

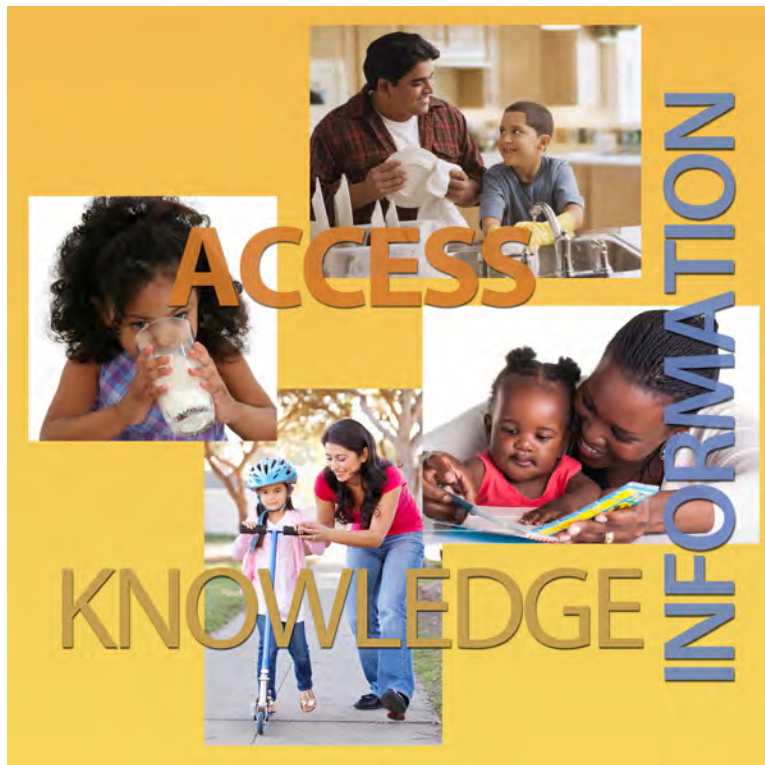
# COMMUNITY CONVERSATIONS MODERATOR GUIDE

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This Community Conversations Moderator Guide has been designed specifically to be used with the Issue Guide *Looking for Answers Together*.

## Looking for Answers Together

How Should We Nurture Children to Be Healthy and Make Better Choices?



Parent Information Action Research Project

An Issue Guide

# Community Conversations about Education

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Community Conversations about Education has supported Connecticut communities since 1993. Original support materials, created in partnership with Public Agenda and the Institute for Educational Leadership, have been adapted over time to respond to community needs.

These current support materials were designed specifically to be used with the Issue Guide, *Looking for Answers Together: How Should We Nurture Children to Be Healthy and Make Better Choices?* A learning partnership with the William Caspar Graustein Memorial Fund, the *Parent Information Inquiry Initiative (Parentii)* of the Institute for Translational Research at the University of Hartford, and the Kettering Foundation supported the recent modifications.

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# BACKGROUND

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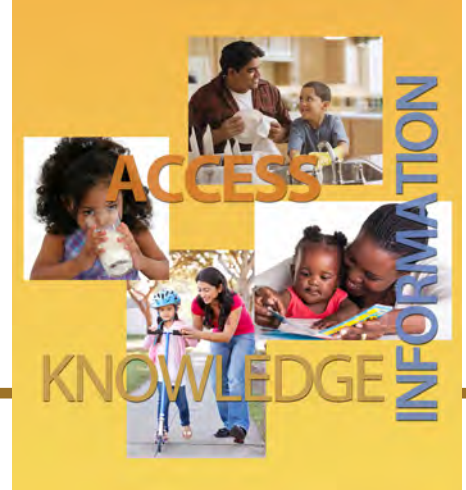
**T***his Moderator Guide is designed for communities who plan to host a community conversation and use the 2013 Issue Guide on the topic: Looking for Answers Together: How Should We Nurture Children to be Healthy and Make Better Choices?*

*Connecting parents, those with primary responsibility for young children, and others in the community to information about early childhood is key to young children's success. Parents who have access to quality information and the supports to use that information can make better decisions regarding children. Ten Connecticut parents and faculty at the University of Hartford spent two years listening to parents, community members, and people like you across the state of Connecticut and then creating this specific Issue Guide.*

*Though Community Conversations about Education has supported hundreds of conversations in Connecticut cities and towns, these particular training materials were created to use with the Issue Guide uniquely created by the Parent Information Action Research Project Parent Researchers, led by Dr. Paige M. Bray, University of Hartford.*

*The Issue Guide and the Community Conversation format are tools for respectful discussions, characterized by full and diverse participation, where real questions are asked, time is shared, and mutual listening and learning happen. They are opportunities for communities to discover ways to encourage all constituents to work together on a common issue—in this case, How Should We Nurture Children to be Healthy and Make Better Choices?*

# MODERATOR GUIDE



## Looking for Answers Together: How Should We Nurture Children to Be Healthy and Make Better Choices?

### Purpose

THE PURPOSE OF THIS COMMUNITY CONVERSATION is to create a productive dialogue among a broad cross-section of community members that will:

- help community members become more informed about how we nurture children to be healthy and make better choices;
- create an environment that acknowledges different perspectives, each of which reflects common values that need to be heard;
- identify insights, “ahas,” and surprises, as well as questions and concerns;
- inform the community’s efforts to help children and families by demonstrating that positive, broad-based conversations can take place;
- build local capacity for future community conversations so that issues can be better handled as they arise; and
- set the stage for new, effective individual and community actions on behalf of children and families.

### A few notes on goals, strategies, and tasks

*This guide is about what happens in the small group discussion sessions.*

There are no predetermined outcomes for these community conversations. Successful moderators of these conversations are comfortable with the goal of an open dialogue without a preset agenda. Moderators need to remain neutral and not lead people toward any ‘correct’ answers. Neutrality of speech and body language is important in helping to promote a civil and productive dialogue during which people feel they can safely express diverse views.

In general, moderators should be familiar with the meeting materials and the issue guide for this conversation about Looking for Answers Together: How Should We Nurture Children to be Healthy and Make Better Choices? but they need not be experts. We encourage a simple, natural, straight-forward style of moderating. Elaborate, “workshop-like” techniques can come across as gimmicky or intimidating in this setting. Rather, moderators of these community conversations are like *skillful* hosts who keep the party lively without themselves becoming the centers of attention. To keep the conversation stimulating and on track, they:

- make sure a point someone is making is well understood;
- ask participants to expand on *why* they feel the way they do—e.g., have they had particular experiences that have led them to their current views?
- point out the tension between the views of different participants;
- bring a new voice into the discussion to enrich what is being said;
- occasionally sum up and focus the discussion;
- occasionally introduce important arguments that people are overlooking to see what people think; and
- create an environment where people can express ideas safely.

Among the main **moderating goals** are to:

***Create an environment where people can express ideas safely.***

Everything we do in structuring these meetings is meant to create an environment in which people can honestly explore their thinking and that of others, and engage in constructive, and hopefully stimulating, dialogue about an important public concern. Moderators can help create this kind of open, exploratory, and stimulating environment by modeling a relaxed, focused, and respectful tone and behavior.

***Encourage participation, but don't let anyone dominate the discussion.***

Especially early on in the discussion, a major goal of moderators should be to help as many people as possible to get involved and “find their voices.” This doesn't mean moderators should have an agenda of making everyone participate equally, but they should try to create an environment where everyone has good opportunities to do so, and can occasionally invite people who are sitting back to get involved.

Two typical challenges in this regard are: (1) the dominant personality, who will talk at such length or with such force that less aggressive members of the group fade into the background; (2) those who have greater experience and expertise, who simply have more fully formed views and can talk at greater length, causing less experienced group members to defer to them rather than engaging in the conversation.

Moderators should not feel the need to police these issues too tightly. (A common mistake of beginning moderators is to jump in too quickly if someone appears to be “getting out of line,” rather than letting things play out a bit and seeing how the group

reacts and if things work out on their own). But, moderators may need to intervene from time to time to keep the conversation open, constructive, and accessible to everyone.

***Help participants examine views they have expressed, and reflect on views others have shared, especially views that differ among participants.***

In post-meeting surveys, most participants have stated that they heard views against their own position that they thought had merit, and they reconsidered one of their own positions at least once. Moderators can facilitate these outcomes by looking for ways to encourage people to examine their views, to articulate and explain them more clearly, and to hear the views of others and perhaps respond to them. Though early on people tend to direct their remarks to the moderator, people will talk to each other as the discussion develops.

***Clarify and advance understanding of this issue in the community.***

Again, the aim is not to achieve consensus. Rather it is to facilitate a positive and stimulating conversation among equals that allows views to be articulated and examined. In this way we hope the dialogue will clarify:

- participants' deep ideas, insights, and feelings about the issue;
- questions and concerns that deserve further attention; and
- next steps for individuals and the community to act.

Moderators should let participants know that it is okay to disagree and that not all disagreements need to be resolved. Moderators should look neither to agitate disagreements nor shy away from them, but rather help the group to identify areas of conflict and disagreement as clearly as possible. If the group wants to focus on it, moderators should help the group make as much headway as realistically possible in a short discussion, leaving the rest for future efforts.

It is important for moderators to make sure the dialogue stays focused on the issue, and that the dialogue proceeds on a schedule that allows a fair hearing for each part of the issue. Beyond this, the job is to make the conversations as highly participatory and as productive as possible.

The meeting agenda will look something like this:

<b><i>Evening:</i></b>	<b><i>Morning:</i></b>	
5:00–5:45	9:00–9:45	REGISTRATION/MEAL
5:45–6:00	9:45–10:00	LARGE GROUP WELCOME AND OVERVIEW
6:10–8:20	10:10–12:20	SMALL GROUP MODERATED DISCUSSIONS
8:30–9:00	12:30–1:00	LARGE GROUP WRAP-UP:
		Reports from small groups
		Closing remarks
		Completion of questionnaires

## Structure of the SMALL GROUP discussion session

THIS GUIDE is about the small group moderated discussion. The moderator's responsibility is to manage this discussion. There are several major components to the small group conversations:

<u>Evening:</u>	<u>Morning:</u>	
6:10-7:50	10:10-11:50	GENERAL DISCUSSION ON LOOKING FOR ANSWERS TOGETHER
		Orientation
		Group Introductions
		Review Agenda and Conversation Guidelines
		Review Introduction to Options/begin (p. 10)
		Discussion of each option (30 minutes each)
7:50-8:05	11:50-12:05	SUMMARY OF PART 1 DISCUSSION (p. 16)
8:05-8:20	12:05-12:20	NEXT STEPS (p. 16)
8:30	12:30	RECONVENE IN LARGE GROUP

Throughout the small group session volunteers will act as recorders, making notes of the discussion on flip charts, freeing moderators to concentrate on managing the group. On the following pages, each of the segments is discussed in further detail. The final page serves as a time chart for moderators to manage the small group discussions.

[6:10-7:50 or 10:10-11:50] GENERAL DISCUSSION ABOUT LOOKING FOR ANSWERS TOGETHER

*Before the conversation begins, please be sure to visit your small group room and check that the set-up is appropriate: circle or horse-shoe shaped chairs, easel, flip chart, markers, and posted Agenda, Conversation Guidelines, Reflections, Questions, and Next Steps sheets.*

### Orientation

Moderator makes a few brief opening remarks explaining:

- who you are and what your role is;
- why we are meeting (reinforcing what was said in the opening session);
- what's going to happen in the small group;
- logistics: you won't take breaks, but people should feel free to take breaks as needed. (Point out restroom locations.)



## Group Introductions

Invite a brief round of introductions. As people introduce themselves, you might want to ask a question with a personal stake such as “What brought you here?”

We recommend making a *seating chart* (p. 30) so you know who is sitting where as you manage the discussion. Note if someone is a teacher, a parent, an employer, a student, and so on. This will help you manage the conversation, especially early on while you’re working to get everyone involved.

## Agenda and Conversation Guidelines

You’ll want to review the agenda and guidelines already posted on the wall. You might say something along these lines:

- “Let’s all work together to keep the conversation on track and to make sure everyone has an equal chance to talk.”
- “We want this to be a session where people feel free to express their views and where they can consider the views of others. It’s okay to agree with others and it’s okay to disagree as well. We just ask that you disagree with ideas, not with people. In other words, let’s keep this constructive.”
- “Time may necessitate moving on to be able to give a fair focus on each part of the issue.”

*Ask if others have additions to the Guidelines. Be sure to **get agreement from the group** to abide by the guidelines.*

*(NOTE: If the question of confidentiality arises in your conversation, please respond that these are open, public deliberations. When they are being videotaped, informed consent confidentiality applies, but people should realize that they are deliberating about a public problem.)*

## Invite Volunteers

There are several tasks with which you will need help. You might want to invite volunteers to help with these:

- Keeping track of time and warning you when you should be moving on;
- Placing the flip chart sheets on the walls; and
- Reporting the results of the group’s work when the large group convenes. (If no one volunteers for this at first, revisit at the end of the small group discussion.)

## Introduction

It helps to introduce the discussion along these lines:

“To help us get the conversation started, we’re going to review the options offered in the [PowerPoint and] Issue Guide that presented three ways of looking at how we nurture children. Afterward, we will talk about each option.”

*(TIP: Try to avoid answering questions (even if you know the answer! Reflect the question back to the group.... “Can anyone answer that?” If no one knows the answer, capture the question on the “Questions and Concerns” sheet.)*

## What should be our **approach** to How We Nurture Children to be Healthy and Make Better Choices?

*Here you will frame the conversation with the first three paragraphs below—feel free to paraphrase! Then briefly cover the three “Options” paragraphs. Then refer people to Option I in the Issue Guide and invite participants to consider the actions and drawbacks.*

### **Introduction to Options and Discussion:**

Being a parent always has been a tough job, but mothers and fathers and others serving in a parental role today find themselves under tremendous pressure. It seems that every day brings a new responsibility or a new expectation, and all of them feel equally important. At the same time, parents talked about the joy they find in parenting and described how raising children has taught them humility. Parenting, they said, is a unique opportunity to learn about our own humanity. (*Issue Guide, p. 5*)

Parents can be very hard on themselves and each other as they try to make decisions in tough situations, and they often look to others for signs of how well they are doing. Many work long hours, sometimes on more than one job, and feel stretched too thin by constant emotional and time demands. We all consider families a fundamental part of our society. How, then, can we put our best parenting into action? What can all of us do to support parents and help them nurture children and ensure that they remain healthy and make better choices? There are concerns we can all agree should be addressed, although we don't always agree on who should do what. As a society we have to walk a fine line between supporting parents and intruding on the family life of others. (*Issue Guide, pp. 5 – 6*)

To help you and your neighbors talk through these issues and decide what's most important to you—as an individual and as a community—this guide offers three options to how we nurture children to be healthy and make better choices. During this conversation you and your community may address the possibilities and drawbacks of each option. And ask, what actions would make sense for your community, and why?

To summarize, here's the essence of each option:

### **Option 1: Parents and Neighbors Should Take More Responsibility**

People who like this option might say:

*The problem is that too many parents are not taking proper responsibility for their children, while friends and neighbors look the other way. Children are affected by the quality of care and decision-making in their homes. As a community, we need to hold children and their parents accountable for their behavior.” (Issue Guide, p. 17)*

### **Option 2: Make Time for Families a Top Priority**

People who like this option might say:

*The problem is that parents become overwhelmed by a perpetual lack of time. The continuous expectations to perform in and away from the home wear parents down. Parenting can be a joy, but it is also very hard, continual work. All parents, including single parents and foster parents, need to see that society values what they do. We should support parents in ways that give them more time to raise children.” (Issue Guide, p. 18)*

### **Option 3: Guarantee That Every Child's Basic Needs are Met**

People who like this option might say:

*“The problem is that major issues affecting our society—such as health care, jobs, mental health, and illiteracy—have very direct impacts on families and communities. We can't create a perfect world, but children are affected by the quality of their environment. If we want to nurture our children, we should provide them and their families with the basic resources they need to thrive.” (Issue Guide, p. 19)*

### **Suggested moderator probes:**

As you consider each of the actions and drawbacks listed on the next few pages, here are some probes that might be helpful to you as a moderator:

- Do the options described here reflect your experience?
- Are there any drawbacks to this option/idea/action?
- How realistic is this option/idea/action/?
- What about this option/idea/action appeals to you? Why?
- What about this option/idea/action concerns or worries you? Why?
- For those who like this option, what would it take to follow this option/idea/action?
- How would we know whether it's working or not?
- For those who don't like this option—are there any actions that appeal to you? Why?

As the conversation unfolds, you might want to go deeper using the following probes at the right moments:

- What makes you think that?
- Could you tell us a little more?
- Does anybody want to tell about a different experience?

After you have reviewed the brief option descriptions, starting with Option 1 (above), you could introduce the discussion by asking people to look at Issue Guide p. 17 and ask them to look over actions and drawbacks, which came from conversations with Connecticut parents, and ask, “What do you think?” It may take a few minutes for people to look this over, so be comfortable with some quiet time. If you need a more direct probe, ask people what they think of the first action/drawback.

Allow about 30 minutes for each of the three options.



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*Option 1 Parents and Neighbors Should Take More Responsibility (Issue Guide p. 17)*

# Parents and Neighbors Should Take More Responsibility

## OPTION 1

Actions	Drawbacks
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Family members and neighbors can speak up when they notice unacceptable behavior and take action to support parents' responsible efforts on behalf of their children.</li> </ul>	<p>Family and neighbors do not want to judge one other. They may not always know the whole story and are concerned about the consequences of interference.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>State and local government can mandate character education for parents and children.</li> </ul>	<p>We run the risk of trampling on parents' rights to raise their children as they see fit.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Places of worship and cultural and community organizations can offer mentoring for model behavior from others in the community.</li> </ul>	<p>Model behavior doesn't mean the same thing to everyone; culture, family, and regional ways influence what a parent does.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Schools can require parenting classes as early as middle school, before dropout rates and most teen parenting occurs.</li> </ul>	<p>Schools will be taking on work once done by families, which means less time to teach academic subjects.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Businesses can establish paid apprenticeships (starting below minimum wage and gradually moving beyond) to help youths and young parents learn responsibility and civic engagement.</li> </ul>	<p>Because businesses are usually intent on saving costs, authentic learning apprenticeships may well turn into rote work.</p>

Reproduced from *Looking for Answers Together: How Should We Nurture Children to be Healthy and Make Better Choices?*



Option 2 Make Families a Top Priority (Issue Guide p. 18)

OPTION 2

# Make Time for Families a Top Priority

Actions	Drawbacks
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>State and local governments can make flexible, affordable, quality child care available for all families on a sliding scale.</li> </ul>	<p>Staffing and regulating a system of quality child-care centers will place a considerable burden on communities.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Businesses can provide more flex-time and family leave time.</li> </ul>	<p>Businesses might have to cut other benefits or reduce wages.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Parents can talk to each other and to members of an older generation to seek support and advice for daily challenges.</li> </ul>	<p>Making time for these conversations, when parents have so little time anyway, may be more burdensome than helpful.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Schools could extend the school day or the calendar year, and offer affordable after-school child care.</li> </ul>	<p>Children would spend more time away from their families. More time in child-care programs may result in lowering parenting standards and letting parents “off the hook.”</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Families and communities can make use of the extensive information available about the needs of children, nutrition, early brain development, and literacy.</li> </ul>	<p>Too much information causes parents to throw up their hands and opt out.</p>

Reproduced from *Looking for Answers Together: How Should We Nurture Children to be Healthy and Make Better Choices?*



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*Option 3 Guarantee Every Child's Basic Needs Are Met (Issue Guide, p.19)*

# Guarantee Every Child's Basic Needs Are Met

## OPTION 3

Actions	Drawbacks
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>State and federal governments could provide access to preventative public health and free or affordable health care for every child.</li> </ul>	<p>Making sure every child gets health care would mean more government involvement in family life.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Communities can provide reliable evening and weekend public transportation.</li> </ul>	<p>To get a critical mass of riders to make public transit economically feasible, people would have to make less use of their cars, which means less flexibility and convenience.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Volunteers and nonprofit groups can combat illiteracy and drop-out rates by reading to every child from birth and teaching family literacy skills.</li> </ul>	<p>This could intrude on family life and could complicate the relationship between children and their parents.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Comprehensive schools can break the cycle of illiteracy and underemployment with programs that guarantee parent education through at least high school.</li> </ul>	<p>This means building a costly bureaucracy to ensure that people complete an education that the public is already giving them for free.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Congress can legislate equal pay for women, which would be particularly helpful to single mothers.</li> </ul>	<p>If we force employers to raise pay for women, they may not be able to hire as many people, including other women.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Government, communities, and businesses should work together to ensure that parents have access to health care, mental health support, and job-training opportunities.</li> </ul>	<p>Giving people a job, good health care, and other resources doesn't mean they'll be good parents.</p>



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### Summary [7:50–8:05pm or 11:50am–12:05pm]

In 15 minutes or so, work with the group on the summary questions listed. You should already have on walls flip chart pages labeled “Reflections,” “Questions/ Concerns,” and “Next Steps.” You’ll be working with the first two while summing up.

Explain to the group that you’ll be covering the summary topics in just 15 minutes and encourage everyone to focus. It is important to discourage people from introducing new material here—the task is to sum up the previous conversation, not begin a new one. Then start with **Reflections** (although you might need to add ideas to Questions/Concerns, too).

You could start this section by saying the following: “We have had a rich conversation so far, and now we’re going to take a few minutes to look back on the conversation (flip chart sheets). As you’re doing so, can you identify any insights, “aha’s,” or surprises? Give people time to consider this question. This is one place where you can introduce your own observations, as can the recorder. For example, if the group is missing a striking insight that you recall very clearly, you might say “I seem to recall.... Would you agree that was an insight?”

Then move on to ask, “What are [other] the **questions and concerns** that need more attention? Do we need more information about some things? Are there areas we haven’t yet talked about?”

### Next Steps [8:05–8:20pm or 12:05–12:20pm]

In the last 15 minutes, work with the group on the theme of “next steps,” or “How should we follow up on this conversation?” This final section is organized around two questions:

1. Is there anything that you as individuals might do, or do differently, as a result of today’s conversation?
2. What would you like to see happen to follow up on this conversation?

*(Please emphasize that the Community Collaborative in your community may serve as a launchpad for next steps.)*

This part of the conversation is a quick brainstorm of ideas to move forward. As needed, you can stimulate their thinking by asking things like:

- Are there any particular aspects of today’s discussion that we need to come back together and spend more time on? (If so, what?)
- Are there other subjects that we should be discussing?
- How can we include more people in the conversation? Would that be a good idea?

By 8:20 (evening) or 12:20 (morning) you should be wrapping up. Be sure to remind people how important the final large group meeting is: That’s where everyone will have a chance to hear from the other groups, and will talk as a large group about the best way to follow up this community conversation.



## **Moderator's Time Chart**

Evening	Morning	
6:10-7:50	10:10-11:50	<p><b>General Discussion on How We Nurture Children to be Healthy and Make Better Choices</b>  <i>(See Moderator Guide pp. 9-15)</i></p> <p>Opening: (about 10 minutes)</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">Welcome, Introduction of self and recorder</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">Logistics: Where are rest rooms?</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">Thank participants for coming &amp; invite introductions</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">Cover guidelines and ask for agreement</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">Review the Issue Guide discussion starter and begin.</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">Invite personal stories—connection to the issue:</p> <p style="padding-left: 80px;">Option #1 (30 minutes)</p> <p style="padding-left: 80px;">Option #2 (30 minutes)</p> <p style="padding-left: 80px;">Option #3 (30 minutes)</p>
7:50-8:05	11:50-12:05	<p><b>Summary Discussion</b>  <i>(See Moderator Guide p. 16)</i></p> <p>Reflection: Insights, Aha's, Surprises</p> <p>Questions and Concerns</p>
8:05-8:20	12:05-12:20	<p><b>Next Steps</b>  <i>(See Moderator Guide p. 16)</i></p> <p>Brainstorm what steps participants or communities can take.</p> <p>Ask people to complete Participant Survey and collect as they are leaving.</p> <p>Thank people for coming.</p>
8:30	12:20	<p><b>Break before reconvening in large group</b></p>

## KEEPING MODERATING ON TRACK

Good Signs	Signs That Moderator Should Make A Move	Tips To Get Back On Track
People listen to what others are saying	People are just waiting their turn to “have their say”	
People are talking civilly to each other; asking questions of each other	All comments are directed to the moderator	
Everyone is listening with respect; no one is dominating	There are “sidebar” conversations or interruptions	
Alternative points get aired	The group mainly concurs on each option	
The consequences of each option get addressed	The benefits arguments have no negative consequences	
People share personal experiences	People speak theoretically/analytically	
People express emotion around what is important to them	The forum is cerebral and lacking feeling	

# RECORDER REFERENCE

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(This section is excerpted from: *The Public's Voice: Building Community Engagement through Deliberative Dialogues*, Sandra Hodge, Ph.D. and Patty Dineen, March 7–9, 2006, Springfield, MO and from *Community Conversations about Education*.)

Along with the moderator, the recorder of a community conversation is a critical member of the process. The recorder basically keeps a “record” of what transpires during the conversation. This requires careful listening and communication skills so that what is recorded accurately reflects what is being said.

## GOALS:

- To accurately capture the **ESSENCE** of what is said by participants;
- To provide a visual representation of the conversation as it unfolds;
- To create the record to be used to inform the community of the findings from the conversation.

## TIPS:

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### An effective recorder...

- Talks with moderator in advance to learn priorities and clarify roles and expectations.
- Like the Moderator, maintains a **neutral** stance and **shares no opinions or points of view**.
- Makes sure recording materials are available and working.  
(black, blue, or green markers—don't use light colors, red, or orange)
- Records the group name and page number on each flip chart sheet.
- **PRINTS CLEARLY** and writes large enough for all to see.
- Asks the *moderator* to clarify a point.
- Tapes completed pages to the wall quickly and quietly (or hand to a volunteer).
- Uses verbs! (They help to capture the intended meaning.)
- Just start writing. If you wait until the sentence is ended, it will be hard to keep up.

## TECHNIQUES FOR RECORDING A CONVERSATION:

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Here are some suggestions for fulfilling the role of a conversation recorder successfully.

1. **Attend the Moderator Training**, since the best way to learn how to record is to try it!

2. Like the Moderator, the Recorder maintains a **neutral** stance and **shares no opinions or points of view**.
3. **Be familiar with the issue.** Be sure to read the Issue Guide prior to the conversation. It's important that you know the material as well as the moderator. This will aid your listening skills tremendously, so that you will be able to hear pros and cons, values, and ideas.
4. **Determine a strategy** with the conversation moderator for recording. Some questions the two of you should think about prior to the conversation might include:
  - Should I introduce myself and explain my role or will the moderator do that?
  - Who is responsible for writing up the flip chart notes?
  - Who will provide easel, flip chart, markers, tape, etc.?
  - Can I tape paper on the wall at the conversation site?
  - Should I help the moderator during the “reflections” part of the conversation?
5. **Be sure room is set up in advance.** The room should be in a horseshoe shape, and the sheets on page 21 should be posted on flip chart paper on the walls.

Keep in mind that you are **recording key points from each person**; not every comment made. Remember—it's each person's comments. It is not up to the recorder to decide WHOM they will record.



Please print the following on separate flip chart sheets a post on the walls:

## AGENDA

1. Introductions & Guidelines (10 min.)
  2. Discussion (about 30 minutes each)
    - **Option 1**
    - **Option 2**
    - **Option 3**
  3. Summary (15 minutes)
    - Reflections
    - Questions and concerns
  4. Next Steps (15 minutes)
  5. Return to large group
- Remember to fill out surveys*

## REFLECTIONS

(post on wall)

## QUESTIONS & CONCERNS

(post on wall)

## FOLLOW-UP MEETING

DATE	TIME	PLACE
CONTACT		

## CONVERSATION GUIDELINES

- Speak for yourself; participate as equals
- Listen carefully and with respect; one person speaks at a time
- Respect other's opinions
- Everyone has an opportunity to speak
- Agree to disagree; disagree with ideas, not with people
- Stay focused
- Silence phones

## NEXT STEPS

(What can I do as a result of today's conversation? What could the community do?)

(post on wall)

# LEAD MODERATOR GUIDE

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## For a Community Conversation focused on the Issue Guide: LOOKING FOR ANSWERS TOGETHER

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### The Lead Moderator's Role

Though the organization of a community conversation is carried out by a diverse planning committee, at the session itself the lead moderator plays a major role in managing the event. The main tasks that the lead moderator must manage are the following:

- Coordinating the moderators and recorders of small group discussions
- Moderating the opening and closing large group sessions

**This guide gives guidelines and recommendations for these tasks.**

### Coordinating the Moderators

Lead moderators work with the local Community Conversation Planning Committee to make sure all moderators are trained to reinforce the conversation structure. Additionally, lead moderators should ensure that all the moderating essentials are in place, including the following:

- Adequately sized breakout rooms, with enough seats properly configured (in a circle or horse shoe, not classroom style)
- Easel, Flip chart, markers (black, green, and/or blue), masking tape
- Issue Guides
- Participant surveys (which can be filled out after the small group discussions or after the ending large group session)
- Pens/pencils to complete the surveys
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_

## Coordinating the Recorders

The recorders play a crucial role in community conversations, and sufficient time needs to be set aside to make sure they are ready. *Ideally*, recorders will have attended the moderator training session.

If recorders are not able to attend a moderator training session, a meeting with recorders and moderators should take place prior to the community conversation to clarify roles and tasks, create a sense of teamwork, and avoid last-minute confusion. They should be carefully briefed and supplied with the following items prior to the meeting:

- “Recorder Reference” (p.19)
- Any background material on the session that you think will help them to understand the intent and their function

The recorders’ briefing should cover the following:

- The purpose of the community conversation
- The structure of the meeting and the recorder’s role
- Exactly what recorders are expected to do at each phase of the session

All of this is covered in the Recorder Reference, but it is important to walk them through it carefully to make sure there is no confusion.

Recorders should be told to ask their moderators for guidance as necessary. Moderators should be told to check on the recorder’s work early in each new phase of the discussion, and to advise as needed.



## Moderating the opening and closing large group sessions

Lead moderators usually play an important role in the large group sessions. Although the lead moderator may not be the host who welcomes participants at the outset of the session or thanks participants on behalf of the planning committee, that person could perform those functions as well. Lead moderators should work with the planning committee in advance of the conversation to understand any fine-tuning of the large group sessions. How many people will be speaking before the breakout sessions begin? (These should be minimal.) Are there special plans for follow-up that should be mentioned at the opening and/or closing session? Whatever plans are devised, the job of the lead moderator is as follows:

- Check that the large group room setup is adequate, with enough seats for the expected crowd to see and hear everything, and microphones and audio-visual equipment as needed.
- Help manage the opening and closing sessions.

### Moderating the Opening and Large Group Sessions

The lead moderator is typically the last person to speak in the opening session (unless the lead moderator is doing double-duty as the welcoming emcee). The basic message is along these lines: “Now that you’ve been welcomed and have some idea why we’re here, I’m going to tell you how we’re going to accomplish our goals today/tonight.” If you choose to use a PowerPoint, this is time to show it. The notes pages accompanying the PowerPoint offer some language you could use, or you could insert your own ideas.

You may want to emphasize the following points—although if earlier speakers cover some of them, you can edit. Use whatever language works best for you, of course, and leave yourself about 10 minutes or so.

- We’ll be moving into small groups in a few minutes, where the real work of the session will take place. You’ll notice that on your name tag [folder] is a [number, letter, color...]. That tells you which group you’ll be going to. [Give directions as needed]. In each group you’ll find a cross-section of your community, a moderator [or moderators] who will help to keep the conversation moving along, and a recorder to keep a record of the major points being made.
- The goal is to have an honest exchange of views among a diverse cross section of the community. We do not expect to arrive at a perfect consensus or a complete action plan at the end of one meeting, but we do think we can take an important step toward greater understanding and toward developing ways of working together that can help parents gain access to the resources they need to nurture children.
- We’re hoping for a dialogue that is frank and honest and that is also positive, and constructive. Please feel free to disagree with ideas that are being put forward in



your group if that's how you feel. We also urge you to take the time to listen to each other, try to understand others' points of view, and to disagree with ideas—not with individuals. Most of all, enjoy yourselves and make the most of this opportunity to exchange views and learn from each other.

- After your small group discussion, we'll all come back together for a short ending session here. We'll briefly hear a few highlights from each group so you can get a sense for how other groups compare to your own. And we'll look especially at your thoughts about where we might go from here, and how we might want to follow up on this dialogue. Finally, we'll ask you to fill out a short survey about the topic and the conversation—please hand it in before you leave.
- We will determine what information summarized from your small groups and the surveys the planning committee plans to send to all participants and others.
- If you have any questions about the session, your moderator will be able to help you with them.
- Announce a time, date, and location for a follow-up meeting.

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### **Send the participants off to their rooms.**

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### **Moderating the Closing Session**

A volunteer(s), recorder, or moderator from each group reports back the highlights (reflections, questions, next steps) of its discussion once the small groups are over and everyone has reconvened. The lead moderator manages the process.

The overall discussions vary, but they all follow the same general four-part structure:

1. A summary of the general discussion that identifies
  - Reflection (insights, “aha’s,” and surprises)
  - Questions or concerns that need more attention, or areas where more information is needed;
2. Generation of ideas to solve problems in the issue area—either individually or as a community.

The reporting of the highlights are organized around the summary items (reflections, question/concerns and next steps), not the general discussions. We recommend the following procedure:

- All volunteers, recorders, and moderators should convene at the front of the room near the microphone, with the appropriate flip chart sheets ready to go. Choose one group to lead off (where there are good notes and the person who will be handling the report is confident). This reporter will give the most complete summary of his or her group's discussion. Each reporter should identify his or her group before they begin.

- Each subsequent group report will add *a few highlights about how their group was similar or different from the first report*, but go into less detail. In this way you keep the reports fresh, and avoid the tiresome repetition that can take place.
- Emphasize again that notes from the small groups and surveys will be summarized and distributed to participants (assuming you intend to do this.)
- *Again urge participants to drop off their surveys before leaving.*
- *Thank everyone for coming.*
- Make sure all the recorders notes are in order, and that the surveys are collected. (Recorders may be asked to collect all their notes—not just the summary sheets—in order and return them to you or a designated person.)

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# HELPFUL TIPS

## Moderator Tips

1. Remember that this is about hearing from participants. You are a skillful host, focused on connecting people and ideas.
2. The goal is not to achieve consensus; it is to get participants to express their own views. So encourage disagreement as natural and important for understanding and growth, but “disagree with ideas, not with people.”
3. Establish guidelines for conversation, especially listening with respect, one person speaking at a time, and everyone having an equal chance to participate.
4. Create a comfortable, safe atmosphere for raising all kinds of thoughts and ideas. Participants are all experts in their own experiences. Seating people in a circle without barriers such as school desks is ideal to create such an atmosphere.
5. Keep focused, and occasionally paraphrase.
6. Ask the group to reflect on their insights, “ahas,” and surprises.
7. Near the end, ask the group to generate next steps—for themselves individually or their community.
8. Manage the process, keep moving forward, keep time.
9. Make sure you hold a NON-PARTISAN, unbiased stance throughout.



## Compromise, Consensus and Common Ground (for Action)

COMPROMISE, consensus and common ground each have a role to play in our decision making activities. Compromise is most often associated with adversarial bargaining with a predetermined outcome (e.g., contract negotiations) while consensus is more frequently seen in ongoing working groups or teams where a decision with unanimous or near-unanimous agreement is important (e.g., the League of Women Voters has developed consensual decision making as an ongoing activity). Common ground, or common ground for action, however, is an essential foundation for public action, which is action that unites diverse positions into a common direction, even if they don't agree on specifics.

The strength of compromise lies in its ability to create agreements between polarized parties, particularly when an agreement must be constructed within a short period of time and when people can be held to that agreement by legal forces.

Consensus, on the other hand, is most powerful with people who have a history of working together, or who are in an organization (e.g., League of Women Voters) with such a history. Consensus works best if there is time for people to work out differences of opinion and to convince each other of the correctness of one position or action. Common ground (or common ground for action), however, draws its strength from the relationships among diverse actors (or groups) that emerge as people work through differences and come to understand each other, and each other's values. We seek common ground for action when working through how to act together to address a shared problem involving fundamental values—e.g., when we must decide how to improve education or make our communities more livable.

### COMPROMISE

- goal is mutual concessions
- both sides agree they got the best deal they could
- start and end with what's best for me (or mine)... based on self-interest
- leads to individual, self-interested action
- leads to hardening of positions and continued opposition
- is constructed—create agreements by mutual concessions
- success = when each person is satisfied with costs and benefits

### CONSENSUS

- goal is mutual agreement
- agree on actions even if not on values (on what to do, not on what's important)
- end with solidarity or conformity
- leads to unified/single homogeneous action
- leads to group think which can discourage dissent
- is artificial—create solidarity in whatever way possible
- success = there is general agreement on what to do

### COMMON GROUND

- goal is mutual understanding
- agree on underlying values (or overlapping interests) even if disagree on which actions get us there
- end with stronger connections/community
- may lead to public action
- leads to mutual understanding of differences and how we can act even with those differences
- is organic—mutual understanding is uncovered or emerges as people explore what's important to them
- success = there is mutual understanding which creates possibilities for complementary action

## Debate, Discussion, Deliberative Dialogue

DELIBERATION is a particular kind of talk. It is the kind of talking that people do when they realize that they are responsible for making decisions and choices—or giving guidance to others who will make those decisions—that will not only affect them but will affect others and will also have costs and consequences along with the good things that may happen. Deliberation is hard work. People work at looking at the pros and cons of each approach, or perspective.

That means making a real effort to find out how other people see the issue and, more importantly, why they see it the way they do. In deliberation, this means listening to the people you don't agree with as carefully as to the people you do agree with.

It is, of course, possible to have a great discussion about issues and problems, sharing opinions, personal experiences, and favorite solutions. And that's a fine, and often satisfying thing to do. Or it is possible to debate an issue, presenting evidence supporting your chosen view, countering and undercutting the arguments that others present for their chosen views, persuading and trying to win by presenting the best and most eloquent argument. But with deliberation talk goes beyond just discussion or debate to trying to understand the problem together and to finding solutions that will be best for everyone. Deliberation happens when a group of people work on a problem as if solving it is up to them and no one else, and when they recognize that they and others will be living with the consequences, both good and bad, of the choices they make.

### DEBATE

- Winners and Losers
- Search for glaring differences
- Search for weakness in other positions
- Counter another's position at the expense of the relationship
- Invest wholeheartedly in your beliefs
- Listen to find flaws and counter arguments
- Is oppositional and seeks to prove the other wrong
- The goal is winning
- Defends assumptions as truth

**Most useful when: A position or course of action is being advocated and winning is the goal.**

### DISCUSSION

- Back and forth exchange of information, stories, experiences, viewpoints...
- May focus on a topic, theme, idea, problems, issues, etc., may be broad or focused
- A generic term meaning talking together
- Focuses on the experience of talking without any particular goal or desired outcomes
- May be between two people or among many
- May mean many kinds of talking together (such as a deliberative discussion, informative discussion, debate, dialogue, etc.)
- Usually implies participants are not adversarial or competing as in debate

**Most useful when: People want to talk together about something without desiring any particular outcome from the conversation.**

### DELIBERATIVE DIALOGUE

- Goal is shared understanding of the issue/problem
- Examining costs and consequences of even most favored approaches
- Assumes that many people have pieces of answer and workable solution
- Listening to understand and find meaning
- Presents assumptions for re-evaluation
- Opens possibilities for new solutions
- Leads to mutual understanding of differences and ways to act even with those differences
- People explore what's important to them and other's by asking questions

**Most useful when: A decision or criteria for a decision, about the best way(s) to approach an issue or problem is needed.**

## Community Conversation Small Group Seating Chart

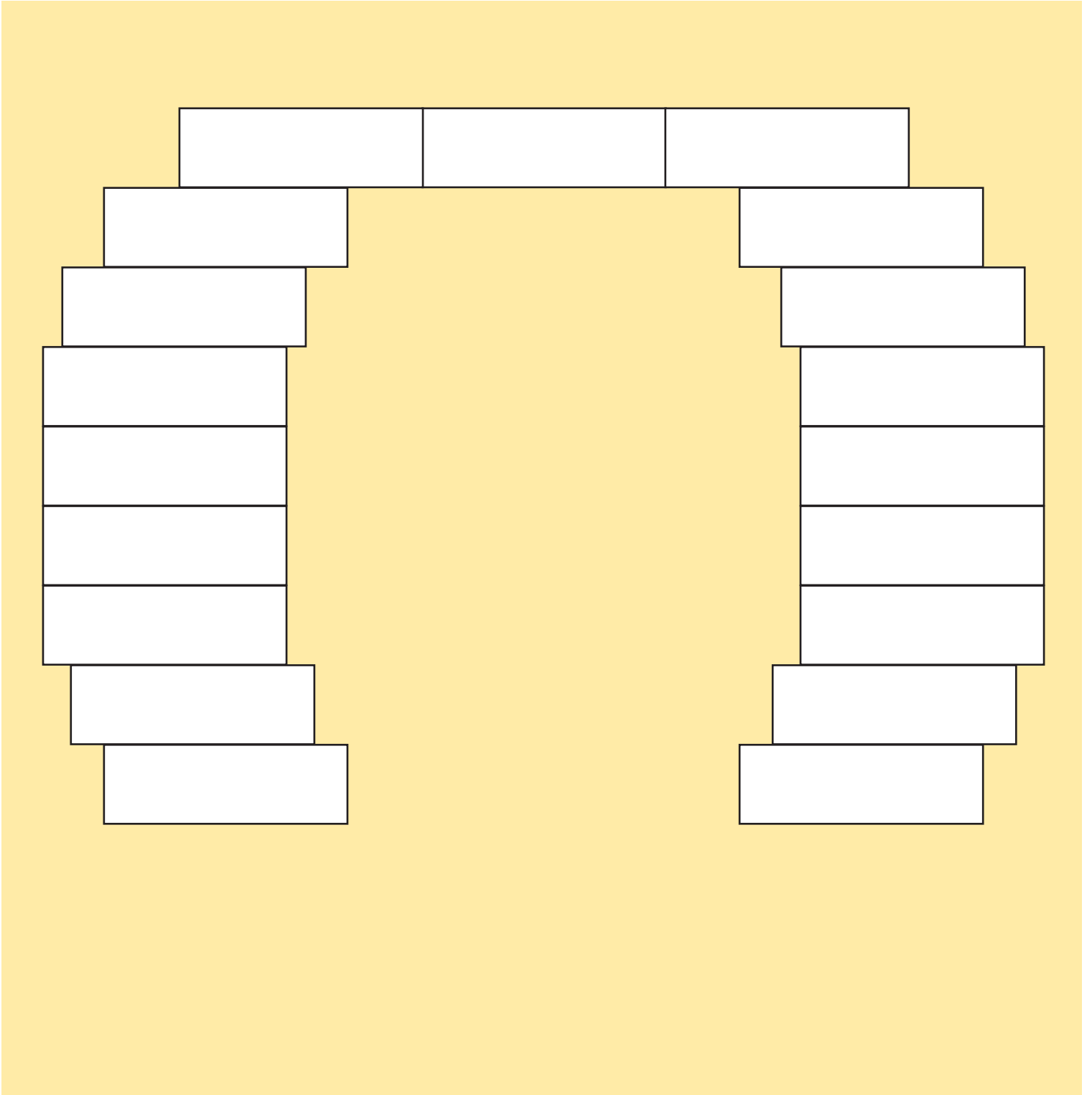


Photo by Karla Woodworth





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