

GUIDE TO DISCUSSIONS

THE KATONAH GREAT DECISIONS DISCUSSION GROUP

Membership is open to those interested in learning about the foreign policy decision-making process, as well as those who want an opportunity to participate in related discussions.

GOALS

In keeping with the FPA credo, “Agreement in democracy is not mandatory for it to succeed, but participation is:”

To promote thoughtful debate and discussion regarding topical foreign policy issues

To bring people together to express their ideas and opinions

To learn from others

DISCUSSION FOCUS

A critical examination of issues and opinions

CHAPTER MOTTO (FROM BEN FRANKLIN)

“Discussions should be conducted without fondness for dispute or desire for victory”

ORGANIZATION

CHAPTER DISCUSSION LEADER

Coordinates overall Chapter program

Sets agenda for and chairs Chapter Planning Committee

In conjunction with the Planning Committee, selects discussion topics, as well as dates and sequence.

Prior to each Chapter meeting, following consultation with the designated Topic Leader or Co-Leader he or she prepares and disseminates a pre-meeting agenda, including topic theme/title, suggested readings and references, synopsis of topic introduction and

preliminary discussion questions.

Subsequent to each Chapter meeting, prepares and disseminates an overall meeting summary, including Topic Leader/Co-Leader notes and the discussion summary.

Maintains attendance list

Maintains and disseminates overall Chapter Participant List, including contact details

In October of each year orders FPA Chapter Briefing Books

Collects Chapter Fee from participants and maintains Chapter financial accounts

Submits forthcoming monthly program to KVL for inclusion in its monthly e-mail to KVL patrons

In conjunction with the Chapter Evening Program Coordinator, develops topical foreign policy related programs of interest to the Greater Katonah and Northern Westchester community.

TOPIC/CO-TOPIC LEADER(S)

Typically the group discussions are led by participants, either by a Topic Leader or by Co-Topic Leaders. To help guide and formulate a forthcoming program, prior to the meeting the Chapter Discussion Leader and/or other members of the Planning Committee will meet with the designated Topic Leader/Co-Topic Leaders.

PLANNING COMMITTEE

To help formulate and guide the overall Chapter program, a small group of regular attendees/active discussion contributors meet every few months with the Chapter Discussion Leader.

CHAPTER EVENING PROGRAM COORDINATOR

In conjunction with the Chapter Discussion Leader and the Planning Committee, formulates and leads foreign policy related programs of interest to the greater Katonah and Northern Westchester community.

KATONAH GREAT DECISIONS WEBSITE

Information regarding the Katonah Chapter program can be found on the website
HYPERLINK "http://bedfordny.com" <http://bedfordny.com> (click on the link to the

Katonah Great Decisions Chapter).

MEETING TIMING/FREQUENCY

Typically held on Tuesdays – 10:15 A. M. – 12:30 – in the Katonah Village Library Garden Room (lower level). Note – 12:00 – 12:30 P. M. is an optional “Current Events” discussion period.

From late September to mid January, meetings are held monthly. From mid January to mid May meetings are held every 2 – 3 weeks.

In coordination with KVL, in late Spring the Chapter Discussion Leader and the Planning Committee establish the meeting schedule for the forthcoming year.

TOPICS

Based on feedback from Chapter participants, the Chapter Discussion Leader and Planning Committee select the topics for late September through mid January.

From mid January through mid May, the Chapter generally follows the topics included in the FPA Briefing Book.

Based on feedback from Chapter participants, the Chapter Discussion Leader and Planning Committee may decide to omit selected FPA topics and/or substitute other topics.

CHAPTER FEE

Participants pay an annual fee (\$75 per couple - \$50 single) which includes an allocation for the annual FPA Briefing Book, a contribution to KVL and an administrative charge.

TYPICAL MEETING FORMAT

(What follows is a general guide rather than a rigid meeting format. Depending on the meeting topic, nature and content of the Topic Introduction, and the discussion issues, the Chapter Discussion Leader and the Co-Topic Leaders may vary the meeting format).

KICKOFF -10:15 A. M. – 10:30 A. M.

Chapter Discussion Leader calls the meeting to order

Announcements follow, including forthcoming events/programs

Participants may suggest topical foreign policy related issues/events for discussion/debate during the optional 12:00-12:30 P. M. “Current Events” module.

TOPIC INTRODUCTION–10:30–10:50 A. M. (“TARGET” MAXIMUM DURATION)

Led by Topic Leader or Co-Topic Leaders

For those discussions focusing on the FPA Briefing Book topics (last half of January through first half of May), prior to the meeting it is assumed participants will have read the FPA Briefing Book article, other Primary/Basic readings and references, and considered the preliminary discussion questions. Additionally, in conjunction with the Chapter Discussion Leader, the Topic Leader or Co-Topic Leaders decide whether to include viewing of the related FPA DVD segment. When using the Briefing Book article as the focus of discussion, the Briefing Book content should not constrain the breadth of discussion.

During the period last half of September through first half of January when the Chapter selects its own topics, in conjunction with the Chapter Discussion Leader the Topic Leader/Co-Leaders will identify the Primary/Basic Readings and References and Preliminary Discussion Questions to be transmitted to participants prior to each meeting.

Since it is assumed prior to the meeting participants will have reviewed the Primary/Basic Readings and References and the Preliminary Discussion Questions, the content of the Topic Introduction should be limited to highlighting principal issues and questions for the subsequent group discussion.

GROUP DISCUSSION – 10:50 A. M. – 12:00 P. M..

The Topic Leader or Co-Topic Leaders adopts a “conference leader” role (engaging participants on principal issues/discussion questions, generally refraining from articulating his/her personal views on any matter, leading/monitoring/guiding discussion including content, pace, relevance to issue/question and, at the appropriate time, shifting discussion onto the next question/issue)

(Note – the following section is adapted from the Great Decisions Program Guide and the Ridgefield, Connecticut Chapter’s “Tips for Participants”).

Participants are encouraged to:

Make every effort to attend all meetings and to be on time. The comfort level of the group depends upon the familiarity with other participants, not just the acquaintances of members of the same organization, but as peers in this particular group with its own special history and fellowship. Make every effort to be on time; late entrance is always disruptive.

Communicate with the Topic Leader. He or she is responsible for guiding the discussion,

summarizing key ideas, and soliciting clarification of unclear points. Additionally, he or she may need advice from the Chapter members and it should be given freely and constructively as necessary. Chances are you are not alone when you don't understand what someone has said.

Help keep the discussion on track. Make sure your remarks are relevant; if necessary, explain how your points are related to the discussion. Try to make your points while they are pertinent.

In addition to questions addressed to the Topic Leader, they can and should be addressed also to particular participants, especially ones who may have special insight. . Don't hesitate to question other participants to learn more about their ideas, but avoid judging their ideas, suggestions, or perceptions.

Strive to understand the position of those who disagree with you. Your own knowledge is not complete until you understand other participants' point of view and why they feel the way they do. It is important to respect people who disagree with you. They have reasons for their beliefs that are usually valid or reasonable. You should be able to make a good case for positions with which you disagree. This level of comprehension and empathy will make you a much better advocate for whatever position you finally adopt. Never jump to conclusions or make assumptions about what another person is feeling or thinking.

Listen carefully to others. Make sure you are giving everyone the chance to speak. Keep a pen handy to jot down your thoughts; this may help you listen more attentively since you will not be concerned about losing the point you want to make. The best listeners are the best speakers.

Speak your mind freely, but don't monopolize the discussion. Expressing your ideas is important, but discussion groups are most successful when more views are shared. Leave room for other Chapter members to get their points across. If you want to contribute to the conversation, raise your hand or somehow signal the Topic Leader that you have something to say. In this regard, the "Golden rule" should be your guide.

Don't withdraw from the discussion. You have a responsibility beyond that of listening. Everyone in the group, including you, has unique knowledge and experience for all. Contributing your opinions, questions, and experiences adds to the knowledge that Chapter members gain from one another.

Engage in friendly disagreement. Differences can invigorate the group, especially when it is relatively homogeneous on the surface. Don't be afraid to play the devil's advocate, but don't go overboard. If the discussion becomes heated, ask yourself and others whether reason or emotion is running the show. You can disagree without being disagreeable. Debate the substance of an issue, rather than relating it to the national political process and

its personalities and/or one's own political persuasion.

Humor and a pleasant manner go far in making a point. A belligerent attitude may prevent acceptance of your assertions. Be aware that aggressive body language can close you off from the group.

Maintain an open mind. You don't score points by rigidly sticking to your earlier statements. Feel free to explore ideas that you have previously rejected or failed to consider. Forget the past and stay in the present.

Think critically. Don't accept without question the statement made by authors, of the readings, the Topic Leader, or other participants. Carefully consider all information presented. Be on the lookout for deceptive argument techniques such as bandwagon or scare tactics, personal attack, faulty deductive reasoning, vague generalizations, and half truths. Focus on the problem; not the person.

OPTIONAL CURRENT EVENTS DISCUSSION – 12:00 – 12:30 P. M.