

Dialogue Incubator 2026–2027

Integrating Dialogue into Research Practice

About the programme

The Dialogue Incubator is a nine-month development programme for VU researchers who want to explore how dialogue can strengthen their research and its connection to society.

Researchers are increasingly expected to engage with stakeholders, citizens, patients, professionals, policymakers and other societal actors. While many researchers recognize the importance of these interactions, they often receive little formal training in how to facilitate meaningful conversations across different perspectives, interests and forms of knowledge.

The Dialogue Incubator supports researchers in developing the mindset, skills and confidence needed to design and facilitate dialogue within their own research practice. Since its launch, the programme has supported 32 VU researchers from a wide range of disciplines. Participants have developed dialogue projects on topics including welfare policy, women's entrepreneurship, healthcare, artificial intelligence, education, climate change and social inequality.

What participants will learn

Throughout the programme, participants learn how to:

- understand the principles and value of dialogue in research and society
- facilitate conversations between people with different experiences, values and forms of expertise
- design dialogue processes that contribute to mutual learning and reflection
- work constructively with disagreement, uncertainty and complexity
- connect research questions to societal concerns and lived experiences
- reflect on their own role as a researcher in dialogue settings
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The programme combines practical skill development with reflection on the role of dialogue in contemporary research.

Programme structure

- Timeline: September 2026 – June 2027
- Number of participants: 10 teams
- Team size: 2–3 participants per team
- Language: English (with room for experimentation and materials in Dutch)
- Participation: free of charge
- Seed funding: up to €2,500 per project

Retreat: Experiencing Dialogue - 18 September 2026 09:00 – 17:00
A full-day retreat focused on community building, reflection and experiencing dialogue methods first-hand.
Training (1): The Art of Dialogue I - 29 October 12:30 – 17:00
Introduction to dialogue facilitation, group dynamics and creating constructive conversation spaces.
Training (2): Designing Dialogue I - 26 November 12:30 – 17:00
Developing a dialogue intervention connected to participants' own research context.
Intervision I - 21 January 15:00 – 17:00
Peer reflection session focused on challenges, experiments and lessons learned so far.

Training (3) Designing Dialogue II – 18 February 12:30 – 17:00 Participants test elements of their dialogue intervention within the group and receive extensive peer feedback.
Training (4) The Art of Dialogue II – 11 March 12:30 – 17:00 Working with tensions, difficult conversations and facilitation in complex settings.
Intervision II – 15 April 15:00 – 17:00 Collective reflection on implementation, impact and future application.
Closing session – June, date tbd Final presentations, shared reflection and community gathering.

Throughout the programme, participants work on their own dialogue initiative connected to their research. The programme culminates in the implementation of this dialogue project and a shared reflection on lessons learned.

Commitment and time investment

Participation in the Dialogue Incubator requires an active commitment throughout the nine-month programme. Participants are expected to:

- Attend all programme sessions. Because the programme is built around a learning community, attendance is important. Participants may miss one session if necessary, but are expected to be present at all other meetings.
- Participate in individual coaching and advisory conversations throughout the programme.
- Act as the lead organiser of their own dialogue project. Participants are responsible for developing, organising and implementing a dialogue activity connected to their research.
- Invest time between sessions to further develop their dialogue project. This may include stakeholder conversations, project design, recruitment of participants, collaboration with partners, and preparation of the dialogue itself.

In total, participants should expect to invest approximately 80 hours over the course of the programme, spread across the academic year. This includes programme sessions, coaching conversations and the development and implementation of their dialogue project.

Because participation requires both time and institutional support, we ask participants to discuss their involvement with their supervisor before the start of the programme.

Who should apply?

The programme is designed primarily for researchers at Assistant Professor level (UD), although motivated researchers at other career stages may also be considered.

Participants should:

- be actively involved in research
- have an interest in dialogue, public engagement or science communication
- be willing to experiment with new approaches to research engagement
- have a concrete research topic, project or societal issue they would like to explore through dialogue

No prior experience with dialogue facilitation is required.

Why participate?

Participants often report that the programme changes how they think about their role as researchers.

The Dialogue Incubator helps researchers move beyond one-way communication towards meaningful engagement with the people and communities connected to their research. Participants gain practical tools, develop new professional skills and build connections across disciplines.

Many alumni continue to apply dialogue methods in their research, teaching and societal engagement activities long after the programme has ended.

Examples of dialogue projects

Previous participants have organized dialogues on:

- [Welfare and social support systems](#)
- [Women's entrepreneurship and economic participation](#)
- [Dialogue sessions to increase awareness, understanding, and appreciation of the knowledge, skills, and expertise of nursing assistants.](#)
- Sustainability and climate transitions

Selection and nominations

To ensure broad representation across the university, participants are nominated by their faculty or school. Each faculty or school is invited to nominate researchers who show both interest and potential in integrating dialogue into their research practice.

Further information

For questions about the programme or the nomination process, please contact:

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<https://vu.nl/en/employee/research-support/dialogue-incubator>