



Canadian
Race Relations
Foundation

Fondation
canadienne des
relations raciales

Our Canada Handbook

Interfaith and Belonging: A Civic Education and Engagement Initiative

Methods for conducting a small group discussion

The Our Canada Handbook represents a practical guide to bridging faith with Canadian identity, human rights, belonging and values. Each chapter provides a perspective on these topics, written to provoke discussion and reflection, with Questions to Consider and Additional Issues at the end of each chapter. The Handbook provides a framework for conversations across Canada about Canada and what it means to be Canadian. By organizing a discussion group, you are making a vital contribution by devoting time and energy to stimulating these important conversations within your community.

Setting the topic

Select a pre-reading (what is this?) from the Handbook with the questions and/or issues you wish to cover. You can select specific pages to print and then provide print copies, or circulate as a PDF. *See the printing tip sheet if you aren't sure how to do this.*

Setting the topic and distributing a common reading in advance ensures that your group will come prepared, and you will have a thoughtful and honest conversation about these important topics.

Gathering the group

The group may be any number of people, but generally 5-10 people works well. This is a good number to allow for a conversation that engages everyone.

Groups often work well if they have something in common, such as ethnic origin, religion, age, number of years in the neighbourhood, same workplace, a group of friends. Once you and the group develop a comfort level with the process and the substance of the content, more heterogeneous groups of people can be gathered.

Preparing the space

The space should be informal in nature. Ideally the group should be able to sit comfortably around a table, or a living room setting. Everyone should be able to see one another.

Discussions seem to flow more easily if refreshments are served as this generally puts people at ease and keeps the discussion communal and informal. Coffee and desserts work well, with perhaps a potluck meal being organized, once the group develops a comfort level. Keep it simple, and be mindful of food restrictions so that everyone can participate.

Inviting the participants

As the convenor, it works best if you are familiar with all of the participants attending. They do not necessarily need to know each other.

As part of the invitation, let people know what it is you have in mind for the evening, and distribute the reading and questions/issues far enough in advance to give people time to do the reading and think about the issues (at least one week).

Opening the discussion

Start with an opening exercise (ice-breaker), something simple that will be comfortable and non-threatening for a number of people. The ice-breaker usually means that everyone has at least two or three opportunities to say something.

This will ensure that everyone has had a chance to speak, and equally that everyone has had a chance to hear the others, before serious discussions begin.

Picking the topic(s)

The topic(s) for discussion must be relevant to the group (not just to you!).

Consider what is of concern to the people attending and to the relevant community of interest, and sound out some of the attendees, if possible. The topic should be chosen in advance and participants should know what will be discussed.

Use the ice-breaker or opening exercise to gently lead into the conversation. A web search for “free ice-breaker exercises” will give you lots of ideas.

The conversation

Try to ensure that the conversation does not get overly heated; issues may emerge that might be contentious. Your role as facilitator is to moderate the conversation so that one issue does not monopolize the conversation.

Acknowledge that everyone’s experience is different and some may hold views that conflict with others. It is very positive to move the group toward an acceptance of different views.

If the conversation gets too heated, break for refreshments and a stretch.

Closing the discussion

Be conscious to ask if anyone has any closing thoughts for that week’s discussion.

If the discussion has gone well, you may wish to go around the circle and ask people to let you know if they have learned anything, or if the evening has inspired them to do something such as engage in further discussions, participate in relevant events or learn more about the topic.

Share your experience

We want to hear from you! At the Canadian Race Relations Foundation, we are committed to giving voice to the current issues that impact Canada’s democratic principles and multiculturalism practices. Please let us know about your group and your reflections from discussions based on topics in the Handbook.

Contact: info@crrf-fcrr.ca or call us 416-441-1900 or 1-888-240-4936.