



## Living in the Tension The Quest for a Spiritualized Racial Justice

### Facilitation Guide

This guide offers some ideas for consideration, especially for those who have never facilitated a group discussion/workshop series process.

#### Who can lead this series?

- Anyone who has read the book in its entirety, has a vested interest in the topic, and is willing to collaborate with community members (seeking counsel along the way).
  - Although it is not required that someone have prior facilitation experience, it is certainly helpful.
  - Although it is not required that the facilitation be shared, having a facilitation team of at least two people is encouraged.
    - Mixed-gender teams would be highly desirable.
    - Mixed-race teams would be strongly advised if the participant group will be mixed-race.

**Note:** Some of the exercises will play out very differently if you work with a mixed-race group. It will require a far more nuanced understanding of the issues on the part of the facilitator(s). This is particularly true for exercises in the two strands related to Developing our Community: Exploring Tensions Together and Exploring a Dilemma.

#### What are the core principles a facilitator should exemplify?

Borrowing from [AWARE-LA's Core Principles](#), a facilitator should be able to adopt, express, and endorse the following core principles in order to run a successful series:

**1. Avoid shaming one another.**

Accept that people give what they can. Take care not to shame people for their opinions and feelings, understanding that we are all in process and at different points in our journey. Within this orientation, uplift the need to challenge one another with care to facilitate growth.

**2. Avoid competing with one another.**

Competing to be the “most down” white person is counterproductive and discouraged. Avoid an attitude of challenge and/or a “show and prove” expectation. Instead, offer the invitation that, “All are welcome, especially those just starting to get awoken to these issues. We value you and are glad you are here. Every voice counts, and we’re here to support and strengthen each other’s voices.”

**3. FOR WHITE PEOPLE: Seek to create healthy and whole identities as anti-racist white people.**

Avoid getting stuck in the debate around whether or not white people can be “good” or not. Racism has been used as a tool to separate one from another and it has been destructive for everyone, including white people. Our own humanity has been reduced as we have been largely socialized to care less about people of color. We need to heal from our positions as

bystanders and perpetrators to injustice. Being healthy and whole means we create an identity that supports us in being anti-racist.

**4. FOR WHITE PEOPLE: We must love ourselves in order to love other white people, and loving white people is essential if we are going to be effective allies for change.**

A common pattern exists among white people. Increasing consciousness around racism often results in heightened anger toward other white people who are not yet racially aware. In effect, there is little tolerance for white people who are just a few steps behind us on this journey toward having an anti-racist practice. If we want to influence those white people to join us, we need to engage them with love. And in order to engage them with love, we needed to love and forgive ourselves for the unconscious white people we have been.

**5. Both action and consciousness-raising are necessary.**

Uplift and appreciate all efforts intended to dismantle racism, privilege, and white supremacy. Some people focus more on action, some on consciousness-raising. A team tries to avoid attacking any effort as less essential than another. And, the challenge to *both* take action *and* raise our level of awareness is important.

**6. Accountability is best practiced within ongoing, reciprocal relationships.**

See [AWARE-LA's Accountability and Alliance Building](#) document for a full explanation of AWARE-LA's history, process, and intentions for being accountable as individuals and as an organization.

**What is recommended for group size?**

- Keeping the group size manageable will allow each person to fully engage in the dialogue and offer his/her personal experiences and perspectives.
- The workshop series can be effectively completed with as few as 5 individuals, but it is not recommended for groups over 25 unless highly skilled facilitators are available.
- The larger the group size the more likely it is you will need more experienced facilitation experience to move the group forward successfully.

**What is recommended in terms of scheduling?**

- Reading one chapter and completing the selected, corresponding exercises at least once each month is recommended. Every other week meetings may also be successful. However, moving faster than that risks participants failing to complete the reading in a timely way.
- It is up to you how much time your group spends on any one chapter. There may be some chapters that have more relevant exercises for the group such that you may extend your time working through that chapter for more than one or two sessions. There may also be some chapters that do not resonate as fully, and you may decide to select only one or two of the available strands from that chapter.
- This workshop series has been designed with the understanding that most groups will be unable to complete all exercises for all chapters. It is up to the facilitators (hopefully in consultation with their group) to determine where to focus their time and energy.

### How should coordination occur?

- Someone will need to take responsibility for keeping things moving forward.
- Logistics to be managed include: date/time/location setting, sending reminders regarding meetings and what is to be read, and facilitation duties (downloads, facilitator preparation, implementation, materials creation/gathering).
- This responsibility can be shared, but a consistent coordinator/facilitation team is essential.

### What is recommended for group composition?

- This series was reviewed by a multi-racial team in order to ensure that all exercises (except those noted) should be workable for a multi-racial group. That said, the series was designed with a particular focus on supporting white people to more successfully expand the “social justice choir” in their communities and more effectively participate in racial justice efforts.
- It is altogether likely that some strands will be more useful to mixed-race groups than others. Although it may not be true for all groups, some considerations include:
  - Mixed-race groups who want to focus on cross-race relationship building and/or discussing how specific issues are treated in their communities might focus their attention on the Developing our Community strands.
  - People of color invested primarily in seeing their white colleagues become more skilled in articulating racial justice concepts and using them to encourage other white folks to join anti-racism efforts may appreciate a focus on the Developing our Analysis and Developing our “Both/And” Skills Sets strands
- Many issues consistently arise when engaging in dialogues on race. Although not an exhaustive list, here are a few things you might consider:
  - *Mixed race* groups offer contrasting experiences. People can benefit from hearing about differential life experiences.
  - *Mixed race* groups can also reinforce a common problem: when white people are new to race dialogue, people of color are often perceived as resources in the room. This can mean that people of color end up carrying the burden of teaching the white people. A multi-racial group would need to address this issue.
  - *Mixed race* groups offer practice on being open to talking about white privilege and racism in the presence of people of color. This can be effective when group members already have a trusting relationship with each other. With little or no prior relationship building, these conversations can be very difficult for all involved.
  - *Single race* groups offer people a chance to delve deeply into their own experiences with those with similar exposure and begin to practice keeping each other focused on racial justice. This can lead to deep insights. It can also lead to the group losing focus when resistances arise.
  - *Single race* groups offer people an opportunity to express ideas that usually are kept hidden out of fear or anxiety. Conversations can take place without worry of injuring or burdening people of different racial backgrounds.
  - *Single race* groups of white people can be seen as problematic for a number of reasons. If you are unsure of how to answer questions regarding this choice, refer to

[AWARE-LA's - Why a White Space?](#) document detailing the reasons for meeting in a white space for our group's rationale.

- *A growth model:* You might consider starting with a *single race* group. This would allow those who are new to the dialogue to build skills prior to being required to practice them. Then the group can expand to create a broader, *mixed race* group that extends the dialogue.

### **What else is important to know about facilitating a group through this series?**

- The first exercise includes an introduction and discussion of community guidelines. It is strongly suggested that you implement that exercise. If you use the handouts provided, it breaks down the rationale for creating a “brave space” for dialogue as opposed to a “safe space.” The important idea is that the idea of “safety” has often been misunderstood by people (usually people of privilege) to infer that the dialogue will not push against comfort zones. We need to be ready for the dialogues to be uncomfortable, and so we ask people to be brave. Also, mixed-race groups are unlikely to be safe for people of color, and therefore, the best we can ask is for people to be brave.
- Essential to recognize is that many people enter dialogues on race with a lot of apprehension. It is important to take the time to create a sense of community within the group for people to share deeply and express their true feelings. If people fear attack or vilification, they will remain guarded and open sharing will not happen.
- A wonderful story was shared with me about a facilitator who began her group with the following (this is a paraphrase):
  - “We’re going to eat, and we’re going to share. And, we’re going to get uncomfortable, and it will be messy, and it will all be okay. There is nothing you can say in this dialogue that will make me love you any less.”
  - “A main feature of white culture is perfectionism and a certain sense of love being conditional. We’re going to disrupt that. We’re going to love each other. We’re going to cultivate the kind of community space that has been missing in white culture. We’re going to create something new, a community where we can get really honest, knowing that we’re not here to judge one another.”
- Here are a few additional thoughts about creating a brave space:
  - Acknowledge we are all entitled to be treated with respect and that the group is engaged in a learning process. It is okay that we each pick up new ideas at different rates.
  - Discuss the role that challenge and critique will play in the group. Respectful challenging of ideas can be beneficial, while defensive critiques are destructive. Consider what each might look like so that the difference is clear to group members.
  - Create a shared agreement for how the group will deal with conflict in a way that maintains each person’s humanity.

To prepare to facilitate, you might consider reviewing the following information offered by Dr. Kathy Obear. It is a wonderful self-reflective resource to help ground facilitation in the kind of values and intentions that are most likely to lead to successful relationship building and positive impact.

## ***Developing White Allies: Challenges, Dilemmas, and Best Practices***

**Dr. Kathy Obear, Social Justice Training Institute; Alliance for Change**

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<b>What are Your Inclusion Values and Intentions?</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• create greater inclusion</li> <li>• leave people feeling whole</li> <li>• engage in respectful dialogue</li> <li>• do no harm</li> <li>• “go with the flow;” trust the process</li> <li>• deepen learning and growth</li> <li>• meet the people “where they are” without judgment</li> <li>• use the triggering moment to deepen understanding</li> <li>• relate in to the person; connect with them</li> <li>• create space for honest, authentic dialogue; sharing of feelings, perceptions</li> <li>• invite people to learn from the situation</li> <li>• model the social justice behaviors you espouse: authenticity, empathy, self-reflection, engagement...</li> <li>• deepen understanding across differences</li> <li>• encourage identity development and growth</li> <li>• demonstrate compassion and empathy</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• identify the deeper issues fueling the feelings, perceptions and behaviors of others</li> <li>• create safety for the expression of differing viewpoints</li> <li>• treat others with respect and dignity</li> <li>• encourage more people to engage in the dialogue</li> <li>• support people to disagree with each other in respectful ways</li> <li>• model effective recovery skills after making an inappropriate comment or when your behavior results in negative impact</li> <li>• identify inappropriate behaviors and explore the negative impact</li> <li>• interrupt unproductive, inappropriate behaviors and group dynamics</li> <li>• build a “bridge” and a connection with the other person</li> </ul>
<b>Have you ever had these less productive intentions?</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• win the argument</li> <li>• get even; get them back</li> <li>• to be right; prove the other person wrong</li> <li>• to prove you are competent, smart</li> <li>• assert your power and authority</li> <li>• gain status and prestige; be admired</li> <li>• to be liked, to fit in</li> <li>• intimidate the other person</li> <li>• “put them in their place,” shut them up</li> <li>• punish the other person</li> <li>• embarrass or put down them down</li> <li>• make them feel your pain and hurt</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• change the other person’s views, feelings or behaviors</li> <li>• to make people learn</li> <li>• trick and “out fox” the other person</li> <li>• avoid confrontation and conflict</li> <li>• keep the conversation “under control”</li> <li>• avoid intense emotions: in self and others</li> <li>• to seen as a “good one,” an ally</li> <li>• make everyone feel happy and harmonious</li> <li>• avoid feeling or being viewed as “incompetent”</li> </ul>