



Group Norms

Every group develops “norms” – ways to behave, communicate, and get work done. Often, group norms are unspoken and arise by default to reflect the dominant culture rather than through intentional negotiation. Take time to develop norms that support authentic dialogue, relationship building, and collective strategizing and action.

These suggested norms can help us practice “confident humility” – the self-awareness that we all have wisdom and other assets to contribute, and we always will have more to learn. With both confidence and humility, we can approach each challenge, including conflicts and failures, with intentionality as an opportunity for creativity and positive change.

Note that these norms reflect various cultural perspectives – some that will seem familiar, and some that will seem foreign. We believe that, collectively, they can deepen our confident humility and open a pathway for breakthrough social change.

1. **Speak your truth**

Share stories, experiences, and thoughts from a personal perspective. Speak from the “I” position, rather than detaching from your perspective (“you”) or universalizing your perspective (“we”). Help create a safer space for everyone to speak their truth by respecting different forms of expression, honoring boundaries, and maintaining confidentiality. Step up and practice asserting if you tend to be reserved or quiet. Step back and practice listening if you tend to be talkative.

2. **Lean into discomfort and lean into each other**

By design, authentic dialogue challenges participants. Discomfort signals that you are being challenged and perhaps even growing from the experience. Support each other to reflect on discomfort with a spirit of inquiry and wonder, in order to reach new awareness and meaning individually as well as collectively. The process can be useful and meaningful only with everyone’s full participation. Support each other to participate fully.

3. Commit to non-closure

While this process might be designed to address an immediate issue, it will raise far more questions than answers. Even while you identify action steps and make progress, there always will be more to learn and do. Staying engaged in the dialogue and process of working together will reap far greater rewards than simply making a decision about what “to do.” You might not go fast, but more likely you will go far.

4. Embrace paradox

Either-or thinking can stymie dialogue, learning, and change. All of us, individually and collectively, embody paradox – identities, beliefs, and experiences that seem to contradict each other. Listen to your intuition, as well as your intellect, to make sense of and hold ideas that appear contradictory. Welcome this in each other.

5. Seek intentional learning, not perfection

Change does not happen through a linear, discrete process of moving from “not knowing” to “knowing.” Instead, periods of deep and intentional inquiry will lead to breakthroughs of discovery...that set the stage for deeper inquiry and further discovery...and so on. Mistakes and failures will occur along the way. But if we are intentional – about learning and growing, being accountable to each other for the impact of our actions, and staying in relationship – we can make progress in our change efforts. This focus on intentionality contrasts with the dominant U.S. culture’s obsession with “perfection,” which is unrealistic, unachievable, and even undesirable. It distracts us from engaging in the lifelong work of making sustainable social change. “Perfect” truly can be the enemy of the good.