

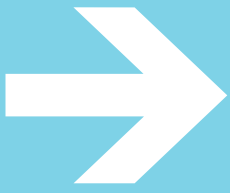
do-it-yourself
CAFE
SOCIETY
t o o l k i t



A Guide to Hosting Your Own Discussions
Getting Started: Five Easy Steps
Sample Topics
Facilitator Cheat Sheet



www.prairie.org/cafesociety



A Guide to Hosting Your Own Cafe Society Discussion

“Engage a stranger in conversation across a racial, ethnic, or class divide and one gets not only an extra pair of eyes but also an ability to see and understand parts of the world that are to oneself invisible.”

— Danielle Allen, author of *Talking to Strangers*



Cafe Society is a project designed to foster a more robust civil society, more cohesive and interactive communities, greater media literacy, and a more informed and engaged public through “coffee shop” conversations about contemporary social issues.

Current media reports (along with ample doses of caffeine) serve as stimulants for the conversations.

Anyone can host their own discussion. Join the conversation!

Bring together family members, friends, neighbors, co-workers, and strangers to discuss current events and other important political and social issues. By engaging in a meaningful exchange of ideas and perspectives, these conversations can enliven the core of democracy and empower communities and individuals.

“It’s critically important that not only friends but strangers talk to each other about social issues. A cornerstone of any kind of deliberative democracy is talking to strangers and doing a lot of it.”

— Barbara Ransby, historian and author of *Ella Baker and the Black Freedom Movement*

CAFE SOCIETY



~~Don't~~ Talk to Strangers.

Join the Conversation.

Topic:

Date:

Time:

Location:

www.prairie.org/cafesociety



Photo credit: Dave Marques

Getting Started

Five Easy Steps



Check out the archive of topics at www.prairie.org/cafesociety. New topics are posted every Friday. You are welcome to use these topics or choose your own topic.



Find online news stories, Op-Eds, blog posts, and other resources on your topic to share with discussion participants. These resources can be a useful jumping off point for a conversation. We like to use sources that show different perspectives on an issue. Providing multiple points of view invites people to think more critically about what they're reading and seeing in the media.



Think of questions for consideration. Meaningful conversations are often generated by thoughtful questions. Dig deep. Don't settle for yes or no questions. Ask yourself what's important to you about an issue and why.



Choose a location, date, and time. You can host a Cafe Society discussion in your home, at your church during coffee hour, at your workplace during lunch, or at your public library. Other possibilities are your favorite neighborhood bar, restaurant, or coffee shop. We've also hosted Cafe Society discussions at high schools, art galleries, and museums. We recommend an hour of discussion time to keep the conversation focused on the topic.



Invite folks to attend your discussion. You can publicize your event with local papers, blogs, and on Facebook. Use the flyer on page 3 of this booklet. Fill in the details of your event.

Join the Cafe Society page on Facebook where you can share topic ideas, experiences and your events!

Talk is Action. Let's Get Talking.

Sample Topics and Questions for Consideration



You can find an archive of past topics online at www.prairie.org/CafeSociety

More Police, Less Crime?

What are the intended and unintended effects of more police presence in communities? Why do certain neighborhoods experience more or less violence than others? What role can individuals and communities play in making streets safer for everyone?

Living Green

What does living green mean to you? Is it just hype or is there real value to a greener lifestyle? What evidence are you seeing that communities are taking environmental issues more seriously? How can you make your life greener?

Happiness is...

What does happiness mean to you? How can we achieve greater happiness in our individual lives and as a society? How do the pressures of modern life affect our happiness? What is the relationship between democracy and the potential for happiness?

Does Hip-Hop Lean to the Right?

How is mainstream hip-hop culture inherently conservative, progressive, or both? What are hip-hop values and what does it mean to be part of the hip-hop generation? How is hip-hop a useful political tool or vehicle for social change?

Osama Bin Laden: Justice Served?

What do you think of the various reactions to Osama Bin Laden's death? How has or hasn't justice been served? What will this mean for the "War on Terror"? What effect does Mr. Bin Laden's death have on Americans' sense of safety?



A Cheat-Sheet for Cafe Society Facilitators

A thoughtful and engaged facilitator can make a world of difference for your conversation. An effective facilitator strives to unlock the wisdom in the room by setting a welcoming and open tone that urges everyone to participate.

You don't have to be an expert to host Cafe Society. Follow these useful tips to help guide your discussion.



Photo credit: Dave Marques



Introduce yourself as the facilitator. Let people know that your role is to keep the conversation going and to make sure that everyone has the opportunity to participate. You'll pose questions to the group to kick off the conversation. You'll keep track of who wants to speak and call on them. And, you'll urge everyone to chime in.

Consensus is not the goal. The discussion does not need to end in agreement or with everyone on the same page. It is productive to see how varying viewpoints can coexist. Allow the group to examine the roots of an opposing or unpopular stance.

Make sure everyone has a chance to participate. Don't let anyone (including yourself) dominate the discussion. On the other hand, don't be afraid of silence. If there's a brief pause in the conversation, that's okay.

Open up the discussion by sharing these guidelines:

- Speak with the expectation that you will be heard. Listen with the expectation that you will learn something new.
- Listen actively. Listening is not simply waiting for your turn to speak.
- Disagree without being disagreeable.

Stay on topic. Reference articles or supplemental materials as a way of bringing the conversation back to the topic if the discussion goes astray.

To begin a discussion, ask a thought-provoking question. Conduct a round-robin, allowing each person to share his or her initial thoughts. Once everyone gets a chance to be heard, the conversation can open up to a natural dialogue. You can also read a paragraph from an article or news story as a preface to your question.

Be mindful of your role as the facilitator. Your role is not to lecture or to be an expert. You're there to create a welcoming, comfortable forum for people to freely exchange ideas. You shouldn't feel the need to respond to every comment or know the answer to every question that gets asked. Encourage participants to direct their comments to everyone.





Troubleshooting

IF some participants are talking a lot and others aren't talking at all, ask if anyone who hasn't had a chance to speak would like to offer their thoughts.

IF someone is dominating the discussion, you can ask participants to limit their points to three minutes or less and let them know if they go beyond three minutes.

IF everyone agrees, you can play devil's advocate and raise a different point of view.

IF no one is talking, ask an open-ended question. It can be as simple as what interests you about this topic or what brought you to this discussion?

IF the tone of the conversation gets uncomfortably tense, you should say so in an even-handed way. Make sure you remain calm and ask participants to consider why this issue is so controversial or evokes heated responses.

Useful prompts to keep the conversation going:

- What do you mean by that? Was there a particular resource that gave you that idea?
- Does anyone agree or disagree with what was said?
- Can you tell us more about that? If "X" is true, then what about "Y"?
- Have you heard something that stirred fresh thoughts or feelings?
- Has an interesting theme or idea emerged that you would like to add to?



The Public Square creates spaces for public conversations about cultural, social, and political issues.

The DIY Cafe Society Toolkit is brought to you by The Public Square, a program of the Illinois Humanities Council.



We foster a more participatory democracy by bringing people from all walks of life together to discuss, debate, and exchange ideas.

Check out The Public Square's programs:

Art of Dissent is a series that uses the arts as a springboard for public conversations. Performances, exhibits, and presentations are a prelude to community conversations about contemporary issues. Art, issues, and dialogue are the key components to this engaging series.

Civic Cinema is an exhilarating series that uses the most exceptionally creative and engaging documentary films of our times to help communities talk about the most pressing social issues that we face. The documentaries we screen and discuss challenge many of the mainstream representations of critical social issues.

Artists, Activists and Authors After Hours are intimate discussions that allow for meaningful exchanges among people who share a connection to the work of an artist, activist, or scholar. Since coalition building is one of the cornerstones of social change, AAAH programs are structured to give individuals a chance to meet others engaged in similar struggles and projects.

To learn more about The Public Square or any of our programs visit us online at www.prairie.org/publicsquare or call us at 312-422-5580.