

# Everyday Democracy and the Dialogue to Change Process



## Do you want to work with others to make your community better? We have resources that can help.

Dialogue to Change is an adaptable approach to community engagement that is grounded in years of experience and learning with communities throughout the US.

In our process, diverse groups of people meet over several weeks, and take part in activities that build trust, provide opportunities to share honestly, learn about an issue and work together on solutions and action.

The process involves a combination of listening to others, being heard, engaging productively in disagreement, and developing priorities for action. We provide discussion guides and other resources online that guide you through the process. Our staff or consultants may also be available to help you implement Dialogue to Change in your community, or to create your own discussion materials.



*The combination of people listening to each other, sharing their own experiences, and working together to solve problems can have a deep impact, both on the issues area at hand and on how the community addresses other issues in the future.*

Given the impact of racism on our country, our process pays special attention to how structural racism and other inequities affect the issues we address. Everyday Democracy has learned that progress in addressing structural racism leads to progress in addressing other inequities as well. This is why a racial equity lens is built into all of our resources, coaching and materials.



## Everyday Democracy's History and Goals

Everyday Democracy started out as the Study Circles Resource Center, and has worked with more than 600 communities, incorporating lessons learned into our principles, process, and coaching. Our Dialogue to Change process creates the time and conditions for people to listen to each other, be heard, and together, effectively tackle difficult issues and move forward with real change.

Everyday Democracy works for an equitable, participatory democracy at the local, state and national levels. Everyday Democracy is a project of the Paul J. Aicher Foundation, a national, nonprofit, nonpartisan operating foundation, whose mission is to advance deliberative democracy and improve the quality of public life in the United States. Our goal is a democracy where equity, voice and participation are made real for everyone.

The Dialogue to Change process is a core element of our work. It helps communities create their own space for engagement, equity and problem solving. Many communities have sustained the dialogue process and embedded more deliberative and inclusive practices into the way they operate.



*"It surprised me how many things we could all actually agree on, and how many things we actually talked about throughout the span of the circle."*



## Core Principles: Our Approach to Change

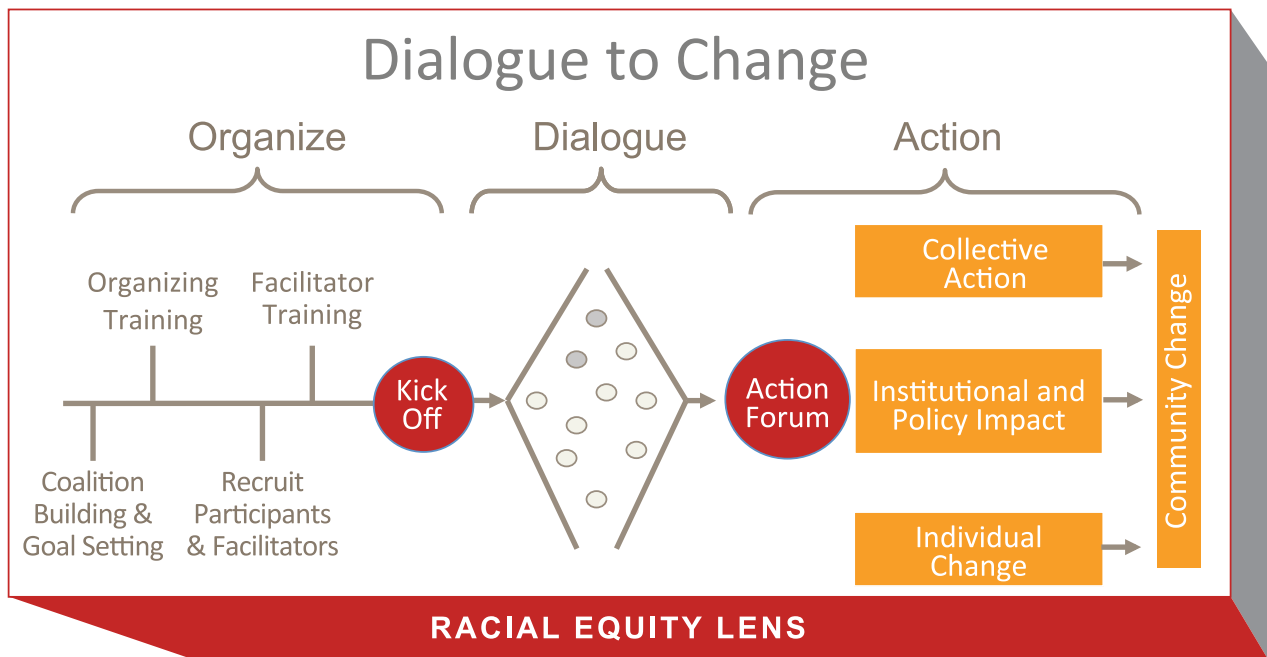
- Include everyone. Demonstrate that the whole community is welcome and needed.
- Create opportunities for people, institutions and government to work together for the common good. Keep all participants at the table.
- Embrace diversity. Reach out to all different types of people and create opportunities for them to speak honestly and listen to each other.
- Make decisions that reflect everyone's voice, particularly those who have been marginalized or excluded.
- Share knowledge, resources, power and decision making.
- Combine dialogue and deliberation. Create public talk that builds understanding and explores a range of solutions.
- Recognize how structural racism has shaped our nation and our communities. Use understanding of racial equity to create equitable opportunities and outcomes.
- Connect deliberative dialogue to social, political and policy change.
- Connect local change to a national movement to strengthen democracy.

Communities that wish to begin work connecting across divides may not yet be in a position to undertake a full community-wide Dialogue to Change process. In those cases, the principles above, and Everyday Democracy's resources, can be useful in shaping or informing other organizing and change efforts.

# What are the steps involved in organizing Dialogue to Change?

A community-wide Dialogue to Change initiative needs a commitment of time and a diverse group of core supporters. Our process calls for an Organizing Team to generate publicity, recruit participants who represent the community in terms of race, age, gender and other factors, and follow through on action steps. Local people are trained as dialogue facilitators.

First, we suggest you reach out to us to learn more. If you decide to move forward, our staff and coaches may be able to help you create an Organizing Team and coalition to lead the work in your community. Our website also contains a wealth of information, about the overall process and about each step, and many stories of how the process has been used over time.



<b>1</b> <b>Organizing</b>	Making sure the right people are included in the Dialogue groups. Participants should reflect the community, diverse in race, gender, age, gender identity and socioeconomics. This stage can take four to six months.
<b>2</b> <b>Dialogues</b>	Many small groups, sometimes called Study Circles, led by local, trained, facilitators, meet weekly for four to six weeks. These generally consist of eight to 12 people each, and may use an Everyday Democracy topic-specific discussion guide.
<b>3</b> <b>Action</b>	Groups come together after the Dialogues to share findings and agree on action steps.
<b>4</b> <b>Evaluation, Communication and Follow-up</b>	Everyday Democracy remains in touch, providing follow-up support and feedback, help for communities in sharing stories of their work and progress and incorporating outcomes and lessons learned into our own knowledge and work.

## Other Everyday Democracy Resources

In addition to resources and technical assistance in the Dialogue to Change process, Everyday Democracy can also connect you with our staff, resources, or members of our Senior Associate Network, to help you apply the principles and elements of Dialogue to Action in your community.

**An extensive, open-source resource library** offers a full catalogue of discussion guides, handouts on specific stages and topics, stories of communities who have used our Dialogue to Change process, and other resources.

We maintain a **network of coaches and Senior Associates** who are experienced in our process and can provide consultation and train community leaders.

We **partner with communities and with national organizations** in the fields of civic engagement, dialogue and deliberation, and racial equity, to advance public participation and expand the reach and impact of civic engagement and tools.

Finally, Everyday Democracy's partner **Anchor Institutions** also provide related coaching and training.



*“It definitely helped out a lot with everybody’s opinions and feelings about the situation.”*



Everyday Democracy is driven by the knowledge that together we can tackle and make progress on the most difficult issues facing us.

We have seen the power and impact of honest and authentic conversations in which people share their own experiences, hear from others, and tackle difficult perceptions and beliefs that often fester unstated. More than ever our country needs ways for diverse people and institutions to come together to create deeper understanding and systemic change.

The work requires a foundation of inclusion, bridge-building, respect and trust; a commitment of time and energy; and a willingness to engage in conversations that are difficult. Our process provides the opportunity and structure for these elements to develop. Though the work requires a commitment of time and energy, it helps build communities that are safer, more equitable and more welcoming.



Suggested further reading and resources:

1. For a full listing of our discussion guides, handouts on specific stages of the process, and other resources, visit our website.
2. *Organizing Community-wide Dialogue for Action and Change: A Step-by-Step Guide*, Everyday Democracy, 2001.
3. *A Guide to Training Public Dialogue Facilitators*, Everyday Democracy, 2008.
4. *What Works: Study Circles in the Real World*, Everyday Democracy, 2003.