Universal Principles for Planning a Dialogue

A dialogue process can look like many things. Here are the basic elements to consider when planning your dialogue, no matter what the topic or approach.

the WHY

1. Clear + Transparent PURPOSE

What **drives** you to create dialogue around this topic?

What do you hope participants will come away from the dialogue **feeling**, **thinking**, and/or **doing** as a result?

Make sure that your purpose is **clear** to you and **transparently** communicated to participants.

the WHO

2. Defined AUDIENCE

Who would you like to **speak to**, **serve**, and **include** in this dialogue process?

What do you know about them? What are their **identities**, **interests**, and **needs**?

What do you need to **find out** about them in order to better serve them through the dialogue?

the WHAT

3. Concrete OBJECTIVES

What specific, concrete **actions** will participants engage in towards the realization of your purpose for the dialogue?

How will you ensure that participants have the **background knowledge and skills** to effectively execute those actions?

the HOW

4. Supportive STRUCTURES

What dialogue **model** or **format** will best serve your purpose? What **activities** will participants engage in? What **questions** will they respond to?

How will you **accommodate** different learning styles? How will you **include** different identities and perspectives? How will you create a space that is both **safe** and **challenging**?

Structures That Should Always Be Included In Dialogue

Community Building
Make sure there is a way for participants to connect to one another as human beings first, through a **"check-in" or initial sharing activity**. This should be low-stakes, not requiring much vulnerability or heavy critical thinking from participants.

Community Agreements
Make sure there are guidelines or norms in place that all participants can **understand, clearly visualize, and agree to.** These should be aligned to your purpose. They should not be just abstract ideals, but also the behaviors that support them.

Reflection & Synthesis
Make sure that you create space and time at the end of your dialogue process for participants to **reflect on what they are taking away and synthesize what they've learned.** This can be individual and/or shared with the group.