



Constitution Conversations – Facilitators Guide

INTRODUCTION:

The League of Women Voters of the City of New York thanks you for helping lead the conversation. Every conversation we start

- Explains the connection between civic engagement and the power of a vote
- Is an act of protection of our democracy
- Informs New Yorkers how and why to vote

Today's video should spark conversation about the U.S. Constitution. No one in the room is a Constitutional expert, but everyone is engaged in the conversation about our democracy. To help understand our rights, it is important to take a look at the document that shapes our nation and our daily lives

We hope that this conversation will inspire people to learn more, get engaged, and understand the power of "We The People."

KIT SUPPLIES

- 21-minute Video – download from the League's website (<https://f.io/7CqAQPzU>)
- Pocket Constitutions or PDFs (download ahead and make copies)
- Civic Explainer – "Who Makes NYC Better? You!"
- Feedback Questions

INSTRUCTIONS:

- Welcome the group and discuss ground rules for conversations. For example:
 - Allow everyone a chance to participate
 - Avoid interrupting or engaging in side conversations
 - Maintain a respectful tone
- You may want to assign a timekeeper to help you end on time.
- Instruct everyone that this discussion is to spark more interest. No one is a Constitutional expert in this group, so there may be opportunities to look up answers to questions raised, and we can all benefit from learning together.
- Make sure everyone has a copy of the Constitution. You will either have a pocket copy, or you've downloaded the PDF and made copies – or you can give everyone the url to find the Constitution at www.lwvnyc.org/ConstitutionConversations
- Begin playing the video and hit pause when the slide instructs "Pause for Conversation."
- Choose a question on the screen to spark conversation. Allow 5 minutes per Question Slide to keep the conversation to one hour.
- Ask everyone to complete the Feedback survey questions

Would you like to lead more conversations? Let us know!

The League of Women Voters of the City of New York

admin@lwvnyc.org 212-725-3541 lwvnyc.org

SLIDE CONTENT

SLIDE #1: Time Code: 3:03

Pause for Conversation

What comes to mind when you think about the Constitution?

When did you start learning about the Constitution?

Where/when should Civic Education be offered?

SLIDE #2: Time Code: 4:45

Pause for Conversation

What Rights are in the Constitution?

SLIDE #3: Time Code: 8:58

Pause to Read

The First Amendment

Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances.

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Prompt answers if needed

Prompt answers if needed

1. Freedom of speech/Right to assemble: 1st Amendment
2. Due Process: Fifth Amendment and 14th, Section 1
3. Right to vote: The Constitution does not mention the right to vote, but gives the states the rights to govern voting. It does, however, stipulate how not to discriminate for race (15th), gender (19th), and age (26th)
4. Right to bear arms: 2nd Amendment. Read "a well regulated militia" – what does that mean – scholars disagree
5. Right to clean air and water: Not in the U.S. Constitution, but several states have adopted their own amendments

Facilitator reads Amendment out loud

SLIDE CONTENT

SLIDE #4: Time Code: 9:08

Pause for Conversation

Choose any question relating to one of the five freedoms listed in the First Amendment:

Religion: Why did the framers restrict the government from establishing a religion?

Speech: Is Hate speech protected by the First Amendment?

Assembly: Are peaceful protests protected by the First Amendment?

Press: Does the “press” cover anyone’s right to publish information, meaning bloggers or independent journalists?

Petition: Can you think of ways to petition the government?

FACILITATOR

Note: You only need to choose one of these questions

Religion: Why did the framers restrict the government from establishing a religion?

Short answer: to not allow a situation like the Church of England as it was the state Church and it required membership and taxation.

Speech: Is Hate speech protected by the First Amendment?

Yes, but hate speech can cross the line if used to cause direct harm. The Supreme Court excludes protection of speech that is seen as causing direct harm – as with the intent to incite violence, “fighting words,” true threats, harassment, defamation, and obscenity.

Assembly: Are peaceful protests protected by the First Amendment?

Yes, but protests can be restricted if they become violent, unsafe, block traffic, or violate public safety laws (e.g, permits may be required for large marches). Public universities (not private) must abide by the Constitution.

Press: Does the “press” cover anyone’s right to publish information, meaning bloggers or independent journalists?

Yes, The Supreme Court has defined the “press” as “every sort of publication which affords a vehicle of information and opinion,” which includes modern digital platforms, blogs, and social media in addition to reporters at traditional media outlets.

Petition: Can you think of ways to petition the government?

Short explainer of why petition...
The framers viewed the right “to petition

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SLIDE CONTENT

SLIDE #5: Time Code: 12:06

Pause for Conversation

What is the citizen's role in the U.S. balance-of-power system?

SLIDE #6: Time Code: 17:20

Pause for Conversation

What Amendment would you include?

SLIDE #7: Time Code: 20:59

Keep the Conversation Going

Through dialogue and action, we defend democracy together.

10 Actions:

1. Keep the *Constitution Conversation* going. Download the video and facilitator guide to host your own group.
2. Support local media. Stay informed.
3. Join community or special interest groups.
4. Attend Community Board meetings.
5. Volunteer your time.

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the government" as essential, since King George III refusal to heed colonial petitions was a direct justification for the Declaration of Independence. Examples of ways to petition: Call legislators, direct mail, testify, gather signatures, advocate, lobby, sue.

Prompt answers if needed:

Vote. Be Informed. Talk with elected officials and hold elected officials accountable. Participate in public hearings. Write letters. Join special interest groups. Demonstrate.

Prompt answers if needed

Note:

The U.S. Constitution has only been amended 27 times in its history. Why? Because it is hard to do.

To amend the U.S. Constitution, an amendment must be proposed by a two-thirds vote of Congress or by a national convention called by two-thirds of the states. It must then be ratified by three-fourths of the states, either by their legislatures or by state conventions.

Discuss the 10 actions.

*Hand out Civic Explainer:
"Who Makes NYC Better? You!"*

SLIDE CONTENT

6. Go to rallies, marches and protests.
7. Contact your Elected Officials: mygovnyc.org.
8. Serve on Juries.
9. Run for Office.
10. **Vote in all elections!**

SLIDE #8: Time Code: 21:07

QR code for Feedback



Download
Constitution Conversation Starter Kit
www.lwvnyc.org
Take Action/Constitution Conversations

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Ask everyone to fill out the feedback form and encourage them to host their own conversations.

Feedback survey questions: (use QR code)

1. Where did you hold your Constitution Conversation?
2. How many attended?
3. How much did this information inspire you to do something? (for example... share with others, learn more, become involved, take action, vote?)
*Scale 1-5: 1= was not motivating
5= very motivating*
4. What were you motivated to do?
5. Would you like to receive the League's emails with action alerts, volunteer opportunities, and news? Please provide your email.