Community Agreements

What?

Community agreements, sometimes referred to as community norms or community expectations, are guidelines designed to create safe, inclusive, and open interaction between participants. [Source]

Here are some examples of community agreements, as developed by Paul C. Gorski:

Listen actively – respect others when they are talking.

Speak from your own experience instead of generalizing ("I" instead of "we").

Do not be afraid to respectfully challenge one another by asking questions but refrain from personal attacks – focus on ideas.

Participate to the fullest of your ability [without taking up too much space] – community growth depends on the inclusion of every individual voice.

Additional agreements you can make:

Invite participants to share any personal access needs with the facilitator and/or the group whenever necessary. Some examples of access needs include getting up to stretch every 20 minutes, lowering the lights to avoid headaches, participating less for health reasons, etc.

Invite participants to share their preferred gender pronoun(s) with the group. These include gender binary (he, she) and gender-neutral (they, ze) pronouns.

Why?

Event attendees come from a wide variety of backgrounds and lived experiences. In order to provide everyone with an interactive and engaging space – one where participants can address topics openly and honestly – it is important to provide structures and opportunities for safe self-expression.

How?

We recommend setting community agreements prior to any activity that involves conversations, discussions, and participation of some kind. The facilitator may start by listing a set of agreements prepared beforehand, then ask for additional contributions to the list from the participants if time allows. It is important to ensure these guidelines are observed throughout the activity, so it may be useful to reiterate them with the group from time to time. [Source]

Alternatively, if the event schedule is tight and fitting in community agreements verbally is difficult, you can publish a list of community agreements prior to the event (i.e. in an event reminder email, on social media, etc.) or in the event chat for online events. For example, an Instagram post prior to the event encouraging participants to follow some of the guidelines listed above can not only make the event run smoother and more equitably, but it can also encourage more participants from diverse backgrounds to attend.