

# Tips for Creating Effective White Caucus Groups

developed by (unless otherwise noted):

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## Description and Purpose

White Caucuses are an important mechanism for people who identify as white and/or have white skin privilege to do our own work. It provides us an environment and intention to authentically and critically engage in whiteness, white privilege, and hold each other accountable for change. We explore how to recognize whiteness and white privilege, identify and interrupt our internalized dominance, and collectively develop strategies for liberation and change.

Caucuses are our group-level work (building upon our individual self work) so that we individually and collectively can be effective partners for change.

## Pedagogical Approaches

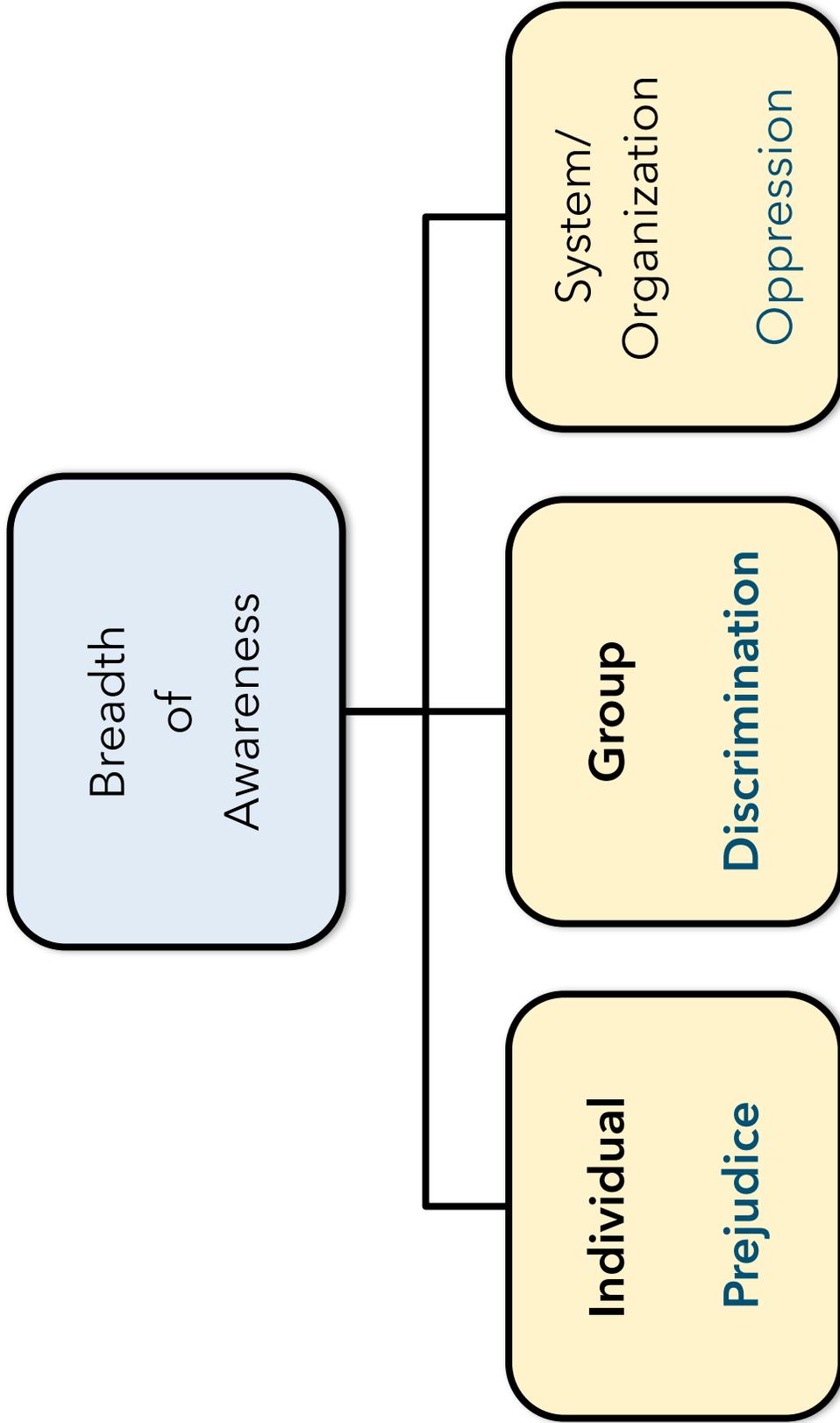
To be effective, we need to get our hands dirty. The solutions we generate depend a great deal on how we see the problem and we need to get out of the classroom.

Whiteness often has us stuck in our heads and intellectualizing. Racism and oppression are lived experiences, and embodied. We cannot be effective in partnering for change if we stay in our heads; we need to be courageous to engage, be vulnerable, feel, and be imperfect. Only then can we partner with other whites and people of color.

### Pre-Caucus Work

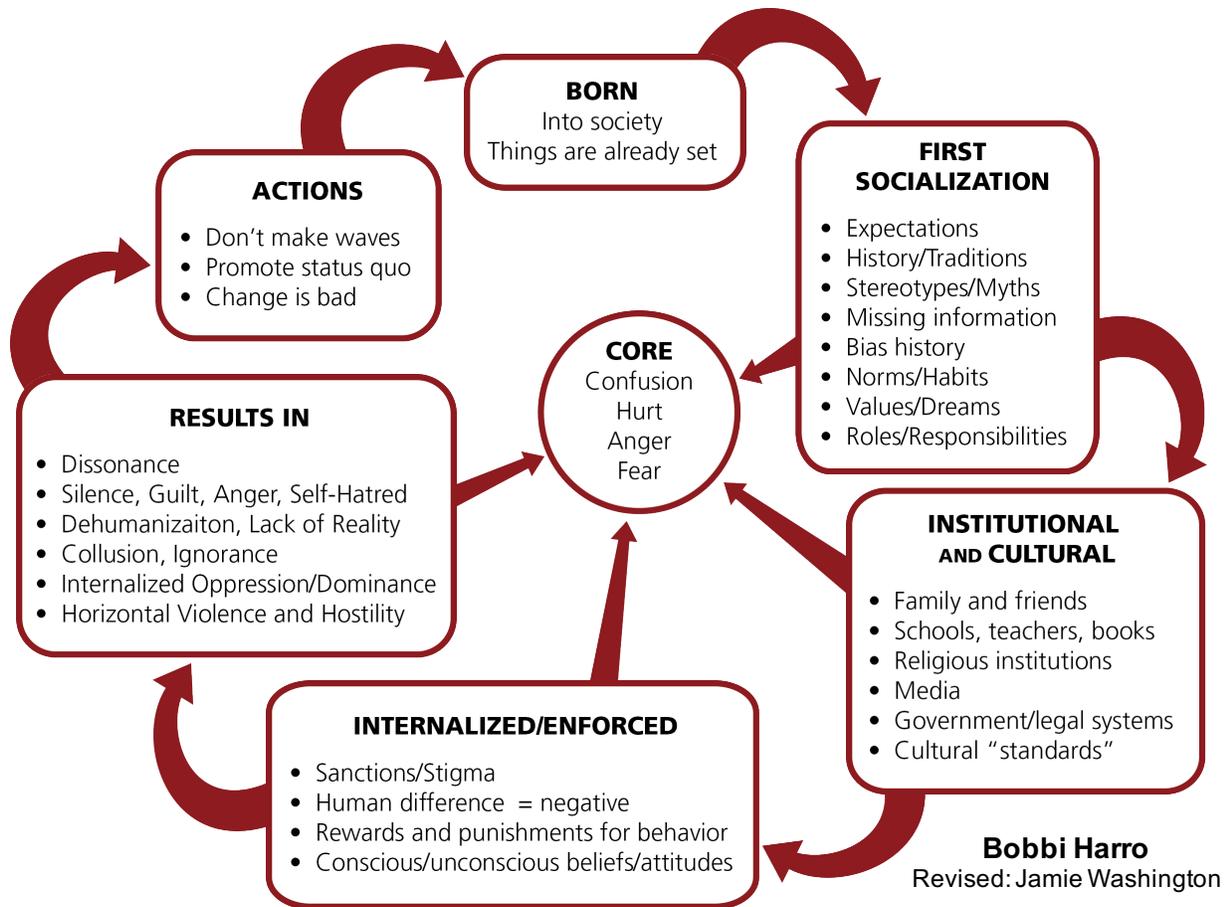
- It is important for caucus members to do their own self work exploring their relationship to whiteness, white privilege, dominance, systems of oppression and other intersectional areas of oppression.
- If the group is new, or if there are participants who have not done their individual group work, you will need to take time to prompt that self work.
- Related, the group must have some knowledge of “Dimensions of Difference” and “Cycle of Oppression and Socialization”
- Spend time identifying your intentions for meeting. This will help the group stay motivated toward liberation and healing rather than self-loathing and denial.

# Dimensions of Difference



courtesy of the Social Justice Training Institute [www.sjti.org](http://www.sjti.org)

# Cycle of Oppression/Socialization



### Set Up (Thoughts to Consider)

- In the least, you will need to arrange for a time and place to meet. If you are meeting in person, this can be an actual place; if you are meeting virtually, this can be via technology.
- Consider meeting over a food if you are meeting in person. Communion is a powerful energy for connection, but it is not necessary, nor always possible.
- Know that the time you have is never long enough, but it is enough. Traction happens over the course of time, session by session. To quote Pema Chodron, start where you are.
- Invest in the process of building the community. Whiteness trains us to skip process and go right to outcomes, and to be individuals. Building community allows us to support each other, hold each other accountable, and understand that we are truly a group/team.
- Having motivated participants is very important. You will experience resistance as a part of this liberatory journey, and having this motivation to lean on when it gets difficult is important. To quote, Jamie Washington, resistance is a sign that you are in the right place.
- Remember that Whiteness has us remain in discussion structure, timeframes, and agendas rather than engaging in our embodied experiences with whiteness, white privilege, and internalized dominance. We also get stuck in the quest for perfection before we start. Have the courage to start.
- Over time, you will need to do less facilitating and structuring as a invested group will steer themselves
- Start with a check in

# Sample Caucus Setup

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Caucuses are a structure for like groups to build community, share feelings, engage in dialogue, and doing “like group” work. Race-based caucuses then allow a group to see the complexities in how race and racism manifest in our lives. It is an opportunity for Reflective Practice and Action.

For White groups, we often need to reflect, explore, and act around:

- Discovering whiteness and its meaning
- Discovering our internalized dominance
- Learning how we show up in our whiteness
- Seeing ourselves in each other
- Needing individual and collective healing

Commit to intended focus and purpose for the caucus, and allow for specific topic flexibility (allow it to ebb and flow). Also be transparent about purpose so that we can acknowledge the distrust that we have in discussing whiteness with other people.

## *A Note About Whiteness and Multiracial People*

The US population is increasingly multiracial, yet we exist in a structure that operates mono- racially. Remember to recognize the complexities of race and know that multiracial people who are white as part of their racial identity or have white skin privilege will be exploring their racial experience on multiple levels. Providing fluidly to go to create multiple caucuses or have breakout time can be important.

## *Caucus Framing*

Share the importance of caucus group and why is it necessary now. Acknowledge that it is also problematic because race is complex and that it is essential for our consciousness building and for our ability to be effective partners. Bringing our own reflections and own stories will help us to go deeper into the work

## *Caucus Time*

Here sample flow for the White People Group:

- What thoughts or feelings do I have about meeting in caucus groups?
- How have I benefited from white privilege? How have I internalized white dominance?
- How can I move from colluding with a system or racism to taking responsibility for my role as an agent of racism? To taking action to end racism?

- What are the costs and benefits of becoming an ally to people of color and doing anti-racism work?
- How will we share our thoughts & experience with the large group? (Pay special attention to air time!)
- Caucus Debrief (Fishbowl)

### *Moving Toward Liberation*

developed by Tanya O. Williams, Ed.D.

Liberation is the creation of relationships, societies, communities, organizations and collective spaces characterized by equity, fairness, and the implementation of systems for the allocation of goods, services, benefits and rewards that support the full participation of each human and the promotion of their full humanness. (Love and Dejong, 2013)

Liberatory Consciousness is a way of living in a world characterized by oppressive systems with awareness and intentionality. It enables us to maintain an awareness of the dynamics of oppression without giving into despair and hopelessness and an awareness of the roles played by each individual in the maintenance of that system without blaming them for the roles they play. And it enables humans to live outside the patterns of thought and behavior learned through oppressive socialization process to support us in being intentional about our role in working toward transformation and the elimination of internalized dynamics (Love, 2003)

As your group develops and has significant time exploring and engaging white privilege and whiteness, they may be ready to explore how to dismantle our oppressive structure and help build one built upon liberation. Here are some additional prompts to use:

- Describe a memory of experiencing or witnessing someone mistreated because of they were a member of a subordinate racial identity group.
- What happened?
- What do you remember doing, saying?
- How did you feel?
- Did anyone interrupt the racism in this incident?
- What did they do to successfully interrupt the racism?
- If no one intervened to interrupt the racism, what do you wish that someone had done to interrupt the racism? What do you imagine that someone could have done to interrupt the racism?
- What is one thing that you wish that you would be able to do if that incident occurred again in the future?

## Additional Resources

# Authentic Dialogue With White Activists

*Developed by Dr. Craig Elliott 2016; adapted from Dr. Kathy Obear*

*In your small group share and relate to each other using any of the following prompts:*

1. When are you at your best as a white activist?
2. What are some of your fears as you engage issues of social justice as a white activist?
3. What common dominant group behaviors and attitudes do you still notice within yourself as a white activist?
4. When and where do you get stuck? Not show up very effective or competent as a white activist? How do you feel when you are stuck and less effective?
5. What would feel supportive from other white activists? To help you continue to grow and develop skills?
6. When have you:
  - Felt fear when interacting with people of color?
  - Felt fear when interacting with whites?
  - Felt guilt or shame as a white person?
  - Felt anger towards people of color?
  - Felt anger towards other whites?
7. What are 5+ ways you have personally benefitted from white privilege?
8. What are some examples of how you have intentionally used white privilege to help dismantle racism?
9. When have you used white privilege to gain an advantage for yourself? Greater access?
10. What racial stereotypes do you still find yourself believing, tripping over?
11. What are 3-5 examples (over the past 1-2 years) when you have reacted out of some of these racial stereotypes: either within a group of whites, or in a mixed race group, or with people of color?
12. Share an example of a time you spoke up and effectively engaged whites whose comments or behaviors were biased or misinformed: How did you feel? What did you do/say?

# Privileged Group Dynamics: Common Patterns of Whites

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Directions: review these common group dynamics:

- Check-off any dynamics which you have observed or heard a credible story
- Make a note next to the dynamics that you have personally experienced, felt, or done.
- Add any additional common patterns/dynamics you have witnessed or experienced.

**Some/Many Whites Tend to (consciously and unconsciously):**

1. believe they have "earned" what they have, rather than acknowledge the extensive white privilege and unearned advantages they receive; believe that if people of color just worked harder...
2. not notice the daily indignities that people of color experience; deny them and rationalize them away with PLEs (perfectly logical explanations)
3. work to maintain the status quo and protect the advantages and privileges they receive
4. believe that white cultural norms, practices and values are superior and better
5. internalize the negative stereotypes about people of color and believe that whites are smarter and superior to people of color
6. want people of color to conform and assimilate to white cultural norms and practices
7. accept and feel safer around people of color who have assimilated and are "closer to white"
8. blame people of color for the barriers and challenges they experience; believe that if they "worked harder" they could "pull themselves up by their bootstraps"
9. believe that people of color are not competent and are only hired/promoted to fill quotas
10. interrupt and talk over people of color
11. resent taking direction from a person of color
12. dismiss and minimize frustrations of people of color and categorize the person raising issues as militant, angry, having an "attitude," working their agenda, not a team player...

13. focus on their "good intent" as whites, rather than on the negative impact of their behavior
14. focus on how much progress we have made, rather than on how much more needs to change
15. want people of color to "get over it" and move on quickly
16. get defensive when people of color express their frustrations with current organizational and societal dynamics
17. "walk on eggshells" and act more distant and formal with people of color
18. segregate themselves from people of color and rarely develop authentic relationships across race
19. exaggerate the level of intimacy they have with individual people of color
20. fear that they will be seen and "found out" as a racist, having racial prejudice
21. focus on themselves as an individual (I'm not racist; I'm a good white), and refuse to acknowledge the cultural and institutional racism people of color experience daily
22. pressure and punish whites who actively work to dismantle racism to conform and collude with white racism; criticize, gossip about, and find fault with white change agents
23. expect people of color to be the "diversity expert" and take the lead in raising and addressing racism as their "second (unpaid) job"
24. minimize, under-value, ignore, overlook and discount the talents, competencies and contributions of people of color
25. rephrase and reword the comments of people of color
26. ask people of color to repeat what they have just said
27. assume the white teacher/coach/facilitator/employee, etc., is in charge/the leader; assume people of color are in service roles
28. rationalize away racist treatment of people of color as individual incidents or the result of something the person of color did/failed to do
29. dismiss the racist experiences of people of color with comments such as: That happens to me too...You're too sensitive...That happened because of \_\_\_\_\_, it has nothing to do with race!
30. judge a person of color as over-reacting and too emotional when they are responding to the cumulative impact of multiple recent racist incidents

31. accuse people of color of “playing the race card” whenever they challenge racist policies and practices; instead of exploring the probability of negative differential impact based on race, or that racist attitudes and beliefs are operating
32. if confronted by a person of color, shut down and focus on what to avoid saying or doing in the future, rather than engaging and learning from the interaction
33. look to people of color for direction, education, coaching on how to act & what not to do
34. compete with other whites to be “the good white:” the best ally, the one people of color let into their circle, etc.
35. if a white person makes a racist comment or action, aggressively confront them and pile on the feedback to distance from them and prove who is a better ally
36. seek approval, validation, and recognition from people of color
37. if confronted by a person of color, view it as an “attack” and focus on and critique HOW they engaged me, not my original comments or behaviors
38. disengage if feel any anxiety or discomfort
39. avoid confronting other whites on their racist attitudes and behaviors
40. when trying to help people of color, feel angry if they don’t enthusiastically appreciate the help
41. believe there is one “right” way, meaning “my way” or the “white way”
42. track patterns of differential treatment of people of color and intervene to stop inappropriate actions and educate others
43. continually learn more about the experiences of people of color and racism
44. recognize when people of color might be reacting out of cumulative impact, and offer space to talk about issues and their experiences
45. analyze policies and practices to assess any differential impact on people of color and intervene to create change
46. constantly track daily organizational activities to ensure fairness, respect, and inclusion for all people with respect to group dynamics, communication, task assignments, professional development opportunities, decision-making, conflict management, mentoring, networking, etc.

# Personal Qualities of an Effective Activist

developed by Craig Elliott PhD, 2016. Adapted from: Diane J. Goodman, Promoting Diversity and Social Justice: Educating People from Privileged Groups, Routledge, 2011.

- **Knowledge of the oppression** - Activists understand the oppression in its various forms and contexts. They are aware of how it impacts people from subordinated groups and dominant groups, and how it intersects with other forms of oppression.
- **Self-awareness** - Activists have insight into how their own socialization and experiences impact their attitudes, beliefs and behaviors. They maintain vigilance about how their privilege, sense of entitlement, and internalized dominance gets enacted, and actively work to dismantle them. This includes the ability to honestly self-reflect and assess their strengths and areas for growth.
- **Accountability** - Activists develop authentic relationships which facilitates honest feedback. They regularly check in with themselves and others to ensure they are acting in ways consistent with their values.
- **Non-defensiveness** - Activists are able to hear critical feedback and use this to continue their own learning and development as an ally. They can acknowledge mistakes and view feedback as “gifts” toward their growth.
- **Humility** - Activists can let go of their internalized sense of superiority and value others’ wisdom and ways of doing things. They are able to work with people from the subordinated groups in equitable and supportive ways without needing to rescue or dominate. They are willing to admit what they do not know and continue to learn.
- **Ability to choose appropriate action** - Activists are able to analyze situations and their own competence in order choose strategies appropriate to the situation. They recognize the power of collective action, rather than just individual efforts, for creating social change.

# Barriers to People from Privileged Groups Working Collaboratively

Diane J. Goodman (2011) Promoting Diversity and Social Justice: Educating People from Privileged Groups [www.dianejgoodman.com](http://www.dianejgoodman.com)

- Taking over. Individuals from dominant groups are often in positions of power and have confidence in their knowledge, skills and ability to get things done. Add to this internalized (often unconscious) superiority. People from privileged groups can share their resources in ways that enhances rather than controls or diverts the group.
- Wanting things to be done according to the norms of the dominant culture. When people from the oppressed group get to set the norms, whether it be about communication, conflict, food, time, or process, it may be different from how the dominant group usually does it. This requires people from privileged groups to value other ways of thinking, being and doing. They need to be willing to be flexible and out of their comfort zone.
- Trying to be one of them. Whether out of shame, lack of rootedness in one's own culture or wanting to be accepted, people from privileged groups cannot pretend to be someone they are not. More likely, people will be seen as "wannabes", making it more difficult for trust to develop. People from dominant groups can be sensitive to their enactment of privilege while being clear about who they are and their values.
- Seeking emotional support. People who work together ideally can develop relationships that are mutually caring and respectful. However, people from the privileged group should not expect emotional caretaking from people from the oppressed group.
- Expecting to be taught. People from dominant groups can learn a lot from working with people from marginalized groups. However, this can be done without looking to people from the oppressed group to teach them.
- Expecting gratitude or praise. Everyone likes to feel that her/his efforts are recognized and appreciated, but as an ally in social justice work, that is not the purpose. Social justice work is done for one's own and others liberation, not as charity or to be seen as a good person.
- "The main goal [of allies] is to develop relationships of solidarity, mutuality and trust, rooted in a praxis of intentional anti-racist thought, action and reflection." (Raible, 2009)

# **Liberating Behaviors and Attitudes from Members of Privileged Groups that Shift the Status Quo**

Developed By: Dr. Kathy Obear, [kathy@drkathyobear.com](mailto:kathy@drkathyobear.com) [www.drkathyobear.com](http://www.drkathyobear.com)

1. Consistently track interactions and group dynamics: work to create balance of engagement among all members; and speak up when you notice exclusionary comments and behaviors.
2. Cultivate relationships with other members of privileged groups who actively work to dismantle oppression and create inclusive organizations. Talk honestly about where you get stuck and ask for feedback and coaching.
3. Continue to deepen your awareness about privilege and dominant culture, and how these operate in you, others, and organizations/systems.
4. Recognize and change in the moment when you are operating out of stereotypes, privilege, and/or dominant cultural beliefs.
5. Track patterns of negative differential treatment on members of marginalized groups and intervene to stop inappropriate actions and educate others.
6. Recognize and intervene when unconscious bias and prejudice are impacting opinions and decisions.
7. Continually learn more about the experiences of members of marginalized groups and oppression.
8. Recognize when members of marginalized groups might be reacting out of cumulative impact, and offer space to talk about issues and their experiences.
9. Analyze policies, programs, services, and practices to assess any differential negative impact on members of marginalized groups and shift practices to create change.
10. Track current utilization of services and assess the degree of satisfaction and usage by members of marginalized groups.
11. Regularly assess the climate and culture of organizations and analyze the data for any differential experiences from members of marginalized groups.
12. Constantly track organizational activities to ensure fairness, respect, and inclusion for all people with respect to group dynamics, communication, task assignments, professional development opportunities, decision-making, conflict management, mentoring, networking, hiring and promotion, etc.

13. Support others when they question or challenge un-inclusive or disrespectful behaviors or policies so they are not alone. Recognize that marginalized group members have a far greater risk if they challenge and speak up.
14. Ask questions to seek to understand BEFORE disagreeing or defending your position.
15. If your behavior has had an impact on a member of a marginalized group, avoid defensively talking about your intent. Instead, listen thoughtfully to their feelings and perspective; acknowledge the impact; make amends and change your behavior as needed.
16. In meetings and conversations, ask these questions, "How might this impact members of different marginalized groups?" "What perspectives and input might we be missing from different marginalized groups?"
17. Talk with members of privileged groups who seem to be colluding, "going along to get along" ~ help them consider the consequences of their actions and shift their behaviors.

# Expectations for Us Whites Engaging in Race Work

Dr. Craig Elliott II (c) 2012 "An Open Letter to Us White People in Engaging Race Work"

I offer these as tools for developing and deepening our authentic and systematic engagement toward social change. The path is complex, and often messy, as we begin unraveling privilege from our lives.

1. Don't Run Away—This is what we are trained to do. We must stop this behavior. For those of you whose inner voice is now saying, "I don't run away," that is exactly what I am talking about. The moment we create distance between our self and another, or distance from an issue, we are running away.
2. Untrain Yourself—We must read, talk, critically reflect on issues, stories, and examples of how injustice and privilege show up in our lives. We must check in with others on our assumptions until we can learn to trust our perspectives again. And then we must act to make changes, which starts the learning cycle again. We need to do our homework.
3. Lead by Example—We need to stop waiting for someone else to do it. Start down the path of freedom by modeling effective resistance strategies in the moment.
4. Self As Instrument—We need to share our stories of struggle, success, mistakes, and reconciliation. Doing so most importantly illuminates the path for others to follow. In addition, when people see us doing our own work, it creates opportunities for collaboration, which is ultimately what needs to happen to shift the system of oppression.
5. Support and Encourage—We need to acknowledge the fear and isolation that comes from refusing privilege and shifting an oppressive system. Our support and encouragement is the salve for the hurt that comes from a system trying to keep us in line. It also provides motivation to stay in the work, keep acting for change, and keep trying.
6. Celebrate the Discomfort—Learning and growing is inherently an uncomfortable process, whether it is muscles growing, learning organic chemistry, or growing in our social justice consciousness. We are learning to swim up stream, and we need our new muscles developed.
7. Connect to a community—We can't do this work alone, and people at all stages of development need collaborators and supporters. In addition, we need to create our communities of folk who are willing to engage in the work with us. We need to stop worrying that we will be perceived as white supremacists by having a whiteness dialogue group. Invite people in.
8. Accountability—We need to express what the expectations are of socially just White people in the organization, why being so is in our holistic interests, and hold our colleagues and ourselves accountable for acting as such.
9. Take Risks—Actions that interrupt oppression and injustice are often messy and rarely neatly resolved. We need to take the risk to interrupt the cycle even when we are indelicate, inarticulate, or messy ourselves. Find the courage to do what is needed when it is needed.