FACILITATING CONVERSATIONS ON RACE: The Fundamentals

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The mission of Interaction Institute for Social Change (IISC) is to ignite and sustain social transformation, catalyze collaborative action, and build collaborative skill to bring alive our vision of a just and sustainable world.

We accomplish this by providing network building, consulting, facilitation, and training services designed to transform communities and organizations and build the capacity of leaders of social change.

IISC works in partnership with those in every sector of society who are committed to social justice, including:

- Leaders in marginalized communities and those who work with them;
- Organizations, conveners, leaders and educators who work at the local, national or global levels; and
- Collaboratives, networks and coalitions focused on policy change or social impact.

A nonprofit organization founded in 1993, IISC provides training, consulting, partnership building, and facilitation services. Our multicultural team of seasoned consultants helps people in organizations and communities to build agreement about their goals, create organizational processes that support collaboration and success, and strengthen relationships within their organization and with external partners. From our offices in Boston and Ireland, we serve local communities across the country and around the world.

This manual contains excerpts from the following workshops:

- Essential Facilitation: Core Skills for Guiding Groups®
  © 1994, 2008 Interaction Associates
- Facilitative Leadership: Tapping the Power of Participation®
  © 1994, 2008 Interaction Associates
- Diversity in the Collaborative Organization: Leveraging the Power of Difference®
- The Community Building Curriculum
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Facilitating discussion and dialogue about race can be tough. Lack of information and knowledge, different lived experiences, unspoken assumptions, varying definitions of key concepts and differing interpretations of problems and solutions are just a few of the things that can get in the way of groups communicating authentically and building solid agreements. During this workshop, we will explore a few key concepts and skills to help you play the role of facilitator with grace, guiding meaningful conversations that stay on track and using effective techniques for intervening when conversations stray.

Agenda

Start Ups

Facilitation Frameworks

- *Dimensions of Success*
- *Distinguishing Process from Content*
- *Profile of a Racial Justice Facilitator*

Facilitative Behaviors—Preventions & Interventions

Interactive Group Exercise

Preparing Ourselves to Serve

Preparing Ourselves for the Process

Preparing Ourselves for the Content

Close the Workshop
Balancing the Dimensions of Success

As you prepare for a meeting, plan for achieving success across three important: Results, Process and Relationship.

Results
How will we:
- Achieve our goals in a high quality way?
- Meet the expectations of key stakeholders?
- Make wise, well-informed decisions?

Process
How will we ensure that the process:
- Involves stakeholders appropriately?
- Makes the best use of available resources in support of achieving our goals? Is clear, logical, efficient, appropriate to the task?
- Ensures full and free information exchange and informed decision making?

Relationship
How will we enable participants to:
- Feel supported?
- Feel respected and valued?
- Trust one another?
Distinguishing Content from Process

The products of successful collaborative efforts (e.g., decisions, plans) are based on a series of content and process agreements. Content is the subject matter or the topic being considered. Process is the way content is managed or treated.

CONTENT (WHAT)          PROCESS (HOW)

Examples:

CONTENT AGREEMENTS

• Whether or not to purchase new equipment.
• What criteria will be used for hiring.

PROCESS AGREEMENTS

• How decisions will be made.
• How meetings will be conducted.

90% Of Meeting Problems Are Process Problems.
Profile of a Racial Justice Facilitator

Evaluate your profile across these three critical attributes and three core values.

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**Instructions**

Consider the Profile of a Collaborative Change Agent and answer the questions below.

1. Which of the attributes and values do you think you model regularly? How do (or will) they help you with your facilitation work?

2. Which of the attributes and values would you like to develop more fully?

3. What steps can you take to support your continued growth and development?
Profile of a Racial Justice Facilitator, continued

Attributes

Collaborative
- Creates opportunities for people to work together.
- Shares the power of decision making.
- Promotes the value of win-win solutions.
- Engages diverse participants, acknowledging their value to the group, and brings their experience, strengths and competencies into the room.

Strategic
- Reminds others of the “big picture” and the overarching goal.
- Keeps attention focused on high leverage issues and activities.
- Provides perspective at critical moments.

Receptive & Flexible
- Welcomes, encourages, seeks out and explores different ideas and opinions.
- Accepts others’ ideas, perceptions, and feedback in a non-defensive way.
- Adjusts plans to meet changing needs.
- Models collaborative behaviors.

Values

Service
- Works for or assists.
- Focuses on the interests and needs of others.
- Builds relationships based on equality, humility and mutuality.

Authenticity
- Brings one’s full self into the room; expresses one’s passion for the issues.
- Tells the truth; admits uncertainty.
- Seeks deeper understanding of his/her own and others’ cultural backgrounds

Love
- Holds others in their full humanity.
- Communicates deep acceptance of others’ thoughts, feelings and intentions.
- Unselfishly delights in the well-being of others.
- Taps his or her own inner core.
Facilitative Behaviors: Preventions & Interventions

Facilitative Behaviors are actions anyone can take (1) to help others collaborate and (2) to help make a meeting run more smoothly and effectively.

Preventions are facilitative behaviors used before or during the meeting to prevent the meeting from getting off track with respect to either content or process.

Interventions are facilitative behaviors used during the meeting to help people get back on track with respect to either content or process. Interventions are often useful at a Strategic Moment when people are confused, spinning their wheels, or participating in counter-productive debate.

An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of intervention.
Clarifying and building agreement on your role is an important prevention. Groups need different kinds of facilitation support depending on their situation, capability, and goals. One of your first process decisions (with the group leader or the entire group) is to select an appropriate mix of responsibility for the process and content to help the group achieve its goals.

**Content**: The topic that is being discussed (the "what").

**Process**: The way a group handles the content (the "how").
# Process Preventions

Preventions are facilitative behaviors used before or during the meeting to prevent the meeting from getting off track.

## At the Beginning of a Meeting
- Get agreement on:
  - Desired Outcomes
  - Agenda
  - Roles
  - Decision-Making Method (if choosing consensus option, include fallback)
  - Ground Rules

## During the Meeting
- Make a process suggestion (a suggestion on how the group could proceed).
- Get a process agreement (an agreement on how the group will proceed).
- Educate the group (process commercials).
- Ask open-ended questions to generate participation.
- Request that people reserve judgment.

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<th>PREVENTION</th>
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| Get agreement on desired outcomes, agenda, roles, decision-making method, ground rules. Reviewing and checking for agreement on important meeting start-up items. | Leader or Facilitator: "Before we get into our agenda for today, I'd like to make sure we all agree on how we're going to work together."
Group Member: "I'm not sure what that desired outcome means. Can we spend a moment to clarify?"

| Make a process suggestion | Leader or Facilitator: "I'd suggest looking at criteria before trying to evaluate options."
Group Member: "I think we're jumping around too much here. I'd like to suggest that we list the problems first, and then go to solutions."

| Get a process agreement | Leader or Facilitator: "Is everyone willing to identify criteria first?"
Group Member: "I think I heard Carlos propose an alternative suggestion. Carlos, do you think we should identify criteria first?" |
Process Preventions (continued)

Educate the group (process commercials)
Heightening the group's process awareness through education.

Leader or Facilitator: "There's no one right way to solve a problem. Which way do you want to start?"

Group Member: "Remember we said that the success of this entire project will depend on building a series of small agreements?"

Ask open-ended questions to generate participation
Asking a question that has many possible answers.

Leader or Facilitator: "What would you do in this situation if you were in Julie's position?"

Group Member: "What else did you find out about the system we have for tracking errors?"

Request that people reserve judgment
Holding back on opinions so that information can be freely generated.

Leader or Facilitator: "I'd suggest we hold off evaluating these ideas until we've finished brainstorming."

Group Member: "I'd like to hear more information before reaching any conclusions on the subject."
Strategic Moments

Strategic Moments are those points in a discussion or team process where group members are faced with a choice about what to do next and how to do it.

Examples of Strategic Moments

- The group is stuck and can't decide how to move forward.
- People are talking about different subjects or using different processes.
- The group has reached a key agreement and is ready to move on to something else.

The Three Key Questions of a Strategic Moment

1. Where Are We?
2. Where Do We Want to Go?
3. How Do We Get There?

It's not knowing what to do that counts. It's knowing what to do when you don't know what to do.
Process Interventions: Dealing with Difficult Behavior

Interventions are facilitative behaviors that anyone can use during a discussion to help the group navigate though a strategic moment. A number of interventions are defined below with examples of what one might actually say or do when employing the intervention. At one point or another, everyone behaves in a manner that others find difficult or disruptive. At these Strategic Moments, the Facilitator aims to: (1) meet the underlying needs of the “difficult” participant while (2) helping the group stay on track.

The appropriate use of Interventions enables you to:
- Hear what people are saying.
- Have individuals take responsibility for their own behavior.
- Move toward a successful outcome.

Descriptions

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<th>INTERVENTION</th>
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<tr>
<td>Boomerang</td>
<td>Leader or Facilitator &quot;Katherine, you wanted to know why we're going to a second shift. Can anyone describe the rationale for that decision to Katherine?&quot;</td>
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<td>Regain Focus</td>
<td>Leader or Facilitator &quot;Just a moment, one person at a time. Jamal, you were first, then Don.&quot;  Group Member &quot;Jerry, you're bringing up an entirely new issue here. I don't think we've quite finished dealing with this one yet. Could we stay focused on the first issue and get to your question next?&quot;</td>
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<td>Ask/Say What's Going On</td>
<td>Leader or Facilitator &quot;It's very quiet here. What does the silence mean? What's going on?&quot;  Group Member &quot;My sense is that not everyone agrees with the way we're going about making this decision. Does anyone else have that feeling?&quot;</td>
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Reinforce Process Agreements
Reminding the group of a previous agreement or ground rule when the discussion starts going off focus.

Leader or Facilitator "We agreed to brainstorm and you're starting to evaluate the ideas. Would you mind holding onto that idea for now?"

Group Member "Barry, we said we'd only spend 10 minutes on this agenda item and it's already been 20. I suggest we move on now."

Accept/Legitimize/Deal With or Defer
A positive method for dealing with difficult people or situations that might get a meeting off track. Accept the idea without agreeing or disagreeing. Legitimize it by writing it on the "group memory." Then, decide as a group if the issue/idea is more appropriately dealt with here or deferred to another time. Record ideas or issues that are deferred and agree on when they will be addressed.

Leader or Facilitator "You're not convinced we're getting anywhere? That's okay, you may be right. Would you be willing to hang on for 10 more minutes and see what happens?"

Group Member "Marybeth, I hear what you're saying about using these preliminary numbers as the basis for a decision. I'm not sure we have enough information yet to solve the problem. Would you be willing to wait until we analyze this month's report before we make our final decision?"

Use Body Language
Reinforce words with congruent body language.

Leader or Facilitator
Regain focus by standing up and moving to the middle of the room.

Encourage participation by asking for ideas with palms open.

Group Member
Lean forward to convey interest.

Use eye contact to acknowledge people's ideas.

Use Humor
Make a joke to relieve the tension. Be sensitive not to joke at someone else's expense.
Preparing Ourselves to Serve

Diving instructors are taught to function effectively at depths well below the depths to which they will guide groups of divers. The same should be true for facilitators of conversations about race and racial equity. We should be experienced at going deeper than the groups we will lead.

Facilitating any conversation that aims for deeper shared understanding and solid agreements can challenge the most skilled facilitator. When the subject of the conversation is race and racial equity, the facilitator is likely to encounter additional challenges due to the complexity of the issue, the deep connections between the issues "out there" and individuals' sense of personal and cultural identity, and the deep emotions that accompany personal experiences and collective memories related to the issue. In addition to the kind of "due diligence" required to prepare for and facilitate conversations of any nature, we offer additional guidance about three important aspects of your preparation for these kinds of conversations in particular:

Prepare yourself to serve. Your role as facilitator is to serve the highest aspirations of the group, to ensure that everyone in the conversation is treated with respect and dignity, and to enable everyone to participate. Guiding a group through such conversations requires that you recognize who you are and how you can use yourself as a tool. Beyond your skills and technique, you will need to draw on your own creativity, spirit and intuition. In the rest of this section, we offer a several thoughts and strategies deepening the well from which you draw so that you can support others in their journey.

Prepare for the process of the conversation. Talking about race and racial equity is challenging for most groups. You will need a robust set of strategies, methods and tools for designing and guiding the process. We find that creating and facilitating a well-designed process increases the likelihood that the experience will be a service and gift to the group. In later sections of this manual, we offer some specific guidance for preparing and facilitating the process.

Preparing for the content of the conversation. While your role as facilitator would ordinarily mean that you would not take responsibility for the content of a conversation, in conversations about race and racial equity, you will likely be called upon to provide guidance about handling or even presenting some content (such as definitions of terms). And, even if this is not the case, you will need a deep understanding of the content in order to serve the group well by listening for underlying meaning, unearthing and testing assumptions, synthesizing parts of the conversation, noticing what might be causing the group to get stuck, and reflecting the group's thinking back to them in ways that allows for deeper insight and agreement to emerge. In late sections of this manual, we offer some guidance about specific issues to learn about and predictable dynamics to anticipate.
Preparing Ourselves to Serve (continued)

Recognize that your role as facilitator is to serve the highest aspirations of the group, to ensure that everyone in the conversation is treated with respect and dignity, and to enable everyone to participate.

- **Center yourself.** Connect to your values and source of strength and power. Forgive yourself and others for your own and their imperfections. Be ready to create a safe space with participants that is able to hold the pain and strong emotions associated with these issues without becoming overwhelmed or swept away.

- **Keep doing your own personal work** on understanding your own identity, your worldview regarding diversity, race and racial equity, racism, and other forms of oppression, and your understanding of how your identity affects your work for equity. Be willing to use yourself as a tool.

- **Understand your worldview** as it relates to diversity, power and privilege. Be ready and willing to articulate it if that will serve the group.

- **Challenge yourself to listen non-judgmentally.** Practice compassion and empathy for participants, particularly those with whom you do not agree.

- **Be willing to meet people where they are;** understand and be patient with people who are in different stages of their own journey on these issues.

- **Be willing to learn:** acknowledge that any one person has only a partial grasp on the truth, at best. Be willing to be challenged; be willing to change your mind; be willing to tolerate ambiguity and momentary confusion.

- **Give yourself and others permission to seek understanding without committing to agreement.** Attempt to understand things you do not agree with or accept. Be willing to pursue and sit with an understanding of something you do not accept.

- **Envision yourself handling challenging situations** with grace and effectiveness.

- **Take care of yourself.** Eat and sleep well. Exercise and play. Find opportunities to reflect, refresh and connect with people and activities that restore your soul.
Preparing Ourselves to Serve (continued)

- Be prepared to deal with strong emotions.
  - As a facilitator, actively work to become comfortable with strong emotions. Watch challenging documentaries to increase your capacity to hold others’ pain. Observe your reactions to hearing others’ express strong emotions and practice centering yourself as you engage. Acknowledge others’ emotions and create space for people to take care of themselves, manage their own emotions and get back into the conversation as they are willing and able. It’s not your role to manage other people’s reactions or emotions or them.
  - Understand that anger often masks other emotions, such as fear, shame or sadness. Listen for what might be beneath the surface.
  - Remember that people respond to and express emotion differently. Everyone is entitled to feel their emotions without being told that they “shouldn’t feel that way.” Recognize that when group members insist on a quiet, measured discussion style (as in “Let’s not shout” or “Let’s not get too excited about this.”) they may inadvertently privilege some culturally-based forms of expression over others.
Preparing Ourselves for the Process

Your role in designing and guiding the process has multiple dimensions and responsibilities. Creating and holding people in a well-designed process increases the likelihood that the experience will be a service and gift to the group.

As part of your overall meeting preparation, before the conversation:

- **Link the conversation to an overall strategy.** Be clear about what the group is trying to accomplish and why it's important for the success of the group/organization to address the issue. Be sure to understand who is sponsoring or calling for the conversation and why they think it's important, as well as other points of view.

- **Assess the group's readiness** for the conversation. For instance:
  - What troubleshooting needs to take place before the group can move ahead on this issue?
  - If the group is weak on the basics of collaboration, listening, or consensus building, consider building the skills of “Collaboration 101” as a way to build skill in having difficult conversations.
  - If the group tends to avoid conflict, consider beginning with a simpler conversation that can enable the group to build skill and tolerance for handling conflict before beginning a dialogue about race and racial equity. Build strategically toward conversations about race and racial equity as the group builds skill in working with conflict.

- **Help participants understand the whole process and how any individual conversation fits into it.** What is the series of discussions, workshops, and other activities and what are your plans for next steps after this specific conversation? Be clear about how decisions will be made throughout the process.

- **Establish a clear focus and clear goals for each conversation.** Don't try to take on everything in one conversation.

- **Prepare to involve a broad range of stakeholders** in the conversation, and to involve a sample of that range in the planning process.

- **Be sure to consider and address logistics and language needs** from the viewpoint of different stakeholders and the cultures from which they come.

- **Be sure that the materials (pre-reading, handouts, etc.) and activities are appropriate** for the audience. Design for the whole person, both left and right brain. For the left brain, create structured conversations. For the right brain, use creative activities and tools such as art projects, films, story telling, or hands-on experiences.

*During any given conversation:*

- **Begin by building an agreement about meeting norms** or ground rules together. Suggest “Say ouch,” meaning that if a person is offended or hurt by something that is said or done, they should say “ouch” and explain the impact of what was said or done, in the spirit of creating a “teachable moment”
Preparing Ourselves for the Process (continued)

- **Create opportunities for relationship building** within the dialogue (e.g., opener/icebreakers that enable participants to discover interests or experiences that they share in common; paired and small group activities)

- **Keep the conversation on track** by ensuring agreement about the process, roles, and desired outcomes before beginning the conversation, clarifying the process along the way, reflecting back what is emerging in the conversation, and using the agenda as a guide to help the group achieve its desired outcomes.

- **Intervene as needed** to get the conversation back on track. Be sure to tailor the interventions for appropriateness to the group.

- **Expect that some (possibly many) people will feel uncomfortable** at different moments during conversations about race and racial equity. Help the group experience safety even in the midst of discomfort by:
  - Reinforcing the group’s norms
  - Reminding people of the difference between intent and impact
  - Inviting people to make “I” statements and own their attributions
  - Acknowledging the difficulty and pain involved with the conversation and creating space for people to pause, reflect, and even briefly disengage if necessary
  - Inviting people to separate the search for understanding from assessing, judging, agreeing or disagreeing
  - Modeling respectful listening
  - Offering clear, useful feedback to individuals and the group
  - Designing a mix of small group and large group conversations to enable people to share their thoughts and feelings in different settings
  - Creating opportunities for people to connect with one another and to reflect on and connect with their own sources of power and purpose
  - Designing the physical space in ways that create familiarity and comfort for participants
  - Balancing power dynamics by inviting people to self-manage their participation to share the air space, by noticing and intervening if a few people tend to use a lot of air-time or frame the conversation, and by actively encouraging participation, especially by quieter participants via design choices (e.g., round robin—where you take comments from each person moving around the circle, rather than a brainstorm where people jump in randomly) or by direct invitation (e.g., “Let’s hear from some of the folks who haven’t spoken in the past fifteen minutes.”)

- **Be aware and help the group to acknowledge the difference between intent and impact.** Help group members to educate one another productively about the impact of their words and actions.

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1 For more information and opportunities to practice preventions and interventions, consider attending IISC’s workshops, *Essential Facilitation* or *Facilitative Leadership*. Visit IISC at [www.interactioninstitute.org](http://www.interactioninstitute.org) for more details.
Preparing Ourselves for the Content

Preparing for the content of the conversation
While your role as facilitator typically means that you would not take responsibility for the content of the conversation, you will likely be called upon to provide guidance about handling or even presenting some content (such as definitions of terms). And, you will need a deep understanding of the content in order to serve the group well by listening for underlying meaning, unearthing and testing assumptions, synthesizing parts of the conversation, noticing what might be causing the group to get stuck, and reflecting the group’s thinking back to them in ways that allows for deeper insight and agreement to emerge.

Be ready to define terms and use definitions as ‘teachable moments’
- Acknowledge that people hold different definitions of many concepts related to race and racial equity. To avoid talking past one another, it’s often useful to define terms—either offer working definitions or facilitate the group to build its own working definitions. Use context-appropriate examples to demonstrate the meaning of definitions so that they are clear. If the group gets stuck, try building agreement around a term “for the purpose of this conversation only.” Failing that, have the group experiment with moving forward without consensus on definitions in order to keep talking. It’s possible to accomplish a lot even without such a consensus, and sometimes consensus emerges through the process of dialogue.
- Help people to understand and distinguish between the different levels at which power and oppression operate. Help the group to understand and distinguish between the ways people express bias, prejudice and bigotry and the impact of systems, collective practices and norms that create systematic and accumulated disadvantages for some people and advantages for others based on aspects of their identity.
- Anticipate different perspectives that are likely to arise based on the identities and experiences of the participants. For instance, in many conversations about power and oppression, people who are in the “up” or advantaged categories (white people in the case of race and racial equity) tend to focus on individual attitudes and behavior, while people in the “down” or disadvantaged categories (people of color in this case) tend to focus on structural and systemic analysis. This is a by-product of the reality that “downs” have to pay a lot more attention to systemic/structural aspects of oppression than “ups” because the systems tend to “work” for the ups.

Recognize the assumptions and worldviews of people in the room.
- Listen for how unspoken assumptions about the nature of the problem and strategies for solving it drive the conversation. Help participants to articulate their implicit theories about why the situation exists and what can be done about it.
- Make the assumptions visible and testable. Help people to hear and understand their differing worldviews as a way to make sense of specific disagreements or differences of opinion. Use yourself as an example, making visible your assumptions and worldview.

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For a detailed discussion of worldviews regarding race and racial equity, see Cultivating Interdependence: A guide for race and racial equity relations and racial justice organizations by Maggie Potapchuk with Lori Villarosa, published by the Joint Center for Political Studies. Available online at: http://www.jointcenter.org/index.php/publications_recent_publications/race_and_racial_equity_relations/cultivating_interdependence_a_guide_for_race_and_racial_equity_relations_and_racial_justice_organizations
Preparation: Preparing Ourselves for the Content (continued)

- Create opportunities for dissent and encourage people to express differing perspectives, assumptions, and worldviews.

**Understand who is in the room and their experience with the issues.**

- **Acknowledge power.** In an organizational or community context, hierarchies of power affect comfort level. The background of the people with more power also affects comfort level. Those who traditionally have less power tend to lose trust when power dynamics are not acknowledged.

- **Expect different dynamics if room is homogeneous or heterogeneous** with respect to the dimensions of diversity that are under discussion. For instance, in a racially mixed group, white people might withhold their questions or thoughts in order not to offend, to avoid exposing their lack of understanding, while people of color might withhold thoughts to avoid “airing dirty laundry in public.” In racially homogeneous groups, participants may be more willing to acknowledge what they don’t know or what concerns them about the issues.

- **Recognize that internalized oppression often manifests** itself even when there are no people with dominant group identities present. Similarly, internalized superiority often manifests itself even in the absence of people with non-dominant group identities.

**Understand some of the likely dynamics in conversations about race and racial equity, racism and white privilege:**

- **Understand that a range of color/racial backgrounds exists within many ethnic and nationality groups and that color prejudice can exist within ethnic or racial groups.** Recognize that because race is a social construct, it is named and experienced differently in different countries and cultures. Don’t assume that the American construct of race is obvious, universal or makes sense to participants from other backgrounds. Recognize the complexity for immigrants of learning the unspoken norms and attitudes about race in the United States, and that they may have internalized such norms and attitudes unconsciously.

- **Recognize that other tensions exist within racial groupings** based on ethnicity, nationality, immigration status, socio-economic status, gender and other factors. Any of these factors could easily be conflated with race, or could be put forward as an alternative to avoid a conversation about race and racial equity.

- **Anticipate that different dynamics will be at play among people who see or work with one another often than among people who don’t.** In some cases, fear of creating tensions within an ongoing group may hinder participants’ willingness to be candid. On the other hand, in some cases, ongoing relationships may help to create a space for deeper trust and honesty.
Preparing Ourselves for the Content (continued)

- **Anticipate defensive reactions to the concept of white privilege**, particularly for people who are learning about it for the first time or are just beginning to explore the concept. Some participants may focus on their own behavior and attitudes ("I don't discriminate.") or on their own challenges in society ("Being white isn't creating advantages for me!") Some may challenge the existence of structural racism. Some may think they have nothing to contribute to a conversation about racism because they have not been discriminated against and they don't believe that they actively discriminate against people. Some white people will be more comfortable identifying with people of color than with other white people. Many white people also are more comfortable talking about areas in which they are a "down" and will try to shift the conversation to gender, anti-Semitism, homophobia, etc. Another frequent dynamic is that people with privilege are uncomfortable exploring privilege and will want to move quickly to action.

- **Expect that people will come to the conversation with different levels of understanding of and investment in the issue.** Some may see a dialogue about race and racial equity as an “add-on” rather than “central to doing our work or lives.” Some may feel “we have to do something!” and others will feel that “dialogue is the thing we have to do!” Some, but not all, will have passion about this issue and be ready to engage. Consider how much support you need to get started, knowing you may not need everyone’s enthusiasm at the beginning.

- **Understand as much as you can about how structural racism has manifested itself** in the specific experience of program participants, the community, the organization itself. How does structural racism relate to the mission and purpose of the organization/group or the issues it is addressing? (E.g., a project to facilitate home ownership by people of color in low income urban communities is an attempt to address the consequences of structural racism in the housing market.)

- **Be ready to engage typical hot button issues** such as...
  - “The real problem is economics/class.”
  - “The leaders of institutions in this neighborhood are paternalistic. They never want to hear from the people who use the services they provide.”
  - “Those who run this organization exclude people of color from important decisions and overlook them when it comes to hiring and promotions.”
  - “There’s no need for affirmative action any more. Racism has been solved.”
  - “Focusing on diversity is watering down the quality of our students, workforce, etc. and is discriminating against whites.”
  - “That (negative attitudes and behavior by people of color in reference to white people) is ‘reverse racism.’”
  - “People of color can be racist against other people of color.”
Preparing Ourselves for the Content (continued)

- For any of these kinds of issues...

- Educate yourself about what the likely issues are and the range of data and viewpoints on the issue.

- Before you respond to a hot button comment, remember that it’s not your role to “correct” the person. Be clear about your role with respect to the content of the conversation. It may not even be your role to participate in the content of the conversation. If your role contract does not include training, education or participation around content and you believe that getting into the content could be of service, contract for that new role with the group (ask their permission to offer your thoughts) before you begin.

- If your own “buttons” get “pushed” by the comment, pause and set aside your own reactions so that you can stay in service to the group.

- Begin by “accepting, legitimizing” the comments—thank the participant for raising an issue that they’re concerned about without agreeing or disagreeing with the point of view. Then decide whether to deal with the issue now, defer to later in the conversation or defer to another conversation.

- If the group has an “ouch” norm — using moments where one participant might inadvertently offend another as a teachable moment — let participants explain any ouches.

- If you and/or the group decide to engage an issue, remember to keep everyone working together in phases—first opening, then narrowing, then closing.
  - Opening—be sure everyone understands the issue that has been raised and all of the viewpoints around the issue have been expressed and understood
  - Narrowing—assessing, organizing or evaluating the different viewpoints
  - Closing—building agreements about the viewpoints.

Remind people that they have the freedom (and actually an obligation) first to explore differing viewpoints for understanding, and that such an exploration does not imply or commit people to agreeing on anything they are exploring. Most likely, you won’t close on the content, but you may have to build an agreement around a process for continuing to explore the issue.
Help avoid typical pitfalls when groups think together:

- Avoid globalizing or over-generalizing from personal experience or from limited anecdotes.

- Avoid looking for an "authoritative voice" in the room who can speak for all members of a particular group. Acknowledge that different opinions and experiences exist within racial groups. Allow participants the freedom to speak from their own experience without "representing" their entire group.

- Avoid compartmentalizing. Encourage participants to bring the conversation back to other parts of their world (work, home, community, etc.).

- Avoid "group think" by:
  - Pressure testing emerging consensus, actively inviting concerns or different viewpoints into the conversation
  - Asking the group "what if..." questions. (e.g., "What if there is more to the story than you've articulated?" "What else could explain the situation besides what you've already named?" "What if your own experience is making it difficult to imagine what it's like for others in this situation?")
  - Offering data or alternative ideas that no one in the room is raising for group to consider
  - Ensuring before the meeting that a wide range of voices and views will be in the room
**BIO: Andrea Nagel, Senior Associate, Interaction Institute for Social Change**

Andrea brings passion, experience and cross-cultural sensibility to her work for social and racial justice. Moving from Chile to the United States at the age of 8 was a defining experience that deepened her resolve to address inequity and bridge differences. Andrea has worked in the areas of community development and community building, both in the United States and abroad. She has worked as a community organizer, leadership development designer and advisor, community planner and researcher with the Dudley Street Neighborhood Initiative (DSNI, Boston), YouthBuild USA, CARE, and the government of Nicaragua. Andrea delivers training, consulting and facilitation services in both Spanish and English at Interaction Institute for Social Change. She holds a Bachelor of Arts degree from Tufts University and a Master in City Planning from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. In addition to her meditation practice, Andrea also enjoys music, dancing, walking, dabbling in jewelry-making and sharing stories and her home with family and friends.

**Past and current clients include:**

- Barr Foundation
- CARE
- Grace Hill Settlement House
- The Hyams Foundation
- Massachusetts New Americans Agenda
- Springfield Health Equity Initiative
- Year Up

Email: anagel@interactioninstitute.org
BIO: Melinda Weekes, Senior Associate, Interaction Institute for Social Change

Melinda brings a diverse set of skills to her work at IISC from professional experiences in law, community development, urban ministry and nonprofit consulting. As a Senior Associate, she is engaged in facilitation, training and process design consulting. In her native New York City, Melinda practiced law before moving to Boston to pursue additional graduate work and ministerial training. Before joining the staff of IISC, her consulting clients included the Boston Capacity Tank, the Pine Street Inn, the Social Innovation Forum, and the United Way of Massachusetts Bay. Her areas of concentration at IISC include policy development, the arts, faith based initiatives, and practical applications of design thinking for social change. She has published scholarly works for Harvard University, the Journal for Black Music Research and Oxford University Press. As a gospel music theorist and ordained clergy, she is a sought after conference speaker, panelist and preacher. Melinda holds a Bachelors of Arts degree from Wesleyan University, a Juris Doctorate from New York University School of Law, and a Masters of Divinity degree from Harvard Divinity School.

Past and current clients include:

- Gulf Coast Fellowship for Community Transformation
- Springfield Health Equity Initiative
- Berklee College of Music
- Haitians Building Haiti
- Grantmakers in the Arts
- Greater Allen Cathedral of New York
- Kirwan Institute for the Study of Race and Ethnicity
- William Caspar Graustein Memorial Fund
- Ford Foundation

Inspiration:
“To whom much is given, much is required.”
- Luke 12:48

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