



# FISHBOWL

## 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.