

THE NEW
COMMUNITY
FOUNDATION

NECE
LABS

NECE Lab: Working with Polarised Groups in Civic Education

LAB Workbook

12-14.07.2026 | Warsaw



General information

The goal of the Lab is to equip interested NECE member organizations and civic education specialists with the dialogue delivery know-how, developed and tested by the New Community Foundation (NCF). While many programs explore facilitation techniques and dialogic theory, the Lab addresses a frequently overlooked dimension: the organizational infrastructure and practical knowledge required to design, recruit for, produce, and scale meaningful civic dialogue processes. The Lab will focus on both online and in-person dialogue formats at local and national levels, highlighting their complementary potential to reach diverse audiences and bridge geographic and social divides.

In the course of the Lab, participants will gain practical tools and strategies for designing, producing, and scaling civic dialogue initiatives in their own contexts. They will also have the opportunity to develop and receive feedback on their own dialogue project ideas, strengthening their capacity to turn dialogue into a sustainable civic engagement practice.

NECE is financially supported by the German Federal Agency for Civic Education / bpb and led by THE CIVICS Innovation Hub.

NECE Lab in Warsaw is co-financed by the Robert Bosch Stiftung.

This event is co-funded by the European Union. Views and opinions expressed are however those of the author(s) only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union or the European Education and Culture Executive Agency. Neither the European Union nor the granting authority can be held responsible for them.

NECE Lab: Work with Polarized Groups in Civic Education is organized by the New Community Foundation in cooperation with THE CIVICS.

About the New Community Foundation (NCF)

The New Community Foundation is a Polish NGO whose mission is to reduce divisions. For the past five years we have been organizing Good Conversation Trainings and dialogue sessions, where people with different views come together to discuss controversial topics in an atmosphere of respect, openness, and mutual curiosity. We teach how to communicate effectively despite differences and how to build meaningful connections in both everyday life and professional settings.

About the Networking European Civic Education (NECE)

The Networking European Civic Education is Europe's largest and one of its longest-standing platforms for non-formal and informal civic education. Currently led by THE CIVICS Innovation Hub, NECE is dedicated to fostering a vibrant and engaged community. Through impactful initiatives such as the NECE Festival, Labs, and online Campus they equip civic education champions with the tools and resources they need to drive meaningful change in their local communities.

Program of the Lab

<u>Day 1</u>		<u>Day 2</u>		<u>Day 3</u>	
Sunday July 12	Polarisation and civic dialogue: understanding the landscape	Monday July 13	Organising a civic dialogue from A to Z	Tuesday July 14	Designing my own dialogue initiative
14:00-14:30	Opening of the event and framing of objectives, agenda, and working principles	9:00-10:00	Workshop on spotting dialogue topics	9:00-10:30	Introduction to facilitation tools
14:30-16:00	Are we really so divided? Lecture on polarisation Group discussion	10:00-10:15	Break	10:30-10:45	Break
16:00-16:30	Break	10:15-13:15	Civic dialogue – live experience	10:45-11:45	Designing a dialogue initiative: group work with mentors
16:30-17:30	Group integration and entry into dialogue practice	13:15-14:15	Lunch break	11:45-12:00	Break
17:30-17:45	Break	14.15-15.45	Recruitment and communication strategies: input from NCF expert	12:00-12:45	Presentation and feedback session
17:45-18:45	Participants' practice exchange – turbo presentations	15:45-16:00	Break	12:45-13:30	Reflection and closing: What comes after the dialogue?
19:00	Dinner	16:00-17:30	Dialogue production and delivery: input from expert from NCF	13:30	Lunch
		17:30-17:45	Break		
		17:45-18:45	Social impact and evaluation: input from expert from NCF		
		19:00	Dinner		

List of speakers



Joanna Zięba

Co-founder of the New Community Foundation and an expert responsible for dialogue facilitation and local engagement

Cultural studies scholar, assistant professor at the Institute of Polish Culture, University of Warsaw, and president of the “Cathedral of Culture” Association. She educates cultural animators and co-creates the Social Arts degree program at the University of Warsaw. As a trainer and expert, she collaborates with NGOs and cultural institutions across Poland.



Maja Jeśmanowicz-Mierzejewska

Project Coordinator at the New Community Foundation

She has been involved in the NGO sector for over five years. She studied Management at the University of Warsaw and spent one semester at the University of Padua as part of her academic education. For many years she was actively engaged in scouting activities within the Polish Scouting and Guiding Association (ZHP).



Anna Chmielewska

Program Director at the New Community Foundation, responsible for project operations and fundraising

She has been involved in the non-governmental sector since 2006. She has implemented social and educational projects and programs for organizations including the Polish Donors Forum, the Foundation for Polish Science, the Working Community of Associations of Social Organizations (WRZOS), and the Ocalenie Foundation. She is a trainer and facilitator associated with the NGO Trainers' Association (sTOP). She supports organizations in change management, institutional fundraising, strategic processes, and internal communication.



Grażyna Latos

Communication and Social Impact Coordinator at the New Community Foundation

A reporter with twenty years of media experience. Co-author of several books, including one on the everyday lives and challenges of elderly people in Poland. Nominated for several press awards, among them the Newsweek Teresa Torańska Award. She has been involved in the NGO sector for over fifteen years. She has collaborated with organizations in Poland, Palestine (Psychosocial Counseling Center for Women), and Belgium (Engaged Partnership for Change). A graduate of philosophy, gender studies, and a postgraduate program in health coaching.

List of speakers



Witold Choraży

*Research and Communication Specialist
at the New Community Foundation*

Graduated in Sociology at the University of Warsaw. He has contributed to research projects for NGOs, academic institutions, and pooling organizations. He studies political institutions, voting behavior and ideological polarization. Co-author of a nationwide study on polarization conducted by the NCF, in partnership with SWPS University.



Magda Latuch

*Certified facilitator and trainer
at the New Community Foundation*

She has worked in the field of cultural and social animation for 20 years, and for 15 years has facilitated both group and individual meetings with socially engaged individuals. She has implemented a number of her own initiatives through her work within the NGO and governmental sector. She specializes in supporting the social animators and activists in implementing projects and initiatives at every stage of implementation, on planning moment and implementing social diagnosis.



Wawrzyniec Smoczyński

*Co-founder and president
of the New Community Foundation*

Founder of the Polityka Insight think tank; consultant and analyst; member of the European Council on Foreign Relations (ECFR). He worked as a journalist for 13 years, covering international affairs, economics, and politics. From 2019 to 2024, he served as director of strategy at SWPS, Poland's largest private university. His work focuses on community-building processes, including the formation of civic bonds and political polarization. Alumnus of the Leadership Academy for Poland, Open Society Fellow and Marshall Memorial Fellow.



Natalia Kulik

Facilitator at the New Community Foundation

She is currently PR & Social Media Manager at the Etiuda&Anima Foundation, promoting artistic and visual culture through international film festivals and cultural projects. She also leads Rozmowa Inaczej (A Different Conversation), an initiative creating space for open, respectful conversations across different perspectives. Natalia has collaborated with the Women's Rights Center (Centrum Praw Kobiet), CAS PLinEU, the Multicultural Centre in Kraków, and the New Community Foundation. Natalia is a certified dialogue facilitator.

Polarization: what is it?

What do you think polarization is?

A 10x10 grid of dots, consisting of 10 rows and 10 columns, totaling 100 dots. The dots are arranged in a regular, repeating pattern across the entire grid.

What images come to mind when you hear that word?



A grid of 100 small blue squares arranged in 10 rows and 10 columns.

Differences of opinion are a natural part of democracy. They become a problem when they make cooperation, trust, and democratic decision-making impossible.

This process is called polarization.

Polarization has two dimensions:

- Ideological polarization – differences in opinions and beliefs
- Affective polarization – negative feelings toward people who think differently

A growing body of research shows that argument-driven debates have no impact on highly-polarized groups – they actually harden radical views instead of bringing people together. Our view is that differences of opinion reflect underlying differences in lived experience – and that those personal and group experiences need to be talked about as they carry the affective charge which later fuels ideological divisions. The community dialogue is designed to enable such exchanges.

Dialogue: what is it?

What does a dialogue mean to you?



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What needs to happen during exchange to call it a dialogue?



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What are the key elements of a dialogue?



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Think of a conversation that went really well.
What made it a good conversation?



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Dialogue in our approach

A dialogue is a format of conversation that allows individuals to exchange views on an important and/or contentious topics in a calm and respectful manner.

During a dialogue, people holding different views, values or perspectives meet to better understand each other – not to convince one another. Dialogues provide a space for active listening to others, reflecting on one's own beliefs and examining the underlying needs and values.

The goal of a dialogue is to enhance mutual understanding among participants. This is made possible through a trustful atmosphere held by facilitators, enabling participants to share their perspectives, personal experiences, and emotions related to the topic – without engaging in a debate. Dialogues offer an opportunity to understand what lies beneath general terms (such as family, patriotism, security), how different individuals perceive them, and what shapes these perceptions.

Dialogue: mechanisms and limits

What can dialogue achieve?

A 10x10 grid of dots on a white background. The dots are arranged in 10 rows and 10 columns, forming a square pattern. Each dot is a small, solid black circle. The grid is centered on the page.

What are the limits of dialogue? When does the dialogue end?

A 10x10 grid of dots on a light gray background. The dots are arranged in a regular pattern, with 10 dots per row and 10 dots per column, totaling 100 dots. The dots are small, dark gray circles. The grid is centered on the page.

Why does dialogue work, what are the mechanisms behind that?

A grid of 100 small blue dots arranged in 10 rows and 10 columns. The dots are evenly spaced and form a rectangular pattern.

A dialogue rarely follows a straight line. Instead, it moves through moments of tension, uncertainty, and connection. These moments of tension are not signs that something is going wrong – they are often the turning points that make dialogue meaningful. When participants navigate them successfully, they become breakthrough moments that help build understanding, trust, and a sense of community.

Dialogue: mechanisms and limits

Types of breakthrough moments

1. Personal openness

Someone reveals themselves personally, authentically, and emotionally.

Effect: participants begin to see one another as people rather than representatives of opposing groups. In psychology, this is known as de-categorization.

2. Being heard without being attacked

Someone expresses a controversial opinion and is met with curiosity rather than judgment.

Effect: Defensiveness decreases, making it easier to reflect instead of argue.

3. Challenging expectations

Someone says something surprising within their own bubble.

Effect: Participants recognize complexity instead of black-and-white thinking, encouraging a more critical and nuanced reflection.

4. Discovering common ground

Someone notices a similarity with a person who holds different views.

Effect: Shared identity begins to emerge despite disagreement. In psychology, this process is called re-categorization.

5. Genuine curiosity

Someone spontaneously asks an open, curiosity-driven question to a person with different views.

Effect: This shapes new behavior patterns towards individuals from another bubble – openness to differences instead of competition.

6. Expressing appreciation

Someone spontaneously expresses gratitude to a person with different views.

Effect: This builds trust, sympathy, and a sense of connection. Participants feel the warm glow, fostering a sense of community.

All of this makes dialogue an experience of positive contact with individuals from different bubbles and helps to depolarize perspectives.

The principles of dialogue

DEBATE

Why do we talk?	To convince someone that I'm right
What am I focused on?	My next response
How do I start?	I give a "lecture"
When responding to someone's viewpoint?	I present my own
How do I express disagreement?	I present counterarguments
What do I bring to the conversation?	"Objective" facts
Where do the differences come from?	Others are wrong
How do I see the other person?	They are my opponent
My opinion?	I stick to one side
How do I deal with emotions?	I fight or withdraw
What do I take away from the conversation?	I see how different we are
How do I want to end?	I want to be right

DIALOGUE

To understand other people's perspectives and broaden my understanding of the issue
Listening deeply
I briefly share my opinion and show openness
I check if I understood correctly
I first paraphrase, then share my different perspective
Personal story
Others have had different experiences
I am curious about them
I look at the issue from different angles
I take care of both my own well-being and that of others
I discover what we have in common
I want to have a relationship

Dialogues: different formats

There are many ways to organize dialogue, and a wide range of methodologies and approaches that can guide the process. In this course, we focus on the practical side of designing and organizing dialogue initiatives rather than on a single facilitation method.

At the beginning of this journey, we would like to introduce two dialogue formats that we have used extensively in our own work. Both have been tested in practice and have proven effective, but they serve different purposes and respond to different needs.

As you read, think about the strengths and limitations of each format. Which one fits your context best? Which one could help you achieve your goals? You may also find yourself inspired to experiment with a format you have not tried before.

Online dialogue

Online dialogues bring together participants from different regions to discuss broad, often controversial issues that are part of the national public debate. Their purpose is to increase mutual understanding, reduce polarization, and help participants develop dialogue skills.

Because they take place online, these conversations can also be livestreamed, allowing a much wider audience to observe the discussion, reflect on different perspectives, and learn from the dialogue.

Local dialogue

Local dialogues are organized in close cooperation with a local partner who understands the community, its history, and the relationships within it. They focus on issues that are important to local residents and create space for conversations rooted in the community's everyday experience.

Alongside increasing understanding, reducing polarization, and strengthening dialogue skills, local dialogues also help build trust, strengthen relationships, and foster a greater sense of belonging. Depending on the format, they can also be open to a live audience. This option needs clear ground rules for the audience to ensure they support, rather than disrupt, the dialogue.

What other formats of dialogue can you imagine?



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Dialogues: different formats

**Which format would best address the needs of your target group?
Why?**

A grid of 20 columns and 20 rows of small blue dots on a white background. The dots are arranged in a regular, repeating pattern, forming a square grid. Each dot is a small, solid blue circle. The grid is composed of 400 dots in total.

Which format fits better the goal you want to pursue with your own dialogue initiative?

A grid of 20 columns and 20 rows of small blue dots, forming a square pattern. The dots are evenly spaced and cover the entire area of the page.

Dialogues: different formats compared

Online dialogue

Strengths

- Participants from across the country may join, more diversity.
- Easier and cheaper to organize.
- Can be livestreamed and reach a wider audience.
- Lower barrier to entry. – Participants can join from anywhere.



Local dialogue

- Addresses real challenges faced by the local community.
- Participants connect more naturally in a face-to-face setting.
- Strengthens local networks and partnerships.
- Can lead to follow-up actions and increase civic participation.



Challenges

- Technical issues may occur.
- Less personal connection, lack of physical presence.
- Bigger chance of dropping out.
- Subject-matter experts may dominate the conversation.



- More demanding logistics and venue preparation.
- Requires more budget.
- Limited to one community and location.
- Requires a trusted local partner.
- Smaller pool of participants and perspectives.
- Participants may find it difficult to step outside their existing roles and relationships within the community, which can make open and equal dialogue more challenging.



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Dialogues: different formats compared

What other strengths and challenges of each format do you see?



Grid of dots for writing response

Which format would you prefer as a participant? Why?



Grid of dots for writing response

Which format is more realistic for your organization at the moment?



Grid of dots for writing response

Which format would have the greatest impact in your context?



Grid of dots for writing response

Which format would help you reach the people you most want to involve?



Grid of dots for writing response

The dialogue process

Organizing a meaningful dialogue requires more than moderating conversation. It involves building the right organizational infrastructure and applying practical knowledge at every stage – from defining the purpose to evaluating the results.

Our guidelines takes you through each step of the process. The following pages provide practical guidance, tools, and examples for every stage.

Step 1 Understanding the context

Define the purpose of your dialogue, assess your resources, and identify your ambitions and limitations before you start planning.

Step 2 Topic selection and framing

Identify a topic and present it in a way that sparks curiosity, encourages participation, and welcomes diverse viewpoints.

Step 3 Participant recruitment

Think carefully about who should be in the room, how to reach beyond your usual networks, and how to design a recruitment process that brings together people with different experiences and perspectives.

Step 4 Communication

Design invitations and messages that clearly explain the purpose of the dialogue and encourage people from different backgrounds to participate.

Step 5 Dialogue production and delivery

Plan the practical aspects of the dialogue including venue or platform, timeline, team roles, and technical arrangements.

Step 6 Dialogue structure

There is no single way to facilitate a dialogue. Select a method and structure that fit your context and help participants engage in a respectful and constructive conversation.

Step 7 Impact measurement

Evaluate whether your dialogue achieved its goals and identify what participants experienced and learned.

Step 8 Documentation

Capture the key insights, recommendations, and outcomes so they can inform future work and reach a wider audience.

Step 9 Reflection and improvement

Review what worked well, what could be improved, and how the experience can strengthen your future dialogue initiatives.

Bank of inspirations from participants' practice exchange

What inspired you most in the examples shared by other participants?



A 4x18 grid of dots, consisting of 4 rows and 18 columns of small black dots.

What would you like to try in your own work?



Which idea surprised you?



What similarities do you see between your work and others'?



A 4x16 grid of dots, representing a 64-point grid. The dots are arranged in 4 rows and 16 columns, with a small gap between the 8th and 9th columns.

Did anything challenge your assumptions?

A grid of 100 small blue dots arranged in 10 rows and 10 columns. The dots are evenly spaced and form a rectangular pattern.

Bank of inspirations from participants' practice exchange

Ideas worth remembering:



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Questions I want to explore further:



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Resources, contacts or organizations to follow up with:



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Civic dialogue – lived experience

Take a step back and reflect on the dialogue as a participant and a future organizer. What did you notice about the process, the structure, and the conditions that made the conversation possible?

The goal of this exercise is not to evaluate the dialogue, but to identify the design choices that made it possible. Reflect on what you observed and how these insights could inform your own dialogue initiative.

What made this conversation different from an ordinary discussion or debate?



Which elements of the dialogue design helped participants engage constructively?

A 5x16 grid of dots, consisting of 5 rows and 16 columns of small black dots.

What moments seemed to shift the atmosphere or deepen the conversation? What made them possible?

A 10x10 grid of dots, consisting of 10 rows and 10 columns, totaling 100 dots. The dots are arranged in a regular, repeating pattern across the entire grid.

What role did the facilitator play?
Which interventions seemed particularly effective?

A 7x16 grid of dots, consisting of 7 rows and 16 columns of small black dots.

Civic dialogue – lived experience

What challenges or tensions emerged during the dialogue? How were they addressed?



What organizational or facilitation choices would you adopt in your own dialogue initiative?

A 7x18 grid of dots, consisting of 7 rows and 18 columns of small, dark gray dots. The dots are arranged in a regular, repeating pattern across the entire grid.

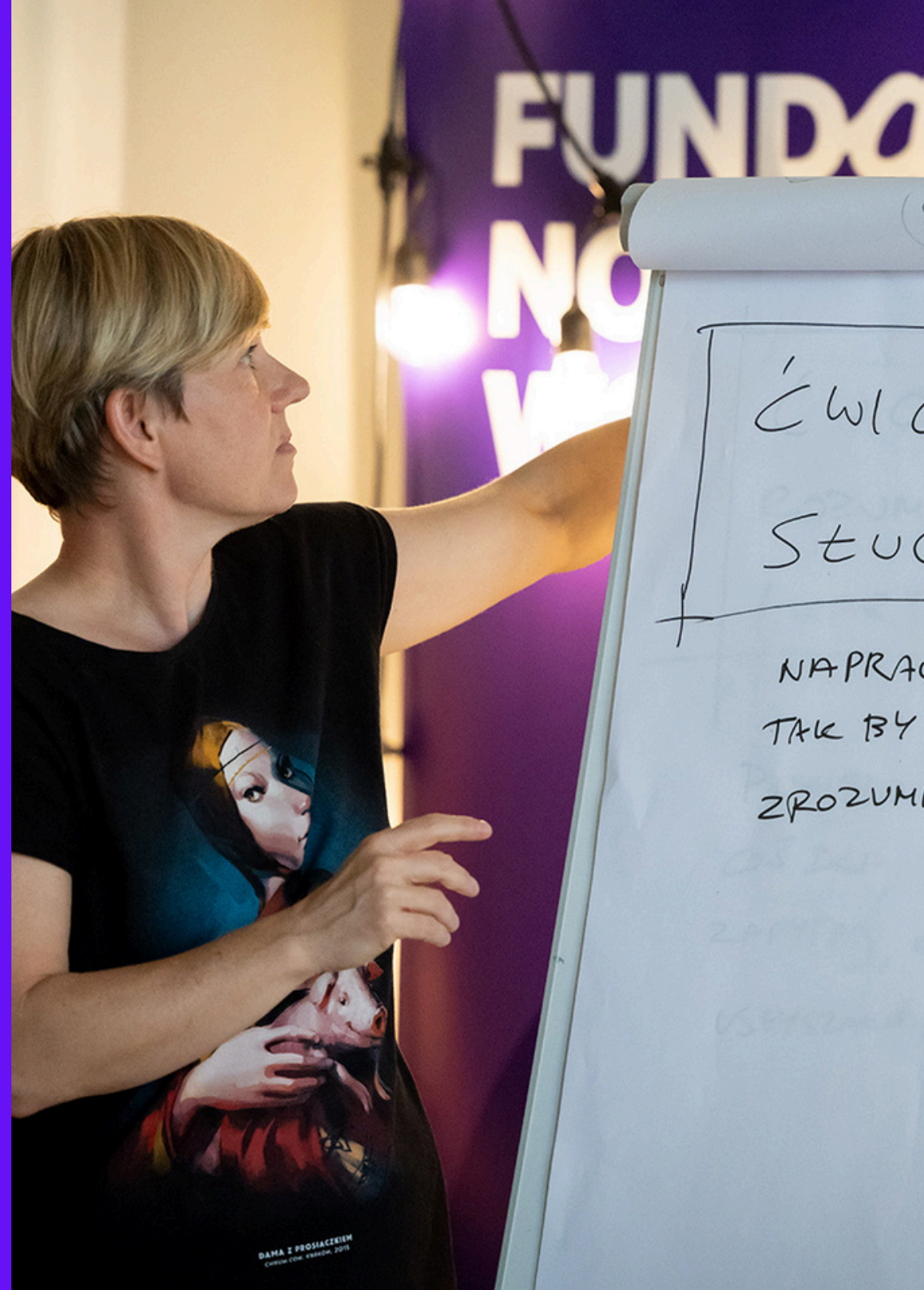
Draw the flow of the dialogue

Use the space below to sketch how the conversation unfolded.
There is no right or wrong way to do it. For example, you could draw:

- a wave or sine curve showing the energy of the conversation,
- a timeline marking important moments,
- a bridge representing increasing understanding,
- a path with turning points,
- or any other visual that captures your experience.

A 10x10 grid of small blue dots on a white background. The dots are arranged in a regular pattern, with 10 dots in each row and 10 dots in each column, totaling 100 dots.

Setting up my own dialogue initiative



The dialogue process | Step 1: Understanding the context

Before choosing a topic or inviting participants, take time to understand why you want to organize a dialogue. Every successful dialogue starts with a real need, a clear purpose, and a realistic assessment of your resources. Think about your motivation, the change you hope to achieve, and the people who can support you. At this stage, it is equally important to recognize both your ambitions and your limitations. Defining these early will help you make better decisions throughout the planning process.

Feel free to sketch your ideas

A mind map or simple diagram can help you organize your thoughts before answering the questions.

A large grid of dots for drawing, consisting of 20 columns and 10 rows of small black dots. In the top-left corner, there is a small icon of a blue pencil with a pink eraser.

What is the main purpose of your dialogue initiative?



What challenge, conflict, or division do you want to address?



Why do you believe dialogue is the right approach?



What resources do you already have?

(people, skills, partners, funding, time, venue, technical support)

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What are your biggest concerns or limitations?

[illegible]

The dialogue process | Step 2: Topic selection

The topic is one of the most important design choices you will make. A well-chosen topic attracts participants, encourages diverse perspectives, and creates the conditions for a meaningful dialogue. A poorly framed topic may discourage participation or lead to an unproductive debate.

The way you identify the topic depends on your context. If you are organizing a national or online dialogue, start by exploring current public debates, media coverage, research, and opinion polls. Ask yourself whether your dialogue responds to an important societal question or fills a gap in the public conversation.

If you are organizing a local dialogue, work closely with local partners, community leaders, or other people who understand the community and its needs. The topic should reflect a real local issue and resonate with the people you hope to bring together.

Choosing the topic is only the first step. Framing it is equally important. A good dialogue topic should:

- address a specific aspect of a broader issue,
- be timely and relevant,
- matter to the target group,
- invite different perspectives,
- be phrased in a neutral and open way,
- be clear and specific.

Before giving your topic the final wording, test it with colleagues or potential participants. Ask yourself: Does it invite people into a conversation, or push them into taking sides?

What broader issue does your dialogue address?



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What is the specific question you want participants to explore together?



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The dialogue process | Step 2: Topic selection

Does your topic...

- ☐ address a real issue?
- ☐ matter to your target group?
- ☐ invite different perspectives?
- ☐ sound open rather than judgmental?
- ☐ encourage curiosity rather than debate?
- ☐ feel specific enough?

Test your title.

Write three possible titles for your dialogue.



1.

2.

3.

Which one would make people with different views think: "I'd like to join this conversation."?

The dialogue process | Step 3: Participant recruitment – a process

Recruitment is much more than inviting people to an event. It is the process of intentionally building the group that will take part in your dialogue. When planning recruitment, think about the entire journey from identifying your participants to confirming their attendance. Every decision influences who joins the conversation.

The recruitment process

1. Define your participants

Who should be in the room? Think beyond demographics and consider the different experiences, perspectives, and viewpoints you want represented.

2. Prepare your invitation

Write a short, engaging invitation that explains why the dialogue matters and why someone should take part. The invitation should define what benefits the participants can expect from their attendance.

3. Design the registration process

Make registration simple and accessible. Decide how people will register (e.g. through an online form, by phone, by email, or other method), what information you need to collect, and how you will use it to build your dialogue group.

4. Build partnerships

Partners can help you reach communities you would not otherwise reach. Look for organizations and community leaders who are trusted by different groups and can help you broaden your audience.

5. Plan your recruitment campaign

Decide how people will hear about your dialogue.

Combine different channels depending on your resources and target audience. Possible channels include:

- posts on your own social media channels,
- newsletters and mailing lists,
- Facebook groups,
- paid social media campaigns,
- partner organizations,
- community organizations,
- direct invitations,
- local media,
- influencers and public figures,
- posters and flyers,
- personal recommendations.

The dialogue process | Step 3: Participant recruitment – a process

Who should be in the room?



Handwriting practice area for 'Who should be in the room?' consisting of 10 rows of dotted lines.

Whose voices are the hardest to reach?



Handwriting practice area for 'Whose voices are the hardest to reach?' consisting of 10 rows of dotted lines.

Who could help you reach them?



Handwriting practice area for 'Who could help you reach them?' consisting of 4 rows of dotted lines.

Which recruitment channels will you use for your dialogue initiative?



Handwriting practice area for 'Which recruitment channels will you use for your dialogue initiative?' consisting of 4 rows of dotted lines.

How will you confirm participation and reduce no-shows?



Handwriting practice area for 'How will you confirm participation and reduce no-shows?' consisting of 4 rows of dotted lines.

The dialogue process | Step 3: Participant recruitment – lessons learned from the practice

Great dialogues begin long before participants enter the room. The way you identify, invite, and select participants determines what kind of conversation becomes possible. Here are some lessons we have learned from our practice.

Recruitment always takes longer than you think.

People rarely sign up immediately. Start recruiting early and expect to spend more time than planned.

Diversity requires intentional recruitment

Different perspectives rarely appear by chance. Think in advance about whose voices you want to include and actively look for ways to reach them.

Partnerships are about trust, not only promotion.

Local organizations, informal groups, schools, libraries, community centers, faith-based organizations or NGOs often have relationships with communities that you do not. Good partnerships are built on shared goals rather than transactional promotion.

Whenever possible, plan resources for local partnerships in your project budget. They require time and effort, but they often make recruitment, communication, and follow-up activities much more effective.

Your registration form is also a recruitment tool.

Keep it short and welcoming. Collect only the information you really need, but ask questions that will help you build a diverse dialogue group.

Selection shapes the conversation.

Sometimes more people register than you can invite. Selection should not be random; it should help create a diverse group of participants while remaining transparent and fair. Remember to take care of the selected participants to prevent last-minute drop-outs before the dialogue. Confirm the presence of participants one day prior to the dialogue and keep a reserve list.

Protection of participants' data is important.

Recruitment involves collecting personal data, so make sure your registration process complies with GDPR and your country's data protection regulations. Prepare the necessary privacy notices and consent forms before launching recruitment, especially if you collect sensitive information or plan to use photos or recordings. If needed, consult a legal expert before launching your registration process.

Which recruitment challenge do you expect to be the biggest in your context?

[illegible]

If your recruitment attracted only one “side” of the conversation, what would you do?

The dialogue process | Step 4: Communication

Communication is often confused with event promotion. In our experience, it is much more than that, it is a cross-cutting element that shapes every stage of the dialogue process. Throughout the dialogue process, aim to communicate in a way that is open, balanced, and welcoming to people with different perspectives.

Communication starts with the topic

The way you frame your dialogue topic is already part of your communication. A good title should spark curiosity, not signal that only one perspective is welcome.

Assume every word sends a message

Words, visuals, examples, partners, and media channels all communicate your values. Be mindful of language or imagery that might unintentionally suggest an ideological position.

Speak to more than one audience

Your communication should resonate with people holding different views. Whenever possible, test your invitations and promotional materials with someone outside your usual network.

Communication is an ongoing relationship

Communication doesn't end with the invitation or registration. Plan the participant journey from the first contact to the follow-up after the dialogue. Regular communication builds trust, reduces no-shows, and encourages future participation.

Be aware of your own position

No organization is perceived as completely neutral. Rather than pretending to be, acknowledge your own perspective and make a conscious effort to communicate respectfully across differences.

The dialogue process | Step 4: Communication

Who might feel invited by your communication? Who might not?

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Could any words, images, or partners unintentionally discourage participation?

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How will you communicate with participants before, during, and after the dialogue?



Who could review your communication and help you identify blind spots?



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The dialogue process | Step 5: Dialogue production and delivery

Once you have defined your purpose, recruited participants, and planned your communication, it is time to turn your dialogue into reality. Good production creates the conditions for participants to focus on the conversation rather than organizational issues. Careful planning before the event helps facilitators feel confident and allows the dialogue to run smoothly. Keep in mind that facilitators should be chosen according to the target group, and a kick-off meeting should be held prior to the dialogue to outline the structure and define your roles.

Three rules of thumb

- 1. Prepare for the unexpected**
Technical failures, late arrivals, cancellations, or emotional situations are common. Discuss possible scenarios with your team before the dialogue.
- 2. Choose the format carefully**
Online and in-person dialogues require different logistics, technologies, and team roles. Adapt your production plan to the format you choose.
- 3. Test everything in advance**
Visit the venue or test the online platform beforehand. Check equipment, internet connection, seating arrangements, and all materials before participants arrive.

Planning checklist for your dialogue initiative

Venue
Choose a neutral, accessible, and comfortable space.



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Date
Pick a day and time that works for your target participants.



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Number of participants
We recommend 8–15 participants.



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Audience/online streaming
Create a set of rules either for the audience live or online.



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The dialogue process | Step 5: Dialogue production and delivery

Room setup

Arrange chairs in a circle to support equal participation.



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Duration

We recommend no longer than 3 hours.



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Break

Include one break for dialogues longer than 2 hours.



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Materials

Prepare any materials you may need (e.g. name tags, flipchart, markers, sticky notes).



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Team roles

Who will facilitate, welcome participants, provide technical or logistical support, and document the dialogue?



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Accessibility

Is the venue accessible and suitable for all participants? Consider transport, accessibility needs, and refreshments.



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Technical equipment

Do you need a projector, microphones, speakers, internet connection, or equipment for recording or livestreaming?



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The dialogue process | Step 6: Dialogue structure

There are many methodologies and approaches to facilitating dialogue. Below is the dialogue framework used by the New Community Foundation. Rather than a fixed script, it is a flexible structure that we adapt to the purpose, topic, participants, and context of each dialogue.

Phase 1 **Getting to know each other**

The facilitator introduces the purpose of the dialogue; participants introduce themselves and begin building trust and connection within the group.

Phase 2 **Setting the framework**

The facilitator explains how the meeting will be structured and what participants can expect, then introduces and agrees on the ground rules with the group.

Phase 3 **Sharing perspectives**

Each participant has an opportunity to share their views, experiences, or opinions on the topic without interruption.

Phase 4 **Deepening understanding**

Participants explore each other's perspectives through active listening, curiosity, and open questions.

Phase 5 **Finding similarities and differences**

The facilitator invites participants to reflect on both what they have in common and where they continue to differ. The goal is to acknowledge differences while identifying shared values, concerns, experiences, or insights that emerged during the dialogue.

Phase 6 **Closing the dialogue**

Participants reflect on the dialogue, share final thoughts, and bring the conversation to a meaningful close.

The dialogue process | Step 6: Dialogue structure

Useful facilitation tools

Encourage curiosity

Invite participants to ask each other open, curiosity-driven questions.

- *What do you mean by...?*
- *Why is this important to you?*

Use paraphrasing

Reflect back what you have heard and check your understanding before moving on.

- *So, if I understand correctly...*
- *Have I understood you correctly?*

Explore the experiences behind opinions

When emotions rise or positions become more entrenched, invite participants to talk about the experiences that shaped their views.

- *When did you start thinking this way?*
- *What influenced your perspective?*
- *Was there a particular personal experience that shaped your opinion?*

The dialogue process | Step 6: Dialogue structure

Design structure of your own dialogue

[illegible]

The dialogue process | Step 7: Impact measurement

Evaluation helps you understand whether your dialogue achieved its purpose. Before choosing your evaluation methods, ask yourself what you want to learn and how you will use the results. The way you measure impact should reflect the goals of your dialogue and the community you are working with. Most importantly, plan your evaluation before the dialogue takes place.

Start with your objectives.

Before designing an evaluation, ask yourself: What change do we hope to create? Your indicators should reflect the purpose of your dialogue.

Plan evaluation before the dialogue.

Decide in advance what information you need, how you will collect it, and when participants will be asked to provide feedback.

Keep surveys short and focused.

Participants are much more likely to complete a short survey. We recommend collecting feedback during the final minutes of the dialogue to maximize response rates.

Combine different methods.

Surveys provide useful quantitative data, but interviews, observations, and follow-up conversations often reveal deeper insights into participants' experiences.

Look beyond the dialogue itself.

Some of the most meaningful impact appears later. Consider a follow-up survey or interview a few weeks after the dialogue to understand whether participants applied what they learned in everyday life.

Measure only what you will actually use.

Collecting data takes time for both organizers and participants. Choose indicators that will help you improve your dialogue, demonstrate its impact, or communicate results to partners and funders.

The dialogue process | Step 7: Impact measurement

How will you know whether your dialogue was successful?

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How will you measure it?

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What do you want to measure?



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How will you use the results?

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The dialogue process | Step 8: Documentation

Dialogues involve relatively small groups, but their impact can be much greater. Good documentation allows you to share the insights, experiences, and outcomes of the dialogue with people who were not present, increasing both its reach and its long-term impact.

Document with a purpose.

Before the dialogue, ask yourself who will use the documentation and what you want it to achieve.

Choose the right format.

Different audiences engage with different formats. A report is not always the best way to share the outcomes of a dialogue. Some examples from our practice include:

- [Summary posts](#) with photos
- [Short video reels](#) featuring selected moments or quotes from the dialogue
- [Social media carousels](#) featuring participants' quotes
- [Short participant interviews](#) after dialogue
- [Dialogue maps](#) highlighting different perspectives, common ground, and key tensions
- [Practical guides](#) inspired by dialogue outcomes (e.g. How to Talk About...)
- [Recommendations](#) for institutions or decision-makers
- [Reports](#) summarizing findings from a series of dialogues

Protect participants' privacy.

Always obtain informed consent before using participants' quotes, photos, or recordings, and respect the level of anonymity agreed before the dialogue.

Tell the story, not only the conclusions.

Documentation should reflect the diversity of perspectives discussed during the dialogue, not only the final outcomes.

The dialogue process | Step 8: Documentation

Who is the audience for your documentation?

A grid of 100 small blue dots arranged in 10 rows and 10 columns.

What would you like people who did not attend the dialogue to learn?

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Which documentation format best fits your goals?

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How could your documentation inspire further conversations or action?



The dialogue process | Step 9: Reflection and improvement

Every dialogue is an opportunity to learn. Reflection helps you understand what worked well, what could be improved, and how to make your next dialogue even more effective. Take time to reflect not only on the conversation itself, but also on the planning, recruitment, communication, facilitation, and overall process of organizing a dialogue.

Reflect as a team.

Set aside time shortly after the dialogue to discuss your observations while they are still fresh.

Celebrate what worked.

Reflection is not only about identifying problems. Recognizing successful decisions helps you repeat them in future dialogues.

Learn from challenges.

Every dialogue brings unexpected situations. Instead of looking for mistakes, ask what they can teach you about improving your process.

Turn insights into action.

Reflection is valuable only if it leads to change. Write down clearly defined improvements and use them when planning your next dialogue.

Questions to reflect on after completing the dialogue process:

- What went particularly well?
- What surprised you?
- What challenges did you encounter?
- What would you do differently next time?
- What feedback from participants was most valuable?
- What is one thing you will definitely keep and one thing you will change in your next dialogue?

Summary of my dialogue initiative

Goal



Topic

Dialogue format

Target group

Participant recruitment strategy

Summary of my dialogue initiative

Partners and stakeholders



Communication strategy

Logistics (venue, date, team and roles)

Dialogue structure

Evaluation

Documentation

Summary of my dialogue initiative

Biggest challenge



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Support I still need

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First next step after the Lab

A grid of 20 columns and 20 rows of small blue dots on a white background. The dots are arranged in a regular, repeating pattern, forming a square grid. There are 20 dots in each row and 20 dots in each column, totaling 400 dots.