



Part One: Get Ready > 4. Prepare yourself to facilitate.

## PREPARE TO SERVE

Recognize that your role is not simply to persuade people to come on a journey with you. You're also facilitating their engagement with the ideas and creating space for them to participate. As you do, you enable everyone in the conversation to have a voice and ensure they are treated with respect and dignity. The more you can make creative and caring spaces for this work, the more people will be excited to engage further. That requires deep self-awareness, a willingness to prioritize the engagement of others and the capacity to recognize and work with emotions in yourself and others. Here are a few practical tips:

**Ground yourself.** Connect to your values and source of strength and power. Forgive yourself for imperfections and do the same for others. Be ready to create a safe space that can hold the pain and strong emotions associated with these issues without becoming overwhelmed or swept away yourself.

**Keep doing your personal work** on understanding your own racial identity; your worldview regarding race, racism and other forms of oppression; and your understanding of how your identity affects your work for racial equity. Be willing to use yourself as a tool and share mistakes you've made.

**Understand your worldview** as it relates to race, racism, power and privilege (e.g., analysis of problems and root causes, assumptions and theories about what can change and how to change it). Be ready and willing to articulate it if that will serve the group.

**Challenge yourself to listen non-judgmentally.** Practice compassion and empathy for participants, particularly those with whom you do not agree.

**Be willing to meet people where they are.** Understand and be patient with others in different stages of their own journey through these issues.

**Be willing to learn.** Acknowledge that any one person has only a partial grasp on the truth, at best. Be willing to be challenged; be willing to change your mind; be willing to deal with ambiguity and momentary confusion without rushing toward resolution.

**Be willing to direct.** You are committed to values and a process and you're using tools and skills to get there. Honor your role and don't be afraid to guide. Oftentimes, you need to redirect people from a focus on interpersonal racism to a focus on organizational policy and systems change.

**Pursue understanding.** Give yourself and others permission to seek understanding without committing to agreement. Attempt to understand things you don't agree with or accept.

**Envision yourself handling challenging situations** with grace and effectiveness.

**Take care of yourself.** Eat and sleep well. Exercise and play. Find opportunities to reflect, refresh and connect with people and activities that restore your soul.

**Be prepared to deal with strong emotions.**

- ▷ As a facilitator, actively work to become comfortable with strong emotions. Watch challenging documentaries to increase your capacity to hold others' pain. Observe your reactions when you hear others express strong emotions and practice centering yourself as you engage. Acknowledge others' emotions and create space for people to take care of themselves, manage their own emotions and get back into the conversation as they're willing and able. It's not your role to manage other people's reactions or emotions for them.
- ▷ Understand that anger often masks other emotions, such as fear, shame, or sadness. Listen for what might be beneath the surface.
- ▷ Remember that people respond to and express emotions differently. Everyone is entitled to experience their emotions without being told that they "shouldn't feel that way." Recognize and be ready to reflect back to the group the ways in which insisting on how others should feel or insisting that they should express themselves in a quiet, measured discussion style (as in "let's not shout" or "let's not get too excited about this")—can privilege some culturally-based forms of expression over others.

Source: Interaction Institute for Social Change. May be used and reproduced by local United Ways for non-commercial use, with attribution. This tool was developed based on experiences of many IISC consultants with the countless organizations and individuals we have served over the years and the colleagues in many fields from whom we have learned. The original idea for this piece grew out of an 18 month learning process about facilitating dialogues about race that IISC facilitated for a group of community development practitioners, funders and intermediaries convened by the Local Initiatives Support Corporation—Boston office and the Massachusetts Association of Community Development Corporations, which was supported by Third Sector New England's Diversity Initiative. The section on preparing oneself to serve was influenced not only by IISC's ongoing internal learning processes about the love that does justice and spiritual leadership, but also by our work with the Sisterhood for Peace: Transforming Sudan project of My Sister's Keeper and coach and colleague Selena Sermeño.