

An Overview of PCP's Collaborative Dialogue Process

Receive Initial Request

Explore Proposal and Address Concerns:

Early on in our conversations with potential participants and/or convenors, we seek to determine whether our general approach is well-suited to their goals or if what they want is better achieved through some other type of practice (e.g., mediation). We also weigh possible constraints such as their timeline and resource availability.

For more detail, see <http://www.publicconversations.org/pcp/uploadDocs/questions1.pdf>

Make Contract (or decline or refer)

Map the Situation

We talk with potential participants and others familiar with the issue to learn about the “old” stuck conversation and about times when a “new” conversation has taken place. Interviews constitute a first pass at “mapping;” we continuously enrich our understanding of old stuck places and new possibilities throughout the dialogue process.

For more detail, see <http://www.publicconversations.org/pcp/uploadDocs/talkingwith.pdf>

Develop Provisional Meeting Design

At this point, a decision has been made about who will convene the event. The convenor may be PCP as a third party; it may be a planning group consisting of a diverse subset of the participants, whom we serve as design consultants and facilitators; or it may be some variant of these. Based on what we learn in the exploration and mapping processes, we work with the convenor to make the decisions necessary to develop an outline for the meeting design.

Issue Invitations

The next step is to issue an invitation (either by phone or writing) that enables potential participants to make an informed decision about whether to attend. The invitation always includes: a statement of objective; an indication of what participants can expect of us; contact information for the convenors; and an indication of what the convenors and facilitators will expect of the participants. The invitation also is likely to include a request that people only attend if they can commit to participating for the full duration of the meeting(s) and a list of proposed group groundrules (agreements).

For sample invitations, see Appendix C in <http://www.publicconversations.org/pcp/uploadDocs/CommunityGuide3.0.pdf>
For sample ground rules, see <http://www.publicconversations.org/pcp/uploadDocs/SampleGroundrules.pdf>

Engage with Participants

The extent and form of communication before the meeting depends on the size of the group and resources available (for example, it can be more cost effective to use email for some of the pre-meeting contact). In many cases a phone call is made to those who agree to attend. This phone call addresses questions the participants may have about the process and provides an opportunity for us to begin to build a relationship with participants with whom we have not previously spoken. We also seek to find out if participants have reservations about their ability or willingness to abide by the group agreements. If they have reservations, we encourage them to be fully candid with us and to consider declining the invitation. If they indicate that the agreements will require a stretch that they are willing to try to make, we ask them how they think we can best support them in making the stretch.

For examples of questions, see <http://www.publicconversations.org/pcp/uploadDocs/talkingwith.pdf>

The Final Phase of Meeting Design

Using what we learn through our pre-meeting contacts with participants, and any last minute "weather reports" we may receive about the shifts in relevant personal or political situations, we transform the general outline of the meeting, as presented in the invitation, into a detailed plan. We resist "getting ahead of the group" in our planning because we are committed to evolving designs that are maximally responsive to the interests and needs expressed by the group over the course of the meeting.

Note on Team Building: Although a collaborative spirit has shaped each interaction in the planning phase, it is important to set aside time for team building during the final planning session so that all who will be working together can support each other in doing their best work.

For examples of meeting design plans, see <http://www.publicconversations.org/pcp/uploadDocs/CommunityGuide3.0.pdf> page 17, or <http://www.publicconversations.org/pcp/uploadDocs/modelforintro.pdf>



The Meeting – Structure and Facilitation

General Structure

PCP has a number of detailed resources that provide a sense for what happens in an opening meeting, including:

- <http://www.publicconversations.org/pcp/uploadDocs/CommonPhases.pdf> (overview chart)
- <http://www.publicconversations.org/pcp/uploadDocs/beginningsession.pdf> (tips and questions to consider)

Facilitation

Our facilitation style is characterized by transparency (openness about the thinking behind what we do or propose to do), compassion, legitimacy (derived from group agreements) and group decision-making procedures that promote participants' ownership of their conversation. When we work with groups over time, we may offer them a set of "self-help" guidelines for constructively addressing difficult moments. For facilitation tips, see <http://www.publicconversations.org/pcp/uploadDocs/guidelinesfacil.pdf>

A Note on Extended Meetings

During extended meetings the team meets during meals and breaks to design subsequent sessions in a manner that is maximally responsive to the needs, concerns and interests in the room. The same questions that guided the team in developing the plan for the opening session of the meeting also guide them as they engage in "emergent design" (e.g., What interests and motivates the participants?; How can the old or feared conversation be avoided and the new and desired conversation be invited?)



Participant Reflections, Feedback

After the meeting we seek feedback from participants through written evaluations and/or follow-up phone conversations to promote further reflection, learn how we can be most helpful in next steps with this particular group (if there are next steps), and learn lessons that help us improve our practice.

For details, see a <http://www.publicconversations.org/pcp/uploadDocs/sampleprotocol.pdf>



Extended Team Reflections, Feedback

Debrief dialogue, synthesize learnings, and determine next steps.



Reports, Letters, etc.



Complete Contract

Begin Next Phase

The next phase could take many forms, depending on the needs and interests of the group.