

Using These Modules as Individuals or Groups

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These modules and their respective contents are designed so that individuals interested in the content can use them to further their knowledge and understanding. We urge individuals to do this work with at least one other person who is also interested in the content and committed to open and honest discussions as the work proceeds.

Designed for Small Groups

The modules are designed for small groups. Eight to twelve persons is the optimal size. This allows for full group participation in discussions and exercises. Large groups generally do not allow for everyone to have an opportunity to speak within a session and normally require more than one facilitator.

There are many important processes to consider when working in small groups. (These considerations are based on over 50 years of research and practice.)

- When working with any of the modules, attention to group process, identified group outcomes and group composition are warranted.
- For example, if you are working with a larger group, be sure to develop strategies for smaller break out groups within each session so that in-depth discussion and exploration of the material can take place.
- Another helpful process is to have co-facilitators for each session, allowing one person to focus on group interactions while a second can focus on presenting or facilitating discussions in the session. Co-facilitators then have the ability to confer with one another about session outcomes and plan methods of addressing them in future sessions if needed.

Group Composition

Attention to group composition is very important. Ideally, one would populate groups with equal representation of people from different backgrounds and experiences. In terms of race and ethnicity, this will not be possible in most of our Threshold chapters. Having only one or two people of color in even a small group is problematic for three reasons.

- First, White people in the group often look to the People of Color for answers or to represent their respective ethnic backgrounds.

- Second, unconscious bias (discussed in detail in the curriculum) occurs in mixed groups; be they related to ability, economic background, ethnicity, race, or gender. For example, it can be very damaging for the people of color who have to hear discriminatory remarks made about their groups or other groups of color.
- Third, these microaggressions (also discussed in detail in the modules) can sever any cohesion a facilitator or chapter might hope to achieve in any of the modules. While all of us believe that we do not openly practice discrimination, it is worth being explicit about who is invited into the small groups.

Caucusing

The second process to incorporate into the work is caucusing. People who are in the minority of the module you are engaged in, be it race, ableism, gender, etc. must be allowed to meet with just each other to process emotions that may have emerged during a full group discussion. If they wish to be included in a workgroup of other people with their particular experiences through the TCI organization, they should seek out that opportunity through the Board. While the goal of this work is for all of us to unite, caucusing is an important step towards this union.

Facilitation

The role of the facilitator is very important to the success of these groups. As group members explore and self-examine, there may be difficult conversations that include “messy” thoughts and feelings. It is essential to have a facilitator who has the skill to create a space where people feel brave and comfortable enough to experience new ideas and possibly discomfort.

Good facilitation requires knowledge and preparation, so that:

- People feel safe in expressing their truth.
- Everyone knows they will be heard and respected.
- If/when difficult thoughts or feelings arise, they will be handled with skill and care.

Some of the skills and tools of good facilitation include:

- Guiding the group in setting agreements (ground rules, constants) for respect, confidentiality, non-judgmental listening and feedback, and other expectations to create a safe/brave container for the group sessions.
- Making space for an opening and closing for each session, such as a centering/grounding exercise, song, and/or check-in.

- Using a talking stick, stack, time limits and other methods to ensure everyone will have time to speak, without having to wonder if they will get a turn or feel pressured to jump in, and to give everyone the space to listen deeply and with empathy.
- Attending to the “tone” of the group - comfort/discomfort, body language, number/length of time each person speaks, underlying issues/concerns, etc.
- Making space for small group discussions and feedback.
- Handling difficult situations/distress calmly and effectively.

Your chapter/group may have someone who is skilled in facilitation to lead your work with the modules. If not, please contact TCI for information about facilitators who may be available to offer facilitation, training and/or support to your group.

To summarize, for our work to be successful, we must be conscious of group composition and process. We must not only be open-hearted but we must be open-minded as well.