



# WHAT IS JOURNALISM FOR?

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## KINDLING CONVERSATION GUIDE

“Journalism can never be silent.

That is its greatest virtue  
and its greatest fault.”

-- Henry Anatole Grunwald

This Kindling Conversation Planning Guide supports an intentional community conversation with a specific purpose: **to strengthen our community and explore the role of journalism in our lives.**

The conversation is designed to engage everyone interested in participating, regardless of our background, perspective, or level of connection to the topic. This conversation is an opportunity to connect across difference, not just similarity.

## Our Guiding Questions

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At the heart of this community conversation are two questions that matter to everyone and that everyone can answer:

*What is journalism for?*

*When does journalism succeed?*

We all have experience trying to share and gather information in our lives, so we will all have valuable perspectives to share.

## Our Springboard for Conversation

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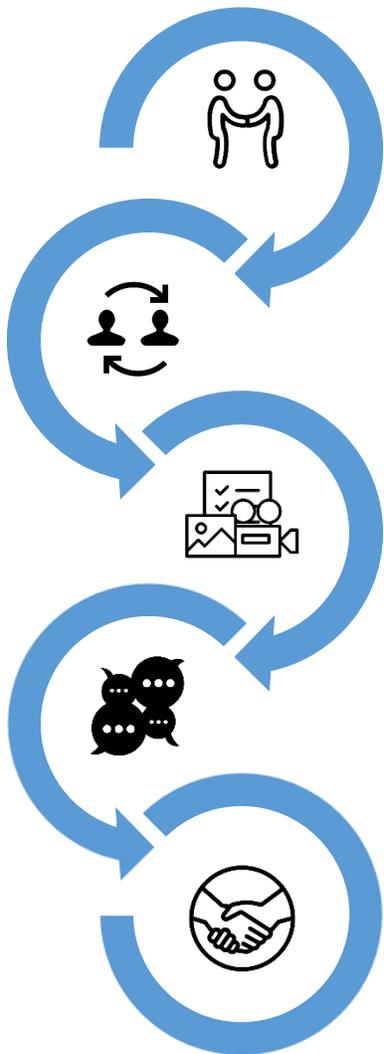
The Kindling Conversation Toolkit provides a springboard to help jumpstart the conversation about language and connection. The article “**What is Journalism For?**” offers a shared reading experience and a common text that everyone can respond to. The article features multiple perspectives and stories for you to interpret and discuss.

Community conversations like this one need a facilitator to keep them on track. You may act as the facilitator, or you may ask someone else to fulfill that role. The facilitator is not an expert on the subject; they are not there to teach or explain.

Instead, the facilitator works to ensure as many participants as possible feel welcome, included, and engaged in the discussion. The facilitator will use the structure provided below to keep the conversation on track and create a transparent flow.

### *The Conversation Flow*

This conversation guide walks you through leading a community conversation designed to encourage participants to connect to one another. The flow of the conversation is structured to deepen the conversation gradually and ensure every participant has the opportunity to share their perspective in a way that is comfortable *for them*.



#### **1. WELCOME**

Introduce the discussion and set expectations.

#### **2. CONNECT**

Get comfortable and get to know each other.

#### **3. EXPERIENCE**

Find common ground through shared experience.

#### **4. DISCUSS**

Explore different responses and perspectives.

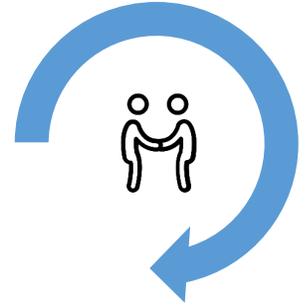
#### **5. CLOSE**

Reveal insights from the conversation.

## 1. WELCOME

*Introduce the discussion and set expectations.*

[~ 5 minutes]



- Thank everyone for making the time to come.
- Review “housekeeping”: parking (if relevant), bathrooms, emergency exits, food... Ask everyone to turn their phones on silent if they haven’t done so already.
- Describe the **Purpose** of the conversation: *to strengthen our community and explore the role of journalism in our lives.*
- Ask people to raise their hands if:
  - they are journalists. Pause to take in the response.
  - they have ever found themselves the subject of a piece of journalism. Pause to take in the response.
  - they consider themselves consumers of journalism. Pause to take in the response.
  - they do their best to avoid journalism. Pause to take in the response.

Explain that these are some of the many vital perspectives of journalism that you hope will be a part of this conversation.

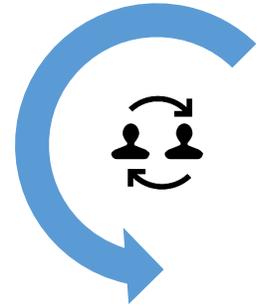
Read the **Guiding Questions** aloud: *What is journalism for? When does journalism succeed?*

- Share the agenda.
- Review the Four Agreements.

## 2. CONNECT

*Get comfortable and get to know each other.*

[Time varies by number of participants. We estimate (60 seconds) x (# of participants)]



- **Introductions:** Go around the circle and have everyone introduce themselves with their name and one word that comes to mind when they think about great journalism.
  - Ask people to keep their answers brief (30 seconds or less). We'll have plenty of time to get to know one another better.
- **Influential Experiences:** Ask everyone to turn to someone next to them, introduce themselves again, and then share one concern they have about journalism. What was the personal experience that led to this concern?
  - Give each pair 6 minutes total to tell their stories so each person has 3 minutes to tell their story. If the group is an odd number, and there is a group of 3, they'll each have 2 minutes. You may want to call out at the half-way mark.
  - Once time is up, go around the circle and ask each person to share a word or phrase that stuck out to them from their partner's story. They should not share the the whole story or any personal details, just a word or phrase that stuck out.

### 3. EXPERIENCE

*Find common ground through shared experience.*

[~ 25 minutes]



- All participants will share the experience of reading short stories from the article “What is Journalism For?”
- Choose 2-3 of the five short stories for your conversation. Base your selections on your audience. Which of the five texts will be the easiest for them to relate to, or elicit strong personal responses? Which of the five will be the most helpful for your group as jumping-off points to explore the guiding questions?
- Before you give out the texts, acknowledge that the conversation will now turn from airing concerns about the failings of journalism to focusing on what journalism is and what it can do for us. Explain that to help make that turn, the group will read a few short perspectives together.
- Hand out the texts and explain that you’ll be reading them out loud together. Give everyone a minute to scan them beforehand.
- For the first text, go around the circle, with each person reading one paragraph at a time. Stop at the end of that story.
  - Ask everyone to turn the person next to them *on their other side*, and then share their answer to the question that matches the story they just read:
    - For Lina Mariscal’s *Our Worst Enemy*: Lina Mariscal describes using a newspaper to unite and strengthen one community in particular. Do you think that’s an appropriate role for journalism? Why or why not?
    - For Kirsten Swann’s *Block by Block*: Kirsten Swann tells us that the smallest stories have the biggest impact on our lives. Does that resonate with your experience? Are you drawn to so-called small stories in the news?
    - For Susan B. Andrews and John Creed’s *Valuing ‘Ordinary’ Voices*: Does a story about making jam count as journalism to you? Why or why not?
    - For Margaret Bauman’s *Democracy’s Storytellers*: Margaret Bauman talks about a “deluge of news.” How has that increasing deluge changed your relationship with journalism?
    - For Daysha Eaton’s *Front Lines of Social Change*: Daysha Eaton paid her own way to report on Standing Rock. How does that shift your perception of her work?

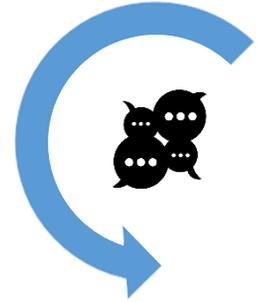
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- Give each pair 6 minutes total to share their responses so each person has 3 minutes to tell their story. If the group is an odd number, and there is a group of 3, they'll each have 2 minutes. You may want to call out at the half-way mark.
  - Once time is up, ask each group member to share a word or phrase that comes to mind from their partner discussion.
  - Move to the next story. Go around the circle, each person reading a paragraph at a time. Stop at the end of that article.
    - Ask everyone to turn back to the person *on their first side*, and then share their answers to the question that matches the story they just read:
      - For Lina Mariscal's *Our Worst Enemy*: Lina Mariscal describes using a newspaper to unite and strengthen one community in particular. Do you think that's an appropriate role for journalism? Why or why not?
      - For Kirsten Swann's *Block by Block*: Kirsten Swann tells us that the smallest stories have the biggest impact on our lives. Does that resonate with your experience? Are you drawn to so-called small stories in the news?
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      - For Daysha Eaton's *Front Lines of Social Change*: Daysha Eaton paid her own way to report on Standing Rock. Does that shift your perception of her work? If so, how?
    - Give each pair 6 minutes total to share their responses so each person has 3 minutes to tell their story. If the group is an odd number, and there is a group of 3, they'll each have 2 minutes. You may want to call out at the half-way mark.
    - Once time is up, ask each group member to share a word or phrase that comes to mind from their partner discussion.
  - Finally, move to the last story. Go around the circle, each person reading a paragraph at a time. Stop at the end of that article.
    - Ask everyone to turn the person *on their other side*, and then share their answers to the question that matches the story they just read:
      - For Lina Mariscal's *Our Worst Enemy*: Lina Mariscal describes using a newspaper to unite and strengthen one community in particular. Do you think that's an appropriate role for journalism? Why or why not?
      - For Kirsten Swann's *Block by Block*: Kirsten Swann tells us that the smallest stories have the biggest impact on our lives. Does that resonate with your experience? Are you drawn to so-called small stories in the news?

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- Give each pair 6 minutes total to share their responses so each person has 3 minutes to tell their story. If the group is an odd number, and there is a group of 3, they’ll each have 2 minutes. You may want to call out at the half-way mark.
  - Once time is up, ask each group member to share a word or phrase that comes to mind from their partner discussion.

## 4. DISCUSS

*Explore different responses and perspectives.*

[Time varies. Make sure to leave at least 10 minutes for the Close, and 20 minutes for a group of more than 15 people.]



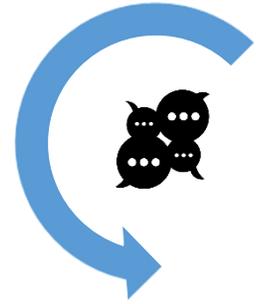
- Let everyone know the rest of the conversation will be as a whole group.
- Take a moment to review the **Four Agreements** and the **Purpose** of the conversation.
- Before launching into the discussion, encourage the group to talk to one another, not just to you. Let them know it is ok for them to throw out questions, and there is no need to raise hands before speaking.

*With groups of 15 or less...*

- Ask if there is anyone who would like to share a passage that particularly resonated with them. Then follow up, why did it resonate? Ask if anyone else had a similar reaction...
- Let the conversation go from there. Don't be afraid of silences! Count to 20 in your head before jumping in.
- The conversation may naturally begin to address the guiding questions, but if it doesn't, ask them directly!
  - So, is that what journalism is for?
  - When does journalism succeed? / Could that be considered successful journalism?
- If you want people to dig deeper into an idea or story, you might consider these questions:
  - Does that resonate with anyone else? Why?
  - Can you tell a story to illustrate that?
  - What do you think the author intended there?
  - What do you mean when you say \_\_\_\_\_?
- If you want to shift to something new, you might ask:
  - What are a journalist's responsibilities to their community? Are there stories that shouldn't be covered?
  - What do we lose when we lose local journalism?
  - When does journalism become advocacy? Is it ever appropriate for journalists to be advocates?
  - Would anyone like to suggest a different perspective?

### *With groups of 15+*

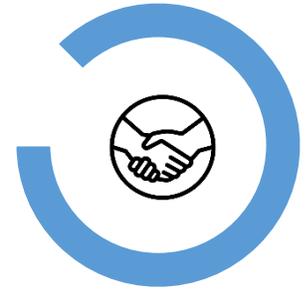
- Let everyone know that you'll be breaking into smaller discussion groups. In your toolkit, there is a resource titled “**Breaking into Smaller Groups**” which explains an easy and organized way to break into small groups efficiently.
- Give everyone the following instructions:
  - Once you are in your small groups, go around the circle and share your name again and one quick (30-seconds or less) reaction to the article.
  - After the last person shares, the first person reads the two guiding questions aloud.
  - Then it is up to the group to discuss on their own.
  - And don't be a conversation hog! Listening generously means everyone in the group should listen more than they talk.
- Make sure everyone knows the time when they are supposed to come back together as a group. Make sure to leave at least 20 minutes for the closing.
- Drop by each group to let them know the 10 minutes, 5 minutes, and 1 minute remaining marks.



## 5. CLOSE

*Reveal insights from the conversation.*

[~ 10 minutes with groups of 15 or less, ~ 20 minutes for groups of more than 15]



- To transition out of the discussion, summarize what has happened so far:

“Today, we all came together to strengthen our community and explore the roles that journalism plays in our lives. Before we close out, share final words, and say our goodbyes, let’s take a minute to silently reflect on what has happened in the last hour or two. What will you take away from today’s conversation?”

Sit in silence for one minute to allow people time to reflect.

- Go around the circle one more time, with each person sharing one thing they will take away.
- Once everyone has shared, take a moment to give thanks:
  - Thank you to the authors of your stories (Lisa Mariscal, Kirsten Swann, Susan B. Andrews, John Creed, Margaret Bauman, or Daysha Eaton) for sharing their stories.
  - Thank you to our sponsor, the Alaska Humanities Forum.
  - This program is part of the “Democracy and the Informed Citizen” Initiative, administered by the Federation of State Humanities Councils. The initiative seeks to deepen the public’s knowledge and appreciation of the vital connections between democracy, the humanities, journalism, and an informed citizenry. We thank The Andrew W. Mellon Foundation for their generous support of this initiative and the Pulitzer Prizes for their partnership.
  - And thank you to all of you, who came to this conversation today, who listened generously, and who shared your stories. When you make time for events like these, you make time for your community. Thank you.
- Ask everyone to please fill out a quick survey before they leave. Their feedback is critical for improving future conversations and for ensuring continued support for community gatherings like this one. If nothing else, please answer the “zip code” question on the form, as submitting at least that piece is a requirement of the micro-grant.