



**Animating
Democracy**

A Program of Americans for the Arts



ARTS & CIVIC ENGAGEMENT TOOL KIT

Basics of Arts-Based Civic Dialogue

☐☐☐ Distinguishing Dialogue

Conversation	Sharing information and ideas in order <i>to express one's views without any intended impact</i> on the listener.
Discussion	Sharing information and ideas in order <i>to accomplish a specific task.</i>
Debate	Sharing information and ideas in an effort <i>to bring others into agreement or alignment with one's position or belief.</i>
Dialogue	Sharing ideas, information, experiences and assumptions for the purposes of <i>personal and collective learning.</i>

DIALOGUE IS:

Two or more parties with differing viewpoints working toward common understanding in an open-ended, most often, face-to-face format

IN DIALOGUE:

- Assumptions are revealed.
- Judgment is suspended.
- Multiple and conflicting perspectives are included.
- Empathy and understanding are promoted.
- Equality among participants is established.

CIVIC DIALOGUE IS:

Dialogue in which people explore matters of civic importance and consider the dimensions of a civic or social issue, policy, or decision of consequence to their lives, communities, and society

IN CIVIC DIALOGUE:

- Purpose and goals for the dialogue are understood by participants.
- Participants are encouraged to contribute their own views and listen actively to others.

☼ Potential Dialogue Outcomes

Significant personal learning motivates collective social change.

People from different communities and/or perspectives form more substantial connections with one another because dialogue has enabled them to identify and challenge their assumptions and confront the deeper issues that have separated them

People who have different perspectives and experiences discover a larger more expansive understanding of “truth” than any of them had previously.

People with different perspectives develop new strategies for effective social change.

People adopt dialogue as a lifelong learning process that has application in personal, organizational, community, and societal settings.

☐☐☐ The Arc of Dialogue

The Arc of Dialogue offers a framework for designing dialogue experiences that create a safe space, a sense of trust and willingness to take risks, and encourage people to be open to learning and listening. It also suggests how to facilitate dialogue to encourage participation, break down barriers, draw out meaning, and leave people feeling like they know where they've been and what they can do next.

Purpose	Why are we coming together to engage in this dialogue? Why is it important to us?
Intended Outcomes	What do we hope to achieve, gain, or accomplish by engaging in dialogue?
Ground Rules/ Guidelines for Engagement	What are the “norms,” rules, or guidelines we want to establish to guide our dialogue?
Ice Breakers/ Community Building	Who is in the room? What connections to one another can we find?

(Over)

Experience Questions / Activity	<p>What questions/activity will invite participants to think about their own experiences with the topic and to bring these into the conversation? Experience questions help participants begin to <i>make personal connections</i> and <i>find personal meaning</i> in the dialogue topic. This process also allows participants to begin to <i>establish a “common ground” of understanding</i> and personal connection to the topic.</p>
Exploratory Questions / Activity	<p>What questions/activity will help participants explore the dialogue topic beyond their own personal experiences with it? Exploratory questions help people engage in <i>inquiry</i> and <i>exploration</i> in an effort to learn with and from one another.</p>
Synthesis of Ideas	<p>The facilitator helps participants to <i>identify</i> and <i>make meaning</i> from the “threads” that connect the ideas, perspectives, and insights generated through the dialogue.</p>
Next Steps	<p>The facilitator works with the group to decide what, if any, are the next steps the group wants to take.</p>
Reflection / Closure	<p>The facilitator works with the group to reflect on its learning, offer final observations, and make comments to one another about the learning process.</p>

☼ Sample Ground Rules (Agreements) from the Public Conversations Project

Speak personally, for yourself as an individual, not as a representative of an organization or position.

Avoid assigning intentions, beliefs, or motives to others. Ask others questions instead of stating untested assumptions about them.

Honor each person's right to "pass" if s/he is not ready or willing to speak.

Allow others to finish before you speak.

Share "air time."

Respect all confidentiality or anonymity requests that the group has agreed to honor.

Stay on topic.

Call people and groups by the names they prefer.

Honor new voices.

Summary of Facilitation Skills

ICE BREAKERS

This activity serves as the initial step in community building. Allowing participants to begin by calling their names and giving other information as well as partaking in whatever game the group plays allows them to break down the unconscious walls they've built up as a result of being with people with whom they are not familiar.

You might begin with a name game. The first person says his or her name and the group says "Hi Person's Name", the second person says his or her name and the group responds with "Hi second person's name, hi first person's name" and so on.

By having the entire group say every name, everyone gets a chance to remember the names and it doesn't put too much pressure on the last person in the circle to remember every name. An action or statement of favorite food, secret fact that most people don't know about the individual, hobby, etc, might accompany the reciting of names.

There are many ice breakers. Be creative and risk a little!

GROUND RULES

Ground rules serve as the structure on which security and safety is build. Allowing the participants to formulate the ground rules creates in them a sense of responsibility to keeping these rules.

USING SELF AS MODEL

Giving your personal experience may inspire participants to look at areas in their own lives where they can effect change. This, on the overall, leads to honesty, which is the core of the entire process.

Facilitators need to think strategically about when to use stories to encourage deeper sharing, however. Thinking through certain personal experiences and paring down the story to its essential elements prior to a dialogue will enable a facilitator to have a brief story to encourage others without taking too much time from the dialogue process.

For instance, after a difficult subject has been put on the table, if there is great reluctance for the participants to share around that subject,

a facilitator might want to open the discussion somewhat like this, "I know these things are hard to talk about so I'd like to share an experience I had...."

LONG-WINDED SPEAKERS

Long-winded speakers have the tendency to dominate the dialogue. Shutting them down without alienating them encourages others to participate.

For instance, "Charles, I appreciate your participation and understand your eagerness to share a lot about this subject. I'd like to ask you to wrap up, though, so we can hear the view of someone who hasn't had the chance to speak yet on this subject."

As facilitators, we should be mindful that there are many reasons individuals may appear to dominate. The person may see him or her self as an 'expert' in the area of diversity or cultural competency and may need validation that they have done this work before. An individual may be genuinely confused and 'thinks aloud' as they work out a challenge. The participant may be in real pain about the subject being discussed or

a personal area that has been touched by the discussion and need some personal care.

Usually there are mitigating reasons someone dominates to which a facilitator should be sensitive. However, the facilitator's primary role is to the entire group, and making the space accessible and safe for all. Personal attention to individual needs should be done outside of the dialogue process.

ENCOURAGING SOMEONE TO SPEAK

This is important as some participants' styles of dialogue is to wait until there is an opening in the dialogue before responding. If, as facilitator, you wish to encourage quiet participants to speak there are several tools you might use. One is to ask for a moment of quiet expressly so others will have the space to speak. Another is to simply ask those who have already spoken to withhold any further comment until someone who has NOT spoken speaks next.

As facilitator you may need a tool or device that will create an intentional process for getting input from all present. Some examples are to ask each speaker to name the next speaker, always

naming someone who hasn't had an opportunity to speak yet. Whoever is named should have the choice of passing to another or speaking and then passing to another.

Another way is to have participants write out on cards or a piece of paper the response to a question. Then the cards can be read by each participant with no feedback or further discussion at the time. After all the cards are read, the dialogue can resume.

Another technique asks the participants to imagine passing around an invisible baton to the next speaker.

SILENCE

The intentional use of silence by the facilitators may serve as a tool for giving participants a moment to reflect on a difficult question, i.e. "This next subject is often a difficult one to discuss so let's look at the question and then take a minute or two to think about our answers before responding. I'll ask X to begin in a moment when we've all had a chance to think about it."

It is also an effective tool to use when a facilitator wishes to honor (without feedback which may be

inappropriate or minimizing) a specific response that may have very deep emotions attached. Sometimes a participant will share something quite deep and painful, and the group may be stunned by that particular sharing. The facilitator may ask for silence as a mark of respect for what was shared, "Thank you for that, Sharyln, and I wonder if we could take a moment of silence before going to the next person." Then call on someone after an appropriate silence.

Silence is always an appropriate tool to use when the group is looking for a way to move forward. Giving everyone time to let the deepest and best within them come to the surface to impact and inform the next moments often leads to new depths in the discussion.

CHECKING IN

This keeps the facilitators in touch with the atmosphere of the interactions, as well as a good way to reassure those who may feel uncomfortable for some reason. It shows concern for the entire group, and can encourage those present to attend to the ground rules. "How are we feeling right now? Are we doing ok with our ground rules?" etc. Checking in at the beginning of a dialogue

can help all attending to understand the particular stressors and/or state of mind of each other. Those arriving with stress or fatigue or energy and optimism can self-declare at the beginning. This sensitizes the entire group to each person.

BEING ALLIES WITH A CO-FACILITATOR/ SHARING FACILITATION

The use of good communication (which may include signals) between facilitators to enhance their teamwork keeps both facilitators in charge of the process. This also enables participants to build confidence in the process.

RESPONDING WHEN ASKED DIRECT PERSONAL QUESTIONS

Some participants may ask direct personal questions to the facilitator in order to know/push the perimeters of the interaction. Statements like "I understand your concern, but would love to meet you after the session to address that" may be useful in such settings. Participants may be consciously or unconsciously trying to get approval of their own point of view or may be trying to divert the attention away from themselves. "I have an opinion on that, but I'm not sure that it's a productive direction to take this

discussion since our dialogue is about what you think." A simple redirection of the question may be enough, "What is YOUR thought about that?"

PHRASES THAT SPARK ENERGY

Phrases that are often 'hot buttons' such as '...you people' can spark energy within the group. There are several ways to use that moment to deepen the dialogue. Perhaps during the ground rules period, an "Ouch then educate" rule is established. This would ask that anyone who is offended or hurt by another's statement or vernacular could say "ouch", the discussion would stop and the offended person could explain why that term offends or hurts them.

Another way is for the facilitator to intervene at the moment such a phrase is used. Asking the participant to rephrase their statement gives them a chance to fully develop the intent of what they said and then the facilitator may want to develop a dialogue about the phrase and its emotional impact on certain groups or individuals. A question like, "Are you willing to accept feedback on why that statement offends/upsets others?" may be useful in opening the dialogue. It is important to recognize what and why the pain and feelings behind the generalization exist.

One of the important concepts that you can put on the table for discussion is "intent versus impact." Allowing that individuals may have intended one result or understanding with their statement, the statement may have impacted others and created a very different environment than anticipated. This is often an opportunity to facilitate greater understanding with the group, as well as a 'teachable moment' which can change other's behaviors in the future.

SUMMARIZING

Summarizing the observations/expressions of participants validates that they are a part of the process and that they've been heard. A facilitator may do this, or may ask another in the group to paraphrase what was said and check back with the original person to see if that person felt 'heard'. It is a good tool to use if a facilitator needs to cut short a longwinded speaker and move on, but one must be willing to check back with the original speaker to make sure the summary captures the essence of the statement(s). Please be aware that the 'check back' always has the potential of developing into an even longer 'side' conversation.

QUEUING

Can prove to be an effective tool in allowing participants to be recognized and freeing them to then be able to give full attention to the ongoing discussion. It is also effective in helping to move the discussion to the next subject or questions, “We’ll hear from John, Tasha, and Bo, in that order, and then move on to the next question.”

ASKING QUESTIONS FOR CLARITY

Questions like, “Could you say more about that?” or “Can you explain that further?” are useful in getting a participant to expand on his or her point. Oftentimes a facilitator realizes that the level of the dialogue is not progressing to a deeper or personal enough point, and can see the potential in a comment that someone has made. It is quite acceptable to go back to a statement that you may feel is ripe with potential, and ask the participant to expand his or her thoughts.

BRINGING CLOSURE TO A MEETING

After deep discussions that reveal differences as well as similarities between participants, it is very important to end a session with an activity or exercise that reinforces a sense of community. We don’t have to all agree to every point in any discussion, but as facilitators we should be mindful of encouraging a sense of community within the group as all explore this subject together. Closing activities often reinforce one of the basic concepts of Hope in the Cities dialogue – ‘There are no enemies here’.