

INTERCULTURAL DIALOGUE FACILITATION

Intercultural dialogue facilitation is a science and an art. Facilitators are the single most important determinant of successful dialogue outcome. They are the engines that drive the experience to produce meaningful interaction among participants within and across groups.

Here are the most important things to know about facilitation:

1 Listen: The most important skill in facilitation is learning to practice generous listening. Use open-ended questions, don't get bogged down in the details, don't pontificate or push your own agenda, and don't repeat yourself. Listen with the intent to understand and assume that you will learn something from everyone.

2 Be aware and knowledgeable: Know your own identities, know the content of your material, and understand all the activities you are going to lead. Create group norms and ensure they are adhered to.

3 Time Management: Know exactly what you intend to accomplish and approximately how long it will take, but be flexible when necessary. Facilitation is improvisational.

4 Conflict: View conflict as a learning opportunity and frame it that way for participants.

5 Balance Power: Equalize power in the room through engaging in multi-partial facilitation and keeping a check on the dominant narrative. Make sure no individual or group is spotlighted or ignored.

6 Story Telling: Story-telling is the heart of dialogue. Providing space for participants to share personal stories breaks down stereotypes, bias, and prejudice. Connect personal stories with structural inequalities. Welcome and normalize emotion. Frame discomfort as a learning edge.

7 Good Questions: Good questions are the conduit for eliciting meaningful stories. Keep your questions open and meaningful. They should be simple, geared toward sharing experiences and reflection not opinions. Facilitators don't have to demonstrate expertise in all topics.

8 Respond Mindfully: When participants share their stories: listen actively, affirm the speaker's generosity in sharing, connect comments with the "big ideas" in the dialogue. Check in privately with participants if they have revealed difficult topics.

9 Work with your "Co:": Communicate openly, plan carefully, share responsibility in both planning and carrying out dialogue; do what you say you are going to do; share your hot button issues; address co-facilitation issues as soon as they arise. Debrief and reflect together to improve your practice.

10 Resistance: Anticipate that there will be resistance and become familiar with a variety of ways to support resistant participants.

