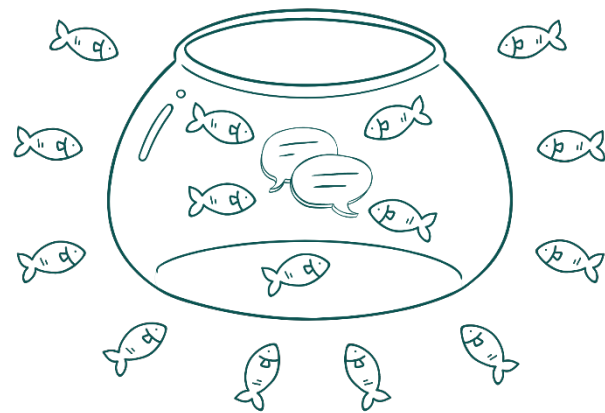


TOOL FISHBOWL

OVERVIEW

A fishbowl is a method for dialogue that creates a smaller space for conversation within a larger group. It is designed to have a deeper discussion between a few people while providing an opportunity for many to witness and listen deeply. A fishbowl can be closed or open leading to a structure that encourages participation from a wide range of voices.



WHEN TO USE

This group discussion tool is great for any larger group (20-100). It can be used in community discussions, team meetings, conferences, classrooms, or trainings. It is free-flowing and relatively unstructured. There can be a facilitator who can help to guide the conversation or ask questions to prompt participants. It can be a powerful way to break through power dynamics and put every speaker on the same level. Fishbowls can also be used to literally “center” voices that are typically and systematically silenced—folks with lived experiences, specific identities, or expertise.

HOW TO USE

Set-up: Place a small number, usually 5, chairs at the center of the room with a circle or several rows of circles around the center. Make sure there is enough room for participants to easily move to the center.

Open: In an open fishbowl, anyone can join the conversation at any point. The facilitator starts off by asking participants to fill all 4 out of the 5 chairs in the center and kicks off the discussion. When someone in the audience wants to join in, they come up to the inner circle and sit in the empty chair. When this happens, someone from the inner circle must leave and



return to a seat in the audience. Participants come in and out until the facilitator closes the discussion.

Closed: A closed fishbowl can be structured either by the *time spent* in the center circle or *specific people* asked to join the center circle. The facilitator asks to fill all 5 chairs, either with people of their choosing or volunteers for a timed round. The facilitator can then decide when to end the round or when to switch out specific participants. The facilitator can also ask for people with specific experiences to join the circle—for example, “if you live in this community and have experienced food insecurity, please join in.”

COMMUNITY LEARNING MODEL

Dialogue

Create a high-quality conversation that clarifies values, surfaces tensions, and taps into creativity; leading to concrete plans that achieve results. Establish conditions of genuine respect for the views and needs of the other.

Fishbowl is a tool for the Dialogue phase of the Community Learning Model. To learn more about tools for dialogue and the other areas of the Community Learning Model, visit civiccanopy.org/clm.

