

Dialogue may occur in many different contexts or settings. It is not limited to a structured forum or an isolated event. Below, we discuss 8 common and creative tools that can be used to spark and nurture community dialogue. Use them alone, adapt them to your community or combine them together. There is no limit to the possibilities when it comes to dialogue.

### 1. Conversation Cafés

Coffee shops, from their very beginning, have not only been places that serve hot beverages, but have always been locations for partaking in social life. Conversation Cafés are open conversations in coffee shops or any other publicly accessed community setting including restaurants, conference rooms, churches or more. The simple format allows a group to feel at ease while providing a space and time to be heard. Conversation Cafés encourage us to shift from discussion to dialogue with exploration of thoughtful questions with careful consideration to listening and understanding. With the capacity to adapt to groups of varying size, Conversation Cafés stimulate dialogue through the exchange of ideas, perspectives and values that underpin our beliefs.

Here are ways Conversation Café is conceptualized through some Core Principles at <http://www.conversationcafe.org/>:

Conversation Café Agreements	Conversation Café Process
<p><b>Open-mindedness:</b> Listen to and respect all points of view.</p> <p><b>Acceptance:</b> Suspend judgment as best you can.</p> <p><b>Curiosity:</b> Seek to understand rather than persuade.</p> <p><b>Discovery:</b> Question assumptions, look for new insights.</p> <p><b>Sincerity:</b> Speak from your heart and personal experience.</p> <p><b>Brevity:</b> Go for honesty and depth but don't go on and on.</p>	<p><b>Assemble</b> up to 8 people plus host, hearty topic, a talking object, and time (60-90 min.). Host explains process and agreements.</p> <p><b>Round 1:</b> Pass around the talking object; each person speaks briefly to the topic, no feedback or response.</p> <p><b>Round 2:</b> Again with talking object, each person deepens their own comments or speaks to what has meaning now.</p> <p><b>Dialogue:</b> Open, spirited conversation. Use talking object if there is domination, contention, or lack of focus.</p> <p><b>Final Round:</b> With talking object, each person says briefly what challenged, touched or inspired them.</p>
<p><b>Questions To Go Deeper</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What happened that led you to this point of view?</li> <li>• How does this affect you personally?</li> <li>• I'm curious, can you say more about that...</li> <li>• Here's what I heard...is that what you mean?</li> </ul>

### 2. Dinner & Dialogue

To eat is to meet. A dinner dialogue (or kitchen table discussion) is an encounter that takes place over a meal. Human beings have been using meal time as a natural opportunity to discuss issues for millennia. In our super-charged lifestyles, pausing to eat together and having meaningful conversations about issues that matter (like changing cannabis policy) might be health-promoting. In a planned "Dinner & Dialogue," while there is no formal agenda, there is a focused intention to engage with one another around a particular topic. Sometimes the meal is collaboratively prepared. This can nurture relationships prior to sitting down to eat and discuss, or the dialogue may actually begin less formally during the preparation. Having some well-chosen questions or sending out an article related to cannabis with the invitations can act as a catalyst for a rich dialogue.

### 3. Photovoice

Photovoice is a community-based participatory research method that utilizes the use of photography to document and reflect participants' reality with a goal to work towards influencing healthy public policy. By showcasing photos about hidden and often overlooked issues within communities, policy makers have an opportunity to engage with those whose voices are not being heard. A fun and creative methodology, Photovoice provides an alternative to traditional ways of knowing and values knowledge that is grounded in lived experience. To use Photovoice in dialogue, you must ensure opportunities for people to interact around the meaning of the photos produced.

Photovoice has been defined as "listening activities using participatory photography". PhotoVoice.org talks of their vision – "a world in which everybody has the opportunity to represent themselves and tell their own story. Our mission is to promote the ethical use of photography for positive social change, through delivering innovative participatory photography projects." (From <https://photovoice.org/vision-and-mission/> - Jan 23, 2018). While this definition comes out of the United Kingdom, there is also [www.photovoice.ca](http://www.photovoice.ca) out of Hamilton, Ontario to give you a sense of how this approach can be conceptualized.

### 4. Silent Discussions

Silent discussions provide an opportunity for everyone, especially those less likely to speak up, to contribute and have their ideas heard. Stations are created with the intent to explore multiple questions on a given topic through collaboratively writing on a shared roll of paper. As participants rotate through the stations, they have an opportunity to not only personally reflect on the topic but also build off the ideas of others. This activity can be used to showcase the varying perspectives that make up a group and encourage dialogue as participants come together to debrief afterwards.

### 5. Portraiture

Portraiture is a creative way to work with art and images symbolically and investigate questions that push us into deeper thinking. Using the outline of a silhouette of themselves, participants can fill in the space with visual indicators or collages (e.g., words, drawings, magazine photos, narratives, etc.) creating a self-portrait that reflects their own thoughts and feelings on the topic. Upon completion, participants resume in a larger group to share their creations. Display of these visual representations of different perspectives can itself invite empathy. Opportunities for participants to share their portraits further in group conversations increase the potential for enhanced understanding of and identification with others.

### 6. Community Arts

Art is more than entertainment. Art provides a way for communities to come together and nurture integration. It can contribute to people's sense of identity while fostering a shared meaning within communities. Methods such as participatory theatre or community art shows are ways to showcase varying perspectives and encourage dialogue. You can use community art as a jumping-off point for further inquiry. Dialogue is sparked when we dig into the experiences of the other in order to learn and understand.

### 7. Talking Circles

Certain First Nations communities have used talking circles to address problems in communities. In order to explore a given topic, a talking object is introduced and passed clockwise in a circle. In order to promote deep listening, participants are encouraged only to speak once they receive the object. The object can rotate multiple times through the circle as participants deepen their thoughts and respond to others. Used alone or in conjunction with other activities, a talking circle is an activity that can be used with groups of any size and in exploration of any topic.

### 8. Walking Tours

Walking tours are creative ways for participants to engage with different perspectives while touring a particular setting. As a way to encourage understanding, tour guides provide stories and context as participants walk and experience together. By physically walking the path of others, tours are geared towards greater understanding between diverse individuals who happen to live differently within the same community. In order for this method to be dialogic, ensure that it is more than a narrated excursion. This means creating ample opportunities for participants and guides to exchange, reflect and share different perspectives.

For example, walk by a cannabis dispensary and a pharmacy and a liquor store – what curious questions could facilitate dialogue upon arrival at each location, what do people notice near or in each location.

Is part of the walking tour inviting people to talk to people along the way, with a few open minded sentence starters for their consideration in approaching brief dialogue with people they meet

OR

Is the walking tour more of an internal reflection/writing process where the dialogue happens between the 10 people on the walking tour when they return to a welcoming meeting space for dialogue post walk?

Brainstorm more walking experiences...

Perhaps you have 3 mini-walks with stops to chat in between the walks. If weather permits you can walk it; if not you could do it virtually with photos.

I prefer the people talking along the way or stopping to have conversation rather than the internal reflection/writing process as I believe at a community level this is a bit tougher to engage and to facilitate.

This is cool: <http://janejacobswalk.squarespace.com/get-involved/host-a-walk/> Edmonton has gotten involved in this approach with <http://janeswalk.org/canada/edmonton/>.