Home / Region / Place
What place are you from? How does it shape your thinking, your values, and your sense of belonging? What do you know about someone when they tell you where they come from? What is the history behind your community’s array of opportunities, limitations, or threats?

City / Suburbs / Country / Maritime
Many early settlers were involved in a cosmopolitan maritime world that crossed national and ethnic boundaries. City-versus-country is a classic American dividing line. In the modern era suburbs have created unique environments. Scholars suggest that these different types of community can lead to differing ways of viewing the world. How has living in your type of community shaped your perspectives? How does it shape the attitudes people have about you? How did it affect policy-making in the past? When did these communities emerge in the past and how did their evolution shape the perspectives of their inhabitants?

Age / Life-stage
Age can say much about your personal development, thinking styles, and experience in overcoming obstacles. How different societies have talked about the best way to raise a child, the rituals of “coming of age,” and the roles of adults and elders can reveal much about their distinctive cultural traits. It also speaks to the history someone may
have experienced. Living through the American Civil War or the Great Depression, for example, might have given you very different ideas and formative experiences than someone raised in the age of Instagram, Facebook, and Twitter. Your participation in a particular moment in history can be a defining force in your sense of self.

Socio-Economic Status
A comedian once quipped that a working class person has their name on their shirt, a white collar person has their name on their desk, an upper class person has their name on the building, and an aristocrat has their name on the street or neighborhood. How deeply does status shape your outlook and values? What are some common preconceptions about class status? How have views of status changed historically?

Ethnicity/Nationality
These are group identities, sometimes defined internally by groups, and other times imposed from outside, to lump together diverse populations for purposes of self-protection or control. These identities are often associated with a shared belief in a common history, or a purported claim of common behaviors. Concepts of race, ethnicity, and national origin were among the most rapidly-changing, most influential, and most complex forms of identity in Early North America. How these evolved over time and varied geographically will be important for us to consider.

Gender
Do men, women, (and other genders) tend to have different values and behaviors? This has been a subject of deep debate from the era we are studying down to the present, even as there is some general sense that these differences have mattered to many people for many reasons. How much does gender matter to your sense of self, to your outlook on life, and to how people treat you? What were some distinctive views of this in the past and their legacies on the present?

Sexual Orientation
Human Rights Watch defines this as “An inherent or immutable enduring emotional, romantic or sexual attraction to other people.” Historic communities have varied greatly in their laws, customs, and policies regarding sexual orientation and the privileges or restrictions attached to these orientations. Researchers, public intellectuals, and adherents of different religious and philosophical traditions disagree about the nature and extent of these differences. How have these debates shaped rules and policies in your world, and in the past?

Physical Ability
We all have physical abilities and dis/abilities. How deeply does this shape your own perceptions and the perceptions of those around you? What are some implications for community and belonging? How have these perceptions of the body and of dis/ability evolved over time and across different cultures? How did physical prowess or limits affect social power or marginality?

Religious / Spiritual / Ethical
What is your relationship to the divine and to the ethical? How important is this devotion in defining who you are and to those you feel the strongest sense of belonging with? Questions of religious and spiritual identity, philosophical notions of the “the good,” processes and imperatives of religious conversion (or resistance), religious conflict, and secular doubt, were a central and dynamic part of the story of Early North America. Consider, for example, debates over the role of the state in religion. The legacies of those early North American debates and events continue to be as profound as they are still a cause of debate.

Free / Unfree Status
Are you the legal property of another person, or are you a free owner of yourself? In early North America this would have been one of the most fundamental identity traits. The story of enslavement and freedom is a critical tale.

Leadership and Decision-making Preferences
When it comes to groups do you like it best when one person takes a clear and firm leadership role (a guide, organizer, rule-maker, or authority)? Or do you prefer a more collaborative style where everyone works together equally to complete tasks and develop policies? This is not a question about whether you yourself like being a leader, but rather about how you think groups should function when working together and making decisions. Debates over the balance between leadership authority and bottom-up community influence are among the most profound, interesting, and revealing features of the past societies we will consider.

(Derived and expanded from from Paul Emerich France’s adaptation of the Social Identity Wheel for “Voices of Discovery,” Intergroup Relations Center, Arizona State University)