



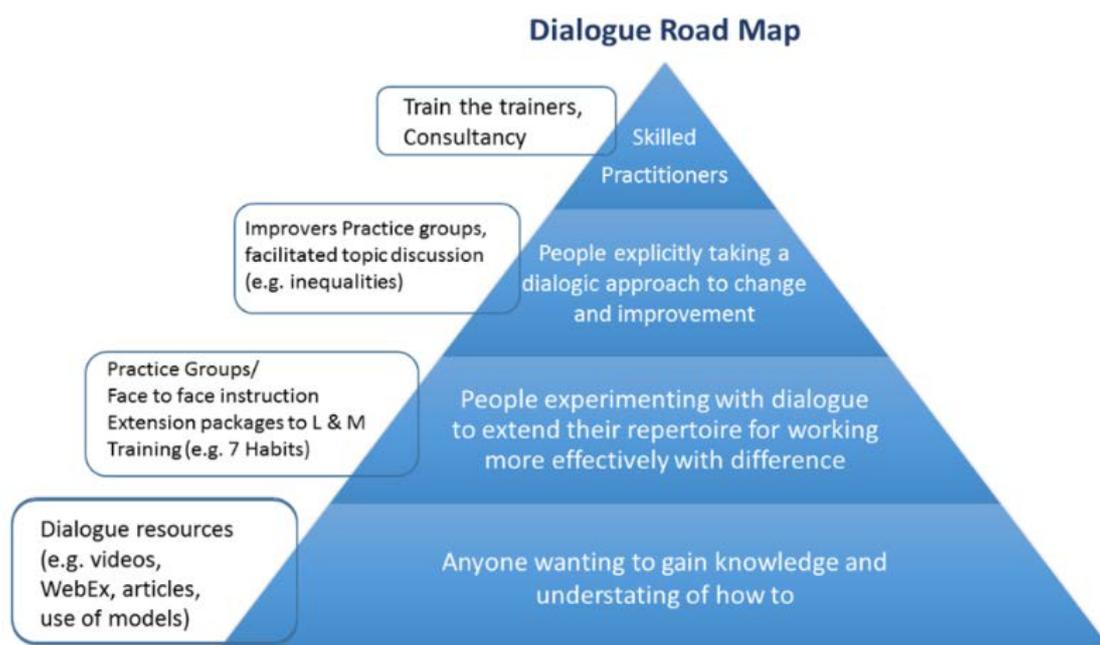
## **Dialogue Community of Practice Becoming a Practice Group Host**

## Dialogue Community of Practice – Becoming a Practice Group Host

### Background

Since its inception four years ago, the National Dialogue Community of Practice (DCOP) has seen the capability of its members in dialogue practice as fundamental to its success. Over the past few years' practice groups have been one of the developments available to Community of Practice participants. Dialogue Practice groups provide an opportunity for a small group of people (typically 6-10 participants) to meet over a series of sessions to experiment with and practice dialogue.

Following an independent evaluation of the work of the DCOP<sup>1</sup>, The Community of Practice participants met to co-create the way ahead and identify key strands of work for the future. This work further reinforced the placement of practice groups as core in developing capability and capacity in Dialogue. Practice groups sit alongside other learning resources such as formal training, video and online tools in our recommended 'roadmap' to dialogue practice.



### About this guide

This document is intended to help you on your way to becoming a host for a dialogue practice group. It incorporates a series of questions to guide your thinking, helping you to assess your readiness to facilitate a dialogue practice group. It will also assist you in identifying possible issues, as well as plan for the

<sup>1</sup> Laidig, M.J. (2016) Dialogue Community of Practice Evaluation: In supporting the development of individuals and their work towards public services transformation. Available at <https://workforcescotland.files.wordpress.com/2014/11/dialogue-community-of-practice-evaluation-240616.pdf> Accessed 20 May 2017.

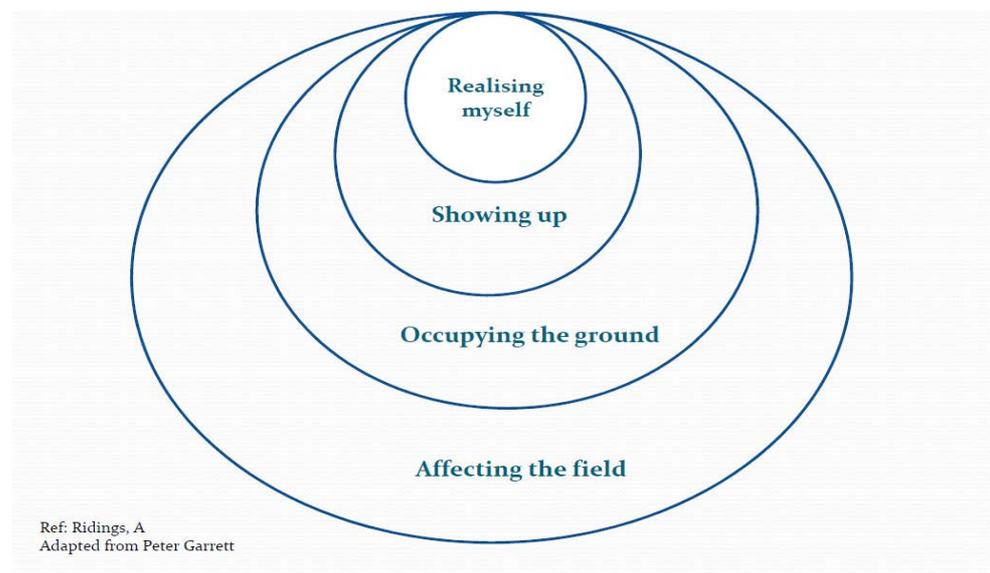
way ahead, so you can facilitate a great dialogue experience for you and your group members.

We have also provided some key ideas, references and example templates that you can use to help you plan your own Practice Group.

## 1. Initial Considerations

### Where are you on your own journey in dialogue development?

If you are considering becoming a practice group host, it is worthwhile considering the stage you are at in working with dialogue. In our practice groups and dialogue core concepts training, we often refer participants to a framework for “Cultivating Practice”<sup>2</sup> (illustrated below) which can be a helpful way of self-assessing the maturity of your dialogue practice.



We suggest initially assessing where you see yourself in this model, then working through this document and returning to your original assessment. As a guide, if you see yourself in the spaces of Occupying the Ground or Affecting the Field, then you are probably ready to become a practice group facilitator / host.

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<sup>2</sup> Ridings, A. (2011) *Pause for Breath: Bringing the Practices of Mindfulness and Dialogue to Leadership Conversations*. Live It Publishing.

Are you:

**Realising yourself** – engaging and exploring dialogue concepts but largely privately.

**Showing up** – Experimenting with dialogue at home / work, becoming a bit more visible, possibly a bit self-conscious when doing so.

**Occupying the ground** – Embracing dialogue practice more visibly and confidently, “this is what I do, how I work”. Openly sharing practice and enabling others to engage with dialogue.

**Affecting the Field** – Embodying dialogue, becoming less obviously visible – more “this is who I am” rather than “this is what I do”. Emanating, enriching others.

### **Why do you want to be a host?**

There are many reasons why you might like to become a host - to help you have a dialogue with others about issues that are important to you or you may want to develop your own dialogic skills. Whatever your motives, it's probably a good idea to have a clear picture of what you want out of this.

### **Where do you want to hold the space?**

Having a vision of the practicalities right from the start can be helpful in planning your events and attracting people into your group. Some groups might incur costs and meet in paid venues and share the costs between participants. Some groups can be hosted at participants' workplaces. Others might meet virtually e.g. over Skype, whilst some might choose to change the venue each time they meet.

Whatever your thoughts, consider a venue that allows a peaceful space with no interruptions and comfortable furniture. Our conversations are helped by the surroundings we meet in. Our standard of office chairs can be fine for a day of desk work and then become increasingly painful after an hour of dialogue.

### **Do you want to work with beginners, more experienced practitioners or both?**

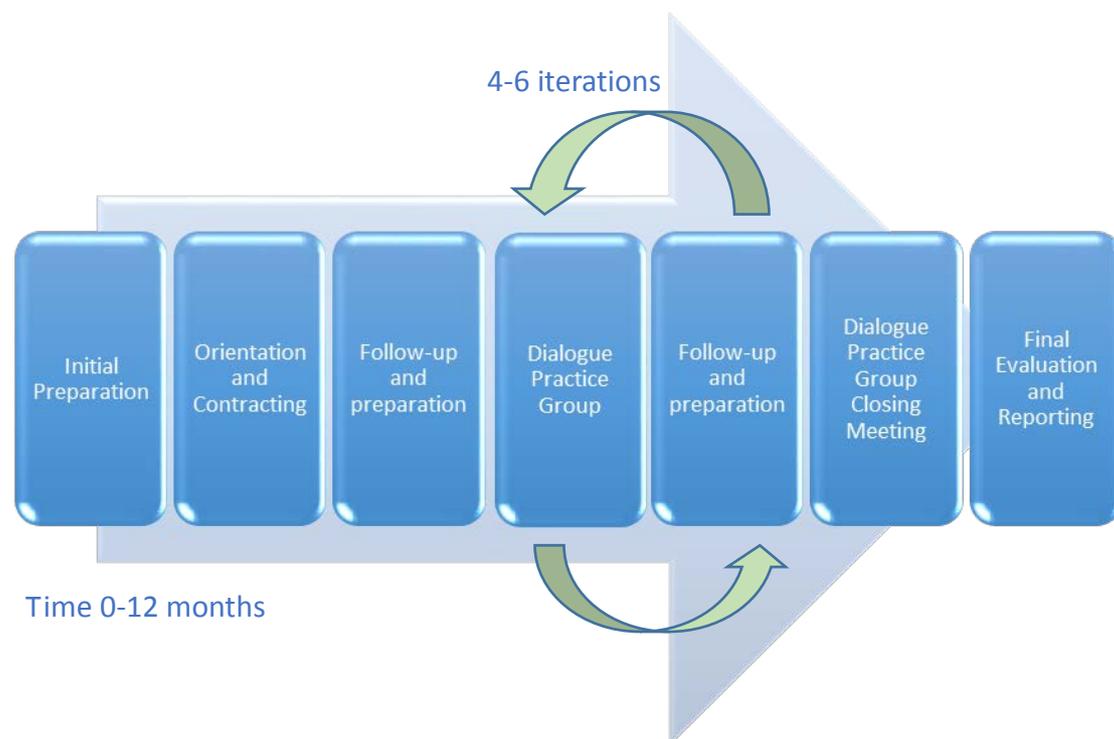
Consider if you have any preferences for the level of experience within your group and why that might be?

## How much time can you give to this?

Consider the times of each session (often half a day seems about right for a practice group, but you may go for more or less and experiment with what works

well). How many meetings you will plan over a year? Groups typically meet 4-6 times within a year and then close. Think about how much time you will need to do admin and preparation for the group e.g. preparing any documents, contacting people, arranging dates and communicating key information between sessions. It can take couple of months to get the group going!

The time of day and duration will also impact the experience of the group.



The stages are on a continuum; you can pass through one stage or go back to an earlier stage. Senge has chosen to use the analogy of a container to develop the theory of dialogue. A container is the sum of the collective assumptions, shared intentions, and beliefs of the team. As the team moves through the phases, team members can perceive a change in the atmosphere. This is not merely brainstorming. It is the ability to share meaning through learning about each other and having a collective perspective about the task.

## What support might be useful to you?

In addition to the guidance in this document, consider what else might be useful e.g. online resources, buddying up, being part of a peer support group of facilitators, reading, articles etc. Remember to get full contact details of your participants.

## When do you want to start?

There are two options for getting started

Option 1 - Identify a provisional date and work back from this to give yourself adequate time to attract participants (from experience, this can take a couple of months.

Option 2 – Invite notes of interest and work forward with them to secure a mutually convenient starting date.

## How might you write a description to attract people into your group?

Here is an example Facilitator's profile courtesy of Anne Leigh-Brown. You can find a blank template at the end of this guide to create your own.



**Anne Leigh-Brown**  
[anneleighbrown@gmail.com](mailto:anneleighbrown@gmail.com)

### Background:

- Accredited Executive Coach with a long-term interest in the role of Dialogue Practice in effective leadership
- Former NHSScotland senior manager in one of the Special Health Boards
- Many years of experience as a senior leader and latterly as an executive coach
- Particular areas of interest are leadership and career development and the positive impact of skilful communication to enable transformation

### Dialogue experience

- I've been a member of the Dialogue Community of Practice since it was established
- My initial exposure to Dialogue Practice was through one of Amanda Ridings' practice groups
- I really enjoyed taking part in a Dialogue Practice group last year
- I'm still learning and keen to further develop my own practice with others who are open to experimenting with Dialogue
- I use the concepts of Dialogue in my coaching practice as a tool to expand leadership range and resilience

### What to expect

- An invitation to build the group together
- Exploration of the potential of dialogue to improve the outcome of conversations

- A group that holds judgement (of others and self) lightly and operates in a climate of mutual respect
- A balance of mutual support and challenge
- A commitment to ongoing participation for the duration of the group

#### **Models/Styles for the group**

- An eclectic approach that includes the Kantor 4-player model and structural dynamics, also reference to Amanda Ridings' work in *Pause for Breath*
- Some knowledge of Dialogue core concepts would be an advantage but a curiosity about this approach is more important! I can supply some background information before the first session if needed
- In the first sessions, we will take time to explore our various experiences of Dialogue and agree how we would like to work together

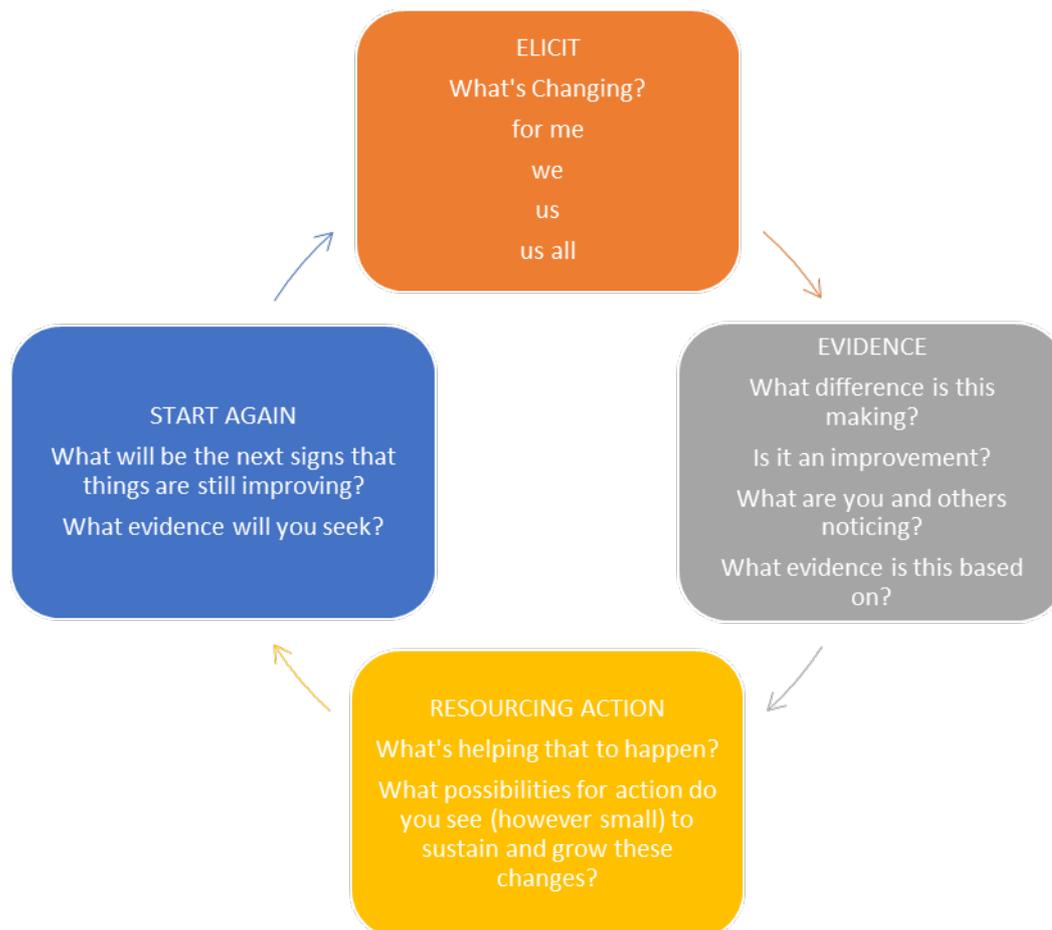
#### **An Invitation to connect**

- Aiming for a group of 6-8 people meeting in the Edinburgh area
- Six sessions of between 2-3 hours over a period of 6-8 months
- We can be topic based or have a more open dialogue around leadership challenges – we can discuss this during the first session
- Hoping to get a group set up in the New Year so please email me know if you would like to participate or need more information.

I do hope you can join me!

## Begin with the end in mind

Practice groups aim to develop dialogue capabilities. A good starting point is to use the self-assessment against the Cultivating Practice model shown on page 2 to consider what outcomes you will be working towards and think about what indicators would suggest you had cultivated practice enough to have met your personal development needs. The following framework can be useful to reflect on your development and plan continuous cycles of action and reflection.



## **Hosts Guide for running a Practice Group**

Being a dialogic facilitator means that you are prepared to engage in a particular kind of way of talking and thinking together. Running a practice group means that you are extending your interest in dialogue into your practice.

### **What does it mean to host dialogue?**

Are you accustomed to being a facilitator already or have experience being in facilitated conversations; how do you think being a dialogic facilitator would be different? You could begin by thinking about how the intention for a dialogue differs from any other kind of conversation and how you would be or “hold” that kind of dialogic space.

### **What knowledge and skills do you currently hold that will support you and what do you think will stretch you in being a dialogic facilitator?**

The core concepts that form the basis for being in dialogue range from the dialogue practices of Voice, Listen, Respect & Suspend; Kantor’s Four Player Model & Structural Dynamics, Being Present & Mindfulness, as well as your own personal style and how you like to contribute to dialogue will also play a part in how you see yourself facilitating. There is a full suite of dialogue resources on the Knowledge Hub.

### **Contracting with group**

There are a lot of things to consider when the group first comes together. It will be important to agree some ground rules; these can be referred to when needed to keep things on track or indeed to change according to group needs. This include practical and psychological contracting. Practical contracting aspects include commitments, time, admin, sharing of costs, being part of an evaluation process, confidentiality etc.

Psychological contracting and psychological safety are essential for dialogue. Senge<sup>3</sup> refers to a process through which people can learn how to think together as creating a “container”. This means co-creating the conditions, a place for psychological safety, that enable participants to express themselves with their authentic voice and so allow the best quality conversation.

The initial meetings are therefore particularly important to build the container. Things to consider are: respecting each others’ voices, confidentiality, where are people starting from, the environment – how the room is set up, no interruptions or distractions, being present and available as people arrive and putting them at ease.

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<sup>3</sup> Senge P. et al. (1994) The Fifth Discipline Fieldbook: Strategies for Building a Learning Organization. Nicholas Brealey Publishing.

What would you do to attend to building the container? What will be important for you? How would you intend to work through this contracting phase – for example you might include a question for the participants beforehand or wait and talk about this at your first meeting.

### **How to collect feedback data and evaluate your group work?**

What feedback options do you have? One way of evaluating dialogue is to have a conversation (using e.g. dialogue, paired reflection) during each session to reflect on your dialogue and identify what's working for people and what would make the conversations and experience better. Another way to collect immediate feedback is to use questionnaire at the end of each session. You could also ask people to respond to a survey at the end of your programme. Whichever method you choose to use, we recommend that you include both, pre-Practice Group questions on participant goals, and the end of session/programme feedback questions addressing intent, competency and confidence to allow impact evaluation in the future. [questions at the end of this guide - to follow if decided to use uniform evaluation questions]

### **What is your approach to dialogue?**

Would you like an open agenda or more closed where you contain the topic for dialogue? How do you hold the space? Do you normally lightly hold things or prefer to shape and control things a little more

### **What size of group would like to work with?**

To support dialogue and learning, you need sustained membership. To minimise the effect of potential cancellations the group should be large enough, typically 6-8 participants, to survive a withdrawal from the group or an occasional non-attendance.

### **What would make this dialogue group a success for you?**

## **2. Purpose and Guidance for Supervision**

### **What is Supervision and why do we have this?**

The purpose of supervision is to facilitate the ongoing learning, development and continuous improvement of the practitioner. Ultimately it is about evaluating and improving the practice across the wider system.

It provides quality assurance: We all have our blind spots, gaps in our knowledge, skills and capabilities. Supervision, providing a safe space for reflection and feedback, collaborative dialogue and opportunity to share experiences and alternative perspectives, can help maintain and expand a good practice. It is a space for professional support and challenge where practice and learning can be explored.

Supervision can help ensure that the ethical and organisational standards are maintained; it can be a valuable place to explore the systemic and boundary issues that working in complex organisations and interdependent systems brings - including issues around relationships, power balances, and differing agendas. The container building and ground rules developed on forming the practice group will include ethical matters important to the practice group members.

### **What's expected of you?**

Supervision is parallel process in being in a dialogue group. Your supervisor needs to be able to maintain strong enough container in your group supervision to support your own and other facilitators learning. To get the best out of the supervision, a contract should be agreed to make expectations of all parties clear. The contracting outlined on page 6 above, for practical and psychological safety is equally relevant you're your supervision.

It is important to attend the agreed meetings and to come prepared to reflect and discuss your practice with your (peers) supervisor(s).

There is no reason why you couldn't engage in supervision relationship with more than one supervisor at a time, to benefit from a variety of experiences, views and ideas, and share learning more widely. For the same reason, it can be useful to rotate the membership of peer supervisor groups on a regular basis.

Some supervision will be given for all hosts from DCoP. This could be:

- Group Supervision,
- Individual Supervision,
- or both Group and Individual, based on dialogic coaching.

If you want to explore the supervision options that would work best for you, please contact Sharon Millar at [Sharon.millar@nes.scot.nhs.uk](mailto:Sharon.millar@nes.scot.nhs.uk) or post a note of interest on <https://workforcotland.com/workstream/dialogue/>

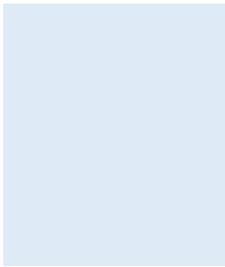
## Facilitator Profile

Name

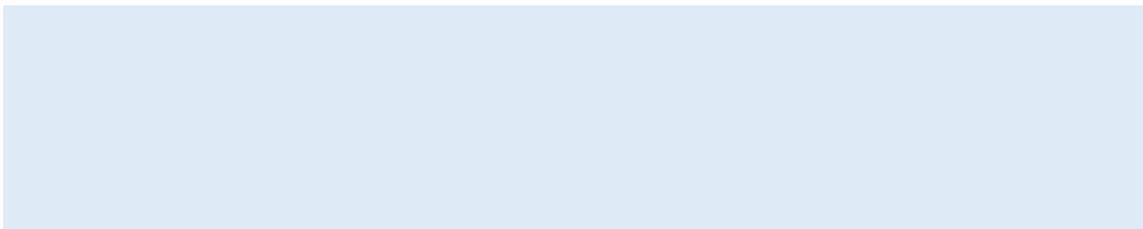
Phone/mobile number

Email

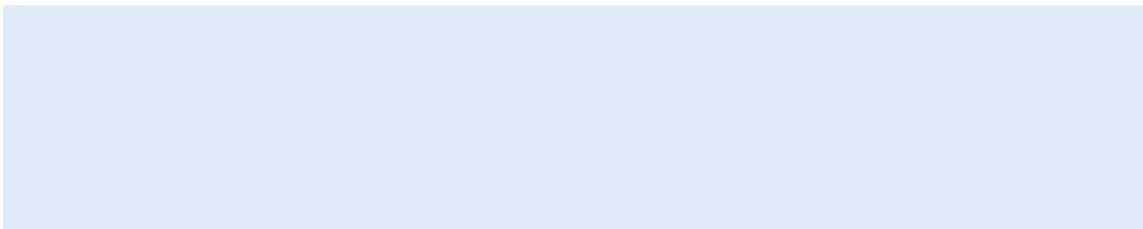
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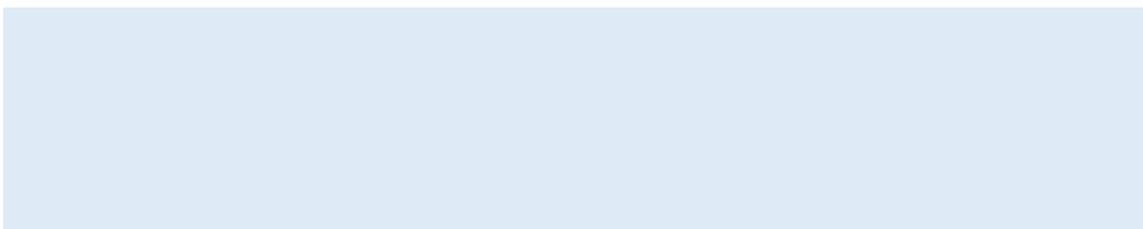
Background in general (200 words) – things you might include are – roles and experiences, knowledge and skills, areas of interest

A large light blue rectangular placeholder for the facilitator's general background information.

Background in Dialogue – your experience which has led you to be keen to facilitate a practice group

A large light blue rectangular placeholder for the facilitator's background in dialogue.

What I like about dialogue? – how you work with dialogue, the models which influence your dialogue approach

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What participants can expect from you. (what model / style you use; the structure that you will follow such as: check in and learning – deeper dialogue – check out and learning – e.g. see diagram below)

What I would like to see in the group. How many people, where, when, how long, topics, how many sessions. (Include e.g. max/min numbers, whether your intention is to have a focused group around a topic or open to anything open to all experience. Are there limitations to when or where it can run?)