

MEETING THE MOMENT THROUGH CIVIC CIRCLES

This summer, you and scores of others will facilitate Civic Circles across Kansas. Why? Because people in towns and cities around the state – and the nation – are yearning for fellowship, a connection to common purpose, and a bigger story of ‘us.’

As someone who cares about the future of your community, our country and the health of our democracy, you may be feeling stressed, exhausted, or activated. In the face of immense challenges, the need to strengthen civic culture – by practicing the skills of citizenship – feels as urgent as ever. We need experiences that help us resist the pull of polarization, that counter the ways we’re tearing ourselves apart, and that help us weave ourselves back together.

Civic Circles offer space to do just that; to channel feelings of hope and fear into constructive dialogue, to practice curiosity, to speak with courage, to sharpen listening skills, and to build willingness to – and confidence that we can – “stay at the table together” even when things get hard, even in the midst of deep disagreement about how to address pressing problems.

In hosting a Civic Circle, you will:

Bring friends and strangers together to nurture a spirit of shared purpose; to help the group remember that we’re all parts of the same story, even as we hold different identities or ideas.

Use texts and/or music to **spark connection, and reflection** about why and how to recommit to one another as Kansans and as Americans – despite and because of those differences.

Use discussion questions to **facilitate important conversations** about what that recommitment requires and looks like in practice.

Using the Civic Circle Facilitator’s Guide

We’ve created this guide to help you **host a gathering that motivates people to resist polarization and to recommit to “others”** – so that we can face challenges more effectively, and live more meaningfully, together. While this might seem like a tall order, we bet you’ll find the experience engaging, constructive...even joyful!

The guide contains some tips for planning, and a curated array of music, poetry, civic scripture and discussion questions you can choose from, to focus and structure the experience. Use what resonates, and make the Civic Circle your own.

STEP 1

Consider your hopes for this Civic Circle – and who you will invite to participate. How could a gathering like this serve your community right now? Having a clear sense of why you're hosting this can inform who you want to bring together. That, in turn, can help you determine what to focus on, and how you will facilitate.

STEP 2

Review the suggested content below, and find what works for you. Maybe you want to jump directly to the discussion questions to dig deep into themes of polarization, *healthy* conflict, and what it looks like to embody change. Perhaps you'll [also] share poetry, music (or other art) that moves the heart and invites more spontaneous reflection. The choice is yours!

STEP 3

Set an intention for yourself or your group. How do you want to feel during the Civic Circle? How much do you want to be facilitating vs engaging as a participant yourself? Think through what elements and activities will help you, and other group members, feel focused and fortified through this experience.

STEP 4

Chart your own adventure. Equipped with these ideas and resources, it's time to bring your participants together – to bring this Civic Circle to life. Just remember this key recipe for impact: *connection, reflection, inspiration, activation*. Now go forth and gather!

Choosing Content

The central theme and goal for the Civic Circle is to **recognize and resist the rising challenge of polarization – and to inspire people to recommit to “others”** as Americans. We're not talking about fluffy-but-empty friendliness, or false unity. Rather, cultivating a willingness to find, nurture, and *earn faith* in one another by shifting the ways we relate to and engage with each other.

While it may be appealing to slide right into discussion, remember that there's a certain magic in different forms of media! Quiet intention setting, singing or listening to songs, and taking in texts – together – can open our hearts and minds to new ideas, and to one another, in profound ways. Consider how to use some of the possibilities on the pages that follow, or other selections you find:

Reflecting Together

This is the heartbeat of the Civic Circle! These or similar questions offer a way to:

- Face the civic culture challenges in your community, and the country, together.
- Share personal experiences, questions and insights about why good faith citizenship, and coming together across differences matter...building self-awareness and confidence-in-community along the way.
- Practice skills that enable constructive dialogue and strengthen civic culture: authentic sharing, deep listening, asking curious questions, reflecting back what someone said, etc.
- Co-create an energizing, connective experience; one that gives a taste of what healthier democracy can look and feel like *beyond* the gathering, if folks help build it!

Pick a few of these questions to discuss. You might want to zero in on one theme, or you could select a question from each area. Or, you could develop your own prompts. Consider your original hopes and intentions for the Civic Circle – and determine what will best serve you and the group!

Polarization and Conflict	Health Community, Healthy Democracy	Embodying Change
<p>How would you describe the culture of civic life in our community, or across the country right now?</p> <p>Where and how have you noticed or experienced polarization in public? (Think about <i>and beyond</i> political party affiliation!)</p> <p>How have you been personally impacted by polarization, conflict, or tension in our community and the country?</p>	<p>Why are a variety of perspectives and approaches to solving problems necessary?</p> <p>What is at stake if we stay, or retreat further into our own ideological corners?</p> <p>What does <i>healthy</i> conflict look like? What might it look like for us to engage in healthy conflict together?</p>	<p>Looking back on the last several months, when and how have you found yourself discounting or dismissing “those people”? Why?</p> <p>What are you curious about, in the midst of such seemingly entrenched polarization? What are you willing to change your mind about?</p> <p>What commitments do you want to make in the coming year, to help strengthen our community and civic culture?</p>

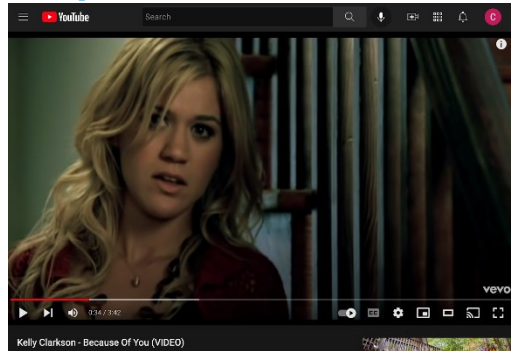
Appendix- Examples of Media and Texts to Use

Music:

Johnny Cash - "One" (U2 cover)



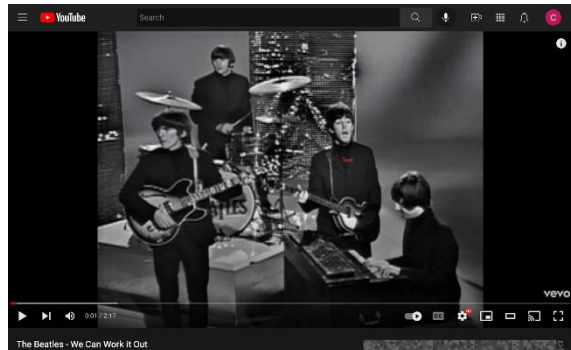
Kelly Clarkson - "Because of You"



Ben E. King - "Stand by Me"



The Beatles - "We Can Work It Out"



Poetry:

- [Renaissance Garden: Poem: Origami Emotion \(renaissancegardenblog.blogspot.com\)](http://renaissancegardenblog.blogspot.com)
- [Sanctuary by Jean Valentine | Poetry Foundation](http://Poetry Foundation)
- [Per Aspera Ad Astra by Huascar Medina – The Coop: A Poetry Cooperative \(wordpress.com\)](http://wordpress.com)

Examples Civic Text:

[Lincoln's First Inaugural Address | American Battlefield Trust \(battlefields.org\)](#)

[Susan B. Anthony's "On Women's Right to Vote" | Nolo](#)

Additional Resources

Looking for other materials that can support healthy conversation during your Civic Circle? Check out the work of our friends and partners:

- Priya Parker's [The New Rules of Gathering](#), "a guide to planning with purpose for any occasion" – in ways that create connections between people
- [Living Room Conversations](#), a methodology for dialoguing across difference

[The Better Arguments Project](#) for, well, having better arguments