

Welcome!

This guide is designed for organizations that are conducting community conversations. This guide provides questions and texts for the following themes, but organizations are welcome and encouraged to develop conversations that fit the needs of their community's interests.

Themes for *Open for Discussion: 250th Edition* include:

- A More Perfect Union
- We the People
- American Experiment
- Doing History
- Power of Place
- National Holidays and Celebrations
- Breaking Bread

Open For Discussion supports Idaho communities in creating opportunities for shared discussion, engagement, and connection about topics that matter to them.

IHC has provided 2-3 humanities related texts per topic, under TEXTS (Beginning on Page 21). Texts include historical documents, photos, poems, short stories, and essays. Texts help center the conversation on a topic, invite multiple perspectives, and opens discussion. Texts are available for host organizations to select for their conversation. Host organizations are welcome to mix and match objects from different topics and are not required to use the objects provided by IHC.

IHC has also provided a sample outline and sample questions for each conversation topic and activity. Each conversation is designed to last approximately 60-90 minutes, but you can adjust the conversation based on your needs. You can use the questions provided by IHC and/or create your own to achieve your goals for the conversation.

Why Host an Open for Discussion Program

For fifty years, the IHC's mission has been to provide opportunities to deepen public understanding of human experience by connecting people with ideas. The vision of the IHC is that the humanities inspire a more literate, tolerant, and intellectually inquisitive Idaho citizenry, better able to embrace life's possibilities.

Open for Discussion helps IHC fulfill our mission and vision by providing opportunities for individuals from all communities to explore ideas together and engage in respectful conversations. Listening to other perspectives through Open for Discussion Community Conversations can help deepen our understanding of what it means to be human.

IHC Guiding Principles include:

- We believe that the humanities should be open, accessible, and welcoming to all Idahoans
- We believe that every story contributed to a deeper understanding of being human
- We believe that respectful communication provides opportunities to learn new perspectives
- We believe that curiosity about the variety of expressions of the human spirit teaches us the value of our differences.

Community conversations centered on the 250th anniversary of the Declaration of Independence provide opportunities for Idahoans to reflect and share their perspectives about this anniversary. Continuing to discuss the ideas represented in the Declaration of Independence and United States Constitution are an important part of honoring the generations who have sacrificed to preserve these values.

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Getting Started

The hardest part of ***Open for Discussion: 250th Edition*** is getting started and being clear about the goals of your conversation. As you consider the different topics, themes, and objectives, remember that you will be hosting these conversations with members of your community from different backgrounds. We suggest you start with a question that connects to the themes and feels especially relevant to your community's history.

The planning guide below can support you in this process:

Reflect

- What is your own reaction to hearing the term, “**A More Perfect Union?**” How might this be relevant to your community or organization?
- What topics within this theme do you think people in your community will be most interested in discussing?
- What topics might be unfamiliar or challenging to discuss with your community?
- Are there opportunities to intersect or amplify programming you’re already doing with this theme?
- What challenges do you foresee with hosting a conversation?
- What does success look like for your organization as you bring people together in conversation?

Identify

Guiding Question – compose a guiding question that synthesizes your above reflections and feels measurable. What do you hope that participants will be able to explore in conversation?

Potential Partners - What other organizations may help you explore your guiding questions? Who will facilitate the conversation?

Metrics for Success – How will you measure progress towards your goals? How do these align with your organization’s mission and goals?

Event Planning Checklist

Below is a to-do list to use as you prepare for each community conversation.

Before

- Set tentative dates and times for your community conversations.
- Decide where you will host the community conversation. We recommend neutral spaces where groups can spread out: public libraries, parks, community centers, art galleries, and even coffee shops can serve as a venue depending on the number of participants.
- Ensure you have facilitators for participants. We recommend no more than 25 participants per facilitator.
- Review the activity guide, adapting it to fit your context or focus.
- Promote your upcoming event. Social media, community calendars, and the IHC are all great ways to spread the word.
- Print and/or prepare any necessary materials.

During

- Use your plan but adjust as needed to meet your group's needs.
- Administer and collect participant feedback surveys.
- Depending on the group's comfort and consent, take photos to highlight your event.

After

- Reflect on your outcomes and review the plan for your next event to make any necessary changes or adjustments.

Facilitating Conversations

1. Focus on engaging the participants in the discussion. Facilitators do not serve as lecturers and should refrain from providing their perspectives.
2. Limit the conversations to 25 people per facilitator to allow everyone a chance to speak multiple times during the conversation.
3. Arrange the chairs in a circle so everyone can participate and engage.
4. Use people's names and encourage participants to do the same to personalize the conversation.
5. Set a relaxed and open tone. Most people feel relaxed when they know what to expect, so prepare participants. It's important to also acknowledge that you understand people participate in a variety of ways; some people are more shy, they are active listeners or feel less comfortable speaking in a group.
6. Get people talking by asking an opening question. Ask questions that encourage multiple perspectives and viewpoints.
7. Structure the conversation in different ways to encourage participants to talk. Do activities in pairs or small groups throughout the conversation to create a sense of connection and openness.
8. Select 2-4 objects to ground the conversation. These include photos, historical documents, short texts, essays, articles, speeches, and other media to anchor the conversation. Texts should be accessible in their format and invite multiple interpretations from participants. IHC recommends using only 2-3 objects per conversation but having a couple of additional on-hand based on your goals. Objects focus the conversation on a topic with multiple perspectives and can help redirect or liven the discussion if needed.
9. Encourage participants to ask each other questions, not just the facilitator.
10. Anticipate challenges and find ways to address them through dialogue. For example:
 - a. Ask for clarification, "Can we dig into this a little bit more?"
 - b. Ask for input from the group, "Can someone help me understand what _____ is saying?" or "Does someone want to add any thoughts?" or "Does anyone have a different perspective?"
 - c. Call out the tension, "I noticed that after you said _____ it got quiet."

Asking Questions

1. Ask open-ended questions that will spark discussion. Refrain from asking yes or no questions.
2. When introducing an object, scaffold your questions to ensure that attendees gain a mutual understanding of the object's content. This method also helps attendees become more comfortable with talking about the text before diving into deep conversation. See below for examples:

Clarifying:

- a. What's happening in this object?
- b. What do you notice?
- c. What do you see?
- d. What stands out to you?

Implication:

- a. What do you think the author meant?
- b. What is the author trying to say?
- c. What is the meaning of this object?
- d. What is this object saying about this topic?

Significance:

- a. What does this object mean to you?
- b. What does this object say about your community?
- c. What is this object's significance to current events, your family, your community, etc?
- d. Follow up with questions that get into deeper meaning and conversation about how people connect with the theme, topic, and/or object. See examples:
 - Tell me more about...?
 - What do you mean when you say...?
 - What does everyone else think about ...?
 - Did anything about their response surprise you?
 - It sounds to me like you value.... Can you tell me more about that?
 - Does anyone have a different perspective or a different take on this?