



FRONT PAGE DIALOGUE

Guns in America

According to the Gun Violence Archive, as of February 14, 2023, there have been 67 mass shootings in America since the beginning of 2023 - more shootings than there have been days.¹ With 120.5 firearms per 100 residents, the United States is the only country with more guns than people.² It is perhaps unsurprising then that 59% of adults in the country have experienced gun violence or know someone who has.³

As of October 2022, 57% of Americans feel that laws covering the sale of firearms should be made more strict.⁴ Broad coalitions of survivors, victims' families, minority groups disproportionately affected by gun violence, and their allies feel such restrictions on gun ownership must be in place for the overall good. For others, however, guns are something they've grown up with – a part of leisure and sporting culture; a necessity in some industries, like farming and ranching; and a right protected by the Second Amendment. With strong emotions on both sides of the issue, polarization around guns in America has made progress addressing mass shootings almost stagnant.

Across America, people want to live in safe communities and to feel that their children do too, but conversations about guns in America are complex and multifaceted. They touch on an array of topics, including culture, race, domestic abuse, mental illness, firearms education and constitutional scholarship. Facilitating constructive conversation on the role of guns in our society is one way Sites of Conscience can help support communities. Below is one model for engaging visitors in dialogue which we encourage you to adapt and ground in the unique history that your site works to preserve and share.

HOW TO USE FRONT PAGE DIALOGUES

Rather than using all the model questions suggested under each phase, facilitators may select questions that reflect the evolving conversation of the group they are guiding in the dialogue. We also anticipate that you will develop new questions ahead of time or during the dialogue to draw on the strengths of your site or respond to the needs of participants. If you are not familiar with the Arc of Dialogue model, you can contact Braden Paynter (bpaynter@sitesofconscience.org) for support and more information.

GUIDELINES

Group agreements or guidelines help make the expectations for behavior of the group visible to all participants. They help build the "container" for productive dialogue. Here are some sample agreements:

1. Use "I" statements. Speak only for yourself.
2. Share the air: leave room for everyone to speak
3. Own your intentions and your impacts
4. Controversy with civility

SHARED CONTENT:

Timeline of the major, federal gun control laws in America

Adapted from: <http://time.com/5169210/us-gun-control-laws-history-timeline/> and <https://www.thoughtco.com/us-gun-control-timeline-3963620>

1791 – The first ten amendments to the US Constitution are ratified. The Second states, "A well-regulated militia, being necessary to the security of a free State, the right of the people to keep and bear Arms, shall not be infringed."

1. <https://www.gunviolencearchive.org/>

2. <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2022-05-25/how-many-guns-in-the-us-buying-spree-bolsters-lead-as-most-armed-country?leadSource=uverify%20wall>

3. <https://everytownresearch.org/report/gun-violence-survivors-america/>

4. <https://news.gallup.com/poll/1645/guns.aspx>

1934/38 – The National Firearms Act, in response to gang activity like the St. Valentine’s Day Massacre, imposes a tax on the manufacturing, selling and transporting of some firearms. It also defines a group of people who cannot purchase guns, such as convicted felons, and mandates that gun sellers keep customer records.

1939 – The US Supreme Court rules in *United States v. Miller* that Congress could regulate the interstate selling of a short barrel shotgun, stating that there was no evidence that a sawed off shotgun “has some reasonable relationship to the preservation or efficiency of a well-regulated militia,” and thus “we cannot say that the Second Amendment guarantees the right to keep and bear such an instrument.”

1967 – Backed by Governor Ronald Reagan and the National Rifle Association - and developed in part as a reaction to the emergence of the Black Panther Party - the Mulford Act restricts the open carry of loaded firearms in California.

1968 – Following the assassinations of President John F. Kennedy, Attorney General Robert Kennedy and Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., the Gun Control Act of 1968 bans importing guns that have “no sporting purpose,” imposes age restrictions on the purchase of handguns (gun owners have to be 21), prohibits felons, the mentally ill, and others from purchasing guns and requires that all manufactured or imported guns have a serial number.

1986 – The Firearm Owners Protection Act is passed by Congress prohibiting a national registry of dealer records, limiting ATF inspections to once per year (unless there are multiple infractions), softening what is defined as “engaging in the business” of selling firearms, and allowing licensed dealers to sell firearms at “gun shows” in their state. It also loosens regulations on the sale and transfer of ammunition.

1993 – The Brady Handgun Violence Prevention Act of 1993 requires that background checks be completed before a gun is purchased from a licensed dealer, manufacturer or importer. It also establishes the National Instant Criminal Background Check System (NICS), which is maintained by the FBI.

1994 – Tucked into the Violent Crime Control and Law Enforcement Act, the Public Safety and Recreational Firearms Use Protection Act bans the manufacture of certain semi-automatic firearms for civilian use from September 1994 to September 2004.

2005 – The Protection of Lawful Commerce in Arms Act is signed by President George W. Bush to prevent gun manufacturers from being named in federal or state civil suits by victims of crimes involving guns made by that company.

2008 – *District of Columbia v. Heller* changes a nearly 70-year precedent set by *Miller* in 1939 by challenging the constitutionality of a 32-year-old handgun ban in Washington, DC and finding that, “the handgun ban and the trigger lock requirement (as applied to self defense) violate the Second Amendment.”

2013 – Following the mass shooting at Sandy Hook elementary school, both the Manchin-Toomey Bill, which would have required background checks for all gun sales between private dealers, including gun shows and websites, and the Assault Weapons Ban, which would have banned certain kinds of semiautomatic weapons, fail to pass Congressional votes.

2018 – More than 100 federal gun control measures have been proposed between 2013 and 2018. All have failed to pass Congressional votes. More than 200 state-level gun laws have been passed.

2022 – One month after 19 children and three adults were killed in the Robb Elementary School shooting in Uvalde, Texas, the U.S. Supreme Court strikes down a New York law that placed strict restrictions on carrying concealed firearms in public for self-defense, finding its requirement that applicants seeking a concealed carry license demonstrate a special need for self-defense is unconstitutional.

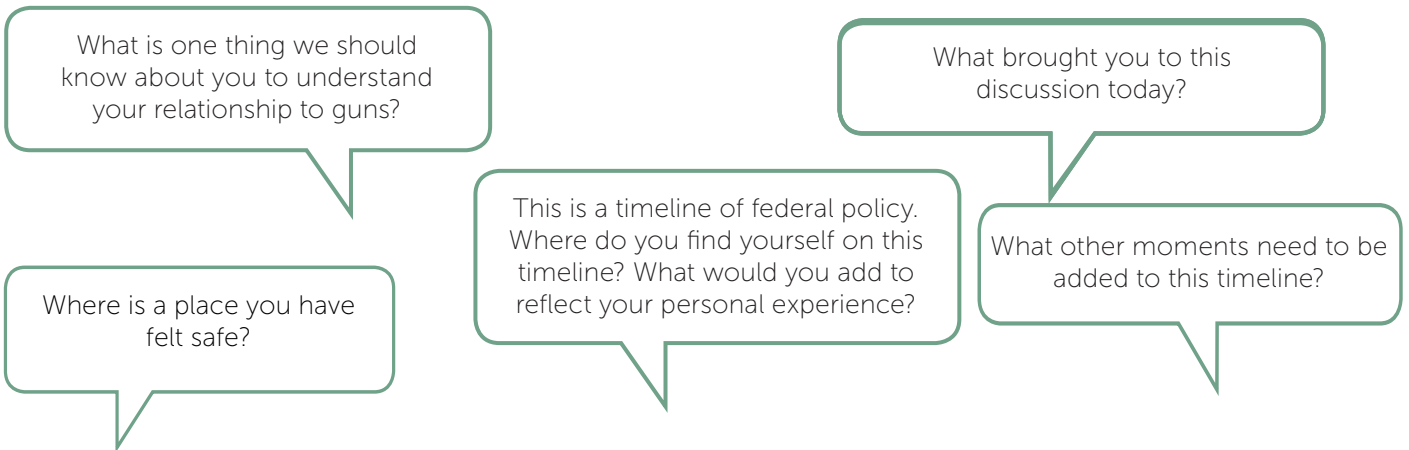
2022 – With bipartisan support, the “Safer Communities Act” becomes law, becoming the most significant gun control law in almost 30 years. This law includes reforms like tougher background checks for buyers younger than 21, \$15 billion in federal funding for mental health programs and school security upgrades, funding to encourage states to implement “red flag” laws to remove firearms from people considered a threat, and closing the so-called “boyfriend loophole” by blocking gun sales to those convicted of abusing unmarried intimate partners.



PHASE I - COMMUNITY BUILDING

Questions in Phase I help build the “learning community” by allowing participants to share information about themselves.

Facilitator should welcome the group, introduce themselves, explain their role and the purpose of the dialogue. Facilitator should also ask for agreement to the guidelines established for the group. Facilitator should share copies of the timeline with all participants OR using paper, adhere an enlarged version of the timeline to the wall of the dialogue space, allowing for participants to share their answers to the Phase I questions by writing on the timeline and then allowing participants time to talk about the moments that others have added.



PHASE II - SHARING OUR OWN EXPERIENCES

Questions in Phase 2 help participants recognize how their experiences are alike and different and why.





PHASE III - EXPLORING BEYOND OURSELVES

Questions in Phase 3 help participants engage in inquiry and exploration about the dialogue topic in an effort to learn with and from one another.



PHASE IV - SYTHESIZING THE EXPERIENCE

Questions in Phase 4 help the group to reflect on the dialogue and what they learned.

