

# RACIAL EQUITY LEARNING LAB

## Value-Based Community Agreements

The National Farm to School Network has established **Community Agreements** that you can use when collaborating with teams working towards a shared goal. However, we encourage you to amend and/or co-create your own values-based agreements since the needs of each community and individual vary.

Developing community agreements grounded in values is a powerful strategy for coalescing a group into a team. The process of constructing agreements is often more important than the product. Agreements come from a consensus-driven process to identify what every person in the group needs from each other and commits to each other to feel safe, supported, open and trusting. They provide a common framework for how people aspire to work and be together as they take transformational action.

### Here are a few tips for developing community agreements:

#### 1. Frame the Conversation

*Ask: What are community agreements and why do we need them?*

Agreements are an aspiration, or collective vision, for how we want to be in relationship with one another. They are explicitly developed and enforced by the group, not by an external authority, and as such must represent a consensus.

Establish 'truths' in this work:

- Everything we do exists within a cultural context
- Being culturally competent is a social, emotional and cultural process
- Being aware of our personal bias is essential to this work
- This work is messy, some toes will be trampled on
- "Recipes" and models for change can actually work to promote stereotyping
- Stereotyping is a natural part of what we as humans do
- We all have a role to play
- No one here is to blame nor personally responsible for institutional bias

Recognize and understand that white supremacy culture, dominant cultural norms are embedded in both formal and informal organizational practices, structures and processes and we must work to continually dismantle them.

- Fear of open conflict
- One right way/paternalism/saviorism
- Either/or thinking and the binary
- Defensiveness/denial
- Right to be comfortable & fear of conflict
- Individualism
- Progress is more & quantity over quality
- Worship of the written word
- Sense of urgency

### An Alternative Framework

#### Colonized Approach

- Individualism
- Assimilation
- Intellect
- Action
- Timeliness
- Linear

#### De-Colonized Approach

- Collectivism
- Inclusion
- Emotions
- Process
- Emergent
- Cyclical

## 2. Engage People in the Process

**Ask: How do we ensure all voices are reflected?**

There are many ways to engage your team in the process of developing community agreements. Start with establishing a decision-making process.

Sociocracy, also known as Dynamic Governance or Decision Circle where decisions are made by consent (everyone agrees), rather than majority voting, in discussion and decision-making by people who have a shared goal or work process. Sociocracy seeks to create psychologically safe environments and productive organizations.

### Three operating principles:

1. The interests of all members must be considered and the individual must respect the interests of the whole.
2. No action should be taken without a solution that everyone can accept
3. All members must accept decisions when unanimously made.

*"By consensus, I must convince you that I am in the right; by consent, you ask whether you can live with the decision."*

- Annewiek Reijmer, Sociocratisch Centrum co-founder

## How it Works

### 1. Present Topic/Proposal

Present all the elements and components of the topic, task or proposal

### 2. Clarification Round

Do you understand the topic, task or proposal? Call upon each participant in turn (without interruption); individuals can "pass" if they have no questions  
Respond to queries  
No discussion or evaluation at this point

### 3. Discussion Round(s)

Call upon each participant in rounds to add their input; individuals can "pass" if they have no comments  
Conduct rounds until everyone has had the opportunity to add their suggestions  
Facilitator collects suggestions and organizes input without additions or modifications in meaning

Decisions are made when there are no remaining "paramount objections", that is, when there is informed consent from all participants. Objections must be reasoned and argued and based on the ability of the objector to work productively toward the goals of the organization.

## 3. Crafting Your Team's Community Agreements

*Ask: How do we develop community agreements collectively?*

There are two types of community agreements:

- **Relational community agreements** are about how we want to be in relationship with each other (e.g. speak your truth, be present).
- **Operational agreements** identify procedures or structures we all agree to use (e.g. have a process observer for each meeting).

## Here's an approach to engage people in the process:

1. Journal on a prompt, e.g. *"What do you need from every person in this group in order to feel safe, supported, open, productive and trusting... SO THAT we can do our best work, and achieve our common vision?"*
2. Pairs or trios share list. Ask groups to agree on their top 1-3 agreements in priority order, and rewrite each one in a simple phrase or sentence.
3. Each pair or trio shares only their top agreement with the large group and explains why it is important to them. Large group asks clarifying questions, then discusses. Check for consensus with thumbs up/down/sideways. If no consensus, set aside.
4. Repeat process for each pair or trio.
5. After meeting, simplify language and synthesize agreements under thematic headers.
6. Revised list brought back to large group in subsequent meeting for final approval.

## National Farm to School Network's Community Agreements

To facilitate a community and culture of respect, openness, and learning, we ask all attendees to agree to these agreements. Thank you to the Program Planning Committee for developing these agreements.

- In every chair, a leader
- Notice power dynamics in the room
- Create space for multiple truths and norms
- Be kind and brave
- Take space/Make space
- Practice examining racially biased systems and processes
- Look for learning
- Take care of yourself, take care of each other
- Put relationships first
- Children are always welcome
- Keep focused on our common goals
- Be present and engaged

\*Agreements adapted from First Alaskans Institute, Northeast Sustainable Agriculture Working Group, and Color Brave Space.

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### Sources:

- [Alena Paisano](#), Equity Consultant
- [National Farm to School Network Community Agreements](#), updated June 2020
- [White Supremacy Culture](#) website by Tema Okun and collaborators
- [What is sociocracy?](#) By Sociocracy For All