

# **Listen to understand, not to respond.**

Growing in your understanding of race and racism requires a willingness to learn about the experiences of others who may not share your background or culture. Unfortunately, our ability to listen is often compromised by our desire to respond in some way to what has been said. This might be a positive response or a negative one, but either way, when we focus on what we will say next instead of allowing for time to simply process new information, we risk missing important pieces of what has been said.

# **Share accountability for challenging racism and the dominant culture.**

Often in discussions of race and racism, the burden of noticing and defending against biased or racist remarks and behavior falls on the shoulders of BIPOC. All group members, but especially white group members, should look out for potentially offensive or hurtful language and behavior and call it out when observed. If a BIPOC brings an incident to the group's attention, it is important that all group members acknowledge the harm done and take proactive steps to address it and prevent future harm.

# Step forward, step back.

We have all been in meetings with “that person” who dominates the conversation, shutting out other voices in the process. Commit to monitoring your own contributions to the conversations you will share during Project READY. Sometimes, you may need to “step back” to allow others to speak. At other times, you may need to “step forward” to inject a new perspective into the conversation. You should also agree to group norms for gently reminding each other to step forward and step back as appropriate. As part of these conversations, consider how the racial and gender backgrounds of the people in your group may contribute to expectations about who will do most of the speaking and whose voice might be more valued in other settings, such as faculty members. Commit to prioritizing and centralizing the voices of people of color and Native people within your group.

# Use “I” statements.

When we state our opinions as facts or attempt to generalize from our individual experiences, we can alienate others whose experiences may not be the same as ours. Instead, commit to using “I” statements to make it clear that your thoughts and experiences are your own. This isn’t about making your conversations nicer or more polite, but rather about fostering clear communication among group members and encouraging each person to take personal responsibility for their contributions.

# Brave space.

Exploring racial equity issues in community with others will open you up to vulnerability. You may say something hurtful, or you may be hurt by what someone else says or does in the space. Thus, you can't guarantee that your group can create a "safe space" for these conversations, in the sense of ensuring that no negative emotions arise from your work together. Instead, commit to establishing a brave space, which Brian Arao and Kristi Clemens (2013) have described as having five main elements:

1. Controversy with civility: varying opinions are encouraged and openly discussed.
2. Owning intentions and impacts: when someone is hurt by the actions or words of another, the incident is openly acknowledged and discussed.
3. Challenge by choice: each group member always has the option to step out of a challenging conversation.
4. Respect: group members show respect for each other's shared humanity.
5. No attacks: group members agree not to intentionally inflict harm on one another.