

Civility in Conversation: Ground Rules for Participants

- We will speak for ourselves and from our own experience, with specificity rather than sweeping generalizations or buzz words.
- We are here to increase our understanding of our own views and values and the views and values of other participants. We do not expect consensus nor is our purpose to convert others to a cause or to our own beliefs.
- We will listen with an open mind and with resilience, “hanging in” when what is said is hard to hear.
- We will assume good intentions and motives from our fellow participants.
- We will disagree about ideas, not about motives or personalities.
- We bear the responsibility – as individual participants and as a group – to conduct a conversation that is respectful, fair, and kind.
- We will not interrupt, except to indicate that we cannot hear a speaker.
- No one is required to speak but everyone has the right to speak. We promise not to dominate the conversation. When in doubt, W.A.I.T. (ask yourself, Why Am I Talking?)
- What we say in this room stays in this room. We will respect the confidentiality of the conversation so that we all feel free to speak our minds.
- Group members should use each other’s first names whenever possible (name plates are provided) in acknowledging comments and offering follow up comments or questions.
- Dialogue is most successful when conversation proceeds coherently from idea to idea or topic to topic. It is good to give full treatment to an idea before moving on to the next.
- It is good to remember the Latin root of the word “conversation”: to turn, i.e. to turn together, to turn around, to face one another, to turn toward. Group members should feel encouraged to turn toward one another, to turn their thoughts around, to acknowledge good ideas, and to question statements they don’t understand.

- Silence can be a good place for reflection.

A note on our facilitators:

Your group discussion is lead by two facilitators, one grounded in content specific to the topic and serving as a resource for specific Constitutional questions, and the other trained in the humanities and the model of discussion called civic reflection, which uses textual prompts to encourage exchange of values that lead to increased understanding of self and of each other. Neither facilitators are presenters: they are helping you navigate the conversation by asking questions, encouraging follow up, keeping the group on track, both in terms of making sure the conversation stays civil and that ideas get a full treatment.