

SPEAKING OF IMMIGRATION

Statue of Liberty National Monument and Ellis Island

The “Speaking of Immigration” program seeks to explore how values and assumptions about immigrants have shaped U.S. immigration policy. Participants will consider the historical experience of the Ellis Island Immigration Station and use this as a starting point for a thoughtful discussion of the immigration policy choices facing our country today.

The program consists of two parts: an interactive tour of Ellis Island followed by facilitated dialogue among participants. The tour portion will be led by Park Rangers and by staff from Save Ellis Island, Inc., the National Park Service’s cooperating partner for the South Side of Ellis Island. The tour will walk participants through the Ellis Island immigration process and help them examine the policies, values, and assumptions that shaped the experience of immigrants a century ago. Participants will then be led in facilitated discussion that will invite them to explore their own values and assumptions about immigrants in their communities and immigration policy issues today. Visitors will be encouraged to formulate and express their own ideas on how they can help their friends, colleagues, and community have a more informed discussion about U.S. immigration policy and the values that shape it.

Post-tour dialogue:

Size of each group: 10-12 people

80 minutes for total dialogue

Introduction / Setting the Tone / Community Building

Explaining the Purpose (1 minute)

This program is an opportunity to continue learning from one another. Invite you to share your experiences and to explore questions, ideas, and issues the tour might have sparked for you about the experiences of immigrants today.

Facilitators’ Role (1 minute)

Facilitators’ role is to guide this conversation, to offer questions for you to reflect on, and from time to time, to share our observations about the issues we are discussing. My name is ... and I am (Facilitators introduce themselves.)

Group Agreements (8 minutes)

To help us get the most out of our time together, share some simple guidelines that we will use to facilitate this conversation. (Have on flip chart or dry erase board.)

- *Sharing and Hearing*
Share your thoughts honestly, but be aware that others need the opportunity to be heard as well. Allow others to finish speaking before you jump in.
- *Spirit of Inquiry*
Seek to learn how other people view an issue, rather than trying to persuade others to accept your view. Make an effort to suspend your own judgment as you listen to others.
- *Diversity and Individuality*
Honor the diversity of opinion that is likely to exist around this table. When you speak, we invite you to use “I” statements to represent your own experiences and ideas; you are not responsible for representing the experiences of an entire group of people.

Would anyone be willing to read an agreement aloud?

Is there anything you would like to add to this list? (Make any necessary adjustments to agreements.)

Is everyone comfortable with these basic agreements? Great. Let's get started.

Sharing Personal Experience / Sharing the Diversity of Experiences

Icebreaker (15 minutes) – Serial Testimony

- Share your name, and answer this question: ***If someone asks you where you're from, what do you say and why do you identify yourself in this way?***
- Synthesize/reflect on the assumptions that often come up in people's responses to that question. People make assumptions about our identities that we have to either go with or refute. Perhaps we also make assumptions about other people?

Personal Experiences (20 minutes) – Discussion

- Some of you have mentioned the immigrants in your family. Let's broaden that discussion and ask: ***What effect does immigration have on your life today?***
- Debrief by exploring themes, differences, and commonalities. *What did you hear that really resonated with you? What did you hear that's different from your perspective? What seem to be the most important themes that emerged from these answers?*

Exploring Beyond / Exploring the Diversity of Perspectives

Opinions About Immigration Today (“Apples to Apples-like activity” – 25 minutes)

- Just as in the past during the operations of Ellis Island Immigration Station, there are many different assumptions about immigrants today. Together we are going to look at some statements about immigrants today.
- Agree/Disagree Cards: Pass out the list of statements and 8 index cards for each participant. The index cards with the green dots will be used if you agree with the statement; the cards with the red dots will be used if you disagree with the statement.
- The four statements are on the table. Place an index card reflecting how you feel about the statement (green dot if you agree, red dot if you disagree) face down by each statement sheet. We will then turn the cards over, tally the “agrees” and “disagrees”, and reflect on the statements as a group. During the full group reflection you may share your thoughts on the statements.

Sample statements:

- *There should be no limits on who can immigrate to this country.*
 - *Undocumented immigrants should not be given amnesty.*
 - *It’s too difficult for immigrants to come to this country legally.*
 - *Immigrants, whether documented or undocumented, boost economic activity.*
 - *Immigrants today do not want to assimilate into our society.*
 - *I would be willing to pay higher taxes to provide additional services to immigrants.*
 - *English should be made the official language of the United States.*
 - *People with HIV should be allowed to immigrate to this country. Recent immigrants should attend their own separate schools.*
- After participants are seated again, ask the person sitting by each statement to turn over and tally the cards for that statement. Note the scores.
 - Start with the question that has the most balanced number of agrees/disagrees. *Would anyone like to comment on why you voted the way you did or what strikes you about how the group voted as a whole?* Discuss all four statements if time permits.
 - *What personal values are you bringing to your opinions about these questions?*

- As the full group comes back together, be thinking about this question: *What values do you believe should drive our nation's immigration policy?*

Synthesis and Closure / Reflection and Action

Full Group Discussion (10 minutes)

- ***What values do you believe should drive our nation's immigration policy?*** (Write responses on flip chart.)
- How do you feel about this experience today? Has it changed the way you feel about immigration?
- What's one idea that challenged you today that you want to continue exploring in dialogue with other people?
- We hope that today's program has not only helped you learn about immigration history, but also made you think more deeply about immigration today. As you return home, continue the dialogue!