

SENSE OF PLACE

MAGNETIC NORTH: THE ALASKAN CHARACTER

ROY MADSEN



KINDLING CONVERSATION GUIDE

OUR PURPOSE

This Kindling Conversation Planning Guide supports an intentional community conversation with a specific purpose: to explore the experiences that shape our understanding of leadership and community in Alaska.

OUR GUIDING QUESTION

At the heart of this community conversation is a question that matters to everyone and that everyone can answer:

HOW DOES WHERE WE'RE FROM INFLUENCE THE WAY WE LEAD?

OUR SPRINGBOARD FOR CONVERSATION

The Kindling Conversation Toolkit provides a springboard to help jump the conversation about trailblazing. The Magnetic North film about Roy Madsen offers a shared experience that everyone can respond to, whether or not they identify themselves as a community leader.

THE CONVERSATION GUIDE

Community conversations like this one need a facilitator to keep them on track. You may act as the facilitator, or you may ask someone else to fulfill that role. The facilitator is not an expert on the subject; they are not there to teach or explain.

Instead, the facilitator works to ensure as many participants as possible feel welcome, included, and engaged in the discussion. The facilitator will use the structure provided below to keep the conversation on track and create a transparent flow.

THE CONVERSATION FLOW

This conversation guide walks you through leading a community conversation designed to encourage participants to connect to one another. The flow of the conversation is structured to deepen the conversation gradually and ensure every participant has the opportunity to share their perspective in a way that is comfortable for them.



1. WELCOME: Introduce the discussion and set expectations.



2. CONNECT: Get comfortable and get to know each other.



3. EXPERIENCE: Find common ground through shared experience.



4. DISCUSS: Explore different responses and perspectives.



5. CLOSE: Reveal insights from the conversation.

1. WELCOME



INTRODUCE THE DISCUSSION AND SET EXPECTATIONS. [~5 MINUTES]

Before people arrive, prepare the space and any handouts or posters you plan to use.

- Thank everyone for making the time to come.
- Review “**housekeeping**”: parking (if relevant), bathrooms, emergency exits, food... Ask everyone to turn their phones on silent if they haven’t done so already.
- Make a brief **land acknowledgment** statement.
- Describe the **Purpose** of the conversation:

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- Introduce **Magnetic North Project**:

Magnetic North is a documentary film project produced by Alaska Humanities Forum in partnership with Rasmuson Foundation. The series explores the personality and character of six Alaskans whose actions and ideas have shaped the history, spirit, and values of our state. Collectively, they challenge preconceived notions of the Last Frontier, promote a richer understanding of its unique identity, and speak to our shared experience of life in contemporary Alaska.

- Introduce the **Guiding Question** aloud:

HOW DOES WHERE WE'RE FROM INFLUENCE THE WAY WE LEAD?

- Review the **Four Agreements**:

(listen hard, embrace complexity, take risks, be present).

Ask if anyone wants to add another agreement, and if not, if everyone is OK with these four.

2. CONNECT



GET COMFORTABLE AND GET TO KNOW EACH OTHER.

[TIME VARIES BY NUMBER OF PARTICIPANTS. WE ESTIMATE (60 SECONDS) X (# OF PARTICIPANTS) FOR INTRODUCTIONS.]

Introductions: Go around the circle and have everyone introduce themselves with their preferred name, their gender pronouns if they feel comfortable sharing it, and a brief story from your childhood when you broke a rule.

Share a brief story from your childhood when you broke a rule. Ask people to keep their answers brief (30 seconds or less) - we'll have plenty of time to get to know one another better.

Writing Exercise: Have each person take a piece of paper and pen and free-write in response to the following prompt: *Choose a place that has influenced your life. Describe the personality of that place. How does this personality change through the seasons? Your lifetime?*

Let everyone know they will have 6 minutes to write, and you will let them know when there is 1 minute left so they have a chance to wrap up their thoughts. They will not be asked to share what they've written with anyone else.

In Large Group: Reconvene in the large group, and ask if anyone would like to share reflections or realizations that came out of the silent exercise.

The time will vary by the number of participants and willingness to share. We recommend spending no longer than 10 minutes sharing responses.

3. EXPERIENCE



FIND COMMON GROUND THROUGH SHARED EXPERIENCE. [~25 MINUTES]

- As a group, watch the [Magnetic North: Roy Madsen](#) film.
- URL: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FKvrM-bwEi0&feature=youtu.be>

4. DISCUSS



EXPLORE DIFFERENT RESPONSES AND PERSPECTIVES. [TIME VARIES. MAKE SURE TO LEAVE AT LEAST 10 MINUTES FOR THE CLOSE, AND 20 MINUTES FOR A GROUP OF MORE THAN 15 PEOPLE.]

- Let everyone know the rest of the conversation will be as a whole group.
- Take a moment to review the **Four Agreements** and the **Purpose** of the conversation.
- Before launching into the discussion, encourage the group to talk to one another, not just to you. Let them know it is ok for them to throw out questions, and there is no need to raise hands before speaking.

WITH GROUPS OF 15 OR LESS...

- Ask if there is anyone who would like to **share a quote or scene from the film that particularly resonated** with them. Then follow up, **why did it resonate?** Ask if anyone else had a similar reaction...
- Let the conversation go from there. Don't be afraid of silences! Count to 20 in your head before jumping in.
- The conversation may naturally begin to address the guiding questions, but if it doesn't, ask them directly!
 - How does where we're from influence the way we lead?
- **If you want people to dig deeper into an idea or story, you might consider these questions:**
 - Does that resonate with anyone else? Why?
 - Can you tell a story to illustrate that?
 - What do you mean when you say _____?
- **If you want to shift to something new, you might ask:**
 - At the beginning of the film, Madsen looks to the trees surrounding him for inspiration. In what other ways can the natural world inspire us?
 - At one point in the film, someone describing Madsen says "he is the island". In another moment, someone says, "He was the people's judge. He was Kodiak." What do you think was meant by these statements? Can one person embody a place?

4. DISCUSS



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- In what ways do you think the way we are influenced by place is unique to Alaska? In what ways does this transcend geography?
 - How do you think Madsen's relationship to Kodiak changed when he decided to leave and then come back? Does this experience of leaving a place you deeply identify resonate with any of you? Have you returned since?

WITH GROUPS OF 15+

- Let everyone know that you'll be breaking into **smaller discussion groups**. In your toolkit, there is a resource titled "**Breaking into Smaller Groups**" which explains an easy and organized way to break into small groups efficiently.
- **Give everyone the following instructions:**
 - Once you are in your small groups, go around the circle and share your name again and one quick (30-seconds or less).
 - After the last person shares, the first person reads the guiding question aloud.
 - Then it is up to the group to discuss on their own.
- Remind participants that listening hard means everyone in the group should listen more than they talk.
- Make sure everyone knows the time when they are supposed to come back together as a group. Make sure to leave at least 20 minutes for the closing.
- Drop by each group to let them know the 10 minutes, 5 minutes, and 1 minute remaining marks.

5. CLOSE



REVEAL INSIGHTS FROM THE CONVERSATION. [~10 MINUTES WITH GROUPS OF 15 OR LESS, ~20 MINUTES FOR GROUPS OF MORE THAN 15]

- To transition out of the discussion, **summarize** what has happened so far:

Today, we explored one facet of what it means to be a leader in Alaska, and asked ourselves and each other: How does where we're from influence the way we lead? This is just the beginning of the conversation, and I hope you all leave here today with a desire to continue thinking, reflecting and sharing on these themes.

- Sit in silence for one minute to allow people time to reflect.
- Go around the circle one more time, with each person sharing one thought they would like to leave the group with, and one thought they will be taking with them.
- Once everyone has shared, take a moment to **give thanks**:
 - Thank you first and foremost to Roy for sharing his story with us and to Marla Williams for directing this beautiful film.
 - Thank you to our sponsors, the Alaska Humanities Forum and Rasmuson Foundation.
 - And thank you to all of you, who came to this conversation today, who listened generously, and who shared your stories. When you make time for events like these, you make time for your community. Thank you.
- Ask everyone to please fill out a quick survey before they leave. Their feedback is critical for improving future conversations and for ensuring continued support for community gatherings like this one. If nothing else, please answer the “zip code” question on the form, as submitting at least that piece is a requirement of the stipend.

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