

Building and Sustaining Principles of Community in Academic Settings

Codes of Conduct and Sexual Harassment policies operating in academic spaces are established by host and supporting institutions to comply with federal and local civil rights laws (for more information see [Equal Employment Opportunity Commission](#), [National Center on Safe Supportive Learning Environments](#), [Title IX](#), [National Science Foundation](#), and the [Jeanne Clery Act](#)). These represent the legally mandated minimum and depending on MOU and sources of research funding, even in international settings, home US institutional rules can apply. The legally mandated minimum, however, falls short of our broader aspirational goal of stewarding a culture of inclusivity and equity. After on-boarding everyone to established codes of conduct, the team can together build their aspirational Principles of Community.

Purpose: Here is a step-by-step process for collectively developing guiding **Principles of Community** to use in academic settings, particularly in field sites in which colleagues are working and living in remote, isolated, and challenging conditions so that there is a shared culture of respect and accomplishment. Ideally, brainstorming and crafting the principles together contributes to building the community, establishes a collaborative, respectful culture, affords more equitable opportunity for agency, contributions and perspective, and consequently is expected to increase individual buy-in, understanding, and knowledge of the shared principles of community.

This document is not intended to be, nor able to serve, as the sole guidance for the development of principles of community. This approach can only be effective if research leadership is motivated, invested, and participating in continuing education in justice, equity, diversity, and inclusivity via sustained reading, training, and workshops. This suggested process is intended to be adaptable and useful for collectively establishing Principles of Community as a living document that can be refined, revised, and extended in response to lived experiences. Poorly executed, such exercises can become spaces of micro- and macro-aggression, and require cultural humility and foundational knowledge.

Materials

Pens/Pencils

Small Square/Rectangle Pieces of Paper ~4x6 inches

Large Visible Writing Surface, such as:

Large Pieces of Paper $\geq 11 \times 17$ inches

Large pad of paper on easel

Chalkboard or Dry Erase Board

Large Blue, Purple, and/or Green Marker/Dry Erase Marker

Clear Fishbowl/Bowl

Process (Steps 1-4 can be in one day, or split up across adjacent days)

Step 1 Brainstorm: Distribute writing implement to all community members and multiple sheets of paper and prompt them to contribute and submit key elements, concepts, themes, values, priorities for the shared culture of the research team/field site/research season (as applicable).

One key thought/concept/principle per piece of paper (so that they can be conceptually sorted once collected). Using a single color of paper allows anonymity of submissions. Have participants submit their sheets of paper folded up into a fishbowl or other clear bowl. The facilitator will read the submissions while a recorder transcribes the themes as list onto surface that is visible to the participants, combining identical or similar submissions. (~30-90 minutes)

Step 2 Small Group Break Out: In small break out groups (~3-4 people), task everyone to identify what and/or who is missing or underserved by the themes. PI/Managers pre-design the breakout groups so marginalized, under-represented identities are not alone in their group (even if different identities so that sole burden of explanation does not rest on a single person or that they are isolated from any other person of marginalized identity). If there are individuals on the team who are expected to be less productive in their contributions make sure someone quite comfortable in knowledge, personality & positionality is assigned to the same group to disrupt, address, or shut-down problematic contributions. Small Groups select a reporter from their group to share their group's additions for themes. Recorder adjusts the running list accordingly. PI and/or knowledgeable others should ask questions to elicit any remaining themes/aspects that should be included. (~60-120 minutes)

Step 3 Combine, Refine, & "Finalize": Collectively structure and organize all the elements, combining and refining concepts and themes, collecting subpoints under major points, to generate ~10 core principles. If the full team is particularly large, the PI and several other volunteers can take the raw, comprehensive list and generate a DRAFT list of principles (using the anonymous fishbowl or group free discussion to confirm that they have accurately honed the list to reflect the group's vision). (~45-60 minutes)

Step 4 Individual Reflection & Commitment: Each team member writes a personal statement describing/explaining what the Principles of Community mean to them and their commitment for their own behavior and how they plan to support their fellow team members (1-2 paragraphs, ~30 minutes) to be submitted to the PI/Leader(s)/Field Manager. This essay allows leadership an excellent entry point for a gentle, productive one-on-one conversation with individual team members if it is noted that a team member is drifting away from their own explicit intentions and planned behavior. For example: "I know that this is important to you because you said _____ in your mini-essay, and I want to check in with you so you can accomplish your professional and personal goals this season." Such a conversation is collaborative, supportive and not adversarial increasing their likelihood of a productive conversation.

Step 5 Revisit & Refresh: At the time of establishment and adoption, the team can agree to revisit the Principles of Community collectively in ~4 weeks to discuss if they are functioning as intended, if there are necessary additions or revisions that should be made. This revisit exercise can once again make use of the fishbowl for anonymous submissions so everyone feels like they can contribute their thoughts without risking reputational consequences. It can also be communicated the if there are concerning events or dangerous dynamics that emerge, the team can adjust the schedule to accelerate and prioritize a revisit and refresh of the Principles of Community (~30-90 minutes).

Resources

[UC Davis Principles of Community](#)

[UC San Diego Principles of Community](#)

Further Reading

Jason, L. A., Glantsman, O., O'Brien, J. F., & Ramian, K. N. (2019). [Introduction to the field of Community Psychology](#). Introduction to Community Psychology.

Foronda, C., Baptiste, D. L., Reinholdt, M. M., & Ousman, K. (2016). Cultural humility: A concept analysis. *Journal of Transcultural Nursing*, 27(3), 210-217.