
**Constructive Conversations
about Challenging Times:
*A Guide to Community Dialogue***

Public Conversations Project



Constructive Conversations for Challenging Times: *A Guide to Community Dialogue*

February 7, 2002

Dear Reader,

This *Guide* contains resources for those who want to convene and facilitate constructive conversations about what's going on in the world.

It includes instructions for a two-hour structured dialogue focused on events related to the September 11 attacks and the changes that have occurred in their wake.

It also includes ideas about planning and conducting briefer or less formal conversations that have the spirit of dialogue.

These resources can be adapted to other challenging or divisive issues by changing the questions that are addressed.

This is the second edition of this *Guide*. The improvements we have made were inspired by feedback from people who used the first edition. Your feedback will be greatly appreciated and factored into the next edition!

The Staff of the Public Conversations Project



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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Why We Developed This Guide

Since September 11, 2001 we have been living in a transitional time. Many of us have been questioning old assumptions, searching for new understanding, and changing personal priorities. Some remain confused and uncertain about what we think about what's been happening. Others have developed clear and passionate views about the meaning of what has been happening and what ought to be done.

When some of us have tried to share our thoughts, we have inadvertently offended others or felt painfully misunderstood. Others of us, erring on the side of silence, have felt increased distance from people we care about.

The Public Conversations Project developed this *Guide* for people who think it is more important than ever to talk about what's been going on in the world. It is written for those who want to engage with others in their communities, such as those with whom they work, pray, study or socialize. It is intended to support people in having constructive conversations - conversations in which experiences, convictions, uncertainties, ideas, feelings and questions are shared and people listen to one another with care and compassion even when what is said is different, surprising, or upsetting.

We dedicate this *Guide* to those who want to make or maintain caring and enriching connections in challenging times—connections that can embrace conflicting worldviews and withstand fear, confusion and polarization.

1.2 What We Mean by “Dialogue”

“Dialogue” has different meanings for different people. For the Public Conversations Project (PCP), a dialogue is any conversation that is animated by a search for understanding rather than for agreements or solutions. Dialogue, as we view and practice it, differs from both mediation and debate. (Appendix A presents a table that clearly distinguishes dialogue from polarized debate.)

A good dialogue offers those who participate the opportunity to:

- listen and be listened to so that all speakers can be heard;
- speak and be spoken to in a respectful manner;
- develop or deepen mutual understanding; and
- learn about the perspectives of others and reflect on one’s own views.

Participants in the dialogues with which we are familiar usually agree to follow communication guidelines that support these purposes. The more fundamental and passionate the differences among those involved, the more important it is to clearly articulate and commit to such agreements and to have a facilitator present who can remind participants to observe them.

1.3 Who This Guide is Intended to Serve

We developed this Guide to encourage group leaders and facilitators of all levels of experience—including novices—to bring people together in dialogue. It can be used with any group of people that is drawn to its purposes and willing to adopt communication agreements. Some examples of community groups we have had in mind are:

- a group of neighbors or friends;
- a civic group like the League of Women Voters or the Lions Club;
- a group from a church, temple, or mosque—an ad hoc group or a working group like a parish council or a board;
- an interfaith group that is already established or that you convene;
- a group of teachers who want to explore their own views and feelings with other adults; and
- a women’s group, men’s group, book group, or any other group that meets regularly.

It also can be used with a group of family members. Our website (www.publicconversations.org) offers a version of these materials customized for use with families and other loved.

1.4 Different Ways to Use This Guide

If you want to facilitate a structured dialogue, you can use what we will refer to as the “*Plan*” presented in Section 3 “as is.” You also can use the *Plan* simply as a source of ideas for a dialogue you design yourself. You might even read it for ideas about how to bring elements of dialogue into spontaneous and informal conversations with family and friends.

To decide how to make the best use of this *Guide*, we suggest you begin by glancing over the detailed *Plan* for a two-hour dialogue presented in Section 3. This should give you a sense of one way to design a carefully constructed dialogue. Then, we recommend you read through the Q&A’s in Section 2 which will give you some suggestions for planning and facilitating a community dialogue.

After this you can return to Section 3 and modify the *Plan* to suit your group or to focus on a different topic. To make your modification process easier, we provide a Microsoft Word version of the *Plan* on our website: <http://www.publicconversations.org/Pages/commsecs>

If you decide to vary the *Plan* format and/or its topic, we encourage you to pay special attention to the following points:

- the spirit and clarity of the invitation and orientation;
- the critical importance of explicit group agreements to support the conversation;
- the formats for reflecting, speaking, and listening;
- the purpose of each segment of the dialogue;
- the way questions are crafted to serve those purposes; and
- the spirit and purposes of a facilitator’s interventions.



2. Planning the Dialogue: Questions and Answers

2.1 Convening Your Group

Who should I invite?

That is up to you. This Guide was developed for the benefit of any group that wants to engage in a dialogue as previously defined (Section 1.2) and is willing to adopt some communication agreements. Some of the community groups that we have had in mind are listed in Section 1.3.

Is it wise to convene an intergenerational group?

An intergenerational group offers special rewards and poses special challenges. Teens and adults can benefit from grappling together with the uncertainties and confusions they are feeling. Younger children, however, may not fully appreciate the content of the discussion. In addition, the presence of younger children may inhibit some adults from expressing any anxieties and fears they might have pertaining to the situation in the world.

What's the ideal number of participants?

Five to eight people is an ideal size. Groups of seven or eight are likely to include a greater diversity of views. Smaller groups are generally easier to facilitate and more relaxed in terms of time management. If you include more than six, you'll need to shrink the time that each person can take to respond to a question, reduce the number of questions, or extend the time beyond two hours. Another possibility is to invite a larger group and divide them into two or more smaller groups, each with its own facilitator.

Where should I hold the dialogue?

Any place that is comfortable and free from distractions. When we have preceded dialogues with a dinner or another sort of social gathering, we've found it ideal to have two rooms. Physically entering a different, quiet space for the dialogue seems to help people to switch gears and prepare to have a slower, more reflective conversation.

How long should the dialogue take?

With six participants, the entire dialogue will take about two hours. In Section 3.1, "Flow of the Plan," you can see how the time is divided among the different segments.

The group I have in mind might be hard to facilitate. Should I do it anyway?

There are a number of reasons a group can be hard to facilitate. They include: dislike of anything that smacks of "rules," complicated prior relationships, or strong differences in their views.

The greater the likelihood that conflict will emerge in the group, the more care and experience will be required to prepare for and facilitate the dialogue. If you'd like to work with such a group, we recommend that you first do a "test run" of the format with a group that feels a little less challenging, e.g., a group with established relationships of trust and respect, and one in which political and religious divides are not cavernous.

If you are new to dialogue facilitation and nervous about convening and facilitating a particular group, you may wish to partner with someone who is more experienced. If you aren't sure where to start in your search for such a partner, contact us at PCP. We may have ideas; we may even know someone in your area who has taken one of our trainings.

In addition, if you want to brainstorm about ways to handle specific dilemmas, give us a call. We will be as helpful as our staff resources permit.

How should I invite people?

A phone call has the advantage of allowing you to hear the nuances of people's responses and questions. A conversation also allows you to answer their questions, correct misunderstandings about what dialogue is, and make sure they want to participate in what you are offering.

On the other hand, written invitations take less time and have the advantage of ensuring that all those you invite have been oriented in exactly the same way.

What should I include in the invitation?

We recommend that you include something about:

- the spirit and goal (e.g., to promote open speaking, compassionate listening, and greater understanding rather than agreement or resolution of differences);
- the guidelines and structure (e.g., “Unlike many discussions, this one will be structured to promote careful listening and to discourage rebuttal and criticism.”);
- the starting and ending times; and
- encouragement to decline the invitation if it does not appeal to them.

Appendix C presents two sample invitations.

Suppose potential participants ask how this will differ from an ordinary conversation?

You can explain that the spirit of this dialogue is likely to feel familiar. It may remind them of some conversations that happened spontaneously and informally—respectful conversations in which no one dominated, real questions were asked, time was shared, and mutual listening and learning took place.

The dialogue you have in mind will be more formal than these “ordinary” good conversations—more explicit about its purpose and spirit, and more organized. Those who come will be asked to observe communication guidelines that foster an exploratory, respectful, and compassionate spirit. You can predict that some of these guidelines may feel a bit “unnatural”—at least for a while.

Other things you can mention are that participants will be asked to speak from the heart and listen with appreciation and resilience—keeping their ears open even when they don't like what they hear. They will be asked to notice the assumptions they are making and then find a way to test them out by asking questions. Hardest of all, they will be asked to refrain from attempts to persuade and refute.

You can tell them they probably won't agree with all the views of other participants, stressing that agreement is not the goal of dialogue. However, you can predict that they are likely to understand themselves and others better. They also are likely to feel enriched by different views and different ways of expressing perspectives, fears, hopes, and deeply held values. They may also feel closer to the other participants.

2.2 Design and Preparation

How closely should I follow the Plan?

The *Plan* provides many suggestions and many choices but it does not, and could not, anticipate your group's needs and culture, or your preferred style as a facilitator. The *Plan* includes some scripted comments but these are only suggestions. The *Plan* also specifies the purposes of each section.

Some facilitators are comfortable with very clear directions and scripted comments. They will probably follow the *Plan* very closely. Other facilitators will use the *Plan* to get an overall sense of the purpose of the gathering, the purpose of each segment in the sequence, and the tools available to them. Then, they will feel comfortable improvising, drawing on well-honed intuitions. Such facilitators are encouraged to honor their intuitions and use the *Plan* only as a very general guide. (See Appendix E for a description of such stylistic differences. It's entitled "A Tale of Two Grandmothers.")

What decisions will I have to make ahead of time?

Well before the dialogue, you will need to familiarize yourself with the *Plan* and the choices it asks the facilitator to make. For example, you will need to decide:

- whether or not to alter the basic format, e.g., to fit your plans into the amount of time you have;
- which questions to plan to ask and which to have on hand as alternatives;
- how you want to tailor the wording in the *Plan* to suit you and your group;
- whether or not you will participate; and
- what materials you will need to gather or prepare ahead of time.

What if I need to shorten the *Plan*?

There are various ways you can shorten the *Plan* presented in Section 3. Options include:

- leave out the "Hopes" question (Section 3.2.3);
- combine the First Question and the Second Question into one go-round (choosing one option from each set in Sections 3.2.4 and 3.2.5);
- shorten the unstructured discussion (Section 3.2.6) to 20 or 25 minutes; and
- shorten the closing comments (Section 3.2.7) to 5 or 10 minutes.

What if the group is large and needs to be divided?

You can welcome and orient the whole group and, as time permits, ask people to say their names and one sentence as a means of introduction. Then they can be divided into

small, diverse groups, each with a facilitator. The facilitators can complete the welcoming process, including comments about his or her role, in the small groups.

There are a number of ways of subdividing groups. Some are random (e.g., “Count off by 3’s and all the 1’s go...”). Others try to connect people who know each other less well (e.g., “Stand next to someone you never met until tonight or rarely see... Then the two of you find another pair you know less well...”) If you notice that the resulting subgroups are unbalanced in some way, e.g., in terms of race, ethnicity, or gender, and better balance is possible and desirable, you can ask for volunteers to switch groups.

If time and numbers permit, the full group can re-convene after the small group dialogues. You can invite brief comments from participants about themes or threads they noticed in their conversation, how they experienced the dialogue (e.g., what they did or did not do to make it work as a dialogue rather than a debate), and/or what commitments, ideas, or questions they are taking with them.

If you do this, we recommend that you be clear about the kind of comment you want, the time parameters, and the need to be brief (e.g., “We’d like to take about 10 minutes to hear a little from people about their dialogue experience. We hope to hear from all the groups, so please limit yourself to a sentence or two.”)

What’s a “go-round”?

A “go-round” begins with the facilitator asking a question and asking the participants to pause and reflect on their response before anyone speaks. Going in turn around the circle, each participant responds to the question (or chooses to “pass” or “pass for now”). When a go-round has been completed, the facilitator checks back with those who passed to see if they would like to have a turn to speak at that point.

You can also invite people to respond “popcorn” style, meaning that participants take their turns to speak in no particular order, as they are ready. However, the basic guidelines stay in place: one person speaks at a time; there is no interrupting; and participants observe the time limit suggested for their response.

What is the advantage of using go-rounds?

Go-rounds, especially at the beginning of a dialogue, serve many purposes.

- They provide a tight structure and clear expectations which tend to reduce anxiety.
- The structure clearly separates the acts of speaking and listening which makes it easier to listen with full attention and to speak knowing that you will not be interrupted.
- The format also creates a “level playing field” in which everyone has equal access to the “group ear.” This can be important in groups where the presence of one or two outspoken and expansive members usually results in some people speaking first or longer.

What is the advantage of pausing before the go-rounds?

First, people who are figuring out their own responses while others are speaking cannot listen closely. Second, speakers who have the chance to collect their own thoughts before they hear others speak are more likely to make their own distinctive contribution. They are less likely to speak in reaction to what others have said. (Solid research is available that documents the power that the first speaker's comments have on the rest of a conversation.)

Once people sit down, what steps should I take?

Once people are seated in the circle, your first step will be to welcome participants (see the Welcome Section 3.2.1). Keeping the purposes of this section in mind, reword the opening comments in a manner that is natural for you. In addition, you may wish to consider whether your group has an honored way to gather together—with a prayer or lighting a candle, for example.

What considerations should guide my decisions about what questions to ask?

Base your choices on what you know about your group. For example, do they tend to need more or less encouragement to speak about their certainties or their uncertainties? Other factors that may influence your decisions are recent events, group size, time constraints, relationships among participants, and the likelihood of polarized views.

If you're uncertain about what to ask, mark or write in your preliminary choices but keep your alternatives at hand during the dialogue. You may want to alter your plan as the dialogue unfolds depending on what happens. (e.g., Is time running short? Have people already addressed a later question in their responses to an earlier one?)

Can I add or replace questions?

Yes, but we strongly recommend that any questions you use

- encourage reflection;
- use very open language, free of “buzz words” and narrowing assumptions;
- do not reinforce stereotypes; and
- encourage people to speak from their own perspectives and experience, not as experts who make sweeping statements about what others think or what is “really” going on.

For example, consider the different effects of these two questions about displaying the American flag.

- What thoughts and feelings are stirred in you when you see a flag on a car or a house or a lapel? Or when you display one? What does it mean to you?
- or*
- What do you think of all the flag-waving that is going on out there?

The first question invites expression of the meaning that the listener attaches to this symbol. The second may invite the listener's judgment about other people's expressions and meanings.

If you replace the questions in Sections 3.2.4 or 3.2.5, we recommend that you use questions that will achieve the purposes identified in those sections.



What are some examples of additional questions?

- How have your responses and concerns shifted over time?
- What is most encouraging, confusing, or worrisome for you about the current global situation and/or the ways individuals, groups or organizations such as governments and the media have been responding to it?
- Have you seen yourself or a group to which you belong (racial, ethnic, regional, religious, national, etc.) in a new light since September 11?
- What strengths or values have you found yourself drawing on as you try to understand and respond to what is going on in the world?
- Do you see any opportunities or cause for hope in the current situation?

What supplies should I have on hand?

- Your customized *Plan* for the dialogue (see Section 3.2). You can prepare your own plan in one of three ways:
 1. print out the *Plan* and mark it with choices you have made;
 2. go to www.publicconversations.org/Pages/community, download the *Plan* as a Microsoft Word document and edit it to reflect your words and choices; or
 3. use the Facilitator Worksheet that appears as Appendix D.
- Handouts or posted newsprint with
 1. suggested agreements (Section 3.2.2);
 2. *optional*: the flow of the dialogue (Section 3.2.1); and
 3. *optional*: guiding questions for the facilitated discussion (Section 3.2.6).
- Pads and pens or pencils for each participant for note-taking;
- Two three-minute egg timers or a watch with an easily visible second hand;
- A box of tissues;
- Participant feedback form.

What considerations should guide my decision about participating as well as facilitating?

We do not recommend full participation by the facilitator unless the group has a high degree of trust and/or the facilitator is experienced and able to be sensitive to the impact of his or her contributions on the group. Some questions to ask yourself are: Are you comfortable playing both roles? Are your views likely to be so controversial as to raise questions about your ability to be a fair facilitator? Will you be viewed as a privileged participant, less subject to the guidelines?

One possibility is for you to participate in the introductory and closing go-rounds, but “pass” in the body of the dialogue where the dual role is most likely to be a strain for you or a complicating factor for participants.

If you decide to participate, you may wish to ask all of the participants to assume more responsibility for the quality of the conversation. If you anticipate doing this, you might send out the “Self-Help Tools” presented in Appendix B with your invitation.

2.3 Facilitation

What will be my role as facilitator?

The main responsibilities of the facilitator are to

- welcome people and orient them to the event and its purpose;
- get agreement to a set of guidelines;
- remind people about their agreements if they forget them;
- move the group through the dialogue, keeping an eye on time.

How active you will need to be as a facilitator will depend on your group. Some groups or individual participants need a lot of time management; others do not. Some will need a reminder about the spirit of dialogue; others will not. If you're not sure about what your group needs at a particular juncture, don't feel that you need to read the participants' minds. Ask them! For example, "We have about 45 minutes to go. Would you like to keep going, or take a 5-minute break?"

It has been our experience that, if the invitation is clear and the group agrees to follow the guidelines, the demands on the facilitator are minimal. The structure as defined by the guidelines and the *Plan* "holds" the conversation.

What guidelines should I propose to the group?

In the *Plan* we offer the following set; you may have other ideas or alternative wording.

Regarding the spirit of our speaking and listening,

- We will speak for ourselves and from our own experience.
- We will not criticize the views of other participants or attempt to persuade them.
- We will listen with resilience, "hanging in" when what is said is hard to hear.

Regarding the form of our speaking and listening,

- We will participate within the time frames suggested by the facilitator.
- We will not interrupt except to indicate that we cannot hear a speaker.
- We will "pass" if we do not wish to speak.

How can I help the participants use the time well?

Time is one of the precious, invisible ingredients of dialogue. (Attention is another.)

You will have a limited amount to work with so it needs to be managed wisely.

There are two purposes of time management:

- to make sure that the conversation has a solid beginning, a long enough middle, and a satisfying end within the time available; and
- to ensure that all participants have an equal opportunity to be heard, and that the dialogue is free from the "domination" or disproportionate verbosity of its members.

Your job is to choose a way of shepherding people through the dialogue that accomplishes these purposes and also suits your style and your group's culture.

What are some methods of monitoring time?

You can use an easily readable watch or clock or egg timer during the go-rounds in which people are invited to speak for up to three minutes. If you use an egg timer, we recommend that you have a second one on hand so that you can keep the process moving if a participant does not use the full three minutes and still has “sand” left in the top of the timer.

Whatever you decide, be clear about what you are inviting participants to do (e.g., “speak for up to three minutes”) and how you plan to signal when a participant’s time is up. Indicate that a signal is a request to the participant to stop after they complete their thought or sentence.

What should I do about time when there are no go-rounds?

At the start of the more informal conversation that follows the go-rounds, you can remind participants to share the limited air time with others. You also can keep track of who speaks and invite the quieter participants to speak before all the time is used. Some facilitators like to let the group know when half the time is gone and when the end is approaching so the participants know what they have to work with.

Can I ask the group to help me with managing time?

Yes. Especially if you are new to facilitating or if you are concerned about your ability to attend to time as well as everything else, you can ask all the participants to share responsibility for time management. In the go-rounds, you can ask them to circulate a watch with an easily visible second hand. The watch follows the speaker. You ask the person who has just spoken to time the one who speaks next. The proximity of the timekeeper to the speaker gives the timekeeper a gentle, non-verbal way of signaling that time is up: by simply handing the speaker the watch or placing a hand on his or her shoulder or arm. You can do the same thing with an egg timer.

Alternatively, you can ask one person to play this role. He or she keeps the watch or egg timers and gives a visual and/or verbal signal when each speaker’s time is up. There are disadvantages to this. It is less intimate than passing the timepiece. In addition, if the speaker is looking at the floor, or cannot see the timekeeper’s waving hand, the timekeeper also may need to speak which can be distracting to others.

What if someone speaks out of turn in a go-round?

Sometimes a participant will feel compelled to speak out of turn, sometimes with the good intentions. For example, someone might say “Oh, I just *have* to give a great example of what you just said.” Or “Can I just respond quickly?” Or “Oh, I saw that show, too, and I thought it was so...” If this happens the facilitator can say, “Will you hold onto that thought, until we complete the go-round? You can jot it down and bring it up later.”

What if someone is overwhelmed with emotion?

Speaking and listening about the events of September 11, or other experiences related to terror and war, may be upsetting for some participants. Some may be stimulated to re-experience past pain. They may get upset, tearful, fearful, or angry.

Groups of people who know each other well will probably know what to do if this happens. They may offer support, for example, by taking the person's hand or making some other gesture of comfort.

In a group of people who are not well known to each other, it is harder to know what is appropriate. Our best advice is to keep your heart open and take your lead from the person who is upset. You can ask simply, "What would be most helpful for you now?" Or you may want to suggest that the group take a break, allowing everyone to breathe and stretch. During a break, the person who is upset may wish to be alone to calm him or herself. Or the person may accept supportive contact from others.

If the person who is upset has spoken about someone they lost on September 11 or in related circumstances (e.g., a plane crash or war), it may be appropriate for the group to take a moment of silence to honor that person's memory.

What should I do if a participant forgets to observe the agreements?

The agreements are a key ingredient in the creation of a respectful and safe space for dialogue; they protect the spirit of dialogue. If a speaker has clearly forgotten to observe an agreement, you must intervene.

If I need to intervene, how should I do it?

With legitimacy and compassion.

What constitutes a "legitimate" intervention?

An intervention is legitimate (i.e., not guided by facilitator bias or whim) if a behavior violates agreements the participants made with each other.

Legitimacy is most clear in the case of an easily identifiable behavior like interrupting. In this case a simple intervention, with no need to explain, is often appropriate, e.g., "Excuse me, Mary, I want to see if John was finished."

If a participant begins his statement with a judgment of another person's response, he is violating the agreement about refraining from criticism. If he says, for example, "Well, Kelly, it's not going to get us anywhere to just carry on about ...," or "Kelly, I can't believe you are so blind to..." you can ask him to say what he cares about without passing judgement on Kelly's contribution.

It may be difficult to tell whether an agreement is being violated. For example, you may be uncertain whether John is just expressing a strong feeling or trying to persuade Mary that her view is wrong. If you're not sure, ask. For example, "John, I'm wondering if you're trying to refute or criticize Mary's viewpoint or if you are simply trying to help others understand your views."

What constitutes a “compassionate” intervention?

An intervention is compassionate when it serves the group’s needs, honors the spirit of the dialogue, and does not blame or shame any of the participants. One way you can intervene with compassion is to inquire about what you notice (as described above), rather than make a quick judgement that may be based on a misreading of the situation. Another way is to include in your intervention an acknowledgment of what is valuable, appropriate, or understandable about what is going on.

Suppose Susan's comments in two go-rounds strongly suggest (in your mind) that anyone who doesn't agree with her is immoral or dangerously unrealistic. Susan hasn't directly criticized another participant or what people said; nonetheless her tone and some of her language makes you feel uncertain about whether she is implicitly insulting the intelligence and morality of those who have expressed different views.

Rather than saying, “Susan, you’re violating an agreement,” you can express curiosity about the needs of the group by saying, “Susan, it sounds like you have really strong feelings about this. How are those of you who have different views hearing what Susan is saying? Are you feeling criticized or shut down or are you still able to listen? How is your resilience holding up?” By taking this approach, you remain squarely in the role of servant to the group. You give the speaker indirect feedback and a chance to reflect. You also give others a chance to give him or her direct feedback. Finally, you are “walking the talk” by resisting the impulse to assume knowledge of others’ intentions or impact on others and modeling genuine inquiry.

You can also serve the group by helping people stay focussed. For example, if Joan responds to a question in a way that seems unrelated to the question, don’t assume it is unrelated. Ask. For example, “Joan, I’m having trouble connecting what you’re saying with the question. Can you help me make the connection?” Joan may say what the connection is or she may realize that she has lost track of the question. This is easy to do, especially toward the end of a go-round when one’s mind may be filled with thoughts and feelings related to what other people have said rather than the question. If this is the case, Joan may ask to be reminded of the question or you can remind her.

If you’re noticing a pattern in the group that may be problematic, you can comment on what you are noticing and see what people think. For example, “We’re about half way through our discussion time and I notice that we’ve stayed focussed on Dan’s question about x. That may be fine with everyone, but I want to check to see if any of you were hoping to ask another question.” Or you might address a subgroup, e.g., “The conversation has been going at a really fast pace among you three and I wonder if you (other) three are having a hard time getting a word in or just choosing to listen right now.”

What if someone repeatedly neglects to observe the guidelines?

You can propose that the group take a five-minute break. During the break, you can have a private conversation with the person who seems to be having trouble following the agreements and see if he or she wants to

- stay (with renewed commitment to the agreements);
- leave (perhaps with an opportunity to say some parting words to the group); or
- ask the group to re-negotiate the agreement that he or she finds hard to follow.

Suppose several people are having difficulty maintaining the spirit of the dialogue?

A direct and honest approach is best. Share your perception with the group and ask participants what their perceptions are. If they agree that there has been a mismatch between the agreements they made and the ways they are talking, you can ask what agreements would serve them best now. The group may re-commit to the original agreements or decide to modify them.

Remember that your job is to help people honor their agreements. When there is a mismatch, either the agreements or the behavior can be adjusted. In the unlikely event that the group wants to completely abandon their agreements, offer to bring the dialogue to a close after a closing go-round. In this situation, you might ask them questions like:

- What was most satisfying and what was most unsatisfying about this way of speaking and listening?
- Are there any aspects of it that you might want to incorporate into future conversations?

If there are some participants who want to continue with the dialogue, they can re-start it as a smaller group at that time or at another time.

What if the dialogue doesn't go well?

Consider it to have been an experiment from which something can be learned and ask participants to join you in identifying the lessons learned. Written feedback has the advantage of allowing you to hear directly from all participants without having anyone's views overshadowed by the views of others. (See the Feedback Forms, Section 4.)

How can my experience be helpful to others?

By telling the staff at the Public Conversations Project about it! We are interested in learning what was difficult as well as what went smoothly. Some of our most important learning has come from what we felt at the time were "failures."

We plan to continually refine this *Guide* with the help of people like you. So tell us what worked and what you would do differently next time using the feedback forms in Section 4.

3. THE PLAN

3.1 The Flow of the Plan

Welcome and Orientation (5 minutes)

Agreements (10 minutes)

Introductions and Hopes (10 minutes)

First Question (20 minutes)

Second Question (20 minutes)

Facilitated Discussion (35 minutes)

Parting Words (15 minutes)

Note: Times indicated are for a group of six participants.



3.2 The Plan: Step by Step

3.2.1 WELCOME AND ORIENTATION

5 minutes
Purposes: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• To welcome participants into the conversation.• To remind participants about the purpose and spirit of the dialogue.• To say something about roles, schedule, etc., so people know what to expect.
Welcome and restatement of purpose <p><i>Say something like</i></p> <p>“Welcome. I’m glad that you decided to participate in this dialogue. It’s likely that each of us has been affected differently by the attacks of September 11 and what has been happening since then. I hope this will be a time when you’ll feel fully welcome to speak about your experiences and your views and when you can commit to listening to each other with resilience even when what you hear upsets you. By taking in different views, we may leave with richer and wider perspectives. At least we will understand each other better.”</p> Schedule and ending time <p><i>Say something like</i></p> <p>“Let me tell you a little bit about the flow of the dialogue. (<i>Refer to a handout or posted newsprint if you have made them. See Section 3.1.</i>)</p> <p>We’ll begin by making some agreements—that is, we’ll agree on some communication guidelines for our time together.</p> <p>Then we’ll have a quick go-round in which you can say something about what led you to participate or what you hope for.</p> <p>Next we’ll have two go-rounds in which you can respond to two questions that I will pose.</p> <p>Following the go-rounds, we’ll have at least a half an hour for less structured conversation in which you can explore connections among your experiences and perspectives.</p> <p>Those connections might take the form of one person asking another person a question. Or they might take the form of simply noting similarities and differences and exploring them a bit further.</p>

Finally, we'll take time at the end for each of you to say some parting words. We'll aim to end by (time). Can everyone stay until then?"

If people have to leave early, determine how they will leave (e.g., by saying a few parting words or by just getting up to leave quietly) and how you will get their feedback.

Pens and paper

Say something like

"I have made pens and paper available so that you can jot down notes. The pads can help you to listen by giving you a place to hang on to the thoughts that come to you as others are speaking so you can readily return your full attention to listening. The pads also can support making connections in the later part of the dialogue if you use them to jot down themes, differences, or similarities or questions that you may want to explore further."

Your role

Say something like

"In my role as facilitator, I will guide us through the dialogue and ensure that whatever agreements we make with each other are either followed or renegotiated. If I've asked you to speak no more than three minutes and you've gone over that time, I'll signal you. That simply means that I'd like you to complete your thought, not that you need to stop mid-sentence."

If you will participate in the content of the dialogue, say something like

"If I participate in the content of the dialogue, I would like you to intervene if I don't follow the agreements. Knowing that you will do that will help me feel freer to participate."

"Finally, if at any point you have concerns about how things are going, please let me know and we'll work together to figure out how to address those concerns. Can I count on that?"

3.2.2 AGREEMENTS

10 minutes

Purpose:

To craft a set of communication agreements that everyone understands and agrees to that will serve the purposes of the dialogue.

“Now let’s make some agreements about how we will communicate. Your handout (*or a posted sheet*) lists some guidelines that others have used to create an environment where people can speak openly and listen fully. Please take a moment to read them and then I’ll check in with you to see if you’d like to adopt them as is, or revise them for our group.”

Read them aloud or have participants take turns, each reading one. (A handout version of these agreements is found in Appendix F)

PROPOSED AGREEMENTS

*Regarding the **spirit** of our speaking and listening,*

1. We will speak for ourselves and from our own experience.
2. We will not criticize the views of other participants or attempt to persuade them.
3. We will listen with resilience, “hanging in” when what is said is hard to hear.

*Regarding the **form** of our speaking and listening,*

1. We will participate within the time frames suggested by the facilitator.
2. We will not interrupt except to indicate that we cannot hear a speaker.
3. We will “pass” if we do not wish to speak.

After reading the guidelines, you can say something like

“Are there any questions about what any of these guidelines mean?”

“Would you like to suggest any revisions or additions?”

If suggestions are made and agreed to by all, write them on any posted list.

“So is each of you prepared to follow these guidelines as best you can, and allow me to remind you if you forget?”

Look for verbal and non-verbal responses.

“OK, these will serve as our agreements.”

“If at any point you feel that these agreements are not serving our purposes adequately, speak up and we’ll see if it makes sense to revise them.”

3.2.3 INTRODUCTIONS AND HOPES

10 minutes

Purpose:

To create a shared sense of participants' hopes for the dialogue, what they bring to it and/or what they hope to experience during it.

Say something like: "Let's start by going around and saying your name and ..."

(Facilitator chooses one or two of the following)

What led you to accept the invitation to join this dialogue.

-or-

What you hope to experience or learn while you are here.

-or-

What could happen in this conversation that would lead you to feel glad that you decided to participate.

"Please say just a few sentences - not more than a minute or so. I'll start, then we'll go around." (As the first speaker, you can model brevity with a two-sentence response.)



3.2.4 FIRST QUESTION

20 minutes (Time for each response: 3 minutes)

Purpose:

To invite participants to connect their response to the current situation with their own personal experience.

“Now, I’d like to invite you to take up to three minutes to respond to the following set of questions:”

(Facilitator chooses one set of questions)

How have events related to September 11 and the war on terrorism affected you personally? Is there something you’d be willing to share about yourself or your life experiences that may relate to the ways you have responded to the attacks and/or the current situation in the world?

-or-

What thoughts and feelings are you sitting with as you reflect back on September 11 and all that has happened since? Would you be willing to say something about your life experiences prior to September 11 that may relate to your having those thoughts and feelings?

“First, a moment of silence to collect our thoughts.”

After pause, repeat the questions.

“Anyone can start when they are ready. Then we’ll go around. If we come to you before you are ready, you can pass and I’ll check in with you later to see if you’d like to speak.”

Optional: “Remember, you may want to jot down key phrases, theme, or connections to explore later.”

3.2.5 SECOND QUESTION

20 minutes (Time for each response: 3 minutes)

Purposes:

To encourage participants to

- reflect on aspects of their own views that they may not express as readily as their usual views; and
- reveal fresh information about complex thinking that may be fodder for connections across different views and new perspectives.

“Again, I’d like to pose a question and give each of you up to three minutes to respond.

(Facilitator chooses one or two of the following)

Do you have uncertainties about any of the views you have held in the past? Can you say something about both the certainties and uncertainties you bring to this conversation?

-or-

What’s changed (if anything) in the way that you think or what you feel about your life, your relationships, your nation or the world? What has remained the same?

-or-

Among your views about what is happening in the world are there some areas of uncertainty, conflicting values, or dilemmas that you are willing to speak about?

-or-

Is there anything you have been finding difficult to sort out in your own mind or to speak about? If you don’t wish to say aloud what is difficult, can you say what makes this thought or experience difficult to bring up?

“First, a moment of silence to collect our thoughts.”

After a pause, repeat the questions.

“We’ll start with whoever is ready, then we’ll go around. If your turn comes before you are ready, you can pass and I’ll check in with you later to see if you’d like to speak.”

(Alternative: “Instead of going around this time we’ll hear from people in whatever order they feel ready to speak – ‘popcorn style.’”)

Note: If participants spoke about their current views in the first go-round we suggest that you choose one of the first two options. If they spoke about their uncertainties in the first go-round, you can invite them to say more about their views, their worries or their hopes related to the situation in the world in this go-round.



3.2.6 FACILITATED DISCUSSION

35 minutes

Purpose

To allow participants to have a more interactive discussion that makes connections among others' thoughts and feelings and their own.

Tone-setting comments

“We are now at the point in our time together when you can talk more freely. As we move into this less structured time, it’s important to remember why we are here: not to debate or persuade but to speak with sincerity to listen with open heartedness and resilience, to reflect on our own views, and to seek understanding of other views. *Optional:* When you’d like to speak, please let me know by raising your hand.”

Read and/or have the following written on a handout and/or posted.

“This is a time to make connections between what is on your mind and something others have said. You can identify and pursue a theme, explore similarities and dissimilarities, ask questions, or comment on how what you’ve heard has been enriching or, perhaps, unsettling.”

CONTRIBUTING TO A CONNECTED CONVERSATION

- **Note a point of learning**
Have you heard something that stirred fresh thoughts or feelings?
- **Pick up and weave a thread**
Has an interesting theme or idea emerged that you’d like to add to?
- **Clarify differences**
Have you heard something you disagreed with? If so, first check to see if you understood it correctly. Then say what was unsettling to you about what you heard and why.
- **Ask a question**
Is there something someone said that you’d like to understand better? If you ask a question, be sure it reflects genuine curiosity and is not a challenge in disguise.

(A handout version is available in Appendix G.)

3.2.7 PARTING WORDS

15 minutes

Purposes

- To encourage reflection about what participants learned or valued.
- To invite participants to say something that will bring their participation to a meaningful close

“Our time here is coming to an end. Are there any parting words that you’d like to say to bring your participation to a close?”

“You may want to simply comment on what the experience has been like for you. Or you may want to say...”

(Facilitator chooses one of the following)

- one idea, feeling, commitment or promising question that you are taking with you.
-or-
- one thing you want to remember about this conversation.
-or-
- something about what came up for you here that you may want to share with a friend, family member, or co-worker, or take out into your life in some other way.

After hearing from all who wish to speak, as facilitator, you

- *thank participants, and*
- *elicit feedback. Indicate that you and the staff at the Public Conversations Project would like to learn from their feedback. A Participant Feedback Form can be found in Section 4, as well as two different versions of a Facilitator Feedback Form.*

4. FEEDBACK FORMS

We are eager to learn from anything you do—whether you follow the *Plan* step by step or try something very different. We hope you will let us know what you did, what did and didn't work, and what you learned. We are interested in the nuts and bolts as well as the headlines.

A very simple Participant Feedback Form follows, as well as two versions of a Facilitator Feedback Form—one more detailed than the other. We hope you will share with us as much as you have the time and inclination to write. Future users of the Guide, as well as PCP, will benefit from the fruits of your experience.

You can download the forms at <http://www.publicconversations.org/Pages/commsecs>. Then you will be able to type in the spaces after the questions (the space will expand as you type) or create as much space as you want on your printed form. Please email or fax the form to us. If you have technical difficulties, give us a call.

If you'd like to arrange for a more convenient way to provide feedback, don't hesitate to call. We are eager to learn from your experience.

Web: <http://conversations.forms.soceco.org/49/>

Email: september11@publicconversations.org

Fax: (617) 923-2757 *Phone:* (617) 923-1216



Participant Feedback Form

1. What was most satisfying, enriching, or valuable about your experience in the dialogue?
2. What was less than satisfying, frustrating, or disappointing?
3. Can you say something about what you are taking away from the experience?
4. What advice or suggestions can you offer to people who want to plan and facilitate future dialogues like this in family or community settings?
5. Other comments?

Name: *(optional)*

Facilitator Feedback Form: Short Version

Facilitator's Name:

E-Mail:

1. How did you go about setting up the dialogue?
(Attach sample invitation if you are willing to share it.)

2. Who came? What was the range and intensity of their views?

3. What parts of the *Plan* did you use?

4. What questions did you ask the participants to address?

5. How did it go? What went especially well? What was difficult?

6. Did you use alternatives to the *Plan* that worked especially well?



7. What did participants value about the conversation?

8. What did they find difficult or disappointing?

9. What suggestions did they have for improvement?

10. What advice do you have for people planning to organize and facilitate a dialogue about challenging current events?

11. What changes or additions do you recommend PCP make to the next edition of this *Guide*?



Facilitator Feedback Form: Long Version

Facilitator's Name:

E-Mail:

1. Who participated? How many? Their prior relationships, if any?
2. How did you invite them? (Attach sample invitation if you are willing to share it.)
3. How did you describe the purpose of the dialogue?
4. Where did the conversation take place?
5. What day of the week and time of day? How long did it last?
6. What happened between arrival and the start of the conversation?

7. Who facilitated? What was your/their prior experience leading or facilitating groups?

8. What unexpected challenges arose? How did you meet them?

9. In your view, which circumstances made a difference (positive or negative) in the way the conversation went?

10. How many members of the group had strongly held opinions? How broad a range of views did the participants have?

11. Did the group include a balanced distribution of views? Do you think anyone felt silenced or isolated?

12. What questions did you ask the participants to address?

13. To what extent did you follow the *Plan*? What parts of what you followed worked especially well for you? What parts did not work well?

14. If you improvised, which of your improvisations worked especially well? Did any not work out well?

15. How did you elicit feedback from the participants?

16. What were the most satisfying elements for the participants?

17. What was less than satisfying for the participants?

18. How much difference was there among participants' views about the value of the conversation? Was the pattern of satisfaction/dissatisfaction related to participants' views? Other factors?

19. What was most satisfying for you, the facilitator?

Appendix A: Distinguishing Debate from Dialogue

DEBATE	DIALOGUE
Pre-meeting communication between sponsors and participants is minimal and largely irrelevant to what follows.	Pre-meeting contacts and preparation of participants are essential elements of the full process.
Participants tend to be leaders known for propounding a carefully crafted position. The personas displayed in the debate are usually already familiar to the public. The behavior of the participants tends to conform to stereotypes.	Those chosen to participate are not necessarily outspoken "leaders." Whoever they are, they speak as individuals whose own unique experiences differ in some respect from others on their "side." Their behavior is likely to vary in some degree and along some dimensions from stereotypic images others may hold of them.
The atmosphere is threatening; attacks and interruptions are expected by participants and are usually permitted by moderators.	The atmosphere is one of safety; facilitators propose, get agreement on, and enforce clear ground rules to enhance safety and promote respectful exchange.
Participants speak as representatives of groups.	Participants speak as individuals, from their own unique experience.
Participants speak to their own constituents and, perhaps, to the undecided middle.	Participants speak to each other.
Differences within "sides" are denied or minimized.	Differences among participants on the same "side" are revealed, as individual and personal foundations of beliefs and values are explored.
Participants express unswerving commitment to a point of view, approach, or idea.	Participants express uncertainties, as well as deeply held beliefs.
Participants listen in order to refute the other side's data and to expose faulty logic in their arguments. Questions are asked from a position of certainty. These questions are often rhetorical challenges or disguised statements.	Participants listen to understand and gain insight into the beliefs and concerns of the others. Questions are asked from a position of curiosity.
Statements are predictable and offer little new information.	New information surfaces.
Success requires simple impassioned statements.	Success requires exploration of the complexities of the issue being discussed.

Debates operate within the constraints of the dominant public discourse. (The discourse defines the problem and the options for resolution. It assumes that fundamental needs and values are already clearly understood.)

Participants are encouraged to question the dominant public discourse, that is, to express fundamental needs that may or may not be reflected in the discourse and to explore various options for problem definition and resolution. Participants may discover inadequacies in the usual language and concepts used in the public debate.

This table contrasts debate as commonly seen on television with the kind of dialogue we aim to promote in dialogue sessions conducted by the Public Conversations Project.

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Appendix B: Self Help Tools for Participants

1. **If you feel *cut off***, say so or override the interruption. (“I’d like to finish...”)
2. **If you feel *misunderstood***, clarify what you mean. (“Let me put this another way...”)
3. **If you feel *misheard***, ask the listener to repeat what she heard you say and affirm or correct her statement.
4. **If you feel *hurt or disrespected***, say so. If possible, describe exactly what you heard or saw that evoked hurt feelings in you. (“When you said x, I felt y...” where “x” refers to specific language.) If it is hard to think of what to say, just say, “OUCH” to flag your reaction.
5. **If you feel *angry***, express the anger directly (e.g., “I felt angry when I heard you say x...”) rather than expressing it or acting it out indirectly (e.g., by trashing another person’s statement or asking a sarcastic or rhetorical question.)
6. **If you feel *confused***, frame a question that seeks clarification or more information. You may prefer to paraphrase what you have heard. (“Are you saying that...?”)
7. **If you feel *uncomfortable***, with the process, state your discomfort and check in with the group to see how others are experiencing what is happening. “I’m not comfortable with the tension I’m feeling in the room right now and I’m wondering how others are feeling.” If others share your concerns and you have an idea about what would help, offer that idea. “How about taking a one-minute Time Out to reflect on what we are trying to do together?”
8. **If you feel the conversation is *going off track***, share your perception, and check in with others. “I thought we were going to discuss x before moving to y, but it seems that we bypassed x and are focussing on y. Is that right?” (If so) “I’d like to get back to x and hear from more people about it.”

Appendix C: Two Sample Invitations

Sample Invitation #1

Zoe Reinold and Daniel Lansing cordially invite you to participate in a

**READING RESIDENTS' DIALOGUE
ABOUT SEPTEMBER 11 AND ALL THAT HAS HAPPENED SINCE**

Friday, Feb. 22, 2002

7 to 9 PM

Town Hall conference room (first floor)

By dialogue, we mean a conversation with a particular spirit:

- we listen intently;
- we speak openly; and
- we seek simply to understand each other.

Dialogue also has structure:

- it is facilitated;
- we take turns responding to certain questions;
- we agree to observe communication guidelines; and
- we refrain from debating or refuting each other.

To learn more about our proposed dialogue go to www.publicconversations.org. It's the website of the Public Conversations Project, a nonprofit, nonpartisan group that promotes dialogue about divisive issues. Click on "Constructive Conversations for Challenging Times: A Guide to Community Dialogue."

RSVP: Call Zoe Reinold, 555-1234, or email her at [Zoe's email address].

Sample Invitation #2

Dear Friends,

I'm writing to ask you to join me in an experiment in dialogue. The topic will be our responses to Sept. 11: from the events of that terrible day to the many changes, both global and personal, that have occurred in its wake.

By dialogue, I mean something more structured than casual talk. We'll take turns responding to certain questions. Our conversation will be facilitated (by me and/or anyone else who's interested). It will have guidelines, which we'd all approve beforehand. Ideally, we'll include an agreement to refrain from debating or refuting each other.

The reason to refrain from debating is to create a calm, welcoming space for thoughtful conversation so that we can listen to each other closely and receptively. It may be that our group contains a range of feelings and opinions about the attack and what is happening in the world. Perhaps within our individual selves, we experience contradictory feelings and opinions (I know I do). Or we might feel vague or uncertain about what we're thinking. In dialogue, ideally, we'll all feel free to express any such disagreements, contradictions, vagueness and uncertainty. We'll seek simply to understand them fully, not to resolve or dismiss them.

I've gotten my ideas for this conversation from the Public Conversations Project (PCP), a nonprofit, nonpartisan group that promotes dialogue about divisive public issues. They have a guide that contains a suggested format and lots of stimulating questions. To check it out, go to www.publicconversations.org. and click on "Constructive Conversations for Challenging Times: A guide to Community Dialogue."

I'm proposing this dialogue because I personally feel the need for richer discussion of all that is going on. I suppose it's my way of combating the powerlessness I feel. I also feel a desperate desire not to succumb to the apathy of powerlessness. I want to stay awake, to stay engaged with current events. I also wish to stay connected to all of you.

Some of you may not feel inclined to have this kind of conversation right now. Please feel free to opt out. The dialogue only works if people really want to do it. I promise I won't mind a bit!

The dialogue will take place on Friday, Feb. 22, from 7 to 9 PM. If you can, please also join us for a light supper, which will start at 6. The location will be my home at 123 Main St., Westville.

Thanks for hearing me out. When you know whether or not you're interested in having such a dialogue, you can e-mail me a reply at [e-mail address] or call me at [phone number].

Hope to see you on Feb. 22.

Warm regards,

Jane B. Smith



Appendix D: Facilitator Worksheet

Welcome and Orientation (5 minutes)

Purposes:

To welcome participants into the conversation;
To remind participants about the purpose and spirit of the dialogue;
To say something about roles, schedule, etc. so people know what to expect.

Your Notes:

Agreements (10 minutes)

Purpose:

To craft a set of agreements that everyone understands and agrees to that will serve the purposes of the dialogue

Your Notes:

Introductions and Hopes (10 minutes)

Purpose:

To create a shared sense of participant's hopes for the dialogue, what they bring to it and/or what they hope to experience during it

Your Notes/Chosen Question:

First Question (20 minutes)

Purpose:

To invite participants to connect their response to the current situation with their own personal experience

Your Notes/Chosen Question:

Second Question (20 minutes)

Purposes: To encourage participants to

- reflect on aspects of their own views that they may not express as readily as their usual views; and
- reveal fresh information about complex thinking that may be fodder for connections across different views and new perspectives.

Your Notes/Chosen Question:



Facilitated Discussion (35 minutes)

Purpose:

To allow participants to have a more interactive discussion that makes connections among others' thoughts and feelings and their own.

Your Notes:

Parting Words (15 minutes)

Purposes:

To encourage reflection about what participants learned or valued.

To invite participants to say something that will bring their participation to a meaningful close.

Your Notes/Chosen Question:

Reminder: Ask for feedback



Appendix E

A Tale of Two Grandmothers or, There's More Than One Good Way to Facilitate Dialogue

by Bob Stains, PCP's Director of Training

When I think about how to apply the PCP approach, I'm reminded of the very different ways that my two grandmothers made pasta sauce. On the English side, my great-grandmother Elsie Stains was very clear about what it took to make sauce: a recipe. Six large, peeled tomatoes. One tablespoon of oregano. One-and-a-half teaspoons of salt. The ingredients were to be measured out, mixed, and heated in the prescribed manner. As a young boy, it was great to help Grandma Stains make sauce, because I always knew what to do.

Another approach was taken by my Italian grandmother, Luigina Miglioranzi ("Nonna"). Nonna held whatever recipes she had in her heart. She too would begin with tomatoes, but then was in constant conversation with the sauce-to-be. "What do you need?" she would say in broken English, as she tossed "just a pinch" of salt or oregano or cloves into the pot. Then a taste from the wooden spoon. Pause. Again, "What do you need?" She would continue on in this manner, interacting with the bubbling mixture, until it was "right;" until the correct balance of ingredients was achieved and they had "married;" until it could be pronounced "sauce." I still carry the exquisite taste with me. It was harder to help Nonna because I didn't go back with sauce as far as she did. As I've grown older, though, I've grown more adventurous. I've been in conversation with sauce for some years, sharing the taste with family and friends.

As you approach the adventure of dialogue, remember that there are different ways to make a marvelous sauce. It may be more fitting and comfortable for you to stick with the "recipe" approach, especially if you are new to facilitation. It's good to be reminded about what ingredients are necessary for dialogue, and to be able to put them together in basic, tried-and-true ways. There are detailed resources in this *Guide* and other sections of this web site that will support you.

On the other hand, you may feel more comfortable relying on your own intuition. In this case, you'll want to explore the variety of options offered in each section of the *Guide*. Perhaps you'll use some of our suggested questions and formats; perhaps you'll develop your own. Just stay attuned to the character and mood of your group. Be in conversation with the members about what's working and be prepared to adjust to fit their needs.

Regardless of which approach you are more comfortable with, we hope that you carry the "spirit" of dialogue into your thinking, your planning and your facilitation. If you are rooted in this, whether you have followed a more structured or more fluid approach, participants will leave having tasted something new.



SUGGESTED AGREEMENTS

*Regarding the **spirit** of our speaking and listening,*

1. We will speak for ourselves and from our own experience.
2. We will not criticize the views of other participants or attempt to persuade them.
3. We will listen with resilience, “hanging in” when what is said is hard to hear.

*Regarding the **form** of our speaking and listening,*

1. We will participate within the time frames suggested by the facilitator.
2. We will not interrupt except to indicate that we cannot hear a speaker.
3. We will “pass” if we do not wish to speak.

CONTRIBUTING TO A CONNECTED CONVERSATION

- **Note a point of learning**
Have you heard something that stirred fresh thoughts or feelings?
- **Pick up and weave a thread**
Has an interesting theme or idea emerged that you'd like to add to?
- **Clarify differences**
Have you heard something you disagreed with? If so, first check to see if you understood it correctly. Then say what was unsettling to you about what you heard and why.
- **Ask a question**
Is there something someone said that you'd like to understand better? If you ask a question, be sure it reflects genuine curiosity and is not a challenge in disguise.