

FLEXIBILITY

MAGNETIC NORTH: THE ALASKAN CHARACTER

BILL SHEFFIELD



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:

DO WE EVER LIVE UP TO OUR OWN EXPECTATIONS?

OUR SPRINGBOARD FOR CONVERSATION

The Kindling Conversation Toolkit provides a springboard to help jump the conversation about trailblazing. The Magnetic North film about Bill Sheffield 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:

DO WE EVER LIVE UP TO OUR OWN EXPECTATIONS?

- 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 what their dream job was as a kid.

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: Write about a time when your plans did not end in the outcome you expected. What did you learn from this experience?

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.

Reflect in pairs: In pairs, reflect on what came up for you during the writing reflection. You do not have to share the specific experience you wrote about with your partner if you don't want to.

Let everyone know they will have 6 minutes to share in pairs, and you will let them know when they've reached the halfway mark so that each person has an opportunity to share..

3. EXPERIENCE



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

- As a group, watch the [Magnetic North: Bill Sheffield](#) film.
- URL: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4rX7qyw0nyg>

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!
 - Do we ever live up to our own expectations?
- **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:**
 - In the film, Sheffield says "I'm not the smartest rat in the room, I'm not the best public speaker, but I have something more important than any of those things: the ability to dream big and move forward." How did this ability shape Sheffield's life and career? What holds us back from moving forward?

4. DISCUSS



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- How has the state of Alaska been shaped by the willingness of its residents and leaders to change direction?
 - Sheffield said, “My story embodies the complicated reality of life.” Did you find this to be true? In what ways?

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: Do we ever live up to our own expectations? 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 idea or feeling they will be **taking** with them from this conversation.
- Once everyone has shared, take a moment to **give thanks**:
 - Thank you first and foremost to Bill 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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