USING FACILITATED DIALOGUES TO SPARK COMMUNITY RESILIENCE ACTION

Strategies for Community-Centric Planning

PURPOSE

This module equips community leaders, Extension professionals, and partners to use **facilitated, deliberative dialogues** to help communities define their own resilience priorities and move toward action.

Core Principle: People support what they help shape. Structured dialogue creates space for diverse perspectives, shared understanding, and locally driven decisions.

Outcome: Participants will design and facilitate a dialogue session that surfaces community priorities, builds trust, and leads to actionable next steps.

WHAT DELIBERATIVE DIALOGUE MEANS

Deliberative dialogue is a structured conversation where participants: - Explore multiple perspectives on an issue - Weigh trade-offs and consequences - Identify shared values and priorities - Move toward informed, collective choices

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WHY IT MATTERS

Community challenges are complex and can be difficult or polarized. Dialogue: - Reduces conflict and builds mutual understanding - Centers community values—not just technical data - Creates ownership of decisions - Leads to more durable, community-supported actions

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SECTION 1: DESIGNING THE DIALOGUE

Key Elements

- Small groups (8–20 participants)
- Neutral, trusted setting
- Clear purpose and ground rules
- Balanced information (no single “right” answer)

WORKSHEET 1: DIALOGUE DESIGN PLAN

Element	Your Plan
Topic/Focus	
Target Participants	
Location	
Facilitator(s)	
Date/Time	
Materials Needed	

SECTION 2: FACILITATION FLOW (90 MINUTES)

Opening (10–15 minutes)

Facilitator Script (Example): - Welcome participants - Set expectations: “This is a space to explore, not debate” - Establish ground rules (respect, listening, no interruptions)

Framing the Issue (10–15 minutes)

- Present a neutral overview of the issue
- Share 2–3 different approaches or perspectives

Dialogue & Deliberation (40–50 minutes)

Prompt Questions:

- What concerns you most about this issue?
- What trade-offs do you see with different approaches?
- What values should guide our decisions?

Facilitator Tips: - Encourage participation from all voices - Avoid steering the conversation - Capture key themes visibly

Reflection & Priorities (15–20 minutes)

- What stood out?

- Where is there common ground?
- What should be prioritized?

Closing (5–10 minutes)

- Summarize key insights
- Identify next steps
- Thank participants

SECTION 3: FROM DIALOGUE TO ACTION

WORKSHEET 2: PRIORITY IDENTIFICATION

Priority Area	Why It Matters	Level of Community Support	Next Step

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WORKSHEET 3: ACTION PLANNING

Action Idea	Who Is Involved	Resources Needed	Timeline

SECTION 4: ENSURING INCLUSIVE DIALOGUE

Strategies:

- Recruit diverse participants intentionally
- Provide language access and accommodations
- Use small groups to encourage participation
- Validate lived experience alongside data

SECTION 5: FACILITATOR GUIDANCE – WHAT ACTUALLY WORKS

Do This:

- Stay neutral and curious
- Create a safe space for differing views
- Focus on shared values
- Follow up after the dialogue

Avoid This:

- Turning dialogue into a presentation
- Allowing dominant voices to control the discussion
- Forcing consensus
- Ending without clear next steps

SECTION 6: COMMON CHALLENGES & SOLUTIONS

Challenge	Strategy
Low participation	Use trusted partners for outreach
Conflict/tension	Reinforce ground rules, acknowledge emotions
Lack of clarity	Summarize frequently, capture themes

SECTION 7: REFLECTION

Reflection Questions

- Did all voices have a chance to be heard?
- What values emerged from the conversation?
- Are participants ready to take action?

ACTION COMMITMENT

Within the next 30 days, we will:

SECTION 8: ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Deliberative Dialogue & Facilitation

- National Issues Forums. *Structured guides for balanced, non-polarized discussions* https://www.nifi.org/en/issue-guides
- Dialogue & Deliberation Toolkit (ASTC). *Guide for facilitating community dialogue and engagement* https://communityscience.astc.org/dialogue-deliberation-toolkit/ *Methods*
- National Coalition for Dialogue & Deliberation (NCDD) *Comprehensive facilitation tools and methods* https://ncdd.org

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Community Resilience & Engagement

- Community Resilience Resources. *Case studies and tools for community-based climate planning* https://www.fema.gov/emergency-managers/practitioners/community-resilience
- Additional Community Resources. *Community resilience and preparedness information and tools* https://www.fema.gov/emergency-managers/community-vulnerability

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Facilitation Techniques

- Liberating Structures. *Simple methods to increase participation and engagement* https://www.liberatingstructures.com

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FINAL NOTE

Facilitated dialogue is not just a conversation, it is a pathway to action.

When done well, it transforms diverse perspectives into shared direction and momentum.

Your role is to **create the conditions for meaningful dialogue—and help translate it into action.**

(End of Module)