Decentering Whiteness and Creating Inclusive and Equitable Conferences:

A Tip Sheet

The purpose of this tip sheet is to assist conference organizers in creating more equitable and inclusive conferences that value the participation and contributions of a diversity of people and challenge established power hierarchies. By decentering whiteness we mean addressing the norms, practices, content, and ways of being that reflect the values and ideology associated with white culture which privilege white people and marginalize the cultures, experiences and perspectives of people of color. We hope these suggestions will assist conference organizers who seek to create events that are racially and socially just to better reflect these values and goals.

In order to decenter whiteness, we believe we need to create processes, structures and practices that value relationships and relationship-building; engage the head, heart and spirit; respect the diversity of ways people develop and express knowledge; and provide a space for participants to be their full, authentic selves. We believe that conferences should be accountable to the people and issues they address and the larger community within which they are located.

Ensure conference is responsible and accountable to the local community and larger social justice movements
- ✓ Consider responsibility and accountability of conference itself, and conference participants to the community in which the conference is happening
- ✓ Have an inclusive and equitable process for making sure the conference is necessary and likely to contribute to justice – that the funds and effort to create the conference are a good investment from the perspectives of those with the highest stakes
- ✓ Check cultural and faith calendars to ensure that conference does not conflict with important holidays or dates.
- ✓ Model justice practices in how conference funds are spent, where the conference takes place, acknowledging the tribal lands on which it is held, how much conference workers are paid, which vendors are used and other things within the control of the conference planners/designers
- ✓ Develop clear conference goals and objectives with a variety of stakeholders that will guide conference planning, implementation and assessment.
- ✓ Consider ways to engage the local community in the conference, and find out from community residents, how the conference design and/or participants may contribute to work occurring in the community rather than simply observing the community or being strictly tourists.

Create inclusive and equitable space
- ✓ Acknowledge that people have different responses to conference content and process and create the space for that to be discussed and addressed.
- ✓ Develop community norms. Seek to build in factors and conditions that promote equity, dialogue across differences, healing spaces, and critical thinking and reflection.
- ✓ Have elders available for guidance and support.
- ✓ Integrate relational and trust-building participation strategies or activities where possible, to increase participants' sense of emotional, spiritual, and physical well-being.
- ✓ Seek to integrate art and music from a variety of different cultural backgrounds.

Ensure that the topics and the ways they are framed reflect the leadership, interests, perspectives, and needs of people of color and other marginalized communities.

- ✓ Collaborate with a diversity of people to plan the conference, including local leadership, who will bring unique perspectives, areas of knowledge, and sensitivity to different issues.
- ✓ Have diverse main speakers, workshop facilitators, and participants including attention to differences in academic and lived experience, geographic, socio-economic class, sexual orientation, gender identity, religion, age, nationality, and ability, as well as race/ethnicity.
- ✓ Clearly communicate consistently and throughout the conference the significance of modeling the values of furthering inclusion and decentering whiteness. Examples of methods include: in pamphlets / conference materials, press releases, talking points for the leaders of conference during a few points of the day, social media, etc.
- ✓ Value different kinds of knowledge that is shared at the conference to ensure complementary ways of knowing, such as academic study as well as lived experiences.
- ✓ Consider the process for labeling promising practices or evidence-based practices being shared during a conference– is there consideration on the immediate and long-term effects on communities of color and power dynamics, who is determining a practice as promising, how to also uphold 'practice-based evidence' in addition to 'evidence-based' practice, as well as on addressing systemic racism and white privilege?
- ✓ When talking about 'action,' present a holistic view of actions that include different realms and levels--the interpersonal, community, institutional, systemic--as a part of a whole system of change.

Provide options for multiple ways of learning and engaging.

- ✓ Have different formats: plenaries, small group discussions, roundtable discussions, lectures, experiential sessions, art, learning/practice groups, open space, real-time blogging, tweeting, and groups/space for emerging topics.
- ✓ Strive for diverse forms and tones of expression from main speakers, workshop facilitators, and participants, modeling the diversity of lived experience.
- ✓ Build in time for reflection, informal conversations, and the processing of emotions and new learnings. Avoid rigid timeframes and a rushed agenda.
- ✓ Consider different ways to build a community of practice and action before and after the conference, so thinking, work and relationships are sustained, and provide more possibility for collective work towards systemic change.

Provide options for different areas of interest and depth of knowledge.

- ✓ Offer sessions with varying levels of depth and complexity and label them accordingly so people can make informed decisions about which sessions are most appropriate for their interests and needs.
- ✓ Offer sessions of different lengths to meet the needs for different levels of engagement with a topic.
- ✓ Provide opportunities for people with different interests within a particular topic.
- ✓ Consider how to make the language and processes accessible and inviting to those who are new to the conference and/or the field. Also, for any orientation or welcoming process to

prioritize relationship building with current participants, as well as, to acknowledge new participants' experience and knowledge they bring to the conference.

Consider how to be responsive to people's cultural and physical needs and overall well-being.
- ✓ Ensure a variety of food to meet people's cultural, religious, and dietary needs.
- ✓ Ensure the space and activities are accessible to people with different abilities/disabilities, provide for people's needs for prayer or rest, and has gender-neutral bathrooms.
- ✓ Consider integrating real-time reflection moments. Examples include: integrated minutes of silence, moments in between presentations where participants are invited to journal or think about how what they've heard applies to them, guided breath or meditation moments, etc.
- ✓ Consider conference time sequence that is attentive to modeling balance of learning and reflection, and providing rest periods contributing to the health and sustainability of participants during the conference.
- ✓ Consider location of conference activities and where most participants are staying, factoring in transportation time, effort, ease of access, etc.

Develop a variety of evaluation methods--before, during and after the conference--to assess how well the goals for decentering whiteness, and advancing equity and inclusion are being met.

Preconference:
- ✓ Begin framing evaluation strategies (content and methods) during the initial planning of the conference
- ✓ Provide all keynotes, speakers, and workshop facilitators with the evaluation questions in advance of the sessions

During the conference:
- ✓ Provide opportunities during the conference for feedback to make adjustments and respond to concerns. Various options: suggestion boxes, Twitter feed, clearly designated volunteers, clearly designated email account and phone number.
- ✓ Consider having a group of people of different identities who can attend to and be responsive to ongoing feedback.

Post-conference:
- ✓ Implement a mix of evaluation methods (i.e., in-person focus groups, electronic surveys, observational data).
- ✓ Integrate questions that seek to ascertain participants' sense of belonging, excitement, and hope around the conference topics, in addition to areas of challenge and barriers experienced related to the centering of whiteness and white supremacy.
- ✓ Have an optional question asking for demographics.
- ✓ Capture unanticipated as well as anticipated benefits to various stakeholders.

✓ Share information back to conference participants to ensure mutual communication occurred and there is continued growth and evolvement of future conferences based on lessons learned about decentering whiteness and being more equitable and inclusive.

<p style="text-align:center">�;◆�;◆�;</p>

This tip sheet was created by a multiracial, multinational working group of racial and social justice educators, organizers, scholars, researchers and activists: Natasha Aruliah, Sonali Sangeeta Balajee, Shakti Butler, Bill Calhoun, Diane Goodman, Sally Leiderman, Emily Morrison and Maggie Potapchuk. We are engaged in ongoing work together and with others to develop a critical literacy to transform and heal from the legacy of whiteness and colonization.   Dec. 2015

If you have feedback on the tip sheet, questions or would like to find out more about the working group, please contact:

Sonali Sangeeta Balajee: sonali.s.balajee@multco.us

Maggie Potapchuk: mpotapchuk@mpassociates.us