

A GUIDE TO ORGANIZING DIALOGUE TO CHANGE

For education that works for all

This guide is a project of the Nellie Mae Foundation,
Everyday Democracy and Great Schools Partnership

Guide to Organizing Dialogue to Change for Education that Works for All

INTRODUCTION

Making sure that all our children and young people have equitable opportunities to do well in school and in life is key to the health of our communities and our whole democracy.

Creating those opportunities requires meaningful ways for communities and schools to work together. Every community and its schools need welcoming opportunities for meaningful give and take among a wide diversity of people -- parents and other community members, students, teachers, administrators, business people, municipal workers, nonprofit groups, faith groups, and all sorts of grass-roots concerned residents. People from all backgrounds, incomes, ages, and views need ways to work together for the good of all students.



It is essential for everyone's voice to be heard and valued, especially those who are most affected, who often face the highest barriers to being included.

In New England, Everyday Democracy is working with the Nellie Mae Education Foundation and Great Schools Partnership to help schools and communities build these kinds of inclusive, productive opportunities. As a result, schools and communities are creating more equitable opportunities for their students. We are working in other regions of the country as well.

This brief guide is designed to help you bring this essential work to your local school district and community.

Please get in touch with us to let us know how you are using this guide, and if you would like to be involved in any trainings we are planning across the U.S.

Sincerely,

Martha McCoy
Executive Director
Everyday Democracy

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter 1	Building a School Community Coalition.....	pg 3
Chapter 2	What is the “Dialogue to Change” Process?.....	pg 5
Chapter 3	Applying an Intergenerational and Racial Equity Lens in the Dialogue Process.....	pg 6
Chapter 4	How to Plan and Organize for the Dialogues.....	pg 7
Chapter 5	Identifying the Issues and Materials.....	pg 8
Chapter 6	Recruiting and Training a Diverse Pool of Facilitators.....	pg 9
Chapter 7	Recruiting Participants and Holding the Dialogues.....	pg 11
Chapter 8	Sharing Engagement Results and Moving to Action.....	pg 13
Chapter 9	Supporting Action and Measuring Progress.....	pg 14
Chapter 10	Sustaining and Expanding the Work.....	pg 15

APPENDIX A Comparison of Dialogue and Debate

APPENDIX B Facilitator Training Tips

Chapter 1. Building a School Community Coalition

There are six key elements in developing a community coalition or planning team:

- **Partnerships** - build diverse partnerships with community groups and individuals
- **Member Recruitment** - recruit community members for the dialogues
- **Process** - plan for how the dialogues will happen
- **Facilitator Recruitment** - recruit facilitators for the dialogues
- **Evaluation** - plan how you will evaluate the success of your dialogues
- **Communication** - think about how to share support ideas that result from the dialogues

Partnerships and Member Recruitment

Your community coalition and the participants in your dialogues should be comprised of people from diverse backgrounds. Consider the diversity in your community:



Diversity in:

- Racial and ethnic backgrounds
- Religion or philosophical views
- Political views
- Sexual orientation
- Age
- Professions
- Neighborhoods
- Education level
- Gender
- Socio-economics
- political views

Also consider how to include:

Students	Parents, caregivers, and guardians
Public officials	Human and social service providers
Mental health professionals	Policy advocates
People who work at state and federal agencies	Community organizers and activists
Teachers and school administrators	Education system advocates
Concerned community members	Business professionals
Nonprofit leaders	Faith leaders

Process

When determining the process for your dialogues, be sure to consider the school calendar. When working with schools, it is critical to put all committed time on the calendar for your dialogues before the school year begins. It is also important to have contingency plans in place as schools have a lot going on that can impact the process.

Facilitator Recruitment

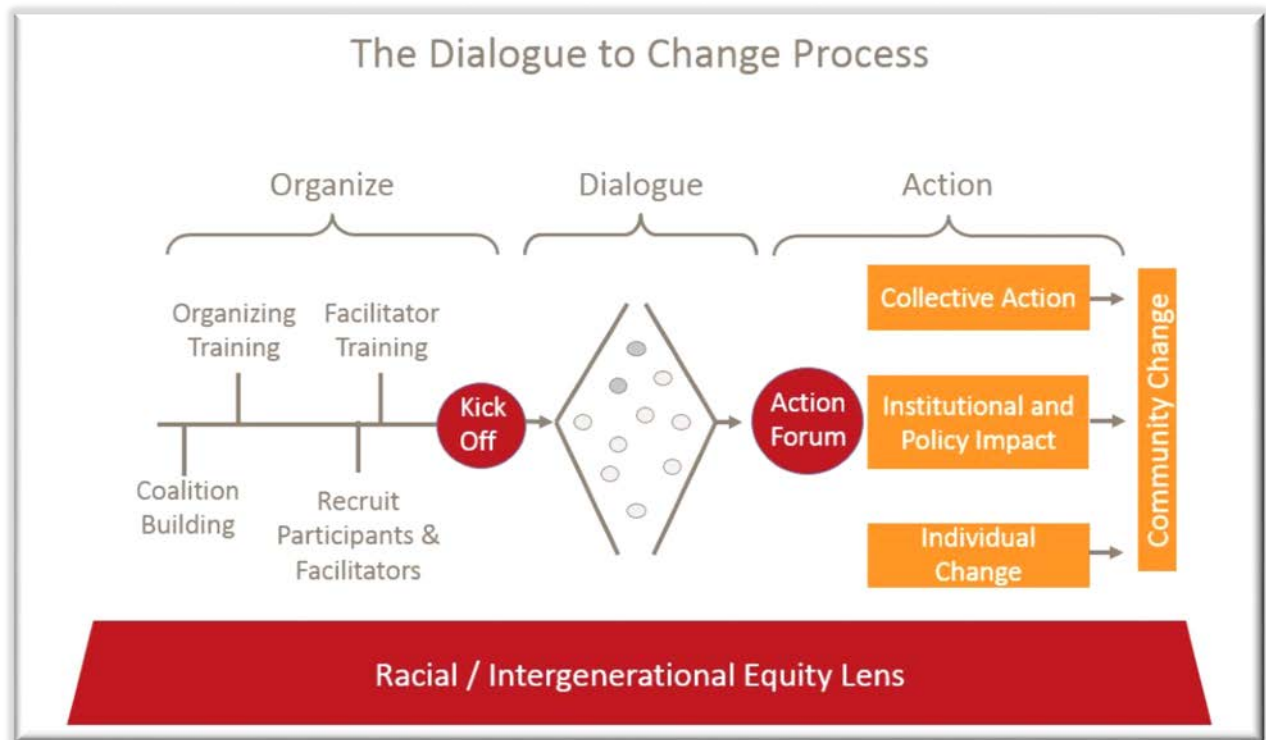
When trying to recruit dialogue facilitators, you can begin by identifying some potential trainers. You have two options: contact Everyday Democracy to provide facilitator training tailored to the kinds of discussions you'll have in the dialogue circles, or use a local resource.

If you choose to use a local resource to train your facilitators, ask someone whose opinion you trust to recommend a trainer. Is there a community college or university that offers courses in facilitation, mediation, or conflict resolution? Who teaches the courses? Is there a list of graduates? Is there a mediation center in town? Where does it find its mediators, and who trains them? How about corporate trainers or facilitators? Think about adding these organizations to your coalition, with the goal of having them assume this part of the work. Keep in mind, you will most likely need to pay trainers for their time.

Evaluation and Communication

Thinking about evaluation and communication in the beginning is important as it helps you to define goals and your measures of success. It makes the process much easier when you have a general idea of how your coalition plans to measure success and communicate that success to the school and broader community. Cultural progression and community change doesn't happen by chance, so your ability to develop sound evaluation and communication strategies will be key.

Chapter 2: What is the “Dialogue to Change” Process?



Dialogue to Change is an adaptable approach to community engagement that is grounded in years of experience and learning with communities throughout the U.S.

Diverse groups of people meet over several weeks, and take part in activities that build trust, provide opportunities to share honestly, learn about an issue and work together on solutions, action and change.

The process involves a combination of listening to others, being heard, engaging productively in disagreement, and developing priorities for action. The combination of people listening to each other, sharing their own experiences, and working together to solve problems can have a deep impact, both on the issues area at hand and on how the community addresses other issues in the future.

There are other models or ways to organize dialogues about education, like in-school dialogues or intergroup dialogues and we encourage you to learn more about these approaches. This guide focuses on the community engagement approach of Dialogue to Change.

Chapter 3: Applying an Intergenerational and Racial Equity Lens in the Dialogue Process

Applying an equity lens, can help the group work more equitably and inclusively. This will ultimately lead to a strong coalition that can address problems in an honest, respectful way. An “equity lens” isn’t necessarily a specific tool – it’s a way of examining all aspects of the work from group dynamics to how meetings are run, to the language that’s used on communication tools as well as among coalition members. When doing the work, it’s important to take some time to ask the group, “Will everyone in our community feel welcomed and included when they use this tool or attend this meeting?”

Here are a few markers of groups that are using a both racial and intergenerational equity lens:

- Group members share information and treat each other as allies, with respect.
- People are encouraged to share their stories and cultural traditions with each other, and to develop trust so that they can have the difficult conversations they need to have.
- People work together across differences of racial/ethnic background, and across other kinds of divisions.
- People of color are given the opportunity to take on leadership roles.
- People speak for themselves and are not asked to speak on behalf of a particular group.
- People understand the history of racism and other forms of oppression in their community, and they take time to talk about how those dynamics could play out in their coalition and community efforts.
- There is equitable decision making power across all ages.
- There are opportunities for intergenerational learning, respecting the contributions of all ages.
- Be sure everyone at the table has a voice, especially youth and elders who are historically marginalized groups.



Chapter 4: How to Plan and Organize for the Dialogues

At each phase of your work as a planning team, ask “Who is missing?” and plan how to include those people. Once your team is formed it’s time to get started. Consider these four steps:

Step 1: Share leadership, decision-making, and responsibilities. All members should be active participants to the best of their abilities and must be and feel that they are meaningfully engaged.

Use these questions to help the planning team think about how to share decision-making:

- How are we involving students in the planning process?
- How are decisions going to be made? By consensus? Voting?
- What happens if some people don’t agree with the rest of the group?
- Who needs to sign off on public messages?
- Who should speak for the group in public settings?

Step 2: Set goals. Once the planning team is in place, and the decision making structure is determined, it’s now time to work together to define your goals, clarify your purpose, and create a plan for the work to follow. Think about the outcomes and kinds of change you want to see from working together, as well as from the dialogues. Think about:

- The kinds of change you want to see in your community as a result of this effort.
- How many people you want to participate.
- Whether you plan to implement the ideas generated as a result of the dialogue.
- How your team will work together, how often and where.

Step 3: Think about how you will support ideas after the dialogues. During the dialogues, the groups think about ideas for how to address racial equity or educational achievement issues in their districts. As a planning team, think about:

- How to gather ideas from the dialogues and help people choose priorities,
- How to track themes and trends from the action ideas as they emerge, and
- How to support people in taking action after the dialogues.

Step 4: Decide how you will learn about and share the changes in your community. People will want to know what has happened in the community as a result of the dialogues. Think about those in your community who may be able to help you learn about this, and how you will evaluate your dialogue.

Chapter 5 - Identifying the Issues and Materials

Everyday Democracy helps communities on a broad range of issues. This guide is focused on educational equity issues and helping communities get at the underlying causes of gaps in student achievement. Once the issues in your school system are defined, you can find resources, guides and handouts as well as success stories on Everyday Democracy's website that might inform your dialogue process.

They can be located under the Resources tab in www.everyday-democracy.org

Here are a few resources for starters:

1. **HELPING EVERY STUDENT SUCCEED: SCHOOLS AND COMMUNITIES WORKING TOGETHER – DISCUSSION GUIDE**

[A four-session discussion guide to help schools and communities improve academic achievement for all students.](#)

2. **LEARNING BEYOND THE SCHOOL DAY – DISCUSSION GUIDE**

[This discussion guide takes a look at when, where, and what young people learn. How do we create the kind of community where all young people will have a chance to learn – in and beyond the school day?](#)

3. **WORKING TOGETHER TO REMOVE RACIAL AND ETHNIC BARRIERS (A FACILITATOR'S GUIDE)**

[This discussion guide will help you build work with parents, teachers and students to develop action plans that will address racial and ethnic barriers to student achievement and parent involvement.](#)

4. **EVERYDAY DEMOCRACY HANDOUTS AND WORKSHEETS**

[A library of activities, worksheets and additional resources for dialogues, organizing, action teams and ways to sustain progress.](#)

Chapter 6 - Recruiting and Training a Diverse Pool of Facilitators

1. Recruiting Facilitators

A group of well-trained facilitators is a key component to the dialogue process because facilitators ensure a quality and equitable discussion in each dialogue. Facilitators need to be good listeners and relate well to many different kinds of people.

Your group of facilitators should be diverse, so be sure to recruit potential people from every sector of the community. Consider racial and ethnic diversity, religion, political view, sexual orientation, age, profession, age, and neighborhood.

Facilitators need to be comfortable with all kinds of people; have the ability to listen well and “read” group dynamics; know how to help move conversation forward, deal with different communication styles; and can guide a conversation without adding their own opinion.

Consider these groups:

- Social workers
- Group leaders from congregations
- Mediators
- People trained in conflict resolution
- Therapists and counselors
- Corporate facilitators
- Senior citizens
- High school or college students; students trained in peer mediation
- Educators of all ages (remember retired teachers)
- Clergy
- Parents
- People interested in public issues

We recommend you use co-facilitators for each dialogue. While this requires recruiting and training more people, it offers several advantages:

- The pair can model diversity in race, age, gender, and other differences.
- This helps the participants feel comfortable opening up and builds trust
- Pairing experienced facilitators with beginners helps give new people more skills.
- It’s easier for two people to monitor the conversation.
- Responsibility can be shared for planning and implementing.
- Working in teams brings different skills to the process.
- If one facilitator can’t make it to a dialogue session, the group can still meet.

To determine how many facilitators you need to recruit, think about the number of participants you’d like to have in your dialogues. We suggest that each dialogue have between 8 and 12 participants. So, if your goal is to have 100 people, you will likely have about 10 dialogue circles. For each circle to have two facilitators, you’d need 20 people to facilitate the dialogues. This is the bare minimum. It’s always a good idea to recruit more than the minimum since it’s likely a few may drop out before the dialogues start.

2. Facilitator Training

Facilitators should be trained a month or two before the dialogues begin. Allow at least a full day – or two “half days” – for the basic training. Most communities schedule additional practice time to provide more experience for new facilitators. Remember, the more training and practice facilitators have in preparation for the dialogues, the more successful they will be.

3. Prepare materials to help facilitators succeed

You can help your facilitators do their job well by providing them with some support materials. For example, give them a written description of the overall project – its sponsors, its goals, and its scope. Be sure to include important information, such as the date, time, and location of the kickoff, and action forum. You should also give them forms (with instructions) for evaluating the process and tracking the discussion as it develops.

Another important piece is a step-by-step outline of each of the sessions, including approximate times for each part of the discussion. Pay particular attention to the final session where the dialogue focuses on action. Work with the trainers to make sure facilitators are equipped to lead brainstorming sessions, and have the necessary skills and written materials to develop, articulate, and prioritize their group’s action ideas, as they prepare for the action forum. See Appendix B for Facilitator Tips.

5. Help facilitators decide how they will handle note taking

Note taking can be a simple, effective way to capture and share the wisdom that dialogues generate. These records help create connections and they can form the basis of a report that extends the message and power of the program to the broader community. Be sure to let facilitators know what information they should be capturing and sharing from the dialogues.

Here is some note-taking guidance to share with facilitators:

- Capture the main ideas and keep track of the direction that the conversation takes.
- Use the language of the speaker when you can. Don’t paraphrase.
- Note taking should serve the discussion, not distract attention from it.
- Check your notes with the group. Did you capture what the speaker meant?
- If your group’s notes will become part of a report, be sure to write enough to make sense to someone outside the group.
- Include the date, location, session, and the group’s name.

Chapter 7 - Recruiting Participants and Holding the Dialogues

1. Review your recruitment goals.

First, the coalition must decide how many and what kinds of people you are trying to reach. Refer back to the recruitment goals generated when you first met. Now, it's time to get specific about your objectives. Ask yourselves:

- How many people do we need to involve to bring about the changes we are aiming for?
- Who are the different kinds of people we need to recruit to make our program diverse? (Be sure to think about multiple kinds of diversity.)
- Why would people from each of these groups want to participate?
- What might keep people in each group from participating?
- Are there groups or individuals on our coalition who can reach out to groups not yet involved? If not, who can help to spark their interest?

2. Develop talking points.

This will help keep your message clear and consistent. As a coalition, role-play describing the dialogue to action effort to each other so members become familiar with the messages. The goal is for all members to be comfortable asking friends, family members, co-workers, and community members to participate in the dialogues. They should be able to give a brief overview about the program, talk about what issue they'll be addressing and why it's important.

3. Plan outreach strategies.

Combine personal invitations and general publicity. As a rule of thumb, people need to hear the same message at least three times before it begins to register. A personal invitation is the best recruiting strategy. There is no substitute! You can do this through face-to-face visits and through phone calls. The coordinator and coalition members can introduce the program to lots of people by speaking at community groups or meetings.

You may want to supplement your in-person invitations with other tools such as flyers, brochures, Facebook announcements, blog posts, or radio interviews. Be creative!

[Or you can use these flyer templates that Everyday Democracy has prepared:
https://www.everyday-democracy.org/resources/flyer-templates](https://www.everyday-democracy.org/resources/flyer-templates)

Whenever possible, give people a chance to take part in a sample dialogue. Be sure to allow plenty of time for questions and answers. Explain how the program can help them make a difference on the issue, form new partnerships and relationships, and strengthen their own organization. Capture the excitement that is generated on the spot by having sign-up forms with you.

To ensure your dialogues include a diverse group of people, design your sign-up sheet to collect basic information – such as name, age, occupation, gender, neighborhood, ethnic/racial group – and then use that data to help arrange diverse groups. Make sure you ask people for their preferred times and days for participating in the dialogues.

4. Give coalition members recruiting assignments.

Ask the members of your coalition to reach out to people in their networks. You may even want to set specific recruitment goals for each member.

Think about people who can spread the word to their entire network and tap into their resources. Reach out to leaders of businesses, nonprofits, faith communities, clubs, and other organizations. If community members hear the message from someone they trust, they will be more likely to participate. And, it'll make recruitment easier because you won't have to sign up each person individually.

5. Take extra steps to recruit underrepresented groups.

One of the biggest challenges is to recruit people who don't often get involved in community events.

This will take extra work, but without it, you will be missing many important voices in your program.

To reach out to groups you may not be a part of, you have to take time to establish trust. If you can, find a spokesperson or leader in that community that can help spread the word. Think about places such as salons/barbershops, restaurants, community centers, or social clubs.



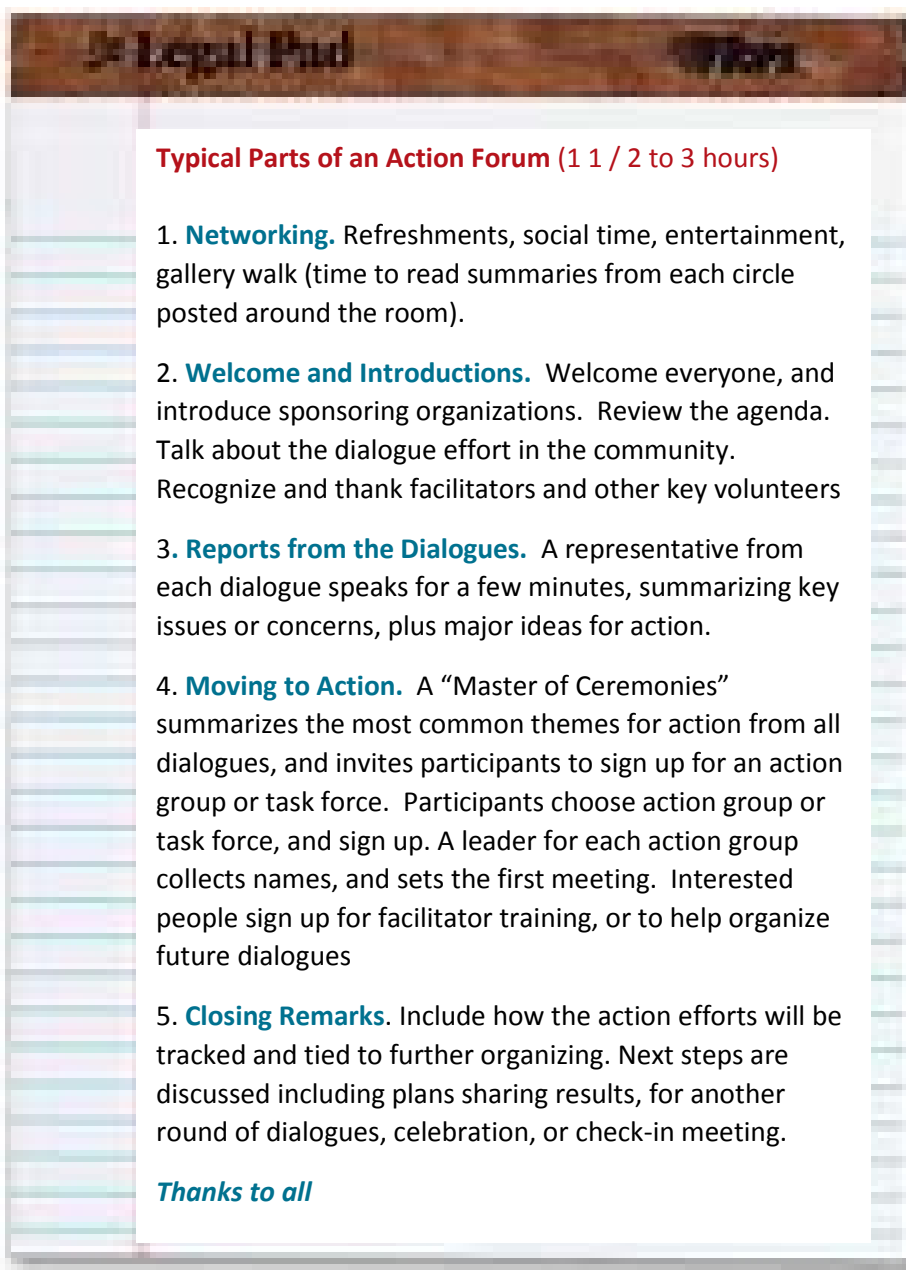
Chapter 8 - Sharing Engagement Results and Moving to Action

After you have your conversations and brainstorm action ideas, you need to identify ways you will share your results. Your School Community Coalition should have already discussed the ways you hope to communicate. Perhaps it will be an article in a School newsletter or website. Or maybe the Coalition members have communications strategies to bring back to their organizations. Or even yet, maybe it is decided that the school should reach out to the media.

Dialogues lead to action and change in many ways. One of the ways in which you will work toward action and change is through an action forum. An action forum is a large-group meeting at the end of a round of dialogues. At this gathering, ideas from all the dialogues are presented. In most cases, there will be several action ideas that many people support. Action groups or task forces form to move these ideas forward. Participants have the chance to work in these action groups, or to stay involved in other ways. In programs that continue over time, more and more people get involved in further rounds of dialogues, and many kinds of action occur.

The action forum is not the only way action and change happen through dialogues, but it is a good start. Here is an outline of a typical action forum:

*Extracted from 2009
Facilitator's Guide*



Legal Pad

Typical Parts of an Action Forum (1 1 / 2 to 3 hours)

1. **Networking.** Refreshments, social time, entertainment, gallery walk (time to read summaries from each circle posted around the room).
2. **Welcome and Introductions.** Welcome everyone, and introduce sponsoring organizations. Review the agenda. Talk about the dialogue effort in the community. Recognize and thank facilitators and other key volunteers
3. **Reports from the Dialogues.** A representative from each dialogue speaks for a few minutes, summarizing key issues or concerns, plus major ideas for action.
4. **Moving to Action.** A “Master of Ceremonies” summarizes the most common themes for action from all dialogues, and invites participants to sign up for an action group or task force. Participants choose action group or task force, and sign up. A leader for each action group collects names, and sets the first meeting. Interested people sign up for facilitator training, or to help organize future dialogues
5. **Closing Remarks.** Include how the action efforts will be tracked and tied to further organizing. Next steps are discussed including plans sharing results, for another round of dialogues, celebration, or check-in meeting.

Thanks to all

Chapter 9 - Supporting Action and Measuring Progress

The best way to support the actions suggested by the group going forward is to form an Action Oversight Group: The Action Oversight Group is charged with coordinating and supporting action implementation. The group should be diverse and represent the different kinds of people in the community. Members may include:

- Members of the steering group/organizing coalition.
- Interested community leaders or others with special expertise in the issue area or connections to decision makers.
- Leaders and other interested members of each action team.

The Action Oversight Group is one way to coordinate the work of the action teams. The functions of the group may include:

- Communicating success; telling the story.
- Collecting and sorting action ideas as they emerge from the dialogue groups.
- Planning the action forum.
- Finding or connecting to resources.
- Applying for funding.
- Helping action teams work equitably and set benchmarks for success.
- Tracking progress.

Make sure you are evaluating your progress every step of the way. Everyday Democracy has a toolkit that can help you with this:

<https://www.everyday-democracy.org/resources/evaluating-community-engagement>



Chapter 10 - Sustaining and Expanding the Work

Sustainability should be integral in your planning process. Focusing on sustainability means you are working toward maximizing long-term benefit to your community. If the dialogues have created something of value on a specific issue or set of issues, you don't want your outcomes to disappear. Long-term planning can be all-encompassing. It asks you to step away from the daily details of in your organization, to look at the community outcomes you are trying to both achieve and maintain over time.

Below is a list of questions that are basic to just about any sustainability effort.

- What are our goals?
- What have we accomplished?
- Have we received any publicity and do we have a plan for keeping the conversation going?
- How is this work structured and governed?
- Do we have sufficient staffing?
- Is our budget sufficient to cover expected costs?

“Educational equity stands at the center of our nation’s growing effort to reform and improve public schools and provide greater educational options to every family.”

APPENDIX A Comparison of Dialogue and Debate

A Comparison of Dialogue and Debate

Our goal in a dialogue circle is to better understand the issue and each other. We will look at different viewpoints and encourage a wide range of perspectives; we don't have to agree. How we talk to one another is as important as what we say. The chart below will help you understand how the process of dialogue differs from debate.

<i>Dialogue</i>	<i>Debate</i>
Dialogue is collaborative: two or more sides work together toward common understanding.	Debate is oppositional: two sides oppose each other and attempt to prove each other wrong.
In dialogue, finding common ground is the goal.	In debate, winning is the goal.
In dialogue, one listens to the other side(s) in order to understand, find meaning, and find agreement.	In debate, one listens to the other side in order to find flaws and to counter its arguments.
Dialogue enlarges and possibly changes a participant's point of view.	Debate affirms a participant's own point of view.
Dialogue reveals assumptions for reevaluation.	Debate defends assumptions as truth.
Dialogue causes introspection on one's own position.	Debate causes critique of the other position.
Dialogue opens the possibility of reaching a better solution than any of the original solutions.	Debate defends one's own positions as the best solution and excludes other solutions.
Dialogue creates an open-minded attitude: an openness to being wrong and to change.	Debate creates a closed-minded attitude, a determination to be right.
In dialogue, one submits one's best thinking, knowing that other peoples' reflections will help improve it rather than destroy it.	In debate, one submits one's best thinking and defends it against challenge to show that it is right.
Dialogue calls for temporarily suspending one's beliefs.	Debate calls for investing wholeheartedly in one's beliefs.
In dialogue, one searches for basic agreements.	In debate, one searches for glaring differences.
In dialogue, one searches for strengths in the other positions.	In debate, one searches for weaknesses in the other position.
Dialogue involves a real concern for the other person and seeks to not alienate or offend.	Debate involves a countering of the other position without focusing on feelings or relationship and often belittles or deprecates the other person.
Dialogue assumes that many people have pieces of the answer and together they can create a workable solution.	Debate assumes that there is a right answer and that someone has it.
Dialogue remains open-ended.	Debate implies a conclusion.

Adapted from a paper prepared by Shelley Berman, which was based on discussions of the Dialogue Group of the Boston Chapter of Educators for Social Responsibility (ESR). Other members included Lucile Burt, Dick Mayo-Smith, Lally Stowell, and Gene Thompson.

APPENDIX B Facilitator Training Tips

1. Be Prepared.

As a dialogue facilitator, you do not need to be an expert on the topic being discussed. The important thing is to be well prepared for the discussion. This means you will need to...

- a. Understand the goals of the dialogue.
- b. Be familiar with the discussion materials.
- c. Think ahead of time about how the discussion might go.
- d. Prepare questions to help the group think more deeply about the subject. In some sessions, you might find that there is more to talk about than you can cover in two hours. Choose what that you think will be most interesting to your group. (Your group might want to consider having extra meetings.) Do your best to prepare ahead of time. This will make it easier for you to give your full attention to helping the circle accomplish its goals.
- e. Stay neutral! It is most important to remember that, as a facilitator, you should not share your personal views or try to push your own agenda on the issue. You are there to serve the discussion, not to join it.
- f. Set a relaxed and open tone.
- g. Welcome everyone and create a friendly and relaxed space. Include well-placed humor if appropriate.

2. Explain the Purpose and Set Ground Rules.

The facilitator helps to frame the purpose of the dialogue, and help the group set ground rules. Once the issue is defined that the dialogue will focus on, remind everyone that the purpose is to work with one another to look at “the issue” in a democratic way. Remind them that your role as leader is not to be an “expert.” Also, make it clear that you will not take sides in the discussion. Your job is to keep the discussion focused and make sure the group follows the ground rules. Consider the following basic ground rules and then ask people to add their own ideas:

EVERYDAY DEMOCRACY GROUND RULES

Listen carefully and with respect.

Each person gets a chance to talk.

One person talks at a time. Don't cut people off.

Speak for yourself, not as the representative of any group. Remember that others are speaking for themselves, too.

If something someone says hurts or bothers you, say so, and say why.

It's okay to disagree, but be sure to show respect for one another.

Help the facilitator keep things on track.

Some of the things we will say in the dialogue will be private (personal).

We will not tell these stories to other people, unless we all agree that it is okay.

3. **Assist the Group Process.**

Besides keeping the group focused on the content of the discussion, you will keep track of how people are communicating. Some people talk a lot. Others tend to be quiet. Be aware of this, and make sure everyone has a chance to speak. Additional pointers:

- a. Consider splitting up into smaller groups to look at different viewpoints. This gives people a chance to talk more easily about their personal connection to the issue.
- b. Try not to interfere with the discussion unless you have to. Don't allow the group to turn to you for the answers.
- c. Resist the urge to speak after each comment or answer every question. Let people respond directly to each other. The most effective leaders often say little, but are constantly thinking about how to move the discussion forward.
- d. Once in a while, ask participants to sum up the most important points that have come out in the discussion.
- e. Don't be afraid of silence! People sometimes need time to think before they respond. If silence is hard for you, try counting silently to ten before you rephrase the question. This will give people time to collect their thoughts.
- f. Don't let anyone take over the discussion. Try to involve everyone.
- g. Remember that dialogue is not a debate. If the group forgets this, remind them of the ground rules. See the APPENDIX A for a tool that can help you.
- h. Keep careful track of time!

4. **Help the Group Look at Various Points of View.**

Make it clear to people that you will never take sides on the issue. Your role as a facilitator is to be fair, and to keep the group focused on their own thinking. Use these written materials when possible to help everyone consider a wide range of views. Referring to the guide helps you stay neutral. You might ask the group to consider a point of view that hasn't come up in the discussion. Ask the group to think about the pros and cons of different ways of looking at an issue or solving a problem. Ask people to think about the concerns and values that underlie their beliefs. Don't allow the group to focus on just one point, or one person's story. Help people find common ground. But, don't try to force agreement.

5. **Ask Open-Ended Questions that Don't Lend Themselves to Easy Answers.**

Open-ended questions are questions that can't be answered with a quick "yes" or "no." They push people to think about why they believe what they do. Open-ended questions also encourage people to look for connections between different ideas.

EXAMPLES OF OPEN ENDED QUESTIONS	
What seems to be the key point here?	If you agree with that, why?
What do other people think of this idea?	What would be a strong case against what you just said?
Have you had any experiences with this that you can share with the group?	Could you help us understand the reasons behind your opinion?
What do you think is really going on here? Why is that important?	How might others see this issue?
Do you think others in the group see this the way you do? Why? Why not?	How does this make you feel?

6. **Questions to use when people disagree:**

- Q. What do you think she or he is saying?
- Q. What bothers you most about this?
- Q. What is at the heart of the disagreement?
- Q. How does this make you feel?
- Q. What might lead a reasonable person to support that point of view?
- Q. What do you think is really important to people who hold that opinion?
- Q. What is blocking the discussion?
- Q. What might you be willing to give up in order to come to some agreement?
- Q. What don't you agree with?
- Q. What do you find most convincing about that point of view?
- Q. What is it about that position that doesn't work for you?
- Q. Could you say more about what you think?
- Q. What have we missed that we need to talk about?



7. **Questions to use when people are feeling discouraged:**

- Q. Can you say a little about how that makes you feel?
- Q. Where can you find some hope?
- Q. Can the problems that you are talking about be solved in any way? How?

8. **Suggested Closing Questions:**

- Q. Where did we agree and disagree today?
- Q. What have you heard today that has made you think, or that has touched you in some way?

9. **Be Culturally Aware.**

Notice how people from different cultures communicate. When issues of race and culture are a part of the conversation, be ready to address the kinds of things that might come up. Even though some of the conversation may revolve around differences, set a tone of unity in the group. Yes, there are differences— but we have enough in common as human beings to allow us to talk together in a constructive way. Having two facilitators is often helpful. This sets an example of unity. The co-facilitators could be a man and a woman, a white person and a person of color, an adult and a young person, a manager and a worker. (If some facilitators are newly trained, team the new people with people who have experience with cross-cultural issues in dialogues.) Sensitivity, empathy, and familiarity with people of different backgrounds are important qualities for the facilitator. If you have not spent much time with people from other cultures, get involved in a local community program that helps you do this.

10. **Help people to appreciate and respect their own and others' communication styles.**

How people were raised affects how they communicate. For example, in some cultures, people are raised to take charge and say exactly what they think. In other cultures, people are expected to be more reserved and keep their thoughts to themselves. Some cultures value listening more than speaking. In others, taking a stand is very important. Point out to the group that there is more than one good way to communicate. Understanding one another takes practice! Your leadership should show that each person has an important contribution to make to the group.

- a. Talk about how cultural labels, or stereotypes, are unfair.
- b. Remind the group, if necessary, that no one can speak for his or her entire culture. Each person's experiences, as an individual and as a member of a group, are different.
- c. Urge group members to talk about themselves and their own cultures, rather than others. This way, they will be less likely to make false generalizations about other cultures. Also, listening to others tell their stories will help break down stereotypes and build understanding.