

THE CIVICS Innovation Hub

# Conversations that matter

*A toolkit for civic dialogues*





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## Introduction

Europe today stands at a crossroads shaped by geopolitical tensions, democratic fatigue, climate pressures, technological change, and social fragmentation. In this context, meaningful civic dialogue is not a luxury but a necessity. It creates space to explore complexity without oversimplification, to hold disagreement without escalation, and to collectively reflect on what democracy means in times of rapid transformation.

This toolkit<sup>1</sup> responds to this need by strengthening civic education as a bridge between institutions and citizens, and between policy and lived experience. It understands dialogue as both a method and a mindset – one that prioritises listening, curiosity, and shared sense-making over quick consensus.

It provides practical and adaptable guidance for organising community dialogues. Rather than replicating formats mechanically, educators are encouraged to creatively adapt them to their local contexts and carry conversations into their own communities. In doing so, they contribute to sustaining democracy not only through institutions but also through everyday practices of reflection, listening, and collective inquiry across Europe.

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“The single biggest problem in communication is the illusion that it has taken place.”

— George Bernard Shaw

## Why dialogue?

Dialogue matters at this moment in Europe’s civic and democratic life because public conversations are increasingly fragmented, polarised, and emotionally charged. While communication seems constant across media and everyday interactions, genuine listening and mutual understanding are often missing. THE CIVICS, therefore, positions dialogue not simply as a communication technique but as a civic practice that helps people collectively make sense of complex realities rather than merely exchange positions.

### **What do we mean when we say “dialogue”?**

In civic education practice, dialogue is a shared process of inquiry where participants seek to understand others’ perspectives while reflecting on their own assumptions and experiences. Unlike debate or persuasion-focused communication, dialogue emphasises reciprocity, learning, and relationship-building. The goal is not consensus but deeper understanding and the ability to engage constructively with difference.

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<sup>1</sup> This toolkit is initially elaborated within the CERV-funded project “COMPASS Europe: Civic Education and Dialogue for Europe’s Future” led by THE CIVICS Innovation Hub in cooperation with New Community Foundation, Znanje na Djelu, and Sofia Platform.



DEBATE	DIALOGUE
The goal is to “win” the argument by affirming one’s own views and discrediting other views.	The goal is to understand different perspectives and learn about other views.
People listen to others to find flaws in their arguments.	People listen to others to understand how their experiences shape their beliefs.
People critique the experiences of others as distorted and invalid.	People accept the experiences of others as real and valid.
People appear to be determined not to change their own views on the issue.	People appear to be somewhat open to expanding their understanding of the issue.
People speak based on assumptions made about others’ positions and motivations.	People speak primarily from their own understanding and experience.
People oppose each other and attempt to prove each other wrong.	People work together towards a common understanding.
Strong emotions like anger are often used to intimidate the other side.	Strong emotions like anger and sadness are appropriate when they convey the intensity of an experience or belief.

**Source:** Lisa Schirch & David Campt, *The Little Book of Dialogue for Difficult Subjects* (comparison between “real life” debate and dialogue characteristics)

## Dialogue as collective (un)learning and democratic practice

Dialogue supports collective sense-making in contexts of uncertainty and complexity by allowing multiple perspectives to coexist and ambiguity to be explored. Inspired by traditions of participatory and transformative learning, dialogue fosters empathy, critical thinking, and constructive engagement with disagreement, contributing to social cohesion and democratic resilience.

## Dialogue tools

If you are planning to organise or facilitate a dialogue, this section offers practical tools and ideas to help you think through your approach. We do not believe there is a fixed formula for organising a dialogue session - the intention here is to provide inspiration, structure, and tools as you design conversations that make sense in your own context.

As a facilitator, your role is not to be the expert on the subject or to have all the answers. Rather, you are hosting a process: shaping conditions where people feel able to speak, listen, and reflect. What matters most is intentionality: creating a space where people can



slow down, engage respectfully, and remain open to listening and learning from one another.

In the following pages, you will find some dialogue formats and facilitation guidelines to support you in adapting dialogue to your own environment. Additional recommended resources are listed at the end of this Toolkit for those who wish to explore further approaches and deepen their practice over time.

## **CONSIDERATIONS WHEN CHOOSING A DIALOGUE FORMAT**

Before selecting a dialogue format, it is helpful to reflect on the practical conditions and intentions shaping your gathering:

- **What is the space you have available?** Whether a classroom, community room, or more informal setting, the venue will influence how participants interact and how structured the conversation needs to be.
- **How many people do you plan to invite?** Smaller groups may allow for deeper reflection and personal storytelling, while larger groups may benefit from more structured formats or breakout conversations.
- **What will be the topic of the dialogue?** Highly complex or potentially controversial themes often require formats that allow for slower pacing, clear facilitation, and opportunities for participants to feel safe expressing uncertainty or disagreement.
- **How much time do you have?** For meaningful dialogue to unfold, we recommend allowing at least a two-hour in-person session whenever possible, as trust and depth take time to develop.

Finally, if participants do not already know each other, it is important to begin with activities that break the ice. These 'getting to know each other' activities could be...

- a short paired introduction where participants share a personal story related to the topic;
- a "common ground" exercise where small groups identify shared experiences or values;
- a guided round where each person answers a simple reflective question.

Taking time to establish rapport at the beginning creates the conditions for more open, thoughtful dialogue later on.



## **SMALL CIRCLE DIALOGUE**

### **When to use it**

The Small Circle Dialogue format works best when the goal is depth rather than breadth. It is particularly suitable for exploring complex or sensitive topics where participants need space to reflect, listen carefully, and build trust. This format supports slower, more intentional conversation and is ideal when you want participants to move beyond surface-level discussion into shared inquiry. It is especially useful when participants come from diverse backgrounds or hold differing perspectives, as structured turn-taking helps ensure balanced participation and reduces domination by a few voices.

### **Ideal group size**

6–12 participants. Fewer than six may limit diversity of perspectives, while more than twelve can reduce the opportunity for each person to speak meaningfully within the available time.

### **Time needed**

Minimum: 90 minutes.

Recommended: 2–3 hours for deeper dialogue.

### **Step-by-step outline**

- Opening and framing (10–15 minutes): Introduce purpose and principles of dialogue (listening, curiosity, respect). Agree on simple shared guidelines.
- Check-in round (10 minutes): Each participant responds briefly to a low-threshold opening question (e.g., “What brings you here today?”).
- First dialogue round (30–40 minutes): Introduce a reflective prompt. Participants speak one at a time, either in sequence or voluntarily with gentle facilitation.
- Open dialogue phase (20–30 minutes): Transition into more fluid conversation while maintaining dialogue principles.
- Reflection round (15 minutes): Invite each participant to share one insight or question they are leaving with.
- Closing (5 minutes): Thank participants and acknowledge the collective learning process.

### **Facilitation tips**

- Encourage listening without interruption during structured rounds.
- Model curiosity by asking open questions rather than interpreting.
- Allow silence – it often deepens reflection.
- Watch for airtime imbalance and gently invite quieter voices.
- Avoid pushing toward consensus; understanding is the goal.



## **STORYTELLING-BASED DIALOGUE**

### **When to use it**

Story-Based Dialogue is particularly effective when conversations risk becoming abstract, polarised, or dominated by opinions rather than lived experiences. By inviting participants to begin with stories instead of arguments, this format helps reduce defensiveness and opens space for empathy, curiosity, and deeper understanding.

Storytelling grounds dialogue in human experience, making complex societal issues more relatable. This approach is especially useful for topics related to identity, belonging, social change, or contested issues where participants may hold strong views but have limited opportunities to explore the experiences behind them.

### **Ideal group size**

8–16 participants overall. For storytelling rounds, divide into small groups of 3–4 participants to ensure sufficient time for sharing.

### **Time needed**

Minimum: 2 hours.

Recommended: 2–3 hours for meaningful depth and reflection.

### **Step-by-step outline**

- Introduction and framing (10–15 minutes): Explain the purpose of storytelling in dialogue. Emphasise that participants are invited to share experiences rather than defend opinions.
- Storytelling guidelines (10 minutes): introduce shared principles → (1) Speak from personal experience (“I” statements); (2) Avoid generalising about groups or making assumptions; (3) Listen without interruption or evaluation.
- Story prompts (30–40 minutes): Invite participants to share short stories in small groups. Possible prompts:
  - “Tell about a moment when you felt challenged or changed by a conversation.”
  - “What experience shaped your view on this topic?”
  - “What concerns or dilemmas do you carry with you about this issue?”
  - “Describe a moment when you felt heard – or not heard.”
- Listening reflection (15–20 minutes): After stories are shared, listeners reflect back on what resonated or surprised them, without judgment or debate.
- Group dialogue phase (40–60 minutes): Move into a broader dialogue informed by the stories. Encourage participants to connect themes rather than argue positions.
- Integration and closing (15–20 minutes): Invite participants to share insights, new questions, key takeaways, or shifts in perspective.



## **Facilitation tips**

- Encourage “stories before arguments.” If participants move quickly into debate, gently invite them back to lived experience.
- Ask curiosity-based questions (“Can you say more about...?”) rather than challenging questions.
- Allow emotional expression while maintaining respectful boundaries.
- Notice patterns emerging across stories and highlight shared humanity.
- Model attentive listening – your presence as facilitator sets the tone.



## **DIALOGUE CAFÉ / ROTATING CONVERSATIONS**

### **When to use it**

The Dialogue Café (or rotating conversation format) is useful when exploring multiple aspects of a complex topic or generating ideas collaboratively. It combines structured dialogue with movement and variety, helping participants engage with diverse perspectives, avoiding stagnation. This format works well for community engagement, strategic reflection, peer coaching or exploring future-oriented questions.

### **Ideal group size**

12–40 participants. You will need 3–8 hosts for tables (or “stations”), depending on the total group size.

### **Roles: who does what?**

To make the Café work smoothly, participants take on different roles:

- **Table Hosts (or “Callers”):** 3–8 people (one per table). They stay at the same table for all rounds, welcome new participants, briefly summarise what previous groups explored, and help the table stay with the guiding question. They do *not* need to be experts – they are holding continuity.
- **Circulating participants:** everyone else. They rotate between tables, bringing fresh perspectives and carrying insights from one conversation into the next.
- **Facilitator:** keeping track of time and ensuring that circulating participants move from table to table in an orderly fashion.

### **Time needed**

Minimum: 2 hours

Recommended: 2.5–3 hours for depth and good harvesting.

### **Step-by-step outline**

- **Introduction and framing (10–15 minutes):** explain the purpose = shared inquiry and sense-making, not debate or consensus. Briefly name the roles (hosts vs circulating). Offer simple dialogue principles: listen, stay curious, speak from experience, and avoid “winning” or persuading with your point of view.
- **Set-up of tables / stations (5 minutes):** prepare tables with paper/markers (or shared online boards). *Each table can explore the same overarching topic through different lenses, or each table can focus on a sub-question.* Assign one host per table.
- **Round 1 – Opening the landscape (20 minutes):** participants choose a table. Host introduces the guiding question:
  - Guiding question Round 1: *“What is happening here – in our communities, institutions, or everyday lives – that makes this issue feel urgent now?”*  
Optional follow-ups: *“What are we noticing (signals, patterns, tensions)?”*  
*“Where do people seem stuck – or disconnected?”*



Hosts capture keywords and patterns rather than arguments.

- Rotation (3–5 minutes): circulating participants move to a new table. Hosts stay.
- Round 2 – Going deeper: experiences and assumptions (20 minutes). Hosts give a 1-minute recap: “Here’s what we heard so far.” Then:
  - Guiding question Round 2: *“What experiences shape how people relate to this issue – and what assumptions might sit underneath our reactions?”*

Optional follow-ups: *“What feels difficult to name in public conversations?”*  
*“What are people afraid of losing?”* (status, identity, security, dignity)

Encourage participants to anchor in lived experience, not generalisations.

- Rotation (3–5 minutes=): participants rotate again.
- Round 3 – From insight to possibility (20 minutes): hosts recap again, then move to:
  - Guiding question Round 3: *“What could help us move forward – even one small step – in how we hold this conversation in our contexts?”*

Optional follow-ups: *“What conditions make dialogue possible (trust, framing, invitation, safety)?”* *“What is one conversation we need to have – and who needs to be in it?”*

Keep this as “possibility thinking,” not full problem-solving.

- Harvesting insights (25–25 minutes): bring everyone back together. Each host shares:
  - 2–3 key insights that emerged across rounds
  - one tension or open question worth holding
  - one “small next step” idea for dialogue in practice

Option: invite participants to add “what I’m taking with me” on sticky notes or a shared board.

- Closing reflection (10–15 minutes): invite a short closing round (voluntary or full circle): *“What stayed with you?”* or *“What question are you leaving with?”*

## Facilitation tips

- Choose hosts who can hold structure calmly; they don’t need expertise.
- Keep hosts focused on continuity and inquiry, not steering outcomes.
- Remind participants: carry insights forward, don’t restart from zero at each table.
- Watch energy: timekeeping matters – use clear signals for rotation.
- Harvest patterns and questions, not conclusions.



## **REFLECTIVE PAIR CONVERSATIONS**

### **When to use it**

Reflective Pair Conversations are a low-threshold entry point into dialogue, particularly helpful when participants are new to dialogue practices or when trust levels are low. Working in pairs reduces performance anxiety and allows deeper listening. This format is useful as a standalone activity or as a warm-up before larger group dialogue.

### **Ideal group size**

Any size (participants work in pairs).

### **Time needed**

20–60 minutes depending on depth.

### **Step-by-step outline**

- Introduction (5 minutes): explain purpose and listening principles.
- Prompt introduction (5 minutes): provide a clear reflective question.
- Round 1 (10 minutes): person A speaks, Person B listens without interruption.
- Switch roles (10 minutes): person B speaks, Person A listens.
- Reflection exchange (10 minutes): each partner reflects back what they heard.
- Optional group sharing (15 minutes): invite voluntary insights into larger group.

### **Facilitation tips**

- Emphasise listening without preparing responses.
- Encourage participants to avoid advice-giving.
- Provide clear timing signals.
- Offer grounding questions if conversation stalls.
- Highlight the value of small-scale dialogue as meaningful practice.



## **FACILITATOR GUIDELINES**

Facilitating dialogue does not require perfection or expertise. It requires presence, curiosity, and a willingness to hold space for shared exploration. As a facilitator, your role is not to lead participants toward specific conclusions or provide correct answers, but to support a process where people can listen, reflect, and engage constructively with complexity. The following guidelines offer practical considerations for before, during, and when challenges arise in dialogue.

### **What to do BEFORE**

- **Define intention**

Before inviting participants, take time to clarify your intention. Ask yourself:

Why are we coming together?

What kind of experience do I hope participants will have?

Is the goal reflection, understanding, relationship-building, or exploration of a specific issue?

A clear intention helps shape the format, tone, and expectations of the dialogue without needing rigid outcomes.

- **Invite diversity**

Dialogue benefits from the presence of multiple perspectives. Consider who is usually present in conversations, and who might be missing. Diversity can include professional backgrounds, lived experiences, viewpoints, generations, or sectors. At the same time, diversity should not be forced; focus on creating a space where differences can be encountered respectfully rather than staged for confrontation.

- **Set expectations and ground rules**

Participants feel safer when they understand how the conversation will unfold. You may either co-create simple agreements with the group or introduce a few basic principles yourself. These might include:

- speak from personal experience,
- listen without interruption,
- stay curious rather than judgmental,
- allow space for different perspectives.

### **What to do DURING**

- **Hold space, not outcomes**

Your primary role is to hold the process, not to control where the conversation leads. Dialogue is not about steering participants toward consensus or delivering correct knowledge. Focus on creating conditions for listening and reflection. When you feel the urge to intervene with your own opinion, pause and ask whether it supports the dialogue or shifts attention toward you.

Some facilitators find it helpful to symbolically separate roles – for example, by stepping into an “empty chair” if they choose to speak as a participant rather than



as a facilitator. If you share personal perspectives, keep these moments intentional and limited.

- **Slow down the pace**

Dialogue often benefits from slowing down. Allow silence, reflection, and moments where participants can think before responding. If conversation becomes rushed or reactive, gently invite a pause:

- “Let’s take a moment to reflect on what we just heard.”
- “What stood out to you before we move on?”

Slowing down helps participants move from reaction to reflection.

- **Manage airtime**

Pay attention to who speaks and who remains silent. Encourage balanced participation by:

- inviting quieter voices without pressure (“Would anyone who hasn’t spoken yet like to add something?”),
- gently limiting long interventions (“Let’s pause here so we can hear from others too.”), using structured rounds when necessary.

## **What to do WHEN challenges arise**

Challenges are normal and often signal that meaningful dialogue is taking place. Rather than avoiding them, approach them with curiosity and calm.

- **Dominant speaker**

If one person speaks frequently or at length, acknowledge their contribution and redirect: “Thank you – I’d like to open space for other voices as well.”

- **Silence**

Silence is not always a problem; it can indicate reflection or uncertainty. Allow a moment before intervening. If needed, offer a gentle prompt:

- “What thoughts are emerging for you right now?”
- “Would anyone like to share a small reflection?”

- **Emotional moments**

Strong emotions may arise, especially around personal or contested topics.

Validate what you witness/sense, without attempting to fix:

- “Thank you for sharing how this makes you feel.”
- “Let’s take a moment to sit with this.”

- **Conflict escalation**

If dialogue shifts toward argument or confrontation, return to shared principles:

- invite participants to speak from experience rather than generalisations,
- ask curiosity-based questions (“What experience shapes that perspective?”),
- slow the pace and re-centre listening.



## Contemporary issues & civic education

THE CIVICS Labs are intentionally framed around contemporary societal questions shaping Europe today – questions that do not lend themselves to simple answers, but instead require collective reflection, curiosity, and engagement across differences. Issues such as democratic participation, social cohesion, climate transition, technological change, identity and belonging, economic uncertainty, or geopolitical tensions often appear in public discourse as polarised debates framed through opposing positions.

For civic educators, engaging with contemporary issues is both an opportunity and a responsibility. Civic education does not exist outside societal realities; it helps individuals navigate them. Civic educators act as bridges, connecting policy debates with everyday lived experiences. Dialogue provides a framework through which civic educators can address difficult topics without prescribing normative judgments or reinforcing divisions. Instead of asking “Who is right?” or “What should participants believe?”, dialogic framing invites questions such as: What experiences shape different perspectives? What values or concerns lie beneath disagreement? What uncertainties or paradoxes remain unresolved and need to be taken into account?

***When framing contemporary themes in a dialogic way, it is helpful to move away from binary language and toward exploratory questions that open space rather than close it.*** For example, instead of positioning issues as competing sides, facilitators might explore tensions, dilemmas, or paradoxes, recognising that many societal challenges involve legitimate concerns that coexist. Dialogue encourages participants to examine how language, media narratives, and social contexts shape their understanding, fostering critical reflection. This approach supports participants, youth and adults alike, in developing democratic competencies such as perspective-taking, respectful disagreement, and collaborative sense-making.

Below you can find useful questions and framing approaches for fostering dialogue:

- **Opening questions** (that help participants enter the conversation without needing strong opinions):
  - What brings you to this topic personally?
  - When did you first become aware that this issue mattered to you?
  - What experiences have shaped how you see this question?
  - What feelings or associations come up when you think about this issue?
- **Complexity-Framing Questions** (use when topics risk becoming polarised, to move beyond binary thinking)
  - What makes this issue difficult or complicated?
  - What tensions or dilemmas do you notice here?
  - What might people with different perspectives be worried about?
  - What questions remain unanswered for you?



- **Perspective-Taking Questions** (that encourage participants to explore viewpoints beyond their own)
  - What experiences might lead someone to see this differently?
  - What do you think is often misunderstood about this issue?
  - What values might people on different sides of this issue share, even if they express them differently?
  
- **Meaning-Making Questions** (good for going-deeper dialogue phases)
  - What are we learning from each other so far?
  - Has anything surprised or challenged your assumptions?
  - What patterns or themes are emerging from our conversation?
  - How has listening to others shifted your thinking – if at all?
  
- **Closing Questions** (for everyone to leave with reflection, not conclusions)
  - What question are you leaving with today?
  - What will stay with you from this conversation?
  - What is something that you are inspired to stop, start or continue doing, after this dialogue?



## Organising dialogue circles

Organising a dialogue circle is both a practical and relational process. Beyond choosing a topic or inviting participants, it involves creating conditions where people feel able to speak, listen, and explore complexity together. The quality of dialogue is shaped long before the conversation begins, through how participants are selected, invited, and welcomed into the space. The following considerations, created by the Timeout Foundation, offer guidance for designing dialogue circles.<sup>2</sup>

### **Defining participants: Who should be in the room?**

The composition of participants plays a central role in determining the depth and quality of dialogue. Dialogue thrives when diverse perspectives are present – not only opposing viewpoints, but a range of experiences, backgrounds, and relationships to the topic. When defining participants, it can be helpful to ask:

- Who is directly affected by this issue?
- Whose voices are usually heard – and whose are missing?
- Who influences or shapes the conversation around this topic?
- Who rarely participates in discussions like this?

Avoid limiting invitations to the most obvious participants or only to those with strongly opposing positions. Also, be careful not to invite only ‘experts’ on the issue – the idea is to make the dialogue democratically inclusive. Meaningful dialogue often emerges when participants represent multiple layers of experience. Including individuals from different sectors, generations, cultural backgrounds, or life situations can deepen understanding and reveal unexpected insights. Thoughtful participant selection requires time and reflection, but it significantly strengthens the dialogue process by broadening perspectives and expanding collective learning.

### **Inviting participants: Setting the tone from the beginning**

The invitation process is already part of the dialogue. How participants are invited communicates what kind of space they are entering and whether their presence is genuinely valued. Personal invitations are often more effective than general announcements, particularly when aiming to include individuals who do not usually attend civic discussions. Consider:

- What motivates your participants?
- Through which networks or trusted intermediaries can they be reached?
- How can the invitation reflect the language and concerns of the target group?

When writing invitations, clearly describe the purpose of the dialogue, what participants can expect, and why their perspectives matter. Emphasise that dialogue is not a debate or a space requiring expertise, but an opportunity for shared exploration. Investing time in

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<sup>2</sup> For more information, see: <https://www.timeoutdialogue.fi/tools/> (Accessed: 11 February 2026)



inclusive outreach helps ensure that the conversation does not remain limited to already-engaged audiences, expanding the potential for new perspectives and connections.

## **Choosing the venue and practical arrangements**

The physical environment plays a subtle but powerful role in shaping dialogue. A welcoming, neutral space helps participants feel safe and equal, reducing hierarchical dynamics that might inhibit participation. When selecting a venue, consider:

- Is the location easy to access and perceived as neutral?
- Can chairs be arranged in a circle so everyone can see each other?
- Is the environment quiet enough for attentive listening?

Small details, such as lighting, refreshments, or name stickers/tags, can contribute to a sense of belonging and openness. Dialogue often benefits from removing physical barriers such as tables, which can unconsciously reinforce separation. Arranging participants in a circle encourages mutual visibility and reinforces the idea that everyone contributes equally to the conversation.

## **Creating the conditions for dialogue**

Beyond logistics, organising dialogue circles involves creating relational conditions that support trust and curiosity. This begins with setting clear expectations: dialogue is not about winning arguments or reaching consensus, but about expanding understanding through listening and reflection. Consider starting with brief getting-to-know-each-other activities to build connection, especially when participants are unfamiliar with one another.

As the organiser, your role is to design a container that supports openness without over-directing outcomes. Clear structure (such as agreed guidelines, thoughtful pacing, and inclusive facilitation) provides safety, while flexibility allows the conversation to evolve organically. The aim is not to eliminate disagreement but to create a space where differences can be explored constructively.



## Evaluating dialogues

Dialogue outcomes are often subtle and difficult to capture through traditional evaluation methods. Rather than looking for definitive results or consensus, consider evaluation as a way to explore questions such as: Did participants feel heard? Did new perspectives emerge? Small shifts in perspective, increased curiosity, or a sense of connection are meaningful impact indicators following a single dialogue circle experience.

Keep evaluation light and accessible. Short feedback tools, such as brief surveys, reflection questions, or closing rounds, can provide valuable insight without disrupting the dialogue experience.

Here are some sample questions you could use for a brief post-dialogue evaluation:

- How would you evaluate your overall experience of this dialogue session? (Scale 1–5, where 1 = I didn't enjoy it very much, 5 = I enjoyed it very much / it was very interesting):

- 1
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5

- Please explain your grade:

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- Has your understanding of the topic that was discussed changed during the dialogue?

(Scale 1–5, where 1 = not at all, 5 = yes/pretty much):

- 1
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5

- Please explain your grade:

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- What is one key takeaway, highlight, AHA moment or insight you gained from this dialogue session?

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## Recommended resources

This section brings together a selection of dialogue toolkits, guides, and examples from organisations that have developed diverse approaches to dialogue-based community engagement. These resources illustrate that there is no single “correct” way to organise dialogue; formats vary widely depending on context, purpose, participants, and cultural setting. Some approaches focus on storytelling, others on structured facilitation, civic learning, or conflict transformation – yet their common denominator remains the same: creating intentional spaces where people from different backgrounds can sit together, listen to one another, and explore complex issues through conversation rather than confrontation, or experts’ panel/lecture/presentation. We encourage you to view these resources not as templates to replicate, but as sources of inspiration that you can adapt, combine, and reshape according to your own needs, experiences, and local realities.

Name: **The Community Dialogue Toolbox of New Community Foundation**

Description: This guide is written for civil society organisations and informal groups that want to launch a depolarisation program in their country. You don’t have to be an established CSO – we started the New Community Foundation just four years ago. What you will need is: an intent on addressing polarisation in your country, access to local facilitators and willingness to reach across ideological divides in your society. And you will need a grant to launch the project. We will provide you with a starter kit of knowledge and will be happy to partner with you further down the road.

Tools: [The Community Dialogue Toolbox](#)

Website: <https://www.ncf.org.pl>

Languages: English

The Community  
Dialogue Toolbox



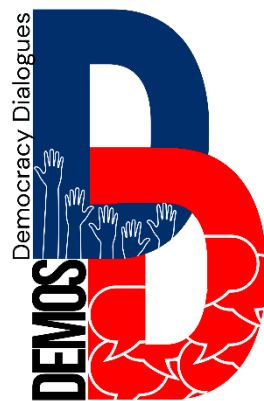
Name: **Democracy Dialogues - DEMOS**

Description: The Democracy Dialogues (DEMOS) project is a user-friendly and accessible initiative designed to help people come together and engage in meaningful conversations about important societal issues. Responding to challenges such as low trust in democracy, increasing polarisation, and difficulties in communication and conflict resolution, DEMOS encourages local dialogues that strengthen dialogue skills, deepen understanding of democracy, and promote lifelong learning and personal growth. At its core is the practical DEMOS Dialogue method - an easy-to-use tool that enables people from diverse backgrounds to share experiences, listen to one another, and explore complex topics in a constructive and inspiring way. By making dialogue approachable and structured, the project supports greater civic engagement and helps build a stronger culture of democracy at the community level.

Tools: [DEMOS Dialogues Guide](#); [DEMOS Dialogues Facilitation Cards](#); various [facilitation resources](#)

Website: <https://democracydialogues.eu/>

Languages: Croatian, English, Finnish, Polish, Swedish





Name: **European Guide for Civil Dialogue**

Description: The “European Guide for Civil Dialogue” is a practical handbook designed to help civil society actors, community leaders, and facilitators design and implement structured dialogue processes that strengthen social cohesion and constructive civic engagement in polarised or conflict-affected contexts. The guide presents dialogue as a participatory and inclusive methodology distinct from debate, and it walks practitioners through the full dialogue cycle – from context and conflict analysis, stakeholder mapping, and objective setting, to session design, facilitation techniques, and post-dialogue follow-up. Its tools include step-by-step planning frameworks, facilitation guidelines, participatory exercises, case studies, reflection questions, and monitoring and evaluation approaches, all aimed at helping communities build trust, improve mutual understanding, and collaboratively generate solutions to shared challenges while reinforcing democratic participation and peaceful conflict transformation.

Tools: [Guide for Civil Dialogue](#)

Website: <https://pourolsolidarite.eu/>

Languages: English



Collection of good practices in old, recent and new countries of the European Union. (Belgium-France-Austria, Hungary, Bulgaria-Romania)



Name: **Hard Topics “Dialogue Tools”**

Description: The Hard Topics “Dialogue Tools” are part of a European Erasmus+ project aimed at empowering young people and those who work with them to navigate social polarisation through constructive conversation and reflection. It offers a set of multilingual resources for youth workers, educators, trainers and community workers that include reflection cards with guidelines for meaningful dialogue, an 80+ page facilitator manual with dialogue concepts and methods, institutional recommendations, ready-made workshop plans for different age groups, and an online course on mastering difficult conversations, all designed to help young people practise respectful listening, ask powerful questions, and engage across differences. The project also includes a digital app for pairing individuals with contrasting views to spark structured dialogue and seeks to strengthen a broader community of dialogue practitioners across Europe.

Tools: [Dialogue Tools](#) – Reflection Cards, Manual for Facilitators, Recommendations for Institutions, Workshop plans, Online course “Mastering Difficult Conversations”

Website: <https://hardtopics.eu/>

Languages: English, Slovenian, Croatian, German, Hungarian, Italian





Name: **KAICIID Dialogue Tools**

Description: The dialogue tools collection from the KAICIID – International Dialogue Centre is a set of educational and facilitation resources designed to support interreligious and intercultural dialogue, peacebuilding, and social inclusion in community, policy, and educational settings. There are various manuals, classroom toolkits, research studies, policy briefs, and interactive learning materials that help facilitators and educators design dialogue processes, strengthen cooperation across faith and cultural groups, and address social challenges collaboratively. Examples of tools include facilitation guides such as the Dialogue for Peace Manual, integration-focused toolkits like Integration through Dialogue, research on partnerships with faith actors, and participatory learning activities such as the Dialogo! game, all aimed at building dialogue skills, fostering mutual understanding, and supporting inclusive societies through structured conversation and shared learning.

Tools: [Dialogo! the game](#), [Project Integration through Dialogue Toolkit: Activity Materials](#), [Project Integration through Dialogue Toolkit: Handbook](#), [STUDY: Partnering with Local Faith Actors to Support Peaceful and Inclusive Societies](#), [Inclusion through Dialogue: Promising Practices for Integration](#), [COVID-19 Interfaith Guide](#), [Dialogue for Peace Manual: Guide for Dialogue Ambassadors](#), [Project Integration through Dialogue Toolkit: Sample Handouts](#)

Website: <https://www.kaiciid.org/>

Languages: English, Arabic, German, Spanish (and other languages)





Name: **Methodenhandbuch – Demokratie im Dialog**

Description: The “Methodenhandbuch – Demokratie im Dialog” is a practical method manual published by the German NGO Gegen Vergessen – Für Demokratie e. V. that provides a collection of tools and exercises for democratic conflict management, argumentation and communication training with adults. It is designed for interested adults, educators and multipliers in civil society and offers workshop methods, communication strategies, and approaches that foster respectful dialogue, empathetic listening, handling of disagreements and constructive engagement across differences in diverse social and political contexts, with the aim of strengthening democratic skills and communication competence.

Tools: [Methods Handbook](#)

Website: <https://gegen-vergessen.de/>

Languages: German





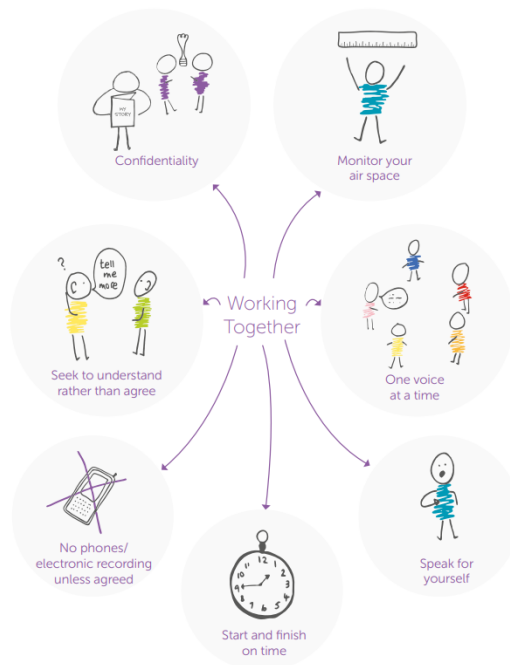
Name: **Place for Hope – Facilitating Community Dialogue**

Description: The “Facilitating Community Dialogue” Facilitation Guide is a practical training manual designed to strengthen the capacity of facilitators, civil society actors, and dialogue practitioners to lead inclusive, participatory processes in fragile and conflict-affected contexts. The guide combines core facilitation principles with hands-on tools and exercises, covering areas such as dialogue design, group dynamics, conflict sensitivity, stakeholder engagement, trust-building, and collaborative problem-solving. It provides structured session plans, reflection activities, case examples, and step-by-step methodologies that help facilitators manage power imbalances, navigate difficult conversations, and create safe spaces for constructive engagement. Overall, the project positions facilitation not merely as a technical skill but as a strategic approach to strengthening social cohesion, participation, and locally driven solutions through well-designed and ethically grounded dialogue processes.

Tools: [Facilitation Guide](#)

Website: <https://www.placeforhope.org.uk/home/>

Languages: English





Name: **The “Pogadajmy” (Let’s Talk) guide**

Description: The “Pogadajmy” (Let’s Talk) guide from the New Community Foundation’s initiative Polski Dialog is a practical conversation handbook designed to help individuals and communities discuss difficult social and political differences in a constructive way. The guide explains why dialogue matters in times of polarisation, how conversations about values and opinions can strengthen relationships and reduce tension, and how to prepare for and structure meaningful exchanges. Its tools include step-by-step guidance on starting conversations, choosing topics, asking deeper questions, managing emotions and disagreements, and reflecting after the discussion, emphasising that dialogue does not need to change opinions but can build understanding and trust between people with different perspectives.

Tools: [The “Let’s Talk” Polish Dialogue Guide](#)

Website: <https://polskialog.pl/>

Languages: Polish

**1** Co to jest rozmowa?

Co za pytanie, przecież wszyscy rozmawiamy!  
To prawda, ale są różne rodzaje rozmów. Jedne  
wzmacniają więzi między nami, a inne nakręcają niechęć





Name: **Search for Common Ground Community Dialogue Design Manual**

Description: The Community Dialogue Design Manual developed by Search for Common Ground's MENA Common Ground Institute (MENA CGI) is a training and curriculum resource that helps facilitators, civil-society actors, and program implementers design effective community dialogue processes for peacebuilding, conflict transformation, and social cohesion in the Middle East and North Africa. The manual combines conceptual guidance and practical tools organised across the dialogue cycle: building a culture of dialogue, conducting pre-dialogue conflict and context analysis, facilitating community dialogue sessions, and planning post-dialogue follow-up and evaluation. It introduces key tools such as conflict-analysis frameworks (issue, context, and stakeholder analysis), dialogue-design planning steps, facilitation guidelines, case studies from the region, training exercises, and reflection questions to support learning and implementation. Overall, the manual positions dialogue as a collaborative, inclusive process distinct from debate, aimed at strengthening trust, enabling mutual understanding, and helping communities jointly develop solutions to shared challenges at the individual, group, and national levels.

Tools: [Community Dialogue Design Manual](#)

Website: <https://www.sfcg.org/>

Languages: English





Name: **Timeout Foundation - Dialogue tools**

Description: The Timeout Dialogue tools are a set of practical resources designed to help people plan, facilitate, and follow up on constructive dialogue sessions that focus on listening, sharing experiences, and building mutual understanding rather than debating or making decisions. The toolkit includes ground rules for respectful conversation, a step-by-step dialogue guide, and ready-made scripts, along with planning resources such as defining objectives and participants, inviting people, and preparing venues or remote sessions. It also provides facilitation techniques (for example, asking dialogic questions, encouraging quieter participants, and managing dominant voices), guidance for challenging moments like conflicts or emotional reactions, and wrap-up tools for summarising insights, collecting feedback, and ensuring impact after the discussion. Overall, the project's tools aim to make it easier for facilitators to create inclusive, reflective conversations that help participants better understand one another and complex issues.

Tools: [All Timeout Tools](#), [Ground Rules](#), [Dialogue Guide](#), [Dialogue Scripts](#)

Website: <https://www.timeoutdialogue.fi>

Languages: English, Finnish, Swedish, [Italian](#)

### What You'll Need for a Timeout Dialogue



**Ground Rules for a Constructive Dialogue**

Every Timeout Dialogue begins with agreeing on the Ground Rules for Constructive Dialogue, which help create an equal and reflective space for everyone.



**Timeout Dialogue Guide**

This Dialogue Guide provides step-by-step instructions for planning, organizing, and facilitating a Timeout Dialogue.



**Timeout Dialogue Scripts**

On this page, you'll find ready-made Timeout Dialogue scripts.



Name: **The “Valiente es Dialogar” (To Be Brave is to Dialogue) Initiative**

Description: The Valiente es Dialogar (VED) initiative is a national citizen dialogue platform in Colombia that brings together people from diverse and often opposing social, political, and economic sectors to build trust, find common ground, and co-create shared visions for the country in response to polarization, violence, and social uncertainty. The project organises dialogue processes, social dialogue summits, and collaborative reflection spaces where participants listen across differences and develop consensus-based proposals on strategic issues such as democracy, inclusion, rural development, and protection of community leaders. Its tools are primarily dialogue methodologies and facilitation practices, including convening diverse stakeholders, structured listening and perspective-sharing, co-creation of future scenarios, and collaborative action planning aimed at strengthening a culture of peaceful conflict transformation and democratic participation.

Tools: [Conceptual and methodological document](#)

Website: <https://valientesdialogar.org/>

Languages: Spanish

