

# *Asking the Right Questions About Voting*

## **The Right Question Institute Voter Engagement Strategy**

**RQI** Right Question  
Institute

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## Asking the Right Questions About Voting

In this session, we will:

- Look at decisions that elected officials can make
- Practice a method for coming up with our own questions
- Think about decisions elected officials can make that affect you
- Reflect on what you have learned and how you can apply it further

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### I. Introduction

**Time: 2 min | Setting: Large group**

Introduce the session – Asking the Right Questions About Voting

Introduce objectives

*Today we are going to:*

- *Look at decisions that elected officials can make.*
- *Practice a method for coming up with our own questions*
- *Think about decisions elected officials can make that affect you.*
- *Reflect on what you have learned and how you can apply it further.*

## Learning about decisions:

A *decision* is the choice of **one option** from among **two or more** options.

We make decisions all the time.

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### I. Learning about decisions group

Time: 2 min | Setting: Large

Introduce a working definition of a *decision*.

*A **decision** is the choice of one option from among two or more options. We make decisions all the time.*

The goal is not to have a discussion about decisions but to **provide** a simple definition. Make sure that the participants understand the concept of options.

## A decision you made today:

A decision about what to have for breakfast.

Think about options you had to choose from:

\_\_\_\_\_ or \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_ or \_\_\_\_\_

The option chosen is *the decision*.

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*Every day you make decisions. For example, you make decisions about what to have for breakfast. You choose between different options.*

*Think about your decision about what to have for breakfast today. Think about specific food or drink options you had.*

*The option chosen is the decision.*

## A decision you made today:

A decision about what to have for breakfast



fruit and yogurt

Options



eggs and toast

The option chosen is the decision that has been made.

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*For example, fruit and yogurt or eggs and toast. The option you choose from these two is the decision you have made.*

## A decision you made today:

Today, you also made a decision about what to wear.



But, imagine that . . .

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*You also made a decision about what to wear today.*

*You might have chosen a t-shirt, or a sweatshirt, or a button down.*

*But, imagine that . . .*

## Imagine that...

TOMORROW there's an election and you will have a chance to choose between two candidates for the position of

### **CLOTHING DIRECTOR.**

The person elected will make decisions about what you will have to wear for the next year.

WHAT QUESTIONS WOULD YOU HAVE?

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**Time: 4 min | Setting: Large group**

Read this slide and then allow the group to ask questions.



**Good news...**

There is no election of a  
**Clothing Director.**

But...

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Read slide.

There are many elections each year that include...



Ballot questions on special laws or propositions.



Electing public officials.

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*Every year, elections are held to elect officials who will represent us. The elections might also include ballot questions on special laws or propositions.*

**Elected officials** are people chosen **by the voters** to make decisions on our behalf.



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*Elected officials are people elected by the people to make decisions on our behalf.*

*They get to make those decisions because we vote them in. There are also people who are appointed to make decisions that affect us.*

No matter the level (governors,  
congresspeople, senators, presidents),  
**elected officials make decisions**  
about the **services you receive.**

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Read slide.

You can add examples of local officials here if relevant.

Elected officials can **decide** to:

- Provide or eliminate services
- Increase or reduce funding
- Make it easier or harder to sign up for those services

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You can read this slide, then also provide examples of the types of decisions made by elected officials...

*A mayor makes decisions about how the city or town is run.*

*A senator makes decisions about laws that affect you.*

*A president makes many decisions about what the government does or does not do.*

**What are three services you use  
that are really important for you?**

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**Time: 3 min | Setting: 1 minute individually; 2 minutes in large group – *Luz:*  
*is this in the large group or individual work?***

Read slide. Ask participants to think individually about what services are important to them, then have the group share a few of their answers.

**Voting is one important way to  
have a say in who makes the  
decisions about the services that  
matter to you.**

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Read slide.

## What happens if you don't vote?

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*Individually, for half a minute, please think about what happens if you don't vote. If you can't vote think about what happens if people don't vote.*



Asking questions can help you learn more about the:

- services you receive
- decisions elected officials make
- candidates

It is important for you to be able to ask your own questions.

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Read this slide as a transition to teaching people how to ask their own questions about decisions that elected officials make.

## How to Ask Your Own Questions

There are a few simple steps.

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Read slide.

## Rules for Producing Questions

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1. ASK AS **MANY** QUESTIONS AS YOU CAN
2. DO **NOT STOP** TO ANSWER, JUDGE OR DISCUSS
3. WRITE DOWN EVERY QUESTION **EXACTLY** AS STATED
4. **CHANGE** ANY STATEMENTS INTO QUESTIONS

What might be difficult about following these rules?

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**Time: 2 min | Setting: Large group**

**Introduce and discuss the rules for producing questions.**

*Here are some tips or “rules” that make it easier to ask questions:*

*Rules for Producing Questions*

- *Ask as many questions as you can*
- *Do not stop to discuss, judge or answer the questions*
- *Write down every question exactly as it is stated*
- *Turn any statement into a question*

*What might be difficult about following these rules?*

Have the group give you a few answers. You can also ask: *which of these rules will be the hardest for you to follow?*

Before presenting the question focus, split participants up into groups of 3-5 and have them identify someone to write the questions—a “scribe.” Tell them that the scribe should also be contributing questions.

## Question Focus

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There is an election in November.  
The winners will be making  
decisions about services that are  
important to you.

What questions do you have?

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Present the Question Focus. Say: *Here is the topic, or "Question Focus," you will ask questions about.*

**QFocus:**

**There is an election in November. The winners will be making decisions about services that are important to you.**

- Ask questions.
- Follow the rules.
  - Ask as many questions as you can.
  - Do not stop to answer, judge, or discuss.
  - Write down every question exactly as it comes to mind
  - Change any statements into questions.

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**Time: 5 min | Setting: Small group/Large group**

Remind participants to ask questions and follow the rules. Allow them 4-5 minutes to ask questions.

## Categorizing Questions: Closed/Open

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- **Closed-ended** questions can be answered with a “yes” or “no” or with a **one-word** answer.
- **Open-ended** questions require more **explanation**.

Identify your questions as closed-ended or open-ended by **marking them** with a “**C**” or an “**O**.”

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**Time: 5 min | Setting: Small group/Large group**

Note: You should be able to complete all the work with closed and open questions in 5 minutes.

**Introduce the definitions of closed and open-ended questions in large group**

**Closed-ended:** *These questions can be answered with “yes” or “no” or with a one-word answer.*

**Open-ended:** *These questions need more explanation.*

**Ask participants to categorize the questions on their lists as closed or open-ended in their small group.**

*Mark all closed-ended questions with a “C” and all open-ended questions with an “O”.*

## Closed- and Open-Ended Questions

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Closed-ended questions	
<b>Advantages</b>	

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Ask participants to name a few advantages and disadvantages of both kinds of questions in large group. Two examples of each will be sufficient.

## Closed- and Open-Ended Questions

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Closed-ended questions	
	<b>Disadvantages</b>

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Ask participants to name a few advantages and disadvantages of both kinds of questions in large group.



## Closed- and Open-Ended Questions

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Open-ended questions	
<b>Advantages</b>	

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Ask participants to name a few advantages and disadvantages of both kinds of questions in large group.

## Closed- and Open-Ended Questions

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Open-ended questions	
	<b>Disadvantages</b>

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Ask participants to name a few advantages and disadvantages of both kinds of questions in large group.

Transition: *Both types of questions are useful depending on the kind of information you want to get.*

## Improving Questions

- Change one **closed-ended question** so it becomes **open-ended**.



- Change one **open-ended question** so it becomes **closed-ended**.



Add the new questions to the bottom of your list of questions.

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*You can change questions from one type to another depending on what you want to know or do.*

Ask participants to change one closed-ended question to an open-ended and one open-ended question to a closed-ended one.

## Prioritizing Questions

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### Review your list of questions

- Choose three questions you consider **most important** from your list.

### While prioritizing, think about your Question Focus:

There is an election in November. The winners will be making decisions about services that are important to you.

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**Time: 4 min | Setting: Small group**

*Prioritize your questions by choosing the 3 questions that you consider most important. Keep the question focus in mind while prioritizing.*

## Prioritizing Questions

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### **After prioritizing, consider:**

- Why did you choose those three questions?

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Read slide.

## Next Steps

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This is what I'm going to do  
with the questions:

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**Time: 3 min | Setting: Small group**

Provide next steps or ask participants to think about next steps to take with the questions.

Discuss with participants or have them work on what they want to do next and how they will use their questions. What information would they like to get? How will they go about getting it? Each time participants name information they would like to get, ask them what steps they will take to get that information.

## Share

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1. Questions you changed from open to closed and from closed to open
2. Your three priority questions and why you chose those questions

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**Time: 4 min | Setting: Large group.**

If you have divided participants into groups, ask each group to share with the whole group or with another group.

*Share the questions you changed- read the original and the new question; and your priority questions and the rationale for choosing them.*

## Reflection

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- What did you learn?
- When there's an election of someone who will make decisions that will affect you:
  - Why would you vote in that election?
  - How do you feel about voting now?
  - How can you help more people to vote?

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### **Time: 5 min | Setting: Large group**

Make sure to leave time for participants to reflect on these questions.

Ask participants to think about what they learned—this step is VERY important. When participants *name for themselves* what they have learned it deepens their understanding of all the thinking they've done.

Then, give participants time to think and respond to at least one of the other questions on the slide. Introduce one question at a time.

For this step, you can also ask participants to reflect individually in writing or as a small/large group with reports.



## Summary

### ***We learned that:***

- *Presidents, senators, congresspeople, governors, and other elected officials make decisions about the services that are important to us.*
- *By voting, we can have a voice in who gets to make those decisions.*

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Facilitators can add the positions of local officials if relevant.

## Summary

***We practiced using a step-by-step process for coming up with our own questions.***

*Asking questions is a skill we can use in many different places and situations.*

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*We practiced a foundational skill for thinking, learning, and taking action: coming up with our own questions.*

*Asking questions is a skill you can use in many different situations, places, and settings.*

## Asking the Right Questions About Voting

Thank you for all your work!



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Thank the participants for their work. You can also leave time for questions.