

Facilitation Plan

Truth and Democracy: Science

I. CONTEXT SETTING: Introducing the Discussion (2-3 mins.)

This conversation is focused on the essential relationship between truth and democracy and how this relationship is at risk. In a democratic, self-governing society, we need truthful information about reality to guide our decisions. But how are we supposed to get this truthful information — and what challenges do we face in this task? This conversation focuses on the democratic importance of science as one way to get truthful information about reality.

We can describe science as a methodical way for humans to explore and understand reality. It represents a systematic and testable way to develop our knowledge of the world, whether the natural world or the social world (in other words, the natural sciences and social sciences). It's a way to create and expand human knowledge that is based on careful observation and evidence and is subject to critical review. Results of scientific research should be repeatable for, and testable by, others. As a consequence, scientific knowledge is constantly subject to change, based on new evidence, new experimental designs, and the overall growth of human understanding of the world. Let's explore how science is important for a healthy democracy.

II. DISCUSSION AGREEMENTS:

It helps to have some group agreements about how we'll engage in this conversation. Our suggestions are:

- **Be generous:** Helping each other to explore and remaining open to the truth others express
- **Be bold:** Opening ourselves up to new and different perspectives
- **Be connected:** We're here to make connections with each other rather than to win an argument

III. ROUND ONE: ROUND ROBIN Introductions and Personal Connections to the Topic (5-10 mins.)

Take a minute or so to introduce yourself and share a question or concern you have about science and how it relates to truth and the possibility of a healthy democracy.

IV. ROUND TWO: OPEN DISCUSSION

Expanding our Sense of the Topic (40–60 mins.)

- What are some major existing or emerging challenges facing the relationship between science and democracy?
- Beyond the initial comments, what are other questions or concerns about science in relation to the health of democracy?
- What roles can, or should, science play in a democracy? Why do democracies need scientific knowledge?
- What challenges or concerns are there about the ways that science is practiced or funded? For example, what values or purposes should guide the practice of science within a democratic society?
- What challenges or concerns are there about the relation of science and democratic governance?

V. ROUND THREE:

Looking Ahead and Wrapping Up (10 mins.)

- What are some different ways that a democratic society might address the challenges that emerged in our conversation?
- What are different possibilities for improving the connections of scientific knowledge, truthful information, and democracy?
- As we wrap up, what are some of the key insights or questions that you will take away from this conversation?