

Black Farmers

Activity 1: Interrogating, Defining and Resisting Oppressive Systems

How do we interrogate, define and resist oppressive systems while farming?
Experiment with some possibilities.

KEY TERMS

Essential vocabulary definitions of technical words relevant to this theme (remember this is the sheet that goes to the farmer, not the curriculum)

INTERROGATE: Ask thoughtful questions.

RESIST: Push back or struggle against something or someone

SUPPLIES NEEDED

- Large sheet paper or chalk board or whiteboard
- Markers and other writing utensils
- Paper or notebooks
- Sticky dots (optional)

Alternate Supplies

- Collaborative softwares such as JamBoard, Mural, etc.



How do you do this?

Interrogate

1. Ask the group to identify a term or topic that may be relevant to an experience at the farm. It is important that the term comes from a particular happening or someone's experience at the farm.
2. Ask for details. What were the conditions? How did it make them feel? Where did it happen? How did it happen?
3. Gather as many perspectives as possible regarding this specific term or topic. Take appropriate notes for everyone to see.

Define

1. Solicit definitions of the term. How do people define it? Why do they define it in those ways? What are people's experiences with the term? Take appropriate notes for everyone to see.
2. Begin to synthesize viewpoints. Note the alignments and misalignments across all perspectives. Point out keywords and phrases from all vantage points by highlighting, circling or another emphasizing method.
3. Pull key words and phrases into a cohesive definition. If that does not work, create a list or other depiction (mind map) of the term that is as comprehensive as possible.

Interrogate (revisited)

1. Now, that a working definition exists, ask for different or more responses on how this term (system, process, idea, etc.) shows up at the farm. Encourage people to be as specific as possible. Elaboration on previous "interrogate" responses welcome in addition to completely new information.
2. See steps 2 and 3 in "Interrogate" above.



How do you do this?

Resist

1. Ask what can be done to mitigate, reduce, and/or eliminate these oppressive dynamics in the space. Make a list of possibilities. Encourage people to be as specific as possible.
2. Generate clear list of responses and ask for feedback on what is feasibly implementable in the present and future (over 1-3 years at most).
3. Ask everyone to choose their top 3 responses of actionable strategies. Ask everyone to write down their personal commitments on what they will do among their chosen 3 strategies.
4. Solicit open sharing with the group for those who want to publicly share their commitments.
5. Close the dialogue or sharing space with a "gratitude circle." Everyone share one thing (material or non-material) that they are thankful for in this space.



Defining Four Community Building Factors

Conflict resolution

What is conflict resolution?

- *Developing* shared understanding through voicing how an experience, conversation, or occurrence affected you or someone else.
- *Addressing* conflict as disagreement or alignment which can build up or fester, if not resolved. *Acknowledging* harm, apologizing and making amends to prevent or minimize future harm (if possible).
- *Practicing* deep, active listening ~ Listening to understand a perspective that may or may not be aligned with yours rather than listening to defend your position or perspective.
- *Implementing* appropriate tools or systemic check-ins to build mutual understanding or mutual agreement.
- *Committing* to being accountable based on how your work space operates, principles guiding the work and capacities to abide by structures governing the work.

What are some processes that have worked?

- One-on-one direct communication (if people are trained and/or can hold space for each other, appropriately).
- Deep, active listening (if people are trained and/or can hold space for each other, appropriately).
- “One mic” ~ only one person speaks at a time OR “Respect the talking piece” ~ only those holding the talking piece can speak at that time.
- Finding middle ground or negotiated space where everyone’s needs are met, everyone’s feelings are acknowledged and held, accordingly.
- Identifying (collective) understandings of conflict and harm. Identifying conflict styles and understanding how they identify with power and privilege.
- Developing shared definitions and intentions at the beginning of the process to keep people accountable to the terms and intentions, and how they may be governing the space.
- Establishing an agreed upon systemic plan for conflict resolution, even in absence of conflict, to be proactive and prepared to address conflict when it unfolds.



Defining Four Community Building Factors

Conflict resolution (cont.)

What are some processes that have not worked?

- Yelling or using another aggressive communication method to articulate a perspective.
- Disregarding others' humanity or experience by denying harm caused in spite of disagreement and assuming behaviors or outcomes based on stereotypical identity traits.
- Ignoring grievances thinking that with enough time, the conflict will go away or be forgotten.
- Relying on employees to always voice concerns instead of having systems in place

What are some questions to consider in developing a unique process that works for your work space and culture?

- What does conflict mean to the people in your space?
- What systems, principles and/or experiences have led to the conflict and the resolution process?
- How and who are the people coming to this space? Where is the mental state of the people involved?
- What are the conflict styles of the people involved?
- Do you have or need a facilitator for the process? Is the facilitator equipped to hold emotional, mental and physical safety?
- Is the facilitator equipped to disrupt harm appropriately?
- What are the intentions of resolving the conflict for the people involved?
- Who are you accountable to?



Defining Four Community Building Factors

Horizontal Communication

What is horizontal communication?

- Communicating honestly, transparently, non-condescendingly and empathically.
- Communicating as if you were speaking to yourself. Communicating with power and privilege in mind.
- Communicating with clear intentions of goals and outcomes, if known.

What are some processes that have worked?

- Meeting leader or facilitator rotates regularly (weekly, monthly, etc.).
- Honoring disagreement as a potential avenue of building trust and utilizing different methods to achieve (un)common goals.
- Ensuring everyone has equal amounts of respect and right to speak regardless of position or status. Valuing everyone's worldview regardless of differences
- Acknowledging the evolution of language based on cultural, generational and other affiliations.
- Committing to vocabulary and language justice by discussing words to describe our "lived experience" from identity to philosophy (where do they come from, etc.).

What are some processes that have not worked?

- Blaming or shaming someone (or yourself) based on their communication style.
- "Calling out" people as a way to build support for your perspective in a debate or situation with opposing viewpoints.
- Over talking or interrupting someone assuming to know more or better.
- Manipulating messages in receiving and transferring them for self-serving and other reasons.
- Communicating without the accused causer of harm present



Defining Four Community Building Factors

Horizontal Communication

What are some questions to consider in developing a unique process that works for your work space and culture?

- What does communication mean to the people in your space?
- What are the personality types and communication styles present in your space?
- What are some challenges to building effective communication among people in your space?
- What are some opportunities to building effective communication among people in your space?
- How has language evolved over time that can affect communication methods in your space?
- Who are you accountable to?



Defining Four Community Building Factors

Internal Relationship Building

What is internal relationship building?

- Leading with the spirit (heart work) to build with other people for the sake of community as a spirit-bound place and process.
- Being curious enough to get to know people for the sake of building trust, unity, love and loyalty.
- Seeing and accepting people for who they are and not who you want them to be.
- Believing in the authenticity of people and their purpose to your personhood.

What are some processes that have worked?

- Prioritizing the relationship over any material or non-material outcome for personal or group benefit.
- Moving at the speed of trust to build towards personal and collective goals.
- Trusting in the process of relationship building, even in the midst of discomfort and uncertainty.
- Emphasizing non-work (recreational) time and activities in work spaces (games, sharing meals together, storytelling, etc.).

What are some processes that have not worked?

- Attempting to build relationships through strictly intellectual means.
- Taking advantage of people's vulnerabilities in the relationship building process.
- Seeing relationships as exploitative and extractive tools for self-serving benefits.
- Being dishonest with yourself about who you are, what you do, why you do it which causes dishonesty to other people.



Defining Four Community Building Factors

Internal Relationship Building

What are some questions to consider in developing a unique process that works for your work space and culture?

- What does relationship building mean for people in your space?
- What are the personality types and communication styles present in your space?
- What are the areas of differences that can be used as strengths in building stronger bonds?
- How can an assessment of personalities, personal strengths and areas of growth, individual and group goals and past experiences (general or specific) be used in building stronger bonds among people?
- How can relationships be used as a type of currency in building towards the vision collectively held in the space?
- How does your internal governance structure (decision making principles and processes) impact the relationship building in your space?
- What has to be potentially sacrificed to build the honorable relationships needed to push the work forward?



Defining Four Community Building Factors

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Defining Four Community Building Factors

Justice and Racial Equity

What is justice?

- Assuring the dignity, rights and well-being of those oppressed.
- Implementing tangible changes for the benefit of oppressed people.

What is racial equity?

- Eliminating racial disparities and improving outcomes for everyone Intentional and continual practice of changing policies, practices, systems, and structures by prioritizing measurable change in the lives of people of color.
- Following the leadership of those most impacted by racial injustices.

What are some processes that have worked?

- Understanding the intersections between justice and racial equity and how inseparable they are. Discerning between equality and equity
 - Equality - focuses on the equal distribution of resources rather than equal results
 - Equity - situation in which all people or groups are given access to the correct number and types of resources for them so as to achieve equal results.
- Recognizing that racial hierarchy is a myth and it is everyone's duty to interrogate and disavow all privileges associated with a history of white supremacy or spaces that reward proximity to whiteness.
- Affirming that any one person's humanity cannot be built on the dehumanization of others.
- Interrogating subconscious racial, gender, class, sexuality, ability and age biases.
- Developing a shared language of power for the co-liberation of everyone. Allowing our culture to exist in the space which enhances work morale and self-efficacy.



Defining Four Community Building Factors

Justice and Racial Equity

What are some processes that have not worked?

- Operating as if problems of racial injustices (enslavement, genocide, etc.) can be ignored for the sake of societal progress.
- Operating as if “race” is marginal rather than central to justice, from all angles.
- Operating as if problems of racial justice are not (as) important and will take care of themselves, accordingly.
- Assuming the focus should be on making white people allies or accomplices which recenters whiteness.

What are some questions to consider in developing a unique process that works for your work space and culture?

- What are your policies on attire?
- What forms of “education” do you require for positions?
- What holidays and other specially designated times do you treat as important?
- How do you adapt to families/kids in the space?
- Are people expected to be available for work on a capitalist time range of 24 hours a day/7 days a week?
- What is the pay structure in the space and its potential complicities to white supremacist values?



What does it mean for my farm?

Whats systems of oppression are present in your farm space? How do they show up on your farm? What are some ways you can push back?

Consider the following possibilities:

- One person's oppression is another person's privilege.
- Multiple systems can be operating simultaneously.
- Change is constant.
- Behaviors, words, habits, thoughts and actions are all related but do not have to be the same.

Discuss with co-learners the observations and how they:

- reduce risks by understanding the observations/learnings of the activity
- impact farming practices and management
- impact market opportunities
- production ability of farm and the soil

RESOURCES FOR ADDITIONAL LEARNING

- [Characteristics of White Supremacy Culture](#)
- [ABC's of Social Justice](#)
- [Robert's Rules Suck: Why We Can't Make Change Until We Change the System](#)
- [PRINCIPLES OF SOCIAL PERMACULTURE: CREATING CULTURES OF RESILIENCE](#)