

Guidelines for Community Engagement

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What are they? Explicitly stated standards of behavior and expectations about individual and group interactions in any given space (classroom, meetings, etc.).

Why use them? Clearly outlined guidelines are an effective way to communicate and hold members accountable for the collective objective of those shared spaces, whether a workplace, classroom, living/social space, or meeting room. If those standards are not being met, the guidelines can be reintroduced and reviewed. In many ways, they contribute to equity since ALL members of a group are held accountable to them. In certain contexts, it might be appropriate to post the guidelines or have them readily available.

How do you create and effectively introduce them? In order to have as much buy-in and group ownership of the guidelines as possible, we suggest that you take some time at the beginning of a meeting or series of meetings to have a group discussion about the importance of common rules and understandings. You can begin by asking participants to think about “the best” and “the worst” dynamics they have experienced in a group setting. Based on that reflection, they can then brainstorm a list of do’s and don’ts to guide your dynamics as a group. Generally, this approach generates broad-based support for the guidelines since the group came up with them for themselves.

Sample Guidelines for Effective Community Engagement

1. Agree to respect others. This includes honoring others’ experiences, regardless of differences of opinion or perspective. Agree to disagree if necessary.
2. Basic courtesies of group interaction apply: arrive on time; turn off cell phones; don’t eat or drink in a manner that is disruptive to those around you.
3. Keep in mind that no one should be required or expected to speak for their whole race, gender, religious persuasion, or any other social group membership. They could not do so effectively even if they wanted to! Thus, agree to speak from your OWN experience and expect others to do the same.
4. Take responsibility for and accept the consequences of your words and actions. Moreover, your language, body language, and actions should be appropriate for the meeting space.
5. Make an effort to stay present, without side conversations.
6. Respect the foundational belief that equality pertains to all people with NO exceptions. To participate effectively, it is important to acknowledge that social inequalities exist of which you may be unaware.

7. Be willing to keep an open mind: it is *likely* that some of your beliefs will be challenged along the way. Consider leaning into the discomfort of not knowing, with a goal of learning without assumptions or judgment.

8. Agree to participate in the creation of a relatively “safe” atmosphere for open discussion.

9. [Add your own . . .]