

## CAPACITY TOOL 4: FACILITATING DIALOGUE

### **FACILITATING DIALOGUE<sup>1</sup>**

*Facilitating discussions can be a useful way to build capacity. The following are some helpful guidelines for the dialogue facilitator.*

#### **1. Establish ground rules for the group.**

Your conversation will proceed more smoothly if you and the participants agree on clear ground rules.

- Listen respectfully
- One person talks at a time
- Be tough on ideas, not on people -- no personal attacks
- Everyone has an opportunity to speak
- Making the dialogue successful is the responsibility of all participants

#### **2. Make sure the dialogue is relaxed.**

Ensure that all feel comfortable giving their opinions.

#### **3. You do not have to be an expert.**

Don't feel as though you must be an expert on any of the issues. Before the dialogue, read the various materials that have been provided. Stay neutral and ask the group if you're stuck.

#### **4. Be flexible in your questioning.**

Each of the questions offered in Tool 2: The Dialogue Questions has been tested. However, you may want to make some adjustments based on your objectives. Be cautious not to bias responses by asking questions that lead the participants to a socially acceptable answer. Also, questions that may be answered with a "yes" or "no" response tend to stifle conversation.

#### **5. Monitor the group process.**

Pay attention to who has already spoken, whether everyone has spoken, and whether a few people are dominating the conversation. You will want to refresh your skills on effective facilitation in advance. There are plenty of resources to support the facilitator.

#### **6. Foster dialogue.**

When conversations start to drift, summarize the relevant points already mentioned and ask for other ideas. Help participants find common ground by asking them about

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<sup>1</sup>Capacity tool borrowed directly from: <http://ctb.ku.edu/en/table-of-contents/assessment/assessing-community-needs-and-resources/community-dialogue/tools>

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advantages and disadvantages of different points of view. Draw out quiet people. Build off of other comments.

### **7. Ask participants applicable key questions.**

Sometimes you may need to prod the participants to get their complete opinion or to clarify a point. You may also need to inspire dialogue about a point that the group believes merits additional discussion, sometimes finding a measure of common ground in diverging viewpoints. Don't worry about achieving consensus. Some useful questions for fostering dialogue are:

- What is the key point or idea?
- Does anyone wish to support or challenge this point?
- What is it about that opinion that you just cannot live with?
- Can you give an example to illustrate the point?
- Are there points on which most of us agree?

### **8. Allow time for closing dialogue and any follow-up steps.**

Be sure to leave some time at the end of the dialogue for closing thoughts and summaries.

- Ask participants to share last comments and encourage them to keep the dialogue going after they return home, engaging others in discussions about their community.
- Thank everyone for participating.

For more information:

Brownlee, T. (n.d.). *Chapter 3. Section 17: Leading a community dialogue on building a healthy Community*. Retrieved from The Community Tool Box: <http://ctb.ku.edu/en/table-of-contents/assessment/assessing-community-needs-and-resources/community-dialogue/tools>