

# COMMUNITY AGREEMENTS

*Tracie Q. Gilbert*

The following lesson establishes a blueprint for creating common sets of ground rules for facilitator and participant engagement during a SWAG Toolkit session.

## TIME

---

15 minutes





# PREPARATION

*The facilitator(s) should use this section to prepare for the lesson.*

PREPARATION

## WHY THIS LESSON IS IMPORTANT FOR BLACK MEN

---

Creating community agreements is a generally useful practice for any standard educational process. Generally speaking, establishing common agreements for participant behavior may serve to increase participants' sense of psychological safety, lessen interpersonal conflict, establish participants' rights to hold their own opinions while expressing them in ways that do not harm others, and allow them to participate fully in the learning experience.

For Black men in particular, historical experiences of social marginalization in learning spaces may make it so that many are inclined feel their voices and/or perspectives are automatically invalid. Engaging in the intentional consensus-building of community agreements sets a tone early on for Black men to see the ensuing conversation as one they can collectively own and contribute to productively.

### GOAL

---

To prepare for successful engagement while using the SWAG Toolkit.

### OBJECTIVES

---

By the end of this lesson, participants will be able to:

- Successfully identify and articulate their needs regarding the workshop session discussion process.

## KEY TERMS

---

**Community agreements:** a set of expectations that participants in a workshop or meeting craft together and then agree to follow, in the effort to maintain a safe and respectful environment/experience. (*glsen.org*)

## REQUIRED BACKGROUND KNOWLEDGE FOR EDUCATORS

---

The ideal facilitator for this activity has previous experience facilitating conversations, and a general disposition for allowing all voices to be heard.

## SPECIAL CONSIDERATIONS

---

It is possible that you may be working with a group that is already familiar with community agreements and has several that they like and would like to see implemented. While suggestions have been provided in Facilitator Resource A, allow some flexibility in using both norms and phrasing that is comfortable to the group.

## FACILITATION PREP

---

The facilitator(s) should complete the following tasks before the lesson starts:

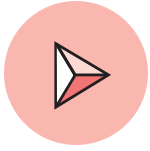
- This lesson includes Facilitator Resource A, “Suggestions for Community Agreements,” which includes a list of potential agreements that may be discussed and included in your final community agreement list. It is strongly encouraged that you review the list prior to the session, so that you can successfully discuss them as needed with the group.

## MATERIALS

---

The facilitator(s) should have the following materials for the lesson:

- Flip chart paper
- Markers



# PROCEDURE

The facilitator(s) should follow the steps in this section to facilitate the session, and use the margin for notes and prompts.

## STEP 1

If you have not yet done so, welcome participants to the group. Solicit general identification information from them (name, pronouns). Introduce the content and the agenda of your workshop, and provide any logistical and/or housekeeping information they need to know about the process they will be undertaking with you.

## STEP 2

Explain to participants that they will now be undertaking a discussion of community agreements, which outline a common awareness of how everyone in the space would like to be treated during the course of their time together. Explain to participants that given the sensitive nature of sexuality and its related topics, creating community agreements can be an important way to ensure people engage with each other in the most thoughtful way.

## STEP 3

Post a sheet of flip chart paper and ask participants to assist in the development of the community agreements list. If you have not done so yet, title the sheet “Community Agreements”.

## STEP 4



Invite participants to offer suggestions for any rules they would like to include on the list. To get the group started, read from [Facilitator Resource A, “Suggestions for Community Agreements.”](#) Explain that the final list can include suggestions from the list and any other agreements they’ve used in other community or learning spaces. Write all suggested agreements clearly on the flip chart paper.

## STEP 5

Once all group suggestions have been given, solicit any final questions, comments, and concerns about the list, making sure all participants understand what each rule on the list means. If there are changes that need to be made, make them until consensus is reached on the final list.

## STEP 6

*(Optional)* Once consensus has been gained on all the agreements drafted, give each participant a marker and instruct them to sign the sheet of flip chart paper as a sign of their commitment to follow through on the agreements created. Begin by signing the sheet yourself as a sign of solidarity.



## FACILITATOR RESOURCE A

---

### SUGGESTIONS FOR COMMUNITY AGREEMENTS

**One Divx/One Mic:** Divx is a gender neutral alternative to “diva. One Divx/One Mic means one person speaks at a time, respecting one another to not interrupt, and to give the speaker your full attention.

**Vegas Rule:** What is said in this session, stays in this session. Participants will be sharing personal information and making themselves vulnerable. All that is discussed should be kept confidential among participants and facilitators.

**Move Up, Move Up:** This is an anti-ableist alternative to another common community agreement or group norm called, “Step Up, Step Up”. This agreement encourages participants to share the time and contribute to the building of group knowledge. You might say, “We ask that if you’re speaking a lot and taking up a lot of time, that you move up your listening skills to give others a chance to share. Conversely, if you’re only listening and not contributing, we may ask you to move up your sharing skills so that we can get to know you better.” We like to say “move up” as opposed to “step up,” because not everyone is able to take a step.

**E.L.M.O.:** Stands for “everybody, let’s move on!” There will be many opportunities for participants to contribute their ideas, and discussion and exploration are encouraged. However, sometimes we can get stuck on one subject for too long, which impacts the lesson. If you find this is happening, or if the group gets too off topic, you can gently move everyone along with this community agreement.

**I Statements:** Everyone is encouraged to speak about themselves and their experiences throughout the lesson. You may suggest that participants use “I statements” to avoid conflict with others who may hold opposing viewpoints. I statements help individuals to take ownership over their own feelings.

**There Are No Dumb Questions:** We are all here to learn! Knowledge is power! If you don’t know, just ask. Similarly, participants should respect their peers and not laugh at questions they deem basic, silly, or irrelevant. We all have to start somewhere.

**Individually, We Know a Little. Collectively, We Know a Lot:** This community agreement recognizes that everyone has something to contribute to the group. We are all experts in our own experience and we should seek to learn from our peers.