



The Conversation Guide

A Guide to Help You Host Your Big Table Conversation

Central Ohio is a region that thrives because we care. We give our time to listen and learn from one another. When we do that, we draw each other closer and create the power to lead our community to an even better future.

GUIDING YOUR CONVERSATION

We hope The Big Table generates open, thoughtful conversations that will spark new relationships and new ways for working together by deepening our understanding of each other and what the community needs. Emphasis is not on finding immediate solutions, but rather on creating authentic human connection and civic engagement through conversation.

How can we work together to create a strong and connected community?

We know there's no single way to get there. It will take the involvement of individuals, families, businesses, governments, and nonprofits. All ideas are welcome, and all voices will be heard.

This conversation can focus on any topic. We recommend against choosing the topic for your conversation. While you may put together a group that will quickly and naturally settle on a particular area of shared interest, it is best if the topic develops organically as the group shares their voices. The conversation should be open and natural, which may mean multiple topics are discussed.

Here are a few tips on how to get started:

ORGANIZING THE CONVERSATION

- **First**, introduce yourself. Share your name, background, and why you decided to be a host for The Big Table. Perhaps add a quick fun fact about yourself to further break the ice.
- **Second**, invite your guests to introduce themselves and talk about what brings them to the table. Ask them to share a similar fun fact about themselves.
- **Third**, urge your guests to stay focused during the conversation. Ask them to put their cell phones and other distractions away until the conversation has ended.
- **Fourth**, encourage guests to share their thoughts about the community and their ideas for working together to create a strong and connected community.

GETTING THE MOST OUT OF YOUR CONVERSATION

- **First**, the fundamental question—how can we work together to build a strong, connected community?—is intentionally left open-ended. Think creatively and productively. Encourage guests to reflect on possibilities rather than dwell on already identified challenges.
- **Second**, warm up the guests. Consider asking guests to identify their favorite thing about our community. Or perhaps you may ask the guests to share what they'd most like to change. This helps everyone get into the conversation while providing focus.
- **Third**, consider the conversation as a journey where the process is as important as the destination. Be willing and prepared to take detours along the way. Help your guests reflect on what they value most and consider the choices and tradeoffs related to their ideas.
- **Fourth**, most importantly, remind your guests that conversations are as much about listening and learning as they are about talking. Make sure all ideas are invited and all voices are heard.

CONVERSATION PROMPTS

For your reference, we've compiled a list of prompts that you may want to use to kick off and guide your conversations. You do not have to use these. They are simply ideas that may help you steer your group in a productive direction.

1. What are the best things about our community and how can we use them to build a strong and connected community?
2. What does our community need and what steps, no matter how small, can we take to meet those needs?
3. What can we do to spread more kindness in our community?
4. What would you like to learn from the others in this conversation?
5. What commitment can we make, big or small, to better our community?

QUICK TIPS FOR YOUR CONVERSATION

DO

- Host the event at a comfortable, inviting place where all of your guests will feel welcome.
- Encourage everyone to participate by talking, listening, and learning from each other.
- Promote creative and productive dialogue, rather than focus on negativity.
- Invite guests to expand on their ideas.
- Take notes and encourage guests to do the same.
- After the conversation, share your ideas, photos, and topics on social media using #TheBigTable.
- Exchange contact information so your group can keep in touch in the future.

DON'T

- Demand that your group focus on a topic that you chose ahead of time; be open to what your guests think is most important to discuss.
- Micromanage the conversation; let it flow freely.
- Be judgmental or dismissive of any person's comments or ideas.
- Promote complaints, arguments, or unproductive debates; these conversations should not dwell on what is wrong but rather what will make us better.
- Be afraid to ask questions.
- Be nervous; conversations should be casual, comfortable, and fun.
- Stop sharing when your conversation ends; keep discussing your ideas with colleagues, friends, and neighbors, or on social media using #TheBigTable.

AFTER YOUR CONVERSATION

In today's world, coming together has never been more important. We hope your Big Table conversation connects you, your guests, and our larger community in a new way. Listening to and learning from each other is an important first step toward creating a strong and connected community.

SHARE YOUR FEEDBACK

As a host, it is critical that you share your feedback about your Big Table conversation. Please take notes during your conversation and share your thoughts afterwards. After The Big Table has ended, you will receive a brief survey from The Columbus Foundation to assist you in providing your feedback. Please make every effort to respond to this survey in a timely manner. Additionally, feel free to share any additional information not requested by the survey via email to bigtable@columbusfoundation.org.

Before your guests leave, remind them that they will receive a link to the survey from you and strongly encourage them to respond and provide their feedback as well.

KEEP IN TOUCH

We hope The Big Table is only a starting point in sparking conversations, and that you and your guests are inspired to continue to listen to and learn from each other as you create the power to lead our community to an even better future. Please don't forget to thank your guests for participating in The Big Table. By participating in The Big Table, they are giving our community a great gift. We hope you stay in contact with your guests and continue the conversations by setting up additional get-togethers or talking with others who may be interested in the ideas your group shares. This is a day focused on community-building—but The Big Table is always open for conversation.

INFORMATION SESSIONS

In addition to this toolkit, there will be two host information sessions at **The Columbus Foundation's Davis Hall** (1234 East Broad Street, Columbus, OH 43205). While attendance is optional, you'll have the opportunity to meet other Big Table hosts, ask questions about guiding your conversation, and hear from others about their Big Table experiences.

The first will take place on **Monday, July 16** from **noon-1:00 p.m.** RSVP to attend this session at <https://cbusfdn.org/BigTableInfo>.

The second will take place on **Monday, August 20** from **5:30-6:30 p.m.** RSVP to attend this session at <https://cbusfdn.org/BigTableInfo2>.

HOST KIT PICK-UP

Your host kit may be picked up starting on **Monday, August 20** at **9:00 a.m.** through **August 29**.

ABOUT THE COLUMBUS FOUNDATION

The Columbus Foundation serves more than 2,500 individuals, families, and businesses that have created unique funds and planned gifts to make a difference in the lives of others through the most effective philanthropy possible. Nearly 75 years strong, The Columbus Foundation is Your Trusted Philanthropic Advisor® and ranks among the top ten largest community foundation in the United States. The Foundation's Giving Store is a one-stop shop for easy and effective philanthropy. Visit columbusfoundation.org to learn more.

QUESTIONS?

Contact us at bigtable@columbusfoundation.org or **614/251-4000**.