

CivilSay™

Regional Civic Engagement through Inclusive Public Dialogue

Overview

The CivilSay™ process brings the broadest spectrum of viewpoints possible to the discussion table to address the most pressing regional issues of the day. When citizens of diverse backgrounds, experience and points of view come together, three powerful outcomes are possible:

- 1) community relationships are restored or strengthened;
- 2) future decisions affecting the region are better informed; and
- 3) participants learn and apply tools and techniques to hold valuable conversations within their own institutions, neighborhoods, and community groups.

The CivilSay™ principles include:

- No financial obligation to participate
- Welcoming, inclusive and representative of the community, i.e. cross-sector, cross-geography, cross-class, and cross-generation perspectives.
- Shared authority and responsibility for the content of the conversation, e.g. no expert and panel presentations and inclusive process for defining topics for consideration
- Shared authority and responsibility for the quality of the conversation, e.g. no dialogue facilitators
- CivilSay™ endorses and commits to the seven core principles established by the National Coalition for Dialogue and Deliberation (see appendix 1A).

The CivilSay™ process includes:

- Inclusive process for identifying relevant community issues
- Periodic open community forums
- On-going dialogue groups (at least six meetings over a period of three to six months)
- Agreement to CivilSay™ ground rules at the beginning of each meeting

CivilSay™ is trademarked in order to define and preserve the core elements of the process which include free and inclusive participation and shared authority and responsibility for the content and quality of community dialogue.

CivilSay™ seeks institutions to adopt the CivilSay™ process in communities interested in promoting inclusive civic dialogue. Appropriate organizations will include promotion of civic engagement, public dialogue, and education in the mission of the organization and the CivilSay™ programs must occur as value-added to community.

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CivilSay™ Public Meetings

The CivilSay™ public meetings consist of three primary types:

- 1) Promotion meetings
- 2) Periodic, large group community forums throughout the region and
- 3) On-going, smaller, topic-specific dialogue groups

Promotion meetings will engage and attract the public to the CivilSay™ community forums. Many of the principles and processes that define CivilSay™ will be demonstrated in small promotional meetings for community neighborhood groups, clubs, and organizations. Outcomes of these meetings will include data about relevant topics for the community forums.

Periodic community forums will provide a mechanism for community members to discuss issues of importance to them and connect with others who are interested in the same topic. The community forums will be designed to gather people interested in particular topics. Forums will focus on several regional issues. Some topics will be specific to a subset of the region while others will be relevant to the entire region. The choice of topics will be informed by queries throughout the communities to identify the most timely and important issues for consideration. The forums will always allow for community members to raise additional issues for consideration.

On-going dialogue groups will be launched through the community forums. Dialogue groups will form because of interest around a certain topic. A minimum of three people will be required to start a CivilSay™ dialogue group. The “conveners” of the dialogue group commit to a minimum of six meeting over three to six months. The groups will remain open to new members at any time. The dialogue groups will be structured in order to include new members while maintaining the momentum of group. CivilSay™ dialogue experts will act as resources to the dialogue groups: however dialogue experts will not lead or guide the groups. Each group will find its own rhythm and cadence among the members in the group. Dialogue groups will meet at locations that are inclusive to all community members.

CivilSay™ Participation Ground Rules

Participants agree to:

- follow the CivilSay™ meeting structures and ground rules
- allow equal time for individuals voices to be heard
- balance question-asking with statement-making
- make no public judgments of people
- seek to understand different viewpoints and to be understood
- exercise equal responsibility for helping each other hold to the ground rules

CivilSay™ Pilot in Central Oregon

City Club of Central Oregon (CCCO) will adopt the CivilSay™ process for its new Regional Forums program. Greg Ranstrom will act as the CivilSay™ consultant to CCCO. CCCO will seek grant funding for the CCCO Regional Forums.

Calendar of Events

- November 2009: First Semi-annual regional issues forum held in several Central Oregon communities (for example: La Pine/Sunriver, Redmond, and Bend)
- Multiple on-going dialogue groups
- May 2010: Semi-annual regional issues forum held in several Central Oregon communities
- Multiple on-going dialogues
- November 2010: Semi-annual regional issues forum held in several Central Oregon communities
- ...Cycle continues, adjustments will be made to find the most successful patterns for a sustainable process for inclusive civic engagement.

Sample Format of November 2009 regional issues forum (one each in Sunriver/La Pine, Redmond, and Bend)

Venue: Auditorium
Time: 5:30pm -9pm
Room set up: Chairs in small circles of 5-6
Flipcharts or large signs spaced around the room identifying specific topics

5:30pm Open time and light snacks and beverages
(ask people to sit close to the issue of most importance to them)

6:00 Welcome

6:10 Opening music, poem, performance (for a creative and appreciative mood)

6:20 Introduction and Overview

6:25 Two-minute Introductions among participants in small groups: What's your name and what matters to you about this specific issue?

6:35 Questions round: Ask follow up question to anybody in your group to understand why the issue is important to him/her. Rule: The conversation must be guided by questions and not statements. Too often conversations become serial monologues; change this by requiring questions as the vehicle to guide the conversation.

6:50 Form new groups of 3 or 4

6:55 1st Round of 3 or 4: 1) Name one different interest or perspective that you find hard to understand. Use your partners to try to understand where that interest perspective comes from.

7:10 Full group check-in: What have you learned about other perspectives that you didn't know before this evening?

7:20 Form new groups of 3 or 4:
Include time for break

7:30 2nd Round of 3 or 4. Quick introductions. What facts/circumstances do all perspectives agree upon?

7:45 Form new groups of 3 or 4:

7:50 3rd Round of 3 or 4. Quick introductions. Open conversation: What has caught your attention this evening? Where do you see opportunities for making progress on this issue?

8:10 Full group check-in. What possibilities are you beginning to see?

8:20 Call for conversation conveners: Who is willing to devote time to grow the conversation in any of the topics explored tonight? First meeting to be held in two weeks to create on-going conversation, recruit important individuals, agree to schedule, decide on venue, etc.

8:30 Close and thank you. Ask people to stay if they want to be part of an on-going dialogue group. Dialogue conveners stay and talk further about meeting logistics.

9:00 Meeting ends.

Sample Format of On-going Dialogues

Sample Agenda for 90-120 minute session

- Two-minute Check-in: Each participant states name, agrees to the dialogue ground rules, and states why the topic is of particular interest to them.
- Appreciation: Open conversation about what is working/moving forward in the space of the topic.
- Challenges: Open conversation about on-going challenges and concerns.
- Two minute Check-out: Each participant has an opportunity to say a word of thanks, make a suggestion, etc.

Each topic group will design the particulars of its meetings. In general, topic groups will meet every 2-6 weeks for six months. Groups will recruit diverse members. Meeting dates and times will be published and distributed to community leaders who are involved in the issue and made available to public via web. Later sessions will begin to consider whether the topic should be brought back to the next semi-annual community forum for further consideration and the launch of another six month dialogue group.

Next Steps

- May 19 –June 8, 2009: Distribute proposal throughout the region for comments.
- June 12, 2009: Assemble advisory board.
- June 26, 2009: Research possible funding sources and prepare report.
- June 29, 2009: Begin to submit funding applications.
- August 3, 2009: Accelerate community “road show.” Prepare and distribute PR package.
Present to 100 distinct venues across the region by September 11, 2009.
- October 2, 2009: Secure initial funding
- Mid-November 2009: Hold first CivilSay™ community meetings

Appendix 1A

The CivilSay™ endorses and commits to the seven core principles established by the [National Coalition for Dialogue and Deliberation](#).

The Seven Core Principles

These seven recommendations reflect the *common* beliefs and understandings of those working in the fields of public engagement, conflict resolution, and collaboration. In practice, people apply these and additional principles in many different ways.

1. Careful Planning and Preparation

Through adequate and inclusive planning, ensure that the design, organization, and convening of the process serve both a clearly defined purpose and the needs of the participants.

2. Inclusion and Demographic Diversity

Equitably incorporate diverse people, voices, ideas, and information to lay the groundwork for quality outcomes and democratic legitimacy.

3. Collaboration and Shared Purpose

Support and encourage participants, government and community institutions, and others to work together to advance the common good.¹

4. Openness and Learning

Help all involved listen to each other, explore new ideas unconstrained by predetermined outcomes, learn and apply information in ways that generate new options, and rigorously evaluate public engagement activities for effectiveness.

5. Transparency and Trust

Be clear and open about the process, and provide a public record of the organizers, sponsors, outcomes, and range of views and ideas expressed.

6. Impact and Action

Ensure each participatory effort has real potential to make a difference, and that participants are aware of that potential.

7. Sustained Engagement and Participatory Culture

Promote a culture of participation with programs and institutions that support ongoing quality public engagement.

¹ In addition to reflecting democratic ideals of liberty, justice, and freedom for everyone,

“common good” refers to that which benefits all, like a traffic light in a dangerous intersection or a cleaned-up water supply.

Appendix 1B

The CivilSay™ Expansion Possibilities

CivilSay™ for seeks to become an easily replicable and sustainable process for other communities.

The key ingredients for a replicable and sustainable CivilSay™ program will include:

- Regional institutional partners with missions that include inclusive civic engagement and dialogue
- Strong support from the community for CivilSay™ as a value-added program for the region
- Appropriate institutional host for the program
- Dedicated involvement of experienced facilitators/consultants in design of large public forums
- Commitment and adherence to The CivilSay™ principles and processes

Additionally, CivilSay™ intends to design and build a website which will act as a worldwide resource to others interested in improving regional civic engagement and dialogue.