

Notes for White Folks New to BRIDGE

This document is meant to serve as an orientation frame for white folks joining and participating in BRIDGE as volunteers and community members. As white folks, we often bring toxic whiteness into racial justice work at BRIDGE (and beyond), and part of our work is to take collective and individual responsibility for the ways in which we do this--and to hold one another accountable in shifting our engagement. This document is meant to serve as a starting place, but this requires continuous reflection, honesty, and hard work.

This framework comes directly from learning and engagement with BRIDGE, as well as Gwendolyn's coaching and writing. Most recently, Gwendolyn did several interviews [here](#) and gave some powerful recommendations around [how to move as an antiracist](#) that are echoed in this document.

RACISM= White **Privilege** + Economic/Social **Power & Access** + Racial **Prejudice**

- *BRIDGE Definition of Racism, taken from the BRIDGE TRJ Newcomers Norms / Ground Rules / Agreements document*
1. **Work alongside, not “on behalf of.”** Take time to think about--and stay rooted in--your “why”--why are you here? As Lilla Watson said, “If you have come here to help me you are wasting your time, but if you have come because your liberation is bound up with mine, then let us work together.” Part of working alongside is giving up the feeling of having a right or a need to lead or control the work, which is bound up in whiteness. Instead, listen to what's needed and what's being asked for, and find ways to plug in. [From Gwendolyn's 5 A's](#): “Most importantly, align with communities that have been marginalized and ask them what they need and work alongside them because they know best what they need. White people often get this fire burnt up in them to help and then they just go do without checking in with communities that have been taking care of themselves throughout all this for a long time. Align yourself with organizations that serve these groups, that are trusted with people that represent these communities, and ask what they need. See what resources you have to offer and offer them.”
 2. **Decenter yourself and whiteness.** BRIDGE works to support and lift up Black and brown voices, youth and leadership--catalyzing change in communities to tear down white supremacy and transform systems for collective liberation, healing and justice. To paraphrase Rachel Cargle, racial justice--and volunteering with BRIDGE--is not about self-improvement for white people, and when we turn it into this, we're devaluing, extracting and preventing the actual work from happening.
 3. **Educate yourself.** It's okay to say you don't know something and to ask for help, but don't hide behind discomfort or lack of understanding. Often we as white folks expect people of color to educate us on racism and their experiences. Use what's available and accessible to you, right now: BRIDGE provides coaching, training and tools as a part of its Cultural Competence and Workplace trainings (some of which are linked throughout this document). Sign up for a training; do some research (Google is your friend); reach out to the folks who wrote this document with questions.

4. **Respect and support the leadership of Black and brown people.** Acknowledge expertise, give attribution and credit where it's deserved, and check the way in which your "feedback" (often rooted in personal discomfort) may be originating from [white supremacy culture](#). BRIDGE is composed of an incredible and diverse (identity, background, skill set) group of professionals. Volunteers are not staff, make sure that you are keeping BRIDGE staff informed in all actions.
5. **Honor the work.** BRIDGE has been organizing for racial justice and equity in the Berkshires for the last 12 years. This organizing has been done with great care and collaboration with many local organizations. It's important that white folks contextualize and honor BRIDGE's history, longstanding partnerships and vision.
6. **Be accountable.** Just because we as white folks don't "mean" to be racist doesn't mean we aren't. Intent is not the same thing as impact--and being accountable means owning the impact of our actions. Look critically at your behavior and be open to hearing this feedback, not defensive. Work to repair damage and harm in individual relationships as well in community.
7. **Prioritize care.** BRIDGE prioritizes and functions as a network of care and support centered on those who have been mostly deeply impacted by structural oppression. This work is inherently relational--at its core, it is about connection, care and community.
8. **Interrupt racism in yourself and others.** Speak up when a white community member interrupts, makes an assumption about a person of color or another instance of white supremacist behavior--disrupt this in yourself and others. You won't have the "perfect words" but silence gives permission to the racism you are witnessing. White voyeurism is harmful and extractive, and we are called to engage vulnerably--not to be spectators.
9. **Practice cultural humility.** Critically examine how you are participating in holding up white supremacy on a daily basis in your own life as a starting point. Try to hold a "beginner's mindset," especially those of us who have been working with BRIDGE or other anti-racism initiatives. Be open to learning and unlearning and relearning.
10. **Follow BRIDGE leadership and protocols.** Engage in the systems and with the tools and resources that BRIDGE has created and shared from other organizations and leaders. Explore the website to find tons of resources and insights, including the recent [New Pathways videos](#). Come to Race Task Force (1st Monday of the month) and/or Towards Racial Justice meetings (1st Thursday of the month); get connected with the TRJ Caucus break-out groups and meet up with an Accountability buddy to dig in deeper.

This document was created by members of BRIDGE TRJ White Caucus in accountability with Gwendolyn and BRIDGE. If you have questions or want to dig into these notes in conversation, please reach out!

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