



inclusion
network

KirklandTalks

A City of Kirkland Community Dialogue Project



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Dialogue design and kit prepared by Debbie Lacy, Eastside Refugee and Immigrant Coalition

BACKGROUND

The City of Kirkland's Inclusion Network (IN) piloted a community dialogue project as part of Kirkland's Welcoming City initiative. IN is a group of community leaders working with the City to create opportunities to make Kirkland an inclusive and welcoming place for people of all backgrounds.

The City contracted with the Eastside Refugee and Immigrant Coalition (ERIC) to explore successful dialogue formats that:

- support inclusive participation in diverse groups
- can be used with a variety of question sets and topics
- are relatively simple to facilitate

A subgroup of IN met to review top models and selected two to pilot, with the goal of identifying one model to adopt. Personal invitations to the “Dinner and Dialogue” events were extended by IN members, City staff, and ERIC with an emphasis on gathering a group that was ethnically and culturally diverse.

PILOT MODELS

Both dialogue models have been around for the past 25 years, used by thousands of people in diverse communities across the United States.

- [*A More Perfect Union*](#) – This dialogue model was part of a PBS initiative to stimulate citizen engagement in civic life in mid-1990’s. The initiative included a documentary (titled “Talk to Me”) and a conversation guide that explored cultural identity and pluralism. The pilot group for this model included 18 participants and 4 table facilitators. 56% of participants were people of color and/or immigrants.
- [*Fostering Dialogue Across Divides*](#) – Created by *Essential Partners*, this model was initially used to help bridge communication between those on opposite sides of the abortion debate and has since been used for a range of “hot button” topics such as gun rights, same-sex marriage, racism, and immigration. The pilot group for this model included 18 participants and 4 table facilitators. 39% of participants were people of color and/or immigrants.

Taking into account the desired criteria and feedback from the two pilot events, the format that follows is for a 2-hour, 3-round dialogue event that combines elements from both models. The theme is “American” cultural identity and pluralism. (The same format can be used with other themes. See the City of Kirkland’s website for additional question sets as well as resources for hosting successful community dialogues.)



SET UP and MATERIALS

The format works best for groups of 4-5 at a table and one table facilitator. If you plan to have more than one table, consider the size of the room and the noise level. In general, we recommend no more than 5 tables at an event.

Materials for Each Table:

- Pens and blank sheets of paper
- Water cups and a pitcher
- *Snacks
- Name tags and markers
- Set of handouts for each participant: Group Agreements, Listening and Sharing in Diverse Groups, and 7 Circles. (Table facilitators will pass these out when it's time.)
- 1 copy of the questions in large font for the table facilitator.
- A countdown timer that everyone can see

The Gracious Space framework is an excellent resource for creating a welcoming, supportive environment for events.

**You may choose to provide a meal or have a community potluck prior to the dialogue. Either way, small treats are helpful to have at the tables for people to snack on while they're talking. The dialogue itself takes two hours to complete, so calculate the additional time needed for a meal and socializing when determining the start and end times for your event.*

FACILITATION

Plan to have one facilitator for each table. Table facilitators don't participate in the dialogue. Their role is to pose the questions, keep time, and support participation during the open discussion periods. At events where there will be more than one table, a front-of-the-room facilitator is recommended. This person will do the welcoming and closing as well as tend to any needs that arise among the groups (answering questions, filling water glasses, etc.).

TIPS

- The dialogue is fully scripted for you, but it can take some practice to facilitate smoothly. It's helpful to familiarize yourself with the flow of the agenda, the questions, and the task prompts (indicated by brackets in the script).
- You'll be stopping and starting the timer frequently so practice with the timer prior to the event.
- During the open discussion periods, the goal is to continue with equal engagement from all participants so feel free to invite people to share. *"Maria, were you thinking something similar or do you have a different perspective you'd like to offer?"*



“American” Cultural Identity and Pluralism

DIALOGUE OUTLINE and SCRIPT

Welcome: Purpose, Overview of Theme & Format, Agreements [15 minutes]

Suggested Script:

Thank you all for coming. Today’s dialogue theme is about the notion of American identity and what it means to live in diverse communities.

Let’s briefly go over the Group Agreements [refer to handout on tables]. These are from the Interaction Institute for Social Change and their work called “Listening as an Ally.” [Briefly go through each one.] Some are especially good to remember during the open discussion periods like “Step Up, Step Back.” There’s also a handout on Listening and Sharing with some tips.

*Here’s how the rounds will go: There will be time for the whole group to reflect quietly after each question is asked. Then your table facilitator will invite someone to begin and timed sharing will proceed around the group clockwise. Everyone will have the same amount of time to share **without interruption**. You won’t ask questions or comment until the open discussion part begins. You may want to write down any thoughts or comments as people are speaking.*

If you don’t want to speak when it’s your turn, you can pass and the facilitator will check in with you at the end to see if you want to share then. If you finish before your time is up, we ask that everyone sits quietly and reflects on what’s been said. This may seem awkward for some of you and you may want to move ahead to the next person, but we encourage you to sit with the silence. When the timer goes off, please finish up as quickly as you can. If you don’t have time to say everything you’d like, make a note to yourself and you can share more during the open discussion period.

The format may feel too formal for some of you, but the structure intentional and is aimed at encouraging equitable participation and meaningful engagement for everyone, across cultural and personality differences.

Please remember that this is a dialogue, not a debate. Your job is not to persuade or convince. You are also not required to justify yourself or your experiences. This is not about reaching consensus or working toward a shared goal. Your job is to listen deeply to others’ perspectives and to share your own. The hope is that you’ll leave understanding something about others who are different from you in some way and maybe you’ll also learn something new about yourself. [Ask if there are any questions.]

Let’s get started. (If the Welcoming was done by a front-of-the-room facilitator, she/he can direct the table facilitators to begin.)



[Note to Table Facilitators: Share the attached question sheets with the group *one at a time* as indicated in the script. Hold each question up for everyone to see as you read it aloud and place it in the center of the table so the group can refer to it. Don't show the questions to the participants in advance. And, when using the timer, try to position it so that the person speaking can see it.]



Warm Up [6 minutes]

Please say your name and share a little about why you wanted to participate in this dialogue. You'll have a minute to think about that first and then you'll each have one minute to share.

[Set the timer for 1 minute for the reflection time, then set the timer for 1 minute for each person. Select a person to begin. Thank each person for sharing after they're finished. If necessary, remind the group to keep questions and comments to themselves until later.]

Round One [30 minutes total]

- **[Hold up Q 1]:** *Describe one of the communities you lived in as a child and please share if you're still connected in some way to that community. You'll have a minute to think about this first and then you'll each have two minutes to share.* [Pause for 1 minute, then set the timer for 2 minutes for each person. Select a person to begin.]
- **[Hold up Q 2]:** *What are some of your earliest memories of coming in contact with people who were different from you? We'll have a minute to think about that first and then you'll each have two minutes to share.* [Pause for 1 minute, then set the timer for 2 minutes for each person. Select a person to begin.]
- **[Open Dialogue]** *Now we'll have about 8 minutes for open dialogue. You may want to share any themes, similarities, or interesting differences. Or, was there something someone said that you'd like to hear more about?* [Set timer for 8 minutes]

10 Minute Break (now or after Round Two)

Round Two [25 minutes total]

- **[Hold up Q 3]:** *When are the times you have felt most "American?" If you have never felt very "American," why is that? We'll have a minute to think about that first and then you'll each have two minutes to share.* [Pause for 3 minutes, then set the timer for 3 minutes for each person. Select a person to begin.]
- **[Open Dialogue]** *Now we'll have about 7 minutes for open dialogue. You may want to share any themes, similarities, or interesting differences. Or, was there something someone said that you'd like to hear more about?* [Set timer for 7 minutes]

Round Three [25 minutes total]

[Pass out the 7 Circles handout.] *We're going to do a short activity as part of the next conversation. You'll put your name in the large circle in the middle and in the smaller circles, write the names of 7 groups with which you identify, such as nationality, ethnicity, gender, religious affiliation, political stance, sexual orientation, geographic ties, etc. Reflect on the two questions at the bottom of the sheet. We'll take 5 minutes to work on the 7 Circles and then you'll each have 2 minutes to share what you'd like about those two questions – 2 minutes total, not 2 minutes per question. [Set timer for 5 minutes]*

- **[7 Circles Sharing]:** *Now you'll each have 2 minutes to talk about a time when you felt proud to be a member of a certain group, and also when did it feel painful to be a member of a certain group? [Set timer for 2 minutes for each person.]*
- **[Open Dialogue]** *Now we'll have 10 minutes for open dialogue. You may want to share any themes, similarities, or interesting differences. Or, was there something someone said that you'd like to hear more about? [Set timer for 10 minutes]*

Takeaways [6 minutes]

- **[Hold up Q 4]:** *Please share an insight you had about yourself or something someone said that will stick with you after tonight. You'll have a minute to think about that first and then you'll each have up to 1 minute to share. [Pause for 1 minute, then set the timer for 1 minute for each person. If someone finishes early, you can move onto the next person.]*

Closing [3 minutes]

[Thank everyone for coming and have them complete the feedback forms.]

Q1

Describe one of the communities you lived in as a child and please share if you're still connected in some way to that community.

Q2

*What are some of
your earliest
memories of coming
in contact with
people who were
different from you?*

Q3

*When are the times
you have felt most
“American?”*

*If you have never felt
very “American,”
why is that?*

Q4

Please share an insight you had about yourself or something someone said that will stick with you after tonight.

Group Agreements

From the Interaction Institute for Social Change ("Listening as Ally")

- Listen deeply
- Make I statements
- Step up, step back
- Keep it here
- We don't have to agree
- Use "ouch" and "oops"
- Be willing to be uncomfortable



Listen deeply - Listen for understanding, not to prepare your rebuttal. Don't interrupt people as they speak. Try to acknowledge what you've heard before going on to make another point. When you hear something that is different from your own thinking or analysis, accept the speaker's description of their experiences as real for them, even if you haven't experienced it or don't understand it.

Make I statements - Speak from your own experience rather than speaking for others or about others, or generalizing your experience assuming it applies to others.

Step up, step back - If you tend to talk early and often, challenge yourself to step back and make space for others. If you tend not to talk much, challenge yourself to jump in.

Keep it here - Exercise good judgment and respect when people share personal stories. Carry away what you learned without sharing who said what.

We don't have to agree - When we disagree, respond to the statement or the behavior instead of the person. Avoid using blame, shame, and guilt on ourselves or others. Try saying "...yes AND..." rather than "...yes BUT..." to make space for different views to be heard.

Use "ouch" and "oops" - We may say something without intending to harm or offend, but harm or offense might result anyway. *If we notice ourselves saying it*, we can say "oops" and try again. *If we notice others saying it*, we can say "ouch" and share in a sentence or two what was off-putting. Use these situations as teachable moments to highlight the difference between intent and impact. No shaming or blaming, just a straightforward way to name things that hurt or offend.

Be willing to be uncomfortable - Don't mistake discomfort for a lack of safety. It's possible to be safe and uncomfortable at the same time. Lean into the discomfort to see what you can learn.

Listening and Sharing in Diverse Groups

Tips for Connecting

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LISTENING

- Listen to understand, not to prepare your response.
- Your attention is a precious gift. Give it generously and fully.
- What are you learning about the other people as they share? What do you know about them now that you didn't know before?
- What connects you to the person speaking? What can you relate to?
- Be curious about the differences you hear between the person speaking and yourself. What intrigues you?
- Be conscious of cultural and communication differences that you may be judging in some way. Don't get distracted by the delivery of the story to the point that you miss understanding the content of the story.
- Did something someone shared make you think about yourself and your own life in a new way? How?

SHARING

- Listen within and be discerning. Ask yourself: "What needs to be expressed now with this particular group of people?"
- Speak from your experience instead of making generalizations; when you share an opinion on a topic, share something about how you formed that opinion. For example, what experiences have you had that helped shape your values?
- Speak to the whole group, not just the facilitator. Look around and notice how your story is being received.
- If you talk with your hands, use words at the same time so people understand your full meaning.
- In dialogues that are less structured, be conscious of the amount of time you're taking. Are you supporting everyone in the group to have a chance to share or will there be a story left untold?
- Value your stories. They are worthy of being shared.

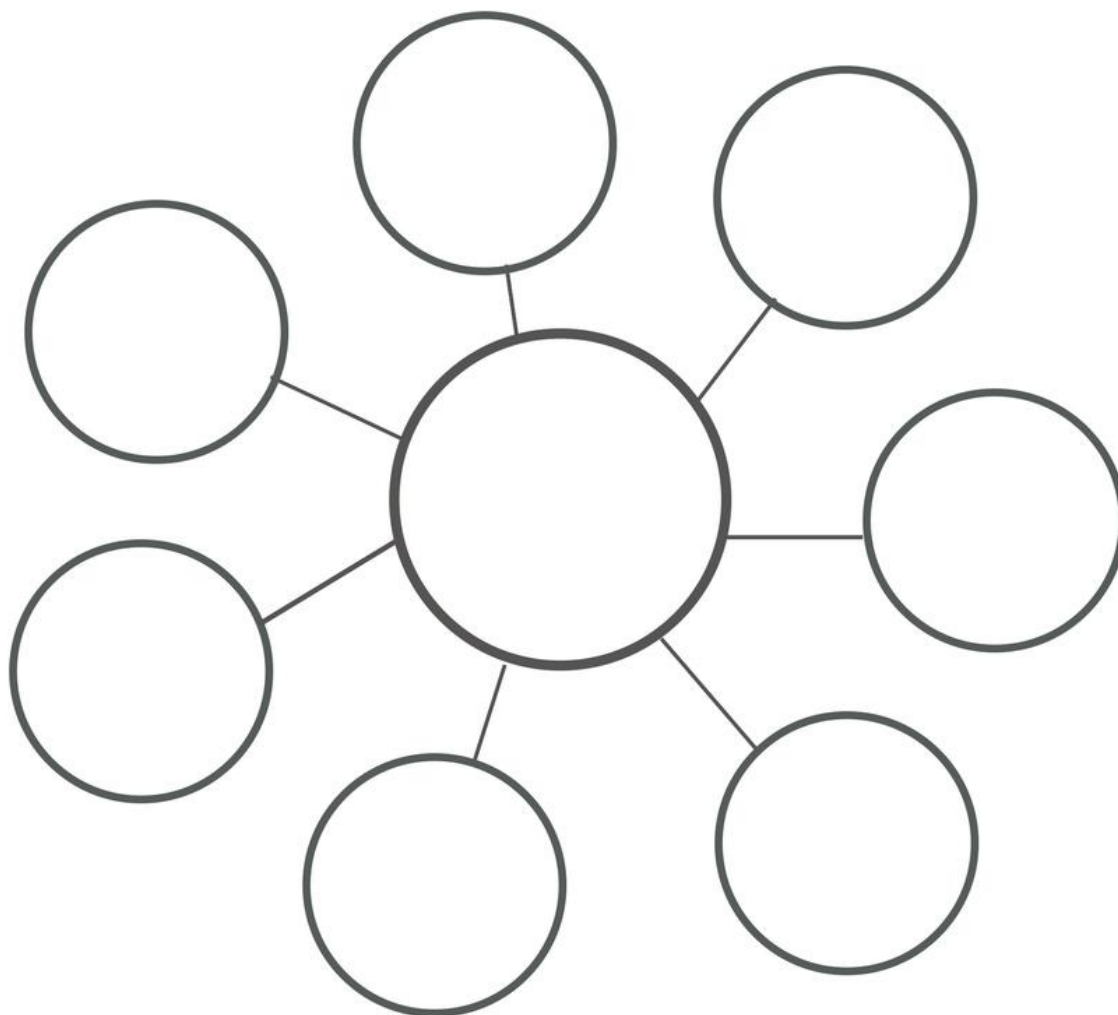
7 Circles

Exercise Adapted from Madison Area Technical College

Instructions: Write your name in the center circle.

In the smaller circles, write the names of 7 groups with which you identify. Examples: nationality, ethnicity, gender, religious affiliation, political stance, sexual orientation, geographic ties, etc.

Reflect on the questions below, which you'll be sharing your answers to. You'll each have 2 minutes to share with the group.



Was there a time when you felt proud to be a member of a certain group?

When did it feel painful to be a member of a certain group?

PARTICIPANT EVALUATION

Dialogue Theme: "American" Cultural Identity and Pluralism

Please take a moment to share your thoughts and help organizers improve the community dialogue events. Thank you!

What did you think about the content and questions? For each one, do you think we should keep it or replace it?

	Keep It (✓)	Replace It (✓)	Other/Additional Comments or Suggestions?
Q1: Describe one of the communities you lived in as a child and please share if you're still connected in some way to that community.			
Q2: What are some of your earliest memories of coming in contact with people who were different from you?			
Q3: When are the times you have felt most "American?" If you have never felt very "American," why is that?			
7 Circles Exercise			

What did you like most about this event? What did you like the least?

What other topics are you interested in having a dialogue about?