

Racial Identity Caucuses

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What are Caucuses?

All people of color and white people are affected by racism and have to work together to end racism. However, how we are affected by racism and the work we have to do is different. Caucuses are times when people of color and white people within an organization meet separately in order to do our different work.

Caucusing can lead to more authentic and powerful integrated groups. Both people of color and white people are needed to work collectively for racial equity, but they have different work to do - precisely because of their different experiences with and location relative to white culture and privilege. Working only in integrated groups puts an undue burden on people of color to be the teachers and obscures the responsibility of white people to do their own work. The value of caucusing is so both white people and people of color have intentional space and time to focus on their respective work to dismantle racism and advance racial equity.

What are some reasons to have caucuses?

People of Color can caucus in order to:

- ✚ Provide a safe space of relief and support for people of color to talk about and address internalized and interpersonal experiences of racism and how it affects each person personally and professionally without having to explain it to white people
- ✚ Discover patterns of white culture and privilege within the organization and how to address them on a personal and organizational level.
- ✚ Check in and assess an organization's progress in anti-racist organizational development or racial justice organizing
- ✚ Gain tools to talk about racism
- ✚ Create an alternative power base for people of color within the organization to create accountability processes, expectations of whites and the organization, and create action plans
- ✚ Build relationships and solidarity. Build capacity to interrupt the interpersonal manifestations of racism that are imposed by the hierarchy of racial and ethnic identity.
- ✚ Provide a space to address how internalized racism can hold people of color and racial justice work back. Discuss - without judgment or marginalization for emoting - feelings such as anger, fear, and self-doubt that can act as barriers.

White people can caucus in order to:

- ✚ Understand how whites internalize superiority and manifest it in attitudes and interactions. Resist marginalizing for being emotive or honestly sharing racist beliefs.
- ✚ Share personal incidents and interactions and receive feedback from peers.
- ✚ Discuss current events, organizational patterns, and policies, and apply a structural racism analysis to understand how white privilege and culture are present.
- ✚ Hold each other accountable to address privilege and racism on individual, interpersonal, and institutional levels. Caucusing is a place to build the capacity of each person as well as the white collective to act intentionally, consistently and effectively and not be complicit or silent.

- ✚ Unpack guilt, fear, grief and other feelings that hold white people back from doing racial justice work, and use these feelings for reflection and action.
- ✚ Ask questions and explore ideas that help white people learn about racism without having to learn at the expense of people of color
- ✚ Build relationships
- ✚ Check in and assess an organization's progress in anti-racist organizational development or racial justice organizing
- ✚ Gain tools to talk about racism, white supremacy and privilege
- ✚ Remind white people that work needs to be done to address racism every day

Tips for Successful Caucusing

Confidentiality is crucial to successful caucuses. Confidentiality means that personal information, stories or concerns are not shared outside the caucus. Individual sharing may lead to group proposals, ideas or plans of action that will be shared through the appropriate channels. Caucuses must take the time to be clear and reach consensus about what is being shared and what is not.

One of the goals of caucusing is to create a space for building relationships that will strengthen dismantling racism work. Successful caucuses will pay attention to creating activities and time that will support relationship building.

Successful caucusing is often based on having clarity of purpose. Caucuses are the place to identify and talk about issues or concerns about racism, but are not always the appropriate place to solve those issues. When issues or concerns are raised it is important for the caucus to identify which organizational structures or processes should address those issues. In the case where the issue is a result of a lack of organizational structure or process, the caucus will need to identify how to give direction toward the development of that structure or process.

Just as any other committee or working group, caucuses may need to be staffed. It is crucial that people of color caucuses receive equitable staff time and resources as compared to white caucuses. It is a common barrier to successful caucusing in predominantly white organizations that the white caucus has more staff and resources than the people of color caucus. This racist practice will undermine the caucus process.

It is important for an organization to integrate caucusing, whether frequent or infrequent, into the organizational work-plan so that caucus members have a sense of timeline for getting together. For example, caucus agenda's need to be developed with intention. People of color caucuses and white caucuses will often have very different agendas. But, an organization that is seeking to use caucuses as part of a process of anti-racist organizational development must think clearly about how the caucus agendas create movement toward organizational goals. Similarly, the regularity or frequency of caucuses is often based on the logistics of bringing people together. Some organizations have caucuses on a regularly scheduled frequent basis while others may hold caucuses infrequently or in relation to other events such as board retreats.

Integration does not always mean equal reporting; it is about creating common ground, respecting one another's process, and sitting with the discomfort of the intentionally segregated groups.

Caucuses do not necessarily have to come together after meeting separately in order to "report back." However, there needs to be a conduit through which appropriate information is shared. In many organizations, this is one role of the change team.