

## ANIMATING DEMOCRACY'S WORKING DEFINITIONS

It's true that the arts stimulate spontaneous conversation all the time. Individuals who experience the arts together are likely to talk about what they have seen and the ideas and issues suggested by the work. Such incidental dialogue contributes in an important way to broader public discourse about contemporary civic issues.

While Animating Democracy acknowledges the value of such spontaneous and incidental conversation, it is primarily focused on opportunities in which cultural organizations and artists deliberately plan civic dialogue activity in relation to the art experience, with the intent to enhance participants' connection to the issue as well as the art. Such planned dialogue may be facilitated in conjunction with the final artistic presentation, as an integral part of the development of the work, or both.

### **DIALOGUE**

Those involved in dialogue and civic dialogue work may differ on approaches and methods. Most agree, however, on certain basic qualities that characterize dialogue and distinguish it from conversation or debate.

Animating Democracy understands dialogue as a purposeful, deliberative process. Our definition derives from that given by the Study Circles Resource Center: dialogue is two or more parties with differing viewpoints working toward common understanding in an open-ended, face-to-face format. Dialogue is inclusive of multiple and possibly conflicting perspectives. According to Daniel Yankelovich, author of *The Magic of Dialogue*, three qualities of dialogue distinguish it from debate or discussion:

Dialogue allows assumptions to be brought out into the open and encourages participants to suspend judgment in order to foster understanding and break down obstacles.

Dialogue seeks to create equality among participants. Certain conditions can be created to even the playing field for participants with various levels of information about the issue, experience in public forums, real or perceived positions of power or authority, and to help build the trust and climate of safety for deep dialogue.

Dialogue aims for a greater understanding of others' viewpoints through empathy. In dialogue, multiple perspectives are invited to the table and people are encouraged to voice them.

## **CIVIC DIALOGUE**

For Animating Democracy’s purposes, civic dialogue refers specifically to public dialogue in which people discuss civic issues, policies, or decisions of consequence to their lives, communities, and society. Civic dialogue is intentional and purposeful. Dialogue organizers have a sense of what difference they hope to make and participants are informed about why the dialogue is taking place and what may result. The focus of civic dialogue is not about the process of dialogue itself, nor is its intent solely therapeutic or to nurture personal growth. Rather, civic dialogue explores the dimensions of the civic issue, working toward common understanding in an open-ended discussion. It engages multiple perspectives on an issue, including potentially conflicting and unpopular ones, rather than promoting a single point of view.

## **ARTS-BASED CIVIC DIALOGUE**

In arts-based civic dialogue, the artistic process and/or art/humanities presentation provides a key focus, catalyst, or forum for public dialogue on the issue. Opportunities for dialogue are embedded in or connected to the arts experience. Arts-based civic dialogue may draw upon any of the arts and humanities disciplines. It may be undertaken by individual artists and artist companies, community-based arts and cultural organizations, and cultural institutions such as museums and ballet, utilizing a wide range of artistic practice and dialogic methods.