



Election Outreach Campaign
To reclaim our elections and end voter disenfranchisement in '06

HOST COMPANION GUIDE

To Enhance
Audience Participation and Deliberative Dialogue

“Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world. Indeed, it's the only thing that ever has.”

— Margaret Mead



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At an election, every citizen should consider the public happiness as depending on his single vote.”

- James Wilson (1742-1798)



THANK YOU

We want to begin by thanking you. We know that you are committed to fostering democracy in your community, and we appreciate your allowing us to be a part of your initiative to increase voter participation. We understand what it takes to work on the ground organizing communities, and we hope that *American Blackout* can be a source of inspiration and motivation for your efforts.

INTRODUCTION:

Statement from the Filmmaker Ian Inaba:

Americans have always taken for granted that fair and honest elections ensure that their voice will be heard in the shaping of our democracy now and in the future. On this the eve of the 2006 elections, we are living with the consequences of vote suppression in the last two national elections through the intentional disenfranchisement of specifically targeted communities. By documenting these cases of voting irregularities particularly in Florida and Ohio I hoped to show that these events are not merely one off failures of an overburdened election system and appear to be occurring with increased frequency across our nation.

With American Blackout we are attempting to raise public awareness and discussion now so that we can motivate communities to be vigilant in protecting the right to vote for every American. I hope that you can share American Blackout with your family, friends and co-workers and join our End the Blackout and Video the Vote campaigns to help ensure that every voter in every precinct in America will know that their voice will be heard.

BEFORE YOU BEGIN

Preparing For Your Event

1. **Post the date of your event and location at www.americanblackout.org.**
2. **Use the Community Screening Checklist.** This list will help you plan, organize and orchestrate a successful event. (See Downloadable Screening Checklist.)



3. **Send out invitations early, to a broad population:** We want to encourage you to use the screening of *American Blackout* as an opportunity to bring together a wide range of people that may not normally come into contact with one another. The more eclectic your crowd—the more dynamic and potentially influential your post-discussion will become. (See Downloadable Flyer Template.)
 - When possible, invite members of your local Board of Elections. By including local leaders, you’re creating an opportunity to foster dialogue with the people directly influencing the issue of voting fairness. (See Downloadable Sample Board of Elections Request Letter.)
4. **Share your event** with your local newspaper by sending a press release announcing your event. (See Downloadable Sample Press Release.)
5. **Decide which dialogue questions you want to use.** You will find several examples of questions to help you get your dialogue started. (See “Suggested Dialogue Questions”, Page 7)
6. **Inform your audience about election procedures and issues specific to your community.** We encourage you to develop simple, informative Hand-Outs that participants can take away. This material can also provide information on your organization and its mission including a list of voter precincts in your area.
7. **Document your event:** your actions can inspire and educate others. We can disseminate footage, photos, anecdotes, action plans and solutions from your event via our website. (If you decide to videotape your event, please see the submission guidelines posted on americanblackout.com)

During Your Event

1. **Encourage your participants to utilize Sign-In sheets and Pre-Film Surveys.** Staying connected and learning from each other are key outreach campaign objectives. Please help by encouraging all participants to fill out the survey questionnaires, utilize the sign-in sheets and share their experiences on-line. (See Downloadable Sign in Sheet and Downloadable Pre-Film Survey. You can also encourage people to fill-out the survey and plug into the network online at americanblackout.org.)
2. **ENJOY!** The screening and post-dialogue!



3. **Create an opportunity for ACTION TEAMS.** For participants who want to continue to work on the issues:
 - a. After the dialogue, provide time for people to identify issues they are invested in continuing to address and create groups based on liked minded interests.
 - b. Provide time for each action team to:
 1. Identify a team leader
 2. Set up a time and a place for their next meeting
 3. Decide on their first agenda

After Your Event

- I. Please send us:
 - a. Sign-in sheets (you can scan + email, fax, or mail)
 - b. Your video-footage and photos. (Please see the Submission Guidelines on americanblackout.org and include a SASE if you want materials returned.)
 - c. **YOUR STORIES!** We want to hear back from you. Please share with us your experiences with the film and outreach campaign. We want to know what worked, and what you think can be done better!

Email: americanblackout@gnn.tv.

Fax: 510.548.5151

Mail: GNN / American Blackout, 2887 College Ave #369, Berkeley, CA 94705



HOW DIALOGUE AND DELIBERATION WORK WITH AMERICAN BLACKOUT

What is Dialogue?

Dialogue can be a confusing term, and is often used in many different contexts. Even the experts who study and teach it will disagree about its exact definition. What is the difference between an office meeting, a discussion with a loved one, and this term, *dialogue*? There are two key elements that differentiate dialogue: the first is that it is a facilitated constructive discussion where ground rules are established with an agreement to engage in conscious communication. The second distinct element is that dialogue is not an experience where you brainstorm or debate, it is an environment where the focus is on listening.

Dialogue is a process that allows people to share their perspectives and experiences with one another about difficult issues. Dialogue is not about judging, weighing or making decisions, but rather understanding and learning. The process of dialogue can be valuable in dispelling stereotypes, building trust, and enabling people to be open to perspectives that are very different from their own.

What is Deliberative Democracy?

The core objective of Deliberative Democracy is to make citizen participation meaningful and effective. The ideal of a “deliberative democracy” is that public policy decisions are reached through informed discussion among citizens.

While the process of dialogue builds relationships and explores difference and values, *deliberation* builds on this process to include critical thinking and analysis to solve public problems, and address policy issues.

What does a deliberative dialogue look and sound like? The content of the deliberative dialogue might have a progression of: 1) providing information, 2) opportunity to explore participant responses, 3) analysis of the issue, and, 4) an exploration of specific action steps. When participants have the opportunity to consider a range of actions, and see themselves as active participants in solving the issue, they also associate themselves as a part of the solution. When a public conversation ends with analysis of the issue and does not progress to a conversation about action, it can negatively reinforce the idea that the possibilities for addressing the issue are not inside the room.



In this manual you will find a series of questions that will help you guide your audience members through this deliberative progression, and offer opportunities to create solutions.

Basic Principles of Dialogue

The following guidelines will offer guidance to the facilitator. If you are interested in learning more about facilitation, (Please see Page 10 for a list of resources.)

- **Develop Trust: Make listening as important as speaking.** Establish a time for participants to share experiences, perspectives, and values before they begin discussing policy options and action plans. Encourage participants to make the political issues personal by sharing stories about their own experiences.
- **Encourage Civic Responsibility:** Our everyday public discourse reinforces the idea that real change happens “out there,” beyond most people’s reach or influence. It also reflects the difficulty in seeing how individuals’ efforts to create change connect to the bigger issues or the larger community. Give participants a sense of political status and membership, a feeling that ordinary citizens have a place on the public stage.
- **Utilize the Media:** It is also important to keep the results of the deliberative dialogue process in the public eye. Invite the press and political leaders to your dialogue. This helps your entire community see the value of participation.

SUGGESTED DIALOGUE QUESTIONS

SECTION I: *Consciousness Raising Questions* - 3 Topics to choose from:

Voter Disenfranchisement and Democracy

- If you saw a movie about efforts to lower the voting rates of Republican voters, would you have a different set of feelings than you have now? Why?
- Do you know anyone (perhaps yourself) who has felt affected by purposeful effort to keep people from voting?
- If you were working for a campaign, would you spend energy trying to encourage everyone to vote, or primarily just folks in your party?



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- In sports sometimes you are on the offense trying to score points and at other times you play defense and try to keep your opponent from scoring. Do you think it is ok to try and prevent an opposing political party from 'scoring' votes?
- Is there anything unethical about taking pains to ensure that your electoral opponents are following all of the election rules?
- Do you think such watchdog behavior can balance out in the end?

Race

- Do you think that racism is at work in what happened to the voters in Ohio, Georgia and Florida? Or are these just cases of hardball political maneuvers in which the targets just happened to be black? Is race fundamental to what is happening, or mostly incidental?
- The people who orchestrated the Republican Crossover in McKinney's election might deny that racism played a role in that campaign – Would you believe them, or do they just see racism differently than some other people?
- What do we learn from the fact that people see these issues so differently? Why does that happen?

Media Portrayals

- What role does a free press play in a democracy?
- Do you think you have ever been taken in by a media spin campaign? What made you realize this? What can individuals do to keep from being unduly influenced toward distorted understandings of people and issues?
- How important is it for the media to cover dissenting and/or fringe voices? How should the media make a distinction between dissenting voices and fringe perspectives Do you believe that all voices should be given equal weight no matter how extreme?



SECTION 2: TALK BACK: A CHANCE TO RESPOND TO KEY QUOTES IN AMERICAN BLACKOUT

“ the media, large corporations, the people who control politically our country today, do not want you to participate... that is only bad for them. They want a low turn out of primarily upper middle class people, they want big money to dominate the political process, their nightmare is that young people, lower income people, working people jump into the political process... they do not want that”

Bernie Sanders
US Congressman
I-Vermont

“When you have a situation like Florida it tends to discourage people from participating. People start saying it doesn’t matter. Why should I vote? My vote is not going to count.”

John Lewis
US Congressman
D-Georgia

“You know people didn’t wake up one morning and say we’re gonna pass the Voting Rights Act. It was not out of the goodness of someone’s heart. People struggled. People bled. People died. When I was growing up many years ago, in Southeast Alabama people could not register to vote simply because of the color of their skin. You had to pass a so-called literacy test, interpret certain sections of the constitution, pay a poll tax...”

John Lewis
US Congressman
D-Georgia

“We have to take political power seriously. The forty-eight thousand Republicans who crossed-over in my election took political power seriously. When the Atlanta Constitution doesn’t write the truth, they take their power over us seriously. Black people who voted in Florida at nearly 100% took their power seriously.”

Cynthia McKinney
US Congressman
D-Georgia

SECTION 3: MOVING TO ACTION QUESTIONS: Seeing Ourselves As The Solution

- Who do you think is ultimately responsible for protecting voting rights?
- Have you ever heard of any citizen-based efforts to promote voter turn out that you found inspirational, appealing or creative?



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- If there were a hundred citizens who wanted to make sure that everyone had an equal chance to vote—what could they do to act on that interest?
- Who is the person whose work on these kinds of issues most inspires you? Is this someone you would be willing to contact and work with on an initiative you have in mind? Or are they already working on an initiative that you want to get involved with?



WANT MORE INFORMATION on dialogue and facilitation?

Here are a few more organizations you can learn from:

Public Conversations Project www.publicconversations.org

The Public Conversations Project helps people with fundamental disagreements over divisive issues develop the mutual understanding and trust essential for strong communities and positive action. Their dialogue model is characterized by a careful preparatory phase in which all stakeholders/sides are interviewed and prepared for the dialogue process.

Study Circles www.studycircles.org

Study Circles enable communities to strengthen their own ability to solve problems by bringing large numbers of people together in dialogue across divides of race, income, age, and political viewpoints. Study Circles combine dialogue, deliberation, and community organizing techniques, enabling public talk to build understanding, explore a range of solutions, and serve as a catalyst for social, political, and policy change.

Appreciative Inquiry appreciativeinquiry.case.edu

Appreciative Inquiry is a change method that encourages stakeholders to explore the best of the past and present in their organizations and communities. AI involves, in a central way, the art and practice of asking questions that strengthen a system's capacity to apprehend, anticipate, and heighten positive potential.

Conversation Café www.conversationcafe.org

Conversation Cafés are hosted conversations that are usually held in a public setting like a coffee shop or bookstore, where anyone is welcome to join. A simple format helps people feel at ease and gives everyone who wants to a chance to speak.