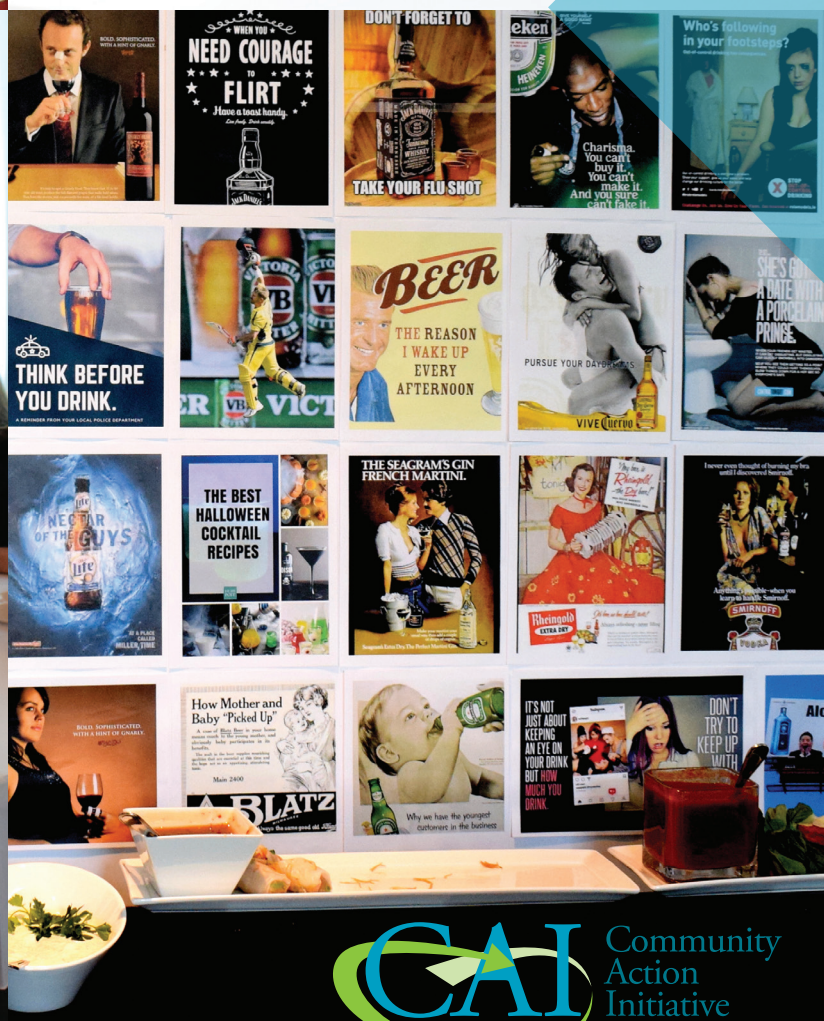


A Guide to
Organizing
**Community
DIALOGUE** *on*
Moderate-Risk
DRINKING



ABOUT THIS GUIDE

This guide is intended to be a practical tool to accompany Community Action Initiative's Convening Grants for Community Dialogue initiative.

It aims to assist you in the planning, organizing and convening of community dialogues about reducing harms related to moderate-risk drinking.

Drawing on learnings from CAI's pilot phase of this initiative, it outlines some of the key considerations for hosting successful dialogues, as well as resources to help you learn more. Much of the information is relevant to all types of community dialogues, however, this guide is particularly useful where community dialogue on this topic is largely new or unexplored across diverse community stakeholders.



Guide developed by



WHAT IS DIALOGUE?

At its core, community dialogue brings together people from different backgrounds and perspectives in an engaging and inclusive conversation. It creates space to listen and explore these different viewpoints, in order to work towards understanding them better together.

Dialogue differs from other types of conversation such as debate which focuses on “winning” an argument or defending personal beliefs and assumptions. It is also different from discussion which some characterize as “debate while playing nice”, or where the emphasis is often on coming up with quick decisions or strategies. In contrast, the emphasis of dialogue is on learning, really listening to each other, and building shared understanding and insight across differences. While dialogue often leads to personal and collective action, it does not aim to provide answers or a “quick fix”. Instead, the focus is on drawing out and exploring our questions, assumptions, beliefs and values. The underlying goal is often better understanding of ourselves, each other and the issue, which can ultimately lead to more informed and thoughtful action.

Genuine dialogue can help build trust and respect, and sow the seeds for collaborative action. It can also help to clarify areas of disagreement and identify separate parallel pathways forward, while reducing polarization.

WHY DIALOGUE ABOUT MODERATE-RISK DRINKING?

Community dialogue can be particularly useful for complex community issues such as moderate-risk drinking. This issue is not commonly explored, there are deeply rooted cultural values at play, and perceptions of the issue vary greatly.

“Real dialogue is where two or more people become willing to suspend their certainty in each other’s presence.”

- David Bohm

In contrast with problematic or high-risk drinking, moderate-risk drinking is one of those issues that is widely practiced but largely unexplored. The degree to which drinking is normalized in our culture, tensions between economic influences and health impacts, and people’s diversity of perspectives and experiences with alcohol are just a few of the aspects that make this issue complex and multi-layered. If exploring this issue is new or if there are diverse values and viewpoints about it in your community, dialogue can be a great first step before jumping into developing strategies. Dialogue can help build understanding of the unique context of this issue in your community, build trust, and potentially create a platform for future collaboration.

For these guidelines,
“a drink”
means:



PLANNING FOR DIALOGUE

When it comes to community dialogue, there is no “one size fits all”. The size, methods, and approach of your dialogue should match your own community context and whom you hope to involve. With that in mind, below are some common steps that may be helpful to consider as you plan your own unique dialogue.

Building Your Team

Building a team of partners to plan and host the dialogue can be helpful to share ownership, strengthen collaboration, and spread out the organizing tasks. A collaborative approach can also be helpful to build your own understanding of various perspectives of the issue, and to reach more diverse networks of potential dialogue participants within your community. Depending on the level of existing partnerships, it is important to factor in adequate time and resources for the partnership building process.



Some questions you may wish to consider:

- Who might be well-positioned as a respected, neutral convener on this issue?
- Who has a stake or is actively involved in this issue that would be well-positioned to help organize? (Who has a valuable perspective but would be better to involve as a participant or in other dialogue roles?)
- Who do we have existing relationships/partnerships with, and who do we want to strengthen collaboration with?
- Who has capacity, energy and resources to be involved in organizing this dialogue?

“Community dialogue can also take many forms. It is not limited to a public meeting or sitting around a board table. The only critical requirement is that it helps us listen to and understand each other.”

*- Canadian Institute for Substance Use Research,
Community Dialogues on Opioid Use*

Exploring & Framing the Issue

The planning process can often itself be an opportunity to begin the exploration and sense-making of the issue that you plan to invite others into dialogue about. Exploring moderate-risk drinking with your partners team and others in advance can help you to surface some of the key questions and viewpoints that you wish participants to engage with in dialogue. This deeper understanding of the issue can also be helpful in framing your invitation to potential dialogue participants.

Some questions you may wish to consider:

- Why is this issue relevant in your community and who does it affect? What does local data and lived experience tell us about this issue?
- What are some of the tensions, challenges and opportunities related to this issue in your community? (e.g. economic benefits vs. health impacts)
- How does your own experience influence your beliefs, assumptions and values about this issue?
- How might community dialogue on this topic be useful?

Developing Your Learning Agenda & Dialogue Goals

It can be helpful early on to work with your partners to collectively define what you hope to learn through your community dialogue, and how this learning might be utilized. This can also serve to inform your dialogue evaluation. While holding your learning agenda and goals, remember that it is also important to stay reflective and open to learning opportunities that emerge through the planning and dialogue process.

Some questions you may wish to consider together:

- What do we hope to learn through this community dialogue and the process of planning and organizing?
- What would a “successful” community dialogue look like to each of us, and to all of us collectively?

The Invitation (and the leg-work)

One of the first things that will be helpful to get clear on is whom you hope to engage in dialogue. This will assist you to frame your invitation by considering the tone, language and information that will feel welcoming to these potential participants. Below are some learnings from the pilot phase regarding framing the invitation:

- Develop an engaging name and provocative facts to make people curious
- Use inclusive, accessible, plain language
- Highlight a respected, neutral convener of the dialogue
- Include balanced messaging that will speak to a broad range of interests and perspectives
- Use the process of developing the invitation as a “dialogue before the dialogue” to develop personalized relationships with stakeholder groups
- Illustrate why this issue is compelling and why it matters, without taking a position
- Outline what people can expect, who should attend, and why it is important that they come
- Define the scope and focus of the dialogue (e.g. focus on moderate-risk drinking, not problematic drinking)

Another key learning from the pilot phase is the importance and value of convening a diverse cross-section of stakeholders who might not usually talk to each other. Below are some examples of the kinds of people, organizations and sectors you might want to invite and target to join in your dialogue.

- Interested community members
- Local businesses, including liquor, tourism and restaurant industries
- Local and regional government
- Regional Health Authorities and other health-sector organizations
- Community-based organizations
- First Nations and aboriginal organizations
- Law enforcement
- Researchers and Educators
- Other target populations

Community engagement often takes intention and effort, and it is important to plan adequate time and resources (the leg-work!) for community outreach and promotion. In a sea of other important community issues, moderate alcohol consumption is often not “on people’s radar” as a critical community concern. In this context, below are some considerations for outreach and promotion:

- Use a combination of broad (e.g. newspaper, social media, etc.) as well as targeted (e.g. personal invitation) outreach strategies
- Invite individuals and organizations personally and explain why you think it is important to have their perspective in the dialogue
- Set up a registration system and time-line that allows you to do additional outreach as needed to fill gaps in your participant group
- Partner with organizations who can help distribute your invitation to their members or mailing list, or who can assist with personal invitations
- Invest in visually appealing promotional materials



Designing & Facilitating Dialogue

Dialogue Design:

While there is no end to how you might structure your dialogue design, below are some typical elements to a dialogue process you may wish to consider:

Introductions

Introductions set the tone and allow participants to warm up for dialogue. It is helpful for participants to feel welcome, to have a sense of who else is participating, what the goals of the session are, and what lies ahead

Developing Agreements/ground rules

Creating safe space is a critical aspect of dialogue process. Developing or introducing a set of “ground rules” or “group agreements” is important in ensuring everyone is committed to sharing the responsibility for creating and holding this space. You can introduce a set of proposed agreements or invite participants to come up with a list that makes them feel safe and productive. This could include agreements such as “listen to understand” or “speak one at a time” or “speak from your own experience, not others”.

Sharing personal stories & perspectives

Starting with people’s personal experiences and giving space for each person’s voice is an important aspect of dialogue. This can build trust, develop a practice of equality, and assist in beginning to hear and understand different perspectives on the issue. It can be helpful to start with people’s personal experiences, instead of starting with an overly conceptual discussion of the issue or jumping too quickly to a conversation about “what we should do”.

Exploring a range of views

Introducing and exploring a balanced range of views on the issue can be helpful to broaden participants’ understanding, particularly if the group is fairly like-minded. This can be done through a range of methods such as a curated panel of speakers representing different viewpoints, or an exploration of key perspectives and themes.

Next steps, recommendations, or bringing it all together

It is important to note that not all dialogue necessarily leads to collaborative action or decision-making. However, depending on the focus of your dialogue, it may be helpful to explore what the dialogue has meant for participants and how this might influence them personally or collectively moving forward.



Role of the Facilitator(s):

An important role in any dialogue process is the role of the dialogue facilitator (which can be played by an individual or a team). The facilitator helps to create safe space for participants by introducing and reflecting group agreements, and helps to guide the flow of the dialogue process by focusing participants and probing for deeper reflection. Facilitators do not need to be experts on the topic; however, it is important that they are neutral, seen as trustworthy, and a good listener.

Some of the key roles of the facilitator include:

- Set a relaxed, comfortable and welcoming tone
- Establish and maintain group agreements or ground rules with the group
- Guide, focus and prompt the dialogue process
- Equalize and balance participation
- Provide closure and highlight key themes that have emerged from the group

GOOD QUESTIONS:

At the heart of good dialogue are good questions. Creating open, inviting questions that go beyond yes/no answers, provoke curiosity and surface our assumptions can invite participants into deeper dialogue.

Moving away from questions that over-emphasize problem-solving can open up our thinking to what might be an unexpected, and different future.

A POWERFUL QUESTION:

- generates curiosity in the listener
- stimulates reflective conversation
- is thought-provoking
- surfaces underlying assumptions
- invites creativity and new possibilities
- generates energy and forward movement
- channels attention and focuses inquiry
- stays with participants
- touches a deep meaning
- evokes more questions

The Art of Powerful Questions
by Eric Vogt, Juanita Brown and David Isaacs

“A question not asked is a door not opened.”

– Marilee Goldberg,
The Art of a Question

Setting the Table (logistics matter!)

One of the key conditions for successful dialogue is creating a welcoming, comfortable environment. The setting for your dialogue matters, as do many seemingly small details that all contribute to setting an appropriate tone.

Some things you may wish to consider:

- Select a welcoming space with physical features and amenities that are conducive to dialogue (e.g. natural light, round tables, comfortable chairs)
- Select a “neutral” venue and location that will be comfortable for different sectors
- Tend to small details that signal this is a “special event” (e.g. table cloths, flowers, etc.)
- Provide refreshments and food – nothing builds community like sharing food!
- Consider ways to create a fun social environment, such as a “mocktail” (non-alcoholic cocktail) reception” before the dialogue
- Ensure you plan sufficient time for meaningful dialogue.

Harvesting the Learning & Seeding What’s Next

One thing you may want to consider in advance is how you will record and harvest learnings, insights and themes from your dialogue in a way that respects participants anonymity. There are a variety of ways to gather this ranging from designated note-takers or graphic recorders, to creating simple templates where participants can summarize and record highlights of their conversations. Large post-its can be particularly useful in having participants articulate key themes. In World café dialogue, small tables are covered with large paper for participants to write, draw and doodle throughout their conversation. Whatever you choose, thinking of non-intrusive and engaging ways to harvest the learning can be effective and fun.

It can also be helpful to gather feedback from participants both on the content of the dialogue as well as the process and level of engagement. For great tips on how you might evaluate your dialogue, please see the [CAI Evaluation Guide](#).

As noted previously, dialogue can be a great mechanism to gauge community readiness for collaborative action. Whatever comes from your dialogue, it is useful to follow up with participants to share a summary of themes and learnings to support them in carrying these learnings forward. As a partners’ team, it can be useful to gather after your dialogue session to reflect on the experience and identify your next steps and any opportunities that you may wish to support moving forward.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES: To dig deeper into hosting and organizing community dialogues, please visit the website www.healthydrinkingbc.ca and see the Additional Resources list for links to many other great resources.

FOR MORE INFO CONTACT:

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