

# **Solidarity Network Guide Frame for Developing and Facilitating Civil Society Discussion Spaces**

**This Guide is presented as a working document**

## **Introduction**

The Solidarity Network is a collective of civil society activists working for transformative change, which has gathered in response to barriers being faced by civil society organisations in their efforts to work towards a society which is based on the values espoused by the Solidarity Network of radical hope, equality, ecological sustainability, solidarity and community.

A key driver in this process will be the ability to generate diverse, creative, and analytical discussion which is based on real needs as identified by those who are most impacted by barriers preventing an equal, ecologically sustainable and socially just society. This will ensure that responses are identified and pursued that are founded on accurate analyses and not presumptions.

## **Why a Discussion Space?**

There has never been as much discussion amongst the general population about the issues facing society due to the proliferation of social media. Conversely, activism in civil society is lower than it has been for years. Opportunities to come together to have in depth discussions are limited, meaning that there is insufficient collective working to towards transformative change.

Diverse intersectional and intersectoral perspectives are required in such discussions if we are to accurately analyse problems in a manner grounded in the values statement of the Solidarity Network, and develop solutions grounded in these values.

## **Purpose & Target Audience**

The overarching purpose of civil society discussion spaces is to mobilise civil society to effectively work together for transformative change.

This would involve promoting and facilitating discussion at local and regional level targeting organisations and individuals interested in progressing core values aligned with those espoused by the Solidarity Network. It would involve creating to spaces to engage in such analysis in communities and among organisational members.

## **Approach**

Every local/regional discussion space would define its own approach, with the following as suggestions.

### Clarity

Define in a broad sense what the discussion space is about. It is not a book club, film club etc. It has parameters which are based on certain values and interests and within this broad container a diversity of media, topics and opinions will be actively promoted.

### Promote Curiosity

There is a multiplicity of ways of perceiving and discussing issues, questioning what might be accepted understandings and interpretations.

### Reflection

The space promotes reflection and critique including self-critique, and people are expected to partake with the view that they are willing to change their minds on issues if the discussion is conducive to this.

### Engaging

The spaces need to be engaging, key components here include, being creative in use of media, moderators who are good communicators and it is allowed to have the craic!

### Progression

Being able to record learning and pursue progression in action for transformative change would be important with the goal of feeding into a collective agenda for transformative change.

## **Format**

- Frequency: Monthly (for example- first Thursday of every month)
- Duration: 60–90 minutes
- Structure:
  - Opening thought ( 10–15 mins) – A short introduction to the topic (a reading/ video/ podcast piece for example.)

- Guided Discussion (30–45 mins) – Moderated conversation with open floor
- Reflection Round (15 mins) – Each member shares a takeaway or insight
- Next Topic Preview (5 mins) – Sneak peek and suggestions for future themes

## **Ground Rules**

- Discussion based on values of radical hope, equality, ecological sustainability, solidarity and community
- Respect other views
- Listen actively
- Keep it constructive
- Stay on topic
- Allow others to speak

## **Moderator Role**

- Ensure that everyone gets a chance to speak and no one person dominates
- Keep discussion focussed
- Ensure group conforms with the ground rules
- Ask questions that prompt meaningful discussions

## **Sample Topics for discussion**

- Gender Identity and inclusion in modern society
- Is democracy under threat in the Western world?
- Freedom of expression vs. hate speech –are people afraid to speak out?
- Gender equality, how far have we really come?
- Refugees and global migration: what should a just response look like?
- Capitalism Failing the majority? exploring alternatives for an equal, ecologically sustainable and socially just future
- Is social media empowering or enslaving people?

Pick a name for your discussion space:, some ideas: The Socratic Space / Justice Talks / The Open Forum / The Roundtable/ Echo Chamber Unplugged/ Beyond the Binary

## **Contributing to a Civil Society for Transformative Change**

The Solidarity Network is committed to supporting and stimulating such civil society discussion spaces. It will be important to feed learning from the local/regional level to the national level to inform the development and spread of these discussion spaces and to inform and strengthen civil society pursuit of transformative change across the island.

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