

From National Equity Project “Developing Community Agreements”

<https://www.nationalequityproject.org/tools/developing-community-agreements>

Developing Community Agreements

Developing community agreements is a powerful strategy for coalescing a group into a team. The process of constructing agreements is often more important than the product. Agreements come from a consensus-driven process to identify what every person in the group needs from each other and commits to each other to feel safe, supported, open and trusting. As such, they provide a common framework for how people aspire to work and be together as they take transformational action. Here are a few tips for developing community agreements.

What are Community Agreements?:

“A consensus on what every person in our group needs from each other and commits to each other in order to feel safe, supported, open, productive and trusting... so that we can do our best work, achieve our common vision, and serve our [students/families/constituents] well.”

Agreements are not “rules” and “norms”.

- **Agreements** are an aspiration, or collective vision, for how we want to be in relationship with one another. They are explicitly developed and enforced by the group, not by an external authority, and as such must represent a consensus.
- **Norms** are the ways in which we behave and are currently in relationship to each other, whether consciously and explicitly or not.
- **Rules** are mandated and enforced by an authority, and do not necessarily reflect the will or buy-in of the group.

there are two types of community agreements:

- **Relational community agreements** are about how we want to be in relationship with each other (e.g. speak your truth, be present).
- **Operational agreements** identify procedures or structures we all agree to use (e.g. have a process observer for each meeting).

Explain “why” community agreements matter.

- We can’t achieve our vision in a hostile, disrespectful, or undermining group culture.
- Some of the most critical conversations teams need to have are emotional, painful, and uncomfortable (e.g., equity issues, examining individual teacher practice), but we won’t engage or make ourselves vulnerable without emotional safety and trust.
- Staff relationships model for students how human relationships should be; staff culture shapes school culture.

- Healthy staff culture is key to personal sustainability in the challenging jobs of education.

“What do you need from every person in this group in order to feel safe, supported, open, productive and trusting... SO THAT we can serve our students well, do our best work, and achieve our common vision?”