

Women's Climate Congress

Building the network

The following pages provide information to on how to build our network by hosting conversation circles in your local area and making contact with your local representatives. Don't forget to let us know how you go!

Running a conversation circle

1. Ask women in your community to read the WCC discussion paper: [Independent mediation for united action on climate change](#)

'Your community' can be in your suburb, town, mother's group, workplace or any other network you belong to. It can be women physically in one location (eg your town), or can be women from anywhere in the country or the world — connected by a thread that is meaningful to you.

Explain that this paper is intended to promote discussion — the principles are important and are the basis of our values, but the proposed process for mediation via a 'wisdom council' is just a starting point for thinking about how to break the current political deadlock that prevents action on climate change.

See below for some key principles in the paper and some other materials that might inspire your conversation. Focus on these principles, the energy your group is bringing and how to harness and amplify that to build this movement.

Also invite the women to read our [Vision, values and commitment statement](#) and the other information on our website (which will be updated regularly as we sense more deeply into this initiative and we receive the harvests of your conversations).

2. Invite the women to a conversation circle to talk about the paper.

In the digital world (eg Zoom, Skype), about 1.5 hours might be long enough. Face-to-face meetings can be longer.

Depending on how confident you feel with hosting such a circle, you might start small (say 5–10 women) or you might have more participants (but probably not more than about 20 for an interactive Zoom conversation).

Note that we want to consciously reach out to women from different walks of life and political perspectives. This might not happen straight away and how to do it might be a topic for conversation at your initial circle.

If possible, get together with 1 or 2 of the other women in your group and design a 'flow' (agenda) for your gathering (see below for a suggested simple flow).

Invite one person to host the circle, one to be the guardian and one to take notes/harvest (see below for an explanation of these roles).

3. Hold your conversation circle

If you are on Zoom, and participants agree, you could electronically record your conversation.

See below for some protocols for the host and guardian to follow to create a safe space for a respectful conversation.

Ask the notetaker to harvest the themes emerging from your conversation (we have provided a template, but do not feel too constrained by this). If there is someone in your group who would also like to create a graphic /artistic interpretation, a poem or a song, that is also a great harvest.

4. Decide next steps

At the end of your conversation circle, gather up the feeling in the circle about what seems to be emerging to happen next.

This might be reaching out to more women to join another conversation (including women who are influential in your community).

And it would also be good if you can write to your local MP (federal and state) to let them know what you have been talking about and, if you feel ready, to arrange a meeting. Some tips for writing to your MP/s are below.

5. Create a short summary of the conversation

The harvester creates a short summary report of the conversation from their own notes, reflections of other participants, other materials, etc. Send a draft to all participants to review and comment on before finalising.

6. Send your recording and harvest report/other information to us

womensclimatecongress@gmail.com

We will collate the information we receive and publish/map it on our website to show the developing web of women's conversations across the country.

7. Have more conversations!

Keep the ball rolling with more conversations — large or small — over a coffee or in a larger more formal setting.

Some key principles from the discussion paper

The paper is inspired by the work of Julia Grace Wales, a 33-year-old English literature scholar working at the University of Wisconsin, USA. In the midst of WW1, when the norm was for warring parties to cut all communication, she expressed the need to create a safe space for the issues and concerns from each side to be examined and mediated by an independent council made up of representatives from the neutral countries. She said that this was 'the natural thing to do'.

Julia Grace set the principles that there should be no blame for who had caused the war and the negotiations should be a safe space with no humiliation of either side. She said the nations were all thinking separately and that this independent group would be like a 'world thinking organ' for bringing the thinking together.

This was pretty profound stuff for a young woman to come up with in 1914! Her paper was adopted as the official platform of several major peace conferences, endorsed by the Wisconsin Legislature, and was considered by US President Woodrow, as well as other world leaders, but was never formally adopted.

Building on Julia Grace's work in the context of climate change today, my paper is built around a number of overarching principles:

- Accept the science, as recommended by the IPCC, and reflected in the Paris Accord, and the need to transition quickly away from fossil fuels.
- Accept the need to sustain jobs and wellbeing of people during the transition away from fossil fuels
- Allow women to take a lead. Some people feel a little uncomfortable with this but I think there are good reasons to try. It has not happened before. It is an experiment. And, as we regularly hear, it is an idea that resonates with women.

There are further key principles that underpin the idea of 'mediation':

- Accept joint responsibility for where we are at now ('no blame').
- Collaborate across diverse voices (nonpartisan).
- Remain independent from political influence.
- Bring nurture of life for future generations, wildlife and the environment into public discourse.

The problem of climate change, like other societal problems, is very complex, But current political discourse tends to simplify that to short policy statements and slogans. These principles would allow us to address the uncertainties, admit what we don't know and think together about how to secure a safe future.

Each of these principles will be expanded further in short discussion papers, which we will post on our website [Resources](#) page shortly.

Roles for holding the conversation space

In WCC we draw on practices from the Art of Hosting Conversations that Matter, to aid our conversations. Three key role descriptions are shown below. They are a guide for good practice, which shares the burdens and the joys of conversations that matter.

Host	<p>Invite and welcome us, ensure all are heard</p> <p>The host can be (but is not necessarily) the same person who does the organising around who is invited, location and attendance. The host also develops an outline ('flow') for the conversation.</p>
Guardian	<p>Keep watch on our needs, timing and energy</p> <p>The guardian prompts the host on how we are tracking against time, if we need a break, or if they observe any other need of the group or an individual participant.</p>
Harvester (reporter)	<p>Gather thoughts and insights</p> <p>The harvester collects the results of the conversation (including notes, flip charts, drawings etc) and creates a summary of the main themes, ideas and agreed actions.</p>

Suggested conversation 'flow'

Welcome and housekeeping	<p>The host welcomes everyone/gives acknowledgement of country, explains context, framing, timing for gathering, introduces (or invites) the guardian and harvester.</p>
Check in	<p>The host invites each participant to introduce themselves and respond to a broad question such as:</p> <p>'What has brought you here today?'</p>
Workshop powerful question/s	<p>Create 1 or 2 powerful question/s issues you want to talk about relating to the discussion paper, or to promote united action on climate change in your community, or generally.</p> <p>For example: 'Why is women's leadership important at this time?'</p> <p>OR</p> <p>'What does a collaborative political culture look like?'</p> <p>Questions can be developed by the hosts before the gathering or co-created by the group as part of the conversation itself.</p>
Conversation	<p>The host opens the circle for conversation around the first question and explains ground rules (see below).</p>
Round up of key themes	<p>Brief feedback from the host and/or harvester on key themes emerging, any actions etc.</p>
Check out	<p>Invite each participant to speak a word or short phrase to capture their experience of the conversation.</p>

Conversation protocols

WCC aims to engage women from diverse backgrounds and perspectives and so some simple ground rules are helpful to create safe spaces for our conversations.

A simple set of agreements can go a long way to making sure the conversations stay respectful and productive:

- Listen with attention. Listen to understand (do not interrupt/one person speaks at a time).
- Speak with intention. Stay on track and stick to the purpose of the conversation. Build on what others have said.
- Slow down to allow everyone to have a say (which means keeping contributions concise; and holding back on the urge to speak again until others have had a chance to speak).
- No expectation to speak – allow everyone the choice of whether to speak or just to listen.
- Suspend judgement —respect people’s right to their opinions even if you disagree.
- Keep contributions constructive, courteous and respectful.
- Welcome pauses and silence — this allows time to process what has been said and go deeper.

Using a talking piece is a great way to help uphold agreements. A talking piece is an object that is held by the person speaking, and signals that it is not an ordinary conversation where interruptions and argumentation might be welcome. The talking piece is placed in the centre of the group to begin with. When a person wishes to speak they pick it up and should be listened to without interruption until they place it back in the centre. Don’t hand it straight to another person. Always place it back in the centre, pause, and the next person can pick up.

For an online conversation, picking up a physical talking piece can be replaced by participants signalling to the host that they wish to speak and the host indicating who the next speaker will be. Speakers can then indicate that they have finished speaking by saying ‘I’m putting the talking piece back’ (or similar).

Further ideas and information on hosting conversations:

[Art of Hosting Conversations that Matter — methods](#)

[Canberra Conversations](#)

[Voices for Indi — doing politics differently](#)

[The Canberra Alliance for Participatory Democracy kitchen table conversation kit](#)

Meeting (or writing to) your local representatives

Our approach is to respectfully engage decision makers in conversations about how to develop a policy framework to ensure a safe and sustainable future. It isn't to protest or demand, but to work out together what needs to happen. However, we are coming from a position of strength and authority — standing up for the safety of future generations and care for the Earth — so we can be firm in our expectation that actions will be taken to ensure these outcomes.

Use the language of dialogue and mediation

Our public discourse is so polarised that we often do not recognise that the language we use is sometimes confrontational and therefore unlikely to encourage the opening up of more productive conversations across currently divided sections of the community.

For example, accusations of lying are common ('the government has been lying to us'). But what appears to us as 'lying' might actually be true when viewed from a quite different perspective. It is useful to identify, explore and analyse that perspective. The same applies to 'greedy', 'only cares about profits' and similar accusations.

Those with differing views are unlikely to come to the table for a more mediative style of conversation while they are being vilified. In recent years, sadly, social media has become a hotbed of adversarial discourse. Such exchanges usually harden differences and provoke further conflict.

Some key things to keep in mind to promote collaboration:

1. **Suspend judgement** about why we are where we are now. We are looking for ways to co-develop a new framework of ideas to go forward (transformation).
2. **Engage in 'appreciative inquiry'** — that is, first look for things you agree on and affirm these. Approach differences with curiosity; ask questions to find out what is actually going on underneath.
3. **Look for common ground** — avoid framing the issue around the contentious issues (eg decarbonising the economy) but around the things we are more likely to have in common (eg a better future for children, creating more jobs)
4. **Collaborate to find solutions** rather than dictating what should change.
5. **Be nonpartisan** and avoid language that shows a pre-existing bias. For example, the terms 'dirty gas', 'big polluter' and 'greenie' carry judgments that are not helpful in building relationships.

Contact

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