

Group Agreements

Establishing rules for working together is a great opportunity to shift culture by promoting equity and inclusion in group decision-making processes and general meeting spaces. Group agreements are a tool for shared accountability. Please find three example sets below. Feel free to edit and adapt for your own use.

Example 1. Racial Justice Tenets for Equitable Participation used by the Office of Equity, Vitality, & Inclusion

TENET	PRACTICE
Strive for Equitable & Diverse Membership & Representation	<p>We strive ALWAYS for equitable and diverse membership and representation across race, gender, culture, and levels of power at every table and every meeting.</p> <p>We acknowledge that inviting new and different voices to the table requires space, time, and flexibility. This work is not easy or quick. It is as much about the process as it is about the outcome. Time and space will bring new participants up to speed and help veteran participants slow down, all along the way, so that we may reap the benefits of full and diverse participation.</p>
Value Everyone’s Voice & Unique Contribution	<p>We value everyone’s voice and unique contribution by expecting participation from all members and actively welcoming those who are new, those who hold less institutional power or authority, and those who are traditionally and currently structurally marginalized.</p>
Share the Air	<p>We engage in new dialogue practices. If we typically are quiet, we practice speaking more. If we typically fill silence with our voice, we practice speaking less. If we are uncomfortable with silence, we practice sitting with it. If we are uncomfortable speaking, we push ourselves to share.</p> <p>In the words of Peggy McIntosh, we may rely on the “autocratic administration of time in the service of democratic distribution of time” particularly so voices of those at the margins are centered and heard.</p>
Listen for Understanding	<p>We listen earnestly to others for greater understanding of different and shared perspectives. We assume best intentions when others speak. We listen to truly understand why someone might think differently than we do.</p>
Intention Does Not Negate Impact	<p>We actively practice the norm of making it okay to call attention to wrongs, mistakes, or slip-ups that may occur. We are human and our behavior is the result of years of conditioning in systems of power, privilege, and oppression. We respond according to that conditioning. <i>Naming without blaming or shaming</i> is critical to overcoming that conditioning. Practice with “Oops and Ouch”. In this way we hold each other accountable, we accept responsibility, and we move on. If repair of harm is needed, we pause long enough to decide when and where that will happen.</p>

Challenge Dominant Cultural Norms

We challenge the cultural norms for convening and facilitating meetings by considering broader definitions of “acceptable” behavior or participation (interruption/silence, coming late/leaving early, defining what participation looks like, etc.). We acknowledge that “professionalism” and “institutional norms” have been defined according to a standard of White, patriarchal euro-centrism. We strive to create spaces where people of color, women, and gender diverse individuals lead.

Example 2. Group Agreements used by BUMG Diversity & Inclusion Advisory Council

Group Agreements	Practice
Share the air	We encourage full participation from everyone, so be mindful to make room for others as well
Assume best intentions	Try not to make negative assumptions about what someone shares or why they are sharing it. Respect the experience/perspective shared, even if it’s not yours.
Intention does not negate impact	We need to be accountable for our words and promote a space where we can all be honest. E.g., oops/ouch is an option when a participant shares something that comes out wrong (oops) or when a participant feels hurt by something someone else said (ouch).
What’s learned here leaves here, what’s said here stays here	Creating space for honesty means creating trust among the team, so as much as possible, particularly when something personal is shared, please do not repeat outside the group.

Example 3. Principles & Norms used by BMC Health Equity Work Group #2

Principles and norms to guide our health equity work

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Principles: Values and beliefs that are the basis of our equity work	Humility	We acknowledge that this journey will take time. We won’t be overconfident in our understanding and capabilities
	Community-based mindset	We acknowledge that we won’t be able to solve these inequities by ourselves and that progress requires collaboration and community partnerships
	Patient-centered approach	We will listen to and work with patients to design solutions that work to improve their outcomes and experiences
	Agency	We respect our patients’ ability to make independent choices
	Intersectionality	We will recognize that each patient represents many interdependent identities that influence their experiences
	Everything is on the table – big and small	We have the opportunity to alter our patients’ life courses. We will be transformative in our thinking. What we do should be different from what we’ve always done
	Bias toward action – with guardrails	We will not let uncertainty paralyze us. We will ensure that ‘perfect does not become the enemy of the good’
Norms: Expectations for our behavior and approach to our equity work	Be comfortable being uncomfortable	We will not shy away from the difficult questions and conversations. Instead, we will engage with our discomfort
	Step forward, step backward	If you are typically more introvert inclined, “step forward”, and if you are typically more extrovert inclined, “step backward”. Everyone should contribute equally, regardless of title of status in the organization
	No sacred practices	We commit to remaining curious and continuously challenging our beliefs and understanding. No idea or practice is immune to questioning
	Be multidisciplinary in our thinking	We will think holistically and work to build bridges across silos at all levels
	Be intentional with our language	We will be intentional with the language we use because words matter and have implications for the work that we do
	Act now...	We recognize that racial inequities have existed for generations. We must capitalize on the current moment and approach this work with a sense of urgency...
	... and commit to the longer term	...and we know that we have a long and challenging road ahead of us. We must sustain momentum and approach this as a longer-term effort
Accept that we will make – and learn from – mistakes	We are all on our own journeys in learning how to discuss and address inequities. We will hold each other accountable for mistakes made and look for “teaching moments”	

We will revisit and refine these principles and norms as new participants are added to the group and as our thinking progresses over time