Equity and Social Justice Commission
November 3, 2022 | 5:30 pm
Example One:

Community Agreement Examples:
Cornell University IDP Guide
https://idp.cornell.edu/idp-guides/idp-guide-community-agreements/

IDP Guide

Community Agreements

Overview

At IDP, we believe that how we talk with each other is as important as the content of what we say. There is immense value in being mindful about how we communicate and connect with each other, especially when trying to create equitable and inclusive space. To help us achieve this, we use community agreements.

Community agreements are 'ground rules' that we establish early on to set expectations for how we want to communicate with each other. These agreements help set both practical norms ('We Agree To…') and broader intentions of how we want to approach the conversation ('We Will Challenge Ourselves To…'). Establishing community agreements gives us a way to hold ourselves and others accountable for honest and respectful communication with one another. The following is a list of the community agreements we frequently use in our various offerings. Community agreements are intended to be dynamic and adaptable to a wide variety of settings. Many classrooms, research laboratories, and student organizations use this framework in different ways across campus. Each group using community agreements as a framework should regularly examine how these agreements can best serve their members, adjust them to meet their specific needs, and provide opportunities to reflect on where there is room for improvement in adhering to them.

We Agree To:

Practice active and empathetic listening

Our attention is valuable. Who we give our attention to often reflects existing power structures and hierarchies. Actively listening to all participants, and being open to hearing perspectives different from our own, are a key foundation to creating a space in which everyone can contribute in a meaningful way.

Challenge the idea, not the person

Critical dialogue requires examining ideas and challenging one another to consider alternative perspectives. While we can't entirely separate thoughts and perspectives from the people who share them, it is important to question and critique the ideas being presented, rather than the person presenting them, to allow all participants to continue to engage without feeling shut down.

Be both teachers and learners
We must acknowledge that we all come with different experiences and perspectives. By sharing these, we can teach and learn from one another and build a fuller and more complex understanding of the topic at hand.

Take space and make space

In creating equitable and inclusive spaces, everyone needs to be heard, and everyone needs to speak. The responsibility of vulnerability and offering experiences and perspectives to the group, must be shared by all participants, and not just rest on a handful of people. Balancing taking space and making space also helps flatten existing hierarchies of who should be heard the most, or who should be expected to share on certain topics. Reflecting on ourselves and whether we tend to take space or make space in a given conversation can be a helpful tool in managing this balance.

Stories stay, lessons leave

Creating spaces where people feel comfortable being candid and vulnerable can be incredibly powerful. It's important to recognize that this comfort often comes from the trust built with the group through time, reciprocal vulnerability, and mutually agreed upon ground rules. Therefore, someone may choose to share something in one space, but they may not be comfortable with it being shared by someone else in another space. While we encourage people to take what they learned and share it with others, names, identifying details, and private information should remain confidential.

Use "I" statements

Our lived experiences provide us with a wealth of knowledge and insight, and are crucial sources for learning and understanding our own and others' roles in organizations, communities, and the world at large. It is important that we own these experiences as our individual perspectives in order to recognize that one person's experience cannot speak for an entire group of people. Focusing on 'I' statements also encourages us to be specific and purposeful in our sharing, rather than relying on general or vague statements.

One microphone

Simply put, one person speaks at a time. This means not interrupting, interjecting, or having side conversations when someone else is speaking to ensure everyone can actively listen to whoever is sharing.

Be here now

In addition to being physically present, it's important for all participants to give their full attention to the group. Being fully present will look differently in terms of body language and eye contact from one person to another, but asking participants to refrain from using phones/other devices or multitasking can help ensure everyone remains engaged.

We Will Challenge Ourselves To:

Embrace discomfort

Discomfort can be a signal that we're moving beyond what we already know. This stretch into unknown territory is an opportunity to challenge ourselves to be unsettled productively, and collaboratively work towards creating new shared knowledge. Along with embracing discomfort, it's also important to recognize when we are being pushed *too* far outside of our comfort zone, to the point where we are no longer able to effectively participate. This shift past discomfort into a 'danger zone' can be an indicator that honoring our emotions and boundaries and taking a step back is actually the most productive way forward.

Trust intent and name impact

When someone shares something that challenges us in some way, trusting that person's intent was not purposefully malicious encourages us to remain present in dialogue. Naming the impact of something someone says has on us allows us to be authentic in our emotions and reactions, while providing the opportunity to identify assumptions or power dynamics at play. Both trusting intent and naming impact together are vital in order to engage thoughtfully and critically with the idea at hand.

Be honest with ourselves and others

In dialogue, being honest doesn't just mean telling the truth, but also honoring our experiences, emotions, and reactions. Being willing to recognize these truths about ourselves, and being willing to share them with others, allows us to show up authentically.

Acknowledge judgments and assumptions (including our own)

We all come in with preconceived notions and assumptions about others and the world around us. Naming these, or calling attention to them when we notice them surfacing, allows us to use them in a way to gain better understanding of where people might be coming from. This might look like us surfacing our own assumptions to explore with the group, or someone calling attention to an assumption that might be underlying what we shared. While we can never achieve full awareness of every assumption and judgement we hold, being intentional about acknowledging the ones we do notice offers the opportunity to use them as a learning experience.

Accept that things may remain unresolved; we might not feel a sense of closure

Big questions and concepts rarely have simple answers, and when time is limited and a conversation must come to close, it can feel like things are being left unresolved both in the group and within ourselves. It's important to remember that dialogue is both a process and

approach, rather than a solution or means to a clear end. The lack of closure we feel from not having all the answers can help us maintain a sense of curiosity and humility, and even encourage us to revisit and continue the conversation at a later time.

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Community Agreement Examples:
National Equity Project – Developing Community Agreements
https://www.nationalequityproject.org/tools/developing-community-agreements

Developing Community Agreements

Developing community agreements 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. As such, 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**

Take time to define what a community agreement means. Modify this definition if helpful:

"A consensus on what every person in our group needs from each other and commits to each other in order to feel safe, supported, open, productive and trusting… so that we can do our best work, achieve our common vision, and serve our [students/families/constituents] well."

Delineate agreements from "rules" and "norms".

- *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.*

- *Norms are the ways in which we behave and are currently in relationship to each other, whether consciously and explicitly or not.*

- *Rules are mandated and enforced by an authority, and do not necessarily reflect the will or buy-in of the group.*

Explain that 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).*

Explain "why" community agreements matter.

- We can't achieve our vision in a hostile, disrespectful, or undermining group culture.

- Some of the most critical conversations teams need to have are emotional, painful, and uncomfortable (e.g., equity issues, examining individual teacher practice), but we won't engage or make ourselves vulnerable without emotional safety and trust.

- Staff relationships model for students how human relationships should be; staff culture shapes school culture.

- Healthy staff culture is key to personal sustainability in the challenging jobs of education.

2. Engage People in the Process

There are many pathways to engage your team in the process of developing community agreements. Take time to assess the factors to the right before designing a process that best meets your group where they are.

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 serve our students well, do our best work, and achieve our common vision?"

2. Pairs or trios share list. Ask these groups to agree on their top 1 -3 agreements in priority order, and rewrite each one in a simple phrase or sentence. You will likely need to model this.

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 discuss. When time expires, test for consensus with thumbs up/down/sideways. If no consensus, set aside.

4. Repeat process for each pair or trio.

5. After meeting, facilitator simplifies language and synthesizes agreements under thematic headers.

6. Revised list brought back to large group in subsequent meeting for final approval.