

On the Table 2022: Teacher Guide

Every good conversation starts with
good listening



What is this Document?

This is a guide designed to help teachers bring On the Table into their classrooms. On the Table is a recurring program in Lexington where our communities gather to discuss a common theme. This year (2022), the theme of On the Table is the future of Lexington, and the discussions are also going to be used as input into our next Comprehensive Plan. The Comprehensive Plan (or Comp Plan) is a long term document designed to govern how Lexington's land gets used, what is built where, and other government decisions about our neighborhoods, environment, housing, and more.

This guide is a shortened and simplified version of a larger body of research about incorporating community conversations into FCPS curriculum. If you are interested, you can find a longer form document with standards alignment and extended engagement at ottlex.org/teachers.

About On the Table

On the Table is not just in schools! Between April 10-16, thousands of Lexington community members are meeting all over the city - in parks, businesses, homes, restaurants, online, and more - to talk about the same topics and take the same survey contained in this guide. The goal of the program is to give all of Lexington an opportunity to build community and learn from one another (in a space designed for dialogues, not debate!) and to give input into local government as it happens. You can learn more about On the Table, who is behind it, how the data will be processed, and more at ottlex.org

Hosting a Community Conversation

What is a community conversation? Community conversations are opportunities for friends, neighbors, colleagues, classmates, and others to gather around a table and have a real conversation about issues important to them.

On the Table is one example of a community conversation - one that is taking place all around Lexington, about the future and how our city is growing and changing. On the Table is an entire week of community conversations about these themes, and the data gathered from these conversations will be used to help guide and improve Lexington's Growth.

The purpose of this guide is to help walk students through the process of hosting and facilitating a community conversation, where participants discuss the present and future issues facing their communities. Through dialogue with their peers, students are fostering greater inclusion, belonging, and understanding within their classrooms, schools, and larger communities.

Bringing OTT to your Classroom

OVERVIEW

There are two ways to bring On the Table to your classroom, and you can choose whichever method suits the needs of your class. The first, and simplest, option is to dedicate one class period (ideally no less than an hour) to holding a table. Spend the first 10 minutes introducing the concept, another 10 taking the survey, and the rest of the available time on the community conversation.

The second option is more in depth - if you are interested, there are additional educational opportunities around On the Table and the Comprehensive Plan that can take place either before or after the table event. You can find the resources to do this at ottlex.org/teachers.

No matter what you choose, the purpose of the On the Table lesson is to facilitate a group discussion where students generate thoughts and opinions about the issues facing their communities, in order to give students an example of a democratic community conversation, and to bring their voices into actual local policy making.

OBJECTIVES

1. **Generate thoughts and opinions** about Lexington's neighborhoods, environment, transportation, jobs, and land.
2. **Share experiences** about Lexington and students' communities
 - **Foster dialogue** in order to develop students' sense of belonging.
 - **Collaborate** with peers in a civil discourse resulting in personal action steps for issues facing their communities
3. Bring **students' voices** into local decision making, via the Comprehensive Plan

BEFORE YOU BEGIN

Keep in mind: The main role of the teacher is to ensure that students' conversations are staying on topic, students are respecting one another, and all students are able to participate. Flexibility is key! Though the survey and specific questions about Lexington are important, the number one priority is that all of your students feel like they are participating and that their voices are being heard.

Determine a note taker, a facilitator, presenter, and a timekeeper (see role descriptions at end of document).

Hosting Tables in your Class

Setting Up

- Seat students at tables of 8 to 10, if possible
- Try to get conversations going among students who don't usually have a chance to talk.
- Ideally, each table can have an adult to participate and supervise. However, teachers/aides can also float between tables as appropriate/necessary
- Adults may act as participants with a student facilitating if it seems helpful. However, the conversations should be driven by students.
- Prepare students to facilitate discussions prior to the event using the resources provided in this guide.

Starting the Conversation

1. Welcome and Introductions

Ask all participants to share their name, neighborhood, and what brought them to the table in one sentence. Encourage participants to keep phones and tablets in pockets or purses during the conversation.

2. The Survey

Ask students to take the **OTT survey** (paper or digital). Make sure to communicate that survey is anonymous, and that their answers are actually being used to help build the Comprehensive Plan, a document that guides how Lexington's land is used and what it looks like in the future. The survey should take about 10 minutes, but it's ok if it takes a little longer.

A paper survey is attached to this guide, but we prefer that as many students as possible take the online version. Scan the QR Code at the bottom of the page or go to ottlex.org/teachers for a link to the digital survey. The student survey is identical to the survey that the rest of the public is taking except that (1) there is no demographic information and (2) there is a longer informed consent statement for students to agree to.



3. The Conversation

Facilitators should use the OTT questions to guide the conversation. If students are particularly interested in one of the 6 topics, it is OK to spend more time on that one than the others -the key thing is that the conversation is engaging! Note takers should capture main ideas using the template provided in this toolkit. Timekeepers should monitor the clock. The conversation prompts listed on the next page are optional, but can be a helpful guide for the discussion.

4. Wrapping Up

Allow enough time for groups to begin to think about and discuss actions they could take to address some of the issues raised during discussions. Invite each student presenter to share the main ideas from his or her group discussion. Encourage students to share the conversation with others: on social media, in school or non-school groups, and at home.

5. One More Question!

After the conversations, there is one more question for students to answer - it is a separate link for the digital survey, and just at the bottom of the paper one. Ask students if they changed their mind, learned anything new, or want to add anything else. This is our way of including some of the value of the conversations in the official input that goes towards the Comprehensive Plan.

6. Taking Informed Action (Optional)

After the conversation, if your students were particularly interested in an aspect of the discussion, there are lots of follow up resources available.

- Check out civiclex.org for issue coverage of the Comp Plan and other local issues
- Go to imaginelexington.com for more information about the Comp Plan and how it is implemented
- There are also other local government bodies that deal with the same topics as the Comp Plan:
 - **Neighborhoods:** Office of Affordable Housing, Office of Homelessness Intervention and Prevention, Code Enforcement, Parks and Recreation, Housing Advocacy and Community Development
 - **Environment:** Environmental Quality and Public Works (EQPW), Live Green Lexington,
 - **Jobs and the Economy:** Finance Department, Grants and Special Programs, Budget, Finance, and Economic Development Committee
 - **Transportation:** Traffic Engineering, LexTran, Streets and Roads
 - **Urban/Rural balance:** Purchase of Development Rights (PDR), Planning Commission, Corridors Commission
- You can also submit your email address with the survey to receive updates about the project, CivicLex's report of the findings, and more engagement opportunities
- Contact info@civiclex.org with any questions about local issues that you or your students have! We will do our best to answer them, or find someone who can.

Roles in a Community Conversation

Participants

What do you need to do?

- Share your experiences.
- Encourage everyone to equally participate.
- Support inclusive and diverse voices.
- Keep phones and tablets in pockets or purses during the conversation.
- If you don't understand something, ask for clarification.

How should you listen?

- Listen with compassion and an open mind.
- Model active listening skills.
- Be attentive.
- Show interest.
- Don't interrupt.
- Be respectful in both verbal and body language.
- Avoid dismissing any person's comments.
- Ensure that everyone has equal space to share insights.

What kind of environment should you help create?

- Commit to creating a safe/safer space while recognizing it is impossible to guarantee absolute emotional safety for this conversation.
- Do not dominate the conversation.
- Support inclusive and diverse voices.
- Remember that individuals from marginalized communities frequently assume greater risk and responsibility in conversations about discrimination.

Practice reciprocity, humility, and caution

- **Reciprocity:** exchange ideas for mutual benefit; listen to the speaker and acknowledge that the speaker is the expert on their own experiences
- **Humility:** everyone's understandings are incomplete; by listening to one another we can learn

Timekeepers

In addition to the rules and guidelines for participants (above), timekeepers need to consider the following questions.

What do you need to do?

- The timekeeper keeps track of the timing for the discussion.
- The timekeeper helps the facilitator move the group through the agenda's topics, allowing the facilitator and participants to focus on the conversation, rather than watching the clock.
- Timekeepers should give the facilitator and participants warnings when there is 10 minutes and 5 minutes left in a section.

Facilitators (For more facilitation resources, got to ottlex.org/facilitation)

What do you need to do?

- Use the conversation starters to guide the conversation.
- Be a participating member of the group.
- At the end of the conversation, allow enough time for groups to begin to think about and discuss actions they could take to address some of the issues raised during discussions.
- Create a friendly and welcoming environment.
- Model active listening skills.
- Intervene if arguments arise or unproductive debate arises, but also allow enough space for discomfort.

How should you structure the conversation?

- Keep the group focused and on task.
- You do not need to answer every question.
- However, you want to foster a productive conversation.
- Avoid micromanaging the conversation.
- Avoid dismissing any person's comments.
- Make sure everyone can participate and has time to talk.
- Make sure no single student is dominating the conversation.

Notetakers

In addition to the rules and guidelines for participants (above), note-takers need to consider the following questions.

What do you need to do?

- Actively take notes on the conversation.
- Summarize the main points that arise.
- Participate in the discussion.

How will you capture the whole conversation?

- Share the conversation as a whole, rather than just the ideas you prefer.
- You will not be able to write down every word.
- Be mindful of what you do write down.
- Avoid dismissing any person's comments.
- Practice compassion and have an open mind.
- Be respectful and mindful of others in both verbal and body language.
- Remember that individuals from marginalized communities frequently assume greater risk and responsibility in conversations about discrimination.

What happens next?

Paper or digital surveys can be submitted until Friday, April 22nd at 5:00pm. Once all the surveys are returned, our team will begin analyzing the data. For more information on what this means, visit ottlex.org/data. After the data is anonymized and processed, it will be sent to the Division of Planning for incorporations into the Comprehensive plan. CivicLex will also be publishing the data for anyone to access and releasing a report of our own findings. If you are curious about the Comprehensive Plan and would like more opportunities to participate in local government, you can go to ottlex.org/followup or civiclex.org.

About CivicLex

On the Table is a project of CivicLex and is organized by a 36 person Advisory Group representing a variety of Lexington community organizations, educational institutions, and neighborhoods. CivicLex is a nonpartisan, non-profit civic education organization that helps Lexington residents connect with and understand local government. Find out more about our work at civiclex.org.



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