

Establishing Group Agreements

**It is suggested that this is the first activity that you complete from the Strengthening Diversity Professional Development Minis*

OBJECTIVE

To develop a clear set of guidelines on how your group will handle discussions around sensitive information and acknowledge each individual member's right to be treated respectfully.

INTRODUCTION

Sometimes the most important conversations are the ones we are least likely to engage in because they are difficult, emotional, and sometimes painful. Group agreements help to establish expectations about how we engage in conversation and form a “collective vision for how we want to be in relationship with one another.”¹ They identify what each individual needs from the group and the commitments they are making to help everyone feel safe, honored, and respected. To be effective, group agreements need to be concrete, realistic, and genuinely agreed to by all group members.

CREATING A GROUP AGREEMENT (15 - 30+ minutes)

METHOD 1: Create Your Own

The following steps from [Seeds For Change](#) walk through the process of creating your own group agreement.

1. Explain the purpose of the group agreement

Make it clear that everyone's input is encouraged and welcomed. It is also helpful to remind people of the purpose of the learning sessions. For example, ‘We will be discussing some sensitive information during our sessions. We can be more effective during these discussions if we have spent time sharing what we need in order to participate effectively.’

2. Make space for people to reflect on what they need

Knowing and expressing needs is easier for some people than for others. Allow time for people to think on their own or by chatting in pairs. A facilitator can offer structured questions. Consider the following questions to help people come up with specific suggestions for group agreements:

- a. How do you feel about participating in workshops or meetings when sensitive information is discussed?

- b. What are your hopes and fears?
 - c. Is there anything that the facilitator or other group members can do that would make these sessions work well for you?
3. **Give everyone the chance to share**

It is important to hear from each group member who wants to make a suggestion. Consider having each person write their ideas on post-it notes which you then collect and read.
4. **Use the suggestions to create potential ground rules**

Look for ways to summarize and group similar suggestions to make the list more manageable. Ask follow-up questions to help people be more concrete or realistic. For example, if someone suggested ‘respect each other even when we disagree’, try asking how someone might *show* that respect.
5. **Edit the suggestions until everyone is happy**

Make space for everyone to look over the list you’ve created and really think about what will and won’t work for them. This includes thinking about whether the proposed agreements are realistic and achievable, and consider what exceptions or tweaks need to be made, if any, to any of the items. Acknowledge everyone's feedback. Explore any differences and look for amendments that everyone can consent to.
6. **Test for agreement**

Remind the group that they are making a commitment to each other. It is much better to raise concerns now than simply ignore the ground rules later. You could ask people to do something proactive to signal their consent, e.g. thumbs-up if in agreement.

METHOD 2: Build Upon & Commit to an Existing Set of Group Agreements

If you don’t have time to walk through the full process outlined above, you may opt to start with some common agreements and build from there. Consider the following examples:

- Embracing Equity: The Four Agreements
https://dpi.wi.gov/sites/default/files/imce/cte/pdf/2019_05_equity_agreements_poster_2.pdf
- Resource Media: Community Agreements
<https://resource-media.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/08/Community-Agreements-1-pager.jpg>

Share the agreements with the group and ask for feedback or additions. Some questions to ask might include:

- Do you think these agreements will help to promote an environment of safety, trust, and respect?
- What is missing or what isn't captured in these agreements that you think is important to add?
- Can you give an example of what it might look like to live out these agreements in our conversations?

As suggestions are given, add and edit the agreements you started with. Continue editing until the group is in agreement and no further changes are recommended.

IMPLEMENTING YOUR GROUP AGREEMENTS

If you spend time creating ground rules and then ignore them, it will undermine trust in you and within the group

Suggestions for Implementing Group Agreements

- Make sure the group agreement is visible throughout the sessions.
- If the original copy is hard to read, create a neat version (type it up if necessary).
- Consider reading it aloud at the start of each session.
- Remind the group of parts of the agreement at specific moments when it is relevant.
- If someone new joins the group, take the time to show them the agreement and explain it to them. Ask them if they can also agree to these ground rules or if there is something they would like to add. If they want to make major changes to the agreement, you could re-open the discussion for the whole group.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- Seeds for Change Short Guide: Group Agreements
<https://www.seedsforchange.org.uk/groupagree>
- National Equity Project: Developing Community Agreements
<https://www.nationalequityproject.org/tools/developing-community-agreements>
- Drawing Change: Co-creating Community Agreements in Meetings
<https://drawingchange.com/co-creating-community-agreements-in-meetings/>

EVALUATION & CONTINUING EDUCATION CREDITS

1. The Strengthening Diversity Community of Practice would love to hear your thoughts on how well the content supported your learning. Please complete the [PD Mini Feedback Form](#). A link to the training certificate will be made available upon submission. Facilitators are encouraged to provide participants with the link to the feedback form.
2. Participants who are a part of the Wisconsin Registry can receive credit for completing a PD Mini. Refer to the [Registry Credit Instruction Document](#) for further details.

SUGGESTIONS FOR FACILITATORS

1. Have post-it notes, chart paper, and markers available
2. Try to keep your group agreement simple and concise but also thorough. A long list of commitments might be hard to remember and stick to during conversation. On the other hand, if your group agreement is too vague or simple it might not be effective in creating the conditions and safety and trust.

Sources:

1. National Equity Project: Developing Community Agreements
<https://www.nationalequityproject.org/tools/developing-community-agreements>