



PROGRAM GUIDE

Repeopling Vermont

*The Paradox of Development
in the Twentieth Century*



Paul M. Searls

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Hosting a Community Program	2
Sample Evaluation Form	5
Moderating Difficult Conversations	7
Repeopling Vermont Discussion Questions	10
Host Your Own Program	11

QUESTIONS?

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HOSTING A COMMUNITY PROGRAM

PRE-EVENT CONSIDERATIONS

- Is your library big enough to host the number of people you hope will attend this event? Do you have enough parking? Is the setup good for this kind of event (*screen with good sightlines, room for breakout group work, surface to write?*) Do you have enough chairs?

You may need to reserve another spot. If you choose to go offsite, make sure to have the offsite location listed on all of your publicity.

- Do you need to have registration for the event? A waiting list?
- What are your technology needs if any? Projector and screen? Microphone? Wifi? Be sure you have everything you need and have tried it before the event.
- Is your building accessible? Have you publicized whether it is or not, and any accommodations you can make if applicable? Consider entrance to the building, room for wheelchairs, accommodations for service dogs. Is there need for a sign language interpreter?
- Food and beverages: Do you want to serve them? Will you purchase them, do a potluck, ask a few people to bring things? Make sure you have plates, flatware, napkins, cups.
- Do you want to ask the community access TV station to record? Consider the balance between possibly inhibiting your audience's participation with sharing the event more broadly. If you decide to do it, get permission from the presenter as soon as possible.
- Confirm arrival time with presenter.
- Create online registration and/or sign-in sheet.
- Create and print evaluation. Include questions about how they heard about the program and if they would like to be notified of future events.

MARKETING

Ask presenter(s) for a blurb and bio so you're certain you're promoting accurately.

Posters

- Design: Use Canva or InDesign or a similar program. If you aren't good at making posters, look for another staff member or volunteer who is!
- Most should be 8 ½ X 11 so they will fit on public bulletin boards. A few larger ones for the library are nice.
- Placement: inside and outside the library, local cafes, schools, community centers, neighboring libraries, general stores, churches, senior centers.

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HOSTING A COMMUNITY PROGRAM *(cont.)*

Digital Promotion

- Post prominently on the library website.
- Promote on the library's Facebook, Instagram, Twitter accounts, and ask other community organizations to post on their pages, too. Front Porch Forum is hugely well-read in most VT towns so be sure to post there! Create a Facebook event on your organization's page. If you have any kind of budget, spending \$20 to "sponsor" the event can gain additional eyes and perhaps additional attendees.
- Email blasts to people who receive your e-newsletters
- Chamber of Commerce event calendar

Other

- Local newspaper(s), local radio stations, school newsletters. Use language and tone appropriate to the event, e.g. more formal for a scholarly event, more conversational for less formal or youth events.
- If you have a presenter, ask them to share the event with their contacts.

HOSTING YOUR EVENT

Arrive at least 45 minutes before the event. Check if the presenter needs water or anything else. Set up chairs; check technology. Ask presenter if they want to take questions throughout or only at the end. Ask presenter to sign a photo release if you don't already have one for them.

What to bring:

- Sign-in sheet and pens
- Name tags (*optional*)
- Any tech needs: laptop, projector, flash drive, dongle, microphone, phone to take pictures
- Food, beverages, plates, flatware, napkins
- Library brochures, fliers for future programs
- Evaluations

Welcome the audience, share any library news and upcoming events. Be sure to tell people where bathrooms and exits are. Tell them about the evaluations and where they are, explain how helpful they are for future program planning.

Introduce discussion protocol: when it's OK to talk or ask questions, expectations around respectful listening. Some programs might lend themselves to collaboratively making a list of agreements about discussion behavior.

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Introduce the presenter, using any information they have shared with you or something you have prepared.

At the end of the event & after

- Thank the audience for attending; thank the presenter, share their contact information with attendees if appropriate.
- Invite people to eat if there's food!
- Ask people to take brochures and to visit your website and social media pages.
- Remind people about evaluations and where to put completed ones. Share the link to the online version if there is one.
- Make notes about what went well, what you wish you'd done differently while it's still fresh in your mind. Ask other planners for feedback. Keep a spreadsheet with these notes from each program.
- Send thank you notes to presenters and volunteers.

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LIBRARY PROGRAM EVALUATION FORM

Please complete this form. Your feedback will help us improve library programming. Thank you.

Program title: _____ **Date:** _____ **Location:** _____

1. Please rate the overall quality of this program:

Poor Satisfactory Good Excellent

2. Please rate the speaker's/performer's knowledge of the topic:

Poor Satisfactory Good Excellent

3. Please rate the speaker's/performer's presentation skills:

Poor Satisfactory Good Excellent

4. How did you hear about this program? Check all that apply.

Library Website Library Poster Library Staff Email Message
 Newspaper Friend Facebook Twitter

Other:

5. Age of Attendee: 0-1 2-3 4-5 6-8 9-12 13-18 19-30 31-49 50+

6. Do you have a library card? _____ Have you previously attended a program here? _____

7. What other library services did you use during your visit today (circle all that apply)?

Borrowing Books/DVDs/CDs Using Library Computers Printing/Copying None Other:

8. What other types of library programs would you like us to offer?

9. What are the best times/days for you to attend library programs?

10. If you would like to be informed of upcoming library events, please share your contact information.

Please share any additional comments on the back of the form.



MODERATING DIFFICULT CONVERSATIONS

- **Be prepared.** Anticipate that people will come to the program with well-informed viewpoints and high expectations. Read the book in advance and take notes, including page numbers so you can refer directly to the text. Your notes should focus on:
 - a) guideposts that help readers understand the story and the argument of the book;
 - b) anecdotes or passages you think are especially interesting, provocative, or germane to the themes of the book and the issues you want the group to discuss. Being able to refer to specific pages in the text puts everyone “on the same page”!
- **Welcome participants.** Begin with thank yous. “On behalf of (your organization) and the Vermont Historical Society, I want to thank you for coming to today’s discussion of Paul Searls’ book, *Repeopling Vermont: The Paradox of Development in the Twentieth Century*.”
 1. A smile, eye contact, and relaxed body language are always helpful.
- **Set expectations.** We often think that people attending a book discussion
 2. or other community conversation know what to say and how to act in those situations, but assuming that can lead to friction later on. You may also have a specific idea about how you want to frame the discussion. So after you’ve welcomed everyone, lay out some discussion guidelines in specific, straightforward terms. Tell everyone how long you expect to be together,
 3. and what your goals are. You can also be upfront about your intentions to make sure everyone has a chance to speak. This would also be a good time to make sure everyone’s creature comforts are addressed – point out where
 4. the bathrooms and exits are!
- You can acknowledge that the book raises issues that people might have conflicting perspectives and strong feelings about. Explain that we value the free exchange of ideas—and the questioning of those ideas—and you expect participants to treat one another with respect as this process takes place. Assure people that they needn’t give up their own perspective in order to consider other perspectives.

THE FOUR AGREEMENTS OF COURAGEOUS CONVERSATIONS

...are a set of simple ideas that can help you, the facilitator, lead a discussion about a difficult subject that might generate conflicting opinions and strong or uncomfortable feelings. If you reflect on your own attitudes and opinions about the subject ahead of time, keeping these ideas in mind can help you focus on moderating what could become a heated discussion.

Stay engaged: Staying engaged means remaining morally, emotionally, intellectually, and socially involved in the dialogue.

Experience discomfort: Discomfort is inevitable when discussing a challenging topic. Divisiveness is more likely if

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MODERATING DIFFICULT CONVERSATIONS

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issues are not brought into the open, not talked about. Dialogue promotes understanding across lines of division.

Speak your truth: This means being open about thoughts and feelings and not just saying what you think others want to hear.

Expect and accept nonclosure: It is probably not possible in this forum to resolve all differences of opinion or perspective. Therefore, participants should realize that the discussion probably won't produce agreement or easy answers. But that's okay! Ongoing dialogue is required to achieve understandings and viable solutions that will be widely accepted.

- **Facilitate introductions.** Ask everyone to introduce her- or himself. Introductions can range from the simple—name and town—to more complex. You could invite participants to talk about why they are interested in the program, and what they expect to get out of it. Or you could suggest they mention a “burning question” they want to be sure gets addressed.
- **Consider starting with a particularly provocative question,** or one that invites participants to make a personal connection to the book. You may get lucky and have such a dynamic group that you never need the list of prepared questions. On the other hand, you may find yourself with a quieter, less forthright group who expects you to constantly direct the discussion.
- **Unruly participants or constant talkers.** Participants who dominate the discussion do everyone, including themselves, a disservice. Often, they are well meaning, articulate people whose enthusiasm simply gets the better of them. Others are chronic “repeaters” or “wanderers” who may not be aware they are pulling the discussion out of focus. How do you deal with them? Kindly, but firmly. You might start by making a general statement encouraging participants to stick to the subject at hand. Look for a moment to interrupt the participant gently with the question, “What does everyone else think?” Or try, “Let’s hear from someone who hasn’t had a chance to comment yet.” For chronic repeaters or wanderers, try summarizing their point for them and redirecting the discussion. You could say, “Our time is short and we have lots to focus on, so let’s get back on track. Anyone who wants to continue that line of thought can do so after we are done.” If all else fails, the facilitator should talk privately with the person at a break or after the program.
- **Interrupters:** Counsel patient and active listening. When someone interrupts another person who is speaking, it is usually because they care deeply about what is being discussed. The interruption signals impatience. You can intervene and ask the interrupter to be patient: “Please be patient, please listen carefully to what X is saying, then you’ll have a chance to respond.” Or, “Please be patient and listen, let’s see if your point is informed

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MODERATING DIFFICULT CONVERSATIONS

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or influenced by what X has to say.” Or, since you’ve asserted some authority by your initial intervention, after X is finished speaking you can redirect the conversation by saying to the group: “X just said _____. Does anyone else agree (or disagree, or have a different perspective)?”

- **Silent Types:** No one should be made to discuss if they prefer to sit silently and observe. But some people are just naturally shy and may want the facilitator to enable them to participate. There are several painless ways to involve the more reluctant members of the group:
 - Try a “sweep.” Start at one end of the circle and ask everyone to answer a question. You can tell the group, “If I call on you and you’ve got nothing to say, just say ‘Pass.’ I’ll leave you alone.”
 - Pay close attention to body language, which can indicate when someone is agitated or interested by the train of conversation. Pick up on that and invite the person to speak.
 - If you’ve remembered (or jotted down) everyone’s name at beginning, you can invite shy types to speak in a more direct way. Most people appreciate this personal attention.
 - Ask someone who has not spoken if they can relate the topic to their personal experiences, so they can talk about their own life.
 - Don’t be afraid of silence. As one veteran facilitator notes, “letting the quiet ‘steep’ for a while can allow insights to arise, and can permit someone who is hesitant to voice an opinion.” Be flexible, adaptable, and ready to rescue the discussion when necessary, but don’t feel you need to pounce on every pause.
- If a group is particularly large or you’re having difficulty holding a discussion with the whole group, break them into units and give them a question to talk about, perhaps giving different questions to different groups. Then bring them back to the full group and invite each unit to report.
- Ask for last thoughts, final comments, or unresolved issues. Have participants changed their mind about anything over the course of the discussion? Use the “sweep” method to let everyone have a final say.
- Leave participants with something to reflect on or question. In doing so, you may want to read a short passage from the book, or share a quotation or poem related to it.

Additional Tips For Keeping A Good Conversation Going

- Use phrases like “how do you feel about...?” or “what do you think about...?”
- Solicit responses to comments that someone else just made.
- Ask participants to draw parallels to their own lives.

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REPEOPLING VERMONT DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

The book *Repeopling Vermont* explores a central tension between efforts to preserve the physical landscape and efforts to preserve the human landscape.

- Can both be preserved, or does a choice have to be made?
- Who should make those decisions?
- What do you see as the difference between the physical landscape and the human landscape?

In the twentieth century, Vermont's state government pursued a policy of tourism and a recreational landscape as a replacement for the old economy of dairy farms, manufacturing, and extractive industries.

- As that old economy declined, did Vermont's state government and private agencies make the right decisions about what to replace it with?
- What was that transition like in your community?
- Do you think the transition has gone too far, or not far enough?

One way that the state government pursued a new economy and new vision for Vermont was through a Bureau of Publicity, the predecessor of today's Agency of Tourism.

- Was money spent on the Bureau of Publicity money well spent?
- Should Vermont still be spending state revenues to attract tourism?
- The people in Landgrove today have a very strong sense of community. Do you see the evolution of Landgrove as a model of what Vermont communities can be like, or a cautionary tale of what too many of them might become?

Alonzo Valentine's Swedish recruitment program was an overt effort to engineer Vermont's human landscape by bringing in new immigrants.

- Whether it was bringing Swedes in 1890, upper-class second-home owners in the 1930s, or offering a \$10,000 incentive now, do you think Vermont's state government should be engaged in trying to lure people to Vermont?
- Do you see the current incentive as similar to or different from those other efforts?

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REPEOPLING VERMONT DISCUSSION QUESTIONS *(cont.)*

Sam Ogden loved Vermont's tradition of small-town democracy, and also loved Vermont's scenic landscape, and wished to make its environment cleaner. In an effort to preserve the latter two he supported measures that diminished the importance of the former.

- Is that a trade-off that necessarily needs to be made?
- How has the balance of local democracy and environmental been handled in your community?

Sam Ogden was a strong advocate in the early 1960s for a comprehensive, statewide land use law. That law was only able to be adopted after the reapportionment of the legislature. But Sam despised and opposed reapportionment.

- How can we reconcile these contradictory impulses?
- Where is the balance between statewide land use policy and local decisions?
- Are there any other overall planning questions that are better handled at the state level or at the local level?
- What conflicts between strongly held values do you see occurring in Vermont today? How are these conflicts playing out in your community?

HOST YOUR OWN PROGRAM

You've read through all of our materials and you're excited and ready to host your own program and community conversation. Great! Here are some simple steps for you to follow.

1. Determine your date. If you'd like to have the author, Paul Searls, at your program, reach out to him directly: paul.searls@northernvermont.edu.
2. Follow all the other steps in the program guide about setting up and advertising your program.
3. If you're a library, we strongly urge you to consider contacting your community's historical society to involve them in the program. If you're an historical society, we strongly urge you to work with your community's library and involve them.
4. We also strongly recommend inviting additional community members to the program – perhaps your legislative representatives, town manager, planning board, and other community leaders who would find the ideas and sentiments expressed to be useful in their work.

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HOST YOUR OWN PROGRAM *(cont.)*

5. If you're able to attend the webinars on Moderating Difficult Conversations live, great; if not, reviewing their content might be helpful. You can find links to register or watch a recorded webinar here:
vermonthistory.org/visit/events-calendar/community-conversation-2019
6. If you'd like copies of the book to have available to patrons of your library, contact Joy Worland at the Vermont Department of Libraries:
joy.worland@vermont.gov.
7. Once you've settled on a date, contact Amanda Gustin at the Vermont Historical Society and pass along your information so it can be listed and shared further: amanda.gustin@vermonthistory.org.
8. On the night of the program, designate someone to take notes and record information such as number of attendees and any other relevant, interesting, or useful things that come up: nature of attendees, topics of conversation, and anything else you think is important.
9. The morning after the program, you'll be contacted by the Vermont Historical Society to fill out a short evaluation form so that we can do two things: evaluate the overall effectiveness of the program, and gather ideas from the programs to collect and compare with other ideas that come up across the state.
10. Reflect on your own time about the program and do some self-evaluation. Did it all go as you hoped? Why? Why not? Feel free to reach out to either the VHS or the VTLIB with any questions, reflections, or ideas for the future.

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