



**Public
Conversations
Project**

Constructive Conversations about Challenging Times

A Guide to Community Dialogue

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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 About This Guide and Other Resources

This *Guide* is for people who want to have more constructive conversations about divisive issues and challenging current events—especially conversations with people who think very differently than they do about the nature of the problems we face in the US and the most promising solutions. We hope that international readers will let US-centric content stimulate alternative ideas more suited to their situation.

The advice we offer here is drawn from PCP's experience conducting dialogues among people involved in conflicts rooted in radically different values and worldviews. It includes step-by-step instructions for a single-session two-hour structured dialogue. It also suggests ways to plan and conduct briefer or less formal conversations.

The first edition of this *Guide* was written after September 11, 2001. We updated that guide during the months preceding the war in Iraq. This edition includes additional questions (see Appendix H) on the Red-Blue Divide in the US and a new Appendix (Appendix I) on using video clips (or a similar common experience) as a stimulus to dialogue.

Please note that after we produced this guide for use in community settings or “living room dialogues,” we published a more comprehensive guide that addresses more aspects of the convening process, includes guidance on multi-session initiatives, and gives more comprehensive advice about design and facilitation. That guide, entitled, *“Fostering Dialogue Across Divides: A Nuts and Bolts Guide from the Public Conversations Project”* is available as a download or as a 183-page bound book. It offers suggestions for designing dialogues on many topics and in many settings. A very similar guide, one that is topic and audience-specific, is also available. It is entitled, *“Constructive Conversations About the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict: A Guide for Convening and Facilitating Dialogue in Jewish Communities in the US.”* That guide was written in collaboration with the Jewish Dialogue Group in Philadelphia. Visit our website for more information about downloading or ordering those guides and for other resources including stories from people who have used earlier editions of this Guide: www.publicconversations.org.

If you conduct a dialogue that draws on these pages, we hope you will let us know how it goes, what you found helpful, and how this *Guide* can be improved. You can reach us at info@publicconversations.org. Your feedback will improve the next edition.

We dedicate these pages to those who seek to make or maintain human connections strong enough to embrace conflicting, even irreconcilable, worldviews, fear, confusion, anger—and, ultimately, hope.

The Staff of the Public Conversations Project

1.2 What We Mean by “Dialogue”

“Dialogue” has different meanings for different people. For the Public Conversations Project (PCP), a dialogue is any conversation in which participants search for understanding rather than for agreements or solutions. (Appendix A presents a table that clearly distinguishes dialogue from polarized debate.)

A good dialogue offers those who participate the opportunity to:

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

Participants in PCP-style dialogues usually agree to follow communication guidelines that support these purposes. In our experience, the more fundamental and passionate the differences among those involved, the more important it is to clearly articulate and commit to such agreements and to have a group leader or facilitator present who can remind participants to observe them.

1.3 Who This Guide is Intended to Serve

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

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

It also can be used with a group of family members. Our website (www.publicconversations.org) offers a version of these materials customized for use with families and other loved ones. As mentioned above (Section 1.1) our website also includes information about a more comprehensive guide that is well-suited for both single and multi-session dialogues and for dialogue initiatives that require a more involved planning process due to the complexities of the situation or the intensity of the polarization.

1.4 Different Ways to Use This Guide

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

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

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

<http://www.publicconversations.org/Pages/commsecs>.

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

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

2. Planning the Dialogue: Questions and Answers

2.1 Convening Your Group

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

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

What's the ideal number of participants?

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

Where should I hold the dialogue?

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

How long should the dialogue take?

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

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

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

The greater the likelihood that conflict will emerge in the group, the more care and experience will be required to prepare for and facilitate the dialogue. If you'd like to work with such a group, here are some ideas to consider:

- first do a "test run" of the format with a group that feels a little less challenging, e.g., a group with established relationships of trust and respect, and one in which political and religious divides are not cavernous.
- attend a skill-building workshop offered by PCP. See www.publicconversations.org.
- partner with someone who is more experienced.
- use PCP's more comprehensive guide, *Fostering Dialogue Across Divides: A Nuts and Bolts Guide from the Public Conversations Project*.¹ See www.publicconversations.org.

¹ The format described in this guide has stood the test of time as a fruitful and replicable approach to facilitating a single session, introductory community dialogue. Our more comprehensive guide is more suitable for groups that have complicated histories, multiple purposes, a need to spend more time together, and/or a desire to move beyond the sort of structured exchange described here. Most of PCP's work over the past two decades is of the latter sort; it involves customized designs and preparatory processes that usually involve collaborative planning with the participants.

If you aren't sure where to start in your search for a more experienced partner, contact us at PCP. We may have ideas; we may even know someone in your area who has taken one of our trainings.

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

How should I invite people?

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

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

What should I include in the invitation?

We recommend that you include something about:

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

Appendix C presents two sample invitations.

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

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

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

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

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

2.2 Design and Preparation

How closely should I follow the Plan?

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

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

What decisions will I have to make ahead of time?

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

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

What if I need to shorten the Plan?

There are a variety of ways to shorten the *Plan* presented in Section 3 if you have less than two hours to work with. Some options are:

1. Invite participants to work with one another and with you to make the most of the short time frame available. (See Section 2.3 for ideas on how to do this.)
2. Give tighter instructions and allow a shorter amount of time for introductions (Section 3.2.3). For example, you could ask people to introduce themselves by mentioning *one* hope or interest that led them to choose to participate.
3. Combine the First Question and the Second Question into one go-round.
4. During the time for reflection before each go-round, ask participants to focus and

prioritize their responses.

5. Shorten the unstructured discussion (Section 3.2.6).
6. Shorten the closing comments (Section 3.2.7). You might say something like, "I'd like you to think of a word or a phrase that describes your experience of this dialogue," or "Tell us one thing you valued about this conversation."

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

You can welcome and orient the whole group and, as time permits, ask people to say their names and one sentence as a means of introduction. Then they can be divided into small, diverse groups, each with a facilitator. The facilitators can complete the welcoming process, including comments about his or her role, in the small groups.

There are a number of ways of subdividing groups. Some are random (e.g., "Count off by 3's and all the 1's go..."). Others try to connect people who know each other less well (e.g., "Stand next to someone you never met until tonight or rarely see...Then the two of you find another pair that neither of you know very well...") If you notice that the resulting subgroups are unbalanced in some way (e.g., in terms of race, ethnicity, or gender, and better balance is possible and desirable) you can ask for volunteers to switch groups.

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

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

What's a "go-round"?

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

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

What is the advantage of using go-rounds?

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

- They provide a tight structure and clear expectations, which reduces anxiety.

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

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

First, it is difficult for people to listen attentively to what others are saying if they have not had time to collect their own thoughts. Second, speakers who have the chance to collect their own thoughts before they hear others speak are more likely to make their own distinctive contribution. They are less likely to speak in reaction to what others have said. (Solid research is available that documents the power that the first speaker’s comments have on the rest of a conversation.)

Once people sit down, what steps should I take?

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

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

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

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

Can I add or replace questions?

Yes, but we strongly recommend that any questions you use:

- encourage reflection;
- avoid narrowing assumptions, “buzz words,” stereotypes, and jargon; and
- encourage people to speak from their own perspectives and experience, rather than in abstractions or in sweeping statements about what others “really” think.

Consider, for example, the different effects of these two questions about displaying the American flag.

- What thoughts and feelings are stirred in you when you see a flag on a car or a house or a lapel? If and when you display one, what does it mean to you?

or

- What do you think of all the flag-waving that is going on out there?

The first question invites expression of the meaning that the listener attaches to this symbol. The second includes a phrase that invites judgments about other people's expressions and meanings.

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

What are some examples of additional questions?

Here are some examples of generic questions you might pose. For additional topic-specific questions, see Appendix H.

1. What is most encouraging, confusing, or worrisome for you about the current global situation and/or the ways individuals, groups, or organizations such as governments and the media have been responding to it?
2. What strengths or values have you found yourself drawing on as you try to understand and respond to what is going on in the world?
3. How have your responses and concerns shifted over time?
4. Has the current situation affected your individual identity and/or your identity as a member of a group (racial, ethnic, regional, religious, national, etc.)? If so, can you mention one or two personal experiences related to the shift you mention?
5. What untapped opportunities, if any, do you see in the current situation?

What supplies should I have on hand?

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

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

We do not recommend full participation by the facilitator unless the group has a high degree of trust and/or the facilitator is experienced and able to be sensitive to the impact of his or her contributions on the group. Some questions to ask yourself are:

1. Are you comfortable playing both roles?
2. Are your views likely to be so controversial as to raise questions about your ability to be a fair facilitator?
3. Will you be viewed as a privileged participant, less subject to the guidelines?

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

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

2.3 Facilitation

What will be my role as facilitator?

The main responsibilities of the facilitator are to:

- welcome people and orient them to the event and its purpose;
- get agreement to a set of guidelines;
- remind people about their agreements if they forget them; and
- move the group through the dialogue, keeping an eye on time. How active you will need to be as a facilitator will depend on your group. Some groups or individual participants need a lot of time management; others do not. Some will need a reminder about the spirit of dialogue; others will not. If you’re not sure about what your group needs at a particular juncture, don’t feel that you need to read the participants’ minds. Ask them! For example, “We have about 45 minutes to go. Would you like to keep going, or take a 5-minute break?”

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

What guidelines should I propose to the group?

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

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

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

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

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

How can I help the participants use the time well?

There are two purposes of time management:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Alternatively, you can ask one person to play this role. He or she keeps the watch or egg timers and gives a visual and/or verbal signal when each speaker’s time is up.

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

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

What if someone is overwhelmed with emotion?

Speaking and listening about divisive issues that touch people’s core beliefs can be emotional. By and large, the structure and spirit of dialogues based on this *Guide* will create an environment within which participants will feel connected and resilient enough to stay fully engaged if other participants become very emotional. It is rare for emotional responses to be so strong that they pose a dilemma for the facilitator. However, if the topic of the dialogue is one that invites participants to speak about their experiences of past trauma, some individuals may become upset, tearful, fearful, or angry.

When feelings of grief or sadness arise, groups of people who know each other well will probably know what to do. They may offer support, for example, by taking the person’s hand or making another gesture of comfort.

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

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

What if someone becomes very angry?

If a participant becomes so angry that she verbally attacks another participant, it will be important for you to intervene. It may be easiest to call for a break and talk to the person privately, especially if you think that person will feel shamed by being spoken to in front of others. On the other hand, addressing the situation in the group has the advantages of being more transparent and possibly less disruptive. The presence of other participants may or may not be a resource. In either case, we suggest you begin by sharing your perceptions of the person's feelings and recent behavior and asking if her perceptions match yours.

Usually the participant’s perceptions will overlap sufficiently with yours for her to acknowledge having been carried beyond the purposes and spirit of the dialogue. In this case, we suggest you ask her how you and/or the other participants might help her to have her feelings and also participate while remaining within the ground rules.

If neither of you can think of ways to do this, cite the responsibilities of your role and suggest, with regret, that she withdraw from the dialogue. Ask if she wants to say some closing words to the group or have you do so for her.

If you and/or she decide she needs to leave, appreciate her coming and acknowledge that it can be hard to know how the dialogue will move someone in advance.

Consider a phone call after the dialogue to brief her on what happened and learn about her reflections on the experience. You can tell her that this feedback will be especially helpful for other people who want to conduct this kind of conversation.

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

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

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

With legitimacy and compassion.

What constitutes a “legitimate” intervention?

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

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

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

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

What constitutes a “compassionate” intervention?

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

Suppose Susan's comments in two go-rounds strongly suggest (in your mind) that anyone who doesn't agree with her is immoral or dangerously unrealistic. Susan

hasn't directly criticized another participant or what people said; nonetheless her tone and some of her language makes you feel uncertain about whether she is implicitly insulting the intelligence and morality of those who have expressed different views.

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

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

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

What if someone repeatedly neglects to observe the guidelines?

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

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

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

A direct and honest approach is best. Share your perception with the group and ask participants what their perceptions are. If they agree that there has been a mismatch between the agreements they made and the ways they are talking, you can ask what

agreements would serve them best now. The group may re-commit to the original agreements or decide to modify them.

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

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

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

What if the dialogue doesn't go well?

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

What if the participants want to plan future sessions?

For guidance in the collaborative planning of multi-session dialogues, see PCP's 183 page guide, *Fostering Dialogue Across Divides: A Nuts and Bolts Guide from the Public Conversations Project*. Visit www.publicconversations.org.

How can my experience be helpful to others?

By telling the staff at the Public Conversations Project about it! We are interested in learning what was difficult as well as what went smoothly. Some of our most important learning has come from what we felt at the time were "failures." We plan to continually refine this Guide with the help of people like you. So tell us what worked and what you would do differently next time using the feedback forms in Section 4.

3. THE PLAN

3.1 The Flow of the Plan

Welcome and Orientation (5 minutes)

Agreements (10 minutes)

Introductions and Hopes (10 minutes)

First Question (20 minutes)

Second Question (20 minutes)

Facilitated Discussion (35 minutes)

Parting Words (15 minutes)

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

3.2 The Plan: Step by Step

3.2.1 WELCOME AND ORIENTATION

5 minutes

Purposes

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

Welcome and restatement of purpose

Say something like

“Welcome. I’m glad that you decided to participate in this dialogue. It’s likely that each of us has been affected differently by _____ [*insert topic of conversation*]. I hope this will be a time when you’ll feel fully welcome to speak about your experiences and your views and when you can commit to listening to each other with resilience even when what you hear upsets you. By taking in different views, we may leave with richer and wider perspectives. At least we will understand each other better.”

Schedule and ending time

Say something like

“Let me tell you a little bit about the flow of the dialogue. (*Refer to a handout or posted newsprint if you have made them. See Section 3.1.*)

We’ll begin by making some agreements—that is, we’ll agree on some communication guidelines for our time together.

Then, we’ll have a quick go-round in which you can say something about what led you to participate or what you hope for.

Next, we’ll have two go-rounds in which you can respond to two questions that I will pose.

Following the go-rounds, we’ll have at least a half hour for less structured conversation in which you can explore connections among your experiences and perspectives.

Those connections might take the form of one person asking another person a question. Or they might take the form of simply noting similarities and differences and exploring them a bit further.

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

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

Pens and paper

Say something like

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

Your role

Say something like

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

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

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

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

3.2.2 AGREEMENTS

10 minutes

Purpose

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

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

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

PROPOSED AGREEMENTS

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

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

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

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

After reading the guidelines, you can say something like

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

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

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

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

Look for verbal and non-verbal responses.

“OK, these will serve as our agreements.”

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

3.2.3 INTRODUCTIONS AND HOPES

10 minutes

Purpose

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

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

(Facilitator chooses one or two of the following)

- something that led you to accept the invitation to join this dialogue.
-or-
- something that you hope to experience or learn while you are here.
-or-
- something that could happen in this conversation that would lead you to feel glad that you decided to participate.

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

3.2.4 FIRST QUESTION

20 minutes (Time for each response: 3 minutes)

Purpose

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

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

(Facilitator chooses one question)

How have events related to _____ [*insert topic of conversation*] affected you personally?

-or-

Can you tell us something about your life experience or current situation that will help us understand your views and concerns about _____ [*insert topic of conversation*]?

“First, let’s take a minute to collect our thoughts.”

After pause, repeat the questions.

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

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

3.2.5 SECOND QUESTION

20 minutes (Time for each response: 3 minutes)

Purposes

To encourage participants to:

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

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

(Facilitator chooses one or two of the following)*

What are your views, hopes, and fears regarding _____ *[insert topic of conversation]*? What is the “heart of the matter” for you?

-or-

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

-or-

Have you experienced any mixed feelings, value conflicts, and/or areas of confusion or uncertainty about _____ *[insert topic of conversation]*? If so, please describe.

-or-

In regards to _____ *[insert topic of conversation]*, is there anything you have been finding difficult to sort out in your own mind or to speak about? If you don’t wish to say aloud what is difficult, can you say what makes this thought or experience difficult to bring up?

“First, let’s take a minute to collect our thoughts.”

After a pause, repeat the questions.

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

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

**Note: If participants already have spoken about their current views, choose a question that elicits their uncertainties. If they already have spoken about their uncertainties, you can invite them to say more about their views, worries or hopes.*

3.2.6 FACILITATED DISCUSSION

35 minutes

Purpose

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

Tone-setting comments

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

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

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

CONTRIBUTING TO A CONNECTED CONVERSATION

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

(A handout version is available in Appendix G.)

3.2.7 PARTING WORDS

15 minutes

Purposes

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

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

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

(Facilitator chooses one of the following)

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

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

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

4. FEEDBACK FORMS

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

A very simple Participant Feedback Form follows, as well as two versions of a Facilitator Feedback Form—one more detailed than the other. If you prefer, you can fill out the Facilitator Feedback Form online at: <http://conversations.forms.soceco.org/99/>. Or, you can download Microsoft Word versions of the forms at <http://www.publicconversations.org/Pages/commsecs>.

We hope you will share with us as much as you have the time and inclination to write. Future users of the *Guide*, as well as PCP, will benefit from the fruits of your experience.

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

Web: <http://conversations.forms.soceco.org/99/>

Email: info@publicconversations.org

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

Participant Feedback Form

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

Name: *(optional)*

Facilitator Feedback Form: Short Version

Facilitator's Name:

E-Mail:

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

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

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

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

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

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

7. What did participants value about the conversation?

8. What did they find difficult or disappointing?

9. What suggestions did they have for improvement?

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

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

Facilitator Feedback Form: Long Version

Facilitator's Name:

E-Mail:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

15. How did you elicit feedback from the participants?

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

17. What was less than satisfying for the participants?

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

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

20. What was less than satisfying for you, the facilitator?

21. What advice did the participants have, or do you have, for people considering organizing a dialogue about a challenging issue?

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

Appendix A: Distinguishing Debate from Dialogue

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

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

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Appendix B: Self Help Tools for Participants

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

Appendix C: Two Sample Invitations

Sample Invitation #1

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

WATERTOWN RESIDENTS' DIALOGUE
ABOUT _____ [*insert topic of conversation*]

Friday, Feb. 22, 2002
7 to 9 PM
Town Hall conference room (first floor)

WHAT TO EXPECT

- This dialogue will be a facilitated small group conversation among individuals who have a variety of views about this issue.
- This dialogue will be a structured conversation, *not* a debate, a negotiation, or a mediation.
- This dialogue will take place in an environment in which participants can speak and be spoken to in a manner that respects their shared humanity and fosters mutual understanding.

TERMS OF PARTICIPATION

All participants will be expected to observe the following ground rules:

- Listen attentively, without interruption.
- Speak in ways that promote learning and genuine inquiry.
- Seek to understand each other, not to attack or persuade.
- Honor requests for confidentiality, if they are made.
- Honor each other's right to "pass" if not ready or willing to respond to a question; all participation is voluntary.

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

RSVP: Call Zoe Reinold, [phone number], or email her at [email address]

Sample Invitation #2

Dear Friends,

I'm writing to ask you to join me in an experiment in dialogue. The topic will be _____[insert topic of conversation].

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

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

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

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

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

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

Thanks for hearing me out. When you know whether or not you're interested in having such a dialogue, you can e-mail me a reply at [e-mail address] or call me at [phone number]. Hope to see you on Feb. 22.

Warm regards,
Jane B. Smith

Appendix D: Facilitator Worksheet

Welcome and Orientation (5 minutes)

Purposes

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

Your Notes:

Agreements (10 minutes)

Purpose

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

Your Notes:

Introductions and Hopes (10 minutes)

Purpose

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

Your Notes/Chosen Question:

First Question (20 minutes)

Purpose

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

Your Notes/Chosen Question:

Second Question (20 minutes)

Purposes

To encourage participants to:

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

Your Notes/Chosen Question:

Facilitated Discussion (35 minutes)

Purpose:

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

Your Notes:

Parting Words (15 minutes)

Purposes:

To encourage reflection about what participants learned or valued.

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

Your Notes/Chosen Question:

Reminder: Ask for feedback

Appendix E

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

by Bob Stains, PCP's Program Director

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

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

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

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

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

PROPOSED AGREEMENTS

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

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

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

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

CONTRIBUTING TO A CONNECTED CONVERSATION

- **Mention something you learned**
Have you heard something that stirred fresh thoughts or feelings?
- **Pick up and extend a thread**
Has an interesting theme or idea emerged that you'd like to add to?
- **Clarify differences**
Have you heard something you disagree with? If so, check to see if you understood it correctly. Then say what was unsettling or disagreeable to you and why.
- **Ask a question**
Did you hear something you'd like to understand better? If you ask a question, be sure it reflects genuine curiosity and is not a challenge in disguise.

APPENDIX H

TOPIC-SPECIFIC QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

Questions for a Dialogue about the Iraq War (2004)

Tips for convening a dialogue on this topic:

- On this topic, you may want to consider providing related articles, either to read ahead of time or to take home.
- Some participants may feel frustrated after a dialogue if they don't know how to voice their foreign policy concerns to decision makers. You may want to provide materials that will help them participate in a constructive democratic process. For example, you might provide contact information for their representatives in the Senate and House of Representatives as well as for the President.

FIRST GO-ROUND OPTIONS

- 1) Can you tell us something about your life experience or current situation that will help us understand your views and concerns about the war in Iraq?
- 2) What are your views, hopes, and fears regarding the war? What is the "heart of the matter" for you?

SECOND GO-ROUND OPTIONS

- 3) Have you experienced any mixed feelings, value conflicts, and/or areas of confusion or uncertainty about the war? If so, please describe.
- 4) What are the central assumptions and values that underlie your views and uncertainties?
- 5) What experience or credible information might alter your views, hopes, and concerns?
- 6) Have the war in Iraq and/or the impact of past or anticipated terrorist attacks strained or challenged relationships that matter to you? If so, how?
- 7) Have you had a constructive conversation about the war with anyone who disagrees with you? If you have, what was the focus of that conversation and what made it possible? If you have not, what internal and/or external barriers have kept you from having such a conversation? What could help you surmount these barriers?
- 8) What are the questions we need to ask ourselves about this war—as individuals, as members of various groups and organizations, and as citizens? Why do you think these questions are important?

- 9) What questions could provide a constructive focus for the conversations you want to have with immediate family and friends? With neighbors or colleagues? With activists or politicians? What makes these good questions?
- 10) What strains or fault lines in your local community are of concern to you at this point? How do you think these divisions will be affected by unfolding events in the Middle East?
- 11) Where do you see the strongest need for dialogue in your community? How might you help create more opportunities for community dialogue?
- 12) What actions do you think US leaders should take to keep the war with Iraq from dividing Americans and/or from further estranging the US from its international allies?
- 13) What specific events or changes have altered your sense of individual, national, and international "security"? In what way do you feel more "secure"? Less "secure"? What are some specific actions our leaders could take that might increase your sense of security at home and abroad?
- 14) What could the US do regarding Iraq that would make you feel proud to be an American citizen (or to live here)?

Questions for a Dialogue about Abortion

INTRODUCING YOURSELF AND YOUR VIEWS

- 1) What life experiences may have shaped your current views about abortion?
- 2) When thinking about abortion, what is the "heart of the matter" for you?
- 3) Are you aware of mixed feelings, value conflicts, uncertainties, or other dilemmas within your overall perspective on this issue? If so, what are they?

SILENCE, STEREOTYPES AND STRESSFUL CONVERSATIONS

- 4) If you have ideas or feelings about abortion that you keep to yourself, what makes you do so?
- 5) Have you ever felt stereotyped by those who hold different views on this issue? If so, how? Which of these stereotypes was most painful to you? Most inaccurate? Why?
- 6) Have you ever had a constructive conversation about abortion with someone who has very different views? If you have, what made this conversation possible?

POLARIZATION

- 7) What fuels the polarizing dynamics of the abortion conflict? What needs to change if we are to deal with our enduring differences about abortion more constructively?
- 8) What effects do you think this polarization has had on US society or on other matters of concern to you?

VISIONS OF THE FUTURE

- 9) Imagine that you are reading these words in the fall of 2053. You have been asked to write a brief op ed reflection about the striking fact that, on the 80th anniversary of Roe v. Wade, abortion is no longer a source of significant political conflict in the US. What has changed? What made these changes possible?

Questions for a September 11 Anniversary Conversation

A SMALL SET OF QUESTIONS FOR THE 10TH ANNIVERSARY OF 9/11/01

- 1) How were you impacted by the attacks of 9/11 and the immediate aftermath? Is there anything others might need to know about who you are and what you have experienced in your life that would help them understand the ways that you were impacted?
- 2) In the fall of 2001, as the US planned and began to implement its response, what were your hopes and fears? What did you feel fairly certain about? What did you feel conflicted about, or uncertain about?
- 3) Now, ten years later, what are your hopes and fears? What has shifted in your understanding of the world around you? What do you feel fairly certain about? What do you feel conflicted about, or uncertain about? What would you like to understand better?
- 4) Over the past ten years, what has occurred – or not occurred – in you, in your community, or the larger world that gives you hope? What has most upset you? And what are you doing, or have you done, to support the future you hope for and to address your concerns?

A LARGER MENU OF QUESTIONS RELATED TO SEPTEMBER 11

- 1) Looking back to the attacks of September 11th, how did those events affect you? What remains memorable a decade later?
- 2) Looking back to the American response in the following year or two, what were your views and concerns then about what should or should not happen? What new learning or understanding has been particularly important to you since September 11, 2001? How has it affected your attitudes or conduct?
- 3) What new questions have you been asking yourself since September 11, 2001?
- 4) Is there anything that you have been finding difficult to figure out or to speak about?
- 5) Have some of your values or beliefs related to global issues been challenged in recent years?
- 6) Given the personal, economic and political challenges of the past few years, what dreams do you now have for yourself, your family, your community, your government? What small steps have you taken, or might

- you take, to help one of these dreams become more real? How could others support you in taking these steps?
- 7) What specific events or changes have altered your sense of individual, national, and international "security?" In what way do you feel more "secure?" Less "secure?" Are there some specific actions our leaders could take that might increase your sense of security at home and abroad?
 - 8) What troubles you most about the course of international events and the role the US has been playing? What do you find reassuring?
 - 9) What ideas or concerns would you especially like to bring to our leaders' attention?
 - 10) What national and international events do you hope we will be celebrating a year from now?
 - 11) What specific actions are you taking (or could you take) that reflect the hopes, beliefs, priorities, and concerns you have mentioned in this conversation?

Questions for a Conversation Across the Red-Blue Divide in the US²

FIRST GO-ROUND: *Our hopes for the dialogue and our underlying values*

- What hopes do you bring to this conversation?
- What values do you hold that lead you to want to try to talk constructively across the red-blue divide? Where or how did you learn those values?

SECOND GO-ROUND: *Sharing what's at the heart of our perspectives*

- What is at the heart of your attraction to, or leaning toward your preferred political party?³
- What hopes, concerns and values do you have that underlie that attraction or leaning?
- (*Important*) What is it in your life experience that has guided you toward those hopes, concerns and values?

THIRD GO-ROUND: *Reflecting upon complexities in our views*

- In what ways have you felt “out of step” with the party you generally support, or in what ways does that party or some elements within that party not fully reflect what’s important to you?⁴
- What aspects of the other party do you admire – or at least understand to be reasonable counter-balances to excesses on the “side” you generally support?

-AND/OR-

THIRD OR FOURTH GO-ROUND: *Stepping away from stereotypes*

During divisive political debates, are there ways that your values and perspectives are stereotyped by the "other side"? If so, what is it about who you are and what you care about that makes those stereotypes especially frustrating or painful? Are there some stereotypes of your own party that you feel are somewhat deserved - even if they are not fully true - given the rhetoric used in political debates?

² These questions are taken from PCP's 3-page guide: Talking Across the Red-Blue Divide: One Person at a Time. See www.publicconversations.org.

³ If “political party” doesn’t capture the differences you want to address, substitute language that fits.

⁴ Feel free to address both topical issues and the manner in which differences are addressed. For example, are there spokespeople with whom you generally agree on some issues who you find to be unnecessarily polarizing or dismissive, making “enemies” out of opponents?

Starting a Dialogue with a Common Stimulus Like a Presentation or Video

PART ONE: GENERAL ADVICE

Adapted from Chapter 4.4 in *Fostering Dialogue Across Divides:
A Nuts and Bolts Guide from the Public Conversations Project*

By Maggie Herzig and Laura Chasin

Offering a shared experience can be a great way to begin a dialogue. Starting with a presentation, a panel of speakers, a reading, a video, or some other experience of visual and/or performance art, can have several advantages. The shared experience can be informative and somewhat “leveling” for a group with different levels of background knowledge. It can be inspiring or thought-provoking. It can also help people warm up to talking with each other about a particular issue. If you plan to use a common stimulus we offer these recommendations.

Choice of Stimulus

The stimulus should be as balanced and non-polemical as possible. If you invite a guest speaker or speakers, it will be important to brief them ahead of time about how you hope their presentation will serve the purposes of the dialogue. You might, for example, encourage them to connect their perspectives to their life experience and to 1) model speaking for themselves as individuals, 2) avoid stereotypes and to speak about those who have other views with respect, 3) focus on their personal responses to the film rather than critiquing the stimulus, 4) avoid grand pronouncements or heady analyses that may be inaccessible to some participants, and 5) share the complexities of their views, not just their certainties. Speeches that are highly academic or meant to be persuasive are valuable in many contexts, but they are usually not good catalysts for dialogue.

The Role of the Common Stimulus

At the beginning of the session, whoever makes the opening remarks should encourage participants to think of the stimulus, not as something to critique or support, nor as the focus of their discussion, but as a common experience that can help them prepare to share their own thoughts and feelings with each other about the particular issues or stories presented. During the dialogue, you may need to remind participants to use the stimulus in this way. If a participant expresses a negative feeling about the stimulus, encourage him or her to speak about the beliefs, feelings and experiences that made that part of the stimulus particularly

upsetting or frustrating. If you have prepared questions to ask following the stimulus, consider telling participants ahead of time what the questions will be.

Transition from Stimulus to Dialogue

If a stimulus is likely to evoke strong emotion, consider, helping participants to make a transition from focusing on the stimulus to talking with each other. This transition time can take the form of a break—an informal time when people can get up and stretch, reflect silently, or talk with someone they know. Alternatively, you can invite them to pair up with one other person and give each person a couple of minutes to speak about his or her thoughts and feelings, while their partner listens silently, without response, critique, or advice.

Questions to Pose After the Stimulus

Some fairly generic questions you can ask after the stimulus, and preview for the participants beforehand, are, “What had special meaning for you? What surprised you? What challenged your usual ways of thinking about the issue? If there was something you found yourself reacting to strongly—in a positive or negative way—what was it and why do you think that stood out for you?” For more specific ideas about questions that may be well suited for communities that are experiencing violence, see the second sample format below. Note that in both of the formats suggested below, the dialogue questions relate to the topic but they don’t elicit comments about the stimulus directly. The focus is on helping the participants to understand each other’s experiences, sources of inspiration, concerns, etc. related to the topic. The film clips serve as a means of stimulating that dialogue, not as the focus of the dialogue.

Additional Advice

When considering using a common stimulus in a group that has only committed to meet once, two caveats are in order:

- Be realistic about time. It is sometimes challenging to offer a satisfying dialogue experience if you only have two hours, especially with a large group, or a group whose size and composition is not known ahead of time. If a stimulus takes more than 20-30 minutes, it will be even more challenging to fit everything in. If you want to use a longer video, consider planning multiple sessions and using different segments of the video in each session. For advice in planning multi-session dialogues, see *Fostering Dialogue Across Divides: A Nuts and Bolts Guide from the Public Conversations Project*.
- In a community that is painfully divided, and/or one where the stakes are high, you may be better off skipping the stimulus and allowing adequate time to lay the foundation for a meaningful dialogue. If participants have a positive experience in that single session, they may be interested in another session that utilizes a common stimulus.

PART TWO: TWO SAMPLE FORMATS INCORPORATING VIDEO CLIPS

The Public Conversations Project has been pleased to work with Active Voice in San Francisco on two projects that utilize PBS documentaries as a stimulus to community dialogue: **The Islam Project** (2002-2003) and **The Mystery of Love Project** (2006). We offer here a format for interfaith dialogue that was well field-tested during our work on the Islam Project, and a suggested format for use with a segment of *The Mystery of Love* that addresses issues of violence, reconciliation and love.

About The Islam Project⁵

The Islam Project supported dialogue and education about Islam to reduce prejudice and discrimination, build bridges between Muslim and non-Muslim communities, and foster an appreciation religious pluralism in the US. Key materials for the project were two PBS films from which thematic clips tapes were produced for use at educational events and dialogues. The films are: *Muhammad: Legacy of a Prophet*, produced by Kikim Media and Unity Productions, and *Muslims*, produced by the Independent Production Fund for FRONTLINE

The Islam Project was implemented in several cities by local lead organizations. The Public Conversations Project was the lead organization in Boston. We used a set of clips from *Mohammad: Legacy of a Prophet* entitled: *The Example of Mohammad in Action*. A VHS tape of that and other film clip modules can be obtained by calling the Independent Production Fund at 800-727-2470 or by ordering the modules at <https://128bit.clickandpledge.com/default.aspx?ID=10156&cid=US&a=>. If you need a DVD format, contact Lisa Zbar at IPF at 212-221-6310 x 23. For more information about The Islam Project, visit www.theislamproject.org.

In Boston, we began by partnering with the Islamic Society of Boston to gather civic and religious leaders and to think together about what opportunities the Islam Project might offer for Boston. Out of this meeting came a commitment to work in three areas: interfaith dialogue; dialogue about civic values; and outreach to specific groups like healthcare professionals.

⁵ The Islam Project was sponsored by Carnegie Corporation of New York, The James Irvine Foundation, The Nathan Cummings Foundation, Surdna Foundation, and the Hasan Family Foundation.

Over 11 months, we worked with 28 different organizations to convene several dialogues:

- *five evenings of interfaith dialogue in five different communities.*

Each evening was designed collaboratively with several co-sponsors and each was attended by 50-80 participants. While the programs varied in different settings, all of the events involved showing the film clips mentioned above and having participants meet in small groups for facilitated dialogue. A typical program and dialogue format is presented below.

- *one event that focused on civic and social values.*

This event was held at Boston's Immigration Museum: Dreams of Freedom. Participants engaged in small group dialogues that focused on how each participant's social values, whether formed through religious or secular means, relate to American ideals. This evening included brief talks by an African-American Muslim and a Pakistani-American Muslim about their experience as Muslims in America.

- *a panel discussion and screening for about 50 health care providers.*

This was held at Massachusetts General Hospital. It was organized and hosted by Partners International Healthcare in conjunction with The Islam Project-Boston.

A Program for Interfaith Dialogue from The Islam Project-Boston

On the next page is the text of the program we used in one of the five interfaith dialogues. About 80 people attended. They were given name tags with group assignments that maximized diversity in each small group. The event began in theatre style set-up in the community center of a church. The opening remarks included an overview of the evening and its purposes and some proposed communication agreements. The 19-minute set of clips "The Example of Mohammad in Action," was shown. After the screening, small groups gathered in breakout spaces, each with a facilitator. After the small group dialogues, participants returned to the theatre style seating. Three people, who had been asked ahead of time, started the process of sharing reflections, then others also shared their reflections on the experience of the dialogue.

Faith and Inspiration

An interfaith dialogue inspired by The Islam Project

*Sponsored by:
Wayland Clergy Association
Weston Clergy Association
Weston-Wayland Interfaith Action Group*

*Sunday, February 2, 2003
7:00 – 9:00 PM
Saint Ann's Church Hall
Wayland*

7:00

Get nametags and refreshments

7:15

Opening Remarks

Welcome: Father Frank J. Silva, Pastor, Saint Ann's Parish

Introduction to the Islam Project: Maggie Herzig, Public Conversations Project

7:25

*Screening of Clips from "Muhammad: Legacy of a Prophet"
produced by Kikim Media and Unity Productions for PBS*

7:45

Dialogue in Small Groups

8:30

Re-convene in Full Group

Reflections by:

Rabbi Hermann Blumberg, Temple Shir Tikva

Reverend Philip J. Mayher, Congregational Church of Weston

Aziza Hussain, Islamic Center of Boston

...and others who wish to speak

8:55

Parting Words: Father Frank J. Silva

FORMAT FOR SMALL GROUP DIALOGUES (A HANDOUT)

I. Identification of Facilitator

II. Consideration of Proposed Agreements

- 1) We will speak for ourselves and from our own experience.
- 2) We will listen with resilience and respect.
- 3) We will set aside the need to persuade others to agree with us.
- 4) We will not interrupt.
- 5) We will "pass" if we do not wish to speak.

III. Introductions

Please say your name, identify your faith community, and share, if you wish, something about your experience of the film – perhaps something about a particular image or story that moved you or informed you. (Please be brief.)

IV. First Go Round: Sources of Guidance and Inspiration

Read Question • Pause • Go around, 2 minutes each

As you strive to be a faithful person, who/what do you turn to for guidance and inspiration? During the course of your life history were there particularly formative or transformative times that relate to your choosing those sources of guidance and inspiration?

V. Second Go Round: Faith in Action

Read Question • Pause • Go around, 2 minutes each

In the film we met three Muslims who spoke about ways that their faith is expressed in action, in their professions and in their personal lives. In what ways, large or small, is your faith or value system expressed in your life?

VI. Questions and Discussion

- *Have you heard something you'd like to understand more about? (If so, you might want to check to see if you heard it right, then ask a question.)*
- *Is there an additional thought you'd like to share that was stimulated by hearing others speak?*

VII. Parting Words

- *Is there something else you'd like to say to bring this conversation to a satisfying close?*

About *The Mystery of Love Project* ⁶

The Mystery of Love Project is a nationwide community engagement project coordinated by Active Voice of San Francisco. It uses the documentary, *The Mystery of Love*, as a springboard for conversations about the many different kinds of love in our lives. Narrated by Anna Deavere Smith, and produced by the Independent Production Fund, the film tells stories of marriage, family, friendship, divine love, altruistic love, brotherly love, the love between parents and children, and love of community. The Public Conversations Project is serving as a National Ally on the project. Airdate on PBS is December 13, 2006 (check local listings). Visit www.themysteryoflove.org/community.php for a discussion guide and for more information about the film. The film can be purchased at www.shoppbs.org.

A SAMPLE FORMAT FOR DIALOGUE ABOUT VIOLENCE IN OUR COMMUNITIES

This sample format is designed for use with the “Brotherly Love” segment of *The Mystery of Love* in which we meet Azim Khamisa, the father of a murdered 20-year-old man and Ples Felix, the grandfather of the 14-year-old who committed the murder. The “Brotherly Love” film clip can be used in an event structured like the Islam Project dialogues, with an introduction in a large group, followed by facilitated dialogue in small groups, and closed by reflections back with the full group. The following dialogue sample is offered as food for thought⁷ for those who would like to bring together various segments of the community to engage in dialogue to address their concerns about violence in their community. The dialogue can occur in various settings—for instance, interfaith, inter-cultural, and or inter-generational group. The participants may include teens, parents, healthcare and social service providers, clergy, elected officials, and educators. The film clip is particularly useful in allowing participants to consider how violence affects everyone in a community – both directly and indirectly. The powerful personal stories also serve as an effective catalyst for viewers to reflect upon their own stories and experiences.

The suggested format can be used in an evening session of 2 1/2 hours, e.g. the event could run from 7:00 PM to 9:30 PM.

⁶ Major support for The Mystery of Love is provided by the Fetzer Institute as part of The Campaign for Love & Forgiveness: www.loveandforgive.org. Additional support provided by Southwest Airlines, and the Betsy Gordon Foundation. The Independent Production Fund gratefully acknowledges the Fetzer Institute for supporting this community engagement initiative.

⁷ It is beyond the scope of this guide to give detailed guidance on the process of achieving a good match between the needs of a community and the specific program to be offered. PCP’s collaborative approach to planning dialogues is described in *Fostering Dialogue Across Divides: A Nuts and Bolts Guide from the Public Conversations Project*, available through www.publicconversations.org.

I. Opening Remarks and Film Clip Screening in the Full Group

(20 minutes)

Welcoming remarks, a statement of purpose, and orientation to the flow of the event can be offered by a respected leader or leaders or by representatives of the various groups, communities or organizations. If the community has suffered a recent tragedy, the opening remarks can acknowledge it and include a moment of silence or prayer appropriate to the community. If there are relevant ongoing initiatives, they can be mentioned briefly to ground the dialogue in the current situation.

Then the segment of film can be shown. (It is about 9 minutes long.) After the film screening, instructions can be given for breaking up into diverse groups of five to seven people, each with a facilitator. If parents and teens are in the group, consider breaking the adults into groups first, then inviting the teens to spread themselves out evenly among the groups with no pressure to go into the same or different groups from their own parents – it’s their choice – they’ll “get *different* things out of being with people they are less close to or more close to.”

II. Dialogue in Small Groups (5-7 people each)

(1 hour and 15 minutes)

A. Opening Comments and Agreements

- Make any opening comments that seem appropriate regarding your role and the plan for the dialogue. (See Section 3.2.1). In particular, we recommend that you:
- Use a handout like the one on page 54, and explain that the first part of the dialogue will be very structured by the opening questions to which each person will respond – or “pass” or “pass for now.”
- Give people pens or pencils and let them know that after you read each of the opening questions, and before they go-around to answer, there will be a couple minutes of silence so they can collect their thoughts. Also, you may want to encourage them to jot down notes to themselves when they hear something they’d like to understand better as they will have time later to ask each other questions.

Ask the group to consider proposed agreements like those and/or others that are appropriate to the community and its circumstances:

1. We will speak for ourselves and allow others to speak for themselves, with no pressure to represent or explain a whole group.
2. We will listen with care and with the intent to understand.
3. We will share airtime and participate within the suggested time frames.

4. We will not interrupt except to indicate that we did not or cannot hear a speaker.
5. We will “pass” or “pass for now” if we are not ready or willing to respond to a question.
6. When we discuss our experience here with people outside the group, we will not attach names or other identifying information to particular comments unless we have permission to do so.

B. Brief Introductions

Please say your name and introduce yourself with just a sentence or two by mentioning a place where you spend much of your time and/or a place where you feel most at home or best known (e.g. school, neighborhood, faith community, family).

Pause, repeat the questions then invite a sentence or two each⁸

C. Three Opening Go-Rounds

#1: Your experiences in this community⁹

How have violent events in the community, or fears of violence, impacted you in your life? How do they make a difference in how you feel about yourself and others, what you do or don't do, how your body feels, etc. If you can, please give an example or share a story that might help others to understand why it matters to you to reduce violence in your community.

Pause, repeat the question, then invite participants to speak up to 2 minutes each

#2: Strengths in yourself

In the film, Azim draws upon his religious beliefs to reach out to Ples with love. Please think of a time when you made a difference – when you made a situation safer for yourself or others or when you resisted violence in the face of hurt and anger. Don't worry if it's a “small” thing that you did – that's fine. What strengths, values, beliefs or commitments did you draw upon to act as you did? Is there someone in your life who was proud - or would have been proud - to witness this strength or these values in you? *(No need to talk about the situation in detail. You won't have a lot of time. Focus on the strengths, values, beliefs, commitments, etc.)*

Pause, repeat the question, then invite people to speak up to 2 minutes each

⁸ At PCP, we sometimes use the “one breath rule” when asking for very brief responses. If you have to take another breath, you've gone on too long. The facilitator can model a brief “one-breath” response.

⁹ This question presumes that the community is facing challenges related to violence.

#3: Resources in this community

Azim and Ples drew upon values, beliefs and strengths in themselves to become active and make a difference. As you think about the strengths that have been shared here and the resources in the community that you notice and value, what do you see as opportunities for action or as promising methods, or as sources of hope and inspiration for reducing fear and violence in the community?

Pause, repeat the question, then invite anyone who is ready to speak.

D. Asking Questions of Each Other

Is there something you heard that you'd like to better understand or learn more about?¹⁰

Take a few questions and invite answer, leaving 10 minutes for the closing.

E. Closing the Small Group Dialogue: Reflections, Inspiration and Ideas

Please take a couple minutes to think about what you've learned or experienced here tonight – what you said, what you heard, how you listened, what concerned you or inspired you. Then we'll go around and you'll have a chance to say, taking just a minute or so to answer any of these questions – no need to address them all:

- What did you notice about how you spoke and listened and connected to other people here?
- What ideas or thoughts would you like to take from this group back to the full group (where you'll be invited to briefly share reflections, as you wish – no "group report" is required).
- What would you like to take out of this room, into your life, perhaps to think about some more, share with a friend or someone else in your life, etc?

Pose the questions, pause for a couple minutes, then repeat the questions and invite answers.

IV. Re-convening in the Full Group: Reflections and Next Steps

(15-20 minutes)

After the small group dialogues, the group can re-convene to hear reflections and ideas. It's helpful to ask participants to be brief. As in the format used for the Islam Project-Boston, a few people can be asked ahead of time if they will begin the process of sharing reflections and model brevity.

The sharing of reflections may evolve into a brainstorming session about next steps in which case notes should be taken and participants should leave with a clear

¹⁰ See also "Contributing to a Connected Conversation," Appendix G.

idea about how next steps will be further explored or implemented. If this transition does not occur, the facilitator can ask if anyone has ideas about next steps or action plans. When a community has been hurting it is especially important to consider possibilities for action and change after people have opened their hearts in the dialogue, or at least to acknowledge that a dialogue that promotes understanding is often a good first step toward collaborative action. Use a feedback form that includes a question about ideas for the future and interest in follow-up initiatives. See page 27 for a sample feedback form.