ONE SMALL STEP
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One Small Step: Great Questions for Meaningful Connection Across Differences

This document is a companion to the Conversation Road Map and supports its use. While the roadmap provides the core framework and essential questions for your OSS journey, this offers additional "back pocket" questions for when conversations need depth, further exploration, or to keep meaningful dialogue flowing. Draw on these to enhance authentic dialogue across differences.

OPENING

- Why did you want to participate in One Small Step? Why are you here today?

BACKGROUND & GROWING UP

- Tell me about your life growing up... (household members, demographics, geography, economy, faith background, education, favorite activities)
- What was life like for you growing up? How is life different now, for you? What was your understanding of politics growing up like? Do you remember when you first became aware of politics?

EXPERIENCES

- What do you do (or want to do) for a living? Tell me about how you became interested in this. What do you like about this field?
- What do you like about where you live? What needs to improve?
- Is there something about you that you think no one else knows?
- What have you learned from life so far? Where did you learn this? What happened?
- What are you most proud of in the past year?
- What was your experience during the pandemic lockdown?
- If you could talk to a younger version of yourself, what would you say?

DIFFICULTY AND LOSS

- Can you remember a time in your life when you felt most alone?
- What has helped you the most in your grief?
- How do you take care of yourself when life is emotionally taxing?

HOPES AND FEARS

- Is there a recent moment in your life that caused you stress or discomfort? Is there a recent moment that brought you joy or relief?
- Is there an experience you've had or witnessed that brings you hope and/or makes you fearful for our country's future? What happened?
- Thinking about the future of the country, what are your fears or concerns?

INFLUENTIAL PEOPLE

- Can you tell me about someone who has been kindest to you in your life?
- Who has been the most influential person in your life beyond your parents? What did they teach you?
- Was there a teacher who had a particularly strong influence on your life? Tell me about them.
- Have you ever felt inspired by a political figure positively or negatively? Who? When?

RELATIONSHIPS

- Tell me about a friendship that has shaped who you are today...
- Can you share a moment when a relationship felt meaningful to you?
- What qualities make someone a meaningful presence in your life?
- What makes a romantic relationship feel fulfilling to you?
- What's a lesson you've learned from a past relationship that you carry forward?

IDENTITY & BELONGING

- How do you spend your time? What do you do for work/fun?
- Was there a moment when you felt misunderstood by people who have different political beliefs from you? When?
- What assumptions do people make about you? About your political beliefs?
- Was there ever a time when people who share similar views made you uncomfortable? What happened?
- Can you talk about a time you felt differently from your family?
- Where do you feel most comfortable?
- Have you ever felt disconnected or out of place? What helped, or what do you wish had been different?
- What gifts do you bring to your community?
- Do you ever feel different from a "typical" person in your community?
- Tell me about where your family is from... (country or countries of origin, history of presence in the United States)
- What language do you use at home? What language do you use at work/school?
- How have your family's cultural traditions influenced you?

RELIGIOUS/SPIRITUAL BELIEFS

- Tell me about your spiritual beliefs. How does your faith impact your political views?
- Have your spiritual beliefs evolved over time?
- Who in your life has most influenced your spiritual beliefs?
- Are there differences in religious perspectives within your family?
- Where do you feel comfortable practicing your religion?
- Have you ever felt your religion was misunderstood?
- Do you ever feel different from a "typical" member of your religious group?

POLITICAL BELIEFS

- Could you briefly describe, in your own words, your personal political values?
- Do you identify with a political party? Why or why not?
- Was there a moment or experience in your life that helped shape your beliefs?
- Who in your life has most influenced your political beliefs?
- Have your political views evolved over time?
- Is there anything you wish your own "side" would stop doing?
- Have you ever felt patriotic or unpatriotic? When? What does patriotism mean to you?
- In your opinion, what are the most important political issues we should focus on as a nation?
- Have political discussions strained any of your relationships with friends, family, coworkers or classmates?
- Are there any issues that motivate you to engage? What is extremely important to you? Why? How did you come to these beliefs?
- Have you ever had an experience or witnessed something that changed the way you view the United States?
- How has your family history of immigration or experience of immigration or immigrants influenced your views, if at all?
- Is there anything you admire about people on "the other side of the aisle"?
- Is there someone you disagree with politically but still respect? If so, why?
- What is it that people say about "your side" that is most surprising or unexpected?
- Was there ever a time where you felt doubt in your political beliefs?
- Is there anything about the current political climate that you do not like?
- How has this (policy, belief, etc.) affected your life?

QUESTIONS ABOUT YOUR CONVERSATION PARTNER

- What did you think when you first read my bio?

- Is there something about my beliefs that you don't agree with but still respect?
- Is there anything about me that surprised you?
- What was your biggest concern coming into this interview/meeting me? Did that change?
- Is there anything new you've learned from our conversation?
- Do you think there's anything we agree on?
- What do you want me to understand about you?

INTERGENERATIONAL QUESTIONS

- What's an impactful event you witnessed?
- How has technology changed something important in your life? What's better or worse about that change?
- How has your idea of 'community' changed over time?
- How is your definition of success different from your parents' generation?
- What are some of your proudest moments?
- How and where do you envision yourself in the future?
- Is there anything you wish your generation would stop doing?
- What do you wish people understood about your generation?

CAMPUS LIFE EXPERIENCES

- What surprised you most about campus when you first arrived?
- What is one way you feel (or felt) different from a "typical" student here?
- What is (or was) your favorite place on campus?
- Who do (or did) you look up to on campus?
- Tell me about a pivotal moment in your college experience...
- If you weren't studying _____, what would you have done as an alternative?
- Where, on campus, do you feel most comfortable?

HIGH SCHOOL

- If you could go back and tell your younger self something, what would it be?
- What do you think the biggest challenges are that students face in our school? What could be done to address those challenges?
- In your opinion, what is the most important part of school? Why does it matter?
- How do you think AI is affecting youth, both in good and bad ways? What can we do about these effects?
- What does it feel like to be respected?
    - Do you feel respected by teachers? Why or Why not?
    - Do you feel respected by other students? Why, why not?
- Tell me about a time you've changed your mind about something. What caused the shift?
- What role do you see yourself playing in society or your community right now?
- In your opinion, what character traits are the most admirable? Why?
- Do you prefer to do activities by yourself or with a team? Why?
- What's challenging about going to school in a (rural/urban/etc.) area like (insert county)? What do you think people outside our community might not understand about the issues we face here?
- Tell me about a favorite trip you took. Why was it special?
- What, if anything, about living here motivates or encourages you? Why?
- How do you think school is different for you then it was for your parents? Why?

COMMUNITY CONNECTION QUESTIONS

COMMUNITY EXPERIENCES

- What first brought you to [community name]? What has kept you here?
- What's your favorite hidden gem in our community that more people should know about?

- Can you share a memory of a local event, celebration, or tradition that made you feel most connected to this community?
- How has [community name] changed since you've been here? What changes have you welcomed and which ones concern you?
- What public spaces in our community do you value most and why?
- If you could preserve one thing about our community for future generations, what would it be?

COMMUNITY NEEDS & ASPIRATIONS

- What do you see as the greatest strength of our community?
- What do you think is the biggest challenge facing our community right now?
- If you had the power to improve one thing about [community name], what would it be and why?
- What resources or services do you wish were more accessible in our community?
- How do you think different generations experience our community differently?
- What gives you hope about the future of our community?

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

- Have you ever volunteered locally? What motivated you to get involved?
- What local issues have inspired you to take action or speak up?
- How do you stay informed about what's happening in our community?
- Do you feel your voice is heard in local decision-making? Why or why not?
- Can you think of a time when our community came together during a difficult situation?
- What do you think prevents people from being more engaged in local issues?

COMMUNITY BELONGING

- When have you felt most welcomed or included in our community?
- Have you ever felt like an outsider in [community name]? What happened?
- How do you think different groups experience our community differently?
- What bridges do you see being built across different parts of our community?
- What traditions or cultural aspects of our community are most meaningful to you?
- How might we make [community name] more welcoming for everyone?

LOCAL CONNECTIONS

- Who are the "community builders" you most admire locally? What impact have they had?
- Have you formed any unexpected friendships or connections through community activities?
- How do you think technology has changed how people connect locally?
- What local businesses or organizations do you feel contribute most to our community's character?
- When was a time you saw people with different viewpoints work together effectively in our community?
- What do you think most people misunderstand about our community?

VISION FOR THE FUTURE

- What would make you feel more optimistic about our community's future?
- How do you hope [community name] will be different in 10 years?
- What wisdom or advice would you share with someone new to our community?
- What local story or perspective do you think deserves more attention?
- If you could create a new community tradition or event, what would it be?
- How do you think our community could better bridge political divides?

SECOND CONVERSATION QUESTIONS

- Why did you want to talk again?
- What has your life been like since our first conversation?
- What did you take away from our first conversation?
- Has it changed the way you see or interact with people who are different from you?
- What is something that we didn't talk about in our first conversation that you would like to talk about now?
- What would you have done differently, if anything in your last conversation?
- What did you find you and your conversation partner had in common?
- What differences/different viewpoints did you find?
- Is there anything from the last conversation that stayed with you? What? Why?

FOR PARTICIPANTS WHO KNOW EACH OTHER

- Is there anything about the way that we talk to each other about politics that frustrates you?
- Why do you think we fight over politics?
- How have our political differences impacted our relationship?
- Why do you think we've grown to have such different beliefs?
- Is there anything about my worldview that you respect?
- What good, if any, do you sense comes from our differences?
- What are your hopes for our relationship?
- What are your hopes for our country's future?

QUESTIONS TO GET THE CONVERSATION BACK ON TRACK

If they've been focused on an issue for too long or it's turning into a debate:

- Tell [the other participant] why this particular law is so important to you.

- Can you define what [the term that you're using] means to you?
- Was there a moment when you started to feel that way?
- Was there a person who made you feel that way?
- [To the other participant] How does it feel to hear that?
- Transition questions, ex. When did you start to change your mind about ___?
- Descriptions and portraits of people that shaped political beliefs (classic "paint me a picture" portrait questions)

CLOSING

- What do you think you'll take away/with you from this experience?
- Is there anything you learned about me today that you didn't expect?
- What is something you were hoping we would discuss today?
- How would you like to be remembered?
- How can we come together after difficult times?
- Is there anything else you wanted to ask me today but didn't get the chance?
- Can you think of anything you respect about the way the other sees the world?
- Do you have any regrets?
- What are your hopes for the future?
- We might not have a "shared vision" for the future, but how would you begin to think about a vision for a "future that we can both share?"

ADD YOUR OWN QUESTIONS!

Is there something about your partner, or in your partner's bio you're curious about?

Is there an issue on which you have a different point of view and you would like to understand better how your partner came to their beliefs?

Have you shared a similar experience with your partner and you'd like to know how they navigated that time?

Do you share similar passions or hobbies?

- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____

Looking for even MORE questions? Visit
https://storycorps.org/participate/great-questions/