Wageningen
Dialogues

Design Guide

A hands-on guide for making
Wageningen Dialogues happen

WAGENINGEN
UNIVERSITY & RESEARCH

Contents

To truly achieve WUR's ambition of 'Finding Answers Together', it is essential to engage in dialogue and deliberation both within WUR and especially with other stakeholders and the wider society. With our Strategic Plan (2019-2022)*, we aim for 'Expanded connection with society and partners' in order to have more responsible impact for (and with) partners and society and especially to accelerate transitions (CPI10).

We therefore aim to further enhance reciprocal connection with society and partners by adapting reflexive science, adopting dialogue as part of our culture and creating places to meet. We do this in the **new Omnia building***, as well as in other places and online.*

* https://www.wur.nl/en/about-wur/strategic-plan.htm

Artist impression Omnia: Broekbakema

Welcome to the team

You have been invited to join a Wageningen Dialogues design team. Together you will make Wageningen Dialogues happen! You will shape, organise and reflect on a dialogue process about a societal issue that was selected by the Wageningen Dialogues programme panel.

In this guide you will read more about the philosophy of Wageningen Dialogues and your role as a **design team member**. The guide also provides practical steps to help you plan a dialogue process together, resulting in a one-off large multi-stakeholder meeting or even a series of events.

The societal issues we aim to explore are complex. This implies that results cannot be predicted but will emerge from the interaction between stakeholders. In this guide we outline several steps and elements that help you design and implement the dialogue process together and adapt where necessary along the way.

We invite you to embark on this learning journey together. To take the time to listen to yourself, the team and other people involved. It's through listening that we may identify what is truly important, and it's through listening that we can find answers together.

The Wageningen Dialogues core team, Sebastiaan Berendse (CVC), Jack van der Vorst (SSG), Inge Wallage (CCM) and **Simone Ritzer** (programme manager Wageningen Dialogues)

What is Wageningen Dialogues about?

Today's society faces major global issues in the areas of health, energy, biodiversity, food and sustainability. Issues on which opinions and interests differ widely and which benefit from different perspectives. WUR aims to address these global challenges and to contribute to the necessary transitions in society with high-impact research, by designing and accelerating these transitions into practice.

Whether it is food production or the refugee crisis, when an issue becomes polarised or contested, people quickly call for dialogue. Wageningen Dialogues is both a programme and a label through which we encourage **meaningful conversations** among different researchers and between researchers and society. To do this well, we support our students and researchers to experience, organise and practice dialogue and deliberation in various forms and in different settings (online and on site).

The Wageningen Dialogues **programme** encourages researchers, students and employees to reach out to society. We do this by programming dialogues about heavily debated topics in society which fall within the Wageningen University & Research (WUR) domains of healthy food and living environment. The Wageningen Dialogues **label** can be used for dialogue processes and activities that are in line with the Wageningen Dialogues philosophy and building blocks.

The aim

To fulfil our role as a knowledge institute and transition partner, it is essential that students and researchers allow themselves to be enriched by the different viewpoints that exist within our university and in society. Having an open mind and listening to each other helps us to obtain a **better understanding** of the interrelatedness of the issues we are faced with. In this way we can arrive at new insights together for a **positive impact** on, with and for the world.

Dialogues at different levels

As a knowledge institute, we hold many relevant insights. But these insights sometimes remain in their own silos, may be based on different values and world views, or may result in different trade-offs. To truly have **impact for society,** it's necessary to move beyond one's own silo and become aware of underlying values. By making space for values and trade-offs, we can make a much more relevant contribution to societal debates. It enables us to create **better understanding** of different perspectives and to counteract further polarisation.

To transform from a 'knowledge provider' into a 'transition partner', we need to open up to different perspectives, values, responses, questions and comments from society and partners. Multi-stakeholder dialogues on topical societal issues can contribute to this.

The Wageningen Dialogues programme panel **identifies relevant societal topics** upon which to base and to catalyse dialogue. For each topic the panel seeks a strategic 'sponsor' and forms a design team. Together they take responsibility for the organisation of the dialogue process for their topic. However, of course we believe that dialogue should take place across the entire organisation, so students, staff and researchers across WUR are also encouraged to initiate dialogues themselves. While we find it important to organise dialogues about topical societal issues, dialogue can also certainly be useful within **research projects** and for **strategic programmes**. This is further described at the end of this booklet.

Wageningen Dialogues supports the WUR community to exchange knowledge and opinions…

…in a safe, open, interdisciplinary and creative setting

In complexity there is not one single solution

Will you join us in finding answers together?

That's why Wageningen University & Research fosters the dialogue

What does a 'Wageningen Dialogue' look like?

A Wageningen Dialogue event aims to bring the (whole) system together: a diverse group of stakeholders with different perspectives and knowledge in relation to the topic on the table. All participants are invited to actively take part in the conversation on an equal basis.

In a Wageningen Dialogue all participants may think out loud, contribute knowledge, share perspectives, and create something new together: From a manifesto to a novel attitude. Dialogue participants have an **open and curious attitude**, suspend their judgement and strive to understand others, even if they don't agree. The focus is on collective exploration and learning in order to develop new insights, solutions or innovations that could not have emerged from mere individuals.

A dialogue can't be won like a debate. In a debate people try to persuade or convince each other of the validity of an already known particular view. The outcome of a dialogue process cannot be predicted in advance. So **be prepared to be surprised**. Embrace emergence!

Get inspired

Dialogues come in different shapes and sizes: Form always follows function. The Dialogue Navigator* offers many examples of dialogue processes and events, from one-off large multi-stakeholder meetings to series of events. And besides organising dialogue events, it is also possible to add dialogic exercises to other type of events, like those on the next pages.

In this clip a colleague gives a testimony about what it can bring you if you open up to the viewpoints and underlying values of others.

And finally we'd like our research to be supported by our society.

Energy Transition Dialogue

Question: How do we use social, technological and spatial knowledge to speed up the energy transition?

Process: Wageningen Energy Alliance invited more than 50 energy professionals – researchers, local and regional policy makers, energy providers, technology consultants - for an extended afternoon dialogue programme about this complex challenge. The day kicked off with a World Café with nine tables around three themes: build environment, electricity & agriculture and land use. In three rounds participants explored pressing questions, possible solutions and potential new collaborations for each topic.

Result:
- A better grip on the jumble of many different forms of infrastructure, generation and use.
- A shared understanding that not technology, but social acceptance is the biggest challenge to realize the energy transition.
- Enhanced network and connections and more clarity on the added value different parties have to offer.

Dialogue Biodiversity & Circular Agriculture

Question: What knowledge and innovation is needed for biodiversity in circular agriculture? And how do we strengthen each other to realise this?

Process and result: A group of diverse WUR researchers organised a WUR-internal dialogue, followed by a dialogue with the broader stakeholder field. Through the organisational meetings, the involved scientists came to understand each other's perspectives much better, which made them realise how they needed different disciplines to address the complex issues at hand.

One of the organisers explained how knowledge, inspiration and support from society is necessary in order to be able to make an impact as a researcher. "Through dialogue, you come to discover which knowledge, opinions and emotions are present. Such a process also further inspires you and leads to understanding and consensus."

The Value of Nature: The wonderful life intervention

This dialogue intervention is based on the work of dr. Jacky van de Goor, with the purpose of connecting with each other and understand better what nature means to one another. WUR employees and students joined this intervention at an informal online gathering on biodiversity.

The main question was as follows:
What if there is an afterlife. There, all your memories will be erased, except for one. Which memory [of yourself, out] in nature, do you choose to take with you to eternity? Participants were asked to close their eyes and relax, to then play a movie in their head, collecting all their valuable experiences out in nature, and subsequently choose one memory to take to their afterlives.

One by one, each shared his/her memory vividly in breakout groups – doing so in such a way that the others were almost able to 'see' the moment. The other group members listened in silence, to subsequently respond in the chat with a few words about what moved them in that story. Sharing such personal stories, listening in silence and responding about what moved them brought participants closer together, as they understood better that when it comes to nature, there is more that connects them than that divides them.

Quotes from participants:

"It was so connective! Especially that we didn't have to explain or rationalise our choice, but just feel it."

"Through dialogue, you come to discover which knowledge, opinions and emotions are present."
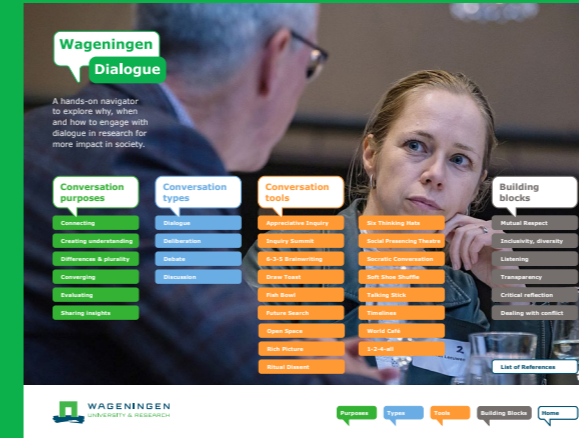
Dialogue Navigator & Tool

The Dialogue Navigator and Tool can help to formulate the purpose of the dialogue process and to explore suitable dialogue methods and tools:

- Depending on the issue at hand or the level of polarisation, dialogue can serve multiple purposes. **The Dialogue Navigator*** guides researchers, project leaders, business developers and others through the potential of dialogue in a scientific environment, showing which purposes conversations can serve, providing insights in the differences between dialogue and debate, and offering hands-on tools and insightful working principles to organise or participate in effective dialogues.
- **The Dialogue Tool**** is a decision-tree that can help you to assess the situation and determine appropriate methods and insight into how to adhere to the building blocks of effective science-society interactions.

* https://library.wur.nl/WebQuery/edepot/549568

**https://www.wur.nl/en/Value-Creation-Cooperation/Collaborating-with-WUR-1/In-dialogue-finding-answers-together/Wageningen-Dialogues/Getting-started-with-dialogues/Dialogue-navigator-tool.htm

Building blocks

- Mutual Respect
- Inclusivity, diversity
- Listening
- Transparency
- Critical reflection
- Dealing with conflict

Building blocks for fruitful conversations

There are a number of general working principles that underpin effective interactions among scientists and between scientists and societal stakeholders. We call them the building blocks for fruitful conversations that are part of science-society interactions. These building blocks are relevant for all those organising, facilitating, and participating in a conversation between people with different backgrounds, knowledge, viewpoints and stakes.

Organisation: Roles and responsibilities

The **core team** safeguards the quality, general development and embedding of the Wageningen Dialogues programme within the organisation. The **programme panel** – a diverse group whose members have affinity with science-society interactions - functions as the 'eyes, ears and hands' of the programme. The panel identifies and selects societal topics that call for dialogue and develops the basic framework for these topics (see the Programme Panel Travel Guide*). For each topic, a member of the programme panel functions as liaison with the design team, being actively involved in the monitoring of the dialogue process.

For each dialogue process, the programme panel identifies a **sponsor** who functions as the commissioner on the content. He/she sees potential in the rationale for this particular dialogue process, agrees to work within the set framework, is open to following up on the outcomes, can mobilise people and resources to shape a design team and possibly follows up on the outcomes. Together with the sponsor, the panel forms a **design team**, which is responsible for making the dialogue happen. Design team members are dedicated to moving the dialogue process forward and should be genuinely open to connecting with others.

The organisational structure of Wageningen Dialogues is under continuous development. Therefore, the **scientific advisory committee** provides advice to the core team, programme panel, and design teams about dialogue methods and governance aspects of dialogue.

Wageningen Dialogues core-team

Scientific Advisory Committee

Programme Panel

Sponsor

Dialogue Design Team

3-9 stake-holders

Process facilitator

Event support member

Dialogue Design Team

The design team ideally consists of the following people:

- **3-9 internal and/or external stakeholders** who can bring both content and network to the process and represent various views and disciplines. Together they form a mini-reflection of the stakeholder field for the topic. They have sufficient connections and credibility to get various other stakeholders to attend.
- A **process facilitator** offers expert advice on the dialogue practices. This can be a (combination of a) facilitator from WUR's facilitator pool or a Pakhuis de Zwijger programme maker.
- The team is supported by an **event support member** (student assistant / events support).
- The **sponsor** may be part of the design team or choose to take a more distanced role.

Your role is to:

- Fine-tune the purpose, formulate a central question and an inspiring title for the dialogue process.
- Identify the stakeholder groups that are needed to be able to answer the central question.
- Design and adapt a process plan (and budget), manage resources, select suitable locations and dialogue methods, and work out the follow-up process.
- Invite individual stakeholders to participate in the dialogue events.

Two or three stakeholders, the process facilitator, and the event support member form the organisational **backbone** of the team. They initiate meetings, shape the agenda, soundboard with the sponsor and the liaison in the programme panel, etc.

Practice what you preach

As the design team is a mini-reflection of the larger stakeholder system, design team meetings are like small dialogue sessions in themselves and constitute crucial steps in the dialogue process. Team members are likely to have different stakes and raise many issues. Rather than solving those issues on the spot, these can be considered as foresights of the conversations that may take place during the dialogue process. We invite you to take the time to listen to each other and use this as input for the conversations with the wider group of stakeholders.

Making Wageningen Dialogues happen

Let's get started! This section describes the five iterative steps that design teams will take to design and organise the dialogue process and individual events. The steps are among others inspired by the principles of Chaordic Design.

Chaordic - coined by Dee Hock - comes from the combination of chaos and order. It is used for working in complex situations, when there is a lot of uncertainty and many unknowns. The steps help to bring some form and order to the unpredictability, while creating room for the emergence of new insights, ideas and innovation.

Steps undertaken by the design team

1 Eleborating the framework
2 Team collaboration
3 Process design
4 Event design & hosting
5 Monitoring & learning
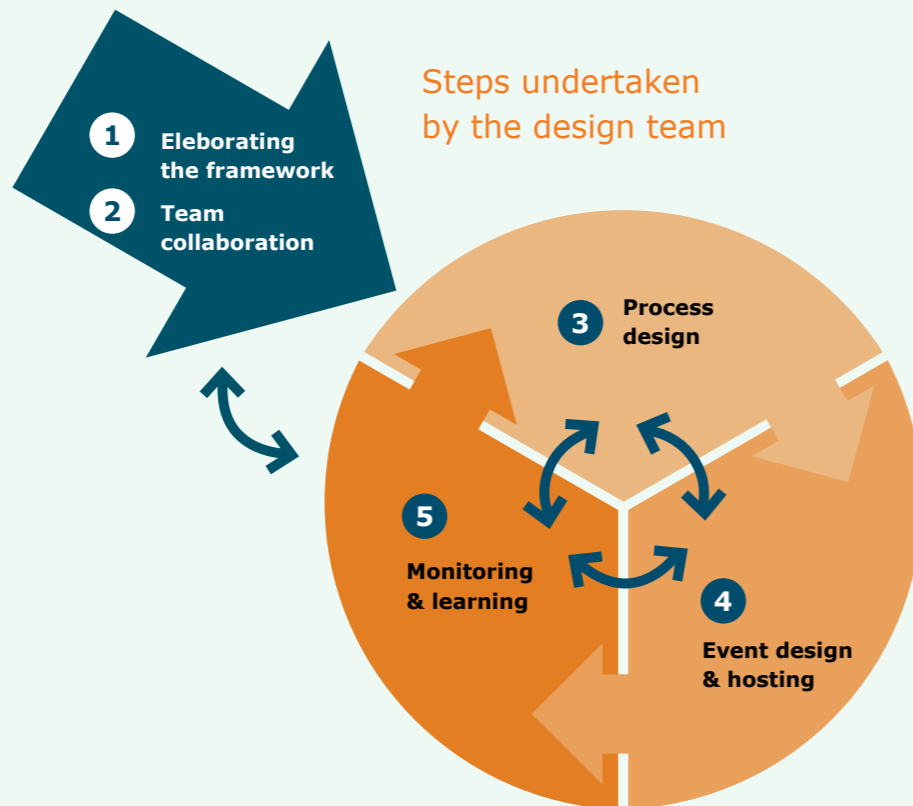
We distinguish five iterative steps:

1

Elaborating the framework
You start with refining the framework for the dialogue. This includes refining the purpose, identifying the stake-holder landscape, and pinpointing the rele-vance of the topic.

2

Team collaboration
You will explore the conditions for fruitful collaboration within the design team during the process. Don't forget to have fun together!

3

Process design
Here you really take off: you will design the overall dialogue process, which may consist of one or more dialogue events. You think through how spe-cific events will result in desired outcomes, and if additional infor-mation is needed be-fore writing a summary mandate.

4

Event design & hosting
This step is about the design and hosting of individual events. This is where things get practical. You set a clear objective for each event, identify whom to invite, explore and choose appropriate fa-cilitation methods and tools, select a location, draft the invitation, decide how to harvest and share results, and think about the follow-up.

5

Monitoring & learning
The final step is about ensuring reflective monitoring and adaptive learning. The liaison panel member and sponsor also play an active role in this throughout the process.

While these steps are presented here as distinct, subsequent steps, in reality the process of design, implementation and follow-up are usually messier and asks for an iterative approach. So, bear in mind that you may go back and forth between these steps…

This guide is not meant to be complete or exhaustive, nor is it a prescriptive recipe. As mentioned before, every dialogue topic, context and process is unique, and there is no such thing as a blueprint for success. Experience shows that these aspects are building blocks that contribute to meaningful conversations.

1 Elaborating the framework

Topic
- Topic
- Need
- Purpose
- People
- Design team
- Role WUR

The programme panel already made a quick scan resulting in the framework. It is up to the design team to elaborate and finetune this framework, as you probably have more knowledge of the topic and form a more diverse group. Major changes should be discussed with the sponsor and the liaison panel member.

Topic

The societal topic or issue that will be addressed in the dialogue process.

Need

The need refers to the compelling and present reason for embarking on this process. Sensing the need together helps to clarify the urgency: why would people engage in a dialogue on this topic? The need is often external: it is the thing that is served by the work you are doing.

Questions that may help:
- What is going on in the world right now that makes this dialogue process important?
- What are the challenges and opportunities we are facing?
- To whom is this important and relevant?
- Why do we need this process now?
- What bigger debate / societal issue is this dialogue contributing?

Purpose

From the need flows the purpose. Formulating a shared purpose for the dialogue process is helpful to guide your work and seek outcomes, but don't get too attached. Working in an unpredictable space means constantly adapting and adjusting as you learn and create new ideas and solutions. A purpose statement should be a direction, not necessarily a destination.

Questions that may help:
- What do we want to set in motion and when are we satisfied?
- What has been done by others that we can build on; and what have been their challenges?
- What makes it so that we will do it differently or more successfully?
- What could be potential unintended consequences of initiating a dialogue on this topic?
- What are your hopes and fears in relation to the main topic that we are addressing?

People

Here you refine the stakeholder map. Who are the relevant actors for this topic, both within WUR and beyond? Mapping the network helps to identify the stakeholders who have a need for and interest in this process.

Questions that may help:
- What are the major groups that have a stake in the issue? Think of the usual suspects (such as government, education, business), but make sure to also identify those who operate under the radar, as well as the unusual voices (such as smallholder farmers, migrants, students, etc).
- In what different ways is the issue framed by different people/parties? Which aspects should be part of the conversation and which should be left out (and why)?
- Among whom is dialogue needed and in what order (internally/externally, small/large scale, open/closed sessions)? Why do we want or need to engage in dialogue with them?

Design team

It is good to reflect on the composition of the design team every now and then. When circumstances change, or when new insights arrive, this may have ramifications of who should be in the team.

Questions that may help:
- Is this team a good reflection of the stakeholder system as identified above?
- Does our team also include the unusual suspects or the minority voice?
- If not, do we want to invite those that are not being represented into the team?

Role WUR

The role WUR takes depends on your assessment of the situation and the stake that WUR (or individual researchers therein) has in relation to the issue. It is important to cross-check your conclusions about the role of WUR with the sponsor and liaison panel member.

Questions that may help:
- What is the position, role and stake of both individual WUR researchers and WUR as an institute?
- Given the above, what would be an appropriate role for WUR: host, knowledge provider or both? To what extent will WUR be seen as a legitimate player?

2 Design team collaboration

- **Principles**
- **Communication**
- **Inner enemies**

Before you actually move into the design, you want to take some time to establish the conditions for fruitful collaboration. This may save frustration and resources later on in the process, and it builds the basis for a fun and effective process.

Principles
Creating joint principles of collaboration helps to build a common ethos of how you want to work together. Aim for crisp statements that are tangible, co-owned and well understood. That is why you shape them in dialogue together.

Question that may help:
- What key principles guide us in this process?
- How would you like to be treated by others in this trajectory?
- What commitments are we willing and capable to make to one another (realistically)?
- How do we want to hold each other accountable?

Team communications
In this step you decide how you will communicate with each other as a team.

Question that may help:
- What do we need to communicate efficiently and effectively?
- What are our means of communication (e.g. email, WhatsApp, Teams)?
- How often will we meet?
- Where will we store documents?
- What are recurring ingredients for our meetings? (check in/check out, minute taker, etc.)

Our inner enemies
So much of what we do is based on unquestioned models of behaviour. Patterns that can be helpful, but that may also limit us in fulfilling our true potential. We cannot create innovation in the world if we keep on doing what we always did (using old models and approaches).

In this step you examine what you fear about new ways of working together and what others may say about our effort. Facing our inner enemies helps to overcome barriers, so we can help each other into new and powerful ways of working together.

Question that may help:
- What may be holding us back in relation to this topic, and why?
- What is your inner critic telling you when you are working on this dialogue process?
- What are other cynics and sceptics saying about our work in relation to this dialogue process?

Mastering judgement, cynicism, and fear

The first enemy **(judgement)** blocks the open mind. If we judge others we cannot understand them, and if we don't understand others, we cannot be open to new possibilities.

The second enemy **(cynicism)** blocks the gate to an open heart. Cynicism is a defence mechanism that works like emotional distancing. If we want to have an open heart, we have to accept that we are vulnerable.

The third enemy is the voice of **fear**. It seeks to prevent us from letting go of what we have, or fear of being ridiculed...

If we can let go of these enemies, we can be truly open to new possibilities. *Scharmer, 2016*

Process design

- **Scope**
- **Central question**
- **Outcomes & outputs**
- **Research**
- **Summary mandate**

There are many ways to interact with society. Large-scale multistakeholder processes can last months or years. But interaction can also be short within smaller groups. Dialogues on societal topics are likely to be more than a one-off event. They are ongoing processes of the construction of meaning and sensemaking. Each dialogue-based intervention has impact on the situation and may alter it. Length and frequency of engagement therefore need to match the goals of the process. Outcomes are highly dependent on the amount of time available, circumstances and context.

One or more dialogue events

A dialogue process usually consists of several preparatory meetings and one or more large and/or small event(s). Each process is unique; this is just an example and not meant to be prescriptive of what should be done.
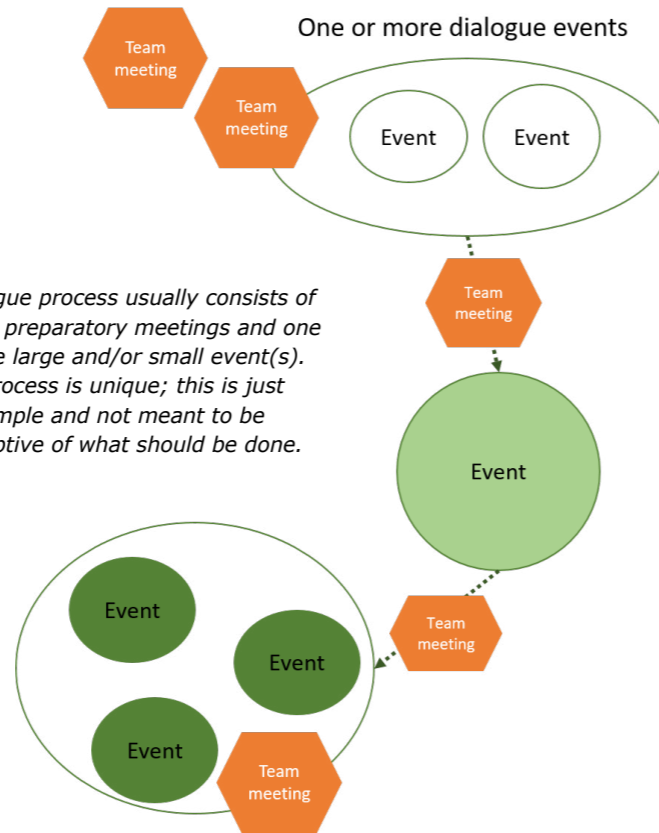
Dialogue process and events

A dialogue process usually consists of several preparatory meetings and one or more large and/or small event(s). Each process is unique; this is just an example and not meant to be prescriptive of what should be done.

Scope
To make expectations explicit, it is helpful to jointly clarify the scope of this dialogue process. What are the prerequisites (things you cannot change) and what do you need to decide together? You will probably not have all the answers to these questions at once. Some can be decided or revisited later.

Aspects to consider:
- **Timeframe**
  Are there deadlines, milestones or external events that we need to take into consideration? If not, what timeframe is necessary for this topic? When do we end what we have started?
- **Resources**
  How much time, money and people are needed to realise our ambitions? Where are these coming from?
- **Participants**
  How many people should participate in the dialogues? What is appropriate, given the topic, stakeholder field, ambitions and resources available?
- **Events**
  Do we envision one (large) public dialogue meeting, or is a series of (perhaps smaller) events more appropriate? How does this dialogue process link to other initiatives and events? Sometimes it is good to have smaller events with a sub-set of stakeholders before organising a larger stakeholder meeting. In other situations, it is appropriate to organise a series of events with slightly different objectives and/or audiences. The Dialogue Navigator* offers much inspiration.

* https://library.wur.nl/WebQuery/edepot/549568

Central Question
A central question articulates the purpose of the dialogue process clearly and concisely and helps to keep the process on target. Formulating this question together with a diverse team forces you to make the question relevant, urgent, inspiring and crystal clear for all different stakeholder groups. A central question may include several sub-questions, to clarify the topic and/or focus the conversation. The question can be put on the wall during dialogue events, so that all participants maintain clarity on the overall purpose of the process.

A central question is:
- **Relevant**
  Keeps us awake at night! (important & challenging)
- **Urgent**
  Requires action now! (current & opportune)
- **Inspiring**
  Gets us out of bed in the morning! (meaningful & fun)
- **Clear**
  Is formulated in clear language (simple & jargon-free)

"What knowledge and innovation are needed for biodiversity in circular agriculture? And how can we strengthen each other in realizing this?"

for the dialogue on Biodiversity & Circular Agriculture

"How can we meet the world's protein requirements in a sustainable way?"

for the Protein Dialogues

"How can humans and wild animals live together in a sustainable way?"

for the Wild Ideas Dialogues on Human-Wildlife Interactions

"How can WUR enable transformative change and societal impact through leadership, research, teaching, institutional change, partnerships and evaluation practices?"

for the Transformative Dialogues

Outcomes & outputs

Whether you are planning a single meeting or an ongoing dialogue process, it helps to discuss the desired outputs and outcomes at the outset. While you cannot know the content of emergent processes in detail, you can plan for the kind of results you expect.

- Looking at the central question, what kind of **outcomes** are you aiming for? For example, do you want this dialogue process to result in a stronger network, improved mutual understanding, better policy decisions, innovative ideas, further conversations, new collaboration structures, new ways of doing things or are there other outcomes you foresee?
- And what concrete **outputs** will help to achieve these outcomes; a report, a video, a joint vision statement, at least 500 participants, newspaper coverage, etc?

Outcomes and outputs must be realistic and in proportion to the need and the resources available. When formulating outputs and/or outcomes, it is wise to think about milestones that will tell you whether you are on track. Your milestones, outputs and outcomes form the basis for monitoring and evaluation.

Questions that may help:
- What kind of results will prove the worthiness of our work?
- What tangible **outputs** will contribute to this?
- What would be needed to move from outputs to outcomes?
- What assumptions do we have about how our events contribute to the wider change that we aim for?

Research

Is there information or are there developments that you need to explore further before summarising your mandate? WUR (or others) may be engaged in research related to the topic, or may be planning to do so in the near future.

Questions that may help:
- What do we know already? What do we need to find out?
- What are stakeholder perspectives, relative power positions, opinions, incentives and stakes?
- Is there an equal level playing field among these stakeholders, or are there (in)visible power imbalances?
- What signals do we see now that could be an indication of underlying conflict or polarisation? (tip: look back to our inner enemies)? What could we do now to avoid these signals turning into actual problems that frustrate the process later on?

Summary mandate

Before you dive into the design of individual dialogue meetings, we suggest writing a summary mandate of the team's view on the challenge ahead. This is an effective method to create ownership by the design team and validate the understanding of the effort with that of the sponsor and programme panel.
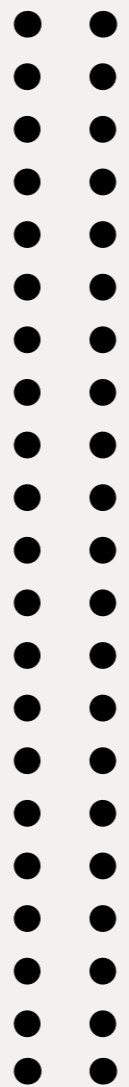
This is also a good time to formulate an inspiring title and perhaps subtitle for the process. It should be catchy, memorable and explanatory enough, so that people will understand what they are invited for.

Summary Mandate Canvas

Topic & title

Need, purpose & question

Outcomes & outputs

Composition design team

Key actors and their stakes

Role WUR

Our understanding of the issue

Timeframe

Resources

Participants

Process & events

4   Event design & hosting

- **Objective(s)**
- **Participants**
- **Methods & tools**
- **Venue**
- **Invitations**
- **Facilitation**
- **Harvest & communication**
- **Follow-up**

Now that you have sketched the overall dialogue process for our topic, it is time to design and host individual events. While you may already have ideas and wishes for a sequence of events, we usually design not more than one meeting at the time. The outcomes of every meeting will offer input for the next event, both in terms of content and format.

Event objective

Briefly describe the objective of this specific event and how it contributes to the overall process: what are you aiming for? When should it take place? How many people would you like to attend? And when are you happy/satisfied at the end of the meeting? Finally, how do the outputs of this single event help to advance the central question? What else is needed?

What do you want to achieve
- Connecting with stakeholders
- Exploring new research questions
- Understanding stakeholder needs and perspectives
- Creating a shared vision of the situation
- Exploring differences and plurality
- Bridging poles, finding common ground
- Formulating a shared vision for the future
- Designing mutually reinforcing actions
- Monitoring and adaptive learning

Each objective can be a stand-alone reason to engage in dialogue. For a long-term change process, some of these objectives could also be addressed in a sequence. Read more in The Dialogue Navigator*

ARE IN

- **A**uthority – decision power to accelerate or impede the process
- **R**esources – in terms of time, money, access and influence
- **E**xpertise – Including scientific expertise in relation to the topic (social, environmental, economic, technical, political) and non-scientific information or experience (lived experiences, lay-men knowledge, tacit knowledge)
- **I**nformation that others need
- **N**eed - those affected by the outcomes of the conversations

Weisbord and Janoff, 2010

Participants

To enable forming as complete a picture of the situation as possible, we usually seek a diversity of perspectives. Also referred to as bringing 'the whole system into the room'. The stakeholder map drawn earlier is the starting point. Doublecheck if the stakeholder groups identified collectively hold the answer to the central question, or if any relevant groups are missing.

The next step is to brainstorm a long-list of potential participants for each stakeholder group. Besides people from different sectors and disciplines, you also want a variety in types of stakeholders.

Questions that may help:
- Do we want to host an open dialogue which anyone can join, or do we need a (balanced) reflection of the stakeholder system related to our central question?
- Do the stakeholders together reflect the whole system? check the ARE IN points/elements
- Does the participants list reflect the demographic diversity of the system in terms of gender, age, income, geographic location, ethnicity, etc.?
- How (via whom or what networks/channels) can we reach these stakeholders? Which figureheads (also from outside WUR) can get them to participate?

Dialogue methods & tools

Based on the previous information, you can now look for suitable dialogue methods for this particular meeting. The online Dialogue Navigator Tool* provides inspiration for exploring appropriate dialogue methods and tools. The process facilitator may offer alternative techniques and will guide you in selecting the most appropriate one(s) to meet the objectives.

Based on this, the process facilitator and assigned team members will work out a detailed script for the meeting, including deliverables, timing, (self-management) roles and responsibilities, resources, preparation tasks and materials. This will then be presented to the design team for feedback.

* https://library.wur.nl/WebQuery/edepot/549568

*https://www.wur.nl/en/Value-Creation-Cooperation/Collaborating-with-WUR-1/In-dialogue-finding-answers-together/Wageningen-Dialogues/Getting-started-with-dialogues/Dialogue-navigator-tool.htm

Basic design principles

To foster fruitful conversations, you need to design a flow. A flow often consists of three phases. A dialogue session may consist of one or a series of these three phases.

OPENING (DIVERGENT) EXPLORING (EMERGENT) CLOSING (CONVERGENT)
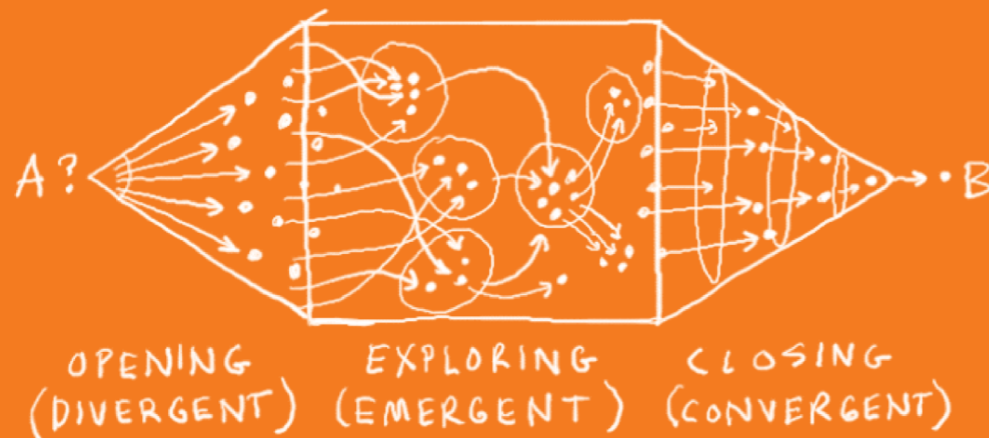
Opening (divergent)

During the first phase, the objective is to open up people and possibilities. Explore all the information and ideas. No judging or scepsis, this is the time for diverging: thinking out of the box, brainstorming, energy and optimism.

Exploring (emergent)

In the second phase, it is time to research and experiment. Dive deep into the matter, look at patterns, test assumptions, try to see things from a different perspective, explore the why behind the why. This is the emergent phase, in which new, unexpected insights may emerge. This is also called the groan zone where the group may get stuck and have a hard time finding their way forward in the process. A phase necessary to discover something new and make decisions bigger than any one person can make.

Closing (convergent)

In the closing phase you help the group move to conclusions, decisions and sometimes action steps. This is the time to judge, prioritise and make choices. You close a session by bringing out the essence, the most relevant insights, in light of what comes next.

Gray, Brown and Macanufo, 2012 and Kaner, 2014

Venue

In many cases Omnia, where science meets society, offers a great place for Wageningen Dialogues. But sometimes a different location might better suit the situation.

Consider the following aspects when choosing a location:

- **Location**
  Easy to reach for all different stakeholder groups.
- **Look and feel**
  An inviting and inspiring setting that invites people to connect on an equal level.

OMNIA

- **Size**
  Enough room for people to move freely in the space, the average is two m^2 per person (not taking into account Corona requirements). Make sure there is enough room for subgroups (4 – 8 people) to spread out over the room. One big room usually works better than separate break-out rooms, because that way you keep the energy in the room.
- **Setup**
  Preferably an open space with movable furniture that can be adjusted for each step of the meeting.
- **Light**
  For long meetings (more than two hours), rooms with daylight and access to fresh air are preferable.
- **Acoustics**
  Soft floors and walls to absorb the sound of parallel conversations.
- **Wall space**
  Enough empty wall space to hang the interim harvest of different dialogue steps.
- **Technology**
  Needed technology in terms of audio and video facilities.

Invitations

Engaging processes require inspiring invitations. This is where you invite people to attend and set the tone for the dialogue.

Consider:
- **Form**
  Something physical and/or online.
- **Format**
  A written invitation such as a letter, card or flyer letter or something more original, such as a poster, a puzzle, an object, etc.
- **Language and tone-of-voice**
- **Visual identity**
  WUR or something more neutral, so that the process can be owned equally by all participants.
- **Medium**
  Owned media such as website or social media, or also earned media such as a newspaper or magazine.

Facilitator(s)

Depending on size of the group, power dynamics, potential conflict and the dialogue method(s) selected, you will need one or more people to facilitate the dialogue. This might be the process facilitator for this topic and/or another more or less experienced dialogue facilitator. Their experience should meet the complexity of the task.

A good facilitator gives room to all voices (especially the minority voice). (S)he can be neutral, and have the ability to disassociate herself from her own opinion, perspective, idea as well as the outcome of the dialogue.

In this clip* dairy farmer Alex Datuma explains that farmers and scientist might mean the same thing but not realise it.

ALEX DATEMA
DAIRY FARMER

If you were to put a group of farmers with a group of people from Wageningen...

Conditions for fruitful conversations

Dialogue is more than a conversation method or a skill, it's also an attitude. Depending on the group gathered, you may need to pay attention to specific conditions for success.

To name a few:
- Listening to truly understand is the foundation for true dialogue and a gateway to transformative change, in scientific fields as much as anywhere else.
- Aim to create an environment in which participants feel safe to say what they want to say.
- Focus on the future and common ground, not on conflicts and problem solving.
- Focus on 'yes, and...' instead of 'no, but...', without avoiding trade-offs, the elephant in the room, and other challenging issues.
- Design for serendipity! Make sure the programme is flexible enough to deal with uncertainties and whatever else may emerge.

Harvest & communication

How do you want to harvest and share the results of the meeting? When determining this, be reminded of the outputs and outcomes which were formulated, and also how to monitor progress along the way.

- **Reporting**
  Make sure that during dialogue meetings key insights are reported, either by participants themselves and/or a separate note keeper/minute taker. Both text and images (photography, video) will help to make tangible results visible to different stakeholders.
- **Sharing results**
  How do we want to share results with participants and other stakeholders who do not participate in the dialogues? Think about appropriate and inspiring formats, such as newspaper reports, podcasts, online reporting, etc.

In this clip* scientist Anne van Doorn argues that we need to exchange more than facts, but look at the whole process together to increase mutual understanding.

ANNE VAN DOORN
COORDINATOR RESEARCH NATURE INCLUSIVE AGRICULTURE

but if you look at the whole process, it's easier to understand each other.

Follow-up

What will you do to sustain the process after the event? A key frustration of event participants is that they don't hear what's happening next, after they've given their valuable time and attention. Although commitment and sustainability should also be generated by the stakeholders during the process, it is important to discuss what has the best chance of supporting the outcomes.

Make sure to plan a design team reflection meeting shortly after every dialogue session—to celebrate successes, share lessons learned and determine the next step.

Questions that may help:
- What went well? What surprised us? Wat new insights did we gain?
- What follow-up do we expect? Who takes this responsibility?
- Can we move on as planned or is there a need to adjust our process?
- Do we have adequate resources (time, people, money) to sustain the results?

*https://youtu.be/gn6utxtPSMg

*https://youtu.be/gn6utxtPSMg

5 Monitoring & learning

- Process
- Events

To realise your shared ambitions for this dialogue process, you need to agree upfront how you will reflect and monitor progress along the way. Reflective monitoring helps to understand if we are doing the right things and if we are doing things right. Consider which milestones will give an indication of whether you are moving into the desired direction.

Working in complexity requires us to cater to emergence. That is why we work in short cycles, instead of making extensive log frames and long-term plans. Reflective monitoring thus becomes a continuous activity enabling us to learn and adapt along the way. We focus on future-oriented adaptive learning and reflect not only on results but also on the collaboration process. Monitoring progress provides data, feelings and energy to fuel the process and shape the next step.

The programme panel plays an active role in the monitoring process. The entire panel will reflect on the organisational process of the dialogues and discuss if follow-up steps are needed based on progress and outcomes. The sponsor and liaison play a central role in this as intermediaries between the design team and the programme panel.

Questions that may help:
- How do we know that we are on track along the way?
- How do we measure and interpret the results of our efforts?
- How do we share lessons learned and how do we incorporate these into our next steps?
- What did you learn during this process?

Scientific monitoring

The amount of effort being invested in organising effective dialogues (i.e. the Omnia building, the Wageningen Dialogues programme, the programme panel, design teams, etc) is significant. At the same time, we are establishing a relatively new and innovative working method; we are learning by doing.

To help the Wageningen Dialogues programme to grow, reflect and learn, a small scientific committee has been set up consisting of WUR colleagues with substantial experience in organising and/or carrying out research on science-society interactions in general, and dialogues in particular. This committee actively supports monitoring and critical reflection with the panel and design teams, in particular in relation to methodological and governance aspects of Wageningen Dialogues.

Scientific monitoring helps the panel to reflect on adherence to the building blocks, keeping in line with the characteristics of Wageningen Dialogues and fulfilling the different roles. Lessons learned help us to design future dialogue processes and get better at finding answers together.

Contact: prof. Cees Leeuwis & dr. Nina de Roo

Enjoy the journey!

Organising societal dialogue processes is a new endeavour by Wageningen Dialogues, with completely new roles, including yours. You can see this booklet as a true travel guide, as we have embarked on a learning journey together. We invite you to be self-reflective, be open to change and be ready to 'hit the road' together.

What is the best dialogue you ever had?

Can you recall why it went so well, what happened or why it was so valuable? It may range from a private one-on-one conversation to a large substantive convention.

What about this journey excites you the most?

Dialogues at other levels

Students, staff and researchers across WUR are encouraged to initiate dialogues themselves, in addition to the societal dialogues initiated by the programme panel. Dialogue can be useful within research projects and for strategic programmes.

If you see potential for dialogue within your research programme, project or team, do not hesitate to explore the Dialogue Navigator or reach out the Wageningen Dialogues.

Dialogues on strategic programme levels
to enrich and recalibrate our research programmes

Experience shows that meaningful dialogue can result in the identification of gaps in understanding and new directions for research. Starting the transition at WUR implied in our motto 'Finding answers together', requires willingness and capacity to follow-up and adapt our agendas to the outcome of these dialogues. After all: true connection with stakeholders and society leads to new expectations and questions and brings with it the obligation not only to adapt our research agenda to its outcomes, but also to keep the dialogue with societal partners going. Organising this kind of process requires serious preparation and process design, careful facilitation and multiple rounds of engagement with the support and co-ownership of all science groups. The strategic programmes at WUR offer a good basis for this kind of process.

The necessary steps in the organisation of this process entail the development of an overall process, the definition of roles, theme demarcation, organisational arrangements, safeguarding integrity, identifying relevant societal stakeholders, organising (internal and external) dialogues to explore and articulate questions that need to be addressed together, and steering the research programmes in new directions based on the outcomes of the dialogues. It's also important to reflect together on the lessons learned in the process, the organisation and organisational commitment, the effect of the strategic programmes/agendas, and the implications for further embedding of dialogue within WUR.

Dialogues on project level
to create greater impact for society

Joint fact-finding and collaborative evidence creation are key to overcoming the societal tensions and polarised debates that typically emerge in the context of transition. Dialogue can enrich research projects at the start, during or at the end. The different purposes that dialogue can serve are also explained in The Dialogue Navigator* such as creating a shared understanding in a polarised landscape and converging for joint action to apply research results.

To acquaint researchers with the potential of dialogue and deliberation, a workshop has been developed to explore the potential of dialogue for their specific project. Researchers can subsequently use dialogue or other forms of science-society interactions at the start, during or at the end of a project. Budget should be allocated to acquire knowledgeable colleagues (e.g. from the facilitator pool) to facilitate the dialogue process within a project.

* https://library.wur.nl/WebQuery/edepot/549568

Sources:

'The Chaordic Stepping Stones, A planning tool for designing participatory processes' by Chris Corrigan (2016)

'Future Search, Getting the whole system in the room for vision, commitment and action' by Marvin Weisbord and Sandra Janoff (2010)

'The MSP guide, How to design and facilitate multi-stakeholder partnerships' by Herman Brouwer and Jim Woodhill (2015)

'Theory U, learning from the future as it emerges' by Otto Scharmer (2016)

Game storming, A Playbook for Innovators, Rulebreakers, and Changemakers by Dave Gray, Sunni Brown and James Macanufo (2012)

'Dialogue Navigator, A hands-on navigator to explore why, when and how to engage with dialogue in research for more impact in society' by Wageningen University and Research (2021)

'Complexity Navigator, Nine building blocks for creating collective impact in complexity' by Perspectivity (2017)

Facilitator's Guide to Participatory Decision-Making' by Sam Kaner (2014)

WAGENINGEN
UNIVERSITY & RESEARCH

Wageningen
Dialogues