Division Assessment for Leaders
A Facilitation Guide
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What is a Division Assessment?
The Division Assessment is a tool that the One America Movement uses with faith communities to help you identify how America’s toxic polarization may negatively affect your community. Each question in the Division Assessment is designed to capture information about a different symptom or driver of toxic polarization. This is not a tool to help faith communities work through the more day-to-day internal issues but rather a tool designed to help you assess how toxic polarization may be playing out in your community and assist you in identifying areas of growth toward a healthy community.

Why Do a Division Assessment?
Toxic polarization is a problem in our country, and it affects different communities in different ways. Over the last several years, we’ve seen how America’s divisions are tearing away at the fabric of society and splitting our faith communities. This exercise aims to help your team discuss the relevant issues within your congregation to address them better and help you identify the best way to support your congregation. It is also intended to provide you with the tools and framework of a common language and understanding of what may be happening in your faith community and to help you find ways to address these issues and keep your community whole and healthy.

How to Prepare
Doing the Division Assessment together is a chance to hear from the different perspectives among your leaders. For this exercise, leaders are any stakeholders with significant influence over other people in your congregation. This could be paid staff, but it could also include volunteers. It could be formal leadership positions, such as ordained people, but it could also include people who hold high levels of informal or relational influence. Who constitutes a leader within your community will vary based on your individual context.

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1 The Division Assessment is also available online at the One America Movement website at: https://oneamericamovement.org/divisionsassessment/
Conversations like this come with both opportunities and challenges, so it is essential to thoughtfully consider how ready your group is to talk about their disagreements and how ready you are to facilitate the conversation. Other things to consider:

1. People with minority opinions are most likely to speak up when they trust the other people in the group. How well do people in this group trust each other? Do you need to establish more trust before you begin?

2. Sometimes, arguments get heated when we disagree over things that matter. How will you respond if that happens? How do you think that response will go over with the group?

3. Some people are likely readier than others. Is there anyone in particular that you feel might struggle with this exercise? How can you prepare them in advance?

4. If you are a leader of your faith community, consider going through this division assessment first. By going through the assessment first, you may be better prepared to predict any hot-button issues during this facilitated meeting and think through how you might handle them before the meeting.

A division assessment aims to talk about the divisions you are already experiencing, not to cause new ones! If you are interested in more training around polarization to prepare for this conversation, sign up for the One America Movement newsletter or email us at info@oneamericamovement.org for more opportunities to learn about the science of polarization. You can also work through self-guided modules on our portal to prepare for the discussion.
Getting Started

1. **We suggest setting aside an hour and a half to go through this exercise together.** Some sections will move faster than others, but we encourage you to schedule enough time so that you do not have to rush through relevant issues or when you uncover disagreements within the staff.

2. **For each section, ask each staff member to take three minutes to answer the questions for themselves.** Answer the Likert scale question as quickly as possible, then use the remaining time to reflect on the second question.

3. **It’s okay to disagree!** Each person on the team comes with different perspectives and experiences. That’s the whole point of doing this together. When you encounter disagreements, take the time to ask clarifying questions. These conversations might lead to some deep conversations. It might be helpful to establish some ground rules ahead of time to allow space for everyone to feel heard.

4. **Someone will need to take notes.** You should designate someone to take notes and be in charge of transferring the group answers over to One America Movement’s online form. That person should report back to the group and present some of the things they hear throughout the discussion to make sure they reflect the entire group’s thoughts. The notes being captured should reflect what is actually being discussed. We know that some answers might have a clear consensus, and some might not. That is okay. When the notetaker reports online, they can give us the average answer, but please have them report in the longer answer that a clear consensus was not reached.
Division Assessment Questions

As toxic polarization sets in, extreme voices can escalate and grow louder. We need people within our communities to stand up to those extreme views and call the group back to its values.

To what extent do/are people in your faith community willing to speak up if someone within their own group expresses extreme views?

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<th>Never</th>
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<th>More often than not</th>
<th>Always</th>
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In what ways do you see your faith community members speaking up against extreme views from members of their own group?
Studies show we are more alike than we think, but false polarization convinces us that our fight is a battle of good versus evil. Working with folks from “the other side” can break down this false polarization and help create cross-cutting identities that bind us across our divides.

To what extent do/are people in your faith community seek out relationships across political or religious divides?

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What do these relationships look like in your faith community?

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It can be challenging in today's hyper-polarized world, but it is important that we are willing to talk to one another, not to change each other’s minds, but to understand each other’s life experiences.

To what extent do/are people in your faith community willing to discuss hot-button topics of the day without having to agree?

Never | Occasionally | More often than not | Always

What hot button topics are off-limits in your faith community and why?
In our 24-hour news cycle, headlines are designed to grab attention, and the most attention-grabbing headlines are those that are the most extreme or divisive. Taking a “buyer beware” approach to what we hear and read can help.

To what extent do/are people in your faith community question what they read/hear on the news or social media?

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Which news sources do they question? And in what ways?

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It is okay to admit if you sometimes give your own political, religious, or cultural leaders a “pass” for bad behavior that you would otherwise call out if the other group did it. Becoming aware of our blind spots can help us move in a less toxic direction.

To what extent do/are people in your faith community acknowledge the wrongdoing of their own political, religious, or cultural leaders?

| Never | Occasionally | More often than not | Always |

Please provide a recent example.
Often, we hold the perception that other groups dislike us for various reasons. This prevents us from working with people across differences.

Do members of your faith community believe people outside your community (other faiths, political parties, etc.) like/trust your group?

<table>
<thead>
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<th>Never</th>
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How does your faith community know if others like/trust your group or not?

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Being able to speak up is an important part of a healthy congregation, especially when someone has a minority opinion that differs from most of the group. Fear of retribution or marginalization may keep people from sharing those views.

To what extent do members of your faith community reject or isolate group members for expressing differing views?¹

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<tr>
<th>Never</th>
<th>Occasionally</th>
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What are the repercussions for expressing differing views within your faith community?

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Technology plays a huge role in our society today, including in our relationships with each other. This makes it vital for us to reflect on how we interact online.

To what extent do members of your faith community exhibit authenticity both in-person and online?

- Never
- Occasionally
- More often than not
- Always

How is your faith community engaging online in healthy/productive ways? How are they engaging in unhealthy or harmful ways?

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Conclusion

Group Debrief

1. What was most surprising to you about these answers?
2. Where did you generally agree? Where did you disagree?
3. Review answers where you responded “Never” or “Occasionally.” Which of those areas seem like a higher priority for your congregation?
4. How eager does your congregation seem to address these concerns? Why do you think that is? Are there some steps you can take to move your congregation toward addressing where they are polarized?

Next Steps

After completing the Division Assessment, you can do a few things to keep the process moving forward. Consider arranging individual follow-up conversations with the people who attended the meeting to discuss their impressions of how it went and ask them how they hope to get involved in addressing the issues. The assessment may have also revealed a hot-button issue that is damaging your faith community. If so, consider seeking additional help. The One America Movement can support you to have healthy conversations about difficult issues and may be able to refer you to experts to go deeper on specific topics. For really intractable divisions, external facilitators can be key to addressing it in a healthy way.

Lastly, toxic polarization in America today tricks us into thinking that our political identities are more important than any other identity we hold. As a faith leader, you play a crucial role in reminding your community members that they are more than just a liberal or a conservative. They have a faith identity that calls them to their highest values. Whether from the pulpit, online, or in your daily interactions, modeling what it means to put faith identity above partisan politics can arrest the cycle of toxic polarization.

The One America Movement is here to help. If you have questions, you can always reach out to us on our website by filling in the Division Assessment online or emailing us at info@oneamericamovement.org.

2 The answers for the question on Page 10 are reversed, with “Always” and “More often than not” as the answers that need review.
Appendix I: Options for Going Deeper

If one of the above questions prompts a good conversation, consider these additional questions for taking the conversation deeper.

Speaking Up

- Against what specific issues do you see members of your congregation speaking up?
- If you see members of your congregation speaking up against extreme views from their own side, against which views are they most often speaking up? What are some of the ways that people are speaking up?
- Recognizing that congregations are often viewed as safe spaces, are there "hot topics" your congregation might be open to discussing? Why do you think that is?

Media Consumption

- How do you think media consumption influences members of your congregation in their approach to particular issues?
- What types of media (e.g., television, internet, podcasts) seem to have the most significant influence?

Community Trust and Relationships

- Where do you see opportunities to build trust between your community and other groups in the community? What are some practical ways you could pursue building that trust?
- If you said that members of your congregation “never” or “occasionally” seek out relationships across divides, why do you think that is? What do you think is preventing people from building these relationships?
Appendix II: Workshop Techniques

We know there are various ways to facilitate this Division Assessment. Below are three ways we have envisioned it. Please let us know how you are engaging your team with these questions.

Walk and Talk

**Materials needed**
Large pads of paper, four different color sticky notes, and markers

**Instructions**
On each piece of paper, write down the Likert scale question. Have your team walk around and place a sticky note on each pad. Each color sticky note would represent—*Never*, *Occasionally*, *More often than not*, and *Always*. When everyone has gone around the room, ask the follow-up questions and take notes directly on the larger sheet of paper. Allow folks to talk about why they picked which answer. For the areas you determine as a high priority during the debrief section, use a different marker to write down ideas on the poster about how to dive deeper into that topic later.

Roundtable discussion

**Materials needed**
Pens and notecards

**Instructions**
Give each person ten notecards. Ask the question and have your team write down answers: 1 (never), 2 (Occasionally), 3 (More often than not), or 4 (always). Then allow everyone to flip over their card at the same time. Ask the people who answer 1 to answer the follow-up question before proceeding with those who answer 2, 3, or 4. Then repeat the process for each number. Make sure to take notes along the way.
Stickers

**Materials needed**
Large sheets of paper, and several small stickers

**Instructions**
Before the meeting, write the Likert scale questions on one sheet of paper and a corresponding line that reads “1 - 5” under each question (i.e., one scale per question). Give each participant ten stickers and ask the first question. Allow participants to go up and put their stickers on the corresponding line. Give folks time to look at the answers and then ask the follow-up question. Repeat for each question.