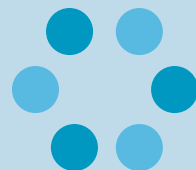


Communities everywhere face crises and challenges. Groups of compassionate citizens seek to mobilize for collective action. One tool these groups often appeal to is “community dialogue.” Many groups, however, understand “dialogue” to mean almost anything that involves oral communication.

WHAT IS DIALOGUE?

Real dialogue focuses on **building mutual understanding and trust**. It brings people together as equals in settings where they can really hear each other. Dialogue involves more than a Q&A session after a presentation or panel of experts. Dialogue does not necessarily lead to consensus even though real consensus cannot occur without the understanding dialogue can help build. Dialogue is not the same as strategic planning. Nonetheless, dialogue builds the foundation for problem solving and effective collective action. Dialogue is about questioning and listening. By listening to one another, community members begin to understand the diversity within their community. By questioning, they acknowledge their own need to learn. In this process, they come to understand their community and gain new insight about themselves.

FOUR MOVEMENTS IN DIALOGUE

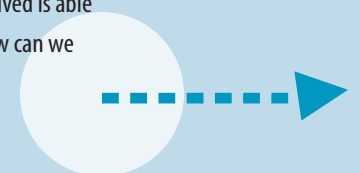


COMING TOGETHER: This initial movement involves identifying misunderstandings in your group or in the community that are making it difficult to deal with the current crisis or challenge. Often disagreements between people or parties are based on misunderstandings. Carefully creating the container, setting or situation in which people can come together and really listen to one another as equal participants can nurture new understanding and trust.

The following section identifies four movements in dialogue that build on each other and flow together. Community groups desiring to promote real dialogue in their communities are encouraged to work through these four movements carefully and reflectively. The questions suggested are not a formula for successful dialogue. Nonetheless, community groups and coalitions that use them to stimulate collective reflection and discussion will be engaging in dialogue even as they as they plan to facilitate dialogue.

By nurturing understanding through dialogue, you will be building a vital foundation for strong community action.

- What disagreements or misunderstanding are making it difficult for us to move forward?
- How might we bring people who disagree with one another together in ways that promote listening?
- How will we ensure everyone involved is able to speak openly and be heard? How can we address differences in power?





FOCUS ON RELATIONSHIPS: The tendency when we bring people together is to share information – to “teach” everyone. But before we are open to learn from each other, we need a level of trust and respect. So when you plan dialogues that bring people together, focus on activities that build relationships. If you do this well, the learning will follow.



QUESTIONING TOGETHER: Learning is not so much about being taught answers but being exposed to good questions. When people build relationships, they become curious about each other. They become open to explore why the other might think differently about a particular crisis or challenge. This questioning, based on a relationship of trust and respect, nurtures learning.



ACTING TOGETHER: This movement is really beyond dialogue. But when a foundation has been built with dialogue, the community will have a solid basis from which to engage in coordinated action. This action will be truly collaborative and most beneficial if it retains the spirit of dialogue in the working conversations that continue.

- What does a “relationships before content” perspective mean for our crisis or challenge?
- What, within our current agenda, are we prepared to give up, change or temporarily set aside?
- In what specific ways might we promote relationships and understanding in our community?

- How can we keep the focus on questions, not to be answered but to be explored together?
- How might we nurture self-reflection, questioning one’s own assumptions and beliefs?
- How might we engage participants in asking honest questions of each other (questions about what they don’t know)?

- How can we avoid going too quickly into action planning?
- How much mutual understanding is needed to support community action?
- What role will dialogue continue to have in our planning and action?

MORE ABOUT HOSTING DIALOGUE

- [Understanding Dialogue](#)
- [A Guide to Nurturing Community Dialogue](#)
- [10 Common Tools for Dialogue](#)
- [Asking Good Questions](#)
- For more dialogue tools see [Opioid Dialogues](#)