

# Audacious Hospitality

## Creating Shared Agreements

When it comes to forming a team dedicated to implementing diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) initiatives, it is important to have cohesion within the group. Although not everyone has to (or should) think the same way, a set of shared agreements allows us to hear *everyone* in the room and avoid *only* hearing those with louder, more culturally dominant communication styles.

Shared agreements are a *brit*, a covenant, used to create sacred partnerships and build and nurture relationships that make our work holy. Shared agreements also create safety and understanding within a group to foster transformation. They can be used in any situation where a team discusses challenging material and can easily become a normative part of your community's culture.

The following are some common useful examples of shared agreements that you can use with your group. These can serve as a launchpad to creating new shared agreements that you and your group might find beneficial. When deciding upon agreements, or amendments to agreements, elicit suggestions from the entire group and confirm that all participants agree to, understand and feel comfortable with all agreements on your list. Establishing a trusting, efficient and safe environment for your DEI working group is necessary to implement the change you wish to see within your community.

Please note: Members from various backgrounds and lived experiences likely will appreciate some of the specific agreements in different ways. What might seem silly, obvious, or even tedious to one might be *incredibly* useful to others.

**Tip:** Keep these shared agreements posted in your office or place of gathering for learning. You can make copies available for everyone in your group or incorporate them onto a PowerPoint slide at the start of all of your meetings.



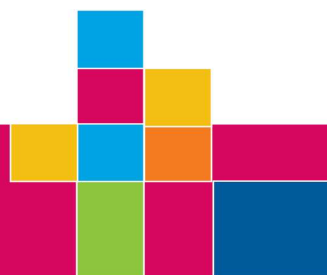


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1. We assume positive intent while acknowledging that intent is different than impact.
2. We acknowledge that people come from different experiences, multiple identities and cultural frameworks as they enter into this work together.
3. Pass/Participate: We are welcome to participate or pass, though we encourage people to challenge themselves to participate in conversation.
4. Take Space/Make Space: We are aware of how much we are participating. If some of us generally speak a lot, we consider making space for others to speak. If some of us generally participate less, we consider taking space and sharing with the group.
5. We honor confidentiality: What is said here stays here. What is learned here leaves here.
6. We use “I” statements and speak from personal experience.
7. “Ouch, Oops.” We call in, and we do not call out. We understand it is okay to let people know if they said something that hurts and, in return, apologize for causing hurt.
8. We have not formed a safe space, but rather a “brave space.” We understand that growth requires us to be brave rather than safe; it requires us to share experiences, to be vulnerable, and to face feelings of guilt or discomfort.
9. We are conscious of who is in the room and any positions of power.
10. We listen to understand (rather than listening with the intent of forming a response).
11. We address concerns, moments of upset and discomfort as soon as possible (especially in the moment), particularly in cross-racial, multicultural relationships (we do not ask others to teach us about their identities and we are mindful of the impact of our curiosity).
12. We rely on the use of a "parking lot" to capture ideas that we agree are not relevant for the moment but are likely important to address later on.
13. We have read “Reconsidering & Disrupting Dominant Culture” (see next page) and commit to incorporating these agreements into our group.

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## Reconsidering & Disrupting Cultural Norms

In *White Dominant Culture and Something Different: A Worksheet*, the author states, “In our society, the dominant culture that shapes our institutions, our media, the way we see ourselves and each other is that of the white, middle class [and heterosexual]. Racial equity trainer Tema Okun suggests that the characteristics of white dominant culture can be harmful not in and of themselves but “when they are used as norms and standards without being pro-actively named or chosen by the group...These attitudes and behaviors can show up in any group or organization, whether it is white-led or predominantly white or people of color-led or predominantly people of color.”<sup>1</sup>

So many of the ways we behave, communicate with each other, share or don't share ideas, make decisions, etc., have been enculturated into our minds and bodies before we could even talk. Many of us learned these codes of behavior as “the right way” or the “polite way” to do things. However, in a society that is systemically plagued by racism, we must look closer at our cultural norms to see them for what they are: norms of *the dominant culture*, which by no means make them “normal” and certainly don't make them inclusive or reflective of a wide variety of identities. Though we think of these norms as having nothing to do with racism, they often serve to maintain the “business as usual” behaviors of the dominant culture. These behaviors often perpetuate dominance over People of Color, women, members of the LGBTQ+ community, people with disabilities, and many more marginalized groups.

Please use the suggestions below to both disrupt “business as usual” during your planning process and help create a culture and process that is as equitable and inclusive as possible. If the process of your working group is inclusive, the results will likely be as well. Also note that even though you are now reviewing the behaviors below with respect to your current DEI group, they can be relied on for any process with any group or organization.

**We hope that through the development of a shared language, purpose, and *understanding* of what a kehila k'dosha (holy community) can look and feel like, your group will be better suited to make knowledgeable and meaningful recommendations to your larger community.**

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<sup>1</sup> White Dominant Culture and Something Different: A Worksheet: Found at <https://www.cacgrants.org/assets/ce/Documents/2019/WhiteDominantCulture.pdf>. Despite best efforts, we have been unable to identify the original source of this information. We would like to properly cite and give credit to its creator. If you are or know of the originating source, please contact us at [AudaciousHospitality@urj.org](mailto:AudaciousHospitality@urj.org) so we can make this important update.



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All of the suggestions below were adapted from *Showing Up for Racial Justice's* adaptation of Kenneth Jones and Tema Okun's *Dismantling Racism: A Workbook for Social Change Groups*<sup>2</sup>

1. **We resist prioritizing the emotions of dominant identities:** We don't believe that those with power have a right to emotional and psychological comfort and understand that discomfort is at the root of growth and learning; we welcome it as much as we can. For example, if we commit to addressing a specific act of racism, we don't prioritize the emotions/emotional responses – tears, feelings of anger, guilt, shame – of white people *hearing* about the racist act, but the experiences and emotions of those who are victims of the racist act itself. Want to know more about this? Read: <https://everydayfeminism.com/2016/02/white-people-emotions-tears/>.
2. **We appreciate getting it right...and getting it wrong:** We have developed an organizational culture of appreciation for people's work while also acknowledging that everyone makes mistakes, which can sometimes lead to positive results. We separate the person from the mistake and talk directly to the person, not *about* them to others, and we address the mistake soon after it was made.
3. **We resist urgency and the dominant culture's norm of sacrificing potential allies for quick or highly visible results. We value process over outcome:** We discuss and plan goals related to DEI work, particularly in terms of time and realistic workplans. We understand that more perspectives might "slow things down" but often lead to better results. We have abandoned the notion that quicker means "better" and we acknowledge that inclusivity often means slowing down. We know our results improve when we include the necessary voices throughout all stages of our process.
4. **We resist defensiveness & either/or thinking:** We understand that defensiveness and fear of losing power, face, comfort, privilege, etc. are interlinked, and we work on our own defensiveness and name it as a problem when it is one. We resist the idea that we are either "not racist" and "good" or "racist" and "bad." We know that anti-oppression is a learning process and that good people have harmful unexamined biases that must be addressed.
5. **We embrace open conflict:** Those of us in power do not ignore or avoid conflicts as they arise. When someone raises an issue that causes discomfort, we do not to blame them; we address the issue itself. We roleplay ways to handle conflict before it happens, and we understand that raising hard issues does not make us impolite.

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<sup>2</sup> "Dismantling Racism: A Workbook for Social Change Groups" by Jones, Kenneth and Okun, Tema, *Showing Up for Racial Justice*. Site name: <https://www.showingupforracialjustice.org/white-supremacy-culture-characteristics.html>.



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6. **We recognize many forms of communication as valid (not just the “written word”):** We recognize the contributions and skills that everyone brings to our organization and we avoid the belief that the dominant perspective or process is the one “right” way to do things that others should adapt to. When we work with communities or individuals from different cultures than our own, or our organization’s dominant one, we expect that we have learning to do about the communities’ ways of doing.
7. **We share power:** Those of us with power do not take suggestions for organizational changes as a threat or a personal attack against their leadership, but rather assume those who suggest change have the best interests of the organization at heart. We do not conflate a desire for change with stupidity, hyperemotionality, or a lack of experience. We understand that a good leader develops the power and skills of others and often *relies on* being challenged by them.
8. **We resist individualism:** We assign credit and accountability to all who participate in an effort, not just the leaders or most public person. We use meetings as a place to solve problems that others may bring up, not just a place to report activities. People in our organization know they are not responsible for solving problems alone and that asking for help is not a sign of weakness.
9. **We resist the idea of objectivity:** We understand that *everybody* has a world view which affects the way they understand and process. We resist the dominant belief that emotions are inherently destructive and irrational and should not play a role in decision-making or group process. We don’t require people to think in a linear fashion and we push ourselves to sit with discomfort when people express themselves in ways unfamiliar to us.
10. **Measure “success” through the lens of sustainability:** Similar to Judaism’s concept of *l’dor v’dor* (generation to generation), Native American Seventh Generation principle asks how the actions of our group will affect people seven generations from now. We are not so short-sighted to think that the work we do is only important if we see immediate results, but rather we find comfort in knowing we are preparing for future generations. In doing so, we make sure that any cost/benefit analysis includes *all* costs, not just financial ones. For example, we account for cost in morale, the cost of not addressing our culture and in turn, excluding identities from non-dominant backgrounds, etc. We set goals that speak to *how* we want to do our work, not just *what* we want to do, and we ask those we work with and for to evaluate our performance.