



adventures in hosting

a conversation choose-your-own-adventure

LivingRoom
Conversations

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getting started

So, you have decided to host your own Living Room Conversation(LRC)? We know that anyone willing to honor the conversation agreements can do it! This guide will help you cover all of your bases in your adventures in hosting.

If you have ever read a “choose-your-own-adventure” story this format will be familiar to you. Each section will give you a page number to skip to, making sure that you get the information that you need!

building your skills

If you already have skills in facilitation and feel confident in your conversation skills, jump right in! If you'd like more support we have these offerings:

[Connecting Through Conversation Course](https://livingroomconversations.org/host-sign-up/)

<https://livingroomconversations.org/host-sign-up/>

Being a good conversationalist is not something you just are or are not. We can all improve our conversation skills with concentrated time and effort. But how? Where to begin?

Well, we have some good news, we've completed the first step for you! Those wanting to grow their practice or deep dive into the power of conversation can now join our Connecting Through Conversation Course. This course will prepare you to bring better conversation to all aspects of your lives and better connect with others through conversation. Over four weeks you will take an in-depth dive into crucial conversation skills including empathy, listening, and communicating with care.

Scholarships are available.

[Custom Host & Organizer Trainings](https://livingroomconversations.org/host-sign-up/)

<https://livingroomconversations.org/host-sign-up/>

Recommended for those looking to build understanding within a specific organization, community, or corporation. This training includes a co-branded PDF packet with resources not available in our standard Host Toolkit. It also includes program design, support for implementation, and a hosted conversation on the topic of your choice. We can pull from content from the other training offerings, offer a combination of both, or focus on building conversation skills in general.

Each custom training is unique—please schedule a consultation for more information.

choose a topic

One of the responsibilities/benefits of hosting the conversation is choosing the topic for the group. What do you want to talk about in your Living Room Conversation?



above: word cloud of
Living Room Conversation topics

Living Room Conversations(LRC) has more than 160 topics ready for you to host! Our guides are created in-house, with partner organizations, and by Living Room Conversations hosts and participants. The Living Room Conversations Guide Review Team ensures our guides are accessible to all participants. The team consists of staff and volunteers of different identities, cultures, and political ideologies.

Do you want to talk about politics? We have guides for that! Want a guide that totally avoids talking politics? Well, we have that too!

questions to consider

- Do you want to host alone or with a co-host? Co-hosts can be helpful with recruiting participants, managing time, and sharing responsibility for the conversation.
- What group are you gathering and why?
- Do you want to invite people to talk about an issue you are passionate about? Do you want to learn more about an issue you're not familiar with? Certain topics may put you out of your comfort zone, but we believe any conversation can be successful if you honor the Conversation Agreements.
- How challenging do you want the conversation to be? (list good beginner topics) We strongly believe you can have any conversation successfully if everyone honors the Conversation Agreements.



above: one-word responses to an LRC
about the Barbie Movie

for in-person conversations go to page 3

for virtual conversations go to page 4

choose your location

Our conversations are held in a wide variety of locations in our communities. Where would you like to hold your conversation?

Why Living Room Conversations?

Our organization's name is a nod to the tradition of conversations in living rooms, but you can hold your conversation anywhere! Our living room is wherever we find ourselves connecting with others. In addition to hosting in your home, consider these options:

Community Gathering Spots

can emphasize that this is a fun, social event. Just make sure your location will be relatively free of interruptions and quiet enough to hear each other!

- Coffee Shop
- Bookstore
- Restaurant
- Park

Public Institutions can be great partners for community conversations and can represent neutral ground and are typically free to use. Living Room Conversations has established relationships with additional staff support and resources for the communities shown below. Click on the links to find out more about how you can join them!

- Libraries
- Faith Communities
- Schools
- Civic Groups

Have fun with your location! A garden party to talk about the environment, a home to talk about parenting, or an online conversation to have a conversation around Technology and Relationships. Your location can reflect the topic you choose. It can also simply be a comfortable place to gather.

questions to consider

- Make a list of your favorite community gathering locations. What do you like about them? How could they foster the kind of conversation you hope to have? Do you want the location to impact how you explore your topic?
- How big is your group? Some locations are better for smaller groups, and vice versa.
- Do you want food to be a part of your conversation? There is something about "breaking bread" together that can help a group to bond. We recommend at least water and some snacks. How would your choice of food impact your choice of venue?
- What kind of diversity are you hoping for? Make sure that the venue you choose would make ALL your invitees feel comfortable. (Examples?)

continue to invitations on page 5

scheduling online conversations

There are many different online platforms you can use to host your Living Room Conversation. We have recently expanded our own capabilities to make scheduling an online conversation easier than ever!

Living Room Conversation's format makes it easy to have an online conversation. There are multiple platforms you can use as a host. This toolkit will go through 3 different ways a host can schedule an online conversation.

Skype

<https://www.skype.com/en/free-conference-call/>

If you are looking for a reliable, free video call service that does not require downloads and also does not restrict your time Skype is a great option. You can reserve a Skype line with no strings attached(not even your email!). The line can run for up to 24 hours and have up to 99 people on the call so you have plenty of time and space for your conversation. If you create an account you can also save the chats and record your conversation as well.

Personal Zoom Account

<https://zoom.us/>

You can always use your own personal Zoom account if you are comfortable doing so and prefer it that way. We do recommend that you upgrade to a paid version instead of using a free version of Zoom. Besides having access to more capabilities that would help you host your conversation, the biggest reason to having a paid Zoom account for your Living Room Conversation is having more time. In the free version, the Zoom line will only work for 40 minutes. Our conversations are designed to be 60-90 minutes long.

If you are using your own Zoom account, we would still love for you to [tell us about your conversation](#). This helps us gain visibility into how our guides are being used and will allow our staff to support you if needed.

Kazm

<https://myjunto.app/space/living-room-conversations>

Kazm is an all-in-one scheduling and videoconference platform. You can create private and public conversations or join a conversation that someone else is hosting. Kazm has an added feature of having conversation guides built in!

continue to invitations on page 5

invitations

You have a topic, now it's time to get a group together! This is your chance to invite people with a wide range of thought and experience into your conversation – give it some mindful consideration.

The people you invite into your conversation each bring their own unique understanding and experience to the topic you've chosen. As a host, you are asking others to share that uniqueness with people they may not know. Keep that in mind as you think of who to reach out to and how to do it.

Get Personal

Why did this person come to mind for you? Explain how this person's uniqueness could enhance your conversation. For example, "I would like to understand [topic] better and I think your experience as [a law enforcement officer, social worker, immigrant, etc] is important to hear."

Clear is Kind

Make sure the people you invite know what they can expect. This is not an average conversation. You are not getting people together to debate or convince others. Living Room Conversations designs guides to help you be curious about others and explore topics together. Stating this in your invitation is always a good idea and will get those you invite into the right frame of mind before you gather. You may also consider sharing the Conversation Agreements or a few questions from the topic guide you have chosen.

Network if you have to

If you don't know the right people, maybe your friends do! Consider asking people in your circle who you should be talking to and ask for an introduction. Make sure those you are asking for referrals understand the nature and intent of the conversation as well.

sample invitation

Adjust to fit your personality and tone

Dear [name],

Hello there! I am trying to organize a Living Room Conversation to talk about [topic and why it might appeal to this person]. It would be so valuable to have you there!

Living Room Conversations use conversation guides with a structured format to help people with different viewpoints and experiences build understanding. There will be 4-6 other people in our group. It is not a debate and the goal is not to change one another's opinion. There are Conversation Agreements like "Listen and Be Curious" and "Show Respect and Suspend Judgement" that create the framework for diving into the questions. The questions are designed to draw out our personal experiences rather than opinions around the topic. The overall purpose is to learn more about the experiences others have around [topic] and build a sense of community.

Your perspective would be a great addition to the conversation. I'd be happy to talk through any other details and I hope you can join us.

Best,
[your name]

invitation tips

- Keep the Conversation Agreements in mind. If you know people who are “experts” on a topic, will they also be willing to honor agreements like suspending judgment and sharing speaking time? Look at our page on [Unpacking The Conversation Agreements](#).
- Be intentional about inviting voices different than your own. Living Room Conversations welcomes diversity and we realize that term holds different meaning for different individuals and groups. We use it to indicate a spectrum of differences of thought and experience i.e. political, ideological, socio-economic, gender, racial, ethnic, and intergenerational differences. Our guide questions are designed to draw out diversity of experience inherent in the differences listed. As you organize your own conversation, be mindful of what kind of diversity you would like to invite.
- Group size affects time. 4-6 people is the ideal number. If you choose to have a larger or smaller group than that, you need to consider how that affects the length of the conversation. A good estimate for how long your conversation will take can be calculated by planning for 15-20 minutes of total speaking time per person (i.e. a 6 person conversation will likely take 90-120 minutes). This estimate includes time for introductions, conversation agreements, and the question rounds.
- Give yourself options. Having backup options can be helpful if some of your original guests are unable to attend.
- Give yourself and your invitees time. Make sure you extend invitations with enough notice (we recommend two weeks) and plan on contacting everyone more than once, especially as your conversation draws near.
- Decide how you want to coordinate everyone’s schedules. As host you can make scheduling collaborative by using an online tool like [Doodle](#) or [When2Meet](#), or you can give everyone two options that work for you and ask which works best for most people.

questions to consider

- Whose voices need to be heard in this conversation?
- What range of thought and experiences are you hoping for your selected topic? How will you find it? [Tips for Welcoming Diverse Experience in Your Conversation](#)
- What range of thought and experiences are you hoping for your selected topic? How will you find it?

continue to helpful tips on page 8

continue to printable resources on page 10

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helpful tips

These helpful tips will help you navigate time management, getting participants back on track during a conversation, and more.

Follow the Conversation Guide

Everything you need to host is in your conversation guide. Remember this is a very distinct type of conversation you are hosting and old habits die hard. At least one participant will get the urge to revert into a casual conversation. Your guide will help you set expectations and serves as a touch stone for everyone in the group. Get familiar with all the components of the guide before your conversation. over-sharing?

- How can I make sure everyone's voices are heard? How can I model this in the conversation? (A good tip is to take time to think of your own answers to the Round 2 questions so you are prepared)
- What is my personal responsibility as the host in this conversation? What do I want other participants to understand about their responsibilities?

Dig into the Conversation Agreements

The more familiar you are with these, the easier it will be for you to ensure they are being honored and understand why they are so crucial to the success of your conversation. Read this link, [Unpacking the Conversation Agreements](#), and then try answering the following questions (feel free to write your answers down if that's helpful):

- When have I really been curious? How can I bring curiosity to this conversation and encourage it in others?
- What does that respect look and feel like? What triggers my tendency to judge?
- What does common ground look like? How can I look for it? How can I value differences?
- How do I bring my authentic self? How can I balance authenticity with over-sharing?
- How can I make sure everyone's voices are heard? How can I model this in the conversation? (A good tip is to take time to think of your own answers to the Round 2 questions so you are prepared)
- What is my personal responsibility as the host in this conversation? What do I want other participants to understand about their responsibilities?

Co-hosting Tips

- If you've decided you are going to share hosting responsibilities, there are some easy ways to divvy up who leads which part of the conversation, who keeps track of time, etc. You will also want to make sure you are both on the same page about how you will intervene when participants forget about the Conversation Agreements.

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Strategies for a Smooth Conversation

- Your conversation may hit some turbulence and you will have over-talkers, cross-talkers, and those who want to take participants on a meandering tour of whatever comes to mind. Don't panic! Living Room Conversations is a practice that you and those you invite into these conversations will grow into.

Time Management

- Although you may want your conversation to go on for hours, it's important to stay within the time frame you shared with your conversation guests. The conversation guide has timing suggestions for each section. If you are nervous about hosting and watching a clock you can share the workload by asking someone to help you with time management (if you have a co-host this will be easy). You could also search your board game stash for a two minute hourglass timer or use the timer on your phone. Be clear about the timing expectations at the beginning of your conversation and how you will intervene (i.e. time out hand signal) if someone goes over time. Hold yourself to the same standards as everyone else!

Gathering Feedback

- Why do we ask for feedback? Each conversation guide has a link and a QR code that asks participants to give us feedback on their experience. Since we are a non-profit, this information helps us communicate to potential donors and grants what we offer to communities. We also welcome feedback around the topic questions, the format, and hosting resources. We are always looking to improve our organization and rely on you to help! Please ask your participants to fill out our feedback form.
- We would also love to hear about your conversation. Since our guides are free and open source, we don't always get a clear picture of who is using them and where. When you [Tell Us About Your Conversation](#) we have the opportunity to thank you, add your conversation to the map, and provide support if needed.

Participate in or watch a Living Room Conversation

- Before you take on hosting your own conversation, you may want to be a participant first. We offer hosted online conversations you can join for free on our [Getting Started](#) page. We also have video recorded conversations that can give you a feel for what a Living Room Conversation is like. Watch one below, or check out more at our [videos and podcasts](#) page.

questions to consider

- What are you most hopeful for in your conversation?
- What makes you the most nervous? Which of these tips address that?

what we do:

Living Room Conversations fosters connection across divides to increase understanding and respect.

We have 160+ conversation guides ready to plug and play, centered around our Conversation Agreements.



“LRCs provide a great entry point for folks to connect with people of varying experiences and perspectives. We have seen folks who might not normally engage with one another come together to learn with and from each other.

- Denise Lord,
Estes Valley Restorative Justice

We have many areas of engagement. Here are some examples of the diversity of guides within those areas. See our website for a full list of offerings.

political



- Post Election - Moving Forward Together
- Polarization
- Climate of Unity
- Abortion

belonging and building understanding



- Communicating with Care
- Healthy Conflict
- Trust
- Mental Health

talking about race



- Race - Where do I start?
- American Aspirations
- Status and Privilege
- Police Community Relations

guide examples

Why Living Room Conversations?

✓ it is...

- easy to use
- customizable to specific needs
- proven to improve listening, open mindsets, and leads to better understanding of other perspectives
- inclusive, scalable, and sustainable
- topical, timely, and responsive to local needs

We can customize our tools for specific communities and organizations.

contact us
510.629.0925
contact@livingroomconversations.org

Used by:



individuals



libraries



higher
education



faith
communities



corporate
+ nonprofit



and
more!



conversation agreements

- Be curious and listen to understand.
- Show respect and suspend judgment.
- Note any common ground as well as any differences.
- Be authentic and welcome that from others.
- Be purposeful and to the point.
- Own and guide the conversation.

LRC Table Topper

To use:

- Print
- Fold on the dotted lines
- Place on tables

Provides a simple reminder for the conversation agreements and to let us know how your conversation went!