

Living Room Conversation Run Sheet

90-Minute Citizen Facilitator-Led Deliberative Democracy Session

Version: Pilot 1.0

Session Type: Living Room Conversation

Duration: 90 minutes

Participants: 8-10 people from diverse perspectives

Setting: Community centre or café

Facilitator: Trained citizen facilitator (non-professional)

Before You Begin: Facilitator Preparation

Materials Checklist

- [] One-page conversation agreement (printed copies for each participant + 2 extras)
- [] Name tags or name cards (tent cards work well)
- [] Sticky notes (3 different colors) and pens for everyone
- [] 2-3 large poster sheets or flip chart paper
- [] Markers (various colors)
- [] Timer or phone with alarm (silent/vibrate)
- [] Session outline (this run sheet)
- [] Sign-in sheet (optional: names, emails for follow-up)
- [] Light refreshments (water, tea/coffee, light snacks)
- [] First aid kit location identified
- [] Emergency contact numbers
- [] Tissues

Room Setup (Arrive 30 minutes early)

- **Seating:** Arrange chairs in a circle or around a table so everyone can see each other
- **No “head of table”:** Ensure no position looks more important
- **Accessibility:** Clear pathways, accessible seating options
- **Temperature:** Comfortable room temperature
- **Lighting:** Warm, welcoming (not fluorescent if possible)
- **Distractions:** Minimize noise, turn off harsh lighting
- **Materials station:** Small table with extra pens, water, materials
- **Bathroom location:** Know where it is and share with group
- **Exit routes:** Identify for safety

Facilitator Mindset

Remember: You are here to guide the conversation, not to contribute your own opinions or lead people to a predetermined outcome. Your role is to:

- Create a safe, respectful space

- Ensure everyone has a chance to speak
- Keep the conversation on track
- Remain neutral and impartial
- Notice who hasn't spoken and invite them in gently
- Manage time
- Bridge differences with curiosity, not judgment

Your most important tools: Active listening, genuine curiosity, and patience.

Session Structure Overview

Time Block	Section	Duration
0:00-0:15	Opening & Relationship Building	15 min
0:15-0:30	Ground Rules & Understanding Purpose	15 min
0:30-0:55	Dialogue Phase 1: Personal Stories & Perspectives	25 min
0:55-1:15	Dialogue Phase 2: Finding Common Ground	20 min
1:15-1:25	Action & Next Steps	10 min
1:25-1:30	Closing & Gratitude	5 min

Detailed Time-Blocked Facilitator Guide

0:00-0:15 | OPENING & RELATIONSHIP BUILDING (15 minutes)

Your Goals:

- Welcome everyone warmly
- Build initial comfort and trust
- Establish you as a neutral, supportive guide
- Begin creating connections

0:00-0:05 | Welcome & Introductions (5 minutes)

FACILITATOR SAYS:

“Welcome, everyone. Thank you for being here today. My name is [YOUR NAME], and I’m honored to be your facilitator for this living room conversation. I’m here as a neutral guide—not an expert on the topic, but someone trained to help create a space where we can all listen, learn, and think together.

This session is part of a new initiative to bring people from different backgrounds and perspectives together for honest, respectful conversation about issues that matter to our community. You were invited because we want to hear from a real cross-section of everyday people—not just the loudest voices or those who usually participate in these kinds of discussions.

Before we dive in, let’s start by learning each other’s names. When it’s your turn, please share:

- Your first name
- One thing that brought you here today, or what you’re hoping for from this conversation

I’ll start...”

FACILITATOR: Model by sharing your own name and a neutral, welcoming reason (e.g., “I’m here because I believe in the power of conversation to build understanding”).

Then: Go around the circle. Listen actively. Make eye contact. Nod. Thank each person. Notice who seems nervous—you’ll invite them in gently later.

0:05-0:10 | Housekeeping (5 minutes)

FACILITATOR SAYS:

“Great, thank you everyone. A few practical things before we begin:

Timing: We have 90 minutes together, ending at [END TIME]. I’ll keep us on track, but we have plenty of time to hear from everyone.

Bathrooms: [Point to location] Please feel free to step out quietly if you need to.

Phones: I invite you to put phones on silent or away if you can. This time is for us to be fully present with each other.

Refreshments: [Point to water/coffee] Please help yourself at any time.

Safety: This space is meant to be safe and respectful. If at any point you feel uncomfortable, you can take a break, or you can speak with me privately. Your wellbeing matters.

Confidentiality: What’s shared here stays here. We’ll talk more about this in our ground rules, but I want to name it now—this is a space where you can speak honestly, knowing it won’t be repeated outside this room (unless someone indicates safety concerns, which we take seriously).”

0:10-0:15 | Why We’re Here (5 minutes)

FACILITATOR SAYS:

“You might be wondering: why this format? Why bring people with different views together?”

Living room conversations are based on a practice called deliberative democracy. The idea is simple but powerful: when everyday people from different backgrounds come together, listen to each other, learn together, and think carefully about an issue, we can find common ground and develop solutions that work for more people.

This is different from a debate where we try to win. It’s different from a town hall where people give speeches. Today, we’re here to:

- **Listen** more than we speak
- **Learn** from each other’s experiences
- **Think together** about [TOPIC]
- **Find common ground** where we can

You don’t need to be experts. You don’t need to have all the answers. You just need to bring your authentic self, your curiosity, and your willingness to hear perspectives different from your own.

Does anyone have questions before we continue?”

FACILITATOR: Answer any questions briefly. Keep it moving.

0:15-0:30 | GROUND RULES & UNDERSTANDING PURPOSE (15 minutes)

Your Goals:

- Establish shared agreements for respectful dialogue
- Create psychological safety
- Ensure everyone understands the topic and scope

0:15-0:22 | Establishing Ground Rules (7 minutes)

FACILITATOR SAYS:

“To make sure this is a productive and respectful conversation for everyone, I’d like us to agree on some ground rules together. I have a one-page conversation agreement we developed for this project, and I’d like to walk through it with you. These aren’t rules I’m imposing—they’re commitments we make to each other.”

FACILITATOR: Hand out the one-page conversation agreement.

FACILITATOR SAYS:

“Let me read through these, and after each one, I’ll pause to see if anyone has questions or wants to add anything.”

Read each ground rule from the agreement. After each one, pause and ask: “Does this work for everyone? Anything to add?”

Key Ground Rules to Cover (adapt based on your one-page agreement):

1. Listen to understand, not to respond

- “We’re here to learn from each other, not to prepare our rebuttal.”

2. **Speak from your own experience**

- “Use ‘I’ statements. Share your story, not generalizations about groups of people.”

3. **Respect different perspectives**

- “We won’t all agree, and that’s okay. Disagreement is not disrespect.”

4. **One person speaks at a time**

- “No interruptions. Let people finish their thoughts.”

5. **Confidentiality: stories stay, names don’t**

- “You can share what you learned, but don’t attribute specific comments to specific people.”

6. **Be curious, not judgmental**

- “Ask questions to understand, not to trap or ‘gotcha.’”

7. **It’s okay to feel uncomfortable**

- “Growth happens at the edge of our comfort zone. If something challenges you, lean in with curiosity.”

8. **Step up, step back**

- “If you tend to talk a lot, make space for others. If you tend to be quiet, challenge yourself to share.”

9. **Assume good intent**

- “We’re all here because we care. We may stumble with words—extend grace.”

10. **Take care of yourself**

◦ “It’s okay to pass on a question. It’s okay to take a break.”

FACILITATOR SAYS:

“Are we all willing to commit to these agreements for our time together today?”

Look around. Get nods or verbal agreement.

“Great. Thank you. I’ll help hold us accountable to these. If we drift off track, I’ll gently guide us back.”

0:22-0:30 | Clarifying the Topic & Purpose (8 minutes)

FACILITATOR SAYS:

“Now let’s talk about what we’re here to discuss today. Our focus for this conversation is: [STATE THE SPECIFIC TOPIC CLEARLY].

[Provide 2-3 sentences of context about why this topic matters to the community.]

Today, we’re not here to solve this issue completely in 90 minutes—that’s not realistic. Instead, we’re here to:

1. **Understand** how this issue affects different people in different ways
2. **Identify** where we might have common ground or shared values
3. **Explore** what solutions or next steps might be worth considering

At the end, I’ll ask you to share one idea or insight you’re taking away.

Before we dive into dialogue, I want to check: Does everyone understand the topic? Does anyone need clarification?”

FACILITATOR: Answer questions. Keep it brief. If someone tries to launch into a speech about the topic, gently redirect:

“Thank you—we’ll have time to hear your perspective in just a moment. Any other clarifying questions about the topic itself?”

0:30-0:55 | DIALOGUE PHASE 1: Personal Stories & Perspectives (25 minutes)

Your Goals:

- Help people share their personal experiences and perspectives
- Build empathy and understanding
- Surface the diversity of views in the room
- Establish a foundation for finding common ground

0:30-0:35 | Opening Question (Round 1) (5 minutes)

FACILITATOR SAYS:

“We’re now moving into the heart of our conversation. I’m going to ask a question, and I’d like to hear from everyone—briefly, just a minute or two each. There’s no right or wrong answer. Just share what’s true for you.

Here’s the question: **What personal experience or story has shaped how you think about [TOPIC]?**

Take a moment to think... [pause for 10 seconds]

Who would like to start?”

FACILITATOR TIPS:

- **If no one volunteers:** “I’ll invite [NAME OF PERSON WHO SEEMED COMFORTABLE EARLIER], would you be willing to start us off?”
- **As people share:**
 - Make eye contact
 - Nod
 - Don’t interrupt
 - Don’t respond with your opinion
 - Notice emotional moments (someone might get teary—have tissues ready, show compassion)
 - After each person: “Thank you for sharing that.”
- **If someone goes too long (over 2 minutes):**
 - Let them finish their thought, then gently say: “Thank you—that’s a powerful story. I want to make sure we have time to hear from everyone. Let’s continue around the circle.”
- **If someone speaks in generalizations or political talking points:**
 - Gently redirect: “Thank you. I’m curious—can you share a specific personal experience that connects to this for you? Something you’ve lived through or witnessed?”

Go around the circle. Everyone gets a chance.

0:35-0:45 | Deepening Question (Small Group Discussion) (10 minutes)

FACILITATOR SAYS:

“Thank you all for those honest and personal shares. I could feel the different experiences in this room.

Now we’re going to break into smaller groups for a few minutes to go a bit deeper. I’m going to divide you into two groups of [4-5 people].

[Divide the room strategically—try to mix people who seem to have different perspectives based on their earlier shares.]

In your small group, discuss this question: **What do you think people who disagree with you on [TOPIC] don’t understand about your perspective? What do you wish they knew?**

You have 8 minutes. I’ll give you a 2-minute warning.”

FACILITATOR TIPS:

- **Position yourself between the two groups** so you can hear both conversations
- **Listen for:**
 - Good insights you want to bring back to the large group
 - Anyone being disrespectful (intervene gently if needed)
 - People dominating or people being silent
- **If a group finishes early:** “Great discussion. Feel free to keep going or sit quietly and reflect.”
- **After 6 minutes:** “You have 2 minutes left.”
- **After 8 minutes:** “Let’s come back together.”

0:45-0:55 | Harvesting Insights (10 minutes)

FACILITATOR SAYS:

“Welcome back. Let’s hear what came up in your small groups. I’d love to hear one key insight or ‘aha’ moment from each group.

Group 1, what’s something important that emerged in your conversation?”

FACILITATOR: Invite someone from Group 1 to share (1-2 minutes). Then Group 2.

Then ask the full group:

“As you listened to the small group reports and reflected on what you heard in the opening round, I’m curious:

What surprised you? What did you hear that you hadn’t considered before?

Let’s do popcorn style—raise your hand if you want to share.”

FACILITATOR TIPS:

- **Take 3-4 responses** (2 minutes max each)
 - **Affirm insights:** “That’s a really important observation.”
 - **Bridge-build:** If someone names something they learned from someone with a different view, highlight it: “I love that you’re staying curious about a perspective different from your own.”
 - **Watch the clock:** You need to move on at 0:55.
-

0:55-1:15 | DIALOGUE PHASE 2: Finding Common Ground (20 minutes)

Your Goals:

- Identify shared values, concerns, or goals
- Move from “positions” to “interests”
- Explore possible solutions together
- Practice collaborative thinking

0:55-1:05 | Identifying Common Ground (10 minutes)

FACILITATOR SAYS:

“We’ve heard a lot of different perspectives and experiences. Now I want to shift our focus slightly.

Even when we disagree on solutions, we often share common values or concerns. For example, people might disagree on how to improve education, but we all care about kids having good opportunities.

I’m going to ask you to think about this question, and then we’ll capture our ideas together:

When it comes to [TOPIC], what do you think most of us in this room—maybe even most people in our community—actually care about or want? What are our shared hopes or concerns?

Let’s brainstorm together. Call out ideas, and I’ll write them on this poster.”

FACILITATOR:

- Stand at the poster paper with a marker
- Invite ideas (popcorn style)
- Write down every idea without judgment
- **Use their words**—don’t paraphrase or edit
- If someone gives a solution instead of a value/hope, redirect: “That’s a solution idea—we’ll get to those in a moment. What’s the underlying hope or value behind that?”

Examples of common ground:

- “We want our kids to be safe.”
- “We want people to feel heard and respected.”
- “We care about fairness.”
- “We want our community to thrive.”
- “We want solutions that actually work.”

After 6-7 minutes (or when ideas slow down):

FACILITATOR SAYS:

“Look at this list. These are things we share, even if we disagree on how to get there. Does anyone want to add anything before we move on?”

Pause. Add any final ideas.

1:05-1:15 | Exploring Solutions (10 minutes)

FACILITATOR SAYS:

“Now, with these shared values in mind, let’s think about solutions.

I’m going to give each of you some sticky notes. I want you to take 2 minutes of quiet thinking time and write down:

One or two ideas for how we might address [TOPIC] in a way that honors the common ground we just identified.

Don’t overthink it—these don’t have to be perfect or fully formed. Just ideas worth exploring. Write one idea per sticky note.”

FACILITATOR: Hand out sticky notes and pens. Set timer for 2 minutes. Let people write in silence.

After 2 minutes:

FACILITATOR SAYS:

“Time’s up. Now, one at a time, I’d like you to briefly share your idea and stick it on this poster. You have about 30 seconds each—just the essence of the idea.”

FACILITATOR:

- Go around the circle
- As people share, put sticky notes on the poster
- **Cluster similar ideas** as you go (put related ideas near each other)
- Thank each person
- **Don’t judge or critique ideas**—this is a brainstorm

After everyone has shared:

FACILITATOR SAYS:

“Look at all these ideas. We’ve got [number] different ideas here, and some are similar.

I want to ask: **Are there any ideas here that you could support, even if it’s not the one you originally thought of? Or are there combinations of ideas that might work together?**

Let’s take a minute for anyone to comment.”

FACILITATOR TIPS:

- Take 2-3 comments
- **Look for emerging themes:** “I’m hearing that several people are interested in approaches that involve [X]...”
- **Highlight collaboration:** “I love that you’re building on each other’s ideas.”
- **Watch the clock**—you need to move to closing at 1:15.

1:15-1:25 | ACTION & NEXT STEPS (10 minutes)

Your Goals:

- Create a sense of forward momentum
- Identify concrete next steps (even small ones)
- Empower participants to take action

1:15-1:20 | Capturing Next Steps (5 minutes)

FACILITATOR SAYS:

“We’ve had a rich conversation today. We’ve heard different perspectives, identified common ground, and brainstormed some ideas.

I want to make sure this doesn’t end here. Let’s talk about next steps—both for you as individuals and potentially for us as a group.

First, thinking about what you’ve heard today, is there one action you personally want to take? It could be small—like having a conversation with a neighbor, reading more about an idea someone mentioned, or attending a community meeting. Or it could be bigger.

Take 30 seconds to think about this...”

Pause.

“I’d love to hear from a few people. What’s one action you’re committing to?”

FACILITATOR: Take 3-4 responses (1 minute each max). Affirm each one.

1:20-1:25 | Continuing the Conversation (5 minutes)

FACILITATOR SAYS:

“This conversation has been a pilot—an experiment in bringing people together across differences. Based on what happened here today:

Would you be interested in continuing these conversations? What might that look like?

For example:

- Would you come to another session like this on a different topic?
- Would you be willing to invite a friend or neighbor who thinks differently than you?
- Are there ways you’d like to see these ideas taken to local decision-makers?
- Would anyone be interested in training to facilitate these conversations yourself?

Just share your thoughts—this will help us shape what comes next.”

FACILITATOR: Take 3-5 responses. Listen carefully—this is valuable feedback.

FACILITATOR SAYS:

“Thank you. I’m taking notes, and I’ll make sure your ideas are shared with the organizers of this initiative.

Before we close, I want to collect any contact information from people who want to stay connected. [Point to sign-in sheet.] If you’d like to hear about future sessions or get a summary of today’s conversation, please add your email before you leave.”

1:25-1:30 | CLOSING & GRATITUDE (5 minutes)

Your Goals:

- End on a positive, hopeful note
- Express genuine gratitude
- Give people a moment to reflect

1:25-1:28 | Final Reflection (3 minutes)

FACILITATOR SAYS:

“We’re almost at time. Before we close, I’d like to go around the circle one last time with a very quick final word.

In one sentence—just a few words—**what are you taking away from today? What will you remember?**

I’ll start: [Share something genuine about what you observed or appreciated—e.g., ‘I’ll remember how willing everyone was to listen, even when it was hard.’]”

Go around the circle quickly. Don’t let people give speeches. If someone starts to go long:

“Thank you—let’s keep it to one sentence so everyone gets a turn.”

1:28-1:30 | Gratitude & Goodbye (2 minutes)

FACILITATOR SAYS:

“Thank you. Truly. What you did here today matters.

You showed up. You listened. You stayed curious even when you disagreed. You looked for common ground. You thought about solutions together. This is how we build stronger communities—not by shouting louder, but by listening better.

I’m grateful to each of you for your honesty, your courage, and your willingness to engage in this way. This is what democracy looks like at its best.

Please take your conversation agreement with you as a reminder. Feel free to grab some refreshments on your way out. And if you have a moment, please sign the sheet if you’d like to stay connected.

Safe travels, everyone. Thank you.”

FACILITATOR:

- Shake hands or offer a warm goodbye to each person as they leave
- Be available for anyone who wants to chat privately
- Notice if anyone seems distressed—check in with them

After the Session: Facilitator Debrief

Within 24 Hours:

1. Personal Reflection:

- What went well?
- What was challenging?
- What would you do differently next time?
- Were there any safety concerns?

2. Document Key Outcomes:

- Main themes of common ground identified
- Solution ideas generated
- Participant feedback on continuing conversations
- Number of attendees, demographics (if collected)

3. Report to Organizers:

- Share your notes and reflections
- Highlight any powerful moments or quotes (anonymized)
- Make recommendations for future sessions

4. Follow-Up (if applicable):

- Send thank-you email to participants who provided contact info
- Share any promised resources or information
- Invite to future sessions

Facilitator Troubleshooting Guide

Situation: Someone dominates the conversation

Response:

- Use the ground rule: "Remember our agreement to step up, step back. Let's hear from someone we haven't heard from yet."
- After they speak: "Thank you, [Name]. Let's hear from others now."
- In small groups, position yourself near them and gently redirect if needed.

Situation: Someone makes a disrespectful or hurtful comment

Response:

- Pause the conversation immediately
- Calmly say: "I want to pause us here. Remember our ground rule about respect. [Name], I know you care about this issue, but the way that was said might have felt hurtful to others. Can you rephrase that in a way that shares your perspective without making assumptions about others?"
- If they refuse or it escalates: "Let's take a 5-minute break."
- Check in privately with the person who was hurt.
- Consider whether the session can continue safely. You have the authority to end early if needed.

Situation: No one is talking / awkward silence

Response:

- Silence is okay! Count to 10 in your head before intervening.
- If it continues: "I know it can feel vulnerable to speak first. I'll invite someone... [Name], would you be willing to start us off?"
- Model openness: "Sometimes it takes a moment to find our words. Take your time."

Situation: Someone gets emotional (tears, anger)

Response:

- Don't panic. Emotion means people care.
- Pause. Offer a tissue.
- Say gently: "Take your time. It's okay to feel deeply about this."
- Ask: "Do you need a moment, or would you like to continue?"
- If they need a break: "Let's take 3 minutes. [Name], would you like to step outside with me, or would you prefer some space?"
- Check in with the group: "Strong feelings are normal when we talk about things that matter. Let's take a breath together."

Situation: Someone shares a traumatic personal story

Response:

- Listen with compassion.
- Don't minimize: "Thank you for trusting us with that."
- Don't therapize or try to fix it.
- After they share: "That takes courage to share. I'm holding that with care."
- Check in privately after the session: "How are you doing? I appreciated you sharing, and I wanted to make sure you're okay."
- Have mental health resources available if needed.

Situation: The conversation goes off-topic

Response:

- Gently redirect: "This is an interesting conversation, and I want to bring us back to our focus on [TOPIC]. Let's return to the question..."
- Use the poster: "Let me write that down as a related topic, and let's stay focused on [TOPIC] for now."

Situation: Two people start debating each other

Response:

- Intervene quickly: "Hold on—I want to pause us. This is starting to feel like a debate between two people, and we want to hear from everyone. [Person 1], I hear you believe X. [Person 2], I hear you believe Y. Let's open this up to the whole group. Who else has thoughts on this?"
- Redirect to the group, not the two individuals.

Situation: You don't know the answer to a factual question

Response:

- Be honest: "I don't know the answer to that, and I don't want to guess. Would someone like to look that up on their phone, or should we note it as something to explore later?"
- You are NOT the expert on the topic. That's okay.

Situation: Someone asks for your opinion

Response:

- Smile and say: "My role today is to facilitate, not to share my own views. I want to make sure we focus on hearing from all of you."
- Redirect: "But I'm curious what others think about that question..."

Situation: You're running out of time

Response:

- Check in with the group: "We're running short on time. I want to make sure we get to [X]. Is everyone okay if we shorten this section?"
- Prioritize the closing—people need a sense of completion.
- It's okay to say: "We didn't get to everything, and that's okay. This is a start."

Key Reminders for Facilitators

- ✔ **Your job is to hold space, not to have all the answers.**
- ✔ **Neutrality is your superpower.** Don't reveal your own opinions.

- ✓ **Trust the process.** Even messy conversations can yield insights.
 - ✓ **Watch your body language.** Stay open, warm, and calm.
 - ✓ **It's okay to slow down.** Pauses are powerful.
 - ✓ **Protect the quiet people.** Make space for them.
 - ✓ **Thank people often.** Gratitude builds trust.
 - ✓ **You can't control outcomes.** You can create conditions for good conversation.
 - ✓ **Take care of yourself.** Facilitating is emotionally demanding. Debrief with someone afterward.
-

Safety & Wellbeing Protocol

If Someone Discloses Harm to Themselves or Others:

1. **Stay calm.**
2. **Thank them for sharing.**
3. **After the session,** speak with them privately.
4. **Ask:** “Are you safe right now? Is there someone I can help you contact?”
5. **Provide resources:** Have a list of local crisis hotlines, mental health services, domestic violence supports, etc.
6. **Follow mandatory reporting laws** if applicable (e.g., child abuse).
7. **Don't try to solve it yourself.** Connect them with professionals.

If the Conversation Becomes Unsafe:

You have the authority to:

- Call a break
- Remind people of ground rules
- Ask someone to leave if they are being harmful (rare, but possible)
- End the session early if necessary

Your priority: the safety and dignity of all participants.

Additional Resources for Facilitators

For Further Learning:

- MosaicLab's “Facilitating Deliberation” guide
- OECD guidelines for deliberative engagement
- Essential Partners’ “Reflective Structured Dialogue” resources
- Living Room Conversations online resource library

Self-Care for Facilitators:

- Debrief with a co-facilitator or mentor after each session
- Notice your own emotions and triggers
- Take breaks between sessions

- Celebrate small wins—even a single moment of connection is a success
-

Acknowledgments

This run sheet is informed by deliberative democracy best practices from:

- MosaicLab (Australia)
- Centre for Deliberative Democracy (University of Canberra)
- OECD Guidelines for Deliberative Engagement
- Living Room Conversations methodology
- Democratic Civic Access Framework (DCAF)

Prepared for: Living Room Conversations Pilot Initiative

Version: 1.0

Date: June 2026

Notes Section (for facilitator use during session)

What worked well:

Challenges encountered:

Key insights from the group:

Ideas for next time:

Follow-up needed:

Remember: You've got this. Trust yourself, trust the process, and trust the people in the room. Democracy happens in conversations like these.