

AWARE-LA

Alliance of White Anti-Racists Everywhere - Los Angeles

~ www.awarela.org ~

Agenda Construction

For AWARE-LA's first 8 years of base building, a facilitation team composed of 4 people met 3 times per month for 2 hours each session (6 hours of prep time) in order to construct each well-designed, structured 3-hour monthly workshop. These workshops explored new content via small and large group experiential exercises and dialogue segments.

This intensive workshop preparation led to highly effective meetings and committed participants who regularly felt enriched by the topics and exercises.

Over those first 8 years, AWARE-LA also developed multiple workgroups that each required multiple monthly meetings for coordination and planning. The core leadership team found that our facilitation duties left us with very little opportunity for our own processing, and the intensive workshop development approach became unsustainable.

In the last several years, a new structure has emerged that requires less extensive preparation time, yet still provides highly structured, predictable, content-rich, and effective meetings.

Volunteer meetings now take place immediately after our Saturday Dialogues. Anyone can stay to support the process. We typically have a handful of long-term AWARE-LA members who stay to talk through agenda construction and other issues related to the logistics of meeting production (see *AWARE-LA Tasks and Volunteers* file). Facilitation is often rotated. The volunteer meetings usually last about an hour; although 90 minutes is optimal.

At the volunteer meetings we craft the following month's agenda. If we are able, we try to prepare two months ahead.

Our current dialogue structure includes four agenda types offered on a rotating basis, each type occurring three times per year.

1. Ask-It Basket

This is the easiest agenda type to produce, as it requires only a decision regarding who will facilitate and help the group move from question to question. The content section involves participants taking a number from a basket (just enough numbers for the size of the group). The participants' number will dictate the order in which they will present their question, issue, or comments to the group for discussion. The success of this agenda type depends upon there being sufficient numbers of skilled, veteran group members present. A fluid, informal facilitation style allows those who are newer to anti-racism to ask

questions to which more seasoned anti-racist white people can often provide perspective. Having at least five seasoned individuals in the room has allowed a group of over 25 to successfully navigate this agenda type.

2. Leadership Share

This agenda type requires at least one volunteer facilitator to contact a speaker (for us this is usually a long-term member of our organization) and guide them in considering how to present their story to the group. Typically, speakers tell their story of coming into anti-racism, work it has led them to do in their families, communities, workplaces, or in activism, and/or how anti-racism relates to another issue they are intimately involved with, such as immigration, food justice, education, etc. This is often followed by an interactive period where the group can ask questions of the speaker.

3. Workshop

Crafting a workshop that provides a skills building opportunity generally takes substantial effort. It is rare that a full workshop agenda can be completed during the 1 hour we have for our Volunteer Dialogue meetings after the main Saturday Dialogues. This means that we usually need a pair of volunteers to follow up on the creation of the agenda and resource materials required. Facilitators with teaching/facilitation experience typically co-construct these agendas. Some workshops make sense to repeat annually, such as role-playing to support engaging in difficult dialogues. This can reduce the workload over time.

4. Broad Question

Broad question agendas also take considerable thought. Determining the topic is often half the battle. Then, determining a set of deepening questions on the topic is required. Often, these sessions focus on exploring the intersectionality between white privilege and another identity (religious affiliation, class, gender/gender identity, sexual orientation, ability/disability, etc.). Because there are only four broad question agendas per year, a group could easily focus on an intersectionality question on an ongoing basis without ever feeling like it is become too repetitive.

Lessons Learned

The following are some essential lessons we have learned over our 13+ years:

1. Focusing our base building, anti-racist white culture dialogue sessions on political awareness can occur on occasion. But, if done more than a few times per year, attendance reduces markedly. We do have political education offerings through our White People 4 Black Lives (SURJ-affiliate) workgroup. Therefore, we have found it essential to commit to focusing the Saturday Dialogues on the racial identity work, anti-racist culture building, and skills-building needs of the group.
2. Every session must provide time for each attendee to have individual needs met. For this reason, we always include our Personal Solidarity section in each agenda. This half hour segment has become an essential support mechanism that allows everyone to leave the meetings feeling personally strengthened.