WHAT IS A FISHBOWL?
A small group conversation or a dialogue process held in a setting which includes a larger group of observers/listeners.

A fishbowl is an experiential exercise that enables active participation through discussion by those inside the “fishbowl” and active observation by those outside of the “fishbowl.” Think of the fishbowl as a center stage with observers sitting around it. A typical fishbowl setup has an inner circle of chairs for about five to eight people with more chairs for observers set around the inner circle.

A FISHBOWL MAY BE ORGANIZED AS AN OPEN OR CLOSED SESSION.
» Open fishbowls allow anyone in the audience to join the fishbowl during the discussion.
» Closed fishbowls engage the participants in the fishbowl as intact groups, joining and leaving the fishbowl as one.

USE IT TO
» increase understanding of difficult or controversial topics.
» support multiple perspectives and debate.
» support problem-solving, especially for complex problems with no single-answer solutions.
» encourage active listening and reflection.
» enable knowledge transfer.

HOW TO USE IT
» Fishbowl requires an experienced coach who, in addition to good coaching skills, is knowledgeable about the subject matter.
» Identify and work with the coach to decide on the structure of the activity.
› Is it going to be an open or closed fishbowl?
› How much time will you allow for the interaction within the fishbowl?
› How many fishbowl rounds are there going to be?
› Do you need a facilitator in addition to the coach to ensure a smooth transition as members of the audience enter and leave the fishbowl?
› Can the selected venue be set up for a fishbowl conversation that also offers good visibility for those observing?
» Based on your expected results, prepare the observers’ checklist. What should observers pay attention to?
› content, and/or
› process
» At the end of each fishbowl, be sure to provide a summary of the key points, using the observer’s checklist as a guide.