

REJI ORGANIZATIONAL RACE EQUITY TOOLKIT

2ND EDITION

Tool D: Community Agreements



**WASHINGTON RACE EQUITY
& JUSTICE INITIATIVE**

Tool D: Community Agreements



Establish Brave Space

In difficult conversations our learning often comes through our own discomfort and risk taking. By avoiding conflict or keeping others “comfortable” you may miss the opportunity to authentically engage with others or further your own understanding. However, we also recognize that sometimes our words create harm despite our best intentions. We acknowledge we are here to learn in community with one another. Our discussions will be more fruitful when we can embrace discomfort, take responsibility for our impact, and extend grace whenever possible.

Take Space/Make Space If you are someone who tends to not speak a lot, challenge yourself to contribute by speaking more. If you tend to speak a lot, make space for others to participate and focus on listening. As a group, notice and acknowledge power dynamics in the room – who is talking first? Who is holding power because of their role (like the facilitator), status, or identity? Who is disengaging or observing instead of actively participating?

Honor Confidentiality

Share themes and learning outside of the space, but not individual stories.

Be Present

Engage in active listening and be aware of your thoughts and feelings in the moment. What do you need to stay present and engaged? Limit technology and distractions to only that which furthers your learning.

Speak Your Truth and Let Others Speak Theirs

Different perspectives are welcome and encouraged. Speak from your own lived experience and not from experience that you do not personally have. Your normal may not be my normal.

Together We Know a Lot

Each of us brings knowledge to our discussions. But together, we know more than anyone of us alone. Shared learning is a practice in humility because we have something to learn from everyone in the room. It also means we all have a responsibility to share what we know and our questions, so that others may learn from us.

No Fixing, No Saving

We are here to do our own work and to be in community with one another. Listen deeply and allow others to experience their own discomfort, which may further their learning. If you find yourself wanting to “fix” a situation or alleviate someone else’s (or your own) discomfort, take a moment to reflect on what is coming up for you.

When Your Mind Starts to Judge, Instead Turn to Wonder

Approach problems and challenges from a place of curiosity and creative thinking rather than a point of frustration or judgment. When you are feeling heated, challenge yourself to form questions instead of statements. Try to remain open to feedback and inquiry that others may offer you.

Embrace Imperfection (We Cannot Be Articulate All of the Time)

As much as we would like to be, we are human and, therefore, imperfect. We cannot always be articulate. Often people feel hesitant to participate for fear of “messing up” or stumbling over their words. We encourage everyone to participate, even if you cannot get it right all the time. Messing up is an important part of learning and growing. In addition, creating gracious space for ourselves can help us do the same for others.

Expect and Accept Non-Closure

We want to solve problems and resolve conflict, but this is lifelong work. These are processes and awareness-raising conversations intended to further individual transformation, not the transformation of others. Sometimes you may have to revisit conversations to reconcile differences, and in other cases, things will go left unsaid, unfinished.

Acknowledgments

Aorta Consulting: http://aorta.coop/portfolio_page/tips-and-tools-for-addressing-systemic-power/

Cultures Connecting: <http://culturesconnecting.com/products/>

Fleur Larsen Facilitation: <http://www.fleurlarsenfacilitation.com>

Reverb DEI: <https://www.reverbdei.com/>

Activity: Breathing Life into Community Agreements

Community Agreements often play a bit part at the beginning of our meetings and are never spoken of again. They can easily become a rote part of our work, resulting in a missed opportunity for impactful change in how we come to racial equity discussions. Integrating them into our work can help illuminate unhelpful dynamics and lead us to more helpful ways of showing up.

Community Agreements and White Supremacy Norms

There is a reason we need to solidify different ways of being together when we gather to talk about race. Many of the unhelpful ways of gathering called out in community agreements are directly connected to the norms that Tema Okun and Kenneth Jones outline in their seminal article about [White Supremacy characteristics](#), such as:

The **individualism** that distracts us from the fact that **together we know a lot**.

The **perfectionism** that causes us to clam up, for fear that we will say the wrong thing or **be inarticulate**.

The **defensiveness** and **right to comfort** that pulls us **away from wonder and into judgment**.

The **fear of open conflict** that makes us crave “safe space” instead of **brave space**.

A conversation of how these two groups of ideas are connected can help participants understand the ways in which white supremacy culture erodes our ability to engage authentically in conversations about race. Breaking down these patterns in long-form helps us understand the dynamics of white supremacy that are woven throughout everything we do; community agreements can give us a shorthand to remind us daily that we can intentionally be different together.

Community Agreement Spotlight

Explore community agreements as a way to create self-reflective spaces and shed light on group dynamics. Choose one community agreement per meeting and ask participants to reflect on questions about it in small groups or pairs.

For example, while exploring the community agreement, “**Take Space, Make Space**,” you might ask participants to consider:

“What barriers are you experience to speaking up in the group?”

“What emotional needs are satisfied when you speak in a group setting?”

When considering the community agreement, “**Embrace Imperfection**,” you might ask:

“What stories do you tell yourself about what will happen if you don’t do things perfectly?”

You might ask participants who are experiencing a lot of conflicts to engage with the community agreement “**Turn Judgement into Wonder**” by asking them to think of something they have heard that made them angry and considering:

“Is there a question you could ask that would help you move beyond your anger and create deeper understanding?”

Move all the way through the agreements and then ask participants to consider how multiple agreements might interact. For example, does an inability to embrace perfection lead to an unwillingness to take space in the group? How might turning to judgment erode the production of group knowledge? Post the community agreements in a prominent place so that participants can be reminded of all they have learned through this process about themselves and the group.