

## Facilitator's Guidelines

Prepared by the Victoria Multifaith Society and the Centre for Civic Religious Literacy, with funding provided by the Vancouver Foundation and the Province of British Columbia



**CCRL** The Centre for Civic Religious Literacy  
**CLRC** Le centre de litt ratie religieuse civique

# Facilitator's Guidelines

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Dear Facilitators,

Thank you for facilitating these anti-racism workshops. Your leadership is invaluable. By facilitating, you are encouraging empathy and insights towards personal and social transformation. A discussion about race and racism is everyone's responsibility in society, so *thank you* for taking on this role. It is not easy but it is important, so we share these details to help you understand this tool. We also offer some suggestions to support you in this important conversation. With that in mind, please use this resource as a Toolkit for your local needs. We encourage you to continue improving it to progress this conversation.

## *How much time commitment is involved?*

We are suggesting that the workshops be 90 minutes in length, held on a weekly basis, but this is flexible. Facilitators are free to adapt this timing depending on the needs of the group. The "Pre-workshop" material is highly encouraged because it will add significantly to the value of the tool. Reflections and comments drawn from their learning will inform the Debriefing discussion and can be used as a flexible time element by the facilitator.

## *Who are the workshops designed for?*

The tool is intended for people of different backgrounds and age groups, from teenagers and up. The size of the group can also vary widely since the format involves breaking into small groups for the first discussions. If the group is too large to do the Debriefing discussion together, it can be divided into small groups.

## *Who can facilitate?*

Some will be trained facilitators, others may have little experience leading groups. The most important element is to have knowledge of the subject and a sensitivity to the dynamics involved. We also encourage facilitators of all backgrounds to remember that a facilitator's role is to:

- ✚ Promote and guide discussion. Ensure that each participant has an opportunity to contribute, and that the conversation is on track and moving forward.
- ✚ Set an inclusive tone and space so all participants are comfortable to contribute.
- ✚ Encourage honest self-reflection and analysis so that participants reflect, listen, and grow.

To that end, we would like to suggest the following guidelines for the sessions:

- ✚ That all facilitators reflect (before, during, and after each workshop) on their own perspectives and understanding about race and racism, and how this identity may also include many others, such as ethnicity, religion, spirituality, socio-economic status, gender, sexual orientation, etc. Please read "Facilitator Self-Reflection" (page 4) for more details.
- ✚ That all facilitators maintain an optimal atmosphere for learning by setting common guidelines for the group to prevent or defuse any potential conflict that may develop between participants. To do so, please read the "Opening Agreements" (page 7) to the group so that everyone begins with common guidelines.

## *Is there room for flexibility in the format?*

Every group will have a different character and different needs. Please use this Toolkit<sup>1</sup> for your needs and be flexible in your pre-workshop preparation and the duration of your sessions in order to meet the needs of your group. To this effect, we encourage you to:

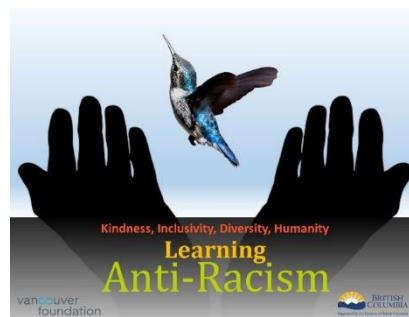
- ✚ Consider including a “sacred opening” that you are comfortable with, resonates with you and is a part of your identity. This can be a time of individual or group reflection, meditation, prayer, ceremony, or reading, and/or setting the atmosphere with music that would suit your group, if appropriate. It’s important to check first whether group members are comfortable with this.
- ✚ Consider switching up the small discussion groups after the first or second session, or adding time for Q&A if you include a guest speaker.
- ✚ Consider hosting a full debrief session if you host a series of workshops or the full selection of eight workshops. It would be an opportunity for attendees to reflect and consider: "Are you thinking differently after this? Are you having new conversations that you found difficult before?" As a full session on its own, the debrief can be a time to cement the relationships that have been built before they leave too.

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*The overarching goal of Learning Anti-Racism Toolkit is to help us reimagine our communities & find ways to create an inclusive environment where everyone belongs, everyone contributes and all are considered worthy of respect.*

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Deconstructing racism will take time because it was constructed over a long period time. We wish you every success in pursuing this goal and express enormous appreciation for helping to bring it about. Thank you for invaluable leadership.



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<sup>1</sup> Regarding the graphics chosen for the project, the symbolism of the hummingbird and some of the meanings are health, joy and harmonious relationship. In this website on the symbolism in the Pacific Northwest culture, the lesson of the hummingbird legend is that each person has gifts to give. <https://www.first-nations.info/hummingbird-totem.html>

## *Facilitator Self-Reflection*

*These questions prompt individual reflection to help facilitators reflect on their own knowledge, unconscious bias, and potential areas of privilege (based on one's ethnicity, identity, or role, such as a community leader, instructor, or another person of authority in the discussion space). They are listed to encourage further thinking and preparation for these discussions.*

### ***Reflection about my identity, perspective, and others' perception of me***

- What are my goals and motivation in facilitating these sessions?
- When I talk about the different groups in each session, am I using my own perspective or bias to describe /discuss them? Or, am I sharing the voices of those from the actual community so that they are represented and not me?
- How may the participants relate to me (or not), based on my visible and invisible aspects of identity (related to title, gender, race, ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation, education level, height, neuro diversity, ableism, income, etc.)? How can I acknowledge my privileges (or lack of) in a way that creates comfort and openness among participants?
- Considering the group and the subject matter, am I the best person to facilitate, based on my identity, resources, location, knowledge, and perspectives? If not, who should I invite to facilitate or co-facilitate with me? Should it be someone from the racial or religious community that we will be discussing?<sup>2</sup>

### ***Reflection about the potential participants***

- Who are the participants? What do I know about their lived experience in relation to each session? What more do I need to learn?
- To what extent am I aware of the diversity within the groups we are discussing about in each session? Do I need to learn more to see the diversity within each group based on their history, politics, geography, etc.?
- Why are participants attending these sessions? What is their objective in comparison to my own?
- Am I familiar with the different abilities and language proficiency among my participants? Will different forms of communication and engagement be needed to make this accessible for my different participants?
- How should the large group and small groups be formed to be mindful of those who are sharing and those who are listening? Discretion and consultation may be needed to determine whether diversity within each group is best or whether it's

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<sup>2</sup> We highly recommend you find a co-facilitator who is a member of the community you are discussing in your workshop, if you do not belong to that community yourself. Because racism is multi-layered for different groups, it is hard for someone not from the community to fully understand the lived perspective within that group. To avoid misrepresenting the group or causing unintended harm, please seek a co-facilitator from the community in discussion to offer the needed perspective to engage appropriately.

more appropriate to divide participants based on race, ethnicity, gender, religion, language, or in another way so that all participants feel safe sharing honestly for the purpose of understanding. What grouping will increase understanding and minimize harm?<sup>3</sup>

### ***Reflection about my responsibility as facilitator***

- Racism is political. Am I familiar with the politics and personal history among participants that may influence the group discussion? How prepared am I to listen and ask questions if I am not familiar with the details of those experiences?
- Am I prepared to engage with the trauma, anger, confusion, silence, or discomfort that may arise from these sessions? How do I best respond if this happens? What if these emotions trigger me?
- What is my plan if I find this role more difficult than anticipated? Who is a local facilitator or guest speaker<sup>4</sup> I can reach out to for support?

### ***Reflection about how to facilitate***

#### **Preparing for facilitation**

- Have I researched how to do an appropriate land acknowledgement<sup>5</sup>? Is it possible for me to personalize it to explain how I understand or relate to local Indigenous Peoples or treaties?
- Concerning our meeting space, how can I acknowledge any power and privilege that may be inherent in the space, so that discomfort can be minimized?<sup>6</sup> And, if there is discomfort, how can I physically rearrange or transform the space to make it welcoming?

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<sup>3</sup> At times, a person's questions, despite their sincerity to understand others respectfully, may be harmful to people listening to the question because of harmful experiences a listener may have had in their past that are related to aspects of the question. Though a listener may not intentionally mean to relate their past to a current situation, those who have been traditionally marginalized in society may have experienced countless instances of racism. As a result, it is natural for many to unconsciously relate their past and present, especially during a conversation about racism. For this reason, a facilitator needs to carefully consider the experiences of speakers and listeners and create a grouping and atmosphere that can be welcoming to everyone.

<sup>4</sup> Guest speakers for these workshops need to be selected carefully. They can be from any part of society, but need to inform, be aware of, and offer different perspectives, be knowledgeable in their topic, promote dialogue, and ideally promote self-reflection among the participants.

<sup>5</sup> A land acknowledgement or territorial acknowledgement is a formal statement, often spoken at the beginning of a public event, which is taking place on land originally inhabited by or belonging to Indigenous Peoples. Acknowledging territory shows recognition of and respect for Indigenous Peoples. It is recognition of their presence both in the past and the present. Some examples of land acknowledgements are from the [University of Northern British Columbia](#), the [University of Victoria](#), and the [BC Humanist Association](#). To find your local traditional territory and peoples, check: <https://native-land.ca/>, and the [Government of BC First Nations pronunciation guide](#).

<sup>6</sup> Discomfort can exist in schools, religious buildings, hospitals, and other buildings for some individuals depending on their experience in them.

- To create a welcoming space and be available for additional support, how early will I arrive before the session?
- What local and/or online resources or supports (e.g. counsellors, art therapists, other professionals, reading material, or community leaders or groups) can I offer pre-, during, or post-sessions, so that participants who are triggered or harmed during our group conversations can access them when needed and practice self-care?

### Opening and during the facilitation

- What will my opening remarks at each session look like?
- As the group facilitator, how can I encourage greater comfort and sense of trust among the participants so that they are open with and honestly listening to one another?
- Participants may be arriving from various activities and circumstances. How can I help participants settle, refocus, and prepare for the discussions when they first arrive? Is a sacred opening, sharing circle, silent note taking on their phones or in a notebook appropriate?
- What listening or dialogue exercises should I begin each session with to create the sense of community and trust that is needed for this topic?
- Are there personal stories or perspectives that I can or should share to model being open in a brave space?
- When we break into small groups, should I select facilitators to lead the conversation? If so, should I approach specific people beforehand for their help, to ensure that those individuals are those who comply with the group guidelines and workshop goals? Or, is it more appropriate to invite external facilitators to guide small group discussions?

### Closing the facilitation

- How can I close our sessions in a reflective and thoughtful way that promotes further thinking, listening, and self-care? Is a sacred closing, sharing circle, or silent note taking on their phones or in a notebook appropriate?

### After the facilitation

- To create a welcoming space and offer support, how long am I willing to stay after a session if people would like to talk more? How will I communicate these options for further dialogue with the participants?
- How can I practice self-care for myself after these difficult conversations? (For reference, see: ["Four Key Dimensions of Self-Care"](#))

## Opening Agreements:

*The best discussion guidelines are those that are co-created with attendees, agreed upon, and specific to the dynamics of each group because every group is different. These are recommended guidelines and we encourage you to build upon them and adapt them for your group needs. We encourage you to review the agreed upon guidelines at the beginning of each workshop to remind all attendees, and reset the tone and focus of each session. Please feel free to use and adapt the following as a script or even as a written agreement. These guidelines are also in the “Learning Anti-Racism Participant’s Copy”.*

Welcome to/back to our important conversations about race and racism. Let’s be mindful of the importance of seven key practices in our discussion.

### 1. Promote the value and practice of respect:

Please communicate your ideas respectfully. This includes respecting the value of the person behind the idea. We may not agree with each story, idea, or question that is raised but respecting the person can help us go through these sessions together with honesty and empathy. This makes room for others and active listening.

Respect looks different in every culture. To agree or show that they are listening, some cultures nod in the middle of listening. To be neutral, other cultures do not like to nod. Some cultures like to interact in the middle of discussion to show that they are highly engaged in conversation, while other cultures may see that as interrupting and being rude. Let’s discuss what respect looks like for our group of participants. (Include specific examples here that the group agrees on.)

### 2. Maintain confidentiality:

Race and racism can relate to very personal experiences, observations, or thoughts. Let’s agree to keep our comments private. If we get permission from someone to share their stories, observations, or thoughts with others who are outside our group meeting, let’s agree to share the comments without naming the person who said it. Let’s be sure to omit any identifiable details that can trace the story back to them too. This way, we can create an environment of trust that welcomes more sharing from the group.

### 3. Use “I” statements:

All participants are individuals and do not reflect their community, affiliated group, neighbourhood, etc. Sharing “I” statements helps us remember that each person is sharing from their personal perspective and experiences. “I” statements are not shared in defensive or offensive tones. For example, “I feel frustrated when people ask me ‘Where are you really from?’ when I was born in Canada.” [Ask your group to offer other examples that are appropriate for the group and include them here.]

4. Practice active listening:

Most people listen in order to share their own ideas. Active listening encourages listeners to focus on the ideas that are shared, ask questions about it to understand it further, and can show the speaker that they are being heard and valued. This guideline relates back to the first one about respecting the person and comments. Discussing race and racism can be hard. Active listening can also help us explore perspectives and ideas that are new and complex to us.

5. Permission to pass or walk away:

Everyone processes ideas and thoughts differently. The opportunity to stay silent in reflection or walk away when triggered or overwhelmed recognizes everyone's willingness to be vulnerable in this important topic. This permission to pass or walk away creates the sense of trust and patience needed for this topic. This does not mean that the person is not engaged or devalues our discussion. It can mean that they need to take a break or that someone in the group could have said something hurtful unconsciously or consciously. Since this discussion can be personal, it is something we should be mindful of and relates again to guideline #1 - respect.

6. Recognize the importance of self-care:

Related to guideline #4, self-care recognizes that people may need further supports or processing before, during, or after our discussion. Kindness to ourselves is just as important as kindness to others. Our conversation may resurface hurtful feelings or experiences for some people. [\*"Four Key Dimensions of Self-Care"\*](#) may be a useful resource in this respect.

7. Promote a brave space:

It is not easy sharing personal stories and experiences about racism. When people share, it requires bravery and courage from anyone who shares and those who listen. In this type of open sharing, questions and ideas will be raised. This means that ideas can be challenged too. In this way, our space is not necessarily safe or comfortable for everyone at all times, but brave, respectful, open dialogue creates opportunity for listening, understanding, and learning.

Are there any guidelines you think we should add for our group?