

Civic Dialogue Friendlies



Civic Conversation & Positive Action: Strengthen Communities & Democracy and Lower the Political Temperature

Intro Pitch: Imagine people from all across the country getting paired up with people from different backgrounds and with different political beliefs to talk an hour a week over 4+ weeks via Zoom – and maybe in person for the first and last sessions. They get to know and respect one another as human beings first. Then they tackle potentially difficult but important conversations about policy issues. The goal? Work together to make sense of where we are as a country and how we can move forward together – taking care of ourselves, our families, and our communities. We support them with videos and resources to help them listen and communicate well, think systematically, understand the issues, and manage any strong emotions that arise.

Ninety percent of Americans believed in the wake of Charlie Kirk's killing in mid-September that there was "an urgent need for greater unity." ([Ipsos, 9/16/25](#)) Let's see if we can build on that sentiment to **lower the political temperature** and **get out of our information bubbles**.

Let's build communities and a nation where we work together across political differences. In World War II and the Great Depression, we did it. **We can do it again now.** Build mutual respect and understanding. Find common ground and make progress.

- Meet as a small group first; then break into **1-hour, 1-on-1 conversations** over 4 weeks over Zoom breakout rooms with someone with different political views or experiences.
- **Get to know one another** as people — our experiences & values.
- **Play the "Co-Presidents' Game":** Talk about political and policy issues that concern you and the sources of information that you rely on. (We'll help you with whatever **resources you need** to understand the issues and have safe & rewarding conversations, whether you find common ground or "agree to disagree.")

Our country faces lots of challenges. How do we get through them? Get off the sidelines, turn off our screens, and start helping one another and talking with each other as "**civic friends**."

Let's build a world where we **honor** the best in our country – both our **kindness** to people AND our **discipline** and **hard work**, both our commitment to the country AND our commitment to build a stable and peaceful world. Let's build a **thriving economy** that can be both an engine for progress AND be of benefit to ALL of us.

Why "Civic Dialogue Friendlies"?

Civic = It's about **us**, not just about me. How can we work together as a neighborhood, city, community, state or nation to make a better life for everybody?

Dialogue = It's about conversation, not argument – a shared effort to understand our world and ourselves, and what we can do to make things better.

Friendlies = In soccer and other sports, teams compete in preseason games. They compete hard, but the real goal is to help one another improve. And nobody gets hurt in a friendly match. That's the spirit of these dialogues, too.

Our Inspiration

With malice toward none, with charity for all, with firmness in the right as God gives us to see the right... let us strive on to finish the work we are in... to cherish a just and a lasting peace among ourselves and with all nations. – **Pres. A. Lincoln**, 2nd Inaugural Address, 1865

I am loath to close. **We are not enemies, but friends.** We must not be enemies. **Though passion may have strained, it must not break our bonds of affection.** The mystic chords of memory, stretching from every battlefield, and patriot grave, to every living heart and hearth-stone...will yet swell the chorus of the Union, when again touched, as surely they will be, by the better angels of our nature. – **A. Lincoln**, 1st Inaugural, 1861

We must work with passion and determination to bridge the gulf between our scientific and technological progress, on the one hand, and our moral and spiritual progress on the other. If we do not learn to live and work together as brothers and sisters, we will perish together as fools. - **Martin Luther King** (1967, edited)

What we need in the United States is not division; what we need in the United States is not hatred; what we need in the United States is not violence or lawlessness; but love and wisdom, and compassion toward one another, and a feeling of justice toward those who still suffer within our country... Let us dedicate ourselves to what the Greeks wrote so many years ago: to tame the savageness of man and make gentle the life of the world. Let us dedicate ourselves to that. And let us say a prayer for our country and our people." - **Sen. Robert F. Kennedy**, April 4, 1968

The Sessions: The groups would be limited to 6-10 people and would be supported throughout by a trained facilitator. We envision a couple of approaches, one that begins and ends with in-person sessions, and another that would be purely virtual and bring together people in urban and rural communities who live too far apart to make in-person meetings feasible. Both the virtual and hybrid approach would begin with a group meeting of 60-90 minutes where people get to know one another and agree on goals and principles for the conversations.

In the first sessions, participants with different political perspectives share the experiences and values that are important to them, practice reflective listening, and step into the shoes of the other person. From that foundation of connection, understanding and mutual respect, they will embark on “**The Co-Presidents Game**,” a roleplaying game in which the participants work together to understand their policy options and craft an agenda for their joint term in office as “Co-Presidents.” (“The major political parties have decided to select two randomly chosen citizens, rather than professional politicians, as their candidates for President and have agreed to share power... and YOU and your partner have been chosen!”)

I shy away from a one-size-fits-all approach. Some people are very comfortable with abstract moral reasoning and putting themselves in other people's shoes. Others may not be. Some are comfortable with long and intense conversations, while others may need frequent breaks. Some may want to dig deep over several sessions into one issue while others may be content to zoom through topics. The bottom line is that we are providing a framework for the sessions and different pairs may tackle them differently.

Other Project Components: We plan to combine the dialogue and deliberation focus with three complementary activities.

- **On-the-Ground Outreach** to Recruit Participants: A disproportionate percentage of people involved in dialogue and deliberation efforts – 85% according to one estimate – lean toward the middle or left politically. I believe we can fix this imbalance by taking a more active approach. Our outreach would combine tabling at events and public spaces, working with local nonprofits and community leaders, social media advertising, and possibly door-to-door canvassing or flyer distribution.

Our work at DCTMI has helped us hone our skills approaching strangers and gently but firmly asking them to consider getting involved as tutors and mentors to make a better community. (We signed up more than 7,000 people last year.) I expect a similar approach will prove effective in rural communities, even if the specific request and the values tapped may differ.

- **Options for Community Service During or After the Sessions:** As mentioned above, we signed up more than 7,000 people in the DC area last year to get involved as tutors and mentors for 1-2 hours per week. This sort of concrete volunteer action appeals to many people and, we hope, has ripple effects that complement the less action-oriented goals of the dialogues. Both approaches are needed. (The 2025 More in Common report found that 64-69% of people were interested in “working to achieve a mutual goal that improves [their] community” or “working in the same work group” to bridge political differences.) In the DC area, we can connect them to opportunities. Elsewhere in the country, local volunteer centers, Idealist/VolunteerMatch, and Points of Light’s Engage platform are potential partners.
- **Continuation of the Dialogues:** We recognize that four sessions may not be enough for many participants and we hope that many will want to continue to meet on an ongoing basis or periodically. Depending on the level of interest and desired support, we hope to be able to continue to help.



Sign up now to learn more or get involved!

Starting Wednesday, May 27th, 7:30-8:30pm!



www.CivicLeadershipProject.org