

# THE ARIZONA REPUBLIC

## EDITORIALS

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### THE ISSUE: CONVERSATION ON IMMIGRATION

## BRINGING CIVILITY BACK TO DISCOURSE

Angry diatribes about illegal immigration are common. Reasoned discussions are rare.

That's unfortunate because anger is a crude tool. Those who wield it often end up breaking more than they fix.

Enter an idea called a Community Conversation on Immigration. It will involve about 200 people who pre-registered for an event that will take place Thursday night at the Rio Salado Conference Center.

The idea is simple: Get people of all ages, races, backgrounds and beliefs to discuss this controversial issue.

Talk and listen. Not shout and retort.

The event is sponsored by Project Civil Discourse, an Arizona Humanities Council project that includes the partnership of Arizona Town Hall and other groups.

Participants will discuss their experiences with the issue and talk about what individuals can do to bring balance, civility and creative solutions to future conversations about immigration.

This is not about finding the answer to illegal immigration. It is about defining new ways to approach the hot-button

questions surrounding it.

The goal is to "demonstrate it is not necessary to demonize people who disagree with you," says Bruce Meyerson, Phoenix attorney, mediator and board member for the Humanities Council.

Tara Jackson, president of the Arizona Town Hall, says the ground rules are simple and firm. Speak and listen with respect. Have an open mind. Try to understand each other's point of view.

After years as a litigation attorney, Jackson says she's learned that "when you pit people against each other, nobody really wins." But when people take the time to talk in a civil manner, they find it hard to depersonalize each other.

That puts them on the road to real solutions.

Jackson says the limited number of spaces at the event filled up quickly.

"There seems to be a hunger for this," she says, noting that people from around the state have expressed an interest in hosting similar meetings.

A hunger for civility.

No wonder.

It is a far more productive problem-solving tool than anger and blame.