

Conversation Guide: Poverty & Homelessness in Utah

*A [Bolder Way Forward](#) for Utah and Living Room Conversations (LRC) are partnering to offer a simple, sociable, and structured way to practice communicating across differences while building understanding and relationships. This is one of a series that are available at the local and state levels in a variety of settings (e.g., workplaces, universities, schools, communities, faith-based organizations, and homes). Typically, 4-6 people meet in person or by video call for about 60 minutes to listen to and be heard by others on one of our nearly 160+ [topics](#). Rather than debating or convincing others, we take turns talking to share, learn, and be curious. No preparation is required, though background links are available on some topic pages online. Anyone can host using these italicized instructions. *Hosts also participate.**

I. Introductions: Why We're Here (~5 minutes)

Each participant has about 1 minute to introduce themselves.

- Share your name, where you live, what drew you here, and if this is your first conversation.

II. Conversation Agreements: How We'll Engage (~4 minutes)

These will set the tone of our conversation; participants may volunteer to take turns reading them aloud.

- **Be curious and listen to understand.** Conversation is as much about listening as it is about talking. You might enjoy exploring how others' experiences have shaped their values and perspectives.
- **Show respect and suspend judgment.** People tend to judge one another. Setting judgement aside opens you up to learning from others and makes them feel respected and appreciated. Try to truly listen, without interruption or crosstalk.
- **Note any common ground as well as any differences.** Look for areas of agreement or shared values that may arise and take an interest in the differing beliefs and opinions of others.
- **Be authentic and welcome that from others.** Share what's important to you. Speak from your experience. Be considerate of others who are doing the same.
- **Be purposeful and to the point.** Do your best to keep your comments concise and relevant to the question you are answering. Be conscious of sharing airtime with other participants.
- **Own and guide the conversation.** Take responsibility for the quality of your participation and the conversation as a whole. Be proactive in getting yourself and others back on track if needed. Use an agreed upon signal like the "time out" sign if you feel the agreements are not being honored.

III. Question Rounds: What We'll Talk About

Optional: a participant can keep track of time and gently let people know when their time has elapsed.

Round One: Getting to Know Each Other (~6 min)

Each participant can take 1-2 minutes to answer one of these questions:

- What are your hopes and concerns for your family, community, and/or the country?
- What would your best friend say about who you are?
- What sense of purpose / mission / duty guides you in your life?

Round Two: Exploring the Topic – Poverty & Homelessness in Utah (~30 min)

One participant can volunteer to read this paragraph.

Poverty and homelessness are serious community concerns nearly everywhere and that includes Utah. Even though we rank better on this metric than most other states, over 36% of single mothers with young children in Utah will be living in poverty. The hope is that everyone has access to safe, decent, affordable housing with the needed resources and supports for self-sufficiency and well-being. Regarding homelessness, lack of affordable housing and addiction support, changes in employment, unexpected medical emergencies, mental health, gender-based violence, trauma, and stagnant wages all contribute to a growing homeless or unhoused population in our state.

Take ~2 minutes each to answer a question below without interruption or crosstalk. After everyone has answered, the group may take a few minutes for clarifying or follow up questions/responses. Continue exploring additional questions as time allows.

- Why are you interested and/or concerned about poverty and homelessness in Utah?
- What do you see contributing to poverty and homelessness in your community?
- What experience have you, or those close to you, had with housing insecurity? What were some contributing factors?
- What has been your personal response to unhoused individuals you've seen? What assumptions do you find yourself making?
- What do you expect from your city, county, state or federal government with regard to poverty and homelessness?
- What is our responsibility as members of a community to people of all ages who are struggling with poverty and/or homelessness?

Round Three: Reflecting on the Conversation (~10 min)

Take 2 minutes to answer one of the following questions:

- What was most meaningful / valuable to you in this Living Room Conversation?
- What learning, new understanding or common ground was found on the topic?
- How has this conversation changed your perception of anyone in this group, including yourself?
- Is there a next step you would like to take based upon the conversation you just had?

Closing (~5 min)

- Join *A Bolder Way Forward* by checking out www.abolderwayforward.org. If you want to be involved, take the [Individual Interest Survey](#) or the [Organizational Interest Survey](#).
- Join or host more conversations through livingroomconversations.org. Support more conversations like this one by [donating](#) with the note "Community Conversations."

Thank you!