

Discussion Format Guide for New Leaders

House of Concord — Democratic Neutrality in Practice

“Our goal is understanding, not conformity.”

Purpose

This guide helps new leaders run discussions that are **nonpartisan, fair, and independent of media and party influence**.

The mission is not to create agreement — it’s to ensure every participant’s reasoning stands on its own merit.

Conformity is not a sign of success.

When a group appears to agree too easily, it’s a signal to stop and ask:

“Have we actually examined every perspective, or have we been captured by comfort or consensus?”

1. Opening (10–15 minutes)

A. Welcome & Context

- State the issue and its civic importance.
- Remind participants: *This assembly is not about sides or winning — it’s about testing ideas for fairness.*
- Explain that all ideas will be recorded for inclusion in **The Concord Report** — no one’s perspective disappears.

B. Ground Rules

Post visibly:

1. Critique ideas, not people.
 2. Listen with respect; don’t interrupt.
 3. Share sources when citing facts.
 4. No slogans, no partisan advocacy.
 5. Disagreement is not failure — it’s evidence of independence.
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2. Understanding the Issue (20–30 minutes)

A. Factual Inputs

- Invite brief, balanced expert overviews (5–7 minutes each).
- Ask: “What’s missing from these perspectives?”
- Record missing or conflicting points in the **Evidence Log**.

B. Clarifying Questions

Encourage fact-seeking, not rebuttal:

“Can someone explain how this works, rather than whether they agree?”

3. Defining the Problem (30 minutes)

A. Small Group Exercise

- Each group drafts its own **Problem Statement** — no merging or editing yet.
- Ask:
 - “What is the real issue underneath the headlines?”
 - “Who benefits if this problem remains unsolved?”
 - “Is this problem described differently by people with other values or experiences?”

B. Share & Compare

- Bring all problem statements together **side-by-side**, not combined.
- If the group starts to settle on one version, ask:

“Is this clarity — or is this conformity?”

Encourage critical re-examination before finalizing.

4. Exploring Solutions (40–50 minutes)

A. Brainstorm Freely

- No evaluating or ranking during this stage.
- Use prompts like: “What would fairness look like from each perspective?”

B. Examine Trade-offs

For each idea:

- Benefits
- Risks
- Who gains / who loses influence

C. Apply the Equal-Value Consent Test (EVCT)

Ask:

“Would I consent to live under this policy if my group were in the minority?”

If not, refine until fairness is restored — or document why equal-value consent can’t yet be met.

5. Documenting the Discussion (10–15 minutes)

- Record all problem statements and solution options **as presented**, not edited for uniformity.
 - Note any points of tension or divergence.
 - Label forced or premature agreement as a “**Consensus Alert**” — requiring later review for possible capture.
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6. Closing (10 minutes)

- Reiterate: “Our value lies in the diversity of ideas we captured.”
 - Ask participants:
 - “Did anyone feel pressure to conform?”
 - “Did any idea get less attention because it was unpopular?”
 - Summarize key insights neutrally and explain next steps: inclusion in *The Concord Report* and submission to representatives and the public archive.
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7. Post-Discussion Transparency

- Publish the notes or report publicly within one week.
- Keep all problem statements and solution sets visible — even the contradictory ones.
- Publicly thank participants for **protecting diversity of thought**, not for “finding common ground.”

Guiding Principle

“A neutral environment is one where ideas compete freely and no voice is silenced by comfort, conformity, or authority.”