

# STORYTELLING TOOLKIT



Facilitated Dialogue



Smithsonian  
Institution



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***This handbook provides basic grounding in the methodology behind facilitated dialogue programs.*** This includes crafting evocative questions, the use of appropriate dialogue techniques, and suggested facilitator responses. This handbook is rooted in methodology utilized by members of the *International Coalition of Sites of Conscience*, a worldwide network of more than 200 places of memory dedicated to remembering past struggles for justice and addressing their contemporary legacies. Aiming to move visitors beyond passive learning. Sites of Conscience use facilitated dialogue as an interpretive strategy to enable visitors to better access larger historical and humanities themes within their exhibits, tours, programs, and social media.

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# What is Dialogue?

**Through facilitated dialogue programs, host sites for the exhibition can tap into the power of the exhibition to open new conversations about difficult subjects that surround the content.**

Dialogue stems from the Greek words “dia” and “logos” or “through words.” It is a mode of communication, which invites people with varied experiences and often differing perspectives to engage in an open-ended conversation toward the express goal of personal and collective learning. It requires participants to move beyond surface assumptions that inform their beliefs and actions and keep an open mind, suspending their judgment of the opinions of others.

Dialogue acknowledges that there are different “ways of knowing” about any given subject. It grants equal value to the insights drawn from personal experience and the knowledge gained from study. Dialogue assumes that it is possible for two markedly different perspectives to coexist at the same time.

The process of dialogue requires participants to establish and nurture a culture of mutual trust and openness. Facilitated dialogue refers to a process “led” by a neutral facilitator. Facilitators use a combination of questions, techniques, activities and ground rules to ensure that all participants can communicate with safety and integrity. Because dialogue is a non-hierarchical mode of communication, facilitators also uphold equality among all participants.

A facilitated dialogue can occur either after a shared experience (for example, a visit to the exhibition), or dialogue questions can be asked throughout the shared experience at appropriate moments.

## **Dialogue vs. other modes of communication**

**Conversation.** Sharing information and ideas in order to express one's views without any intended impact on the listener.

**Discussion.** Sharing information and ideas in order to accomplish a task.

**Debate.** Sharing information and ideas in an effort to bring others into agreement or alignment with one's position or belief.

**Dialogue.** Sharing ideas, information, experiences, and assumptions for the purposes of personal and collective learning.

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# What is a Facilitator?

**The facilitator is essential to helping participants engage with the topic and each other in a productive way.** Facilitators use the context of the exhibition along with questions, techniques, and activities to allow the group to better explore issues of immigration, identity, race, and social justice.

## **Who makes a good facilitator?**

Facilitators can be found amongst your staff, board, volunteers, or community stakeholders. When considering who could make the strongest facilitator, look for people who:

- Equally value emotional, intellectual, and spiritual ways of knowing
- Exhibit a natural spirit of inquiry and curiosity
- Listen intently while reserving judgment
- Are aware and reflective about their own identity/identities
- Have organized but flexible ways of working and thinking
- Show patience with diverse learning processes and learners
- Hold themselves and other accountable for behaviors and attitudes
- Are aware of their body language and exhibit a non-defensive posture

## **Responsibilities before the program:**

- Familiarize yourself with the exhibition content
- Choose appropriate facilitation technique (pgs. 10-11)
- Create agenda and accompanying materials

## **Factors to consider in planning:**

- The number of participants
- The nature of the topics under discussion
- The type of involvement people need to have
- The background and positions of the participants
- How well they know the subject – and each other
- The time you have available

## **Responsibilities during the program:**

- Maintain group safety by setting the proper tone for dialogue and promoting an environment that encourages openness
- Create and sustain a spirit of inquiry in the group
- Identify conflict and lead the group through it
- Facilitate dialogue without imposing their own beliefs or perspectives
- Remain flexible and allow a natural dynamic to occur within the group
- Ensure equality within the group and break down hierarchies
- Ask probing questions to encourage deeper individual exploration and the identification of larger truths
- Synthesize the main ideas that emerge during the dialogue

## **Responsibilities after the program:**

- Have the participants evaluate the program using a custom evaluation or the one found at the back of this handbook.
- Review the evaluations and create a report to inform future facilitated dialogue programs.

# The Four Phases

## **Phase One: Community Building**

Encouraging connectedness and relationship building within the group. The work done here creates of a safe space where all participants can engage. Complete introductions and use questions to get to know the participants.

### **As the facilitator, take several key steps to begin:**

**Welcome the participants.** Introduce yourself and explain your role as facilitator, emphasizing that you are not an expert on the content, but have been charged with helping everyone find their place in the conversation.

**Explain the purpose of the dialogue.** Emphasizing the goal to arrive at a fresh meaning about a topic by hearing from and engaging with each other.

**Establish some guidelines.** In order to make the dialogue as productive as possible, the group should agree upon and establish some guidelines for the dialogue. If time does not allow for the group to generate its own guidelines, the facilitator can suggest guidelines that the group can consider using.

### **Example Guidelines:**

- Listen fully and respectfully
- Make space for all voices to be heard
- Seek first to understand—ask questions to clarify, not to debate
- Stay open: we are all free to change out mind
- Speak for yourself, not as a representative of any group
- Make and effort to suspend your own judgment as you listen to others
- Encourage participation from all the voices in the room by asking them to introduce themselves and respond to the same question



Getting all the voices in the room does not necessarily mean that every participant must always speak. Facilitator can consider using small group introductions or written techniques such as “graffiti wall” or indexed thoughts, both of which are described herein.

## **Phase Two: Sharing our own experiences**

Inviting participants to think about their own experiences related to the topic and share these experiences with the group. Use questions to welcome each person’s experience equally and place minimal judgment on responses. The facilitator helps participants recognize how their experiences are similar and different and why they may be that way.

## **Phase Three: Exploring Beyond Our Own Experiences**

Encouraging participants to dig deeper. Use questions to explore the topic beyond personal experiences, to view topics from the perspective of others. Until this point, participants speak primarily from their own experience. Provoke participants to dig deeper into their assumptions and to actively consider the underlying social conditions that inform a person’s perspective.

## **Phase Four: Synthesizing and Closing the Learning Experience**

Building a sense of community among participants. Use questions to help participants examine what they have learned about themselves and each other share the impact that they dialogue has had on them.

Facilitators are not working toward resolution or agreement. Some participants will actively seek this agreement. In these instances, facilitators should work to remind participants that the goal of this dialogue is to deepen personal and collective learning, not to encourage compromise or accomplish a specific task.

# Facilitation Techniques

## **Pair Share or Small Groups**

Some participants may be hesitant to share or speak before a large group. Dividing them into smaller groups or pairs may encourage more involvement. This also allows multiple people to answer a given question simultaneously. Facilitators should encourage groups to share what they discussed, allowing groups to learn from each others' conversations.

## **Serial testimony**

Serial testimony is useful where one or more participants are dominating the conversation. The facilitator establishes a time limit for each participant to answer a question. As each person speaks, the group is invited to listen silently without asking questions. If a participant does not fill their time, the group is invited to maintain the silence so as to allow for reflection and processing.

## **Quotes**

This technique invites participants to consider multiple perspectives on an issue by using a series of attributed quotes related to the topic. The facilitator hangs the quotes, typically five or six around the dialogue space and asks participants to read them silently. Then participants stand near the quote that they would like to speak about. Participants are then encouraged to discuss why they chose that quote with their small group.

## **Forced Voting**

Facilitators write a series of statements related to a given topic or issue on individual sheets of paper. Participants are instructed to read all of the statements in silence and then to "vote" their agreement or disagreement by placing a red or green dot on each sheet. After all participants have voted on

all statements, the facilitator tabulates the results and shares them with the participants, inviting reactions and comments from the group.

## **Carpet of Ideas**

The facilitator hands a large index card to each member of the group and then asks a question. After a time of silent reflection, the facilitator asks each group member to write their response in large print on the card, but not their name. The responses will be shared with the group, but no response will be attributed to anyone. The facilitator should place the completed cards on the floor, inviting the participants to read and reflect on everyone's responses.

## **Indexed Thoughts**

Similar to carpet of ideas, indexed thoughts invites participants to hold and share their written silent reflection with the rest of the group rather than anonymously submit it to the facilitator.

## **Mutual Invitation**

One participant invited the next to speak. If the person who has been invited to speak is not prepared to do so, they may "pass" the invitation to someone else with the knowledge that the group will return to them. The process enhances the participants' sense that they collectively own the dialogue and is effective when participants may not be responding well to a particular facilitator.

## **Graffiti Wall and Gallery Walk**

The facilitator hangs a large piece of paper on the wall of the dialogue space and writes a word, phrase, or question. Participants write or draw their responses on the paper all at the same time. When done, participants silently read and process what others have written/drawn.

# Troubleshooting

**Sharing authority with visitors and creating space for them to engage with each other and with the content of the exhibition might lead to new interpretive challenges.** Some challenges are listed below with suggested facilitator responses, group guidelines, and techniques to address them.

**One person dominating the discussion.** Remind the group that everyone is invited to participate. Say, “I hear your passion around this and I would like to make sure that others in the group can share their perspectives as well.”

**Participants unable to shift from debate to dialogue.** Remind the group that the purpose of the dialogue is not to debate or convince one another of our “rightness.” Say, “Everyone here has a kind of expertise or knowledge about (topic). While you may want to share your perspective with us, I invite you to first hear from other so that we might deepen our collective understanding.”

**Participant puts forward false information.** First ask yourself if it is vital to correct the information. Be aware and conscious of your own biases and need to “fix” beliefs that don’t match your own. Ask, “Has anyone else heard other information about this?” If no one offers a correction, you might raise one. If participants get hung up on a debate about facts with no answer, remind them that experts often disagree and redirect them to the dialogue.

**No one wants to talk.** You may be filling up too much space yourself, so monitor your own talking. Ask participants to talk about a particular point within a small group and then bring everyone together again. Try to bring other views into the discussion, especially if no one in the group holds them. You might say, “Do you know people who hold other views? What would they say about (topic)?”

**Conflict erupts between participants.** Remind participants that airing different ideas is why they've come together; however, for the dialogue to be productive, it must be focused on the issue. Invite others into the conversation if conflict is escalating between two people. "Would someone else like to offer an opinion?"

As facilitator, you are struggling with a topic or something said by a participant. Have two or three short, non-confrontational phrases that you can use to buy yourself time, e.g. "Tell me more," or "Does anyone else feel similarly?" If you know a topic presents problems for you, co-facilitate. Review your "trigger" issues with your co-facilitator beforehand and decide on a physical cue that will help you signify to your co-facilitator that you need to step back.

# Sample Questions

## **Developing good questions is vital to the success of facilitated dialogue.**

By asking the questions in an open way, facilitators can elicit participant response; a negative tone or pointed question can shut participants down. By understanding the development of questions, a facilitator can increase participant engagement and help participants learn this skill themselves.

## **Three types of questions**

**Factual questions.** Have only one correct answer. *When was Rudyard Kipling's The Jungle Book published?*

**Interpretive questions.** Often have more than one answer, which are ideally supported with evidence. Depending on their personal interpretations, people can have different, equally valid answers. *How did Rudyard Kipling's The Jungle Book share American's image of Indian Americans?*

**Dialogic questions.** Have no right or wrong answer because they ask for opinion, belief, or knowledge based only on personal experience. *What troubles you most about society's perception of (topic)? What do you find most reassuring?*

## **Phase One**

The questions should be non-threatening and allow participants to share information about themselves. They require only a participant's personal experience to answer:

- When people ask you where you are from, what do you tell them and why do you respond this way?
- Chose five words that you would use to describe yourself.
- When you consider (a word related to the exhibition) what comes immediately to mind?

## Phase Two

The group should share both similar and differing experiences. Facilitators should ask follow-up questions that encouraging participants to compare and contrast. Questions to ask after exhibition specific questions:

- What differences do you notice in how you've experienced this topic?
- How was your personal experience different from others in the group?
- How was your personal experience similar to others in the group?

## Phase Three

Facilitators should be focused on helping participants to explore assumptions about the topic, encouraging them to examine why people believe as they do. Sample questions to use after answers to exhibition specific questions:

- Tell me more about that.
- How did you come to feel this way?
- What are the assumptions you make when you think about this topic?

## Phase Four

A sense of community should be built among participants. Use questions to help participants examine what they have learned about themselves and each other share the impact that they dialogue has had on them.

- What, if anything, did you hear today that questioned your assumptions? What did you hear that affirmed your assumptions?
- Are there things you heard today that you want to understand better?
- What have you heard that inspires you to act more on this issue?

# Facilitated Dialogue Observation Form

This form is for facilitators to complete. Please send a completed of this form and any completed participant surveys to SITES, MRC 941, PO Box 37012, Washington, DC 20013-7012.

Introduction: "My name is \_\_\_\_\_. I work with the (organization name) and I will be observing today's program. (Exhibition Name) was created by the Smithsonian Institution Traveling Exhibition Service. This dialogue is part of a national initiative to use this exhibit as a starting place for people to discuss contemporary issues surrounding hte exhibition topic. To this end, we're evaluating programs like this one to see what is working and what is not. I'll be taking notes during the discussion. I'm happy to share my observations with you after the program is you are interested. Thank you for letting me join you today."

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Date	Organization	Dialogue Program
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Number in group	Observation Sheet #	Group (if applicable)
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As you observe the program, place a check mark in the middle column each time you observe a behavior. At the end of the program, add up the total for each behavior and enter it into the third column.

TYPE OF BEHAVIOR	# OF TIMES OBSERVED	TOTAL
Participants ask questions of facilitator(s)		
Participants ask question of other guests		
Beyond introductions, participants share stories		
Participants talk to each other		
Participants share opinions about the issue*		
Participants linger and talk with faciitator(s)		
Participants linger and talk to each other		

*\*After the dialogue has ended, please describe what types of emotions you observed and discuss with the facilitator how well they handled these emotions.*



**After the program, meet with the facilitator and answer these questions.**

1. Did you hear participant(s) indicate in any way (e.g. "I never knew that") that they learned something new about \_\_\_\_\_ (fill in the blank with the subject of the dialogue program) then or now? If so, what did they say they learned?

2. Did you hear or see any evidence that participants were making connections between issues of the past and the present? If so, what were they?

3. Suggestions you have for ways to improve the dialogue of this program?

4. Suggestions for ways the facilitator(s) and you might have for improving the way they facilitated the dialogue?

5. Were there any factors outside of the control of the facilitator(s) that impacted this program in any way? If so, what were they? What did the facilitator(s) do to ameliorate those factors?

# Facilitated Dialogue Participant Survey

This section will be filled out by the facilitator. Please distribute to visitors and return completed surveys to SITES, MRC 941, PO Box 37012, Washington, DC 20013-7012.

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Survey #	Date (mm/dd/yy)	Organization
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Your opinions are very important to us. Please note this survey is only about this program, not the exhibition or the host organization.

1. Please rate the following:

**Strongly Disagree**   **Disagree**   **Undecided**   **Agree**   **Strongly Agree**

a. The facilitator made me feel comfortable expressing my opinion.

1                      2                      3                      4                      5

b. The facilitator made me feel comfortable asking questions.

1                      2                      3                      4                      5

c. I gained insights into different perspectives from fellow participants.

1                      2                      3                      4                      5

2. If you rated any of the above items a "4" or below, please tell us what we could do to make it a "5" for you.

3. For me, the dialogue program was (please circle one of the numbers on the scale below):

1                      2                      3                      4                      5  
**Not Valuable**                      **Moderately Valuable**                      **Extremely Valuable**

*PLEASE CONTINUE THIS SURVEY ON THE NEXT PAGE*

4. Please tell us why this dialogue program was or was not valuable to you:

5. Please rate the following statements (fill in the topic in the blank spaces)

	<b>Strongly Disagree</b>	<b>Disagree</b>	<b>Undecided</b>	<b>Agree</b>	<b>Strongly Agree</b>
<b>a.</b> The dialogue program gave me an increased understanding of the history of _____	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>b.</b> The dialogue program gave me an increased understanding of contemporary _____ issues	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>c.</b> The dialogue program helped me connect issues of the past to issues today	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>d.</b> The dialogue program gave me an increased awareness of opportunities to engage in contemporary _____ issues	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>e.</b> I would recommend this program to others	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>

6. If you rated any of the above items a "4" or below, please tell us what we could do to make it a "5" for you.

7. How did you hear about the dialogue program?

# Code of Conduct

\_\_\_\_\_ is dedicated to providing a harassment-free experience for everyone, regardless of gender, gender identity and expression, age, sexual orientation, disability, physical appearance, body size, race, ethnicity, religion (or lack thereof), or technology choices. We do not tolerate harassment of participants in any form. Sexual language and imagery is not appropriate for any venue or platform, including talks, discussions, Twitter, Facebook, and other online media. Participants violating these rules may be asked to leave or have their comments and submissions deleted at the discretion of the organizers.

*Thanks to The Ada Initiative for developing this open code of conduct and sharing it with a Creative Commons Attribution license.*

# FACILITATED DIALOGUE

**Use the code of conduct on the opposite page (page 20) to set boundaries for any event or online discussion your organization hosts. You can put the code of conduct on your website and link to it from the social media profiles of your organization. You can also hand out a printed version or have a sign at any hosted event at your organization.**

