



Updated March 22, 2021

Facilitation Guide

Practical Tools for Talking About Racial Justice, Inclusion & Diversity

In today's social climate, conversations about race are not easy. They can elicit feelings of grief, anger, frustration and a fear of being judged or misunderstood. But authentic, courageous conversations about race are crucial. They allow perspectives to be exchanged, insights to be shared and beliefs and assumptions to be addressed in positive and productive ways. These exchanges create understanding, growth and empathy. Most importantly, they are often the first step in generating ideas and solutions for ending racial injustice, and they pave the way for true equality in the workplace and beyond.

To advance these conversations the Center For Food Integrity and FMI – The Food Industry Association (CFI/FMI) have partnered to provide an industry resource to support open dialogue around employee experiences and inform current and future racial justice, inclusion, and diversity initiatives in the workplace. The content outlined in this guide is specifically intended to support courageous conversations within the food and agriculture systems, and encourage employees to participate without fear of being reprimanded for participating and sharing their experiences. While this facilitation guide could be used in any part of an organization, the targeted participants are front line workers and managers. Through this guide front line workers will be empowered to examine self and personal behaviors that support a culture of racial justice, inclusion, and diversity. Front line managers will be empowered to examine self, personal behaviors and team dynamics that encourage a culture of racial justice, inclusion, and diversity.

Leveraging this guide, internal facilitators will be provided with specific guidance and enhanced skills to effectively lead courageous conversations by delivering on Three Core Contributions:

1. Creating a psychologically and organizationally safe environment where participants can discuss complex and often emotionally charged issues
2. Actively facilitating the discussion
3. Debriefing and providing next steps and resources

To help guide these conversations, the facilitation process has been divided into six key components that support well-organized and meaningful conversations.

The Six Key Conversation Components are as follows:

1. Open the Conversation
2. Focus the Conversation
3. Reflect on the Conversation
4. Create Accountability for the Conversation
5. Customize the Conversation*
6. Continue the Conversation

*With the acknowledgment that conversations will take place in diverse work environments that are driven by varied organizational factors, we have included a component that outlines ways to customize the conversation in various ways that also recognizes industry diversity and promotes inclusion.

Finding Common Ground

In talking about issues of racial justice, diversity and inclusion, a common vocabulary is essential to avoid misunderstandings and misinterpretations. Words often have different meanings to different people, based on their experiences. The [Racial Equity Resource Guide](#) provides definitions to common terms used to discuss these issues. Not everyone will agree on the definition of every word; but everyone should have a common understanding of how the words are being used in particular circumstances. Key Terms and Glossary can be found in the Appendix of this guide.

The Role of the Facilitator

Preparing to engage in conversation particularly about polarizing topics such as race, inclusion, and diversity is a challenging process. Dialogue facilitators need to be aware that some employees are coming to work carrying a lot of hurt and have a deeper understanding of what the issues are. While others may lack understanding and awareness of the deeper issues based on personal experience. As a facilitator you have the ability to bridge this experience gap using the tools and resources in this guide.

Facilitators do not need to be experts on racial justice, inclusion or diversity, but they need to have strong interpersonal skills and passion for advocacy. Your role as the facilitator is to move people into awareness and consciousness with hopes that deeper understanding and empathy leads to a commitment to change thoughts and behaviors. It is also your role to execute the Three Core Contributions: create a psychologically and organizationally safe environment where participants can discuss complex and often emotionally charged issues, actively facilitate the discussion, and debrief and provide next steps and resources.

It is important to note that during these conversations, your own values and perspectives may be challenged. They are deeply ingrained in who you are and in what you believe. But your awareness of your personal values, emotions and control of your reactions to opposing views or individuals who think differently from you are absolutely essential in your role as a facilitator.

Key Competencies of a Facilitator

Selected and or volunteer facilitators should be employees who are both well respected and in “good standing” within the organization. In addition to the below competencies, they should be viewed by their peers as someone who is open and trustworthy.

1. Be a good listener

Listening is an essential component of any successful conversation—particularly when difficult or emotionally-charged issues are being discussed. Good listeners focus on understanding the other person’s viewpoint rather than on planning their response. When the person has finished, paraphrase what he or she said to make sure you understand their intent.

Strategies include

- “If I understand you correctly...”
- “I may be wrong, but what I’m hearing is that...”
- “Please correct me if I misinterpret what you’ve said. It sounded to me that...”
- “I heard you say... Is this what you meant?”



How to become a better listener

- Take listening seriously.
- Enlist support to take notes to capture thoughts.
- Resist distractions.
- Refrain from speaking for others.
- Don't be diverted by appearance or delivery.
- Focus your listening; listen for main points.
- Suspend judgement.

2. Remain Impartial!

The most important thing to remember is that, as a facilitator, you should not share your personal views or try to push your own agenda on the issue. Remaining impartial creates an environment of openness and candor that will make it safe for others to share. You are there to serve the discussion, not to join it.

3. Keep discussion focused

Discussions are meant to be strategic topic-based threads, that are opened, deliberated, and closed. But it's easy for discussions to lose focus. And it's even easier for participants to become overwhelmed. You need to isolate each concern and avoid discussion sprawl.

Strategies include

- Acknowledging and redirecting:
 - "I appreciate the point you are raising and we will discuss that later. For now, I'd like to stay focused on the current topic of discussion."
- "I can tell you are passionate about that topic and I want to be sure we give it the time needed for full discussion. Let's stay focused on our current discussion for now, so we can give each topic the attention it deserves."
- Asking for more information:
 - "What led you to believe this about___?"
- Paraphrasing the feelings you hear expressed:
 - "I hear you saying___?"
- Challenging stereotypes by asking for counter examples:
 - "Does anyone have an experience or know of an example that differs from what was just said?"

4. Create opportunities for everyone to participate

As the facilitator, you are not only helping to keep the group focused on the content of the discussion, but you will be keeping track of how the participants are communicating with each other—who has spoken, who hasn't spoken, and whose point hasn't yet received a fair hearing.

5. Clarify and summarize key points

Clarification is important in many situations especially when what is being communicated is difficult in some way. It involves non-judgmental questioning and summarizing and seeking feedback as to its accuracy.

When summarizing, it is important to focus only on the essential components of the conversation, and it must be presented from the speakers' frame of reference, not an interpretation from the listener's viewpoint.



Acknowledgements & Agreements

Participants are encouraged to discuss questions candidly and with respect to one another, engaging honestly and productively in conversations where people may hold differing views. Equity thought leader, Glen Singleton, offers four agreements to build momentum for change and inclusivity. The Four Agreements of Courageous Conversations identifies four primary ways that people deal with racial information, events, and/or issues: emotional, intellectual, moral, and relational. These points are used to anchor the conversation. They help people to reflect on their feelings, beliefs, need for action or knowledge-based perspectives.

To get started, introduce the following agreements that challenge some of the tightly held cultural norms relating to race talk.

- **Stay Engaged.** While initially, some participants may be eager to enter into these conversations, experience indicates that the more personal and thus risky these topics get, the more difficult it is for participants to stay committed and engaged.
- **Experience Discomfort.** When most people experience personal or collective discomfort in conversations, they are prone to disengage. Participants should encourage one another to engage in self-examination of their racial identities and personal racial histories. A courageous conversation requires that we grow accustomed to the discomfort of abandoning old habits.
- **Speak Your Truth.** A courageous conversation requires that participants be honest about their thoughts, feelings, and opinions. Many beliefs concerning race are based on misconceptions. It is precisely through the sharing of honest and heartfelt sentiments that participants can begin to transform themselves.
- **Expect/Accept Non-Closure.** As much as participants appreciate definitive answers, conversations about race usually provide no resolution. Participants should understand that for a topic that is not closed in the real world they must accept that their courageous conversations will be ongoing.

Principles for Meaningful Discussion

One of the most critical factors for fostering meaningful discussions is to establish a culture that values everyone's voice. The nature of the discussion process can motivate participants to work towards change. To ensure it is effective, encourage participants to do the following:

- Seek first to understand, then to be understood.
- Withhold judgements. When in doubt, ask.
- Honor and share "airtime."
- Be respectful of self and others.
- Listen actively and intentionally.
- Speak from personal experience using "I" statements.
- Refrain from speaking for others.
- Ask "genuine questions" for understanding.
- Respect confidentiality.
- Maintain an open mind about the process and content.

Time & Space - Preparing for the Conversation

Prepping for the conversation involves not only the agenda content but also consideration of the allotted time and space. Understanding that these types of conversations are sensitive, companies that are committed to supporting RJID Courageous Conversations will dedicate the proper time and space to ensure their success. This must be a top-down commitment starting at the leadership levels of the



organization. The time commitment may look different depending on the workforce but will be the same in the intentional dedication of time as a non-negotiable resource for success.

- When possible, schedule at least 60-90 minutes for all planned conversations.
- Let employees know that participation may be limited to give employees proper time to share openly. When possible, keep participant count limited to ideally no more than 10-15 participants.
- Plan a setting, whether in-person or virtual, that provides a safe and confidential space for those involved (e.g., an office or conference room with a closed door, an invite-only video call where participants are asked to be in a private space).
- Arrange seating in circle, semi-circle or square so participants can provide face-to-face contact with each other. If possible, avoid auditorium style or other seating that doesn't allow for participant eye contact. If meeting in stand-up style, use this same type of configuration.
- Be explicit about the focus, purpose, and goals of the conversation and communicate them clearly to attendees.

Disclaimer

It is important to help participants understand that these conversations are a learning experience and not a forum for participants to discuss ongoing employee relations issues (i.e. wages, hours, working conditions, conflict with supervisor, etc.). Use the technique of redirecting the conversation and reminding participants of the reason for the conversation.

If you find that the conversation takes a wrong turn and begins to include discrimination or harassment, terminate the discussion and report the incident to human resources or your supervisor.

THE FIVE KEY CONVERSATION COMPONENTS

Open the Conversation

Welcome everyone and create a welcoming, inclusive and non-threatening environment for all participants. Clarify the purpose of the discussion and review the principles for the discussion. Acknowledge the hopes and fears that everyone brings to the table. People will make mistakes during the course of the discussion and that's okay. While you want to remain impartial, it is also important to create a safe space for all participants. Interrupt expressions of prejudice but don't attack the person making them.

Open the conversation by asking people to share what is on their hearts and minds related to race, inclusion and diversity.

Questions to get the conversation going:

- What have been your reactions to or experience of the recent events of discrimination and violence?
- Are these events affecting you? If so, how?
- What do you think we can do as individuals to promote diversity and inclusion?
- How will you show up or deepen your learning around social justice? What would you like to see or hear from your colleagues and leadership?



Focus the Conversation

As the conversation proceeds, listen more and talk less. This helps the group own the discussion and its outcomes. Be intentional by monitoring your own verbal behaviors to ensure you are modeling the kind of comments and exchanges the group should be engaged in. Delve deeper into the discussion and issues by probing for understanding. Lead with curiosity and intentional listening.

Those who engage in dialogues about racial justice, inclusion and diversity must admit that they may not know all they have claimed to know or honestly believed they knew. Since we are--individually and collectively--constantly being socialized into points of view about race, it is likely that we will discover places of intense disagreement and experience new levels of cognitive dissonance, or emotional discomfort, as we unpack the perspectives of everyone in the dialogue.

Note that when most people experience personal or collective discomfort in conversations, they are prone to disengage. Participants may notice patterns in the behavior and perspectives of white participants that differ from those of participants of color. Falling into silence is one example. As the facilitator, it's your role to reach out and try to reconnect when a member of the group disengages.

Questions to use to generate further dialogue:

- What would you like your colleagues to know about your experiences/reactions/where you are right now?
- Have you had any experiences with this that you can share with the group?
- Could you help us understand the reasons behind your opinion?
- What do you think is really going on here? Why is that important?
- Do you agree with that? Why?
- What would be a strong case against what you just said?
- How might others see this issue?
- How does this make you feel?

Questions to use when there is a disagreement:

- What do you think they are saying?
- What is at the heart of the disagreement?
- How does this make you feel?
- What don't you agree with?
- What do you find most convincing about that point of view?
- What is it about that position that you just cannot live with?
- Could you say more about what you think?
- What makes this so hard?
- What have we missed that we need to talk about?

Questions to use when people are feeling hopeless:

- Say a little about how that makes you feel.
- What do you see that gives you hope?
- Can the problems that you are talking about be solved in any way? How?
- What have you heard today that has made you think, or has touched you in some way?

Facilitator Tools:

- Create the expectation that one person speaks at a time. We want to hear from everyone and each perspective shared is valued.
- Help people appreciate and respect each other's communication styles. Some cultures value listening more than speaking. In others, taking a stand is most important.



- Help participants to realize that there is more than one good way to communicate. Your leadership should show that each person has an important and unique contribution to make to the dialogue.
- Help participants understand that cultural labels, or stereotypes, are usually unfair.
- Remind the group, if necessary, that no one can represent their entire culture. Each person's experiences, as an individual and as a member of a group, are unique and OK.
- Be sure not to equate experiences. To support participants who tell how they have been mistreated, be sure to explain that you respect their feelings and are trying to help all the members of the group understand. Remind people that no one can know exactly what it feels like to be in another person's shoes.
- Sensitivity, empathy, and familiarity with people of different backgrounds are important qualities for the facilitator. If you are not familiar with the backgrounds of various groups involved in your discussion, look for opportunities to learn more about their culture.
- Ask participants to think about the concerns and values that underlie their beliefs. Don't allow the group to focus on just one particularly personal experience or anecdote. Doing so allows participants to identify common ground. As the facilitator don't try to force agreement, but help participants look for common values where they exist.

Reflect on the Conversation

After a few people have shared, ask others to reflect on what they've heard and share what they related to or what stood out to them. Many beliefs concerning race are based on misconceptions. It is precisely through the sharing of honest and heartfelt sentiments--regardless of whether the participant believes them to be embraced by the discussion leader, their peers, or people of other races--that participants can begin to transform themselves. As the facilitator, help participants open up and share their perspectives regardless of how unusual or unpopular they fear those views might be.

Reflection questions:

- Can you tell me what you mean when you say...?
- Is it possible for you to say more about ...?
- Have the thoughts you shared been shaped by others, or is this your own personal perspective?
- Why do you think others might want to challenge your perspective?

Create Accountability for the Conversation

When concluding a discussion like this, it is essential that the participants understand what the next steps are to continue to support them and to take action to affect change. Start off by asking participants if there is anything the company can do to support them. Take notes and ensure suggestions are documented.

Share your commitment to action and offer suggestions on what participants can do to take action.

Closing questions:

- What is one thing you learned from this discussion?
- What is one thing you are committed to do as a result of this session?

Suggested actions to take:

- Become a sponsor/mentor to someone from an underrepresented group
- Call out inappropriate behavior
- Join a resource group and become an active member
- Practice inclusive leadership and use inclusive language
- Recognize privilege and use it to amplify underrepresented voices



Thank the participants for sharing their feelings with you and the others. It takes a lot of courage to open up, so it is important to acknowledge this.

- **Reaffirm** your commitment to supporting them through the dialogue
- **Reiterate** your commitment and summarize some of the actions needed
- **Reassure** that this conversation is just the start, but you've made a positive step forward.
- **Reaffirm** next steps and Close

Customize the Conversation

Participating in conversations about race, inclusion and diversity is something we want everyone to experience, however we understand that many employees may not have the flexibility to step away from their work area for an extended amount of time. In these events, make opportunities to create agile ways to facilitate conversations:

- Select an article for employees to read and take 10 minutes to discuss during a stand-up meeting.
- Schedule 4-5 mini sessions with the same group of participants.
- Schedule conversations to take place before or following a shift change. This may involve compensating for the employee's time to participate in the discussion.
- Create a safe space in the break room for employees to have one-on-one dialogues.
- Share a resource from this guide and spend ten minutes discussing in team or stand-up meetings

Best Practices for Agile Conversations

- Allow employees to take the lead on how much time they can participate in the dialogue.
- Don't become distracted by your surroundings. Ensure you are present in the conversation.
- Be open to suggestions on how you can further the dialogue.
- Be clear about time commitment and expectations.
- Set the tone for adaptability and the idea that the conversations are ongoing.

Continue the Conversation

In an effort to further develop dialogue, learning opportunities and cultivate conversations, the attached Appendix offers additional guidance on kick-starting courageous conversations, sample messaging and a sample agenda to help facilitators get started.

Also included in the Appendix is a section of Self-Paced Learning Resources. There are a vast number of resources on this topic and the list shared in the Appendix represents only a small fraction of the content and perspectives available. We encourage you to learn more through your own research.



References

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