

21-Day **Equity Challenge**

21- Day Equity Challenge Facilitator & Discussion Guide

Adapted from:

- The Harwood Institute for Public Innovation: *Community Conversation Workbook*
- Food Solutions New England Network: *The 21-Day Racial Equity Habit-Building Challenge Discussion Guide*

Using this Guide

Using the guide starts with you assuming the role of organizer or facilitator, someone who brings an intention to take the Challenge experience from the purely individual level to a shared group or team level. The group, ideally, already has some “common ground” in terms of work, studies or even a shared faith approach even if not everyone knows each other.

All humans are “sense-making” and we can learn quite a bit on our own during the Challenge. But a group or team approach allows for collective sense-making and will help participants discover new ways of thinking, deepen understanding and increase shared learning. We all have different experiences and gifts, as well as our own biases and blind spots; a team approach invites us to expand beyond our usual comfort zone.

Assemble a group or team of people to take the Challenge. It could be classmates, coworkers, organizational partners, friends and family members. Keep in mind that diversity of your group will add to the richness of discussions and learnings. We learn more from encountering worldviews and perspectives different from our own. Seeing through others’ eyes opens the way to new solutions and possibilities for collaborative steps toward more racial equity. Give yourself and each other permission to struggle for the “right words” and give each other grace for stumbles as we work toward deeper connection and understanding.

As you and your group delve into the Challenge in the form of daily email prompts that each person will work through, consider using the group approach to create, strengthen and mobilize your team or group. Get ready to have courageous conversations! Using the **Four Agreements of Courageous Conversations** as a starting frame, be prepared to:

1. Stay engaged
2. Experience discomfort
3. Speak your truth
4. Expect and accept non-closure

Remember to use the Challenge as a tool in your toolkit to advance your work toward racial equity, to activate and support you in taking bold action.

Working with Your Group

Identifying Discussion Leaders

Leading a discussion doesn't require a professional moderator or facilitator, but that doesn't mean you want just anyone leading the discussion. Here are some tips on how to be an effective discussion leader.

- The main responsibility of the discussion leader is to create a safe and inviting environment that enables everyone in discussions to engage, listen to each other, and grow from experience.
- Leading a discussion is different from running a meeting. Look for people who share your commitment to engaging colleagues in new ways of talking through issues and working together. A good discussion leader is a curious listener and focuses on creating a discussion based on discovery, learning from one another, and exploring their ideas.
- Traits of an effective discussion leader:
 - Remains neutral about the topic being discussed – is not seen as having an agenda or siding with a particular group
 - Helps people explore different ideas – displays a genuine sense of curiosity
 - Actively listens to people and builds trust
 - Engages people to consider different perspectives
 - Explores with people seemingly conflicting or contradictory views in a non-confrontational way
 - Stays focused on the goal of the discussion: this is about learning, not promoting an organization or group
 - Keeps people focused on the questions being discussed
 - Prepares for the discussion by reviewing the discussion tips

NOTE: Discussion leaders do not need to be experts on the issues. Oftentimes, it is best if they are not. The discussion leader is there to guide the discussion, not participate in it

Getting Started

Thank you for working with a group during the 21-Day Equity Challenge! This Guide assumes these preliminary steps:

- **Identify a group of people** that are signed up for the Challenge and interested in getting together to talk about their experience or their learnings during the Challenge. An optimal size group is generally between 6 and 10 people. If you have more than 10 people, you might consider breaking into two smaller groups with facilitation for each
- **Decide a format for the group.** There is no “right” way to do this. Some groups schedule one-a-week lunch or coffee conversations during the Challenge. Some organize one-on-one conversation buddies. Some people organize a group email list or Sharepoint group to share reflections, ideas and resources. Experiment with what works for you and your group. Keep notes, as the facilitator, to keep for future Challenges or to jog your memory.
- **Find convenient times and spaces** to meet; we suggest between 60 – 90 minutes. Consider access for people with different abilities. Consider times of day that will work for your participants.
- **Invite people!**
- You might consider having more than one facilitator to share this role or different roles, such as recorder/scribe, visual recorder/photographer (with attendee consent), or timekeeper.

Planning Ahead of Follow-Up

Think about ways to keep the conversation and relationship-building moving toward action and beyond our comfort zones into our “stretch” (sometimes less comfortable) zones. Consider how the group can support one another to push ourselves further than we have before. How can we create the individual, community and workplace supports in order to center **racial equity** in decision-making and activities, including policies, practices, programs, 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. Always ask “What’s next?” and “What’s possible now?”

Sample Agenda for a Racial Equity Challenge Conversation

Use this for a 60-90 minute conversation; modify to suit your needs.

Topic	Process/Presenter	Time
Start-Ups	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Welcome – FacilitatorClarify rolesCheck-in Question: <i>How are you?</i> OR <i>One word to describe how you are feeling today?</i> OR <i>What’s something you are bringing to today’s discussion?</i>Review agendaReview working agreements/ground rules to guide discussion	15 minutes
Discussion	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Present reflection prompts from the 21-Day Challenge – FacilitatorInvite people to reflect silently, perhaps revisit something they have written/created in advanceOpen up the discussion (facilitator ensures that everyone gets a chance to speak, reminding people that pauses and silence are okay and can be powerful)	30-60 minutes
Closing	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Check-out: <i>What is one thing you are taking from today’s discussion? What is something you are committing to further your learning or take action around?</i>Evaluation (“Pluses”: What worked about our discussion today? “Deltas”/changes: What could we do to make our next discussion even better?Next meeting date and time + roles (facilitators/recorders) + prep work for that meeting	15 minutes

Preparing Yourself for the Discussion

1. Center yourself. Connect to your values and what gives you strength and support.
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 and work for 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. Also be thinking about how we can support each other to get beyond where we are now.
4. Challenge yourself to listen to other 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.
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 intents. 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 (examples below), either by writing those up on a blank page or working from a list you prepare in advance.

Working Agreements or Guidelines for the Group

Working agreements, community agreements or even rules of engagement are names for conversation/meeting guidelines that help create an environment that values diversity of thought and experience. They help create a space within which you have a higher chance of a respectful and productive experiences for the participants. Talking about your agreements - or even better, creating them together – and getting consent to use them is a helpful way to build trust when you start the conversation. People are much more likely to respect and use an agreement that they have helped create. It will make your job as the host much easier. When problems or conflicts arise, you all will be able to refer back to your set of agreements (e.g. We all agreed at the beginning that it's best if only one person speaks at a time...).

BASIC GROUND RULES

- **HERE TO HAVE A HONEST DISCUSSION:** Everyone can participate; no one dominates.
- **THERE ARE NO “RIGHT ANSWERS”:** Draw on your own experiences, views, and beliefs. You do not need to be an expert.
- **KEEP AN OPEN MIND:** Listen carefully and try to hear and understand the views of others, especially those you may disagree with.
- **IT’S OKAY TO DISAGREE, BUT DON’T BE DISAGREEABLE:** Respond to others how you want them to respond to you.

Here are some other examples of ground rule lists:

Example List #1

- Listen deeply
- Make “I”- statements rather than generalized “We” statements

- Keep it here
- We don't have to agree
- Notice intent vs. impact (Use "oops" and "ouch" as in "I made a mistake" and "I am hurt")
- Be willing to be uncomfortable
- Expect and accept a lack of closure (i.e. we won't figure this all out today)
- All voices are heard
- Moving in and moving back
- 3 Before Me - let three other people talk before you talk again
- Appreciate each others' differences and values
- Deconstruct language, request clarification when needed
- Take/Share what you've learned (without attribution or with permission)
- Both/And- not binary choices
- Open to curiosity
- Ask "what else would we like to add?"

Example List #2

- Be Curious, Open, and Respectful - call in not out/throw sunshine not shade
- No one knows everything - together we know a lot
- We can't be articulate all the time - give the benefit of the doubt and ask questions
- We take care of ourselves - stretch, eat, drink, use restroom, rest, etc.
- Confidentiality - don't speak for others without explicit permission, don't share something communicated in a private or safe space.
- One mic - one voice at a time
- Take Space/Make Space - if you are usually quiet challenge yourself to take more space, and if you usually talk a lot be mindful to leave room for quieter voices
- Avoid Jargon, Acronyms, and Industry language – use inclusive language that is accessible for people with varying inside knowledge
- Be aware of time - enough let's move on (ELMO) means if what you wanted to say has already been said, don't say it
- Speak from your own experience - Use I statements rather than generalization
- Challenge assumptions
- Be conscious of intent vs. impact - no matter intention you're responsible for your impact
- Avoid using isms without explaining what you mean by them

Once you have a good list of ground rules, be sure to review them with the group and ask, "Do these work for everyone?"

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 real 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 most predictive of opportunity and outcomes in this country and one of the hardest things to talk about in productive ways. And 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 is 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.

- ***“Why use the word “racism”? Couldn’t we find a gentler, less negative word?”*** Consider : Who are we trying to protect by being “gentler” and less negative? Often we privilege the comfort of the privileged (white people), at the ongoing expense of people of color. We have to be bold, courageous and truthful, and recognize that there is a difference between discomfort and outright panic. Unless we name racism, how will we be able to work to undo or dismantle it?
- ***“It seems that you are saying all white folks are racist? I am not a racist.”*** Consider : There is a difference between saying that an individual is “a racist” (by malicious intent) and that someone lives in and is influenced by a racist system. It is very difficult for white people in this country not to have some internalized sense of superiority and bias vis-a-vis people of color because of how systems have been rigged in their favor. This does not mean that white people can’t work hard to overcome these internalized sensibilities, and it requires ongoing commitment, awareness building and action. And even better if we do this in community together, like this group.
- ***“This doesn’t impact me. Racism does not impact me.”*** (person of color saying this) Consider : Racism can be more and less obvious. As Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. once said, “Everything we see is a shadow cast by that which we do not see.” Racism can be interpersonal and institutional (more obvious) and internalized and structural (perhaps less obvious). Research is showing how much of a psychological burden racism is for people of color, even being passed down through genes, and how things as subtle as narrative and primes create barriers for people of color. We do not mean to make this overwhelming, but if we do not name these dynamics, we cannot address them. And the good news is that there are more and more tools for addressing how racism operates at different levels, and this Challenge will point us in the direction of many of these!

Facilitation Tips

There are many important behaviors and skills that facilitators can employ to help guide a group towards 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 in the room. Examples: There seems to be a lot of side conversation. Is that okay with everyone? There is low energy in the room. 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. Examples: 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 goals 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?”

Tips for Leading Discussions

To get the most out of the discussion, you want to go beyond people's surface reactions. Here are several rules of thumb to use when leading these discussions:

- **Take nothing at face value.** Notice the words and phrases people use. Probe by asking, "What do you mean?" and "What are you getting at?"
- **Listen for where people get stuck.** Listen for moments where people need more facts or where a perception prevents them from saying more about a concern.
- **Engage people early on.** Make sure everyone says something early on. Ask people what they think about what others are saying.
- **Ask people to square their contradictions.** Illuminate what folks are struggling with. Ask, "I know this can be a tough issue, but how do the two things you said fit together?"
- **Help keep the discussion focused.** Remind participants of what they are discussing. Don't let things get too far off track.
- **Keep in mind the "unspoken" rules.** Different discussions and spaces have their own sets of "rules." Check the level of trust people have and what it means for how you should interact.
- **Watch out for your preconceived views.** Everyone has biases that can filter our questions and interpretations. Be alert to them.

IF	THEN
A few people dominate the discussion	Engage each person from the start. Make sure everyone says something early on. Ask, "Are there any new voices on this issue?" or "Does anyone else want to jump in here?" Be direct and say, "We seem to be hearing from the same people. Let's give other a chance to talk." Call on people by name to answer, but all people to pass if they are not comfortable sharing.
The group gets off on a tangent or a person rambles on and on	Ask, "How does what you're talking about relate to our Challenge?" or "What does that lead you to think about (the question at hand)?" Ask them to restate or sum up what they said in a few words. If you can't get a person to focus, interrupt him/her when they take a breath and move to another person or question. Then bring him/her back into the discussion later.
Someone seems to have a personal grudge about an issue or topic and keeps talking about it	Remind the person where the group is trying to focus. Ask him/her to respond to the question at hand. Acknowledge the person and move on. Say, "I can understand where you are coming from, but we need to move on." If the person continues to be disruptive, interrupt them. Say, "We heard you, but we're not talking about that right now."
People argue	Don't let it bother you too much – it's okay as long as it is not mean-spirited. Find out what's behind the argument. Ask why people disagree and get to the bottom of it. Break the tension with a joke or something funny. Stop to review the ground rules. Take a break.

<p>People never disagree or are “too polite”</p>	<p>Play devil’s advocate. Bring up or introduce different or competing ideas and see how people respond. Tell the group you’ve noticed that they don’t disagree much and ask if everyone is really in as much agreement as it seems.</p>
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ADDITIONAL THOUGHT FOR THE DISCUSSION

- Listen to how people relate to the issue. Sometimes people will gain context by asking “How does it affect me?” But they also become attached through broader context/ beyond their self-interest. This happens through 1st hand experiences, the experiences of others, what they can imagine.
- Throughout the discussion keep track of “turning points” – those words, questions, or ideas that unlock the issues for people and cause them to rethink or engage more deeply.
- People feel a range of emotions about equity, racism, social justice but may be hesitant to express these in public. Bringing out emotions makes the discussion more dynamic, helping people discover why they care and what they are looking for.
- Pay close attention to whether people see themselves as potential actors. Listen to their sense of possibility. Also, pay attention to whom they trust to engage them and act.