

Sacred Space Setup Guide

Purpose

The Sacred Space Setup Guide is designed to assist facilitators in creating physical and virtual environments for interfaith and inter-spiritual dialogues within the Religious & Spiritual Dialogue Framework. It ensures that dialogue spaces are inclusive, respectful, culturally appropriate, sustainable, and accessible, fostering a sense of safety and belonging for participants, including children, from diverse spiritual, religious, and ethical traditions while supporting the framework's goals of mutual understanding and collaboration.

Intended Audience

- Facilitators organizing global summits, regional workshops, or local dialogue circles
- Community leaders and spiritual practitioners contributing to dialogue environments
- Regional Hubs and the Global Council for Religious & Spiritual Dialogue (GCRSD) overseeing dialogue implementation

Core Principles

This guide aligns with the framework's five core principles:

1. **Inclusivity:** Ensuring spaces accommodate all traditions, including marginalized, non-theistic perspectives, and children.
2. **Respect:** Honoring the sacredness and cultural boundaries of each tradition's practices.
3. **Equity:** Addressing accessibility and power imbalances to create welcoming environments.
4. **Collaboration:** Engaging local stakeholders to co-create culturally relevant spaces.
5. **Knowledge Integration:** Incorporating spiritual, cultural, and ecological wisdom into space design.

Guide Overview

The Sacred Space Setup Guide includes:

- **Preparation Phase:** Assessing needs and consulting stakeholders.
- **Physical Space Setup:** Guidelines for in-person environments, including sustainability and children's inclusion.
- **Virtual Space Setup:** Guidelines for online or hybrid dialogues, with technology contingency planning.
- **Cultural and Ritual Considerations:** Adapting spaces to regional and spiritual contexts.
- **Monitoring and Feedback:** Ensuring spaces remain inclusive and respectful.
- **Tools and Resources:** Supporting framework tools for implementation.

Sacred Space Setup Process

Step 1: Preparation Phase

- **Assess Participant Needs:**
 - Use the [Representation Assessment Tool](#) to identify the diversity of participants (e.g., traditions, genders, ages, disabilities, presence of children).
 - Consult the [Living Directory](#) to understand tradition-specific spatial requirements (e.g., prayer spaces, child-friendly areas, dietary needs).
 - Example: In a South Asian dialogue, note the need for a children's storytelling corner for Hindu and Muslim families alongside prayer areas.
- **Engage Stakeholders:**
 - Collaborate with local leaders, youth groups, families, and marginalized communities via the [Local Partnership MOU Template](#) to co-design the space.
 - Example: In a Pacific Islands dialogue, consult Polynesian elders and youth to ensure cultural protocols and child-friendly spaces.
- **Review Regional Context:**
 - Use the [Regional Customization Framework](#) to understand local customs, sacred symbols, and historical sensitivities.
 - Example: In a Middle Eastern dialogue, avoid decor that privileges one Abrahamic tradition and ensure eco-friendly materials align with Islamic environmental values.

- **Plan Accessibility and Sustainability:**

- Conduct an accessibility audit per the [Digital Access & Inclusion Audit](#), addressing physical, sensory, cognitive, and children's needs.
- Assess environmental impact, prioritizing energy-efficient venues and sustainable resources.
- Example: In a North American dialogue, select a venue with solar power and plan for children's sensory-friendly zones.

Step 2: Physical Space Setup

- **Select a Neutral Venue:**

- Choose a location free of dominant tradition symbols unless agreed upon by all participants (e.g., community centers, secular halls) and with low environmental impact (e.g., energy-efficient buildings).
- Example: In a European dialogue, use a civic hall with LED lighting instead of a church to avoid Christian bias and reduce energy use.

- **Arrange Seating:**

- Use circular or semi-circular seating to promote equity and communal engagement, respecting cultural norms (e.g., gender-separated seating if requested) and ensuring accessibility for wheelchairs.
- Example: In an African dialogue, arrange seats in a circle to reflect communal traditions, with space for children to join or sit separately.

- **Create Inclusive Decor:**

- Use neutral, sustainable decor (e.g., locally sourced plants, recycled fabrics) or co-created symbols with stakeholder consent, per the [Cultural Appropriation Prevention Checklist](#).
- Example: In a Southeast Asian dialogue, display a shared arrangement of lotus flowers (significant to Buddhists and Hindus) using biodegradable materials, with community approval.

- **Provide Ritual Spaces:**

- Designate areas for tradition-specific practices (e.g., prayer rooms, meditation corners), per the [Sacred Time Integration Framework](#).
- Example: In a South American dialogue, include a smudging area for Indigenous participants and a quiet space for Christian prayer.

- **Create Child-Friendly Spaces:**

- Set up a supervised area for children with age-appropriate activities (e.g., storytelling, art) that reflect spiritual themes, ensuring inclusivity across traditions.

- Include child-safe furniture, sensory-friendly materials, and trained staff to support developmental needs.
- Example: In a South Asian dialogue, provide a corner with Hindu and Muslim storybooks and quiet play areas for young children.
- **Ensure Accessibility:**
 - Install ramps, wide doorways, accessible restrooms, hearing loops, and child-accessible facilities (e.g., low tables, step stools).
 - Offer sensory-friendly zones (e.g., low-light areas) and cognitive supports (e.g., clear signage, simplified agendas).
 - Example: In an Australian dialogue, provide braille agendas, a quiet room for neurodiverse participants, and child-friendly signage.
- **Cater to Dietary Needs with Sustainability:**
 - Offer inclusive catering (e.g., halal, kosher, vegetarian, vegan) based on participant needs, clearly labeled, using locally sourced, low-waste options (e.g., reusable dishware, compostable packaging).
 - Example: In a global summit, provide a vegan buffet with locally grown ingredients to accommodate Jain, Buddhist, and secular preferences while minimizing waste.
- **Minimize Environmental Impact:**
 - Use energy-efficient lighting, heating, and cooling systems in venues.
 - Reduce waste through digital handouts, reusable materials, and composting food scraps.
 - Example: In a Latin American dialogue, use solar-powered lighting and distribute digital agendas to reduce paper waste.

Step 3: Virtual Space Setup

- **Choose a Secure Platform:**
 - Select a W3C-compliant platform with multilingual support, low-bandwidth options, and screen-reader compatibility, per the [AI Ethics Guidelines](#).
 - Example: Use a platform like Zoom with live captioning for a hybrid African dialogue.
- **Design Inclusive Virtual Aesthetics:**
 - Use neutral virtual backgrounds or co-created imagery (e.g., nature scenes) to avoid privileging one tradition, ensuring eco-conscious messaging (e.g., images of sustainable landscapes).
 - Example: In a Middle Eastern dialogue, use a desert landscape background approved by Muslim, Christian, and Jewish participants.

- **Facilitate Ritual Integration:**

- Create virtual “breakout rooms” for tradition-specific practices (e.g., meditation, prayer), ensuring privacy and consent.
- Example: In a Southeast Asian dialogue, offer a virtual room for Buddhist mindfulness with a trained facilitator.

- **Ensure Virtual Accessibility:**

- Provide live captions, sign language interpreters, multilingual chat options, and child-friendly interfaces (e.g., simple navigation for young participants).
- Offer asynchronous participation (e.g., recorded sessions, discussion forums) for remote or time-zone-challenged participants.
- Example: In a Pacific Islands dialogue, provide recorded sessions for outer island participants with limited internet.

- **Support Hybrid Integration:**

- Use dual-camera setups to capture in-person dynamics for virtual participants, ensuring remote voices are integrated via a dedicated co-facilitator.
- Example: In a Latin American dialogue, assign a virtual facilitator to monitor chat and amplify remote participant input.

- **Plan Technology Contingencies:**

- Prepare backup communication channels (e.g., mobile messaging, offline recordings) for internet failures, especially in rural areas.
- Provide pre-recorded content or printed materials for participants with unreliable connectivity.
- Maintain a backup platform (e.g., Microsoft Teams) if the primary platform fails.
- Example: In an African dialogue, distribute USB drives with recorded sessions to rural participants and use WhatsApp for real-time updates if internet drops.

Step 4: Cultural and Ritual Considerations

- **Co-Create Opening/Closing Rituals:**

- Collaborate with participants, including children’s representatives (e.g., youth or parents), to design rituals that honor all traditions, per the [Sacred Time Integration Framework](#).
- Example: In a West African dialogue, combine a Yoruba libation ceremony with a Christian blessing, including a child-led gratitude circle, with consent from both communities.

- **Respect Sacred Boundaries:**

- Use the [Cultural Appropriation Prevention Checklist](#) to ensure sacred symbols or practices are used only with permission.
- Example: In an Australian dialogue, exclude Aboriginal sacred symbols unless approved by elders.
- **Adapt to Regional Norms:**
 - Tailor space design to cultural expectations (e.g., removing shoes in South Asian venues, communal seating in African contexts, child-friendly areas in family-oriented communities).
 - Example: In a South Asian dialogue, provide a shoe-free area, gender-separated prayer spaces, and a supervised children's play area.
- **Incorporate Local Wisdom:**
 - Integrate regional spiritual elements (e.g., storytelling, music) into the space, with stakeholder input, per the [Regional Customization Framework](#).
 - Example: In a Caribbean dialogue, include Rastafari drumming in the opening, with community approval, and child-appropriate rhythm activities.

Step 5: Monitoring and Feedback

- **Monitor Space Inclusivity:**
 - Use the [Digital Feedback Dashboard](#) to collect real-time participant feedback, including from children or parents, on the space's inclusivity, comfort, and sustainability.
 - Example: In a European dialogue, address feedback about insufficient prayer space or lack of child-friendly areas by adding a quiet room and play corner mid-session.
- **Address Issues in Real-Time:**
 - Apply the [Conflict De-escalation Protocols](#) if tensions arise (e.g., discomfort with decor, technology failures), pausing to consult affected participants.
 - Example: In a Middle Eastern dialogue, remove an unapproved religious symbol and switch to a backup platform after participant feedback and internet disruption.
- **Collect Post-Dialogue Feedback:**
 - Gather reflections on the space's effectiveness, including children's experiences, via accessible formats (e.g., audio surveys, verbal feedback, child-friendly questionnaires), asking: "Did the space feel welcoming?" or "How could it be more inclusive or sustainable?"
 - Example: In a South American dialogue, collect verbal feedback from Indigenous participants and parents on ritual space and child area suitability.
- **Document Best Practices:**

- Record successful space designs, including sustainable and child-friendly elements, in the [Multimedia Resource Library](#), sharing anonymized examples.
- Example: Share how a North African dialogue used recycled decor and a children's art corner to accommodate diverse traditions.

Step 6: Post-Dialogue Follow-Up

- **Evaluate Space Effectiveness:**
 - Review feedback and outcomes to assess how the space, including sustainability and children's inclusion, supported dialogue goals, per the [Wisdom Documentation Templates](#).
 - Example: Confirm that a Pacific Islands dialogue's communal seating and eco-friendly catering enhanced engagement and aligned with environmental values.
- **Share Findings:**
 - Submit a report to the Regional Hub or GCRSD, detailing space setup, feedback, technology contingencies, and recommendations, per the [Representation Metrics Dashboard](#).
 - Example: Report how a South Asian dialogue's prayer spaces and child-friendly areas improved inclusivity.
- **Refine Future Setups:**
 - Update space designs based on feedback, incorporating more sustainable practices, child-friendly features, or robust technology backups.
 - Example: Add composting stations and child-safe ritual spaces to an Asian dialogue after feedback on waste and family needs.

Considerations for Implementation

- **Cultural Sensitivity:**
 - Respect regional sacred calendars and spatial protocols (e.g., avoiding Christian symbols during Ramadan in Muslim-majority regions).
 - Example: In a South Asian dialogue, ensure no dialogue activities conflict with Hindu festival preparations and include child-appropriate festival themes.
- **Power Dynamics:**
 - Prioritize marginalized traditions and children's voices in space design (e.g., Indigenous, minority faiths, young participants) to counter dominance by majority

groups.

- Example: In a North American dialogue, center Indigenous spatial preferences and child-led activities over Christian ones.

- **Accessibility:**

- Ensure all spaces (physical and virtual) meet diverse needs, including physical, sensory, cognitive, and child-specific accommodations (e.g., safe play areas, simple interfaces).
- Example: In a Central Asian dialogue, provide Kyrgyz-language virtual interfaces and child-accessible facilities for nomadic families.

- **Youth and Children's Engagement:**

- Involve youth and children in space design (e.g., selecting decor, suggesting child-friendly activities) to ensure relevance.
- Example: In a European dialogue, engage youth to propose inclusive virtual aesthetics and children to suggest play area themes.

- **Remote and Rural Engagement:**

- Provide offline access to space plans (e.g., printed guides) and virtual participation options with technology backups for rural communities.
- Example: In an African dialogue, distribute space layout plans via community radio and USB drives for rural participants.

- **Environmental Sustainability:**

- Align space setup with ecological values of many traditions (e.g., Indigenous, Buddhist, Islamic) by prioritizing low-impact materials and practices.
- Example: In a Latin American dialogue, use locally sourced, compostable catering materials to honor Indigenous environmental stewardship.

- **Ethical Considerations:**

- Obtain consent for using sacred elements in spaces, per the [Cultural Appropriation Prevention Checklist](#).
- Example: In a Southeast Asian dialogue, secure Buddhist monk approval for a meditation corner and child-friendly mindfulness activities.

Appendices

- **Sample Sacred Space Plan:**

Sacred Space Setup Plan

Dialogue Title: West African Dialogue on Peacebuilding

Date: May 19, 2025

Location: Hybrid – Accra, Ghana & Virtual

1. Physical Space:

- Venue: Community Center (neutral, solar-powered, accessible).
- Seating: Circular, with wheelchair access and child-safe chairs.
- Decor: Recycled fabrics, co-created with Muslim and Indigenous artists.
- Ritual Spaces: Prayer room for Muslims, smudging area for Indigenous practices.
- Child-Friendly Space: Supervised corner with storytelling and art supplies.
- Accessibility: Ramps, hearing loops, sensory-friendly zone, clear pathways.
- Catering: Halal and vegetarian options, compostable dishware.
- Sustainability: LED lighting, digital handouts, food waste composting.

2. Virtual Space:

- Platform: Zoom with captions, low-bandwidth mode, child-friendly interface.
- Aesthetics: Neutral savanna background, approved by stakeholders.
- Ritual Spaces: Virtual breakout room for meditation.
- Accessibility: Live translation in Twi, asynchronous forum access.
- Contingency: Backup via Microsoft Teams, offline recordings of sessions.

3. Cultural Considerations:

- Rituals: Opening with communal song and child-led gratitude.
- Boundaries: No unapproved use of Vodun symbols, per [Cultural Guidelines].

4. Feedback Plan:

- Real-Time: Monitor via [Digital Feedback Dashboard](/framework/feedback).
- Post-Dialogue: Collect verbal feedback from rural participants.

Submitted by: [Facilitator Name]

Contact: spiritualdialogue@globalgovernanceframework.org

• Facilitator Checklist:

- Assess participant needs, including children, and regional context.
- Engage stakeholders to co-design inclusive, sustainable spaces.
- Set up physical and virtual spaces with accessibility, child-friendly features, and technology backups.
- Monitor cultural sensitivity, sustainability, and address issues in real-time.

- Collect feedback, including from children, and refine future setups.

- **Resources:**

- [Dialogue Facilitation Guide](#)
- [Representation Assessment Tool](#)
- [Cultural Appropriation Prevention Checklist](#)
- [Conflict De-escalation Protocols](#)
- [Regional Customization Framework](#)
- Contact: spiritualdialogue@globalgovernanceframework.org