



## WSLCB Deliberative Dialogue Guidance

### What is deliberative dialogue?

One of the most frequent uses of public dialogue is to initiate conversation between government and stakeholders (including the voluntary sector) or between government and citizens (Dale & Bird, 2010). There are various textures of dialogue, and **deliberative dialogue** is one of them.

According to the Oxford English Dictionary, dialogue is ‘a conversation carried out between two or more persons...a verbal exchange of thought.’ We can think of dialogue as being a shared inquiry - a way of thinking and reflecting together (Isaacs, 1999). However, **dialogue is not about winning an argument or coming to agreement, but about *increased understanding and learning*** (Heierbacher, 2012, emphasis added).

Yankelovich (1999) suggests three principles that are essential to genuine dialogue:

- 1) Establish equity among participants and excluding coercive influences.
- 2) Listening with empathy.
- 3) Bringing assumptions into the open.

Dale & Bird (2010) add a fourth principle particularly relevant to public dialogue:

- 4) Encouraging diversity of perspectives.

In other words, **dialogue is about creating meaning together, finding a shared understanding of an issue, and discovering what values are most important in resolving it.** Dialogue is often open-ended, ***focused more on increasing understanding and developing relationships than on reaching an agreement.*** Deliberation, on the other hand, emphasizes the importance of examining options and trade-offs so people can make informed public decisions. The trust, mutual understanding and relationships that are built during dialogue often lay the groundwork needed for effective deliberation. The process of deliberation is key to public engagement work as well, enabling people to discuss the consequences, costs and trade-offs of various policy options, and work through the emotions and values that are a necessary part of making recommendations and decisions. (Heierbacher, 2012).

**Deliberative dialogue** engages participants in policy discussion. This form of dialogue is a robust process that can be adapted to a variety of issues and to both stakeholder and citizen processes. Citizen processes are those in which people participate in their capacity as individuals. In contrast, some stakeholders participate as representatives of a certain interest group and may feel constrained to stay within the bounds of that interest group’s perspective. However, scholarship and years of practice demonstrate that deliberative dialogue can provide a space and process for all participants to meaningfully discuss multiple positions (Dale & Bird, 2010).

WSLCB is charged with ensuring the safety of the people of Washington state. WSLCB works with the public on key decisions that affect the safety of Washington state residents, and the agency has a central role in creating regulatory frameworks to support that work. However, decision

making is not always an either/or choice. Both expert knowledge and citizen perspectives are crucial to the formulation of wise policy. And, wisdom can be characterized as the union of values *and* information. Policy based solely on technical or scientific knowledge is not necessarily wise policy. Sometimes there is not clear science to go on, as in the case of, for instance, pandemic preparedness, and science itself is not necessarily free of values. WSLCB encourages moving from yes/no options, to yes/*and* options, and creating space for engagement. WSLCB believes that residents have the capacity to be well informed just as experts have the capacity to better appreciate the concerns of people in our state.

**Deliberative dialogue** can serve many purposes:

- Resolve conflicts or differences of understanding, and bridge divides. Increasing opportunity for genuine dialogue between experts and citizens is a way to narrow the divide;
- Shifting the tone of public discourse on a contentious issue to courteous and solvable;
- Building understanding and knowledge about complex issues;
- Generating innovative solutions to problems;
- Inspiring collective or individual action; and
- Building civic capacity, or the ability for communities to solve their own public problems. (Heierbacher, 2012).

Techniques range from intimate, small-group dialogues to large televised forums involving hundreds or even thousands of participants. Evolving communication technologies have been integrated into these programs to overcome barriers of scale, geography, time, and more recently in limitations to in-person engagement as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic (Heierbacher, 2012).

WSLCB is introducing this form of engagement through moderated panel discussions, aligning with the Citizens Panel model (Crosby, Keller & Schaefer, 1986; Heierbacher, 2012; Dale & Bird, 2010).

## How is deliberative dialogue different than debate?

Deliberative dialogue versus debate

DELIBERATIVE DIALOGUE	DEBATE
Collaborative	Oppositional
Common ground	Points of divergence
Listening to find meaning	Listening to find flaws
Listening to find agreement	Listening to find points to argue
Openness to being wrong	Determination to be right
Weighing alternatives	Winning
Assumes that others have pieces of the answer and all can find it together	Assumes there is a right answer and someone has it
Involves concern for the other person	Involves countering others

## What are the ground rules for dialogue?

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1. The purpose of dialogue is to understand and to learn from one another (you cannot 'win' a dialogue).
  2. All dialogue participants speak for themselves, not as a representative of others' interests.
  3. In a dialogue everyone is treated as an equal: leave status and stereotypes at the door.
  4. Be open and listen to others, especially when you disagree. Suspend judgment.
  5. Identify and test assumptions (even your own).
  6. Listen carefully and respectfully to the views of others: acknowledge you have heard the other, especially when you disagree.
  7. Look for common ground.
  8. Express disagreement with ideas, not with personalities or motives (disagree without being disagreeable).
  9. Respect all points of view.
  10. The moderator guides the discussion, yet remains objective.
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Source: Public Health Agency of Canada (2006) (adapted).

## How are the sessions formatted?

This session is scheduled for one hour and thirty minutes.

- The moderator will open the forum with topic background, panel introduction, and ground rules.
- Panelists will provide a brief introduction, including their background, their experience with the subject matter, and any thoughts they'd like to share.
- Questions will be displayed on the screen, and posed to the panel.
- The remainder of the meeting will be interactive (using the hand-raising feature in Teams) to allow participants and listeners to pose questions to the panel.

## How can I participate in Deliberative Dialogue at WSLCB?

Please join us on May 31, 2022 from 10:00 a.m. – 11:30 a.m. You can join by clicking on [this link](#).

Questions? Contact [rules@lcb.wa.gov](mailto:rules@lcb.wa.gov)

## How are panelists selected?

For the fourth panel discussion on this topic, LCB asked a diverse group of professionals with experience in cannabis regulation and oversight. Panelists include:

- Dr. Michael Milburn, Professor of Psychology, UMass Boston (retired)
- Dr. Nicholas Lovrich, Emeritus Regents Professor, School of Politics, Philosophy and Public Affairs
- Dr. David Northrop, Crime Laboratory Manager, WSP Crime Lab

- Sheri Jenkins, WSP Crime Lab

## References

Crosby, N., Kelly, J. M., & Schaefer, P. (1986). Citizen's panels: a new approach to citizen participation. *Public Administration Review*, 46(2), 170–178.

Dale, J., & Bird, F. (2010). *Public dialogue: bridging the gap between knowledge and wisdom*. In Westley, F., & Bird, F. B. (2011). *Voices From the Voluntary Sector : Perspectives on Leadership Challenges*. University of Toronto Press, Scholarly Publishing Division. <https://doi.org/10.3138/9781442699915-017>.

Heierbacher, S. (2012). Navigating the range of public engagement approaches. *Dispute Resolution Magazine*. 18 (2), 10-13.

Isaacs, W. (1999). *Dialogue and the art of thinking together*. New York: Doubleday.

Yankelovich, D. (1999). *The magic of dialogue*. New York: Simon and Schuster.