

Determine if the Dialogue is Appropriate Right Now

How do you know when dialogue is the right process to move parties in conflict with one another forward? How do you know if the stakeholders are ready to engage in dialogue? It is good idea to answer these questions:

- Do you have the support of the leaders of the community?
- Are there clear issues that the stakeholders want to address?
- Do you think you can get a balanced group of willing participants that includes representatives from all stakeholder groups?
- Are those invited to the process at a place where they are able to listen to each other with the goal of creating a broader understanding?
- Will the principles of dialogue be upheld if you bring people together?
- Do you have the resources to bring people together for a sustained period of time?

Sometimes you determine that dialogue is not a good idea. It's not the right fit. This might happen when violence and hatred are higher than the will to work together and find common ground, or when there is a lack of capacity to follow through.

Sometimes dialogue isn't a good idea because the time pressure is too great and there is no sense that a sustained process is realistic. Or perhaps parties express interest but seem to just be going through the motions. You might determine that dialogue isn't the right process for the moment.

What can you do?

It might be that before groups can come together for an intergroup dialogue they need to first spend some time in an intragroup dialogue, to listen to and understand the varied perspectives within their own group. You might find that processes like negotiation or mediation are a better fit for a particular conflict. It may be that participants need training and skills like active listening before engaging in dialogue. Dialogue is a powerful tool of conflict transformation, but it has to be implemented when certain conditions are met that support a transformative experience.

Source

Designing community-based dialogue, Alison Milofsky, United States Institute of Peace,