



# Engagement Streams Framework

National Coalition for Dialogue & Deliberation

*Revised August 2014*



## About the National Coalition for Dialogue & Deliberation (NCDD)

NCDD is an active network of 2,100 groups and professionals who bring people together across divides to discuss, decide, and act together on today's toughest challenges. NCDD serves as a gathering place, a resource center, a news source, and a facilitative leader for an active community of practice centered around the practices of dialogue and deliberation.

Our online Resource Center connects people to nearly 3,000 resources on group process and public engagement, and more than 34,000 people are subscribed to our monthly email updates.

Join today at [www.ncdd.org/join](http://www.ncdd.org/join) if you're not already a member!

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*Would you like additional copies of this document for use in the classroom, at community meetings, at workshops or elsewhere? Download the document at [www.ncdd.org/streams](http://www.ncdd.org/streams) or contact NCDD office manager Joy Garman at [joy@ncdd.org](mailto:joy@ncdd.org) to purchase printed copies in bulk.*

# NCDD's Engagement Streams Framework

## *What are dialogue and deliberation?*

Many dozens of effective techniques have been developed to enable people to have authentic, civil, productive discussions—even on highly contentious issues.

Explore NCDD's full index of nearly 200 techniques on our website at [www.ncdd.org/practices](http://www.ncdd.org/practices).

When done well, these techniques create the space for real dialogue, where people tell their story and share their perspective on the topic at hand.

**Dialogue** increases understanding, builds trust, and enables people to be open to listening to perspectives that are very different from their own.

**Deliberation**, which often comes after dialogue, enables people to discuss the consequences, costs, and trade-offs of various policy options or actions, and to work through the competing values that tough decisions require us to grapple with.

## *About the Framework*

NCDD's popular Engagement Streams Framework helps people navigate the range of dialogue and deliberation approaches available to them. Developed in 2005 and honed since, the streams framework is designed to help you decide which types of approaches are the best fit for your circumstances.

No method works in all situations, though all of these techniques can seem like revelations and appear almost magical to those accustomed to “business as usual” approaches to making decisions and addressing conflicting views. Our goals for this framework are to help you feel more confident in moving forward with your engagement efforts, and to give you a simple, useful tool for teaching others about these approaches.

The framework is a series of two data-rich charts. The first chart (“Engagement Streams”) introduces four “streams” or categories based on your primary intention or purpose, and shows which approaches have proven to be effective in each stream. The second chart (“Process

Almost all dialogue and deliberation techniques involve:

- Utilizing facilitators and ground rules to create a safe atmosphere for honest, productive discussion.
- Framing the issue, questions and background info in an impartial and accurate manner.
- Having people on all sides of the issue talk to each other face-to-face in small groups.
- Using the input and outcomes generated to shape decisions and action.

These techniques strengthen the traditionally distant relationship between citizens and policymakers, and between workers and CEOs. They tap into community assets and citizen potential. They increase the quality of and buy-in for decisions. They mitigate long-standing conflicts between groups. They increase people's knowledge and understanding of complex issues. And they enhance people's sense of connection and commitment to their communities and the people in them.

Distinctions”) goes into detail about 22 well-known dialogue and deliberation methods, including information on group size, meeting type, and participant selection.

Sandy Heierbacher, NCDD's Director, initially developed this resource to help inform workshops she presented on selecting dialogue and deliberation techniques, at a time when there was little clarity about the differences between approaches. The framework was informed by a number of previous efforts to make sense of the emerging fields of public engagement, conflict resolution, and organizational development. Many of the scholars and practitioners whose work was utilized to develop this framework—including Patricia Wilson, Tom Atlee, Archon Fung, Matt Leighninger, Hal Saunders and Barnett Pearce—provided ongoing feedback as the framework took shape.

The streams framework has since been featured in many articles, books, conference workshops, community presentations, and talks, and we welcome you to use it however you see fit.

## *Some other great tools for understanding the field...*

### **Public Participation Spectrum and Toolbox**

International Association for Public Participation  
[www.iap2.org](http://www.iap2.org)

### **Core Principles for Public Engagement**

NCDD, IAP2, Co-Intelligence Institute  
[www.ncdd.org/pep](http://www.ncdd.org/pep)

### **Planning for Stronger Local Democracy**

National League of Cities and Deliberative Democracy Consortium  
[www.ncdd.org/rc/item/6087](http://www.ncdd.org/rc/item/6087)

### **Spectrum of Processes for Collaboration and Consensus-Building in Public Decisions**

Suzanne Orenstein, Lucy Moore and Susan Sherry  
[www.ncdd.org/rc/item/4441](http://www.ncdd.org/rc/item/4441)

### **Participation Compass website**

Involve.org.uk  
[www.participationcompass.org](http://www.participationcompass.org)

### **Goals of Dialogue & Deliberation Graphic**

Martin Carcasson and Sandy Heierbacher  
[www.ncdd.org/rc/item/3636](http://www.ncdd.org/rc/item/3636)

# Engagement Streams

*A Matrix of Proven Practices.*

Primary Purpose	Name of Engagement Stream	Key Features	Important When...
To encourage people and groups to learn more about themselves, their community, or an issue, and possibly discover innovative solutions	<b>Exploration</b>	Suspending assumptions, creating a space that encourages a different kind of conversation, using ritual and symbolism to encourage openness, emphasis on listening	A group or community seems stuck or muddled and needs to reflect on their circumstance in depth and gain collective insight.
To resolve conflicts, to foster personal healing and growth, and to improve relations among groups	<b>Conflict Transformation</b>	Creating a safe space, hearing from everyone, building trust, sharing personal stories and views	Relationships among participants are poor or not yet established yet 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.
To influence public decisions and public policy and improve public knowledge	<b>Decision Making</b>	Naming and framing the issue fairly, weighing all options, considering different positions (i.e. deliberation), revealing public values, brainstorming solutions	The issue is within government's (or any single entity's) sphere of influence.
To empower people and groups to solve complicated problems and take responsibility for the solution	<b>Collaborative Action</b>	Using dialogue and deliberation 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.

*The Engagement Streams Framework (2005) was developed by Sandy Heierbacher and members of the National Coalition for Dialogue & Deliberation (NCDD). Visit [www.ncdd.org/streams](http://www.ncdd.org/streams) for various downloadable formats of this resource, and see NCDD's website, at [www.ncdd.org](http://www.ncdd.org), for many more resources and tips.*

<b>Examples of Issues</b>	<b>Organizer's Strategy</b>	<b>Appropriate D&amp;D Processes</b>	<b>Key Design Questions for Organizers</b>
Strengthening democracy, understanding a community of practice	To encourage new insights and connections to emerge by creating a space for people to share their thoughts, feelings and perspectives.	Conversation Café, Intergroup Dialogue in the classroom, Wisdom Council, Wisdom Circles, Socrates Café, World Café, Open Space, Appreciative Inquiry, Bohm Dialogue	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?
Political polarization, Jewish-Muslim relations, race relations, value-based conflicts, healing after crises or trauma	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.	Sustained Dialogue, Intergroup Dialogue in communities, Victim-Offender Mediation, PCP dialogue, Compassionate Listening	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"?
Budgeting, land use, health care, social security	To involve a representative group of citizens in thorough discussions about complicated policy issues. Ideally, the process is linked to policy making.	National Issues Forums, Citizens Jury, Deliberative Polling, 21st Century Town Meeting, Charrettes, Citizen Choicework, Consensus Conference	How can we best represent the public (random selection, stakeholder representation, recruiting a critical mass)? 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?
Regional sprawl, institutional racism, youth violence, responding to crises	To encourage integrated efforts among diverse stakeholders, sectors, organizations, etc. involved in the issue.	Study Circles, Future Search, Appreciative Inquiry	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?



Process Distinctions

Processes	Focuses significantly on...				Size of Group	Type of Session (excluding prep sessions)	Participant Selection
	Exploration	Conflict Transformation	Decision Making	Collaborative Action			
<b>21st Century Town Meeting</b>			X		Hundreds to thousands in 1 room at small tables	All-day meeting	Open; recruit for representativeness
<b>Appreciative Inquiry Summit</b>	X			X	From 20 to 2,000	4 to 6-day summit	Internal and external stakeholders
<b>Bohm Dialogue</b>	X		x		Small group	No set length or number of meetings	Open or invitation
<b>Charrettes</b>			X	x	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
<b>Citizen Choicework</b>			X		Multiple small groups	1 session, ranging from 2 hours to all day	Open; recruit for representativeness
<b>Citizens Jury</b>			X		Small group	5-day meeting	Random selection
<b>Compassionate Listening</b>	x	X			2 to 200 people; usually fewer than 30	Varies between 30 min and 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
<b>Consensus Conference</b>			X		Large group	2 weekends for participants to prepare, 2-4 day conference	Random selection
<b>Conversation Café</b>	X	x			Single or multiple small groups	1 90-minute session	Open; publicize to encourage representativeness
<b>Deliberative Polling</b>			X		Up to several hundred people in small groups in 1 room	Weekend-long meeting	Random selection
<b>Future Search</b>		x	x	X	60 to 80 people	3 days	All inclusive (attempts to bring in all involved)

The Engagement Streams Framework (in Excel, PDF, and comic!) can always be downloaded from [www.ncdd.org/streams](http://www.ncdd.org/streams).

## *Descriptions of Processes*

**21st Century Town Meetings** bring together a large number of people, organize them into small discussion groups, and use technology to quickly summarize citizen input. Developed in 1995 by AmericaSpeaks (which closed in early 2014), this approach updated the traditional public forum by engaging hundreds to thousands of general interest citizens (sometimes using technology to connect them across multiple locations) in order to give those in leadership positions direct, substantive feedback on policy issues. This approach stood out in its ability to generate media attention and hence increase the accountability of decision-makers.

[www.ncdd.org/rc/item/2768](http://www.ncdd.org/rc/item/2768)

**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.

[appreciativeinquiry.case.edu](http://appreciativeinquiry.case.edu)

Created by late physicist David Bohm, **Bohm (or 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.david-bohm.net/dialogue](http://www.david-bohm.net/dialogue)

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 stakeholders. Charrettes, which combine modern design studio and town meeting, help overcome inertia and create meaningful master plans.

[www.charretteinstitute.org](http://www.charretteinstitute.org)

**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](http://www.publicagenda.org)

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](http://www.jefferson-center.org)

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 create the safety necessary for honest, respectful dialogue and sustainable solutions.

[www.compassionatelisting.org](http://www.compassionatelisting.org)

Developed in Denmark, **Consensus Conferences** 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 conference's main observations and conclusions are presented.

[www.ncdd.org/rc/item/1492](http://www.ncdd.org/rc/item/1492)

**Conversation Cafés** are hosted conversations which are usually held in public settings, like coffee shops or bookstores, where anyone is welcome to join. A simple, straightforward format is used that helps people feel at ease and gives everyone who wants it a chance to speak about the topic at hand. The goal is to simply get people talking to strangers, safely and openly, about contentious issues we tend to avoid discussing publicly.

[www.conversationcafe.org](http://www.conversationcafe.org)

**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>

Used by communities and organizations, **Future Search** is a unique planning method which enables large, diverse groups to validate a common mission, take responsibility for action, and develop commitment to implementation. The method, which allows the entire group to be in dialogue when necessary, is especially useful in uncertain, fast-changing situations when it is important that everyone have the same large picture in order to act responsibly.

[www.futuresearch.net](http://www.futuresearch.net)

Process Distinctions (continued)

Processes	Focuses significantly on...				Size of Group	Type of Session (excluding prep sessions)	Participant Selection
	Exploration	Conflict Transformation	Decision Making	Collaborative Action			
<b>Intergroup Dialogue</b>	X	X		x	Single or multiple small groups	Regular weekly meetings of 2-3 hours	Open; recruit for representativeness
<b>National Issues Forums</b>			X		Up to hundreds in 1 room at small tables	1 two-hour meeting	Open; recruit for representativeness
<b>Open Space Technology</b>	X			x	Up to hundreds in 1 room, then break up in interest groups multiple times	3 days	Varies
<b>Public Conversations Project dialogue</b>		X			Small group	Multiple 2-hour sessions	Involves all sides of an existing conflict
<b>Socrates Café</b>	X				3 to 30 people	1-2 hours	Whoever is in the class or at the meeting, or whoever responds to the flyers or articles
<b>Study Circles</b>	x		x	X	Up to hundreds meeting in separate small groups; all come together later for Action Forum	4 to 6 2-hour sessions	Open; recruit for representativeness
<b>Sustained Dialogue</b>		X	x	x	Small group	Numerous 2- to 3-hour sessions	Open; recruit for representativeness among conflicting groups
<b>Victim Offender Mediation</b>		X			Small group	Multiple 2- to 3-hour sessions	All inclusive (attempts to bring in all involved)
<b>Wisdom Circle</b>	X				Small group (3-12 people)	One or more sessions lasting 1-3 hours; ongoing sessions are ideal	Usually used with an existing group
<b>Wisdom Council</b>	X		x	x	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
<b>World Café</b>	X				Up to hundreds in 1 room at tables of four	Single event ranging from 90 minutes to 3 days	Often held at events, involving all attendees; otherwise, invitations boost representativeness

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## *Descriptions of Processes*

**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.igr.umich.edu](http://www.igr.umich.edu)

**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](http://www.nifi.org)

**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 and learn from one another. It is an innovative approach to creating whole systems change and inspiring creativity and leadership among participants.

[www.openspaceworld.org](http://www.openspaceworld.org)

**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](http://www.publicconversations.org)

**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 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](http://www.philosopher.org)

**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.everyday-democracy.org](http://www.everyday-democracy.org)

**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. As a process that develops over time through a sequence of meetings, SD seems to move through a series of recognizable phases including a deliberative "scenario-building" stage and an "acting together" stage.

[www.sustaineddialogue.org](http://www.sustaineddialogue.org)

**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](http://www.voma.org)

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 welcoming silence, 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](http://www.wisdomcircle.org)

**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](http://www.wisedemocracy.org)

**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](http://www.theworldcafe.com)

# Endorsements

*A few ways people are using the framework...*

“The Engagement Streams Framework is a critical tool for us at the CPD as we initially evaluate potential projects for deliberative ripeness, and then again when we get down to process design. It succinctly introduces and organizes the diverse world of D&D in a very practical way. It’s simple enough for beginners to not get overwhelmed, but rich enough for more experienced practitioners to return to again and again.”

• **Martín Carcasson**, *Colorado State University Center for Public Deliberation*

“I’ve found NCDD’s Engagement Streams Framework to be a very valuable tool when conducting workshops with local government staff and officials on how to improve public engagement practices. It not only helps give the big picture of what methods make sense to use when, but provides enough detail so that people can begin thinking about how they could apply these methods in their local engagement efforts.”

• **Diane Miller**, *Civic Collaboration*

“I love the Engagement Streams as a jumping off point to understanding what features you need in a deliberative process. It’s one of the best breakdowns I’ve seen for explaining the progression of complexity in implementation of the deliberative process. I trust NCDD, which is regularly looking at ALL the methods in play, to do a sound analysis as opposed to people who might be seated in a particular practice or approach. This kind of logical analysis from the community itself is invaluable for technologists to build applications that effectively support dialogue and deliberation.”

• **Ele Munjeli**, Web Developer

“When I was working on my report on the civic engagement landscape in Chicago, I had no idea how to organize the thousands of diverse pieces of information I’d collected into a coherent narrative. As I thought through options, the information naturally seemed to cluster into four areas, strikingly reminiscent of the four NCDD Engagement Streams. At first, I hesitated using that framework, designed to categorize methods, to segment a city’s organizations and projects. Surprisingly though, it has proven the single most valuable tool in helping Chicagoans understand the local D&D field.”

• **Janice Thomson**, Stakeholder Engagement Consultant

“I use the framework in both leadership training and traditional teaching environments. I found it very helpful for adults taking leadership courses who often had little experience with dialogue, as the framework helped them “get it” and differentiates dialogue from other processes. It also quickly gave them several models of dialogue, so they understood that there are many ways to approach it. With professors and students who are engaged in “Difficult Dialogues” classes at UT Austin, focusing on challenging topics such as immigration, science and religion, and HIV, the framework helps them understand what I mean when I say “Dialogue is NOT your usual classroom discussion” and gives them a useful context for learning how to talk about these controversial topics in a meaningful and productive way.”

• **Juli Fellows**, Organizational Consultant and Trainer

“We built the Streams of Engagement framework into our online Issue Guide Exchange. When someone uploads a guide to the tool we give them the option of identifying which streams of practice the guide addresses. Then, when someone is searching for guides, the streams of practice provide them with another way to figure out which guides will best meet their needs.”

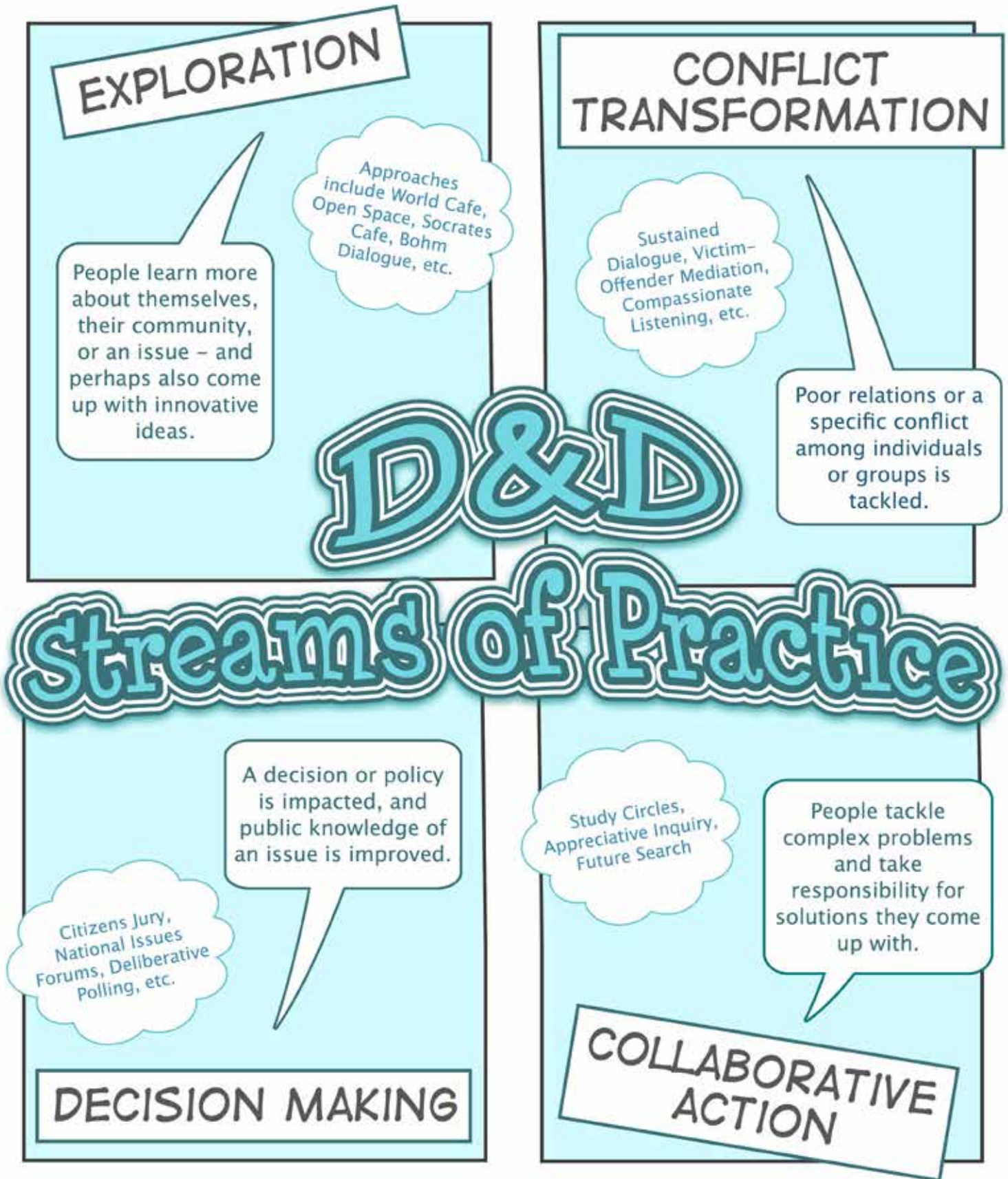
• **Carrie Boron**, *Everyday Democracy*

“I just discovered the framework and am using it in a group facilitation workshop I’m teaching to AmeriCorps interns. My intent is to get them to think about what type of facilitation they are attempting and what outcomes they are looking for, and then look at what methods make the most sense, given the desired outcomes.”

• **Marty Jacobs**, *Systems In Sync*

“I’ve used the engagement streams cartoon mostly, since it’s a great tool for introducing people to the ideas of different uses for the methods. I’ve used it and prepared it for Carolyn [Lukensmeyer] to use at presentations for United Way leadership, state elected officials, and college classrooms.”

• **Susanna Haas Lyons**, formerly of *AmericaSpeaks*



This is a snapshot of the Engagement Streams Framework developed by Sandy Heierbacher and members of the National Coalition for Dialogue & Deliberation (NCDD) in 2005. The framework helps people decide which methods of dialogue and deliberation best fit their goals and resources.

For the full framework, go to [www.ncdd.org/streams](http://www.ncdd.org/streams).



Originally published in this format by the National Coalition for Dialogue & Deliberation  
as part of the 2010 Resource Guide on Public Engagement.

*Find the full guide along with 2900+ resources at [www.ncdd.org/rc](http://www.ncdd.org/rc).*