**Teacher Resource**

**Revolving Conversation Guidelines**

You will be having a special kind of community conversation about climate change that involves using a meeting technique called “revolving conversation.”

The **Revolving Conversation** is designed to:

• Give participants an opportunity to hear about all the ideas and perspectives in the room, thereby enlarging their understanding of the issues.

• Give everyone in the room a chance to talk with others and have everyone hear what they have to say.

• Combine the conversation characteristics of a very few people talking with each other with the need for a larger number of people to be part of the conversation.

This meeting technique is not designed to make decisions. Instead it might be used first to get a better sense of what everyone thinks and all the perspectives BEFORE a group tries to decide what to do.

**How it works**

The room is set up with a small table in the center and four chairs (the “inner” chairs) around it. All the other chairs (the “outer” chairs) are placed in concentric circles (with room for aisles) around this central table and four chairs. There should be enough chairs for everyone who is expected to come to the conversation (can be dozens or even hundreds). If a large crowd is expected, a multi-directional mike should be taped down to the table in the middle.

At the beginning of the conversation, all the participants should be sitting in the outer chairs (any of those surrounding, but not at, the central table). A convener would start the conversation by coming to the center and describing the topic and purpose of the conversation, telling everyone the meeting rules, and then walking away from the center and joining the others in the outer chairs. After this point EVERYONE plays by the same rules during the conversation.

A potential description of the conversation topic about climate change might be: “We’re here today to talk about climate change—what you know, what you don’t know or would like to know, how you might be impacted, what concerns you have, what you think should be done or what you will do.”

**The Meeting Rules**

• Anyone can say anything they want but everyone must be respectful. BUT to do so they MUST be sitting at one of the four chairs at the table in the center of the room.

• Anyone can come to the center, take an empty chair and join the conversation. If no one else is at the table, it’s a monologue. Otherwise it’s a conversation among the 2-4 people at the table. Anyone can join the conversation as often or as frequently as they want.

• If you want to join the conversation but all four chairs are taken, come to the center and stand just to the side of the table. This will signal those at the table that each should evaluate whether or not he or she needs to stay at the table right then or whether to give up the seat to one of those waiting. More than one person can be waiting by standing to the side at any time.

• If you want to join the conversation to talk with a specific person already at the table and if all four of the chairs are full, you should stand directly behind the person with whom you want to talk. This will signal the other three that each should evaluate whether to give up his or her chair to you.

Everyone in the room, including those at the table, should practice active listening. This conversation should be a dialogue not a debate.

**Wrapping Up the Meeting**

When the time is running out, the convener will once again come down and take an inner chair (waiting for one to open up if needed). The convener will warn when time is almost up and suggest that anyone who still has something they want to say should come down and join the conversation. The convener leaves the center to allow the last comments to be made. After an appropriate interval, the convener re-enters the center and closes the meeting by thanking the participants and reflecting briefly on the conversation that just occurred.

Source: Hass, L., Hamel, M., Sabo, A., & Tall, C. (2008). *Wisconsin climate change activity guide* (608.266.6790). Retrieved November 17, 2011, from [www.dnr.wi.gov/eek/teacher/climatechangeguide.htm](http://www.dnr.wi.gov/eek/teacher/climatechangeguide.htm)