

NCDD's Engagement Streams Framework

The framework depicted on the following two charts is designed to help people decide which dialogue and deliberation methods are the best fit for their circumstances. No method works in all situations, yet too often people become overly attached to the first D&D process they learn about - and end up with less-than-satisfying results. The National Coalition for Dialogue & Deliberation (NCDD) developed this framework in 2004 to introduce people to the range of possibilities available to them and to send them in a better direction than they may have otherwise gone.

The first chart of the Engagement Streams Framework categorizes the D&D field into four streams based on the organizer's primary intention or purpose - Exploration, Conflict Transformation, Decision Making and Collaborative Action. It shows which of the most well-known and well-tested methods have proven themselves effective in each stream. The second chart outlines 19 of the most well-known and well-tested dialogue and deliberation methods and, first, identifies which of the 4 streams the method focuses significantly on (some models can be used in more than one stream with little adaptation). It also provides additional details such as size of group and how participants are selected.

When we formed NCDD in 2002, many practitioners seemed to be focused on developing expertise in one specific method or another. In the past five years we have seen a distinct shift as more and more practitioners are taking the time to gain training and experience in multiple methods. Practitioners are increasingly conscious of the importance of matching methods to context, and we think this framework has played a part in this shift.

As practitioners gain experience in this work, they also become more adept at creating unique designs based on principles, qualities and elements of a variety of different methods. And they go beyond the idea of one-time events and begin thinking about how D&D can be embedded into the community, organization, agency, etc. they are working in. It is our hope that this framework is a stepping stone that helps practitioners, decision-makers and communities transition to this ideal.

This framework has been featured in a number of publications (including the 2nd edition of *The Change Handbook*, *Democratic Dialogue: A Handbook for Practitioners*, and IAP2's *Participation Quarterly*). It has been used by numerous D&D practitioners to help communities understand their options, and has been presented at a number of conferences. It is also being used as the basis for NCDD's forthcoming Dialogue & Deliberation Guidebook.

That said, it is and always will be a work in progress, and we welcome your suggestions for changes and additions! As the field continues learning and growing, so will this framework. Please email your feedback to me at sandy@thataway.org. And go to www.thataway.org/streams anytime to see the latest iterations of these charts.

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Exploration

Primary purpose: To encourage people/groups to learn more about themselves, their community, or an issue, and possibly discover innovative solutions.

Key Features

Suspending assumptions, creating a space that encourages a different kind of conversation, using ritual and symbolism to encourage openness, emphasis on listening

Important When...

A group or community seems stuck or muddled and needs to reflect on their circumstance in depth and gain collective insight

Examples of Issues

Strengthening democracy, understanding a community of practice

Organizer's Strategy

To encourage new insights and connections to emerge by creating a space for people to share both their thoughts and their feelings.

Key Design Questions

How can we ensure that people feel safe expressing what inspires and touches them? What kind of techniques or rituals will stimulate listening and sharing, without making people uncomfortable?

Methods: Conversation Café, Intergroup Dialogue in the classroom, Wisdom Council, Wisdom Circles, Open Space, Appreciative Inquiry, Bohm Dialogue, Socrates Cafe

Notes:

Conflict Transformation

Primary purpose: To resolve conflicts, to foster personal healing and growth, and to improve relations among groups.

Key Features

Creating a safe space, hearing from everyone, building trust, sharing personal stories and views

Important When...

Relationships among participants are poor or not yet established and need to be. Issue can only be resolved when people change their behavior or attitude, expand their perspective, or take time to reflect and heal.

Examples of Issues

Political polarization, Jewish-Muslim relations, race relations, value-based conflicts, healing after crises or trauma

Organizer's Strategy

To create a safe space for people with different views to talk about their personal experiences and feel heard. Often, to set the groundwork for deliberation and action.

Key Design Questions

How can the issue be framed so that all sides are brought to - and feel welcomed at - the table? What are people's needs relating to this issue, and how can divergent needs (healing, action, respect) be met effectively? If a conflict exists, how overt and volatile is it? How, if at all, will you transition people to "what's next"?

Methods: Sustained Dialogue, Intergroup Dialogue in communities, Victim-Offender Mediation, Public Conversations Project Dialogue, Web Lab's Small Group Dialogue, Compassionate Listening

Notes:

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Decision-Making

Primary purpose: To influence policy decisions and improve public knowledge.

Key Features	Important When...	Examples of Issues	Organizer's Strategy	Key Design Questions
Naming and framing, weighing all options, considering different positions (deliberation), revealing public values, brainstorming solutions	The issue is within government's (or any single entity's) sphere of influence	Budgeting, land use, health care, social security	To involve a representative group of citizens in thorough conversations about complicated policy issues. Ideally, the group is empowered/ supported by government.	How can we best represent the public (random selection, active recruitment, involving large numbers of people)? Should/can public officials participate in the process side-by-side with citizens? What kinds of materials need to be developed or obtained? How can we ensure that this process influences policy?

Methods: National Issues Forums, Citizens Jury, Deliberative Polling, 21st Century Town Meeting, Citizen Choicework, Consensus Conference

Notes:

Collaborative Action

Primary purpose: To empower people and groups to solve complicated problems and take responsibility for the solution.

Key Features	Important When...	Examples of Issues	Organizer's Strategy	Key Design Questions
Using D&D to generate ideas for community action, developing and implementing action plans collaboratively	The issue/dispute requires intervention across multiple public and private entities, and anytime community action is important	Regional sprawl, institutional racism, youth violence, responding to crises	To encourage integrated efforts among diverse stakeholders, sectors, organizations, etc. involved in the problem	Who needs to be at the table? What kind of power dynamics exist already? What group/ leader/institution is most resistant to change? What group tends not to be at the table, although they're affected?

Methods: Study Circles, Future Search, Appreciative Inquiry, Charrettes

Notes:

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21st Century Town Meeting

Focuses On	Size of Group	Session	Participant Selection	Description
Decision-Making	Hundreds to thousands in 1 room at small tables	all-day meeting	Open; recruit for representativeness	AmericaSpeaks' 21st Century Town Meetings enable the general public to give those in leadership positions direct, substantive feedback on key issues. Each meeting engages hundreds or thousands of general interest citizens at a time, utilizing innovative technology to effectively and quickly summarize citizen input. (www.americaspeaks.org)

Appreciative Inquiry

Focuses On	Size of Group	Session	Participant Selection	Description
Exploration & Collaborative Action	From 20 to 2,000	from 1-hour interviews to 4- to 6-day summits	Internal and external stakeholders	Appreciative Inquiry is a change method that encourages stakeholders to explore the best of the past and present in their organizations and communities. AI involves, in a central way, the art and practice of asking questions that strengthen a system's capacity to apprehend, anticipate, and heighten positive potential. (www.appreciativeinquiry.cwru.edu)

Bohmian Dialogue

Focuses On	Size of Group	Session	Participant Selection	Description
Exploration; can also be used for Decision-Making	Small group	no set length or number of meetings	Open or invitation	Created by late physicist David Bohm, Bohmian Dialogue is focused on attending to and discussing individual internal dynamics--assumptions, beliefs, motivations, etc. The idea is not to eliminate them from happening, but to surface them in the conversation in a way that furthers the dialogue. (www.infed.org/archives/e-texts/bohm_dialogue.htm)

Charrettes

Focuses On	Size of Group	Session	Participant Selection	Description
Collaborative Action	A small team of professionals and a much larger group of stakeholders	Intense work sessions last 1-3 days typically; some last 1-2 weeks	Participants represent a range of organized groups, but others with a stake in the issue are encouraged to attend	A charrette is a collaborative and consensus-building design methodology that incorporates input from all stakeholders (the developer, relevant government agencies, and the community). A "charrette team" of experts uses stakeholder input in an continual "feedback loop" to prepare and refine a plan for development with the goal of reaching consensus among the stakeholders. Charrettes, which combine modern design studio and town meeting, help overcome inertia and create meaningful master plans. (www.charretteinstitute.org)

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Citizen Choicework

Focuses On	Size of Group	Session	Participant Selection	Description
Decision-Making	Multiple small groups	1 session, ranging from 2 hours to all day	Open; recruit for representativeness	Public Agenda's Citizen Choicework helps citizens confront tough choices in productive ways. Participants work through values conflicts and practical tradeoffs, and develop a sense of priorities and direction. Key principles include nonpartisan local leadership, inclusive participation, and unbiased discussion materials that "start where the public starts." (www.publicagenda.org)

Citizens Jury

Focuses On	Size of Group	Session	Participant Selection	Description
Decision-Making	Small group	five-day meeting	Random selection	The Citizens Jury process is a method for gathering a microcosm of the public, having them attend five days of hearings, deliberate among themselves and then issue findings and recommendations on the issue they have discussed. (www.jefferson-center.org)

Consensus Conference

Focuses On	Size of Group	Session	Participant Selection	Description
Decision-Making	Large group	2 weekends for participants to prepare, 2-4 day conference	Random selection	Consensus Conferences, developed in Denmark, typically involve a group of citizens with varied backgrounds who meet to discuss issues of a scientific or technical nature. The conference has two stages: the first involves small group meetings with experts to discuss the issues and work towards consensus. The second stage assembles experts, media and the public where the conferences main observations and conclusions are presented. (www.thataway.org/46192a)

Conversation Café

Focuses On	Size of Group	Session	Participant Selection	Description
Exploration; can also be used for Conflict Transformation	Single or multiple small groups	1 or more 60- to 90-minute sessions	Open; publicize to encourage representativeness	Conversation Cafés are hosted conversations which are usually held in a public setting like a coffee shop or bookstore, where anyone is welcome to join. A simple format helps people feel at ease and gives everyone who wants to a chance to speak. (www.conversationcafe.org)

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Compassionate Listening

Focuses On	Size of Group	Session	Participant Selection	Description
Conflict Transformation; can also be used for Exploration	2 to 200 people; usually fewer than 30	30 minutes to 3 days, depending on how many people are involved	Open to whoever is drawn; often listeners are brought in to hear the stories of oppressed or oppressors	In Compassionate Listening, listeners use reflection and skilled inquiry to help speakers deepen their own understanding and awareness. CL engenders generative listening which is non-judgmental, questions that are non-adversarial, and an ability to remain open when witnessing strong feelings and divergent viewpoints. The process can help soften hearts and create the safety necessary for honest, respectful dialogue and sustainable solutions. (www.compassionatelisting.org)

Deliberative Polling

Focuses On	Size of Group	Session	Participant Selection	Description
Decision-Making	Up to several hundred people in small groups in 1 room	weekend-long meeting	Random selection	Deliberative Polling combines deliberation in small group discussions with scientific random sampling to provide public consultation for public policy and for electoral issues. Members of a random sample are polled, and then some members are invited to gather at a single place to discuss the issues after they have examined balanced briefing materials. Participants engage in dialogue with competing experts and political leaders based on questions they develop in small group discussions with trained moderators. (http://cdd.stanford.edu/)

Future Search

Focuses On	Size of Group	Session	Participant Selection	Description
Collaborative Action, can also be used for Conflict Transformation	60 to 80 people	3 days	All inclusive (attempts to bring in all involved)	Future Search is an interactive planning process which helps a group of people discover a set of shared values or themes (common ground) and agree on a plan of action for implementing them. (www.futuresearch.net)

Intergroup Dialogue

Focuses On	Size of Group	Session	Participant Selection	Description
Exploration & Conflict Transformation; can also be used for Collaborative Action	Single or multiple small groups	Regular weekly meetings of 2-3 hours	Open; recruit for representativeness	Intergroup dialogues are face-to-face meetings of people from at least two different social identity groups. They are designed to offer an open and inclusive space where participants can foster a deeper understanding of diversity and justice issues through participation in experiential activities, individual and small group reflections, and dialogues. (www.umich.edu/~igr/ & www.depts.washington.edu/sswwweb/idea/)

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National Issues Forums

Focuses On	Size of Group	Session	Participant Selection	Description
Decision-Making	Up to hundreds in 1 room at small tables	1 two-hour meeting	Open; recruit for representativeness	National Issues Forums offer citizens the opportunity to join together to deliberate, to make choices with others about ways to approach difficult issues and to work toward creating reasoned public judgment. NIF is known for its careful issue framing and quality issue guides which outline 3 or 4 different viewpoints. (www.nifi.org)

Open Space Technology

Focuses On	Size of Group	Session	Participant Selection	Description
Exploration; can also be used for Collaborative Action	Up to hundreds in 1 room, then break up in interest groups multiple times	from 4 hours to ideal of 3 days	Varies	Open Space Technology is a self-organizing practice that invites people to take responsibility for what they care about. In Open Space, a marketplace of inquiry is created where people offer topics they are passionate about and reflect & learn from one another. It is an innovative approach to creating whole systems change and inspiring creativity & leadership among participants. (www.openspaceworld.org)

Public Conversations Project Dialogue

Focuses On	Size of Group	Session	Participant Selection	Description
Conflict Transformation; can also be used for Collaborative Action	Small group	Multiple 2-hour sessions	Involves all sides of an existing conflict	The Public Conversations Project helps people with fundamental disagreements over divisive issues develop the mutual understanding and trust essential for strong communities and positive action. Their dialogue model is characterized by a careful preparatory phase in which all stakeholders/sides are interviewed and prepared for the dialogue process. (www.publicconversations.org)

Socrates Café

Focuses On	Size of Group	Session	Participant Selection	Description
Exploration	3 to 30 people	1-2 hours	Whoever is in the class or at the meeting, or whoever responds to the flyers or articles	Socrates Cafés and other forms of Socratic Dialogue encourage groups inside and outside the classroom to engage in robust philosophical inquiry. The Cafés consist of spontaneous yet rigorous dialogue that inspires people to articulate and discover their unique philosophical perspectives and worldview. They invite diverse viewpoints and require engaged and empathetic listening. They don't force consensus or closure, but are open-ended and can be considered a success if there are more questions at the end than there were at the outset. (www.philosopher.org)

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Study Circles

Focuses On	Size of Group	Session	Participant Selection	Description
Collaborative Action; can also be used for Exploration and Decision-Making	Up to hundreds meeting in separate small groups; come together later for Action Forum	4 to 6 2-hour sessions	Open; recruit for representativeness	Study Circles enable communities to strengthen their own ability to solve problems by bringing large numbers of people together in dialogue across divides of race, income, age, and political viewpoints. Study Circles combine dialogue, deliberation, and community organizing techniques, enabling public talk to build understanding, explore a range of solutions, and serve as a catalyst for social, political, and policy change. (www.studycircles.org)

Sustained Dialogue

Focuses On	Size of Group	Session	Participant Selection	Description
Conflict Transformation; can also be used for Decision-Making & Collaborative Action	Small group	Numerous 2 to 3-hour sessions	Open; recruit for representativeness among conflicting groups	Sustained Dialogue is a process for transforming and building the relationships that are essential to democratic political and economic practice. SD is not a problem-solving workshop; it is a sustained interaction to transform and build relationships among members of deeply conflicted groups so that they may effectively deal with practical problems. SD seems to move through a series of recognizable phases including a deliberative “scenario-building” stage and an “acting together” stage. (www.sustaineddialogue.org)

Victim Offender Mediation

Focuses On	Size of Group	Session	Participant Selection	Description
Conflict Transformation	Small group	Multiple 2- to 3-hour sessions	All inclusive (attempts to bring in all involved)	Victim Offender Mediation is a restorative justice process that allows the victim of a crime and the person who committed that crime to talk to each other about what happened, the effects of the crime on their lives, and their feelings about it. They may choose to create a mutually agreeable plan to repair any damages that occurred as a result of the crime. In some practices, the victim and the offender are joined by family and community members or others. (www.voma.org)

Web Lab’s Small Group Dialogue

Focuses On	Size of Group	Session	Participant Selection	Description
Conflict Transformation; can also be used for Exploration	Up to hundreds working in small groups online	Participants read & write posts during set duration (such as 3 wks) for each group	Open	SGD is a unique discussion tool that fosters intimate, high-quality online exchanges. By limiting group size and lifespan, each member’s value is visible, encouraging a sense of belonging and an investment in frequent visits. SGD offers participants the ability to genuinely connect with one another rather than creating a collection of people with no sense of accountability who leave a series of drive-by postings. (www.weblab.org)

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Wisdom Circle

Focuses On	Size of Group	Session	Participant Selection	Description
Exploration	Small group (3-12 people)	One or more 1- to 3-hr sessions; ongoing monthly sessions are ideal	Usually used with an existing group	A Wisdom Circle is a small group dialogue designed to encourage people to listen and speak from the heart in a spirit of inquiry. By opening and closing the circle with a simple ritual of the group's choosing, using a talking object, and inviting silence to enter the circle, a safe space is created where participants can be trusting, authentic, caring, and open to change. Also referred to as Council process and Listening Circles. (www.wisdomcircle.org)

Wisdom Council

Focuses On	Size of Group	Session	Participant Selection	Description
Exploration; can also be used for Decision-Making & Collaborative Action	10-12 people initially (and sometimes periodically), then entire community	Several-day session with group of 12, followed by informal large-scale dialogue	Initial 10-12 are randomly selected from community; broader segment is open to everyone	Wisdom Councils are microcosms of larger systems like cities and organizations that engage in a creative, thoughtful exploration of the issues affecting the system. A specialized facilitation process is used called "Dynamic Facilitation" - a nonlinear approach for addressing complex issues that allows shared insights and aligned action to emerge. The outcomes of the Wisdom Council, which are reported back to the community, can catalyze further dialogue, self-organizing action and change throughout the larger system. (www.wisedemocracy.org)

World Café

Focuses On	Size of Group	Session	Participant Selection	Description
Exploration	Up to hundreds in 1 room at tables of four	Single event ranging from 90 minutes to 3 days	Often held at conferences, involving all attendees; otherwise, invitations boost representativeness	World Cafés enable groups of people to participate together in evolving rounds of dialogue with three or four others while at the same time remaining part of a single, larger, connected conversation. Small, intimate conversations link and build on each other as people move between groups, cross-pollinate ideas, and discover new insights into questions or issues that really matter in their life, work, or community. (www.theworldcafe.com)