



## **Best Practices for Safe Dialogue When Working with Differences**

**1. Provide ample time for dialogue on the agenda.**

One way to shut down dialogue is for people to feel there is not enough time and if they bring a difference of opinion there will not be enough time to process it.

**2. Make sure you have ground rules for dialogue and they are either read or referred to at each meeting.**

**3. Allow for silence.**

When a question is asked to prompt discussion and there is silence do not fill the silence. It may take a few seconds or even a minute or two for people to collect their thoughts.

**4. Pay attention to who has not engaged in the conversation.**

If you notice that others have not engaged and you have already spoken wait to speak again after someone who has not spoken has shared.

**5. Don't be afraid to ask follow-up questions when you don't understand a differing view.**

Ask questions that are:

- a) Curious
- b) About the subject
- c) Open-ended (i.e. can you tell me more about how you see that working in this environment?)

**6. Listen for the positive contribution of a view expressed that is different from yours and ask yourself, "What can I learn and/or affirm?"**

**7. Acknowledge emotions appropriately.**

Don't shy away from emotions even if they make you feel uncomfortable. If someone is having a difficult time due to the topic or something that was said don't pretend it's not there. A statement of empathy or a question of curious caring would be appropriate.

**8. Be willing to engage in various forms of opening space for others to speak and feel free to express different views.**

For example:

- a) Talking Circle
- b) Color-coded cards used to gauge how people are feeling about a subject
- c) Small group discussions before engaging with the large group
- d) Six Hat Thinking

**9. Challenge the viewpoint, not the person when there is disagreement.**

**10. Record dissenting views in your minutes.**

Even though a proposal may have passed by the board it's important to record the dissenting views so that people feel they were heard and taken seriously.