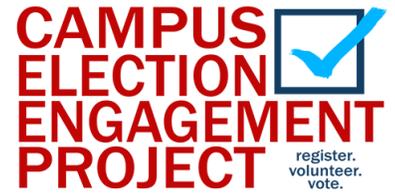


Campus Civic Discussions: A Nonpartisan Guide



The more students talk about public issues, the higher their voting turnout. Our Campus Election Engagement Project has created resources for how to conduct respectful and inclusive conversations about important but potentially divisive issues [in your classrooms](#). And how [to incorporate them in classes](#) beyond the obvious disciplines, like political science.

We've also pulled together resources for structured conversations around particular issues, which can be held in either classrooms or co-curricular venues. The approaches described below aren't about taking sides or reaching agreement as a group. They also differ from informational presentations where students learn about a particular issue as a passive audience. Instead, they focus on active student participation, providing a chance to exchange ideas, perspectives, and experiences.

These discussions can be hosted by individual faculty, students, or staff, by academic departments or campus offices, student government or student organizations – by anyone who wants to promote nonpartisan campus conversations on civic issues and events.

How to host civic discussions in classrooms

Use existing guides from respected nonpartisan groups, like the guides we provide below. Use them to foster respectful, nonpartisan discussions on specific issues. You can hold these discussions in a broad range of disciplines, including English and Composition, Social Sciences, Business, Environmental Sciences, Political Science and Government, History, Health Sciences and Arts and Humanities courses. Align the topic with course content. Either the instructor or students may select the topic, using the guides provided below.

1. To keep the self-guided discussion on track, select a host or co-hosts: either the instructor or students.
2. Set a date and location. Make sure students can break into smaller discussion groups.
3. Conduct the discussion. See tips below to make it respectful and meaningful.
4. Solicit and share feedback.

What to discuss

Free or inexpensive, nonpartisan discussion guides are available from several sources, including:

- [Living Room Conversations](#) offers over [50 conversation guides](#) from topics like [To Vote or Not to Vote?](#) (created together with CEEP), [Status & Privilege](#) and [Fake News](#), to [Guns & Responsibility](#) and [Immigration](#). [Register your conversation](#) to link to Living Room Conversations' national support network, and to get a Zoom video link to host your Conversation online.
- [Kettering Foundation's National Issues Forums Institute](#) (NIFI) offers over [30 Issue Guides](#), including deliberative forums on [the political divide](#), [homeland security](#), and the [opioid epidemic](#). Guides are either free or cost \$1.99 for a downloadable pdf. NIFI also offers online conversations to support users.
- [National Institute of Civil Discourse's Revive Civility](#) program encourages discussions about [reviving civility](#) and provides tips on effective [one-on-one](#) and [small group](#) civic discussions. Revive Civility has [special projects](#) active in Arizona, Iowa, Maine, and Ohio.

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- [CEEP Nonpartisan Candidate guides](#) can be used to discuss not only the stands candidates take on key issues during the campaign, but also how they translate campaign stands into policy positions once they take office. Discussions can take a broad approach or center around specific positions relevant to a course subject or student interests, from climate change to immigration and education funding.
- Use the [Story Circle](#) model to create your own discussions on civic themes.
- Create other approaches using [National Coalition for Dialogue & Deliberation's Resource Center](#) and [Beginner's Guide](#), with information and support on a range of [participatory practices](#) and formats.

Ground rules and structure

- Civic discussions are run by participants. The guides listed are designed to be used without a facilitator. The discussion host arranges logistics, provides a welcome, and brings participants back to the format if they get off course—but does not lead or facilitate the discussion.
- Conversations can run anywhere from a 45-minute classroom period up to two hours.
- Begin your discussion by reviewing the [Conversation Agreements](#) or Ground Rules provided. These set basic ground rules to have a respectful and productive conversation.
- Discussions are typically structured in rounds with questions, conversation-starters or policy options presented for each round of conversation. Tips are provided to ensure that everyone has an opportunity to participate in each round.
- Discussions are focused on sharing perspectives and experiences and learning from one another, and don't require significant knowledge of the topic. It can be helpful to provide a copy or link to the conversation guide in advance so that participants understand the topic and format.
- Effective civic discussions are personal, so if you are engaging a larger group, break out into smaller subgroups of 5-10 participants who can have a richer discussion and then share comments back with the larger group.
- You can observe or participate in a civic discussion before hosting by watching recorded [sample conversations](#) or joining [an online conversation](#). You can sign up for free trainings using Living Room Conversations' [calendar](#) or get tips on managing difficult conversations using the resources of [Civility Tools](#).
- Many guides include a quick participant evaluation or questionnaire to be completed at the end. This feedback can help you improve your next discussion, as well as providing valuable feedback to the discussion creators.
- For more ideas for incorporating civic engagement into courses, check out CEEP's Resources on [Talking About Elections in Your Classrooms](#) and [Incorporating Election Engagement into Your Courses](#) and [our candidate and issue guides](#).

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Civic discussions outside the classroom

CEEP encourages civic discussions throughout campuses. Anyone from individual students, faculty members or staff, to clubs or departments can host a conversation. Consider reaching out to partners like student government, Diversity & Inclusion office, Community Engagement Office, Resident Life, or Student Life. Follow the Ground Rules and Structure outlined above.

Consider:

- **Peer-to-peer student discussions**
Conversations are most meaningful when participants have diverse perspectives. Include participants across gender, cultural, political, and age differences.
- **Discussions across campus silos**
Use your civic discussion to connect groups that may not typically interact. Bring together political science, engineering, and theater students. Invite faculty, staff and students. Engage community members. Mix it up!

Host your civic discussion...

- **In-person**. These discussions can happen anywhere. You just need a comfortable and somewhat private space where the participants can gather. Discussions can take place in a classroom, library, or student lounge or under a tree in the quad. Or take your conversation off-campus to a coffee shop, library, home or park.
- **Online**. You can host your conversation using an online video platform so that participants can see one another and interact. Use a free service such as [Zoom](#), [Appear.in](#), or [Go To Meeting](#) or access your institution's online platform. [Living Room Conversations](#) can provide a free Zoom video link to those who [register their conversations](#). They also host free ongoing online civic conversations.

Ground rules, tips, and structure adapted from [Living Room Conversations](#), [National Issues Forums Institute](#) and [National Institute for Civil Discourse](#).

Know of a great civic discussion guide not listed?

Please share with CEEP at info@campuselect.org so that we can keep improving this resource.