Affordable Housing and the American Dream
11.16.17

Overview
In Living Room Conversations, a small group of people (e.g. 4-7) come together to get to know one another in a meaningful way. Guided by a simple and sociable format, participants will practice being open and curious about all perspectives, with a focus on learning from and about one another. This is not a debate; it is a conversation.

The Living Room Conversation Ground Rules

Be Curious and Open to Learning
Listen to and be open to hearing all points of view. Maintain an attitude of exploration and learning. Conversation is as much about listening as it is about talking.

Show Respect and Suspend Judgment
Human beings tend to judge one another, do your best not to. Setting judgments aside will better enable you to learn from others and show respect and appreciation.

Look for Common Ground and Appreciate Differences
In this conversation, we look for what we agree on and simply appreciate that we will disagree on some beliefs and opinions.

Be Authentic and Welcome that from Others
Share what’s important to you. Speak authentically from your personal and heartfelt experience. Be considerate to others who are doing the same.

Be Purposeful and to the Point
Notice if what you are conveying is or is not “on purpose” to the question at hand. Notice if you are making the same point more than once.
Rounds/Questions: The Living Room Conversation Starts Here

While Silicon Valley’s economy is marked by steady job growth, declining unemployment rates and high median wages compared to the state and nation, housing costs are causing widespread economic distress among many low- and middle-income residents. Silicon Valley earns the distinction of being one of the least affordable places to live in the United States; the median home value is now more than $1 million for the San José metropolitan statistical area. According to the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, housing is considered affordable when a person pays no more than 30 percent of income toward housing costs, including utilities. When people pay more than 30 percent of income toward housing costs, they are considered “housing cost burdened,” and when they pay more than 50 percent, they are considered severely housing cost burdened. In San Mateo and Santa Clara counties, nearly half of all renters are housing cost burdened, and nearly 40 percent in San Francisco are in that category. Median monthly rents in those areas are $2,783 and $3,888, respectively. Let’s talk about how housing costs are impacting our community.

Round One: Getting Started / Hopes and Concerns for the Future?

Answer one or more of the following:

● What interested you or drew you to this conversation?
● What sense of purpose / mission / duty guides you in your life?
● What would your best friend say about who you are and what makes you “tick”?
● What are your hopes and concerns for your community and/or the country?

Round Two: Affordable housing and the American Dream

Remember that the goal for this Living Room Conversation is for all of us to listen and learn about where we have different opinions and where we have shared interests, intentions and goals. Answer two or more of the following questions:

● To what extent are you and your family experiencing changes in housing costs and affordability?
● How is housing affordability affecting your vision for your own future – or the future of your community as you know it?
● To what extent is housing affordability affecting your thinking or experience of the American Dream?
● What would you like to see happen in your community or the country to addressing housing affordability?

Round Three: What Are We Learning Here? and Declaring Next Steps

Answer one or more of the following questions:

● In one sentence, share what was most meaningful / valuable to you in the experience of this Living Room Conversation.
● What learning, new understanding or common ground was found on this topic?
● What is one important thing you thought was accomplished here?
● Is there a next step you would like to take based upon the conversation you just had?

Closing – Thank you! Please complete the feedback form to help improve Living Room Conversations.

Living Room Conversations is an open source project. Please use, share and modify with attribution to www.LivingRoomConversations.org