

TRAILBLAZING

MAGNETIC NORTH: THE ALASKAN CHARACTER

ARLISS STURGULEWSKI



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:

WHEN ARE WE CALLED TO ACT WITHOUT PERMISSION?

OUR SPRINGBOARD FOR CONVERSATION

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

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:

WHEN ARE WE CALLED TO ACT WITHOUT PERMISSION?

- 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 about a time 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.

Share in Pairs: In pairs, re-introduce yourself, and share an example of a circumstance in which receiving and/or granting permission is important to you. Who is giving the permission and who is receiving it?

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.

In Large Group: In a large group, ask if anyone would like to share any takeaways from the conversation with their partner. Remind everyone to please not share personal stories or details from their partner without permission.

The time will vary by the number of participants and their 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: Arliss Sturgulewski](#) film.
- URL: <https://youtu.be/Sbk00ZHa-Xo>

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!
When are we called to ask without permission?
- **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, Arliss says "I set goals and then I go do it. I knew where I wanted to go and I knew it was up to me. Nobody was going to make it easy". How do you think this mindset influenced her life path?
 - A friend of Arliss described her by saying, "When Arliss says 'how are you', she really wants to know." Do you think that caring about the wellbeing of others makes it easier or harder to proceed without permission? Why?
 - In the film, Arliss is described as "a fabulous citizen and a good friend". What qualities do you think make someone a 'fabulous citizen'?

4. DISCUSS



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: when are we called to act without permission? 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 movement, large or small, in which they hope to be a trailblazer.
- Once everyone has shared, take a moment to **give thanks**:
 - Thank you first and foremost to Arliss for sharing her 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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