

Community Agreements for Our Time 2026-27 Program Year

Encourage and Practice Awareness and Self-Knowledge

This work requires self-knowledge and self-awareness. Self-knowledge allows you to see the triggers that can lead to pain and conflict, enabling you to embrace your contradictions and inconsistencies. It allows the space to work on things that you are not happy with about yourself. In turn, self-awareness helps to prevent you from projecting negativity onto other people. By engaging in self-reflection, you contribute to a learning environment rooted in awareness, accountability, and shared purpose.

Bringing your best self also requires that you have an attitude of curiosity, are willing to deeply explore your perspectives, and remain open to the perspectives and experiences of others. While engaging with peers and content, remember to make space for others to engage as well.

Listening for Understanding

Be an active listener. Active listening involves paying full and careful attention to the other person, avoiding interruptions, reflecting your understanding, clarifying information, summarizing the other person's perspectives, and/or sharing your own. Remember that we all arrive in this space socialized about what active listening "looks like."

Be open to how others may be signaling that they are listening and be aware that it might look different than how you were socialized. This can help contribute to the development of a space that is brave enough for us to learn together. Remember that most people need time to open up and might not be willing to immediately share their personal stories, hopes, fears, and/or concerns.

Being Kind and Gracious

Being kind is a vital way of bringing meaning to our own lives and to the lives of others. Kindness is about caring genuinely for those around you, wanting the best for them, and recognizing in them the same wants, needs, aspirations and even fears that you may have. Being kind and generous allows us to communicate better, to be more self-compassionate, and to be a positive force in other people's lives.

Being gracious includes following best practices to protect the health of this learning community (eg; avoiding known allergens (scents, foods, etc.), handwashing, using PPE, staying in your room if you are sick).

Being gracious is strongly informed by your own relationship with privilege. Being gracious and kind means not weaponizing your privilege against people who hold more marginalized identities in our space. Instead, use your privilege to support colleagues whose identities yield less privilege than yours. We are gracious when we accept and genuinely work to use the pronouns that others ask us to use. Please consider how your own and others' intersectionality and relationship with privilege may be showing up when you and others offer grace.

As you take your lessons with you when you leave, part of being gracious is keeping folks' personal stories within the learning space.

Staying Engaged

Staying engaged requires you to be fully involved in the conversation. Staying engaged means that you are listening with curiosity and are willing to deepen your understanding. Staying engaged might also require you to sustain the conversation even when it gets uncomfortable or diverted. By actively staying engaged, you are helping to contribute to the creation of a space that is brave enough to allow for learning. This means a commitment to keeping your electronic communications to a minimum with people not present in this learning community. This also means being present for all portions of the learning agenda. If needs (personal or professional) external to the learning experience arise, you commit to moving away from the learning space, addressing the emergency, and then returning ready to re-engage.

Staying Curious and Suspending Judgement

Staying curious and suspending judgement includes being receptive to the perspective of others. You enter this space carrying lived experiences, emotions, and internal narratives that shape how you hear, interpret, and respond. These responses may be influenced by bias—conscious or unconscious—as well as thoughts or feelings not directly connected to what is happening in the room.

You can suspend judgment by reflecting on preconceived notions and listening to everything someone has to say before responding. When something feels uncomfortable, personal, or activating, you commit to pausing, noticing, and approaching your reactions with curiosity rather than judgment. Rather than disengaging, withdrawing, or assuming harm or targeting, ask yourself *What might be influencing my reaction right now?*

Most importantly, suspending judgment also means listening to what the speaker has to say for understanding, not only to determine whether the speaker is right or wrong. This means that you recognize that we all make mistakes and that we have the capacity to grow. You recognize that growth requires attention not only to the words you are hearing, but to how you are receiving them.

Saying “I”- Tell Your Truth

Speaking your truth in authentic and courageous conversations about race and other issues where experiences/perspectives may differ widely from yours requires a willingness to take risks. It means that you will be honest and candid about your own thoughts, feelings, experiences, and opinions and not just say what you perceive others want to hear. If you are thinking it, maybe, just say it instead of waiting to add it to the feedback. Speaking your truth will require you to speak from the “first person” and use “I” statements.

Leaning into Discomfort

Leaning into discomfort will require you to let go of understandings and stereotypes that you may be holding in order to move forward. You take responsibility for practicing self-regulation, staying present, looking for opportunities to take a risk, and seeking understanding. Remain open long enough to fully hear both what is being said, as well as how it is being communicated.

Leaning into discomfort may require you to sit through moments of embarrassment, confusion, anxiety, and/or fear. Leaning in can be highly informed by your own relationship with privilege and can be weaponized against people who hold more marginalized identities in our space. There are times when recognizing your privilege means moving back, and making space for those who are too often marginalized.

Expecting Non-Resolution and Non-Closure

Expect and accept that there may not be closure. For example, it is not likely that you will resolve your personal understanding about race or another person’s racial experience in a single conversation. The more you talk about complex issues with another person, the more you both will learn. Authentic and productive conversations about issues where perspectives may differ widely from yours, are continuous and always evolving. This means that sometimes we will have unfinished, unexplored, and shortened conversations about some concepts.

When appropriate, you may engage, briefly dis-engage, or re-engage by sharing perspectives grounded in reflection, curiosity, and a growth mindset. In holding tension between non-resolution/non-closure and opportunities for engagement/re-engagement, you contribute to dialogue in ways that build understanding rather than shut it down.

**Adapted from “Embracing equity and inclusion”, Annie E. Casey Foundation*

Reflective Questions to Complete Prior to Attending Your Academy

What questions do you want to ask about any of the ideas in these agreements?

What additional agreements do you need in order to be a fully participating member of our learning community?

Can you commit to these agreements? If not, what would it take for you to be able to commit?