. Before we talk about those perspectives more (Session 3), let's talk about the values that guided the choices we made.
5. Consider starting with a brainstorm. (Please see the *Brainstorming Tips* box.)
6. Keep the list of values the group considers so that you can refer to it in later sessions. Explain that this list will be used when developing a common vision in Session 4.

<p>Brainstorming Tips</p> <p>Purpose</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To help us be creative. • To come up with many different ideas in a short time. <p>Guidelines</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All ideas are OK. • Don't stop to talk about ideas. • Don't judge ideas. • Build on others' ideas. • Help ensure everyone has a chance to contribute. <p>How to do it</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Anyone can offer an idea. You don't need to wait for your turn. • The facilitator will write down every idea.

Discussion questions

- What values guided your choices in response to the *Where We Stand* statements?
- What drew you to the belief system, philosophical system, or views that you now hold?
- Which of these values are most important to you personally?
- Are there any values that you think are unique to the U.S.?
- What values are important to anyone living in the U.S., to making the U.S. a place where you want to live?
- Are there any values that you might list as on the “endangered” list in American society? Do you ever feel that others do not live up to the values you feel are important?
- Which values do many of us hold in common?

Part 5: Wrap-up (15 min)

For facilitators

1. Review what will happen in Session 3 on the nature of the challenges we face. Explain to the group that it is divided into two sessions:
 - a. 3A asks, *Why are there tensions among different religious and philosophical groups?*
 - b. 3B asks, *Why are there tensions surrounding religion when it comes to making public decisions?*
 - c. Read both questions aloud ask participants if they would like to do one or both. Discuss with the group the time limits and challenges, and reach a group consensus on which sessions to do.
 - d. Ask people to read the perspectives under 3A and 3B for next time.
2. Thank everyone for coming.

Discussion questions

- What have you heard or learned today that surprised you?
- How did it feel to participate in this conversation?
- How did this conversation go today? What worked well, and what would you like to change for the next session?

Session 3A What is the Nature of the Challenges We're Facing?

Goals

- Talk about the tensions that can arise in a religiously and philosophically diverse community and nation.
- Reflect on our common values.

Advance preparation

1. For Part 2, write on newsprint the question, *Why are there tensions among different religious and philosophical groups?* List the titles of the viewpoints in the languages of your circle.
2. Hang the **Action Ideas** and **Terms Parking Lots** and the **Guidelines**.
3. Hang on the wall the **Values List** created in the last session.

Part 1: Getting started (15 minutes)

For facilitators

1. Welcome the group.
2. Explain session goals.

Discussion questions

- Let's look at the guidelines we established when we first met. Do we need to change or add any?
- Does anyone have a reflection to share from last session?
- Let's look again at the list of values we created last session. Is there anything on this list that we all agree we need to change?

Part 2: What is the nature of the challenges we face (60 minutes)

For facilitators

1. Remind the group of the two ways of looking at religion in public life, described in the introduction to this guide.
 - a. This session will help the group talk about and address the question, *Why are there tensions among different religious and philosophical groups?*
 - b. The next session will help the group talk about and address the question, *Why are there tensions surrounding religion when it comes to making public decisions?*
2. Ask for volunteers to read the viewpoints aloud. (Please see page 18.)

3. Consider allowing participants some time to think about the perspectives or jot down some notes.

Discussion questions

- Which viewpoint(s) are closest to your own?
- Why do you hold the viewpoint that you hold?
- Are there other views that are missing? What?
- Choose a viewpoint that you don't hold. Discuss why you think someone might hold that viewpoint.

Question:

Why are there tensions among different religious and philosophical groups?

Viewpoint 1: We lack interfaith knowledge and understanding.

Most Americans don't know enough about religion. We lack information about our own individual faith and beliefs, much less those of others. Nor do we have enough opportunities to learn. Our schools don't offer comparative religion. Faith communities focus on their own traditions and belief systems. There are not enough opportunities for people to come together and learn about their common and different beliefs.

Viewpoint 2: We don't know how to talk about religion and beliefs.

Americans avoid talking about their religious beliefs and personal philosophy in conversations with neighbors and colleagues – and even in conversations with people who share their religious and philosophical perspectives. There are few opportunities to participate in structured interfaith dialogues in schools, houses of worship, or communities. As a result, we have difficulty talking with each other about religion in ways that are civil, candid, and productive.

Viewpoint 3: We are growing increasingly intolerant of the views of others.

Americans are growing less tolerant of the religious and secular views of others. There has been a rise in anti-Semitic, anti-Muslim, and anti-Mormon sentiment and acts in this country, and a backlash against Christians and Jews in other parts of the world. Hostility is increasingly aimed at people who are not affiliated with a faith community, the suggestion being that they lack morals or are "unpatriotic."

Viewpoint 4: Forces in our society reinforce stereotypes, fear, and division.

Too often, civic, political, and religious leaders promote stereotypes or foster fear and division instead of cooperation and trust. The media show religion in negative stereotypes of extremists. Many people wrongly associate particular skin color or clothing with a particular faith, and racial profiling too often goes unchallenged. These patterns foster fear, making it hard for us to trust and work alongside people with different religious and philosophical perspectives.

Viewpoint 5: Discrimination on the basis of religion is often overlooked.

Discrimination, prejudice, and bias on the basis of religion in schools, workplaces, and social services often go unchallenged. Schools and workplaces lack non-sectarian spaces for prayer. Workplace and school dress codes prohibit some types of traditional religious clothing. Some religious symbols are publicly displayed, while others are prohibited. People of some faiths or philosophies face open or subtle discrimination.

Viewpoint 6: The centrality of Judeo-Christian values is at risk.

Our foundation of Judeo-Christian values is what has made our community strong and our nation great. Too much religious diversity is divisive and disruptive of our way of life. Our community is a nice place to live because of we share basic Judeo-Christian values. Newcomers are welcome as long as we can continue to maintain our traditions and value systems.

Viewpoint 7: We aren't sure what we want in the way of religious diversity.

We understand the value of diversity, but we wonder whether there isn't a limit. Unlimited religious diversity seems too difficult. We want to hold onto traditions and grow in our understandings of others, but we worry about too many different perspectives in our schools, workplaces, neighborhoods, and public places. And we are not even sure of how we would reach consensus on this volatile and complicated topic.

Viewpoint 8: The U.S. is being promoted as a "Christian nation."

The U.S. is not officially or legally a Christian state, but many politicians, religious leaders, and everyday citizens insist that it is a nation shaped by Christianity. Even though Christians are the majority, they should not have the unfair advantage that they have in shaping public norms, holidays, and values. This privileging of Christianity above other religions and philosophical perspectives is inappropriate because it is inconsistent with our commitment to diversity and pluralism.

Part 3: Some cases to consider (30 minutes)

For facilitators

1. The purpose of this section is to get participants thinking about the many ways that religion affects communities, politics, and policy. In Session 3B, participants will take a closer look at policy, the First Amendment of the U.S. Constitution, and some areas of political conflict. This discussion will lay the groundwork for an examination of the next set of Viewpoints.
2. Ask people to skim the cases below. Pick one or two to discuss briefly.
3. The goal is not to have a comprehensive dialogue on all, or even one, of these cases. The goal is to help participants see the wide range of issues relating to this topic.
4. You can also return to these cases after or before discussing the Viewpoints in 3B.

Discussion questions

- What is your reaction to this situation?
- How would members of your community respond to this situation?
- How would you like members of your community to respond?

Cases

1. Traditionally, newly elected public officials have been sworn in by placing their right hands on a Christian bible. Your most recently elected official wants to use the Qur'an. Should she be allowed to substitute the Qur'an for the bible?
2. Your child's public school teacher starts each morning with "a moment of silence," five minutes during which the students are instructed to "think about and offer silent thanks for the blessings you have in your life and to the people and divine beings in your life." The teacher participates by silently reading a Christian bible. Imagine you have a child in this class. How do you feel about the teacher's morning routine?
3. At your place of employment, employees are given time off for Christian holidays. Some of your co-workers would prefer to work on those holidays and take other days to observe their religious holidays, and at least one co-workers wants to take "personal days" without any religious purpose. Should the employees be able to take other holidays or personal days rather than Christmas?
4. Your local school board has mandated that students learn the theories of both evolution and creationism, with equal time and weigh given to both theories. Should you oppose or support this decision?
5. A local mosque runs a successful "Say No to Drugs- Say Yes to Allah" program that outperforms drug rehabilitation programs without a religious theme. Clients not only give up their drug habits; they often convert to Islam. How do you feel about this situation? Would your feelings be the same if you learned that the program is supported with public funding?
6. Your elected official wants to introduce legislation making "death with dignity" an option for people suffering from the late stages of a terminal disease or from chronic pain. Do you support a law allowing physicians to assist patients in committing suicide under limited circumstances?
7. A local religious group would like to hold weekly meetings in an elementary school nearby. Should that be allowed? Is there a difference between meeting during the school day and after hours? What if the local high school needs a larger space for graduation and would like to use a local church? What is the difference between the two situations? Does it matter whether the place of worship is a church, synagogue, or mosque?
8. Some communities around the world are passing laws banning the wearing of *hijab*, Islamic headscarves. Some of these laws ban hijab in public spaces such as schools and government buildings. What is your view on these bans? Are there ever situations when the wearing of overt religious symbols should be prohibited? Is there a difference between hijab and a nun's *habit*, black robes, rosaries, and head coverings worn by Catholic nuns?

Part 4: Wrap (15 min)

For facilitators

1. Thank participants for coming and sharing.
2. Remind them that there will be time in Session 3B to consider more of the cases.

Discussion questions

- What have you heard or learned today that surprised you?
- Have your views changed toward people who hold different views than you? In what way?
- How did it feel to participate in this conversation?
- How did this conversation go today? What worked well, and what would you like to change for the next session?

For next time

- If you're doing Session 3B, ask participants to read the Viewpoints for Session 3B as well as the section on the First Amendment (below). Ask them to read the questions about the First Amendment and to think about their answers before you meet again.

Did You Know ...?

The First Amendment

Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances.
— The First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution

Whenever discussing the issue of religion in the public life, we implicitly talk about the First Amendment. The First Amendment of the Constitution guarantees American citizens five basic freedoms, beginning with religious freedom. In its “establishment” and “free exercise” clauses, the First Amendment says that the government cannot:

- *Support or demonstrate a preference for (“establish”) one religion over another.* This government limitation is what Thomas Jefferson had in mind when he wrote about a “wall of separation between church and state.”
- *Interfere with individuals who want to practice (“exercise”) their religious freedom.*

These clauses have long been the subject of debate and litigation. Americans generally recognize the importance of religious freedom, but they may also disagree when a religious practice conflicts with commonly accepted laws, cultural norms, or with their own faith or ideology. For example, polygamy, adult-child marriages, curtailed rights of women, educational restrictions, and other conduct sometimes defended as aligned with a particular religion are not allowed. Many agree with “separating church and state,” but they may question certain decisions, such as those that allow religious artifacts from public spaces or prayer in public schools.

Session 3B

What is the Nature of the Challenges We’re Facing?

Goals

- Talk about the tensions that can arise in a religiously and philosophically diverse community and nation.
- Reflect on our common values.

Advance preparation

1. For Part 2, write on newsprint the question, *Why are there tensions among different religious and philosophical groups?* List the titles of the viewpoints in the languages of your circle.
2. Hang the **Action Ideas** and **Terms Parking Lots** and the **Guidelines**.
3. Hang the **Values List** created in Session 2.

Part 1: Getting started (20 minutes)

For facilitators

1. Welcome the group.
2. Explain session goals.

Discussion questions

- Let’s look at the guidelines we established when we first met. Do we need to change or add any?
- Does anyone have a reflection to share from last session?
- Let’s look again at the list of values we created last session. Is there anything on this list that we all agree we need to change or add?

Part 2: The First Amendment (25 minutes)

For facilitators

1. Have volunteers read the statement aloud in the “Did You Know...?” box. (See page 21.)
2. Clarify that the First Amendment is part of the U.S. Constitution.

Discussion questions

- What does the First Amendment mean to you personally?

- Share some stories about ways that you have practiced your First Amendment rights.
- Can you think of a time when your First Amendment rights have been needed or been protected? How?
- What is the significance of the First Amendment clauses on religion to this dialogue?

Part 3: Why are there tensions surrounding religion when it comes to making public decisions? (60 minutes)

For facilitators

1. Remind the group of the two ways of looking at religion in public life, described in the introduction to this guide.
 3. Last session the group talk about and address the question, *Why are there tensions among different religious and philosophical groups?*
 4. This session will help the group talk about and address the question, *Why are there tensions surrounding religion when it comes to making public decisions?*
2. Ask for volunteers to read the viewpoints aloud. (Please see below.)
3. Feel free to use the cases from Session 3A either before or after the discussion of views, if that will help your group.

Discussion questions

- Which viewpoint(s) are closest to your own?
- Why do you hold the viewpoint that you hold?
- Are there other views that are missing? What ones?
- Choose a viewpoint that you don't hold. Discuss why you think someone might hold that viewpoint.

Question:

Why are there tensions surrounding religion when it comes to making public decisions?

Viewpoint 1: Religion plays too much of a role in American public life.

We've strayed too far from separation between church and state. When religious doctrine enters in to public policy making and governance, the discourse inevitably deteriorates making it more difficult to make progress on already difficult issues. Our faith leaders should not be lobbying for particular political positions. And our politicians should not cater to religious groups.

Viewpoint 2: Not enough attention is given to commonly held values.

We hold a lot in common, and some of our shared values come from very different religious and philosophical perspectives. Our society is suffering from a crisis in ethics and morality, so we don't want to set aside our commonly held values. But instead of helping us find these values, public officials and religious and philosophical leaders pit us against one another.

Viewpoint 3: Some religions are privileged, while other religions and viewpoints are marginalized.

The influence and favoritism toward Christianity is hurting us as a nation. School prayer, and religious symbols in court houses and other public spaces, taking the oath of office on a bible, pledging allegiance “under God,” nationally recognized holidays – nearly all of which are Christian – are examples of how the government values Christianity over other religious, spiritual, and philosophical views.

Viewpoint 4: Our country is taking separation of church and state to the extreme.

Our Judeo-Christian roots have served us well so far – they are what have enabled the U.S. to become a great nation. These values have guided this nation through difficult times, and inspired great social changes such as the Civil Rights movement. Judeo-Christian values are values for the common good. This nation is and should be “a Christian nation.” When we take Christianity out of the public sphere, we deny our history and weaken our common values.

Viewpoint 5: Too many people exploit religion for political and personal gain.

Politicians and the media are more concerned about ideological wins and market share than helping the country solve the problems we’re facing. Too many politicians are willing to set aside common values, and instead cater to religious groups in an effort to win votes. And the media promotes stereotypes and exploits fear to keep viewers. This creates polarization at all levels of government, and makes it more difficult to make good decisions.

Viewpoint 6: Government interferes too much in how people practice their religion.

Prohibiting school prayer, removing religious displays from public spaces, controlling what is taught in schools, recognizing certain religious holidays but not others, limiting religious speech – these are just a few examples of how the government infringes on people’s ability to practice their religion as they see fit. We need to reinforce our commitment to religious freedom.

Viewpoint 7: We lack adequate commitment to tolerance in a religiously diverse society.

The U.S. is arguably the world’s most religiously diverse nation, and some Americans do not like it. We need to affirm our commitment to welcoming new people of every religion or ideological perspective. This means responding decisively to incidents of harassment, hate crimes, and any form of denigration based on religion, race, or ethnicity. We all have to take seriously the job of welcoming newcomers to our neighborhoods and new cultures and traditions to our communities.

Viewpoint 8: The most important tension is between “secularists” and people who feel religion has an appropriate place in public life. Even many people of faith do not believe that religion and politics should mix. We need to affirm our commitment to a secular public square, including policy makers who check their religious views at the door. This was the intent of the original framers of the U.S. Constitution, and it should be the commitment of citizens in our society today.

Part 3: Wrap-up (15 min)

For facilitators

1. Thank people for coming.
2. Explain to participants what will happen in Sessions 4 and 5, that in the next session, we'll be identifying a vision for the community and nation and also identifying what concerns them the most.
3. Explain that the next two sessions are designed to help the group move to action.

Discussion questions

- What have you heard or learned today that surprised you?
- How did it feel to participate in this conversation?
- How did this conversation go today? What worked well, and what would you like to change for the next session?

For next time

- Ask participants to consider what terms they might use to describe the ideal community and nation, as the first step to creating a Vision Statement.
- Ask participants to review the **Report Card** and consider how well the community is doing on the report card categories.

Session 4 How Are We Doing?

Goals

- Craft a shared vision.
- Talk about the difference between our vision of where we want to be and where we are today.
- Begin to explore the kinds of actions that might help us create the kind of community we envision.

Advance preparation

1. For Part 2, prepare a sheet of newsprint that says **Our Vision**
2. For Part 3, if you are going to have participants vote for the categories they want to work on using stickers, prepare a sheet of newsprint with the categories of the **Report Card** listed.
3. For Part 4, prepare two sheets of newsprint one entitled **Successes** and the other, **Challenges**.
4. Bring stickers for people to use to vote on the categories in the **Report Card**.
5. Hang the **Action Ideas** and **Terms Parking Lots** and the **Guidelines**.
6. Hang on the wall the **Values List** created in Session 2.

Part 1: Reconnecting (10 minutes)

For facilitators

1. Welcome the group.
2. Explain the session goals.

Discussion questions

- Are there any reflections since our last session?
- Do you have any questions about our task for these last two sessions?

Part 2: Crafting a vision (10 minutes)

For facilitators

1. Your task is to get the group to revisit the **Values List** they created in Session 2 and to turn that list into a statement that describes the ideal community.
2. Give the group an opportunity to change or add to the original **Values List** in light of their discussions on the **Viewpoints**.

3. Turn the **Values List** into a statement. Consider completing this sentence, " Ten years from now, our community will be ..." and "ten years from now, our nation will be ..."
4. When you are done, post the **Our Vision** statement on the wall.
5. If your group cannot reach an agreement on a vision statement, consider posting more than one.

Discussion questions

- Do we need to change our list of values?
- What are some of the values we agree on that can be part of **Our Vision** statement

Part 3: Making the grade (60 minutes)

For facilitators

6. Have participants turn to the **Report Card** on page 28 of their guide. Review the grading system.
7. Explain the purpose of this exercise: to help the group examine the strengths and challenges in their communities *and* to help them begin thinking about action strategies (Session 5).
8. Read the categories and statements aloud. After each statement, ask people to think quietly for a moment and "grade" the category. Ask participants to assign a grade of A (meaning "perfect") to F (meaning "failing"), or something in between.
9. For the discussion on the "best" and "worst" categories, give a volunteer an opportunity to share their best category, then ask for group discussion about that category. Do this until each person has had a chance to share at least one of their best categories. Do the same for the worst categories.
10. Have the note taker fill out the **Successes** and **Challenges** lists by adding the categories to each, along with the grade.
11. Before moving to action, you'll need to get the group to identify where they want to put most of their energy. Don't assume that the "challenges" deserve the most attention; it may be that the group wants to work from the community's strengths, to capitalize on things that it is already doing well.
12. Consider having participants vote on the issues that they want to work on. They can put dots or check-marks next to the topics that interest them the most.
13. Resist the temptation to work on all of the issues in the report card. Limit the categories to 4.

Explain

- We're now going to "grade" our community on how different religious and philosophical groups are treated in our community. Write or think about how our community is doing on each one.

*After completing the **Report Card**, use these discussion questions:*

- What are your best categories? What are your worst categories?

- How did you decide what grade to give? What have you seen or experienced that influenced your grade?
- What categories were you unsure about? What questions do you have for the group about these categories?
- Where do we seem to have the most agreement? Where do we seem to have the most disagreement?
- Based on our discussion, what successes do you see? What are some challenges we need to address? (Capture these on newsprint)
- Based on our discussion, where do we want to put our energies? Which **four** categories concern us the most? Where can we capitalize on successes?

No.	Category	Statement	Grade
1.	Climate	In our community, there are no tensions because of religious diversity or diversity in perspectives on religion.	
2.	Tolerance	Everyone in our community feels welcome, regardless of religious, spiritual, or philosophical views.	
3.	Religious freedom	People in our community are free to practice their faith and free to adhere to non-religious views.	
4.	Religious symbols	In our community, religious symbols and practices are at the level we think is best in our public spaces (schools, public parks, libraries, etc.).	
5.	Demographics	Our community reflects the level of diversity we want.	
6.	Interpersonal relationships	In our community, people know how to solve problems and engage in conversations, even when they disagree strongly.	
7.	Interfaith collaboration	Our faith communities work together to help solve local problems.	
8.	Education	There's a high level of tolerance in our schools. Students from different religious and philosophical backgrounds are treated fairly.	
9.	Social services	The social services system in our community (e.g., welfare, job training, etc.) meets everyone's needs, regardless of philosophical, spiritual, or religious views.	
10.	Employment	In our community, people have equal opportunities for employment, regardless of their faith or non-faith perspective.	
11.	Media	Local media offers fair and full coverage of people from all different kinds of spiritual, religious, and philosophical backgrounds.	
12.	Elections	In our community, nobody faces barriers to voting, regardless of philosophical or religious orientation.	
13.	Faith leaders	Faith leaders encourage a tolerant public and political climate.	
14.	Elected officials	At the local, state, and national levels, our elected officials demonstrate a high and exemplary level of interfaith tolerance, respect, and cooperation we expect.	

Part 4: Moving to action (20 minutes)

For facilitators

1. You don't have a lot of time, so you should probably consider brainstorming. (Please see the tips on page 15.)
2. Explain to the group what you are trying to accomplish here: to start thinking about action, without duplicating (unnecessarily) what is already being done, building on strengths, and considering what others have done to address challenges.
3. You are going to ask the participants the kinds of things that are already being done to address the challenges they identified, or the kinds of things that are already being done that have lead to the successes. If the group does not know much about what is already being done, consider assigning this as homework.
4. Define again what is meant by "**action idea**" before you start.
5. Write the name of the four **Report Card** categories that the group chose each on their own pieces of newsprint.
6. Go through each category individually, asking participants to brainstorm action ideas.

Explain

Action ideas are things we can do. They are specific. For example:

Not this: "We must change the curriculum in schools."

Try this: "Form a committee to examine the curriculum in our local schools and make recommendations for changes."

Discussion questions

- Look at our vision. What are some actions we can take in each category we've chosen, and at each level of change, that will help us reach our vision?
- What are some actions we can take to improve upon some of the strengths we've already identified?
- What are some actions we can take to strengthen some of our areas of weakness? What would make your action idea "doable?"

Part 5: Wrap-up (10 minutes)

For facilitators:

- 1. Thank people for coming and sharing.
- 2. Remind them to attend every session.
- 3. Tell them what they will talk about next time.

Discussion questions

- What worked well today? What would you like to see done differently next time?

For next time

- Ask participants to think about the kinds of things that people and organizations are already doing in their community, and to identify “**community assets**.” Explain that every community has strengths or assets, people, places, traditions, events, organizations – things that make the community a better place. Those assets will help you be successful when you take action.

Session 5 How Can We Make Progress?

Goals

- Review the action ideas that came up in Session 4.
- Talk about the assets we have in our community.
- Choose a small number of ideas for action
- Plan an Action Forum to jump start action.

Advance preparation

1. Meet with your co-facilitator ahead of time to prepare.
2. For Part 3, prepare newsprint labeled **Community Assets**.
3. For Part 4, prepare newsprint labeled **Priority Action Ideas** and **Other Ideas**.
4. For Part 5, bring stickers. You will need three different colors and enough of each color for everyone in the group to have three.
5. Hang the **Action Ideas** and **Terms Parking Lots** and the **Guidelines**.
6. Hang on the wall the **values list** created in Session 2.
7. Hang the **Report Card** created in the last session.
8. Hang the **Action Ideas** created in the last session.

Part 1: Reconnecting (20 minutes)

For facilitators

1. Welcome the group.
2. Explain the session goals.

Ask participants to turn to their neighbor and talk about the following:

- What common concerns do you have with others that are different than you?
- What have you learned about the experiences of others that is surprising?
- What are the most important issues or ideas that we have talked about since our circle began?

Discussion questions

- Have you experienced, seen, heard, or read anything in the past week/two weeks that is relevant to our discussions?
- What are your hopes for this final session?

PART 2: Reviewing action ideas (15 minutes)

For facilitators

1. Have the note taker write down additional action ideas on the newsprint from last week.

Discussion questions

- Did you think of any more ideas for our list during the week? Are there any ideas you like to add?

PART 3: Listing our community strengths (Community Assets) (25 minutes)

For facilitators

1. Hang the pieces of newsprint with the categories of **Community Assets**.
2. This is a brainstorm. (Please see page 15 for brainstorming tips.)
3. Have your note taker write the answers on the **Community Assets** sheet.
4. Explain:
 - o To begin our discussion today, we need to make a list of our assets. Every community has strengths or assets. Assets can be people, places, or institutions. They are things that we have or use to help ourselves and each other. Every group and every person has them. Assets can be handed down in families, or from group to group.
 - o Some examples:
 - In some communities, cultures, and groups, taking care of one another is a way of life.
 - Some people are good at helping people working on similar goals to connect and work together.
 - Community centers are physical resources that anyone in the community can use for meetings and events.

Discussion questions

- What are some things you know a lot about?
- What are some talents or skills of other members in this dialogue? How about other people in the community?
- What groups do you belong to? How can they help?
- What organizations, groups, or government agencies, or individuals in the community are already working on the issues we've identified as important? How can they help?
- What assets do we have — like land, buildings, space, tools, or even money?

PART 4: Connecting action ideas with community assets (15 minutes)

For facilitators:

1. Put the list of ideas for action next to the list of community assets. Ask participants to compare the lists and look for strong links between them to answer the questions.
2. As people make these links, have the note taker write them on newsprint.

Discussion questions

- What assets do we have to support our action ideas?
- For example, one action idea may be to “design and offer interfaith learning experiences.” Here is how we could connect this to some assets:
 - **Problem:** Lack of interfaith knowledge and understanding
 - **Asset:** an already-established interfaith council of religious leaders
 - **Asset:** a community that values education and life-long learning

PART 5: Choosing ideas for the Action Forum (40 minutes total)

For facilitators

1. Post the sheets of newsprint labeled **Our Vision, Action Ideas, and Community Assets**.
2. Once the group decides on three action ideas, write them on the sheet labeled **Priority Action Ideas**.
3. Between this session and the **Action Forum**, you will need to create a list on newsprint called **Other Ideas**. This will be a list of all the ideas you talk about that aren't selected for the action forum. This list will be posted at the **Action Forum**.
4. Explain that ideas not chosen will still be displayed at the **Action Forum**.

If there are no plans for an action forum:

5. Ask the group if they would like to keep on meeting to carry out their action ideas. If so, have them share each other's phone numbers etc. Ask someone from the group to set up the next meeting. Let the organizers know your plans.
6. Explain:
 - We will now go through a process to choose three action ideas to take to the **Action Forum**.
 - Look again at our list of ideas for action. Now we are going to narrow it down to a few ideas we can work with. Then, we will come up with our final list for the action forum.

Discussion questions

- Which ideas might help us reach our vision?
- Which ideas are easiest to get done but will still contribute to our vision? What ideas would be more challenging to do?
- Are there any ideas you need to learn more about before you can decide whether to vote for them or not?
- Pick two or three ideas that seem useful and ask yourself the following questions:
 - What would it take to make this happen?
 - What community assets could we use to move this idea forward?
 - What would our next steps be?
 - What kind of support do we need to take these steps? Who else could we link up with?

Explain:

- We will now each choose up to three action ideas to take to the action forum. We should choose one idea that is easy, one that is medium difficulty, and one that is difficult.
- Each person will get three stickers to put on action ideas you would like us to bring to the **Action Forum**. All three votes can be used on one idea or on different ideas.

Part 6: Wrap-up (20 minutes)

For facilitators

1. Thank people for taking part in the circles and for working to addressing the role that religion plays in public decisions.
2. Ask if anyone has questions about the **Action Forum**.
3. If the date has been set, tell your group where and when the **Action Forum** will take place. Let them know how important it is for them to come!
4. Ask the questions, and then give people a moment to reflect and then answer.

Discussion questions

- What are you hopeful about after this dialogue?
- What is the most important thing you've learned during our dialogue?
- What have you heard in these sessions that changed your mind about people who have different beliefs and philosophies than you?
- What parts of this dialogue process did you find most valuable or helpful?
- What personal commitments would you like to make?

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

The Action Forum

An action forum is a large community gathering that happens after all the dialogues finish. At this event, people present their action ideas and discuss them. Action groups or task forces form to move these ideas forward. There will be many ways for everyone to stay involved.

When programs last a long time, more and more people take many kinds of action. For more information about moving to action, please visit Everyday Democracy's website at www.everyday-democracy.org.

A Sample Action Forum Agenda (approximately 3 hours)

1. Snacks, social time, music or poetry, and time to read action ideas from each dialogue posted around the room
2. Welcome everyone and introduce the sponsors
 - o Review agenda.
 - o Talk about the dialogue-to-change effort in the community.
 - o Thank facilitators and other key volunteers.
3. Reports from the dialogues
 - o Ask one person from each dialogue to make a brief report about action ideas from their group.
 - o Or, when the group is large (more than 60 people), post summaries from the dialogues where everyone can see them. Invite a few people to report out on their dialogues.
4. Overview of community assets
 - o A person from the organizing group reviews key community assets. These assets will help the community move action ideas forward.
5. Moving to action
 - o The MC (Master of Ceremonies) identifies the main ideas from all the dialogues.
 - o People sign up for an action group or task force.
 - o Action groups meet and begin their work. They also set the date for their next meeting.
6. Closing remarks
 - o Closing remarks (including how the action efforts will be tracked and tied to further organizing).
 - o Next steps (including plans for another round of dialogues, celebration, or check-in meeting).
 - o Thanks to all.

Facilitation Tips

**These tips are extracted from Chapter 5 of "A Guide for Training Public Dialogue Facilitators," produced by Everyday Democracy. You can download a free copy of this guide here: www.everyday-democracy.org/en/Resource.106.aspx.*

Key Facilitation Skills

- Reflecting & Clarifying
- Summarizing
- Shifting Focus
- Asking Probing or Follow-Up Questions
- Managing Conflict
- Using Silence
- Using Non-Verbal Signals (Body Language)

Reflecting and Clarifying—feeding back or restating an idea or thought to make it clearer.

- "Let me see if I'm hearing you correctly...."
- "What I believe you are saying is...."

Summarizing—briefly stating the main thoughts.

- "It sounds to me as if we have been talking about a few major themes...."

Shifting Focus—moving from one speaker or topic to another.

- "Thank you, John. Do you have anything to add, Jane?"
- "We've been focusing on views 1 and 2. Does anyone have strong feelings about the other views?"

Asking Probing or Follow-Up Questions—using questions to help people explore disagreements, understand multiple perspectives, and uncover common ground.

- "What are the key points here?"
- "What would someone with a different point of view say?"

Managing Conflict—helping conflict and disagreement to be productive.

- "Let's refer to our ground rules."
- "What seems to be at the heart of this issue?"
- "What do others think?"

Using Silence—allowing time and space for reflection by pausing between comments.

Using Non-Verbal Signals (Body Language)—recognizing and understanding how people communicate without using words.

- "What signals am I sending with my body?"
- "What signals am I reading from others?"
- "How do I signal encouragement?"
- "How do I invite others to participate?"

A Neutral Facilitator...

- Explains her/his role.
- Sets a relaxed and welcoming tone.
- Introduces him/herself, but does not share personal opinions or push an agenda.
- Does not take sides.
- Makes everyone feel that their opinions are valid and welcome.
- Does not use her/his personal experiences to make a point or to get people talking.
- Uses probing questions to deepen the discussion.
- Brings up issues that participants have not mentioned.
- Reminds participants of comments they shared in earlier sessions.

The most important thing to remember is that the facilitator should not share personal views and stories, or try to push an agenda. The facilitator's job is to serve the group and help people have a productive conversation.

Facilitating Viewpoints and Approaches

How to facilitate

- Write the topic sentence for all the views/approaches on a flip chart, to use as a quick reference.
- Help people understand they are not choosing a "winner" but rather exploring a range of ideas.
- Give people time to look over the information.
- Ask participants to choose one view to discuss. They can agree or disagree with it.
- Ask for a volunteer to read the view or approach aloud.
- Touch on all of the views/approaches, and help people see the connections.
- Summarize the discussion by noting areas of agreement and disagreement.
- Help people think about how this issue plays out in their own lives and in their community.

Exploring different points of view about an issue is one of the hallmarks of this approach to dialogue. These viewpoints reflect some of the ways that different kinds of people think and talk about a public concern.

This method allows participants to deliberate about different ways to create change. Looking at different "approaches" helps people understand the complexity of an issue and the tradeoffs that are often necessary to make progress. As the group develops a sense of what might work in their situation, they are more likely to come up with action ideas and strategies that make sense.

Helpful questions

- Which views are closest to your own? Why?
- Think about a view you don't agree with. Why would someone support that view?
- Which views conflict with each other?
- What views would you add?
- Which approaches appeal to you and why?
- What approaches would work best in our community? Which wouldn't?
- How would this approach help us make progress?

A dialogue facilitator does not need to be an expert on the topic being discussed. But the facilitator should be well prepared for the discussion. This means the facilitator...

- Understands the goals of the community change effort.
- Is familiar with the discussion materials.
- Thinks ahead of time about how the discussion might go.
- Has questions in mind to help the group consider the subject.

Helping the Group Do Its Work

- Keep track of who has spoken, and who hasn't.
- Consider splitting up into smaller groups occasionally. This will help people feel more at ease.
- Enter the discussion only when necessary. When the conversation is going well, the facilitator isn't saying much.
- Don't allow the group to turn to you for the answers.
- Resist the urge to speak after each comment or answer every question. Let participants respond directly to each other.
- Once in a while, ask participants to sum up important points.
- People sometimes need time to think before they respond. Don't be afraid of silence! Try counting silently to ten before you rephrase the question. This will give people time to collect their thoughts.
- Try to involve everyone; don't let anyone take over the conversation.
- Remember that this is not a debate, with winners and losers. If participants forget this, don't hesitate to ask the group to help re-establish the discussion ground rules.
- Don't allow the group to get stuck on a personal experience or anecdote.
- Keep careful track of time.

Helping the Group Look at Different Points of View

- Good discussion materials present a wide range of views. Look at the pros and cons of each viewpoint. Or, ask participants to consider a point of view that hasn't come up in the discussion.
- Ask participants to think about how their own values affect their opinions.
- Help participants see the things they have in common.

Asking Open-Ended Questions

Open-ended questions can't be answered with a quick "yes" or "no." Open-ended questions can help people look for connections between different ideas.

General Questions

- What seems to be the key point here?
- Do you agree with that? Why?
- What do other people think of this idea?
- What would be a strong case against what you just said?
- What experiences have you had with this?
- Could you help us understand the reasons behind your opinion?
- What do you think is really going on here? Why is that important?
- How might others see this issue?
- Do you think others in the group see this the way you do? Why?
- How does this make you feel?

Questions to Use When There is Disagreement

- What do you think he is saying?
- What bothers you most about this?
- What is at the heart of the disagreement?
- How does this make you feel?
- What experiences or beliefs might lead a person to support that point of view?
- What do you think is really important to people who hold that opinion?
- What is blocking the discussion?
- What don't you agree with?
- What do you find most convincing about that point of view?
- What is it about that position that you just cannot live with?
- Could you say more about what you think?
- What makes this topic hard?
- What have we missed that we need to talk about?

Questions to Use When People are Feeling Discouraged

- How does that make you feel?
- What gives you hope?
- How can we make progress on these problems? What haven't we considered yet?

Closing Questions

- What are the key points of agreement and disagreement in today's session?
- What have you heard today that has made you think, or has touched you in some way?

ABOUT EVERYDAY DEMOCRACY

Created in 1989 by The Paul J. Aicher Foundation, Everyday Democracy has worked with more than 600 communities across the United States on many different public issues. We provide advice and training, and then use what we learn to benefit other communities. Our innovative tools and processes have proved to be effective in furthering the efforts of people who are organizing dialogue that leads to change where they live.