



Organizational Review Session

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Introductions and Community Agreements

Attendees were recognized for their willingness to attend and participate in this hard work.

Community Agreements (**Adapted from the Northwest Network “The NW Network Relationship Skills Class Curriculum Pre-Session.”** nwnetwork.org)

The session began with members present voluntarily reading aloud the following statements:

- None of us in this room caused racism, sexism, heterosexism, transphobia, classism, ableism, or any of the systems of institutionalized oppression.
- Some of us are oppressed by multiple systems of institutionalized oppression while others of us feel the effects of oppression less acutely.
- Some of us benefit from institutionalized oppression whether we want to or not.
- All of us can take responsibility for challenging institutionalized oppression.
- These systems of oppression compromise everybody’s lives.
- Every one of us is willing and wanting to learn.
- People are basically good. We have a core that strives for loving, cooperative relationships with others. It is with pain, fear, and shame that we learn to participate as oppressors. We can come to recognize this and work for liberation.
- We can reach back to the core of pride, self-loving, caring, and cooperation to find the wisdom to unlearn oppression.
- People may say things that sound or feel oppressive or ignorant. This may be part of the learning process. In this space we will deal with the comment and the idea it represents, not the character of the person. We all learn misinformation about ethnicity, culture, sex, gender, sexuality, class, religion, and other social identities.
- We assume a commitment on the part of the people assembled to work together toward the common goal of eliminating oppression. We want to learn together, in spite of each other’s imperfections.

Workshop Overview

The main focus of this session is to review white supremacy cultural (WSC) characteristics: this can be challenging and hard work as there are strong emotions connected to this and people can take this personally. The purpose is to look at this matter from an organizational lens: similar to how we may look at ancestry to learn about our roots, this is looking at the origin of our current organizational practices.

“white supremacy is not the shark, it is the water”

- White supremacy culture is pervasive and it leaks into a lot of facets of our lives.
- There is history involved here: we need to look at how we got here to see how we can move forward.

Why Review White Supremacy Cultural Characteristics?

- It is helpful to think about WSC characteristics as norms or standards which exist without everyone explicitly agreeing to them: they exist and we exist alongside/within them.
- If we do not engage in this review, if we do not name or recognize the existing standards and norms, WSC will remain in place, unchallenged. Without having this conversation we can perpetuate WSC.
- Also, it is important to note, WSC can be present across many entities and domains, not just in “white” organizations

Definitions:

Anti-Racist / Anti-Racism

Anti-racism is about dismantling systems of oppression, white supremacy, anti-Blackness, privilege, and bias ~ Eliana Chinae (anti-racism educator)

White Supremacy

White supremacy or white supremacism is the racist belief that white people are superior to those of other races and thus should dominate them.

Domains of WSC Characteristics

The 13 domains of WSC are reviewed below, these domains are connected and intersecting. In responding to a survey during the session, attendees were asked to consider each domain with respect to how much they think it shows up in MRFA governance documents and in practices and procedures.

1. Perfectionism

- How much appreciation is there for the work people are doing?
- What is the tendency to point out when things go wrong?
- Are mistakes seen as personal flaws reflecting on the person rather than just being a mistake?
- How much time and energy is left to think about what has been learned and how you can grow (rather than just focusing on what is wrong)?

2. Sense of Urgency

- This is a common feeling especially in the pandemic – a consistent sense of urgency is connected to some cultural characteristics of WSC

3. Defensiveness

- This can involve either or thinking and the protection of power
- Energy is spent on not hurting people’s feelings

4. Quantity over quality

- This tends to be in capitalist organizations (more students/ more research/ more meetings)

5. Revering the memo

- There is likely to be a lot of this in PSE
- If it is not written, or if it is not written well, then it does not exist, and if it is written then it is set in stone.

6. Paternalism

- Considering power and where the decision making is
- Is the decision making clear to those with and not clear to those without power?

7. Either Or Thinking

- Is there energy and resources spent on what is or is not working?
- Is there a reductionist approach where things are considered in dichotomies?

8. Power Hoarding

- How are decisions made and who has power?
- Is it power over people or is power shared?

9. Conflict

- How is conflict dealt with and does the organization have a fear of open conflict?

10. Individualism

- Organizations can function in different ways and need to assess comfort level of working in teams and how much time and resources are spent on working in teams
- How does delegation work?
- Is there shared responsibility for the work done?

11. Progress is bigger or more

- This is connected to quality over quantity
- Expansion at the cost of others (cost to individuals)
- Need to consider at what cost changes are made

12. Objectivity

- Important to acknowledge that objectivity is connected to WSC

13. Right to Comfort

- Do all of us have a right to comfort or only those in positions of power?

Breakout Discussion Notes

The session broke out to five discussion groups with assigned facilitators. The following is a summary of the general points raised.

General discussion of the survey:

- It was difficult to respond to the survey with respect to MRFA organizational structures exclusively due to the intersecting nature of faculty work on campus.
- Some of the questions are difficult also in terms of our perspective – the answer may depend on what involvement members have had at various levels of the Association.
- Taking stock of where we are at in order to determine a starting point is valuable.



How can we make the MRFA more inclusive and more just in its operations?

General Comments

- The Association is an organization which has existed for a long time. The MRFA has made efforts to make improvements but needs to continue to move forward to be as inclusive, welcoming and open as it can possibly be.
- We have to consider equity matters with respect to our contract members: we need to ensure that we are not inadvertently creating barriers to participation. The same situation applies from an anti-racist perspective: have we inadvertently or unconsciously created systems or practices that may not be as inclusive as we think they are?
- Systemic changes have to happen so we have the ability and time to be more inclusive, and the change needs to come from within (stakeholders have to do the work to make improvements).

Specific Ideas

- We need to consider where we are now and know specifically what it is that we need to improve: we cannot make improvements through high level with statements of good will and intention. We need to address specific examples to make us more open, inclusive and welcoming. This will make us stronger as an organization and association.

How does antiracist work fit in your role as an MRFA Leader or Committee member?

Our role is to listen and discover the problems that are present and take action to change them. As such, anti-racist work can fit within all aspects of the faculty role: teaching, research, and service.

Wrap Up on the Characteristics of White Supremacy Culture

From [Dismantling Racism: A Workbook for Social Change Groups](#), by Kenneth Jones and Tema Okun, ChangeWork, 2001

Why

One of the purposes of listing characteristics of white supremacy culture is to point out how organizations which unconsciously use these characteristics as their norms and standards make it difficult, if not impossible, to open the door to other cultural norms and standards.

First Steps

As a result, many organizations, while saying we want to be anti-racist, really only allow other people and cultures to come in if they adapt or conform to already existing white supremacy norms. Being able to identify and name these norms and standards is a first step to making room for a truly anti-racist organization.

Antidotes

Refer to *White Dominant Culture & Something Different (A Worksheet)* – appended to this document.



Concluding Remarks

Members should endeavor to know what it is to be empathetic and support each other in empathy, and, also, consider how we engage with expectations to be fair across the board.

It is important to note that we are all complicated beings and some of our identities give us privilege and others take this away from us.

In this session, we talked about practices and troubleshooting and problem solving and additional information will be shared after the event (see appended worksheet).

Thank you all for coming and being part of this important conversation – we have just started the work on this and there will be more to come.

WHITE DOMINANT CULTURE & SOMETHING DIFFERENT

a worksheet

'Preservation of one's own culture does not require contempt or disrespect for other cultures.' –César Chávez

'All learning happens through culture. Thus, we all have culture.' –Zaretta Hammond

We all have culture which we express in observable ways, how we interact, what we value and hold to be true. No culture is better than another. As lovers of freedom and justice, we can aim to create inclusive spaces where we all can bring our best and highest selves. At the same time, we can be mindful of how our environments impede our ability to unleash our unlimited potential.

In our society, the dominant culture that shapes our institutions, our media, the way we see ourselves and each other is that of the white, middle class. Racial equity trainer Tema Okun suggests that the characteristics of white dominant culture can be harmful not in and of themselves but 'when they are used as norms and standards without being pro-actively named or chosen by the group.... These attitudes and behaviors can show up in any group or organization, whether it is white-led or predominantly white or people of color-led or predominantly people of color.'

In the table below, Okun calls the attitudes and behaviors in the [left column](#) aspects of white supremacist culture. The definition of white supremacist culture, or, white dominant culture, that we like to use is simple and expansive:

The explicit to subtle ways that the norms, preferences and fears of white European descended people overwhelmingly shape how we → organize our work and institutions, see ourselves and others, interact with one another and with time, and make decisions.

We invite you to take a look at the characteristics of white dominant culture in the [left hand column \('Norms of White Dominant Culture'\)](#). Think about how they might apply to you as an individual or play out in your organization. Take a look at the [right hand column](#) for some antidotes, or, alternatives, to white supremacist culture (['Something Different'](#)). How are you or could you apply those to yourself, your work or your organization?

What can you personally do to make a change, or pivot, from the **left column** to the **right column**? What can your organization do?

'NORM' of White Dominant Culture	PIVOT	SOMETHING DIFFERENT
<p>Either/or thinking Believing people are racist or not racist, good or bad. Seeing incidents of inequity as isolated events.</p>		<p>Systems and complexity thinking Understanding context and intersectionality. Seeing patterns, holding contradictory thoughts & feelings simultaneously.</p>
<p>Paternalism No consultation or transparency in decision making. Taking over campaigns, mediating and facilitating others.</p>		<p>Partnership Decision making is clear, affected parties are consulted. Evaluations include staff at all levels. Leadership of Frontline communities is respected and nurtured.</p>
<p>Competition Taking unearned credit for wins. Coopting local organizing efforts, or the work of other staff. Treating core campaign issues as more important than issues that other people are working on.</p>		<p>Collaboration Taking time to build relationships based on trust. Focus is on 'building a bigger pie' instead of fighting over a slice. Mutual support and promotion of each other's campaigns and issues.</p>
<p>Power hoarding Ideas from less senior people are treated as a threat, information and decision making is confidential. Holding on to resources, scarcity mindset.</p>		<p>Power sharing Ideas at all levels are valued for the positional expertise they represent, ideas from others are requested and space is made for them to be heard. Budgets are made available for viewing, providing input on, and resources are shared equitably and appropriately.</p>
<p>Comfort with predominantly white leadership Defaulting to all or mostly white leadership using urgency and lack of available, qualified people of color as justifications for doing so.</p>		<p>Leadership representative of the communities most affected by inequity Take time to weave into the fabric of the organization a critical mass of equity-oriented people of color in leadership and on staff at large. Create inclusive culture. With graceful awareness, acknowledge that we're all unconsciously socialized to see physical features that are more white European, including lighter skin, as 'better'. Be mindful of how norms of the white, middle class can easily permeate the main organizational culture.</p>
<p>Individualism & Separateness Focus is on single charismatic leaders, Working in isolation, from each other and from other organizations.</p>		<p>Community & Collectivism Working together, working from a movement lens. Understanding that to change everything it takes everyone. Understanding interdependence of all social struggles. Working for all who are impacted by destruction and seizing of land, air, water and climate, especially those hit first and worse.</p>
<p>Fear of open conflict Right to comfort. Politeness is valued over honesty. White fragility goes unchecked. Those who bring up discomfort for others are scapegoated. Useful feedback not given in</p>		<p>Direct and constructive feedback/ Growth and learning Peers call each other in and continuously learn from each other. Managers are skilled at providing timely,</p>

<p>timely manner resulting in underperformance, lack of growth and distorted sense of how one is doing. Smaller problems left unattended become bigger ones down the road.</p>	<p>supportive feedback in culturally and individually responsive ways.</p>
<p>Priorities and timelines that perpetuate white supremacy culture Sense of urgency for funder-driven deliverables, but not for community building, capacity building or equity work implementation.</p>	<p>Priorities and timelines set for sustainability and equity People have space for what comes up that is important to address in the moment. More realistic timeframes set. Allocating time for the unexpected and based on how long things actually took last time.</p>
<p>Superiority of the nonprofit written word If it's not written down, it is not valued. If it's written down in any way other than "Standard American English", it is seen as incorrect or less intelligent. Superiors "correct", edit and change documents to reflect a particular normalized language for that non-profit.</p>	<p>All forms of communication valued and taken seriously Communication is treated simply as communication, stripped of "right" or "wrong", recognizing that an individual's use of language involves culture, power, lived experience and geography. Editing focuses solely on communicating more clearly to a particular audience and done with permission of the writer. Appreciation for how in some communities, info relayed effectively through relationship networks and the spoken word, not just the written word.</p>
<p>Comprehensiveness Continual research and writing that leads nowhere. Creating multiple reports, groups, committees that are working in isolation and don't build on each other's work. Vision, values and goals that no one can remember nor easily refer to in a meeting.</p>	<p>Clarity & alignment for action Simple, memorable and repeatable shared vision, values and goals.</p>
<p>Transactional relationships Detached "professional" communication, for the purpose of completing a transaction and efficiency. Reaching out or acknowledging people only when you need something from them.</p>	<p>Transformational relationships Building relationships internally and externally that are based on trust, understanding and shared commitments. Even in the simplest ways, taking time to see, greet and acknowledge each other to sustain caring connections, especially when there's 'no time' to do so. Space to appropriately be in one's majesty, and share in each other's cultural bounty.</p>

<p>Transactional goals Transactional deliverables / quantifiable are ranked above meaningful engagement or qualitative goals. Rushing to achieve numbers.</p>	<p>Transformational goals Working towards meaningful engagement with depth, quality; using qualitative goals in addition to whatever deliverables a foundation is asking for. The timeline for the deliverables includes enough time for quality.</p>
<p>Defensiveness Nowhere to air grievances. Focus placed on protecting power instead of addressing harms, naming intention instead of acknowledging impact.</p>	<p>Vulnerability Give and receive feedback non-defensively, have a clear structure to hear and address grievances. Skills are supported in being both self-critical and self-loving.</p>
<p>Progress is bigger, more Focus on quantity; less focus is put on the cost of growth on people, communities and relationships.</p>	<p>Progress is sustainability and quality Cost/ benefit analysis includes all costs. Focus is on sustainability.</p>
<p>Over-working as unstated norm Encouraging people to work through weekends and into the night (directly or passively by setting up work plans that are unachievable in a 40 hr week) - ignoring how Black and Brown people have been historically and systemically requested to take on physically taxing work by white bosses.</p>	<p>Self Care/ Community Care Actively encouraging a culture of self-care and community care in which people care about each other's physical and emotional wellbeing, support time boundaries and are considerate of time zone difficulties, parental needs, personal health issues, etc. Work plans include 20% of unscheduled time to enable space for the inevitable unpredictable tasks that emerge.</p>
<p>Perfectionism Mistakes are seen as personal, reflect badly on the person - the person is seen as a mistake. Little time for learning.</p>	<p>Appreciation Mistakes are valued as opportunities for learning. People verbally show their appreciation for one another</p>
<p>Skeptical management As new hires slowly learn their job, it is subtly or directly communicated that they "must prove themselves", setting them up to hide mistakes or face discipline.</p>	<p>Supportive management As new hires slowly learn their job they are supported, given freedom to make mistakes and learn from them. Supportive feedback is provided in real-time or soon thereafter.</p>
<p>White mediocrity People of color given extra work, and scrutinized while white staff with more years and/or formal credentials are given a pass, or promoted.</p>	<p>Fair evaluations and just promotions Based on a broader range of competencies than what has been historically valued (skills in the left column)</p>

<p>Equity washing Signing on to big lofty values, but not enacting them. Hiring people of color but not supporting a culture shift to retain them, focusing on inclusion internally while the field work perpetuates inequities.</p>	<p>Real equity Focus on all dimensions of the organization</p>
<p>Official title outweighs experience Regardless of someone’s broad skill and experience base, they are treated as though they only know how to do what is in their job description, and their ideas are valued based on organizational rank. When offering to do more or different, are told to “stay in their lane”</p>	<p>Holistic view of people People’s experience and skills are understood to likely expand beyond what they have been hired to do, and opportunities to contribute more of who they are, are offered.</p>
<p>Changing the subject away from the role of race Limited understanding of how biases (preferences and dislikes) based on race and culture interplay with all aspects of our lives and systems. Seeing difference as bad. Perception that talking about biases is an attack on white people or that white people can’t handle the conversation.</p>	<p>Compassionate curiosity about how race, cultural differences, racial bias may be at play With 360-degree compassion, assume there may be unconscious biases at work with respect to race to some extent. Create an environment that celebrates the courage to explore racial bias in all its forms, avoiding ‘gotcha’ and good person/bad person dynamics and camps. Acknowledge we all carry unconscious bias that is not helpful and each have a role in addressing it. Focus on building stamina and healing for self-reflection; focus on the consciousness and behaviors, not on shaming the person.</p>
<p>Narrow valuation of intelligence / performance Assessing higher value to left column attributes over right column attributes. Verbal/linguistic and logical-mathematical intelligences treated as superior</p>	<p>Broad appreciation of differences Valuing attributes on the right column. Including spaces for work that needs musical-rhythmic, visual-spatial, bodily-kinesthetic, interpersonal, intrapersonal, and naturalistic intelligences.</p>

Adapted for ACCE from adaptation by Partners for Collaborative Change based on “White Supremacy Culture” By Tema Okun and Kenneth Jones, for large, majority white environmental organizations, using interviews with staff and partners of these organizations.

Tema Okun’s Partial Bibliography: Notes from People’s Institute for Survival and Beyond Workshop, Oakland, CA, spring 1999. Notes from Challenging White Supremacy Workshop, San Francisco, CA, spring 1999. Beverly Daniel Tatum, Why Are All the Black Kids Sitting Together in the Cafeteria? NY: HarperCollins, 1997. Derrick Jensen, A Language Older Than Words. NY: Context Books, 2000. Paul Kivel, Uprooting Racism. PA: New Society Publishers, 1996. Anne Wilson Schaef, Living in Process. NY: Ballantine, 1998. For complete bibliography, see complete notebook for dRworks Dismantling Racism process. dRworks is a group of trainers, educators and organizers working to build strong progressive anti-racist organizations.