

What is a Cross-Class Dialogue Circle?

Updated December 2023

As we are increasingly called to collaborate with each other for racial, economic, and gender justice, Cross Class Dialogue Circles (CCDC) are a unique way to learn about:

- socioeconomic class and economic inequality
- how class intersects with race, gender, ability, religion, etc.
- how to practice conversations about class and across class

Check out the video [here](#) for more about what it's like.

Format: The Circle meets on Zoom for 1.5 hour sessions once a week, for twelve weeks. Each weekly dialogue session is a combination of structured activities, new ideas and info presented by the facilitators, and group discussion (a mix of large and small groups each session).

Facilitators: Think Again Training & Consulting team members Davey Shlasko, Kendra Colburn, Romina Pacheco and Toby Davis co-facilitate Cross-Class Dialogue Circles, sometimes with guest facilitators or facilitators-in-training. You can see their bios [here](#).

Participants: Participants are from a mix of socioeconomic class backgrounds and have a variety of other identities. We start out with some small “affinity-ish” groups made up of people with something in common (which could be class, race, age, gender, or some more specific experience). As we build relationships through the first half of the Circle, those groups change each week, so that all the participants get to know each other in a variety of groupings.

After the first few weeks, we match participants in buddy pairs (based on participants' preferences). The buddy pairs check in between sessions to deepen the dialogue.

The participants' own wisdom, experiences, and stories form the heart of the Circle. The dialogue is not only about class and its intersections “in general” - it is mostly about the participants' experiences, thoughts and feelings, reactions to the homework and activities, and the commonalities and differences we discover within the group.

There's a lot of flexibility and choice in how vulnerably people share and how much of themselves they bring to the group. The more personal engagement people bring to the dialogue, in whatever ways work best for them (including not only sharing with the whole group but also sharing in small groups and with their buddies, reflecting individually, etc.), the more they gain from their participation.

Pre-work: We assign 30-60 minutes of homework each week. Some of the homework provides information, so we can all come in with common reference points. Some offers reflection questions, to jump-start participants' thinking about their own experiences. We encourage doing as much of the homework as is feasible, but it's *not required* to participate in the circle.

Funding: We fund the circles with a combination of contributions from current and past participants (using a **cost sharing** process, described below), generous support from members of the [Vermont Resource Generation Praxis group](#), grants, organizational sponsors, and other community donations.

Cost-Sharing and Payment: When people register, they use this [Sliding Scale Guide](#) to consider how much if any money they will contribute to the circle, and note their initial estimate in the registration form. For some people, the amount they can reasonably afford is \$0, and that's okay! These initial estimates help us plan, but they are not set in stone. Most people make their payments (if any) later, toward the end of the circle.

If someone decides to drop out of the dialogue circle before final payments are decided, but after participating in two or more sessions, we ask that they pay ½ of their initial estimated contribution. There are limited spaces in the circle, and this policy helps ensure we will have funding to launch the next circle even though some people choose to leave part way through.

During the Circle (Sessions 8-9), we revisit the initial estimates and figure out what we each will pay for the Circle using a group **cost-sharing process**.

- The cost-sharing process requires us to practice what we've learned and relies on the relationships we've built so far through the cross-class dialogue.
- Participants will have opportunities to communicate openly about their financial resources and grapple honestly with ideas of sharing, equitable decision-making, and mutual responsibility. Often, this means saying aloud in the group how much money they make, how much savings or debt they have, etc.
- Cost sharing is a voluntary activity that stretches our communication and relational skills. It can feel uncomfortable. Like with everything else in the circle, participants have choices about how to participate, how much information to share, how vulnerable to be, etc. We encourage participants to stretch their comfort zones, but no one has to share anything they don't want to share.
- With the group's support, each person is ultimately responsible for deciding how much they will contribute, and no one ever needs to contribute more than what works for them.

Cost Sharing is one of the most valuable and transformative activities of the circle. We build up to it gradually, and discuss the hows and whys of it before, during and after the process.

Online logistics and tech:

- We meet on Zoom and use Google docs and Google forms, Jamboards, and sometimes other web-based programs. We introduce these tools during the sessions. As needed, we can support participants in learning how to use them and we can modify our use of the tools to make them accessible to the group.
- Between sessions, we communicate mostly through email.
- We'll work out agreements for how we want to engage together during our 1.5hr sessions (if/how we use the chat function, etc.)
- Our time together online is only part of this circle - homework, individual reflection, and buddy check-ins between sessions all serve to deepen the dialogue.

Accessibility: We want as many people as possible to be able to participate in this circle.

- We can offer a stipend for childcare costs related to your participation.
- By default we offer computer-generated closed captioning for this online Circle.

- If you have any other accessibility needs, such as human-generated captions, ASL interpretation, printed materials, support for online activities, modes of communication that do or don't work for you, etc. please say so in your application and we will meet as many access needs as possible.
 - Accessibility needs do not have to be related to a disability. No matter why you need something, we want to know what you need to that we can do our best to make the circle work for everyone!
- We approach this Circle with flexibility and an intention to communicate and meet participants' and facilitators' needs as we can.

History and Lineage: In 2014, in response to a clear need for local community organizers and activists in a small VT town to learn and practice collaboration across class, Davey Shlasko and Angela Berkfield drew on their own experiences and the many different lineages of knowledge and practice to create the Cross-Class Dialogue Circles we facilitate today. Some of those lineages include solidarity practices in communities fighting for themselves and each other (like mutual aid, collective decision-making, and affinity spaces), the Intergroup Dialogue process, popular education, Marxist economics, and more.

Participants in the early CCDC found it useful for both individual development and for community action towards justice, and Davey and Angela continued to offer circles to a wider variety of people outside the original local community context. In 2017, we offered the first virtual online CCDC as a way for people from outside VT to join. In 2020, we moved CCDC entirely online. There are pros and cons of in-person and virtual Circles, beautifully written about by a participant [here](#). We continue to improve the CCDC curriculum.

We didn't create this model out of nowhere: we are part of a long history of people working together towards justice. We modify and co-create the design with participants in every Circle, and review and evolve the curriculum regularly.

Accountability: Since Cross-Class Dialogue Circles were originally designed by white people with educational privilege, the design reflects these biases. It also reflects the facilitators' queer, trans, and radical biases, among other experiences they bring to their facilitation.

The CCDC Coordinating Committee is a multi-racial, cross-class, multi-gender decision-making group whose role is to co-create and review the CCDC curriculum and format, and to interrupt harmful and exclusionary biases as we continually improve the Circles.

We hire additional Black and multi-racial consultants to review our evolving curriculum, and welcome and incorporate critical feedback from current and past circle participants about the format, content, homework, and their experiences.

Several of the facilitators are also part of an ongoing Race-Class Trainer's Circle and Community of Practice that was started by [Class Action](#) and continues as an independent project since Class Action has closed, and incorporate that group's wisdom and explorations into our planning and facilitation.

Feedback: Several times during the Circle, we ask participants to do a short survey about how the dialogue circle is going, and use that feedback to make adjustments in the remaining sessions and for future Circles.

Please reach out to crossclassdialoguecircles@gmail.com with any questions, or register at the link here: <https://www.thinkagaintraining.com/cross-class-dialogue-circles/>