Civil Dialogue around Race Relations

Competencies Framework

February 2017

Background:

The Rapid Response Team (RRT) on Civil Discourse [hyperlink] was given as part of a charge from the Extension Committee on Operations and Policy (ECOP) to identify or assemble a set of competencies that help promote civil dialogue on race relations. The RRT gratefully acknowledges contributions of Extension specialists and others with proficiency on this topic for their contributions in assembling and vetting the competency framework that follows.

Civil dialogue involves creating a safe place for community members to assemble to discuss a challenging question. The process of dialogue typically involves some level of facilitation, agreement to a set of guidelines, and has a central focus on increasing understanding among participants on the topic. The process may or may not lead to consensus or action. Yet civil dialogue will always seek to foster listening and understanding.

This particular framework focuses the dialogue efforts on race relations given the intense discord that has been evident over the past year. Many of the competencies identified throughout this document, though, have a much broader application to other issues that cause divide in society including other challenges around diversity, inclusion, and equity, as well as other types of challenges that occur in communities.

Introduction:

Becoming competent in facilitating civil dialogue around race relations requires a broad skillset. Within that set are two partially overlapping subsets of skills from which the professional must draw to be effective. One set of skills relates directly to the ability to organize, convene, and lead an effort to bring people together around any challenging issue. The other skillset is directly related to competencies around multi-cultural communication and interaction. While a person could be competent within one of these spheres and not the other, to effectively facilitate civil dialogue around the unique challenges of race relations involves the intersection of both sets of skills. Mastery of the combined competencies will equip the professional to analyze a situation, determine an appropriate approach, engage others in organizing for a longer term program or event, prepare for the process, foster participation, and facilitate resulting action. Through the lens of race relations, the professional will also be keenly aware of how culture and context may impact a given situation, and will carefully lead the process in such a way as to promote understanding and healing.

**Two Spheres of Civil Dialogue around Race Relations**
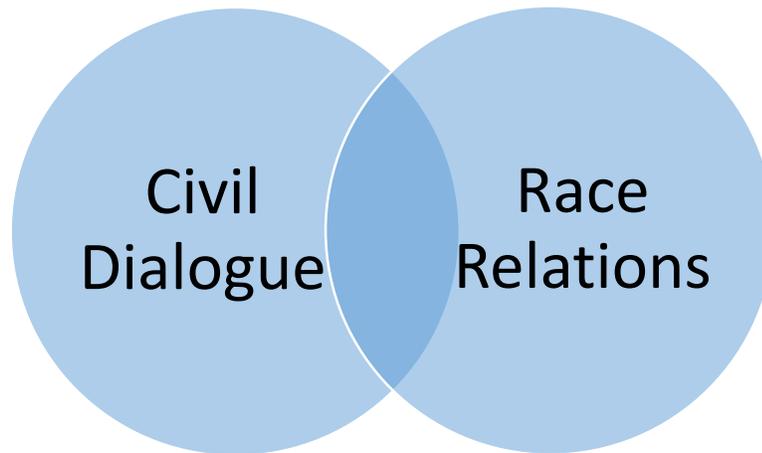
The Rapid Response Team recognizes that building competencies around civil dialogue to address race relations is but one aspect of preparing CES professionals to support communities. Our country is grappling with how to engage in civil dialogue across a range of social and policy issues such as employment, housing, immigration, religion, sexual orientation, political values, poverty, and others. Race and issues of structural racism can often be the underbelly beneath many of these issues. While this document focuses primarily on competencies to engage on the issue of race relations, we recognize that many competencies are transferrable, but additional expertise may be warranted to prepare the professional to address a wider range of issues. Thus, given the original charge to the team, this document focuses primarily on issues around race relations.

I. Civil Dialogue Overview

Before a dialogue process can effectively take shape, community organizers/facilitators need some basic understanding of what dialogue is and when and how it can successfully move a community forward in addressing a challenging issue or at least better understanding it.

A. Understand the importance of dialogue in addressing challenging issues.

B. Recognize multiple ways of knowing that influence the way people think about issues.

C. Understand and can explain the realms impacting community decision-making (diagram).
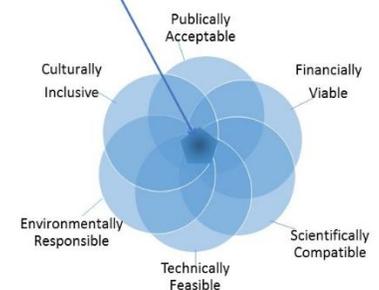
D. Identify factors influencing the type of public input that may be appropriate in a given situation.

E. Recognize situations in which dialogue may be appropriate and when it may not.

II. <u>Civil Dialogue and the Land Grant University (LGU)</u>

Aligning civil dialogue efforts with the Land Grant mission sometimes leads to puzzling questions. In order to successfully integrate civil dialogue into the LGU work, an understanding of how the two fit together—or are challenged to do so—will help pave the way to successful university-community collaboration (see Wright, 2012).

A. Understand the history of Extension as a grassroots knowledge-sharing and relationship-building institution, particularly the role that group discussion and civil dialogue has played in its history (Shaffer, 2016).

B. Recognize how dialogue can strengthen Extension work with communities (Hustedde, 1996)

C. Articulate the value of civil dialogue to both the LGU as well as to communities

D. Balance "deliver science based knowledge" with community engagement to work alongside communities for solutions (Peters, 2014).

E. Recognize community building as one of everyone in Extension's tasks.

F. Address common misperceptions of Extension's involvement in civil dialogue such as Extension's mission and potential roles in conflict.

G. Understand Extension's own unique challenges in reaching all audiences within a given community.

III.   Background Analysis

Before engaging the community in civil dialogue, a good understanding of the situation is needed. This foundation should identify major stakeholders/viewpoints, provide baseline data related to the scope of the issue, and articulate the issue clearly to those that might be interested in engaging in conversation.

A.   Understand and acknowledge how issues become controversial
B.   Identify key elements of the situation including why the issue is contentious, scale and trends locally, historical background, stakeholders, power-brokers, and assets/resources available.
C.   Know where to find and how to analyze relevant data
D.   Determine if a dialogue project should be undertaken based on analysis
E.   Frame an issue in a neutral, inclusive, non-threatening manner in order to promote a productive, civil deliberative discussion.
F.   Quickly adapt the analysis and associated framing as new information is identified or as the situation changes.

IV.   Community Organizing

Once a determination is made to hold a dialogue session, organizing the community to ensure a diverse, broad-base of participants relative to the situation is essential to success.

A.   Understand the elements of creating a safe space for dialogue relative to organization (geographic location, timing, selecting moderators and facilitators, etc.)
B.   Identify, recruit, and lead a planning team that is representative of the voices within the issue and of the community itself and including those already active on the issue and also youth. Fully engage them in the planning process.
C.   Garner needed resources for successful dialogue.
D.   Understand the different approaches to engagement and dialogue and properly identify the best approach for the situation.
E.   Craft community invitations that clearly articulate the purpose and that reach all relevant stakeholder groups effectively, using multiple sources and mediums that are appropriate to the situation. Invite involvement rather than mandating participation.
F.   Identify and train volunteers for facilitating civil dialogue.
G.   Understand the various leadership roles that may be present in a dialogue planning and implementation process (facilitator/coordinator/coach/teacher/co-creator/convener/trainer); determine the appropriate role for yourself in the situation, weighing both professional and personal aspects.

V. Processes and Skills in Dialogue

Effectively facilitating a dialogue process involves watchful attention to how people are interacting together throughout the effort. Attention to key areas are vital to success.

A. Design a process appropriate to the situation and available time. State as clearly as possible the approach, timeframe, and goals of the dialogue process.
B. Manage the facilitator role appropriately (neutral, interjecting questions or comments appropriately).
C. Foster a safe and inviting environment for dialogue.
D. Assist the group in developing a shared vision.
E. Support the group in setting norms or group agreements
F. Maintain a positive conversation flow, shepherding dialogue progression through appropriate questions, reflective silence, and natural dialogue among participants.
G. Foster respectful, balanced, and authentic discussion among all dialogue participants.
H. Understand the principles of group dynamics (group think, group polarization, influence, and power) and adapt processes as needed.
I. Employ conflict resolution/management/mediation skills appropriately.
J. Use summarization and synthesis methods to check group and individual understanding.
K. Guide the group toward brainstorming solutions.
L. Help the group consider tensions, trade-offs, and priorities among potential solutions.
M. Employ a variety of decision-making process as needed to fit the group and issue.
N. Recognize when and how to transition the group from dialogue to action, if/when appropriate.
O. Recognize and plan for on-going dialogue in the face of change.

VI. Dialogue to Action

In some instances, dialogue that results in common and shared understanding may be an end goal by itself. However, often dialogue on challenging issues will lead toward collective community action to address or respond to an issue. During this time, maintaining the open, connected, and exploratory atmosphere created during the dialogue phase is vital to community progress and trust-building.

A. Guide the group through the process of identifying community assets that may support efforts moving forward.
B. Help the group set and work toward reasonable goals.
C. Guide groups in developing and implementing action plans.
D. Encourage community members to embrace leadership opportunities to take action and support their work.
E. Track, report, and celebrate progress.

VII.   Cultural Competencies

Creating space for civil dialogue within our diverse and complex society requires acknowledgement and understanding of cultural differences as well as a sensitivity for how to bring diverse individuals and groups together so that productive dialogue can occur.

A.   Understand foundational issues that are sometimes present in multi-cultural dialogue and the need to address these, either in planning or directly with participants.
Examples of these foundational issues are:

1. Assimilation
2. Bias
3. Discrimination
4. Equality
5. Equity
6. Implicit bias
7. Institutional racism

8. Integration
9. Micro aggressions
10. Oppression
11. Power
12. Social identity
13. Social justice
14. White privilege

B.   Acknowledge history of and current state of oppression of various cultural and ethnic groups (racial trauma, violence, etc.) and how those differ from familiar dominant narratives.

C.   Demonstrate understanding of how to work with diverse audiences (relate to, understand, adapt programming, and promote partnering, etc.)

D.   Present information in a non-judgmental way to help people grow and mature through dialogue process.

E.   Recognize elements of culture dynamics such as development, values, beliefs, etc.

F.   Identify myths, stereotypes, perceptions, and biases and work to effectively understand and overcome them.

G.   Facilitate meaningful discussions that differentiate between tolerance, acceptance, appreciation and celebration.

H.   Understand the needs of groups/voices that are marginalized and underrepresented (identifying, recruiting to the table, and creating a safe/trusting space for participation).

I.   Identify common values or interests among groups.

J.   Understand and communicate multiple perspectives on challenging issues.

K.   Create a process that is inclusive and values differences

Other kinds of diversity

L.   Understand how to work with different personality types in group settings.

M.   Adapt processes to allow for participation of those with differing learning styles.

N.   Manage groups that may involve different skill levels in dialogue.

O.   Understand and adapt efforts to meet the needs of communities at risk.

VIII.   Emotional Intelligence and Management
Topics and issues well suited to civil dialogue are often emotionally charged with strongly held views from multiple perspectives. Facilitators must be able to manage emotional responses as well as coach participants in productive management of emotion.
   A.   Demonstrate ability to regulate one's own emotion as well as assist others, especially in moments of high tension
   B.   Recognize that feelings/emotions are an important way of knowing and experiencing the world alongside factually-based information and expert knowledge.
   C.   Create processes that encourage and invite all emotions into the space as a source of healing and transformation

IX.   Facilitator Attitude and Disposition

To facilitate civil dialogue, especially on race relations, one must have certain attitudes and dispositions in order to convene diverse publics for civil dialogue.

   A.   Approach facilitation with open-mindedness and humility that allows one to serve as a neutral and objective facilitator of dialogue.
   B.   Maintain respect for diverse individuals and positions by having patience for how dialogue participants might engage in civil dialogue while striving for credibility and trustworthiness in how issues are discussed.
   C.   Demonstrate a willingness and ability to listen to understand.
   D.   Exercising care to ensure that one's own conversation promotes positive interactions such as avoiding trigger words or concepts that may hinder conversations.
   E.   Have flexibility to modify processes and/or approach as necessary. Also recognize your own limits. Strive to create an environment in which individuals are comfortable and desire to understand one another and the issues discussed.
   F.   Have self-awareness about one's own culture, values, and biases and how they influence facilitation.
   G.   Maintain a willingness to see the community as having valid knowledge and/or more knowledge than expertise from the university.
   H.   Be aware of one's own triggers while facilitating and have outlets for debriefing and decompressing around the challenging issues that arise in civil dialogue work across differences.

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