

Living Room Conversations & Campus Election Engagement Project Presents:

To Vote or Not to Vote

How do we get students talking about hard and divisive issues in a civil way?

Since 2010, [Living Room Conversations](#) (LRC) has created and promoted an approach for structured conversations that allow people to talk in a friendly yet meaningful manner about issues where they may be strongly divided. These conversations increase understanding, reveal common ground, and sometimes steer participants toward possible solutions. They run themselves with no skilled facilitator needed. [Campus Election Engagement Project](#) (CEEP) and LRC are partnering to bring them to your campus.

We call these Living Room Conversations because living rooms used to be the place where people would gather to socialize and relate with each other. Inviting someone into your home was to treat them as valued and worthy of respect. But before they were called living rooms these rooms were referred to as “parlors” – a term that comes from the French and means place for speaking. Our modern world no longer limits our places for speaking to physical locations. But something powerful can happen when we connect face-to-face with others and listen to their perspectives. That’s what we’d like to do here.

LRC has excellent resources on [Free Speech on Campus](#), [Student Debt](#), [Guns and Responsibility](#), [Immigration](#), or and [various other topics](#), all of which follow a similar format to draw people out across political and experiential divides. They also have [videos where you can get a sense of their approach](#).

But for the purpose of engaging students in elections, we’d suggest you start with this particular Living Room Conversation on the divide between voters and nonvoters. It’s designed for campuses and you can use it in classrooms, dormitories, organizational meetings, or any other campus context you can come up with. If you want to reach large numbers of students, you can also hold it as a standalone special event.

For questions contact LRC’s Serena Witherspoon at serena@livingroomconversations.org.

To facilitate this LRC, first invite a group of participants, or bring the conversation to an existing group. Then follow these instructions:

1. The conversation organizer should read through this information to orient the larger group.
2. Then divide up into small groups, (we recommend 4-6 people per group) and walk through the attached conversation guide.
3. Reassemble as a full group and leave time for reflection together.

Background for all participants: 2018 is a midterm election year. Four years ago saw the lowest midterm turnout since WWII, less than 37 percent overall, and four out of five eligible 18-29-year-olds staying home. What kind of turnout will this year bring? What will lead us to participate or turn away, feeling it’s not worth our effort, or being side-tracked by other obstacles? In this conversation, we talk about what leads us to vote or not to.

—please divide your group up at this point—

Conversation Agreements

Following these guidelines will help you get the most from your Living Room Conversation experience. Please have each group member read one of the following conversation agreements.

1. Be curious and open to learning.

Conversation is as much about listening as it is about talking. Enjoy hearing all points of view. Maintain an attitude of exploration.

2. Show respect and suspend judgment.

Human beings tend to judge one another; do your best not to. Setting judgments aside opens you up to learning from others and makes them feel respected and appreciated.

3. Find common ground and note differences.

Look for a common ground you can agree on and take an interest in the differing beliefs and opinions of others.

4. Be authentic and welcome that from others.

Share what's important to you. Speak authentically from your personal experience. Be considerate of others who are doing the same.

5. Be purposeful and to the point.

Notice if what you are conveying is or is not pertinent to the topic at hand.

6. Own and guide the conversation.

Take responsibility for the quality of your participation and that of the conversation. Be proactive in getting yourself and others back on track if needed.

Timing for each round is suggested and can be altered depending on the length of your session.

ONE: Getting Started / Hopes and Concerns for the Future?

(5 minutes)

Answer one or more of the following questions:

- What interested you or drew you to this conversation?
 - What sense of purpose / mission / duty guides you in your life?
 - What would your best friend say about who you are and what inspires you?
 - What are your hopes and concerns for your community and/or the country?
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TWO: What are your biggest concerns about voting?

(40 minutes)

Remember that the goal of this Living Room Conversation is for each participant to listen to and learn about the different opinions within the group to see where you might share interests, intentions, and goals.

Answer one or more of the following questions:

- Are you registered to vote? What led you to that decision?
 - What was your experience in getting registered?
 - How important was voting in your family?
 - Do you think citizens have a responsibility to vote?
 - Do you believe our election outcomes would be different with substantially higher voter turnout? How so?
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THREE: What Are We Learning Here? and Declaring Next Steps

(5 minutes)

Answer one or more of the following questions:

- In one sentence, share what was most meaningful / valuable to you in the experience of this Living Room Conversation.
- What learning, new understanding or common ground was found on this topic?
- What is one important thing you thought was accomplished here?
- Is there a next step you would like to take based upon the conversation you just had? –*please*

reassemble as a group at this point for 5-10 minutes of full group reflection—

Please give us your feedback...

Send to serena@livingroomconversations.org

Name:

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Email:

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Name of school:

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City:

State:

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1. If you were old enough to do so, did you vote in the last election?

yes

no

2. After this LRC do you feel you are more or less likely to vote in future elections?

I am much more likely to vote ○○○○○○ I am much less inclined to vote

3. Can we follow up with you on your voting status after the midterm elections?

yes

no

Comments:

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If you are looking for a way to get more engaged with voting we encourage you to check out Campus Election Engagement Project at campuselect.org. You'll find information tailored for campuses and students on voter registration, nonpartisan candidate guides, how to volunteer in campaigns, and how to help your peers turn out at the polls. You can reach LRC at livingroomconversations.org.