



HOSTING AMERICAN SPIRIT STORYTELLING CONVERSATIONS

A Brief Guide with 18 Ideas

By Cassandra Stewart* and the Divided Community Project
at The Ohio State University Moritz College of Law

2019

A project of the Divided Community Project at The Ohio State University Moritz College of Law supported by the Kettering Foundation and with support from the Ohio State University Institute for Democracy Engagement and Accountability and Emeritus Academy under the auspices of a project funded by the JAMS Foundation and the Littlefield Foundation.



"Most Americans welcome the voice that lifts them out of themselves. They want to be better people. They want to help make this a better country. When the American Spirit awakens, it transforms worlds."

John Gardner

Hosting American Spirit Storytelling Conversations by Cassandra Stewart and the Divided Community Project at The Ohio State University Moritz College of Law, is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International License. Those seeking to modify this report for targeted audiences may do so for nonprofit purposes as long as they give attribution and they allow the same "share alike" use of their content by others.



Other publications by the Divided Community Project, available at:

moritzlaw.osu.edu/dividedcommunityproject

Planning in Advance of Civil Unrest (2016)

Key Considerations for Community Leaders Facing Civil Unrest:

Effective Problem-Solving Strategies That Have Been Used in Other Communities (2016)

Divided Communities and Social Media (2017)

Identifying a Community Spirit (2019)

Simulation for Leadership During Crisis (2017), available by request to William Froehlich, Froehlich.28@osu.edu.

This guide is designed to help you as you host your own American Spirit storytelling conversation. This conversation will be a community-building event for your neighborhood as you discuss the aspirations that you share and hold dear and will contribute to a national effort to highlight the stories that bring home the high aspirations that connect us as Americans.

While this publication offers ideas for prompting creative storytelling by a gathering of neighbors and friends, it is a guide only. A special aspect of storytelling is that you have the flexibility to design a conversation that works best for your group!

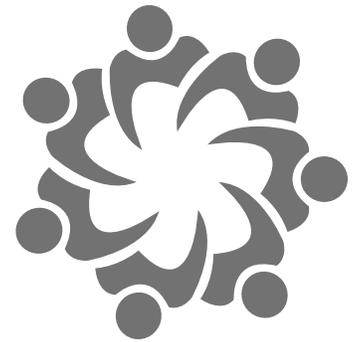
BACKGROUND

This storytelling initiative builds on the work of a diverse group of Americans who were convened by the Ohio State University Moritz College of Law's Divided Community Project late in 2018 and came to a consensus on some over-arching aspirations that Americans share and value deeply -- an American Spirit. They agreed that Americans seek to be innovative and a positive, "can do" people and to unite in our determination to be inclusive and to appreciate individuality. We have not achieved our goals yet, but that is no reason to abandon them.

Americans seek to be innovative and a positive, "can do" people and to unite in our determination to be inclusive and to appreciate individuality.

After all, the preamble to our Constitution acknowledges that we are not perfect and should try to improve constantly in its statement that we are in the process of becoming "a more perfect union." Polling indicates that people agree with these goals. Sharing compelling stories that illustrate those who embody these goals in their daily lives will bring these goals alive not only for those who attend but also for others who hear the stories. For an explanation of the historical groundings of this spirit and more detail on pertinent polling results, see the website: moritzlaw.osu.edu/american-spirit.

This guide is full of ideas for prompting creative storytelling by a gathering of neighbors and friends, but it is a guide only. A special part about this storytelling is that you have the flexibility to complete what works best for your group!



PLANNING AHEAD

As the host you are responsible for planning the meeting, inviting participants, helping them prepare for the meeting, dealing with the logistics for the meeting, and following up afterward. Your responsibilities will include:

- ✿ Planning the conversation—determine what needs to be done to hold the conversation—the place, time, and developing the plan
- ✿ Inviting and preparing participants
- ✿ Overseeing logistics—room set up, equipment or materials
- ✿ Managing the conversation - the facilitator’s role
- ✿ Following up



PREPARING YOURSELF TO HOST THE GATHERING

Once you decide on those you will invite, and the location, time, and the duration of the meeting:

- 1 *Prepare the agenda*** with the participants in mind. This may include a less structured style to encourage creativity and storytelling.
- 2 *Identify and bring any materials*** that may be needed for an in person meeting such as pens, paper, participant agenda print outs, flip chart/dry erase board, snacks, ice breaker games, possibly nametags or name tents, etc.
- 3 *If you invite others to co-facilitate*** the gathering with you, meet with them to go over goals and discuss in detail what will occur during the meeting.
- 4 *Here’s an example of an agenda with notes*** for yourself and any co-facilitator:

AGENDA GIVEN TO PARTICIPANTS

Notes for Facilitators Only

5:45 ARRIVAL TIME

Hand out nametags. If you offer snacks, use a buffet and free seating to facilitate mingling. If a large group, assign a co-facilitator to help you seek out each attendee and introduce that person around.

6:00 PARTICIPANTS FIND SEATS

For groups larger than 10: Set table for 6 to 8 persons – small enough that each person will engage frequently in the discussions. Arrange name tents to produce diversity at each table. Include a table facilitator and recorder at each table.

6:05 WELCOME.

Participants introduce themselves by name and one other descriptor such as affiliation or location in the neighborhood. Introduce yourself first, to provide an example.

Remind participants of the ground rules (sent by email).

Explain the purpose of the session and overview of the meeting.

To make this quicker, hand out a list of participants. Consider handing out the ground rules, emphasizing that statements won't be attributed to a person without permission. Make especially clear that the American Spirit is aspirational in nature, not merely a description of what has already been achieved, and illustrate the importance of the task through examples. Project optimism that this group can make a contribution that will matter.

6:15 AMERICAN SPIRIT OVERVIEW

You can use this website for ideas on how to do this: <https://moritzlaw.osu.edu/american-spirit/>.

Participants should be vaguely familiar with the project because of their preparation. You may want to have a written version available on tables.

6:20 DISCUSS REACTIONS TO THE AMERICAN SPIRIT CONCEPT

Ask a couple questions to review and reflect on the spirit concept to help to get people brainstorming on their stories and connecting it back to the American spirit.

- 🌟 What thoughts were stimulated as you read/heard about the American spirit?*
- 🌟 What do you value in the statement just given in the American Spirit?*
- 🌟 What might you change if you were writing it?*

6:35 STORYTELLING

7:15 BREAK

Invite people to come up with their own American Spirit stories. You can use the questions below as a prompt. Give participants a few minutes to write and then ask each person to share one idea from the list. Continue to share ideas and stories until all ideas have been read.

Sample Questions:

- ✿ *What was a moment in this community where the American Spirit was exemplified?*
- ✿ *What in your experience has shown the true American spirit?*
- ✿ *How is the American Spirit personal to you and this community?*

Optional Event: Pick three or four ideas/starts of stories and elaborate on them. You could select them simply by asking each person to identify three stories that they have just heard which have a strong prospect of resonating with others, perhaps with checkmarks on a flipchart or paper listing the stories, and then decide as a group whether to elaborate on three or four of the stories. Have the group as a whole build the story. If you have a larger group, try breaking into small groups and each elaborate on one story and then report back to the larger group.

Encourage open ended questions such as:

- ✿ *How did that reflect the spirit?*
- ✿ *And then what happened?*
- ✿ *How did x population react?*
- ✿ *What prompted that event?*
- ✿ *What was it like after this event?*

This can also be done as a subsequent meeting of the same group if the participants are pressed for time.

7:45 SUMMARIES OF WHAT WAS ACCOMPLISHED AND WHAT WILL OCCUR AFTER THE MEETING.

Ask whether you should offer the story for the American Spirit website with the names of those involved or without names.

8:00 ADJOURN

Let individuals know that time has ended but inform them if they think of any additional stories or would like to continue a conversation, they can speak with you (if you are able/have the time after the meeting) or can contact the Divided Community Project at americanspirit@osu.edu. Assure them that they are making a difference in helping to create a common purpose among Americans.

PREPARING YOUR PARTICIPANTS

5 Email or drop a note to each confirmed participant ahead of the gathering

with the following information:

- ✿ Logistics such as time, date, and location.
- ✿ Important links for more information, such as the American Spirit website, **moritzlaw.osu.edu/american-spirit**.
- ✿ A statement about the goal for the gathering -- to identify and highlight stories that bring home the high aspirations that connect us as Americans. You could include a note about that spirit:

Most Americans are likely to agree that we are united in the goals innovation and a “can do” approach. And, although the nation’s past includes some tragic failures in reaching our national motto, “E Pluribus Unum” (out of many, one) and we feel divisive forces, Americans seek to be inclusive and appreciative of people’s individuality. In other words, the American Spirit includes interconnected goals to enhance: ingenuity, positive outlook, and inclusiveness and appreciation for each other.

But mere agreement on these points is not enough to bring us together, given the current polarization on many points. People need to care about the American Spirit. That’s where your stories and this community meeting play an important role. Stories bring home why these aspirations matter. We will use our time together to come up with some personal stories that will bring the American Spirit home to others.

Stories bring
home why these
aspirations matter.

Here’s an example of such a story:

Tim Hinds, an artist living near the Tree of Life Synagogue in Pittsburgh, created the “Stronger Than Hate” image after the deadly attack that took place at the synagogue on October 27, 2018. The image takes the old U.S. Steel logo (popularized today by the Pittsburgh Steelers), three diamonds within a circle. The image replaces the top diamond with a Star of David, and replaces the words “US Steel” with “Stronger Than Hate.”

With his post of the image, Hinds wrote: “Before it was the logo of a globally popular football team, the three diamonds were the product which helped develop the foundation of many cities across the globe – steel. Like Pittsburgh and its residents, steel is strong.” Hinds stated that his anger and sadness led him to doodling. His friends convinced him to post the final image to Facebook, and it went viral from there. The image has been re-posted across the internet and has been used in fundraising, on t-shirts, and more.

The more personal the stories are, the more likely to resonate with others. The American Spirit Initiative at Ohio State University's Moritz College of Law will select some stories to post on its website, moritzlaw.osu.edu/american-spirit, for use by the media, speechwriters and others (it will be your choice whether your name is associated with the story).

In your note to participants, mention ground rules that will re-assure potential participants that they can talk freely, such as: "We'll ask for agreements not to record and also not to attribute statements made at the meeting to particular individuals without their prior permission." "We'll agree to listen to each other with a generous spirit that accepts the sincerity with which we offer our stories."

Agenda (on pages 5-6)

6 Remind participants of the importance of the gathering's purpose,
in a subsequent note just before the gathering.

- ✿ Explain to participants that compelling stories can help others understand those unifying aspirations that the country needs to keep in mind, especially in such a divided time.
- ✿ Help them understand how a spirit differs from a particular policy issue. **For example,**

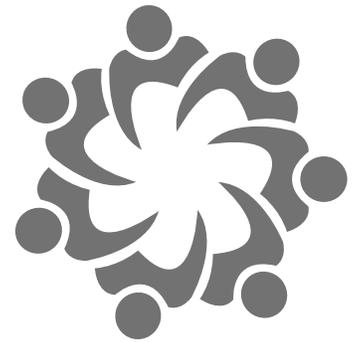
This is not about politics or things that divide us, but is instead is about finding the hopes, over-arching goals that bring Americans together.

"This is not about politics or things that divide us, but is instead about finding the hopes, over-arching goals that bring Americans together. While this forum is not one in which we can adequately address divisive issues, we respect the importance of these issues. Identifying what unites us in no way minimizes the importance of addressing these issues in another context."

.....

***"What the people want is very simple -
they want an America as good
as its promise."***

Former U.S. Representative Barbara Jordan.



IDEAS FOR YOU DURING THE MEETING

7 *Take a few minutes to think about your role as facilitator*—to organize and assist the group and create a safe environment to enable participants to share their stories.

DO'S

- Encourage all people to participate
- Accept all ideas
- Keep the group on task
- Take a neutral stance
- Restate and summarize
- Ask questions to draw out, clarify, etc.

DON'TS

- Criticize or evaluate ideas
- Allow people to interrupt each other
- Let the group get off task
- Promote your own ideas
- Let anyone dominate discussion

8 *Establish the purpose for the conversation and the ground rules* after welcoming and doing introductions.

Describe the steps of the process so that participants know what to expect. Review and gain agreement on the ground rules, sent out in general in advance. **Such ground rules can include:**

- ✿ We'll speak and listen with respect.
- ✿ We'll listen to understand.
- ✿ We won't interrupt others.
- ✿ We won't record or report what others say outside the meeting.
- ✿ We'll all participate; no one will dominate.

9 *Consider setting aside five minutes* of silence for participants to make notes on an idea for a story. Then you can go around and almost everyone will have something to offer.

10 Ask follow-up questions to surface important story details, such as:

- ✿ How did that happen?
- ✿ How did that make you feel?
- ✿ What was the result of that?
- ✿ Did anything happen afterwards?
- ✿ What aspect of the American Spirit does that illustrate?

11 Ask someone to act as a recorder, to write down the stories in a written or digital story format.

12 Encourage participants to include some stories that are not a response to a massive horrible event. Many strong stories work outside that context.



The American Spirit Quilt was created by Jessie Mace-Froehlich's art class at West Jefferson Middle School, West Jefferson, Ohio. You can view the entire quilt and read an explanation for each square by visiting moritzlaw.osu.edu/american-spirit/what-young-people-are-doing.

13 *If it seems important to narrow a story:*

- ✿ Summarize a shorter version and confirm that it is correct.
- ✿ Relate it back to the American spirit.

14 *Ask if each individual gives permission* to run his or her story if Divided Community Project selects it. If so, ask if they would want their name included.

15 *Note that they can contribute after the gathering* by sharing these stories to help engage others in a united national effort and by:

- ✿ Continuing to have these conversations outside of the facilitation space.
- ✿ Sending stories themselves to AmericanSpirit@osu.edu or using their ingenuity and “can do” approach to create videos, songs, artwork and more. To see what some young people did to contribute, for example, see the American Spirit quilt at: moritzlaw.osu.edu/american-spirit/what-young-people-are-doing.

16 *Consider this list of ideas* for dealing with issues that occasionally arise:

Shy/silent participants:

- ✿ Try breaking up into smaller discussion groups.
- ✿ In a small group conversation, ask them directly what their thoughts are on a topic. Encourage them by referencing something that they had mentioned in a previous conversation.
- ✿ Arrange the room in a way that encourages all to participate and allows them to feel heard (for example, a circle of chairs).
- ✿ Talk to them one-on-one to inquire how they are feeling about the gathering.

Talkative participants:

- ✿ Remember that you do not want to make anyone uncomfortable in the setting. When approaching a talkative participant, do not belittle or embarrass them.
- ✿ If you can predict this issue in advance, ask the talkative participants to be recorders. You can call on them at key points to read back a story, for example.
- ✿ Give them an outside opportunity to share more of their opinion. “I love that idea. Let’s write that down and you and I can discuss it more over the break.”
- ✿ Stop eye contact and reinforce the message that you are allowing others to speak with your body language or suggest, “Let’s hear now from someone who has not yet offered an idea.”

Too agreeable participants:

- ✿ “Too agreeable” participants are those who tend to fall into “groupthink” and are hesitant to share individual ideas.
- ✿ Acknowledge a perspective or point of view that has been discussed, and then ask the group as a whole if they have any different thoughts about it.

Participants making off-point arguments about controversial issues:

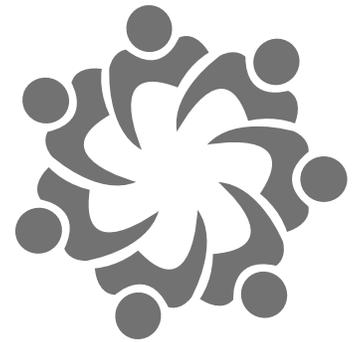
- ✿ Re-direct the conversation while allowing the participants to “save face.”
Try saying: “What stories would help people listen to each other and treat each other respectfully when it is important for people with differing views to address a policy matter?”
- ✿ Suggest words such as “I am concerned that we may be getting off track” to soften the tone.
- ✿ Remind the participant about the ground rules that have already been established to ensure that everyone is treated with kindness and respect.
- ✿ Note that the American Spirit does not describe the present situation but rather is aspirational, future-oriented in nature.
- ✿ Demonstrate respect for the importance of the controversial issue that may be raised, in part by explaining that it deserves additional attention that cannot be sufficiently provided in this meeting.

Participants with tendency to lead the discussion toward another way to think about the American Spirit even after the discussion in the 6:20 part of the agenda:

- ✿ Let them know that you will keep track of their ideas and commit to sharing the ideas with the Divided Community Project, americanspirit@osu.edu.
- ✿ After a short conversation/mention of the new idea of a spirit, re-direct the conversation to stories.
- ✿ This may lead to another meeting to develop these new ideas and decide if Divided Community Project’s version of the American Spirit should be augmented.

Participants who deflate positive feelings with frequent comments such as “I still don’t understand what this is all about.” or “This will never work!”:

- ✿ Increase the number of times that you ask participants to write first, then speak. Often the deflaters will begin to contribute.
- ✿ Note more frequently the progress that the group has made.
- ✿ Make the discussion groups smaller, assign more work to small groups, and change the composition of the groups more often.
- ✿ Speak individually each such person at break to answer any questions in a setting that does not slow down the group. Perhaps even suggest in this individual conversation how the person could help with the group’s chances of making progress by complimenting others when they contribute.



AFTER THE MEETING

17 Document results. Email notes, recordings, and any other feedback to moritzlaw.osu.edu/american-spirit when completed.

18 Share with participants:

- ✿ The Divided Community Project’s plan to select some stories to post on moritzlaw.osu.edu/american-spirit.
- ✿ There will be multiple outlets where these stories will be disseminated, including but not limited to our blog, research reports, scholarly material, etc.

Plan a follow up or meeting with different participants to:

- ✿ Continue the conversation.
- ✿ Discuss contacting the Divided Community Project, americanspirit@osu.edu, for additional ideas and continued facilitations on the local spirit or even ideas about what should be added to the American Spirit.
- ✿ Talk about ideas to further engage Americans on an American Spirit, such as talking with teachers about a project, see moritzlaw.osu.edu/american-spirit/what-young-people-are-doing

.....

"Stories have power. They delight, enchant, touch, teach, recall, inspire, motivate, challenge. They help us understand. They imprint a picture on our minds. Want to make a point or raise an issue? Tell a story."

Author Janet Litherland

ADDITIONAL READINGS FOR THOSE INTERESTED IN LEARNING MORE ABOUT FACILITATION IN A COMMUNITY SETTING:

ADAMS, Tammy, Janet A. MEANS, and Michael SPIVEY (2007) *The Project Meeting Facilitator: Facilitation Skills to Make the Most of Project Meetings*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

BENS, Ingrid (2017) *Facilitating with Ease!: Core Skills for Facilitators, Team Leaders and Members, Managers, Consultants, and Trainers*. Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons.

CARPENTER, Susan & W.J.D. KENNEDY (2001) *Managing Public Disputes: A Practical Guide for Government, Business and Citizens' Groups*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

DOYLE, Michael, and David STRAUS (1993) *How to Make Meetings Work!* New York: Berkley Books.

GHAIS, Suzanne (2005) *Extreme Facilitation: Guiding Groups Through Controversy and Complexity*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

HARVARD BUSINESS SCHOOL PRESS (2006) *Running Meetings: Expert Solutions to Everyday Challenges*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard Business School Publications.

HERZOG, Maggie, and Laura CHASIN (2006) *Fostering Dialogue Across Divides: A Nuts and Bolts Guide from the Public Conversations Project*. Watertown, MA: Public Conversations Project, <https://www.whatisessential.org/practitioner/maggie-herzig>.

HOFFMAN, Kevin M. (2018) *Meeting Design: For Managers, Makers, and Everyone*. Brooklyn, NY:Two Waves Books.

KANER, Sam (2007) *Facilitator's Guide to Participatory Decision-making*, 2nd ed. San Francisco:Jossey-Bass

KAYSER, Thomas A. (1995) *Mining Group Gold: How to Cash in on the Collaborative Brain Power of a Group* (2d ed.). New York: McGraw-Hill.

KELSEY, Dee, Pam PLUMB, and Beth BRAGANCA (2004) *Great Meetings! Great Results*. Portland, ME: Great Meetings.

KILLERMAN, Sam, and Meg BOLGER (2016) *Unlocking the Magic of Facilitation: 11 Key Concepts You Didn't Know You Didn't Know*. Austin, TX: Impetus Books

MARKMAN, Art (2017) "Your Team Is Brainstorming All Wrong," *Harv. Bus. Rev.*, <https://hbr.org/2017/05/your-team-is-brainstorming-all-wrong>.

NELSON, Jo (2003) *Facilitation: A Tool for Evoking and Creating Wisdom*

PARKER, Glenn M., and Robert HOFFMAN (2006) *Meeting Excellence: 33 Tools to Lead Meetings That Get Results*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

ROURKE, Brad (2014). Developing Materials for Deliberative Forums. Dayton, OH: The Kettering Foundation. <http://kettering.org/wp-content/uploads/Developing-Materials-guide.pdf>

ROURKE, Brad. (2011). "Framing Issues for Public Deliberation," YouTube, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ahqj-MTcQi8>

SCHUMAN, Sandy ed. (2005) The IAF Handbook of Group Facilitation: Best Practices from the Leading Organization in Facilitation. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

SCHWARZ, Roger (2007) The Skilled Facilitator: A Comprehensive Resource for Consultants, Facilitators, Coaches and Trainers (3rd ed.). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

SCHWARZ, Roger, Anne DAVIDSON, Peg CARLSON, and Sue MCKINNEY (2005) The Skilled Facilitator Fieldbook: Tips, Tools, and Tested Methods for Consultants, Facilitators, Managers, Trainers, and Coaches. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

STRAUS, David A. (1999) "Managing Meetings to Build Consensus," in Lawrence Susskind, Sarah McKernan, and Jennifer Thomas-Larmer eds., The Consensus Building Handbook 287. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

TUECKE, Patricia (2005) "The Architecture of Participation," in Sandy Schulman ed., The IAF Handbook of Group Facilitation: Best Practices from the Leading Organization in Facilitation. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

VICK, Wayne J. (2015) Process-Based Facilitation: Facilitating for Meeting Leaders, Constituents, and Group Facilitators. Bloomington, IN: iUniverse.

WILKINSON, Michael (2004) The Secrets of Facilitation: The S.M.A.R.T. Guide to Getting Results with Groups. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

**Kassandra Stewart wrote this guide while a student in the Program on Dispute Resolution's Certificate Program at The Ohio State University College of Law. She has since earned a J.D.*

“We are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny.”

Martin Luther King Jr.



moritzlaw.osu.edu/american-spirit