

YWCA GREATER HARRISBURG'S GROUP TOOLKIT



Thank you for leading a group during this year's 21-Day Racial Equity and Social Justice Challenge! This Guide assumes you are able to take - or already have taken some of these preliminary steps:

- **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. An optimal size is generally somewhere between 6 and 10 people. If you have more than 10 people, consider breaking into two smaller groups.
- **Decide a format for the group.** There is no “right” way to do this. Maybe schedule a once-a-week zoom conversations during the three weeks of the Challenge. Or organize one-on-one conversation buddies. Some people organize an email list to share reflections, ideas and resources. Experiment with what works for you and the group. And keep notes, as an organizer/facilitator, to hand off for next year or to jog your memory.
- **Find convenient times and spaces to meet and reserve those time slots.** We suggest something between 30 - 60 minutes. Consider times of the day that will work for your attendees.
- **Invite people!** Use some version of the sample invitations below and check out the rest of the Group Toolkit for flyers that you can use.

A Message from the **CEO**

“In October, we hosted our Week Without Violence campaign to raise awareness and engage action to end the broad spectrum of violence against people of color, women and girls.

Now, our work continues as we challenge YOU, our community, to build more effective social justice habits alongside us, which is why we are introducing our 21-Day Racial Equity and Social Justice Challenge.

Daily communication will feature relevant topics with ways to engage, act, reflect, and inspire in a meaningful way around a unifying principle.”

- Mary Quinn, CEO



Sample #1

You're invited!

Across our region—in communities, businesses, nonprofits and in government — there is significant discussion about race and racial inequity. We have found a tool to strengthen our will and skill to address racism. The good news is that all of us recognize the importance of addressing racial inequity in our institutions and see opportunities for greater impact by working together. The goals of this conversation focusing on the 21-Day Racial Equity & Social Justice Challenge are to:

- Increase understanding of and commitment to racial equity and to make a real difference in the community.
- Share local and national racial equity best practices.
- Further cross-jurisdictional, cross-community, and cross-sector strategies for racial equity.
- Foster post-convening collaboration.

Tuesday, April 6 at 1:00 pm. – 2:00 pm

Zoom meeting

For more information about registration, contact Liz Smith at 555-867-5309.

Sample #2

Are You Taking the Challenge??

Many around our network have signed up for the 21-Day Racial Equity & Social Justice Challenge hosted by YWCA Greater Harrisburg that begins April 5. This year we want to create space and opportunity for those who would like to engage in dialogue and group reflection during the 21 days!

Please join us for a coffee Zoom chat on Saturday, April 10 at 11:00 am-12:00 pm. Only requirement is that we ask that you have read each days challenge email and are eager to talk about what you have learned, what moved you and what actually challenged you to action. **Please RSVP to Jamal at 555-867-5309 by April 8!**

Looking forward to sharing a brave and bold conversation with you!

Sample #3

Convening Post 21-Day Racial Equity Habit-Building Challenge.

You've taken the Challenge - what's next?

Join us on Monday, April 26 at 2:00-3:00 pm to share reflections and begin to brainstorm.

- What did we learn about ourselves, about our organizations and its policies and practices?
- What are ways that we can leverage our network?
- What actions can we take individually and together?

Come with ideas and let's keep this moving!

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 decisions-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. 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 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.
- 7. 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,** either by writing those up on a blank page or working from a list you prepare in advance.

ENCOURAGING PEERS & CHALLENGING OTHERS

Let’s create a more just community
TOGETHER.

- | 4 21-Day Challenge

Navigating Challenging Conversations

Spend time thinking about how you might respond to these challenges that may be raised during your discussion:

- **“What about reverse discrimination?” “What about white people who work really hard...now they can’t get jobs. That’s not fair. Why should whites be punished?”** Consider: Reverse racism and discrimination are not possible given the history of oppression and power structures that has been core to the making of this country. All people can be unfair and treat others badly, but that is not the same thing as being racist. Racism is by definition a form of oppression based on the socially constructed concept of race used by the dominant racial group (whites) over non-dominant racial groups.
- **“We need to lower our standards so that people of color can get in/advance/make it.”** Consider: Lowering standards is not what it means to work for equity, and is essentially giving into myths of racial inferiority. Standards may be culturally/racially biased and changed to be more inclusive, but not “lowered.”
- **“Can people of color be racist?”** Consider: No. Racism is used to justify the position of the dominant group, white people in this case, and to uphold white supremacy and superiority. Everyone can be biased, and engage in bigoted and belittling behavior that is intolerant of other perspectives. But racism is by definition a form of oppression exercised by the dominant racial group (whites).
- **“Why aren’t we talking about the oppression of women/LGBTQ?”** Consider: We can be explicit about racism and at the same time not exclusive of other forms of oppression, which do exist and can compound (through what is known as “intersectionality”.) It can be important to lead with racism and the oppression of people of color because race continues to be one of the hardest things to talk about in productive ways. When we dive wholeheartedly into conversations about racism, they naturally lead to other forms of oppression.
- **“I’m tired of talking about white power/privilege/supremacy. What really needs to happen is we need to learn to have constructive relationships, learn to communicate, try to help them...!”** Consider: It is true that we have to learn to have more constructive relationships and communication. AND we have to recognize that racism is a system of oppression that is used to uphold the power of the dominant racial group, in this case white people. It is used to preserve unearned privilege and the myth of white superiority. This is the water in which we swim in this country, so failing to see it, talk about it, and working actively to shift it essentially helps to keep racism in place.
- **“People of color have to take some responsibility too. I haven’t had it easy and I am white. I overcame many obstacles in my life through hard work and a positive attitude.”** Consider: Many people struggle and suffer, because of poverty, gender and other forms of oppression. We don’t want to deny that. And we don’t want to suggest that individual effort and hard work isn’t important. And we also do not want to diminish the real structural barriers that exist for people of color in this country that often means they have to work many times harder to “succeed” or survive. Think about how white dominant cultural norms can make it easier for white people to progress, like being on an escalator going up, white presenting a counter-force for people of color, like trying to run up an escalator going down. Individual effort matters, and so does addressing societal structures and norms.
- **“I just see people as people. I don’t see Black, or White or green or purple.”** Consider: Science suggests otherwise. Implicit bias has been proven to play out in everyone’s minds to some degree and at a level of consciousness that can be very subtle but still impact our actions in the world. Microaggressions, a statement, action, or incident regarded as an instance of indirect, subtle, or unintentional discrimination against members of a marginalized group such as a racial or ethnic minority are a phenomenon we should discuss and be aware of. And you can take an implicit association test to see about your own biases. It is best that we be humble about this fact and actively work to counter these unconscious biases and stereotypes.

Facilitation Tips

There are many important behaviors and skills that facilitators can employ to help guide a group toward 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 during the discussion. *Examples:* “There is low energy. 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. *Example:* “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 goal 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?”

Group Tool Kit Reference

Adapted from the Food Solutions New England Network’s 21-Day Racial Equity and Habit-Building Challenge Discussion Guide For Groups

**eliminating racism
empowering women**

ywca

Greater Harrisburg

Our Mission

The YWCA Greater Harrisburg is dedicated to eliminating racism, empowering women and promoting peace, justice, freedom and dignity for all.

Contact Tiffanie Keck at 717-724-2250 or tkeck@ywcahbg.org or Monica Flickinger at mflickinger@ywcahbg.org for more information