



## Public Conversations Project

guides, trains, and inspires individuals, organizations, and communities to **constructively address conflicts** that involve differing values and worldviews.



“For years, the Public Conversations Project has set the standard for facilitation materials and training in our field.”

Sandy Heierbacher  
Director, National Coalition for  
Dialogue & Deliberation (NCDD)



### **What is the Public Conversations Project?**

The Public Conversations Project is a Boston-based nonprofit that uses dialogue to improve relationships and understanding among groups and individuals on opposing sides of divisive public issues. These conversations usually result in diminished polarization and hostility, increased trust and respect, and can lead to collaborative action.

Since 1989, PCP has worked in the US and around the world providing workshops and customized trainings and facilitating dialogues on a wide range of contentious issues including abortion, forest management, homosexuality and faith, biodiversity, the use of animals in research, and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

In a world bristling with tension, controversy, polarization, and war, PCP aims to reduce rancor in public squares and promote effective and inclusive organizations and communities.





## What does PCP provide?

- **DIALOGUES**  
Designing and facilitating conversations on divisive issues
- **WORKSHOPS**  
Expanding personal and professional dialogue skills
- **CUSTOMIZED TRAININGS**  
Preparing people to conduct dialogues in specific situations
- **CONSULTATIONS**  
Advising dialogue practitioners and leaders
- **CONFERENCE DESIGN**  
Planning of meetings that build bridges
- **PUBLICATIONS**  
Maintaining a Web site with free dialogue resources, including two guides

## Who does PCP serve?

PCP's clients include educational, religious, health care, environmental, philanthropic, business, civic, and governmental organizations.

Workshop participants include teachers, clergy, consultants, therapists, lawyers, community organizers, journalists, mediators, and others who want to reduce costly discord in their personal lives and in networks they value.

## What does PCP dialogue involve?

Before a dialogue, PCP works with members of all the groups involved to develop the goals, ground rules, and agenda of the forthcoming conversation. This careful preparation increases participants' ownership of the event and builds their capacity to design other dialogues.

During the dialogue, the ground rules help participants restrain polarizing behavior while fostering authentic speaking, careful listening, and thoughtful reflection. Carefully selected questions surface new information that softens stereotypes and leads to more accurate understanding of participants' hopes, fears, life experiences, and values.

As the dialogue proceeds, fresh angles and options emerge and are explored. Participants often realize that they can work together toward shared goals without compromising their deeply held values, beliefs, or positions.



**2007  
Burundi**



PCP associates prepare local trainers to conduct village dialogues among Hutu, Tutsi, and Twa people on post-war reconciliation and reconstruction.

**1994-1999  
Environment**

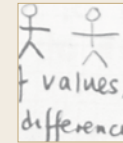


Through eleven retreats, Maine environmentalists, timberland owners, public land managers, scientists, and sportsmen's groups achieve consensus about how to manage forests for biodiversity.

**1997-2001  
World Religion**



Anglican bishops from six continents explore their differences about human sexuality and agree on recommendations to the Archbishop of Canterbury.



**2001  
"Talking with the Enemy"**

Three pro-life and three pro-choice leaders co-author a *Boston Globe* feature about their secret five-year dialogue that lowered tensions fueled by fatal clinic shootings in 1994.



**1993  
International**

Retreats with advocates and researchers from quarreling organizations increase the effectiveness of US delegates to the 1994 UN Conference on Population and Development in Cairo.

**1989  
Beginnings**



Laura Chasin and colleagues brainstorm how family therapists can improve discussion of divisive public issues.

**1990  
Health Care and Diversity**



Dialogues among gay/lesbian and straight staff at a health clinic repair relationships and enable them to address other organizational issues.



**2006  
Red/Blue**

Online dialogue helps US conservatives and liberals understand their commonalities and differences.

## Frequently Asked Questions

### What role does PCP play in making a dialogue happen?

PCP collaborates with participants at every phase while playing a catalytic and guiding role in planning, designing, and facilitating dialogues. It sometimes partners with other professionals who complement its experience and skills.

### How is PCP distinctive?

PCP's work is grounded in ideas and practices from family therapy and in the belief that better communication and relationships are critical to long-lasting amelioration of conflicts that involve identities, core values, and worldviews.

### How does one know if a dialogue has been successful?

Written feedback and follow up interviews indicate whether participants achieved their objectives. Collaborative actions taken by opponents have included initiatives to prevent escalation of further conflict, bipartisan recommendations for policy changes, jointly sponsored research, co-authored publications and public testimony about the value of their dialogue, and the deliberate omission of stereotypes and inflammatory rhetoric from public speaking.

### How is PCP funded?

Generous individual donors, grants, and fee-for-service provide PCP's income. Through a newly formed community called The PCP *exCHANGE*, friends and supporters give the organization a variety of benefits and, in return, gain access to select PCP materials, services, and events.

### What does PCP mean by dialogue?

PCP thinks of dialogue as a conversation intended to create, deepen, or build human connection and understanding.

### Would PCP be useful in my situation?

PCP's dialogue facilitation, training, and consultation have proven especially effective where

- **failed efforts to address** an important issue have evoked cold silence, sharpened animosity, or ended in stalemate
- **widespread distrust** or cynicism has created a climate hostile to effective problem-solving or a community's ability to function
- **the presence of different** values, worldviews, or identities has impeded the development of important collaborations or policies

If you are involved in a situation that has any of these features, an exploratory conversation with PCP program staff would be a good investment.

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“Before, I thought all dialogue that does not culminate in solution was considered equivalent to failure. Now I see that dialogue is a stage complete in itself.”

Donatien Nzokira, workshop participant in Burundi

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### By the Numbers

05	Associates who founded PCP
19	Years PCP has existed
20	Countries in which PCP has worked
40+	Workshops and presentations PCP offers each year
100+	Groups PCP has served
1,500+	People who have taken PCP trainings

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**Immeasurable:** People in conflict who have benefited from PCP

“PCP is brought up as a reference point over and over again. Opportunities for dialogue continue to arise at every turn.”

Sarah Buie  
Director of the Difficult Dialogues Program,  
Clark University



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