

The Listening Circle: A Self-Governing Dialogue

(sometimes known as the Samoan Circle)

The Listening Circle meeting process is designed to facilitate the discussion of controversial issues when there is a large group of people interested in the topic.

- Its principal value is in the opportunity it affords for an exploration and exchange of knowledge and opinion where the large size of the group, or an environment of controversy, might disable other kinds of meetings.
- This meeting process is also useful when the possibility exists that no one person could be accepted as a fair moderator by all who might seek to be involved in the discussion.
- It is intended for the fullest possible exchange of information about an issue in anticipation of other group processes better designed for decision-making or conflict management.
- Although some users of the Listening Circle have experienced spontaneous resolution of conflict views, it is a process that is not intended to resolve conflict.

Instructions:

1. There is no facilitator, chair, or moderator.
2. Participants are expected to maintain their own discipline.
3. Participants gather in two concentric circles - an inner circle with or without a table and four chairs; and an outer circle (with chairs for participants) with ample walking and aisle space.
4. Everyone begins in the outer circle.
5. The issue is presented, and discussion begins.
 - a. Those most interested take chairs in the inner circle; those less interested stay in the outer circle.
 - b. All can move in or out of the centre as the discussion flows or topics change.
 - c. Each speaker makes a comment or asks a question.
 - d. Speakers are not restricted in what they say or how they say it, but they must sit in the inner circle to do so.
 - e. Once seated in the inner circle, parties may interrupt, or wait for an opening in any discussion that is going on; parties may stay as long as they feel they have a contribution to make to the discussion.
 - f. The person taking a seat can join in the discussion OR try to change its direction OR raise a new topic.
 - g. Parties may leave and return again to the inner circle as often as they wish.
 - h. If there are no vacant seats in the inner circle and someone is wishing to speak, they must stand behind a chair. This signals those already in the circle to relinquish their chairs.
 - i. If someone wishes to talk to one of the people occupying the four discussion chairs, they are to stand directly behind that person's chair as a signal to the others in the circle to vacate one of their seats.
 - j. No outside conversations are allowed; if participants wish to cheer, or groan, or make any other noises to represent their opinion, they must come to the inner circle to do so.
 - k. Comments are often recorded. Votes of opinions held by non-speakers are taken at the end, if desired.
 - l. To close a meeting, empty seats are taken away one by one until there are no more chairs, or discussions can be allowed to run its course if there is no time required for adjournment.