

# **Dialog Groups and Diversity**

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**Luisa R. Paster  
Training & Development Specialist  
Princeton University – Human Resources**

## **Agenda**

**Why do we need sustained dialog ?  
What is sustained dialog?  
Models for dialog groups  
Facilitator's role and skill set  
Dialog groups at Princeton University Library**

## Stages of sustained dialog

The classic model of sustained dialog has four distinct steps, but in real life groups do not always work that way. The stages can overlap, occur at the same time, or go back and forth over time. Some groups begin with a problem area already selected. Some groups never get to the last step of group action, leaving actions to the individual participants.

The classic model has the following consecutive steps:

1. **Coming Together** – Participants gather with the acknowledgement that problematic relationships exist in the community. The participants and facilitator create ground rules for open discussion within a safe environment.
2. **Downloading** – The focus is on relationships between participants. Participants share their own personal experiences in order to examine patterns of interaction. The group listens empathetically. Connections are made between participants and major themes are identified. Participants choose 1-3 problems to deliberate on more fully.
3. **Exploring Problems** –The selected problem(s) are analyzed one at a time, by considering the cause(s) and focusing on how the problem(s) affect individual and group interests. Participants explore the important component of power within relationships. Group begins to discuss possible directions.
4. **Formulating Solutions** – The group identifies possible solutions and delineating possible obstacles. They also consider tactics and resources, making a list of steps to be taken.
5. **Group Action** – The group considers the feasibility of the proposed action. They divide the steps and assign roles. As a final step, the plan is executed and evaluated.

Adapted from: Jessica Munitz, Priya Parker, and Samar Katnani.  
*Moderating Sustained Dialogue: A Manual for Facilitators of Dialogues on Race.*  
The International Institute for Sustained Dialogue, Summer 2003

## **Moderator's role**

- Create a safe environment for sharing and disclosing personal experiences.
- Guide discussion on creating ground rules.
- Moderate discussion, using ground rules, agendas, end-of-meeting summaries, etc.
- Encourage discussion by asking questions that help participants think about the topic.
- Suggest readings, films, activities to promote discussion.
- Refocus the discussion as necessary.
- Use discretion in managing conflict.
- Avoid being the power or authority figure.

## **Sample Group Guidelines**

- There are no right or wrong experiences Every experience and perception is valid and deserves respectful listening.
- No interrupting.
- Arrive on time.
- Participate fully.
- Others?

## **Princeton Lessons Learned**

- Groups need some kind of formal structure with a particular focus or topic.
- Groups need skilled (well trained) facilitators.
- Building trust either takes a dramatic event or a long period of continuous discussion and sharing.
- Bonds that develop from dialog groups can be fleeting or enduring, depending on the chemistry of the people involved.
- The program requires real support from management. Everyone involved needs to overcome the misconception that this is just fun and games.
- The program requires real commitment from the participants. This is not just a way to avoid working.

## Bibliography

### **'52 Alumni Day After-Dinner Panel on Sustained Dialogue to Improve Race Relations at Princeton February 22, 2003**

**<http://tigernet.princeton.edu/~cl1952/sustaineddialogue.htm>**

The background of student Dialog Groups at Princeton

**Harold H. Saunders, *A Public Peace Process: Sustained Dialogue to Transform Racial and Ethnic Conflicts*** (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1999; Palgrave paperback, 2001)

Introduces the political philosophy behind SD, explains the five-stage process, offers a brochure for community use, and presents a training manual.

### **International Institute for Sustained Dialogue**

**<http://www.sustaineddialogue.org/>**

An independent organization formed in collaboration with the Kettering Foundation, the Institute helps citizens around the world to transform their conflictual or destructive relationships and to design and implement sustainable change processes.

### **The Sustained Dialogue Campus Network (SDCN)**

**<http://www.sdcampusnetwork.org/>**

A project of The International Institute for Sustained Dialogue (IISD). In 1999, students began using a unique process called Sustained Dialogue (SD) to proactively improve race relations on college campuses. A network of Sustained Dialogue practitioners has since formed, connecting students at over a dozen colleges, universities, and high schools across the country.

**Priya Narayan Parker, *Sustained Dialogue: How Students Are Changing Their Own Racial Climate*** (About Campus, March-April 2006, Vol. II No. I)

Universities have increased diversity among student bodies, but "student racial climate" is not improving. The promise of diversity is not being realized. Students are using Sustained Dialogue as their approach to improving campus climate.

### **Sustained Dialog: It's Not Just Talk, It's a Social Movement**

**[video.google.com/videoplay?docid=235818602816201866](http://video.google.com/videoplay?docid=235818602816201866)**

A 14 minute video about student run sustained dialog groups, filmed mainly at Princeton University. Includes segments of actual dialog group discussions and commentary about how sustained dialogue works.