

The Quad County Dialogue Project

Why should we have a Quad County Dialogue Project?

The purpose of dialogue is to build relationships and understanding of perspectives so the Quad Counties can, over time, develop and implement a common vision together. We hope that outcomes of the Dialogue Project include:

- Having a strong collective voice
- Having our needs met
- Creating excitement, fun, pride, and hope

Why is a dialogue process so important for the Quad Counties?

The complex programmatic situations we face in our counties and the stress created by continued budgetary threats require that we have the ability to quickly respond and adjust to emerging needs. To do so, we need to have a high-level of connectivity and trust between all of us. Without trust and strong relationships, our strategies are likely to be successful only in the short-term. Good relationships build trust. When there is trust, a group can deliberate strategies, decide how to move forward together, and have an increased likelihood to have the communication and trust needed to make adjustments, overcome obstacles, and sustain strategies in the long term.

How does this relate to RBC?

The principles of a Responsibility Based Culture (like trust, listening, team-building, and shared leadership) align with the purpose of the dialogue process. However, the timing and design of our Quad County Dialogue Project are intended to complement, *not duplicate*, the RBC distributed learning process. We will be talking together about working together - better.

Like the RBC Modules, there are five steps (outlined below) included in our dialogue project. Each step of the dialogue project will occur around the same time, or shortly after each module of the RBC distributed learning process (you will receive a handout that has the dates for upcoming Quad County meetings).

When thinking of the Quad Counties, do you think that together we are a high performing team – or do you think we are strange bedfellows?

Many teams operate within a continuum with high performance on one side and strange bedfellows on the opposite side. Most teams fall somewhere in the middle, though we may move along the continuum from time to time.

What is a strange bedfellow? According to Chasin and Herzig (1994), strange bedfellows are groups of people who should be able to collaborate productively, but their full potential for coordinated action is never quite realized. There are several reasons for becoming strange bedfellows including: geographic disbursement, different cultures and styles, hierarchy and programmatic silos. The strange bedfellow phenomenon can occur internally, and with our external partners.

Chasin and Herzig go on to state that strange bedfellows fall victim to choreographed predictable behavior patterns. Instead of “we,” the strange bedfellows become “us and them.” As we begin to assign attributions to one another, the opposition is seen as being all alike. As alliances form within groups of affiliation, members de-emphasize internal differences – this enhances the notion that the opposition is “all alike.” The most extreme member of the opposition is seen as representing the values and perspectives of the entire group. Once this happens, it becomes much easier to “blame them.”

Let's start by thinking about "we" instead of "us and them."

What one sees depends on the breadth of the view that one takes (Pearce 2005). Instead of looking at what "they" (change initiative concepts; teams; office, organization, county, and state relationships) *are*, we will be looking at what "we" are making together.

What does the Quad County Dialogue Project look like?

We will be using the "SHEDD" process developed by Barnett and Kim Pearce (2005). SHEDD stands for:

Starting
Hearing all voices
Enriching stories
Deliberating options
Deciding and moving forward together

What does "Starting" mean?

Simply put, it means "starting off on the right foot" by setting the environment for dialogue. During our first meeting we will:

- Discuss tips for practicing dialogue skills
- Find out why we're all here – why is "talking about it" so important that we decided to show up?
- Get to know one another a whole lot better

How about the rest of the process?

- During Step Two, "Hearing," we'll develop a common base of understanding by exploring our beliefs and assumptions.
- During Step Three, "Enriching," we'll find a focus by exploring questions, issues, or conflicts. We'll begin discussing our internal and external relationships at a deeper level.
- In Step Four, "Deliberating," we'll make the move from dialogue to action.
- In Step Five, "Deciding," we'll develop action steps to implement that will make *us* strong, valued, and *indispensable*, both internally and externally.

Does this seem like a long process with a lot of talk and no action?

Maybe at first, but there are a few things we know about organizational improvements:

- The easy way out always leads back in.
- 2/3rds of all improvement efforts fail because we do not take the time to work out our differences and build trusting relationships on the front end.

Bibliography:

Pearce, W. B. (2005). Towards communicative virtuosity.

http://www.pearceassociates.com/essays/essays_menu.htm

Chasin, R. and M. Herzig (1994). Creating systemic interventions for the sociopolitical arena. The global family therapist: Integrating the personal, professional, and political. B. Berger-Gould and D. Demuth. Needham Heights, MA, Allyn & Bacon.