

- *Strategies for reaching shared understanding of an issue:* How would participants work to ensure all perspectives are taken into account?
- *Examining underlying assumptions:* How do our own opinions impact the way we think about problems, and how can other people's thinking improve our understanding of an issue?

**Facilitator Notes** There are many ways for debriefing this exercise. Participants can reflect independently by writing their thoughts and reactions, can pair-and-share their reflections with each other, and/or can debrief as a group.

### ***Activity Four: Door-slamers vs. Door-openers<sup>2</sup>***

*Time:* 35 minutes

**Learning Outcomes** Participants will

- Explore the power of asking open-ended questions when engaging others.
- Explore and assess types of questions that can open or close conversations.
- Assess the types of questions they have experienced from others and consider how their relative effectiveness affected the outcome of the situation.
- Learn strategies for effectively approaching others with civility and openness.

**Detailed Instructions** Explain to participants that some questions, when asked, have the effect of “slamming the door” on the conversation or on the relationship between the conversation's participants. Other questions have the effect of “opening up a door,” shedding new light, or making possible new ways of thinking or talking about something.

<sup>2</sup> Adapted from and used with permission of How do questions advance dialogue?. (n.d.). Watertown, MA: Public Conversations Project. Retrieved August 04, 2016, from [www.publicconversations.org/sites/default/files/sec10.pdf/](http://www.publicconversations.org/sites/default/files/sec10.pdf/).

Invite participants to take a few moments to reflect on questions they've been asked in their life. Are there particular ones they would consider "door-slammer"? Invite participants to write these questions down on a piece of paper for 2 minutes. If needed, provide an example to illustrate the difference between a "door-slammer" and a "door-opener":

Door Opener: "I hadn't heard that before. Can you tell me more?"

Door Slammer: "Where did you get that crazy idea from?"

To encourage ongoing reflection, ask participants to form small groups of 3 to 5 participants to take turns sharing their thoughts about what elements of the questions shut them or the conversation down. Allow participants 2 minutes each to share on the characteristics of "door-slamming" questions. (This should take 5 to 10 minutes total, depending on group size.)

Repeat the process for the "door-opener" questions. Invite participants to take a few moments to reflect on questions they've been asked in their life. Are there particular ones they would consider "door-openers"? Then have them spend 2 minutes writing these questions down.

In the same small groups as before, ask participants to take turns sharing what qualities of these questions felt "opening." Again, participants should take turns, for 2 minutes each, sharing characteristics of "door-opening questions." (This should take 5 to 10 minutes total, depending on group size.)

Bring the small groups together into one large group. Begin a 10-minute discussion on the effects that different kinds of questions (or ways of asking the questions) can have on engaging Controversy with Civility.

**Facilitator Notes** This activity can be adapted to specific topics or subjects. For example, the group may be considering ways to open dialogue around the topic of privilege and oppression, around international conflicts, or around other hot button issues impacting group members. The framework provided here is intended to be utilized in a way that aligns with the group's interests and needs for learning about effective dialogue.