

CAUCUSES

What are Caucuses?

All people of color and white people are affected by racism and have to work together to end racism. However, how we are affected by racism and the work we have to do is different. Caucuses are times when people of color and white people within an organization meet separately in order to do our different work. Many organizations have gender caucuses or other types of caucuses as well.

What are some reasons to have Caucuses?

People of Color can caucus in order to:

- check in and assess an organization's progress in anti-racist organizational development or racial justice organizing
- provide a safe space for people of color to talk about and address experiences of racism within the organization and in the larger world
- talk about racism and how it affects people of color without having to explain it to white people
- gain tools to talk about racism
- create an alternative power base for people of color within the organization
- build relationships
- create a plan of action
- provide a space to address how internalized racism can hold people of color and racial justice work back
- look at barriers such as anger

White people can caucus in order to:

- work through guilt and other barriers that hold white people back from being an ally and doing racial justice work
- ask questions and explore ideas that help white people learn about racism without having to learn at the expense of people of color
- hold each other accountable for actions and behavior
- build relationships
- check in and assess an organization's progress in anti-racist organizational development or racial justice organizing
- gain tools to talk about racism, white supremacy and privilege
- remind white people that work needs to be done to address racism every day

Tips for Successful Caucusing

- Successful caucusing is often based on having a clarity of purpose. Caucuses are the place to identify and talk about issues or concerns about racism, but are not always the appropriate place to solve those issues. When issues or concerns are raised it is important for the caucus to identify which organizational structures or processes should address those issues. In the case where the issue is a result of a lack of organizational structure or process, the caucus will need to identify how to give direction toward the development of that structure or process.
- One of the goals of caucusing is to create a space for building relationships between people of color and between white people that will strengthen dismantling racism work. Successful caucuses will pay attention to creating activities and time that will support relationship building.
- It is critical that there is a clear communication structure that provides a way for caucuses to communicate with one another. Caucuses do not necessarily have to come together after meeting separately in order to “report back.” However, there needs to be a conduit through which appropriate information is shared. In many organizations, this is one role of the change team.
- Confidentiality is crucial to successful caucuses. Confidentiality means that personal information, stories or concerns that are shared by individuals within a caucus are not shared outside the caucus. Individual sharing may lead to group proposals, ideas or plans of action that will be shared through the appropriate channels. Caucuses must take the time to be clear and reach consensus about what is being shared and what is not.
- In some cases it is important to have an outside facilitator for caucuses. The power dynamics within organizations often make it difficult for staff, board members or leaders to facilitate a caucus effectively.
- Some organizations have caucuses on a regularly scheduled frequent basis while others may hold caucuses infrequently or in relation to other events such as board retreats. The regularity or frequency of caucuses is often based on the logistics of bringing people together. It is important for an organization to

integrate caucusing, whether frequent or infrequent, in to the organizational workplan so that caucus members have a sense of timeline for getting together.

- Just as any other committee or working group, caucuses may need to be staffed. It is crucial that people of color caucuses receive equitable staff time and resources as compared to white caucuses. It is a common barrier to successful caucusing in predominantly white organizations that the white caucus has more staff and resources than the people of color caucus. This racist practice will undermine the caucus process.

- Caucus agenda's need to be developed with intention. People of color caucuses and white caucuses will often have very different agendas. But, an organization that is seeking to use caucuses as part of a process of anti-racist organizational development must think clearly about how the caucus agendas create movement toward organizational goals. Again, it is often useful for the Change Team to have a role in developing caucus agendas.