ACROSS THE AISLE

WELCOME SCRIPT

Good afternoon, as you come into the room, please grab a handout. On the back, you’ll find a copy of the survey you filled out. Quickly recalculate your “number” and form a small group of around four people with a range of scores. Then grab food, sit together, and say hello.

[[continue after everyone has sat down]]

[[offer any acknowledgments, e.g. thanking funders or student organizers]]

And thank you for showing up! The goal of Across the Aisle is to bring people with different points of view back into conversation. In this polarized political climate, it’s to easy to parody, demonize, and “other” people who disagree. In reality, people’s views are much more nuanced than the soundbites portrayed in media. Through discourse, will find more overlap and more room for compromise through mutual understanding. Across the Aisle is an opportunity to share and learn, not to debate or persuade.

[[At this point, I usually ask people to make sure they’re not sitting only with friends. Something like: “Everyone, please point with your left hand to someone in your group who is not your friend yet and with your right hand to someone who has a different score from you. If both hands aren’t pointing, please get up and move to a different group.”]]

We ask that you go into your discussions with that spirit. Start by introducing yourselves: name, year, what you will do this summer. And then launch right into conversation about [[the topic]]. On the handouts, you’ll find three prompts that can help get conversation going, but there’s no need to limit yourselves to them. Let the conversation move organically. The prompts and background information were prepared by non-experts on a best-efforts basis. If you think something is wrong or poorly phrased, that could be a something you raise in your group.

All of the topics we discuss at Across the Aisle are contested and potentially heated. That’s why we do this. Some people in this room in this room likely have very personal experience with [[the topic]]. Whatever your perspective, please the discussion calm and reciprocal. If you feel your temper rising, it’s totally fine to ask to shift topic or to take a break to grab more [[lunch item]].

It's equally important to avoid being or seeming dismissive. Some simple linguistic rules can help. Try acknowledging what someone has said and whatever validity you can see in it before moving to your own contribution. No one should censor their view; that truly diminishes the value of this event. We’re all here to learn from people who disagree with us. Sometimes simple rephrasing can help. Rather than saying, “You say X, but Y is true,” try something like, “I hear you on X, but what would you make of this thing Y that I recently heard in a podcast.”

Lastly, if you find yourselves at an impasse, feel free to raise your hand and I or another organizer will come over. Sometimes a third party can help move things cordially along.

[[move on to introduce expert speaker]]