



DEMOCRACY TALKS: Curriculum Guide

THE PROGRAM

Democracy Talks (DT) is a series of discussions designed to engage Canadians in our democracy and help them develop their political voice. Delivered in partnership with community groups across Canada, DT offers a structured and accessible space in which people can build connections with other community members, share their ideas and aspirations for Canadian democracy, and help define the role they'd like to play within it.

At its core, DT provides participants an opportunity to engage in a meaningful conversation about our democracy and political systems in a non-partisan and supportive environment. Most Canadians never have this opportunity and consequently many never build the confidence to fully engage in our democracy.

WHAT PARTICIPANTS GAIN

- An opportunity to share views and ideas about democracy and public issues in Canada
- An ability to connect issues they care about to politics
- A chance to develop their political voice
- A chance to learn how to take action on an issue that concerns them
- An opportunity to meet and learn from other community members
- An opportunity to improve their knowledge of politics and civic institutions
- A chance to be part of a national project on democratic engagement

THE FORMAT

The format is intentionally designed to be adaptable in terms of length, location and number of participants. If time and space allow, the program can be completed in one session running from 1.5–2 hours and include anywhere from 5–30 participants. This can easily be adapted to run over several meetings and be used with larger groups.

A note about pacing – whenever possible, allow small group conversations to continue uninterrupted. If time is limited, cut out or postpone activities later in the list like “building an action plan.” DT is designed to provide participants an opportunity to discuss issues and concerns that are meaningful to them and it is more valuable to allow those conversations to continue than to cover more material.

FACILITATOR CHECKLIST

- Flipchart or white board, pens and markers
- Pens or pencils for all participants
- “Issues: What Matters to You” sheets (one for each participant)
- Play-Doh or bracelet-making materials
- “Play-Doh’s Republic” Or “Democracy Bracelets” instruction sheet including attributes of democracy page.
- Policy issues note cards
- Post-DT questionnaire (optional)

BRIEF OUTLINE

1. Introductions
2. Issues and Active Citizenship
3. Creating the Ideal Democracy
4. Building an Action Plan (Optional)
5. Debrief and Conclusion

Section 1 – Introductions (10 minutes)

Facilitator introduces him/herself and Samara’s Democracy Talks program and explains how the discussion will work. The facilitator should clearly explain that the purpose and expected outcomes of the DT session are to:

- Create space for participants to discuss democracy and politics and learn from each other
- Generate ideas to improve democratic and political engagement
- Develop participants’ political voice
- Discuss how ideas can be used to improve our community and lives

The facilitator should also highlight the following points before beginning the discussion:

- Establish ground rules for dialogue-type discussion (eg. listen even if you disagree, encourage differing views, pass if you're not comfortable responding, facilitator’s role to ensure everyone can speak, etc.).

Question/Icebreaker

Time and Tips

1	Ask participants to introduce themselves. As an added icebreaker ask participants <u>one</u> of the following: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• What is your favourite food?• If you could vote for anyone dead or alive to be Prime Minister who would it be?• What is your earliest political memory?	5 – 10 minutes For young participants or participants with very little political involvement start with the question on food. For the most sophisticated participants ask the last question. Remember this is about establishing trust.
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Section 2 – Issues and Active Citizenship (25-45 minutes)

This section invites participants to identify an issue that they care about and encourages them to think creatively about change they would like to see. The goal is to help participants draw the connection between the personal and the political, and think beyond the limits they may place on their own sense of political power.

Question/Activity

Time and Tips

2.	Pass out the “Issues: What matters to you” sheets. Have each individual participant choose the four issues they consider most important to them. Encourage them to add an issue not listed.	3-5 Minutes Participants should <u>not</u> be discouraged from talking or asking questions during this individual activity.
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	Organize participants into groups of 3-5 and have each group decide on the four issues most important to the GROUP.	7-15 Minutes This is when participants start their conversations. Encourage participants to share why they made the choices they did.
4.	Have each group report out and explain their choices.	7-15 minutes Regroup to share responses from each group. Note topics on flipchart paper
5.	<u>Optional debrief questions:</u> “If you wanted to work on one of these ideas, who would you go to for help and why?” “What obstacles could you face to trying to create the change you want?”	5 - 10 Minutes Create a “T” Chart on flip chart with “non-government” on one side and “government” on the other. Place responses under the appropriate heading. Note obstacles on flip chart. If time allows ask participants to group obstacles.

Section 3 – Creating an Ideal Democracy “Play-Doh’s Republic” or “Democracy Bracelets” (30 – 50 minutes)

This section encourages participants to brainstorm their definition of a healthy political system and to consider their role within that system. Questions explore the general theme: what does an ideal democracy look like to you?

As a facilitator choose either the Play-Doh’s Republic or Democracy Bracelets activity. You can also make up your own activity that allows you to assign an attribute to each component (others have made democracy soup and fruit salad).

Question/Activity

Time and Tips

6.	Handout Play Doh’s Republic or Democracy Bracelets instruction sheet including Attributes of Democracy form. And review the directions with the participants.	2 -3 Minutes You should answer specific questions participants have about the attributes but also encourage them to discuss these questions in the small groups. If you have samples of bracelets or Play Doh creations, you can share them.
7.	Have each participant individually choose the four attributes that they consider most important to a strong and healthy democracy. Encourage them to add their own if they like.	5-10 Minutes While this is an individual activity, participants should not be discouraged from sharing ideas.

8.	Organize participants into groups of 3-5 and have each group decide on the four attributes they consider most important as a GROUP and assign a Play Doh or bead colour to each of the four attributes.	7-15 Minutes Encourage participants to share why they made the choices they did and discuss the meaning of the words.
9.	Have participants complete their Play-Doh creation or Democracy Bracelets	10-15 Minutes If groups finish early encourage them to add creative elements or if they are not finished allow them to continue while you begin debrief.
10.	Return to group to share and explain the Play Doh creations or bracelets .	10 Minutes Make note of attributes mentioned. Take photos of creations or bracelets. Share with Samara. @samaraCDA

Section 4 - Building an Action Plan (25-60 minutes)

If time allows, this optional section will help participants think through an issue of concern to them and strategize in small groups on how to effectively address it. This is an opportunity to begin a discussion on making an action plan. There is not an expectation that participants will develop in the short time allotted a fully articulated action plan ready for implementation. The exercise will consider:

- an issue of concern in the community
- the qualities of a healthy democracy just discussed
- strategies for effectively addressing issues of concern.

For this activity, participants will be working in the same small groups from previous activities. Depending on the experience and background of participants, they may need more support and information than in previous sections. For example, recognizing which levels of government are responsible for particular issues or the role of cabinet ministers or community organizations in creating change.

	Question/Activity	Time and Tips
11.	Working in small groups, have participants choose <u>one</u> of the issues identified in section 1 that they will then develop an action plan to address.	5 minutes
12.	Have participants use flipchart paper to brainstorm a list of everyone involved in this issue. Have each group report out their list and add to their list as other groups report out.	10-15 minutes

13.	<p>Have participants use flipchart paper to identify obstacles they will face when trying to address the issue.</p> <p>Have each group report out their list and add to their list as other groups report out.</p>	10-15 minutes
14.	<p>Have participants use flipchart paper to brainstorm a long list of possible actions they could take to address the issue.</p> <p>Then have participants choose the 2-3 actions they think would be most effective.</p> <p>Have each group report out their list.</p>	10-20 minutes
15.	<p>Have participants develop a name for their campaign.</p>	5-10 minutes

Section 5 – Debrief and Conclusion (15 minutes)

Reconvened into the larger group, participants will be asked to share their action plans and discuss what worked and what didn't.

	Question	Time and Tips
16.	<p>In making this plan, what were the main challenges? What were the rewards? Is this plan something you could pursue when you leave this discussion group? Why or why not?</p>	<p>Appointed group member to share plan.</p>
17.	<p>What did you like best about today's discussion? What did you learn? What would you like to learn more about? What would you like to discuss further or take action on?</p>	<p>Distribute follow-up questionnaires to participants and collect before thanking and saying goodbye to participants.</p>