

**21-DAY**

**EQUITY**

**CHALLENGE**

**DISCUSSION GUIDE  
FOR GROUPS**

This guide was adapted from content originally created and published by the Food Solutions New England (FSNE) network, hosted at the University of New Hampshire Sustainability Institute in Durham, NH, USA. We are grateful for their work to create the conditions for more just and equitable communities.



## WELCOME

Consider using the group approach to this Challenge to create, strengthen and mobilize your community. We need more people who share this non-negotiable earnestness for racial equity and are willing to walk before us to boldly guide our steps, beside us to steady us and behind us to gently but deliberately push us forward on the road to racial equity.

Using the Four Agreements of Courageous Conversations as a starting frame, be prepared to:

1. Stay engaged
2. Experience discomfort
3. Speak your truth
4. Expect and accept non closure

Remember to use the Challenge as a tool in your toolkit to advance your work toward racial equity, to activate and support you in taking bold action.

## GETTING STARTED

- Identify a group of people that are signing up for the Challenge and interested in getting together to talk about their experiences or their learnings during the Challenge.
- Decide a format for the group. There is no “right” way to do this. Some groups schedule once-a-week lunch or coffee conversations during the three weeks of the Challenge. Some organize one-on-one conversation buddies. Some people organize an in-office email list or physical “bulletin board” to share reflections, ideas and resources.
- Find convenient times and spaces to meet and reserve those time slots. We suggest something between 60 - 90 minutes. Consider access to that space for people with different abilities. Consider times of the day that will work for your attendees. Can you or someone in the group organize some help with child care or transportation if needed? Will anyone in your group need or want an interpreter?
- Invite people!

## SAMPLE AGENDA FOR AN EQUITY CHALLENGE CONVERSATION

Use this for a 60 to 90 minute meeting/conversation. Modify to suit your needs.

WHAT (TOPIC)	HOW (PROCESS) AND WHO (FACILITATOR/PRESENTER)	WHEN (TIMING)
<b>START-UPS</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Welcome (Facilitator 1*)</li> <li>Clarify roles**</li> <li>Check-In Question: How are you? OR One word to describe how you are feeling today? OR What's something you are bringing to today's discussion? (brief response from each participant)</li> <li>Review the meeting agenda</li> <li>Review working agreements to guide discussion</li> </ul>	<b>15 MIN</b>
<b>DISCUSSION</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Present prompt from the 21-Day Challenge (Facilitator 2)</li> <li>Invite people to reflect silently, perhaps revisit something they have written or drawn in advance</li> <li>Open up the discussion (facilitator ensures that everyone gets a chance to speak, reminding people that pauses and silence are okay and can be powerful)</li> </ul>	<b>30-60 MIN</b>
<b>CLOSING</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Check-Out: What is one thing you are taking from today's discussion? What is something you are committing to further your learning or take action around? (Facilitator 1)</li> <li>Evaluation ("Pluses": What worked about our discussion today? "Deltas" (Changes): What could we do to make our next discussion even better?)</li> <li>Next meeting date and time + roles (facilitator(s) and recorder) + prep work for that meeting</li> </ul>	<b>15 MIN</b>

\*You might consider having more than one facilitator to share this role. Or, if you have one facilitator for the entire meeting, consider having someone else facilitate the next meeting.

\*\*Different roles might include facilitator(s), recorder/scribe/visual recorder, photographer (with attendee consent!), timekeeper

## PLANNING AHEAD FOR FOLLOW-UP

Think about ways to keep the conversation and relationship-building moving toward action, to move beyond our "comfort" zones into our "stretch" (sometimes less comfortable) zones. Consider how the group can support one another to push ourselves, our partners, our tribes, further than we have before. How can we create the individual, community and workplace supports in order to center racial equity in decision making and activities, including policies, practices, programs and budgets and day-to-day happenings?

At the end of your first discussion, take the pulse of the group for next steps. Invite an opportunity for ongoing dialogue, meetings with guest speakers; issue-focused meet-ups to extend the learning and action community

Email lists, monthly or quarterly check-ins also support information sharing and connection. Consider bringing in guest speakers, coordinating field trips to related events or sites, hosting a film screening. Create opportunities to celebrate successes. Invite articles and blogs from the team into each other's networks. This multiplies and diversifies voices with shared values and messages. Always ask "What's next?" and "What's possible now?"

## PREPARING YOURSELF FOR THE DISCUSSION

1. Center yourself. Connect to your values and what gives you strength and support (other people, places, activities). Forgive yourself and others in advance for your own and their imperfections. Also remember that racism is, as Jay Smooth says, “a concept that is designed to trip us up.”
2. Keep doing your own personal work on understanding your own racial identity, your worldview regarding race, racism and other forms of oppression, and your understanding of how your identity impacts your conversations about and work for racial equity. As humans, we all carry biases that we may not even realize we have.
3. Be willing to meet people where they are; try to understand people who are in different stages of their own journey on these issues. But also be thinking about how we can support each other to get beyond “where we already are.”
4. Challenge yourself to listen to others non-judgmentally.
5. Be willing to learn, acknowledging that any one person has only a partial grasp on the truth.
6. Be willing to be challenged, to change your mind and to deal with uncertainty.

Envision yourself handling challenging situations with grace and effectiveness, building trust by being, at times, transparent and vulnerable when you are able.

## PREPARING THE GROUP FOR DISCUSSION

1. Acknowledge the purpose of the group at the outset.
2. Acknowledge that power dynamics are always in the room. This is not necessarily a bad thing. Power can be used for good and for ill. And it is important to acknowledge that different power dynamics may be at play and affecting the conversation.
3. Remind people that everyone is unique and that no one speaks for all other people of their race or ethnic group. Invite a spirit of curiosity and for learning from each other as individuals with different experiences.
4. Invite people to share their aspirations for participating in the discussion, including any concerns that they may have.
5. Remind people that the point of these discussions is to help one another grow, to learn and commit to taking action to undo racism. This is difficult to do when we are completely comfortable and things are familiar and easy. It is also difficult to do when we are feeling panicky and worried, whether true or not, about our safety. The work of these discussions is to get us into the “stretch zone,” where we experience some discomfort. It is important to make this experience - of stretching into some discomfort in order to learn, okay for people.
6. Agree on a set of working agreements for the discussion time (examples below), either by writing those up on a blank page or working from a list you prepare in advance.

## WORKING AGREEMENTS OR GUIDELINES FOR THE GROUP

Working agreements, community agreements or even rules of engagement are names for conversation/meeting guidelines that help create an environment that values diversity of thought and experience. They help create a space within which you have a higher chance of a respectful and productive experiences for the participants

Talking about your agreements - or even better, creating them together - and getting consent to use them is a helpful way to build trust when you start the conversation. People are much more likely to respect and use an agreement that they have helped create. It will make your job as the host much easier. When problems or conflicts arise, you all will be able to refer back to your set of agreements (e.g. We all agreed at the beginning that it's best if only one person speaks at a time...).

### EXAMPLE LIST #1

- Listen deeply
- Make “I” statements rather than generalized “We” statements
- Keep it here
- We don’t have to agree
- Notice intent vs. impact (Use “oops” and “ouch” as in “I made a mistake” and “I am hurt”)
- Be willing to be uncomfortable
- Expect and accept a lack of closure (i.e. we won’t figure this all out today)
- All voices are heard
- Moving in and moving back
- 3 Before Me: let three other people talk before you talk again
- Deconstruct language, request clarification when needed
- Take/Share what you’ve learned (without attribution or with permission)
- Both/And- not binary choices
- Open to curiosity
- Ask “what else would we like to add?”

## FACILITATION TIPS

There are many important behaviors and skills that facilitators can employ to help guide a group towards a goal or learning point in a respectful and inclusive discussion. Some of these skills are outlined below, along with several examples. These phrases and techniques are not intended to be exact “scripts” and should be adapted to your own voice and situation.

- 1. Addressing behavior** - acknowledging behaviors in the room. Examples: There seems to be a lot of side conversation. Is that okay with everyone? There is low energy in the room. Should we take a stretch break? There’s a lot of emotion building right now that is interfering with productive discussion. Let’s take a few deep breaths and a moment to remember the ground rules.
- 2. Bridging** - making connections, tying one learning point to another. Examples: We started to talk about ally-building earlier, and now we’re getting into some more concrete ideas of how to be an effective ally.
- 3. Checking for understanding** - making sure directions and questions are clear. Examples: Does everyone understand? Is that question clear? Clarifying - interpreting, clarifying misunderstandings, defining terms. Examples: There seems to be some miscommunication happening here; maybe we should take a step back. Who needs more clarification before we move on?
- 4. Encouraging** - prompting, nonjudgmental responses, open-ended questions, respectful probing. Examples: “We’re all learners in this process. This can be a hard topic to discuss. Thank you for sharing that story.”
- 5. Evaluating** - asking questions that encourage group members to examine an issue from a different perspective. Examples: “What’s another way to look at this issue? A different take might be;” “I appreciate Joseph sharing his perspective on the matter; do others have a similar or different perspective?”
- 6. Gatekeeping** - managing time and group participation. Examples: “Let’s hear from some of the people who we haven’t heard from ..... Let’s take two more responses, and then we’ll move on.”
- 7. Giving** - judiciously offering facts or personal experiences to clarify a point. Examples: “Thank you for that observation. I had a similar experience at a meeting.”
- 8. Naming feelings** - interpreting and acknowledging feelings. Examples: “It sounds like you might be frustrated with this conversation. Is that correct?”
- 9. Re-framing** - helping to find opportunities out of challenges. Example: “That sounds challenging/difficult. What could it look like if it were different in the future, so that it would work better/help us meet the goals better?” “So what needs to happen to turn that around? What resources do we need to move that in a different direction?”
- 10. Orienting** - bringing the group back to task, reiterating the question or topic. Examples: “This is a really interesting discussion, hopefully that will continue during breaks or at lunch. The piece we need to focus our attention on now is.... Let’s go back to the original question.”
- 11. Paraphrasing** - seeking clarity, promoting group understanding. Examples: “A number of different ideas are emerging; let me try to synthesize them into three major points. They are.... ”
- 12. Resolving** - conciliating differences, cooperative problem solving. Examples: “Even though you feel that way, Donna, can you understand what Naomi is saying? This is a complex issue with a lot of different perspectives.”
- 13. Remaining** - honoring silence, allowing participants enough time to reflect and formulate thoughts. Examples: “Let’s take a few more minutes before we begin so that everyone can gather their thoughts.” Allow the silence to exist. Count to 10 silently before asking another question.
- 14. Returning** - keeping all participants engaged in the dialogue, putting the conversation back to the whole group. Examples: “Does anyone have a different perspective? What feelings did this activity bring up for others? What do others think about this issue?”
- 15. Seeking** - asking for clarification, suggestions, more information. Examples: “What has your experience been? Can you say more about that? What does that term mean to you?”