



The Converged Path

A Unique Facilitation Process
For Finding Common Ground

The Convergence Project
A 501 (c) (3) non-profit
www.TheConvergenceProject.org

The Convergence Project is about common ground, not compromise. It's not about a giving up and it doesn't seek to blend the identities of the groups and organizations it partners together.

So to help achieve our goals, we have designed a unique facilitation process that helps groups and group members identify common ground in a simple way that has long-lasting results. It allows the personal truth of each participant to emerge and not the views of the facilitator.

This process uses the transforming, if not magical **POWER OF WRITING** to accomplish this. Quite simply, when you write your thoughts, ideas, or beliefs as opposed to just thinking them or communicating them in speech, something profound happens. Goals become clear, and how you can attain those goals becomes clearer too. In addition to goal clarification, writing has been shown to have many other beneficial effects on both mind and body such as boosting the immune system and lowering high blood pressure by means that are not totally understood by science.

The pages that follow in this guidebook will take you through easy steps that will help you get more of what you want for you and for your group without giving up anything of who you are or what you believe. And surprisingly, perhaps, it will help you further your goals by finding common ground with others who may be very different from you in their values, beliefs, or ideas.

The first part of the process will ask you to take only **5 MINUTES** a day (no more is needed) to write a few thoughts for the 3 days preceding your actual facilitation when your group and the group you are partnering with come together. Even people who hate to write find that they can do this easily if they don't make it harder than it needs to be.

This brief writing experience should be fun and not something that causes you stress. Just let what you write flow out in an unedited, uncensored way. It is best to write for 5 minutes each day and not wait to write for 15 minutes on the day of your facilitation. Part of the magical and transforming power of writing that we mentioned earlier happens as a result of daily writing. Be assured that what you write will never be seen by anyone else. To begin a

process that can help you get more of what you want while furthering the goals of your group, please turn the page.

Please use this space starting 3 days before your scheduled facilitation. An additional page is provided for each day with a different focus for thought. You may find it helpful to write at the same time each day. Many people prefer to write in the evening before going to bed.

Now take 5 minutes to write about **WHAT YOUR GROUP BELIEVES**. In doing so, you may want to write a bit about what your group does not believe. Go beyond the mission statement of your group (if it has one). Make it personal. What do you believe in relation to what your group believes? This is as much about you as it is about your group.

On the second day of writing and 2 days prior to your scheduled facilitation, write about **WHAT SCARES YOU** about this partnering process. For example, what, if anything, frightens, concerns, or worries you about partnering with the other group? Are you afraid your beliefs will be challenged? Are you concerned that your principles or values will be judged? What would be the worst possible outcome of engaging in this process? If your answer is that nothing scares you about this process, please write a bit about that too.

On this third day of writing and 1 day prior to your scheduled facilitation, write about **WHAT GIVES YOU THE MOST HOPE** about the partnering process that you will undertake. When you think about what may happen when you partner with this different group, what would be the best possible outcome? What would surprise you in a good way?

Congratulations! Your pre-facilitation process is complete. The process of finding common ground will soon be completed too. Please bring this

guidebook with you to your scheduled facilitation, remembering that you will not be asked to share any of what you have written unless you care to.

Facilitation day

On the day of the facilitation with your facilitator (we call them Path Guides), he or she will meet with you to take you through the rest of the process with your partnered group. In a typical facilitation, the facilitator usually summarizes the ideas of the group members in writing. As in the pre-facilitation process, we do things a little differently at this stage, too, because we want the conclusions you draw to be totally your own.

After introductions, your Path Guide will ask you to divide into your groups. He or she will then focus each group on the 3 topics you wrote about in your pre-facilitation process—beliefs, fears, and hopes.

Group members will be asked to discuss what they feel about each of these areas as they relate to their group.

To begin this process, please turn the page.

Start with discussing the **BELIEFS OF YOUR GROUP**. As a result of the pre-facilitation process, you will now have a clearer understanding of your own personal beliefs as they relate to your group's beliefs. Your own beliefs are important and you should feel free to express them to your group even if other members of your group do not share them.

After discussing what your group believes, write below the **5 MOST IMPORTANT BELIEFS** that your group identified, recognizing that not all group members may necessarily agree with all of the beliefs and that not all of the group's beliefs may be included here. Every group member should write down the group's agreed upon beliefs in his or her guidebook.

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

Next, talk about **YOUR GROUP'S FEARS OF THIS PROCESS** of working with the other group. Building upon what you wrote earlier and the input from your group members, identify **3 OF YOUR GROUP'S TOP FEARS** about this process. Again, each group member should write these down.

1.

2.

3.

Finally, talk about **YOUR BEST HOPES FOR THIS PROCESS** and **IDENTIFY 3** of them below, making sure that each group member writes each of them in his or her guidebook.

1.

2.

3.

During this next phase, your Path Guide will take a more active role. The two groups will be asked to work together during this process.

Remember that finding common ground is about finding areas where both groups are already in agreement without asking for compromises. This step involves sharing the conclusions of each group with the other group. A representative of each group will be asked to do this. We ask that all participants be respectful of members of the other group in the language they use and the questions they ask. Before you say something, ask yourself how you would feel if it were said to you. Your Path Guide will monitor the discussion to ensure mutual respect.

Your Path Guide will help members of both groups to look at all the responses, looking for areas of mutual agreement on what all parties believe, fear, and hope about the partnering process. Many people are initially surprised that there is mutual agreement on areas where they did not expect there to be any.

Your Path Guide will help you examine carefully your fears about this process, and without minimizing them, find a way to ensure that most of them will never be realized by sticking to common ground areas. As this process develops, you will find that your hopes about the process now feel more achievable and your fears less imposing.

Now your Path Guide will ask each person to write below some of the common ground areas you identified in your beliefs, hopes, and fears. This step could not be more important because it “makes real” for the first time that you **do** have common ground with the people you will be working with.

Your Project

Once you have identified your common ground beliefs while putting some of your fears to rest and strengthening your hopes, you are ready to find a common ground project. Your Path Guide will facilitate the final part of this process for you.

Some of the questions you should ask yourself in selecting a project should include the following:

Is the project really needed and wanted in your community?

Are you duplicating something that some other group or organization is already doing?

Have you checked with the proper authorities to make sure that you have the right to undertake such a project?

Will the project have a specific beginning and a specific ending?

Can the project realistically be completed in 1 to 3 months?

Will it do only good and create no harm?

Are you able to finish what you start?

How are you making sure that you are not leaving a void when the groups stop working together?

Now we hope that you will go out into your community and make it a stronger and better place for all people to live in, remembering that **WE ARE MORE ALIKE THAN DIFFERENT AND THAT WE ARE STRONGER WHEN WE WORK TOGETHER.**

The Convergence Project assumes no responsibility or liability for the actions of its volunteers. What we provide are simply guidelines and the individuals who participate in our programs ultimately make all decisions.

Notes

A space has been provided here in case you wish to do a bit of writing **during or after** the course of the project. You may want to examine what you wrote about your initial fears of the process and see which ones were actualized. And you may find that you were surprised that your best-case scenario and your hopes were actually exceeded by what happened.

Further Reading

On the transformational power of writing

Writing as a Way of Healing: How Our Stories Transform Our Lives,
Louise DeSalvo, 2002.

The Writing Cure: How Expressive Writing Promotes Health and
Emotional Well-Being, Stephen Lapore and Joshua Smyth, 2002.

Writing Cures: An Introductory Handbook for Writing in Counselling
And Psychotherapy, Gillie Bolton, 2004.

Writing to Heal: A Guided Journal to Recovering from Trauma and
Emotional Upheaval, James Pennebaker, 2004

The Way of the Journal: A Journal Therapy Workbook for Healing,
Kathleen Adams, 1998.

The Writing Cure: Psychoanalysis, Composition, and the Aims of
Education, Mark Bracher, 1999.

About The Convergence Project

The Convergence Project is an international 501 (c) (3) non-profit that does community-based work. With the recognition that the world is becoming an increasingly polarized and divided place, The Convergence Project seeks to find common ground without compromise.

What we believe:

We believe that people are more alike than different and that people of differing values, beliefs, and ideas can work more strongly together in their community than by working alone.

What we do:

We facilitate the coming together of diverse or opposing groups to work in an ideology-free setting in order to accomplish projects that benefit the groups involved and their greater community.

The Convergence Project was founded by Brock Oyler. Brock holds an M.A. in Organizational Communication from Purdue University and has an extensive background in facilitation and organizational effectiveness training.

For more information on The Convergence Project, please visit our website:

www.TheConvergenceProject.org

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Nominate another group for a Convergence Project

If you have enjoyed your experience with The Convergence Project, you may wish to nominate another group or groups for a Convergence Project. Below is an example of a letter that you could send to another group to start the process:

Hello,

We'd like to tell you a little bit about our experience with The Convergence Project. TCP is a 501 (c) (3) non-profit that helps dissimilar groups to come together to find common ground and to identify a project that they can do in their community. We recently worked together with _____ to work on and complete _____ in our community. We found it to be a highly rewarding experience. It helped us to achieve more of our group's goals without giving up anything of who we are or what we believe.

If you'd like to learn more about The Convergence Project, we'd encourage you to visit their website at www.TheConvergenceProject.org

Sincerely,

Please give us feedback

The Convergence Project always hope to improve what we do, and we'd like to know what you think. Please use the form below to give us feedback.

On a scale of 1 to 5, please rate your experience with The Convergence Project.

5=extremely positive

4=very good

3=good

2=below average

1=very disappointing

Rate your overall experience of The Convergence Project. ____

Rate your overall experience with your partnered group. ____

Rate what you thought of our printed material. ____

Rate what you thought of your Path Guide. ____

What aspect of The Convergence Project would you most like to change?

What aspect of The Convergence Project did you find most helpful?

You may mail your feedback to:

The Convergence Project

P.O Box 6108

Denver, CO 80206 USA

Or email your feedback to: info@TheConvergenceProject.org

Sample Thank You letter

Everyone enjoys being thanked for their time and what they do. If you've had a positive experience with The Convergence Project in partnering with another group, you might want to take a moment to thank them for working with you. This can be a great way to strengthen the positive relationship that you have begun to build and can serve to make it a lasting one. To make this easier, we have included a sample thank you letter below.

Dear Members of _____,

Thank you so much for taking your valuable time to work together with us on a Convergence Project. It was great to make a personal connection with all of you and to realize that we really are more alike than different.

Our completion of _____ in our community helped to make it a better place for everyone to live.

Once again, thank you for taking the time to work with us on our project. It is our hope that our new relationship can continue in some way now that our project has ended.

Sincerely,