



PRRI/EPU Religion & Public Spaces Focus Group Guide

STAGE I: INTRO AND OPENING QUESTION

I want to set some guidelines for our session today so that we can be as productive as possible.

- Please only speak one at a time.
- Please speak up so that we can all hear you
- We want to hear from everyone, so please speak up if you haven't spoken much, and maybe take a break if you feel like you are talking a lot
- Remember that there are no right or wrong answers; we allow for different views here
- Please give your opinion, even (and especially) if it is different from what others have already said
- Because our time is short, I might have to move us along or cut you off – please do not be offended, it's just to make sure we cover everything.

Before we jump into our topic, let's get to know each other a little. Please introduce yourself to the group and tell us:

1. Your name
2. A tv show, movie, or book you have enjoyed lately
3. Something you appreciate about your community

Who wants to start us off?

STAGE II

1. As I mentioned, today we're going to talk about your community. To get started, I'd like to hear more about your experience in your area.
 - a. How long have you lived in the area, and how have things changed in your community over the time you have lived there?

I also mentioned we would be discussing public spaces in your community. All cities and towns have spaces that are available for public use and enjoyment, as well as spaces that are privately owned. Today we want to talk about the public spaces. Some examples are parks and other green spaces, downtown areas such as town squares, recreational areas, community centers, and schools or libraries.

- b. What are some specific public spaces near where you live?
 - i. **PROBE:** What are some others? Let's get 2-3 more if we can.
 - c. Looking at this list, what are some of the characteristics of these spaces that you like?
 - i. **PROBE:** What makes the space welcoming?
 - d. What are some characteristics of these spaces that you dislike?
 - i. **PROBE:** What makes the space less welcoming?
 - e. Do you ever avoid public spaces because you don't feel welcome?
 2. Often, public spaces are used to memorialize or honor events or people in history, either by naming the space or erecting a statue commemorating a person or event.

- a. In your opinion, what are some good reasons that would justify a public space or statue being named for an event or person?
- b. In your opinion, are there things that should disqualify an event or person from being publicly memorialized in this way?
 - i. **PROBE:** Should the rules be different for privately owned spaces vs. public spaces owned by the city, county, or state?

STAGE III: In-depth Investigation

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- 3. Across the nation, debates about public spaces and removal of Confederate statues and monuments, as well as about renaming schools, streets, and parks with names memorializing the Confederacy have been prominent over the last few years. On a piece of paper, please write down, in just a few words, how you feel about the removal of many of these statues on public land or renaming public spaces memorializing the Confederate side of the Civil War. If for any reason you want to say something privately, just direct message me and I'll say it for you without using your name.
 - a. Let's share some of our responses. Who wants to start?
 - i. What other feelings came up?
 - ii. **PROBE, if most answers similar:** Did anyone write something down that is different from what we've heard? Did anyone write down mixed feelings?
 - iii. **PROBE, if offensive did not come up:** Do you think inanimate objects, such as monuments, can be offensive to people?
 - b. All of you said in the screening that religion is an important aspect of your lives. How, if at all, are your feelings about the removal of Confederate statues and monuments from public spaces connected to your religious beliefs, identity, or heritage?
 - i. When these memorials have offended and ostracized members of your community, what – if any – responsibility does the community have to those aggrieved?
 - ii. What benefit or harm have you personally experienced as a result of these debates?
 - c. Have there been conversations about these sorts of memorials in your community?
 - i. How, if at all, have your views on this topic changed as a result of those conversations?
- 4. Sometimes conflict can occur when communities are in the process of removing Confederate memorials on public land or renaming public spaces. What actions could help bring the community together?

PROBE: What would you, personally, view as a positive outcome of the process?

 - a. Are there ways these removals and renaming could be done that would help the healing process? What kinds of actions make things worse?

- b. In your community today, what kinds of new memorials and public spaces would bring people together?
 - i. What other kinds of recognition might feel inclusive?
- c. What role do faith groups in the community have in this process of change?
 - i. PROBE, *if people seem confused or not making connection*: What religious principles (religious ingredients) could be helpful for people to turn to for healing?
 - ii. Has a group or congregation you are part of had conversations about these issues?
- d. How can religious groups encourage the best possible use of public spaces in your community now and in the future?
- e. **[BLACK GROUPS ONLY]** What would you like your white neighbors to know about public spaces?

STAGE IV: Close

As we wrap up, I have just one last question. Now that we have discussed some difficult topics about public spaces, what do you think is the most important characteristic of a memorialized public space in your community? Let's assume that safety is already assured.

We are out of time. I want to THANK YOU for sharing your thoughts and giving us your time and full attention today.