Guidelines for Effective Community Engagement

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Guidelines allow everyone in a shared space (meeting, classroom, workspace, etc.) to decide on how they want to show up and communicate with each other most effectively in that space. Guidelines work best when the whole group brainstorms and collectively agrees on them. Guidelines also allow each member of a group to be held accountable for their words and behavior. They can be reviewed at the beginning of each meeting as a reminder of what the group collectively agreed on.

Feel free to use some or all of the guidelines* below as a starting point.

1. Agree to respect others by acknowledging and honoring their lived experience.

2. Acknowledge that we are all systematically taught misinformation about our own group and about members of other groups, and through shared communication, we have an opportunity to learn. Come into the discussion with cultural humility.

3. Speak your truth from your own perspective. What are you struggling with? What are you feeling? It's OK to acknowledge what has been the common experience for your community, even though we know no one can speak for their whole race, gender, or any other social identity group.

4. Take responsibility for and accept the consequences of your words.

5. Be willing to keep an open mind: it is *likely* that some of your beliefs will be challenged along the way. Consider leaning into the discomfort of not knowing, with a goal of learning without assumptions or judgment.

6. Take risks. Comfort is over-rated - dare to engage yourself.

7. Agree to participate in the creation of a relatively "safe" atmosphere for open discussion.

8. Make an effort to stay present, without side conversations.

9. Respect the foundational principle that equality pertains to all people with NO exceptions.

10. [add your own]…

*A few of these guidelines are based on Lynn Weber's: Understanding Race, Class, Gender and Sexuality: A Conceptual Framework, McGraw Hill, 2002; thanks also to Christina Jiménez, PhD, and to Harold Fields, for their contributions.