



## Community Agreements for Transforming Systems of Oppression

Our work together requires us to be willing to have challenging conversations in our community about power, inequality, pain, and injustice within contexts of histories, cultures, and experiences. While our intent is to bring compassion that honors our shared humanity as we face these challenging conversations, we know that growth requires accountability.

Below are our proposed Community Agreements. We ask you to read through the agreements prior to our convening, at which point we will discuss them to determine which agreements we can all accept, what changes we may need to make, and if we want to add any not on this list. We will also ask you to individually designate agreements that you will shepherd as part of your responsibility in our shared facilitation throughout this training program.

### **1. WE HONOR THE DIFFERENT WAYS PEOPLE IN OUR COMMUNITY GOT HERE TODAY.**

We know that today is just a snapshot of each community member's journey. Everyone has not read the articles and books you have read, lived the experiences you have had, taken the courses you have, or done the work you have. We come from different places, yet, we all came here because we share an interest in creating a just society.

While we can gain a lot through being patient with one another, we acknowledge that part of that patience includes thoughtful suggestions to others for taking steps from where they are to where they have indicated they want to go next, as long as they are still on the road for justice.

### **2. WE EXPECT AND ACCEPT DISCOMFORT. IT'S GOING TO BE MESSY.**

We accept that we all have been indoctrinated into systems of oppression that must be unlearned, and that unlearning can be uncomfortable. We accept that it is those systems, not the individuals with whom we cross paths, which tightly hold us in this current unjust and unequal society.

We acknowledge that unlearning such deeply rooted systems won't happen in neat, tidy increments. Our individual and collective learning is going to be messy and will happen over time, with a pace that will inevitably feel too slow. Again, we have a lot to gain through patience with ourselves and others.

### 3. WE ASK QUESTIONS OF OURSELVES AND OTHERS.

Part of helping ourselves and other people sort through ideas and beliefs is to ask questions about those ideas. We can start this practice by always asking ourselves hard questions: *Why do I believe this? What about this is making me uncomfortable? What am I gaining or losing by trying on a new perspective?*

Dialogue and exchange of ideas help us come up with our own answers, but ultimately each person will come to their own ideas about justice and oppression on their own time and through their own process. Asking good questions is more supportive than pushing our own perspectives, as long as our colleagues are truly trying to learn.

### 4. WE ENGAGE IN DELIBERATIVE DIALOGUE – NOT DEBATE OR ARGUING, AND NOT JUST LISTENING.

We value sharing our own experiences and listening to others' perspectives because we know that doing so is necessary to maintain the fabric of our community.

In conversation, we offer and receive perspectives, knowledge, and data/theories for consideration and curiosity.

When we catch ourselves and one another debating or arguing, we hold ourselves and one another accountable and insist on course correction.

When we catch ourselves and one another withholding perspectives, we open the door for those perspectives to be shared, either by speaking up ourselves or inviting others to speak. If we don't know what we think yet, we offer even that so that no one is left wondering about our silence.



### 5. WE ACKNOWLEDGE INTENT, AND WE ARE ACCOUNTABLE FOR IMPACT. WE ACTIVELY WORK AGAINST SYSTEMIC OPPRESSION, AND WE SUPPORT ONE ANOTHER IN UNLEARNING.

As the wisdom goes, while others' words may have an impact on us, they are rarely actually about us. Still, when we allow others to speak in ways that feed systems oppression, we are complicit with that oppression.

When we allow individuals to speak and act in ways that – whatever their intent – promote the myriad levers that keep us all locked in systems of white supremacy, patriarchy, capitalism, and imperialism/colonialism, we are failing in our work toward a just society.

We strive to keep our community intact for those who are truly working for justice, while at the same time holding all members accountable for their contributions to systemic oppression.



## 6. WE WORK TO UNDERSTAND HOW WE BENEFIT FROM THE OPPRESSION OF OTHERS.

One of the ways that systems of oppression maintain their own power is by dividing us from one another. We fight against their "logic" by deeply understanding and embracing the complexities of intersectionality and rejecting the binaries that make for "the oppressed" and "the oppressor," which can take our energy away from analysis about shifting benefits of oppression.

To this end, we actively locate and continue to track the ways that we personally benefit from the oppression of others.

And when we see that other beneficiaries in our community are not maintaining accountability, we don't expect those in adjacent categories (i.e., people of color to white people, women to men, straight folks to LGBTQ folks, etc.) to carry the burden of correcting their course; instead, we step up and do the work ourselves. While this work has been called "allyship" in other contexts, we know it's more than that. We know that we are acting on behalf of ourselves and our entire community when we do not allow community members to enact power over or around those from whom they (unconsciously or not) attempt to derive their power.

