

# CULTIVATING LAND AND BELONGING



KINDLING CONVERSATION GUIDE

ALASKA  

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HUMANITIES  

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FORUM

## OUR PURPOSE

This Kindling Conversation Guide supports an intentional community conversation with a specific purpose: to explore the relationship between forced migration, agriculture, and the ongoing process of making a new place feel like home.

## OUR GUIDING QUESTION

At the heart of this community conversation is a question that matters to everyone and that everyone can answer:

**HOW CAN WE CREATE A SENSE OF HOME FOR OURSELVES AND OTHERS?**

## OUR SPRINGBOARD FOR CONVERSATION

The Kindling Conversation Toolkit provides a Springboard to help launch a conversation about forced migration and the process of making a new place feel like home. Alaska Refugees Cultivating Food & Belonging offers a shared experience that everyone can respond to and explore together.

Community conversations like this one need a facilitator to keep them on track. You may act as the facilitator, or you may ask someone else to fulfill that role. The facilitator is not an expert on the subject; they are not there to teach or explain.

Instead, the facilitator works to ensure as many participants as possible feel welcome, included, and engaged in the discussion. The facilitator will use the structure provided below to keep the conversation on track and create a transparent flow.

# 1. WELCOME



## INTRODUCE THE DISCUSSION AND SET EXPECTATIONS. [~5 MINUTES]

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*Before people arrive, prepare the space and any handouts or posters you plan to use.*

- Thank everyone for making the time to come.
- Review “**housekeeping**”: parking (if relevant), bathrooms, emergency exits, food... Ask everyone to turn their phones on silent if they haven’t done so already.
- Make a **land acknowledgment** statement. We encourage you to reflect and write your own beforehand.
- Describe the **Purpose** of the conversation:

We’re all gathered here to explore and reflect on our relationship with migration, agriculture, and building the feeling of home. Some of you may have first hand experience in losing your home and having to build something new and others may be newer to these conversations. Regardless, we are all a part of building a community that welcomes new people and have something meaningful to add.

Kindling Conversations explore topics that are important to Alaskans. Topics that can be challenging, evoke many complex emotions, and that our community may have different perspectives and ideas about.

Please be mindful of your needs throughout this experience, if you need to step away at any point in this conversation please do what is best for you.

- Introduce the **Guiding Question** aloud:

HOW CAN WE CREATE A SENSE OF HOME FOR OURSELVES AND OTHERS?

- Review the **Four Agreements**:

*(be present, listen hard, honor vulnerability, embrace complexity).*

Ask if anyone wants to add another agreement, and if not, if everyone is OK with these four.

## 2. CONNECT



**GET COMFORTABLE AND GET TO KNOW EACH OTHER.** [TIME VARIES BY NUMBER OF PARTICIPANTS. WE ESTIMATE (60 SECONDS) X (# OF PARTICIPANTS) FOR INTRODUCTIONS PLUS 10 MINUTES FOR PAIRING & DISCUSSION]

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- **Introductions:** Go around the circle and have everyone introduce themselves with their preferred name, their gender pronouns if they feel comfortable sharing, and a food tradition that's been passed down in your family.
  - Ask people to keep their answers brief (30 seconds or less). We'll have plenty of time to get to know one another better.
- **Pair and Share:** Ask everyone to turn to someone next to them, introduce themselves again, and share a short story about a time you were new to a place, how did you adapt? This could be a time you moved somewhere new or started a new job or changed schools.
  - Give each pair 6 minutes total to tell their stories so each person has 3 minutes to share. If the group is an odd number and there is a group of 3, they'll each have 2 minutes. You may want to call out at the half-way mark.
  - Once time is up, ask if anyone would like to share a few feelings or phrases that stood out to them from their partner's story. Remind them not to share the whole story or personal details—just a few words or feelings that stood out.
  - After space for answers, thank everyone for sharing and transition to the shared springboard experience.

## 3. EXPERIENCE

FIND COMMON GROUND THROUGH SHARED EXPERIENCE. [~12 MINUTES]

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- All participants will share the experience of watching Alaska Refugees Cultivating Food & Belonging.



- Encourage participants to think about the ways these stories resonate with their own lives and histories.

## 4. DISCUSS



**EXPLORE DIFFERENT RESPONSES AND PERSPECTIVES.** [TIME VARIES. MAKE SURE TO LEAVE AT LEAST 10 MINUTES FOR THE CLOSE, AND 20 MINUTES FOR A GROUP OF MORE THAN 15 PEOPLE.]

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- If you have a group larger than 15, break them into two smaller groups with one designated facilitator in each space. Otherwise, let everyone know that the rest of the conversation will be as a whole.
- Take a moment to review the **Four Agreements** and the **Purpose** of the conversation.
- Encourage the group to talk to one another, not just to you. Let them know it is ok for them to throw out questions, and there is no need to raise hands before speaking.
- Start by asking for someone to share what stood out to them from the film. Leave space for multiple responses before you offer the next question.
  - Don't be afraid of silences! Count to 20 in your head before jumping in, and see where things go.
- As the conversation moves, offer a few of these questions. Ask them one at a time, and leave ample space for people to think, answer, and take the discussion in new directions before asking the next. Don't feel obligated to ask them all—the conversation will go where it needs to.
  - How does the history of the Matanuska Colony Project compare to modern refugee resettlement efforts? What similarities or differences stand out to you?
  - What does it mean to truly “belong” in a new place? How do people create a sense of belonging for themselves and others?
  - The film discusses the idea of “settler fantasies” and how land is often imagined as empty before newcomers arrive. How do these narratives impact the way we understand migration and resettlement today?
  - How do cultural traditions shape the way people experience and navigate resettlement?

## 5. CLOSE



**REVEAL INSIGHTS FROM THE CONVERSATION.** [~10 MINUTES WITH GROUPS OF 15 OR LESS, ~20 MINUTES FOR GROUPS OF MORE THAN 15]

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- To transition out of the discussion, **summarize what has happened** so far:
  - "Today, we gathered to explore the experiences of refugees in Anchorage and the ongoing process of making a home in a new place. Before we close out, let's reflect on what we've learned."
- Sit in silence for one minute to allow people time to reflect.
- Go around the circle one more time, with each person sharing one thing they will take away.
- Once everyone has shared, take a moment to give thanks:
  - Thank you for your participation and willingness to engage in this important conversation.
  - Thank you to those who shared their stories and insights today.
  - And thank you to all of you, who came to this conversation today, who listened generously, and who shared your perspectives. When you make time for events like these, you make time for your community. If there's more from this discussion you'd like to think about, don't stop here! Bring it home, to your friends, to your work, and to each other to keep the conversation going.
- Ask everyone to please fill out a quick survey before they leave. Their feedback is critical for improving future conversations and for ensuring continued support for community gatherings like this one.

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*Any views, findings, conclusions, or recommendations expressed in this toolkit, do not necessarily represent those of the National Endowment for the Humanities.*