

Themed Listening Sessions

Organizer Guide

Structured group sessions focusing on specific themes like "Bridging Generations" or "Community Leaders" using carefully selected One Small Step interview clips. These sessions combine guided listening with facilitated discussion to explore how different perspectives enrich our understanding of universal themes. This activity combines well with guest speakers!

Advanced Planning: Goals and Steps

Goals:

- Create structured listening experiences around themes that resonate across differences
- Facilitate deeper reflection on shared human experiences through guided discussion
- Build empathy and understanding through exposure to diverse perspectives
- Encourage appreciation for different viewpoints on common human experiences
- Create pathways to further engagement with One Small Step

Steps:

The first step is selecting compelling themes that can unite diverse perspectives. Options include "Bridging Generations," "Community Leaders," or "Cultural Connections." The theme should be broad enough to accommodate different viewpoints while specific enough to guide meaningful reflection.

Next, choose OSS clips from the featured conversations page (linked below) that reflect different perspectives on the chosen theme. Select 2-3 clips that offer complementary insights on the theme.

Develop discussion materials including participant guide worksheet with clip summaries, reflection questions, and space for notes.

Arrange a comfortable space with good acoustics, audio/visual equipment, and seating for 12-15 participants. Set up the room to encourage conversation, such as a circle or small group clusters.

Make a list of refreshments if they'll be provided.

Create a structured flow for the 45-minute session including welcome (5 minutes), theme overview (5 minutes), first clip and discussion (10 minutes), second clip and discussion (10 minutes), group reflection (10 minutes), and closing/next steps (5 minutes). Additional (3rd) clip= 60 minute session.

Prepare supporting materials including instructional signs, OSS one-pagers for each table (linked below), conversation agreements display (linked below) and take-home resources like Great Questions bookmarks (linked below) and Great Question Card decks (linked below) that extend the experience beyond the session.

Take photos of both the setup and, with permission, participant engagement to document the program and use in future promotion.

Marketing

Promote upcoming themed sessions by highlighting the universal or topical nature of the themes and their relevance to community interests. Use language that invites many perspectives rather than suggesting a particular viewpoint.

Create eye-catching posters and digital graphics featuring the theme and brief descriptions of One Small Step. Include quotes that spark curiosity without revealing the full story.

Feature the program in community newsletters and social media, emphasizing the value of collective listening and shared discussion of many viewpoints.

Cross-promote with related community programs that touch on similar themes, creating thematic connections across community offerings.

Encourage staff to personally invite participants who have expressed interest in the theme or in community dialogue opportunities.

Take photos during sessions (with appropriate permissions) to share on social media and use in future promotional materials.

Budgeting

The program requires attention to the following costs:

- Audio/visual equipment: \$0-800 (depending on existing supply)

- Print materials: \$25-50 (name tags, reflection worksheet, signage, conversation card decks, bookmarks)
- Marketing: \$10-20 (posters, digital promotion)
- Refreshments (optional): ~\$50

Tips to cut costs:

- Use existing equipment
- Create digital participant reflection worksheet that can be printed on demand
- Partner with community organizations to share costs and promotion
- Keep frequency to quarterly sessions initially and expand as interest grows

Day-of-event Activity

Arrive at least 30 minutes early to set up the room, set out refreshments if present, test audio/visual equipment, and arrange seating for optimal discussion. Place participant guides and any other materials at each seat/table.

Prepare a welcoming atmosphere that invites reflection and sharing. Consider simple decorations related to the theme, or display relevant books and resources nearby.

Brief any staff or volunteers on their roles, the clips being featured, and key discussion points. Ensure everyone understands how to operate the equipment and troubleshoot common issues.

Set up a sign-in area with name tags and any pre-session activities, such as a simple reflection prompt related to the theme that participants can consider as they arrive.

Take photos of the setup and, with permission, of participant engagement to document the program and use in future promotion.

Program Execution

Begin with a warm welcome and brief introduction to the theme. Explain the session format and establish a supportive atmosphere for sharing diverse perspectives.

Introduce key concepts and questions that will guide the discussion. Help participants connect the theme to their own experiences before listening to others'.

For each clip, introduce the speakers briefly, play the StoryCorps recording, and then facilitate discussion using prepared prompts. Encourage participants to share their own perspectives and connections to the stories.

Guide a larger group reflection that synthesizes insights from all clips and explores how diverse perspectives enrich understanding of the theme.

Close the session with next steps for continued engagement, including information about upcoming themes, One Small Step participation opportunities, and related resources.

Collect feedback to refine future sessions and document impact. Take photos throughout (with appropriate permissions) to capture engagement and create visual resources for promotion.

Advice

Create a brave space for discussion by establishing clear guidelines (conversation agreements linked below) at the beginning of group sessions. Emphasize respect for different perspectives and the value of listening to understand rather than respond.

Prepare additional discussion prompts in case conversation lags, but be comfortable with moments of silence that allow for reflection.

Consider rotating themes seasonally or connecting them to community events, celebrations, or issues to maintain relevance and interest. This program pairs well with any concurrent programming where community members are recording their own interviews-- clips from those conversations can be featured (with permission).

For participants eager to engage further, provide clear pathways to One Small Step participation or other dialogue-focused community programs.

Take photos throughout the program (with appropriate permissions) to document impact and create visual resources for future promotion.

These sessions are both standalone experiences of meaningful reflection and potential gateways to deeper engagement with bridging differences.

Solo Activity Adaptation

The themed listening sessions concept can be adapted for individual engagement:

- Setup: Computer/tablet with headphones in a quiet area
- Materials:
 - Simple activity packet with theme introduction and reflection worksheet

- 2-3 selected OSS clips with brief descriptions
- Response cards for written reflection
- Activity Flow (45 minutes):
 - Theme introduction (5 min)
 - Self-guided listening (20 min)
 - Reflection activities (15 min)
 - Next steps information & take a bookmark (5 min)
- Maintenance:
 - Daily equipment checks
 - Regular cleaning of headphones
 - Restocking of materials
- Connection:
 - Display participant reflections (with permission)
 - Include information about group sessions and OSS Connect
 - Take photos to document usage (with appropriate permissions)