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## Overview of Facilitation

As a Facilitator, you will be creating a respectful environment for others to share their personal stories and to listen to each other. These conversations are intended to create an opportunity for participants to interact and to learn from each other. The Local Voices Network is specifically focused on making use of the power of our personal stories to connect us to each other, and to also convey information about the challenges and joys we face in our daily lives in a way no other information can. How we interact with participants influences their trust and their willingness to fully participate.

The function of a Facilitator is to facilitate both content and process.

**Content facilitation** includes clarifying confusing statements, identifying themes or common threads in a discussion, summarizing and organizing the ideas put forth, and testing the climate by expressing the direction and decisions that appear to emerge from the group process. These functions focus on what the group is talking about.

**Process facilitation**, on the other hand, relates to how the group is working. This includes making sure that everyone gets a chance to participate, pointing out feelings that arise in the conversation, and helping others express and deal with conflict or confusion that arise during the conversation. Content and process are both vital and basic elements to achieving the group's purpose.

Guiding a group well calls for careful observation and attention. In addition to listening closely to what people are saying, the Facilitator should watch the participants' faces and posture for non-verbal clues about how the process is working. Eye contact can be used to acknowledge people's wishes to speak and to let them know their ideas are being heard. When facilitating and guiding these conversations, you must be fully present.

**The Facilitator should also abstain from participation in the discussions, except for the first warm-up question.** Good facilitation is hard work, and it is not possible to attend to the group's dynamics and needs as well as to your own personal wish to express a particular point. A little distance is important for keeping the whole picture in view and to host the group towards its goals.

The role of a Facilitator is very different from that of a teacher or educator. Rather than giving information or giving your opinion, your role is to ask questions that help group members share their reflections, feelings and experiences. At times, you may relate to what someone has said and share a bit about yourself to make a connection; however, what is most important is that the group members talk with their peers.

Your role is to try to include as many voices in the conversation as possible, and to help them share the air time equitably. So, if one or two members talk more frequently or for longer periods of time, your role will be to encourage others to join the conversation, by either relating to what's been said or sharing a differing or new perspective. The following prompts usually help folks get engaged in a dialogue after someone has spoken:

- How do others relate to what's been said?
- Who has a similar experience? Can you say more...
- I'd like some new voices in as we talk about this further...
- I can relate to what you're feeling...anyone else?
- I appreciate what you're saying...anyone have a different perspective or something else to add?

**As a LVN Facilitator, please do:**

- Encourage personal stories relevant to public or shared concerns
- Foster a local focus
- Listen attentively
- Use personal stories only for a specific purpose (e.g., to model the level of vulnerability you are hoping for from participants, or to bring an otherwise unheard/unknown perspective to the group)
- Understand and show openness to multiple perspectives
- Question and explore
- Show respect for everyone
- Communicate clearly
- Observe non-verbal communication
- Guide conversation back to focus
- Coach and guide conversation without dictating
- Recognize and encourage different types of participation—including silence
- Maintain confidentiality as appropriate
- Make sure that everyone who wants to speak has an opportunity
- Be prepared and present. If you are feeling “off,” that will reflect on the tone of the group

**When serving as a LVN Facilitator, please avoid:**

- Interrupting or cutting people off
- Singling people out
- Asking someone to speak for one of their group identities
- Shutting down participation
- Allowing any intolerant speech
- Shifting out of the role of a facilitator to the role of a participant
- Assuming a teaching, lecturing, counseling role
- Appearing judgmental
- Losing track of time and getting sidetracked
- Doing much of the talking/talking about yourself
- Shifting gears without transition or explanation
- Forcing someone to speak when they do not want to
- Sharing the specific individuals’ names affiliated with stories in your conversation outside of the group.

## Conversation Host Qualities

<b>Trustworthy</b>	Able to create a climate where participants feel they will be seen for who they are and heard fairly
<b>Listener</b>	Practices good listening habits and models them for others
<b>Structured</b>	Has a natural gift for offering structure for conversations; can keep a group on time and support participants sharing the time
<b>Fearless</b>	Willing to ask questions to open up new possibilities
<b>Proactive</b>	Can manage one's own responses to avoid reactivity and think ahead about ways to support conversation to align with the group's purposes
<b>Flexible</b>	Has a natural gift for knowing when to relax the structure to make space for an unexpected conversation
<b>Connected</b>	Can connect with the group and help the group members connect with one another; has the social intelligence to notice emotional and other nonverbal cues from participants and respond appropriately
<b>Multi-partial</b>	Able to stimulate interaction without bias, or rather <i>with</i> a bias toward seeing and understanding everyone's perspective

## Local Voices Network Conversation Principles

This Facilitation Guide is intended to support you in inviting, welcoming, and hosting a LVN Conversation. It follows the [principles of a LVN Conversation](#):

- Lead with Values
- Share from Personal Experience
- Engage Discomfort
- Connect across Community



In our conversations, we invite participants to introduce themselves while also naming a value that is important to them in order to create a foundation for the conversation built around shared values.

We also use these values to inform our conversation agreements. These agreements are critical to the productivity of a conversation - even among people who know each other and who converse regularly. We are trying to spark a different kind of conversation and having shared agreements supports this intention by allowing participants to connect meaningfully across differences.

## Setting the Tone

The way we begin a conversation is critical to creating an environment where people can fully participate. At the beginning of each conversation, there are three things we want to start with every time:

1. Let participants know what they can expect from the time together in terms of timing, conversation flow, your role, and their role.
2. Share the Local Voices Network values and let folks know that we are hoping the spirit of all conversations will be grounded in these values.

Authentic  
Voices



Diverse  
Perspectives



Community-First  
Approach



Process  
Transparency



Measurable  
Impact



3. Share recommended conversation agreements and get consensus. At the beginning of each session, share the agreements and ask: *“Are there any of these agreements that you aren’t comfortable with? Are there any that you want to add to the list?”*

## Agreements

Agreements are used as a means to promote the fullest participation from as many people as possible. They help guests support each other in maintaining the safety and trust that comes from respecting each other’s worth. Reminding them of this puts primary responsibility for creating safety squarely on each individual in the group.

**Agreements are intended to:**

- Create trust in the group by promoting honesty
- Clarify assumptions about how we want to behave and be treated by others
- Develop a space where open and clear communication will occur
- Help participants take responsibility for how they act toward each other

**Our recommended agreements are:**

- Speak for yourself and out of your own experiences
- Allow others to speak for themselves
- Share the time - allow others to finish speaking, take turns
- Stay curious - ask honest questions
- Pause - take time for reflection
- Listen generously - assume good intentions
- Be aware that your comments may have an impact on others
- Silence all devices (including cell phones and smart watches)

When you begin your conversation, we suggest you share these guidelines and ask people if they have any questions, or if there is anything they would like to add or change in order to fully participate in the conversation. Once you have full agreement and clarity from all participants, you can proceed with the conversation.

## Share from Personal Experience

In these conversations, we are inviting participants to share personal stories and experiences rather than the opinions they have developed as a result of those experiences. There are many tools in a Facilitator's toolbox to help orient the participants and redirect the conversation towards personal experience.

LVN Facilitators should also encourage a focus on the lived experience of the people in the group whenever possible. While we know there are many concerns at the national, international, and global level, the purpose of LVN conversations is to talk about things that relate to the experience of people in this community. When people start discussing national level issues, Facilitators should encourage people to talk about how those issues are related to their daily lives here. For example, if participants start talking about their like or dislike for the President, ask them then to reflect on how the President's actions, words, or policies relate to something that they have directly experienced in their own lives.

The primary tool in your toolbox is the conversation guide. You will find that the structure of the guide and the ways that the questions are framed are all intended to support participants in naturally sharing from their personal experiences. Additionally, all of the skills and strategies outlined in the following pages will also support this conversation principle.

### Skills and Strategies for Facilitating Conversations

**Active listening** is an essential tool for good facilitation. Active listening involves facing the person who is speaking and making eye contact, nodding, and delivering other verbal cues to show you are listening and to indicate that the speaker should keep sharing. This is how hosts can show they are listening without speaking.

**Clarifying and Re-phrasing:** the Facilitator may act as a translator if participants are not being understood. This skill may be called for if participants are talking past each other, not understanding each other's points, and/or if feelings are rising as the miscommunication continues. One other possibility in such situations is to rephrase the difficult points. Be sure to check your interpretation with the speaker for accuracy.

**Reflective Listening** can also be employed as a strategy to gain clarity if two participants are perhaps misunderstanding one another. When using reflective listening, the Facilitator repeats back in their own words what they have understood in a concise, condensed form, highlighting the main points. Facilitators use phrases like: "So what I am hearing you say is..." "I heard...is that correct," "Let me see if I understand." Always follow these statement asking the participant if you got it right.

Facilitators can also ask for more information, using open ended questions, to gain clarity. Asking clarifying questions helps the group gain a deeper understanding and encourages the speaker to explore the situation. Facilitators who are asking clarifying questions will use phrases such as, "What does that mean?" "Tell us more about that" and "How did that make you feel?" Be careful not to ask questions to which you already know the answer because people may feel trapped. Avoid using "why" questions—people may feel that they have to justify themselves—"why" questions can usually be replaced by "how" questions.

**Monitoring and Encouraging Equitable Participation:** the facilitator should be aware of who is speaking repeatedly and who is not speaking at all, in order to help balance

participation. Some members may speak more or less than others for a variety of reasons: the interest and involvement in the subject, their knowledge of the issues and their comfort level speaking in groups. A variety of techniques are available for hosts to use in equalizing full involvement of all members in discussion. If you have a group where this is a challenging dynamic, you can remind people of the conversation agreements or you can take turns responding to questions (participants are still able to pass).

**Timing:** as the Facilitator, people will be looking to you for cues about timing. Develop a strategy that will allow you to keep track of the time so you can move on to the next question at a natural conversation point. Additionally, be clear on what is an essential part of the conversation, so you can move more quickly through less substantive questions if you have a particularly talkative and comfortable group.

**Creating Transitions:** transitioning from one speaker to another is an art form. It requires a host to have a sensitive ear and eye, as well as an ability to listen to the subtle connections within a communication. Be aware of the similarities between the various speakers, and summarize what is being said - and what may not be being said. Make connections between one participant and the next, or between one prompt and the next. When possible, use something a participant says to lead into the next question.

### Panning\*

Just as a movie camera “pans” the environment to see the whole picture, we need to continuously PAN all around us, and within us, as we guide conversations.

Some guidelines for using the skill of PANNING: PAY ATTENTION NOW

- Intentionally observe and notice behaviors, comments, feelings, patterns of treatment...
- **PAN** the specific details and facts of what you see, feel, hear ...
- Describe what you **PAN** without any assumptions, interpretations, conclusions, or prejudgments
- Notice the group memberships of people involved as you **PAN**, and describe the group memberships **if this information is useful to the discussion** ...
- AVOID falling into the trap of making a SNAP JUDGMENT ~ creating a “story” about what you see.



**PAIR: EFFECTIVE DIALOGUE SKILLS\***

P: PAN the environment, yourself

A: ASK questions to explore

I: INTERRUPT the process

R: RELATE to others, their comments

P: PAN the environment and yourself; describe what you notice or engage others based on what you see (Pay Attention Now)

- I'm noticing I'm feeling...anyone else?
- I noticed how quiet everyone got; I'm wondering what is going on for folks?
- It seems some people were impacted by that statement, am I right?
- I'm noticing you're speaking with a lot of energy and emotion...
- I'm noticing that people get interrupted as they try to share...
- You seemed to have a reaction to what was just said...

A: ASK about the specifics behind the person's comment or behavior

- Could you say more about that...Tell me more...
- Can you give us an example of what you're saying...
- Can you help me understand what your intent was when you said...
- Can you give me some background on this situation...
- How were you impacted when....What were you feeling when...

I: INTERRUPT unproductive dynamics

- Let's slow down the conversation and talk about what just happened...
- I'm going to interrupt and try a different approach to this conversation...
- We are not engaging according to our group agreements....
- Let's take a breath...

R: RELATE to the person or their comment/behavior

- I relate to what you're saying...
- I remember a time when I...I did the same thing...
- How do others relate to that comment?
- What you're saying seems to relate to what so-and-so just said...

Engaging Skills	Examples/Descriptions
<b>Ask the person for more information ~ seek to understand</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Can you tell me more...</li> <li>• Can you give me an example...</li> <li>• Can you give me some background on this situation...</li> <li>• What do you mean when you say...</li> <li>• Help me understand what you disagree with...find frustrating...</li> <li>• Help me understand how you came to that conclusion?</li> <li>• What were you feeling when...?</li> <li>• What's your perspective?</li> <li>• What led you to that conclusion?</li> </ul>
<b>Paraphrase the person's comments</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• So you're saying that...</li> <li>• So you feel that...</li> <li>• So you think that...</li> <li>• Are you saying that...</li> <li>• So from your perspective...</li> </ul>
<b>Explore their INTENT</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Help me understand your intent when you...</li> <li>• What had you wanted to communicate with your comment?</li> <li>• What was your intended outcome?</li> <li>• What is underneath your comment/question?</li> </ul>

<b>comments</b>	your head... <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I'm noticing your tone of voice...</li> <li>• I'm noticing your body language...</li> </ul>
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<b>Explore the IMPACT on them</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• It seems --- had an impact on you...</li> <li>• How did that impact you?</li> <li>• What were you feeling when...</li> </ul>
<b>Acknowledge and validate their points</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I hear that you feel...</li> <li>• I can see that from your perspective you think...</li> <li>• I'd probably feel ____, too...</li> </ul>
<b>Explore possible solutions</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What do you think we can do?</li> <li>• What do you see as the next steps?</li> <li>• One thought could be to...what do you think?</li> <li>• Might it be possible to...</li> </ul>
<b>State your desired outcome</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• This is what I suggest we do...</li> <li>• I want to...I need...</li> </ul>
<b>Summarize the dialogue</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Summarize the dialogue without stating opinions or judging the dialogue.</li> <li>• So we've discussed...we agreed to...</li> </ul>
Developed by Kathy Obear, <a href="http://www.drkathyobear.com">www.drkathyobear.com</a> , <a href="mailto:kathy@drkathyobear.com">kathy@drkathyobear.com</a>	

## Engaging Discomfort

### Growth Zone Model

LVN Conversations encourage people to engage with discomfort if it arises. We use the Growth Zone Model to help people understand what we mean by this.



In the **panic zone**, you experience physical indicators of

learning and experiencing new things. This is the level of discomfort with which we hope participants will engage.

In the **comfort zone**, you are at ease. You are not being stressed or challenged in any way. We are hoping people will push out of this zone and engage with discomfort.

## Manage Your Own Emotions and Reactions

As a Facilitator, one of your main roles is to create a space for sharing multiple viewpoints and perspectives. When we are effectively playing that role, it is inherent that we will hear statements or comments with which we do not agree. Some statements or comments may even spark feelings of unexpected anger or a surprisingly strong intensity of feelings, or a feeling of being triggered. When hosting a conversation with family, it is even more likely that past relationships and patterns of communication will impact our reactions. In moments like this, some common reactions include:

- feeling disoriented and distracted from the flow of the discussion and the planned agenda: “stopped in their tracks”
- feeling out of control and overwhelmed by the situation
- requiring extra effort to manage the situation effectively

Facilitators are encouraged to be self-reflective, and to consider what viewpoints or behaviors trigger you into these less effective states.

Before you begin hosting conversations, develop some clarity about your own triggers and some strategies that help you remain present and able to effectively hold space for robust conversation.

## Hold Space for Discomfort

We anticipate that if we are effectively fostering the type of environment and conversations that we hope to create through the Local Voices Network, people will share their honest thoughts about some of the more troubling concerns in our communities. As Facilitator, you should be comfortable holding space for these conversations so people can fully share their experiences. If your inclination would normally be to avoid talking about race or politics or to change the subject when these

things that might make it particularly challenging for you to host a conversation on a sensitive topic, so please listen to your own instincts as you assess whether it is the right time or place for a trickier conversation.

## Troubleshooting

If you are finding that despite utilizing the guidelines and the Conversation Script, people are still moving into arguments and debates, here are some phrases you can use to interrupt and redirect conversations:

- Thank you for sharing that. Do you have a story about how that is playing out in your neighborhood or community?
- You've said a lot. What I'd like to do is to take in what you've just shared. What you said was...
- Did anyone notice what just happened here?
- Before you go any further...how are you feeling about what you have just shared?
- I want to ask you a question before you go on any further. Have you noticed anyone's reaction to what you have said? Why or why not?
- Before you go on to another story, can anyone else tell me one thing that he/she said that deeply moved you?
- Take one more minute...
- Let's slow down the conversation and remember to focus on our personal experiences...
- I'm going to interrupt and try a different approach to this conversation...
- We are not engaging according to our group agreements....
- Let's take a breath...

## Connect with Community

### Making the Invitation

While we cherish the opportunity to connect with neighbors, vulnerable and open sharing is not something with which everyone is immediately comfortable. We do not recommend surprising your guests with an LVN Conversation. Generally you want to help people know what to expect, and why you are inviting them to participate in the conversation.

You can find links to an [email invitation here](#).

existing groups or people with whom you are regularly in conversation. We are hoping that the participants share a level of familiarity and trust that enables them to launch right into conversation.

Please note, everyone participating in a conversation that is recorded and added to the LVN website must be 14 years of age or above (with those under the age of 18 requiring the permission of a parent or guardian). We recognize that when working with minors, there ought to be an extra level of sensitivity to recording personal information.

### Selecting the Location (In-Person Conversations)

If one or more participants have accessibility needs, the location should accommodate those needs. The room should be small, and quiet enough to be able to hear each member's voice, to ensure a high-quality recording. It should have a table and enough chairs or other seating for each of the participants and the host. Some examples of spaces that would work well are a kitchen or dining area in a private home, or a meeting room at a community center or public library.

## Facilitation Resources

### Online Learning Modules for Volunteers

Local Voices Network offers this free training series for LVN volunteers interested in developing their skills in order to support the LVN mission to foster conversation in communities and in the media that improves our understanding of one another. Find the online learning modules here: <https://lvn.org/learningmods>

## Host Conduct Policy

As a non-profit organization at the forefront of fostering a healthy public sphere, Cortico is committed to upholding the highest legal, professional, and ethical standards.

We are powered by the community and we have a responsibility to be a good steward of our resources, to uphold rigorous standards of conduct carefully observe all applicable

expects all volunteers to act in accordance with the letter and spirit of all such laws; to refrain from any illegal, dishonest, or unethical conduct; to avoid all real, potential, and apparent conflicts of interest; to act in a professional and businesslike manner; and to treat others with respect. This conduct includes, but is not limited to, the following:

- Adhering to all applicable laws, policies, and procedures;
- Using Cortico's equipment and resources in a lawful, ethical, and responsible manner;
- Treating all colleagues, partners, and participants in a professional and courteous manner;
- Complying with all safety and security laws, policies, and procedures;
- Discussing with Cortico staff any unlawful, unethical, or suspicious conduct or any potential safety and/or security breaches;
- Discussing with Cortico staff any threatening or potentially violent behavior;
- Performing assigned tasks to the best of your ability and in accordance with expectations.

Examples of prohibited conduct include, but are not limited to, the following:

- Violating, in any way, any applicable law or any other Cortico policy or procedure during the course of your LVN-related activity;
- Engaging in any form of discriminatory or harassing conduct, sexual or otherwise;
- Engaging in or threatening acts of violence in online spaces or in person, including but not limited to fighting, assaulting, or threatening an individual in connection with a LVN-related activity;
- Falsifying or altering any record or report;
- Stealing, destroying, defacing, or misusing Cortico property, including its communications systems;
- Conducting LVN-related activities under the influence of alcohol or illegal drugs;

The examples of conduct described above are only illustrative of mandatory and prohibited behavior and are not intended to be an all-inclusive list.

conduct in a particular situation, or for questions or complaints about the conduct of another individual or other individuals, please seek the advice of a Cortico/local LVN staff member. By working together, Individuals will ensure that Cortico lives up to this Code and to its promise to the public, its donors, the people it serves, and its workforce.