Community Engagement Guidelines
Access & Disability Justice Reading Group (Fall 2023)

The guidelines in this document were adapted from the guidelines in Elise Ahenkorah's "Safe and Brave Spaces Don't Work and What You Can Do Instead," as well as AWARE-LA's "Communication Guidelines for a Brave Space" and CommunityWise's "Anti-Racist Organizational Change: Resources & Tools for Nonprofits"

Ahenkorah's definition of "accountable space:
"Accountability means being responsible for yourself, your intentions, words, and actions. It means entering a space with good intentions, but understanding that aligning your intent with action is the true test of commitment.

Accountable space guidelines allow for allies and marginalized communities to agree on a set of actionable behaviours/actions during the discussion to show allyship in real-time and after the event. It allows participants to align their well-meaning intentions with impact through a collective set of guidelines.

Accountable space guidelines do not place an unfair burden of bravery. They do not create mythical promises of safety and unicorns. They place an equal amount of onus for all to behave equitably and inclusively, to foster a deeper understanding of diverse lived experiences in real-time."

As a community, we commit to the following guidelines for engaging with each other:

1. Recognizing that each of us brings our own social location, values, and contexts to the conversation

Like our students, each of us experiences the world differently based on our personal experiences and contexts, as well as our social location (i.e., the communities/groups to which we belong or with which we identify that shape how we see the world, how the world sees us, and the degree to which we hold power or privilege).

2. Listening actively to each other and being open to multiple perspectives

We bring our own lived experiences and values to the group, so it is important that we sit with and reflect on what others have to say about engaging with disability justice.

3. Being mindful of our individual talk time and ensuring all voices are heard

This is especially important because community members may be a part of equity-denied groups whose voices have been suppressed.

4. Making space for multimodal engagement (e.g., live during our meetings, textually in the chat, and asynchronously through shared documents and notes)

Not everyone will engage in the same ways at all times, and a person's unique access needs, as well as their individual context on a given day can shape their capacity to engage and the ways they choose to engage. Let's take care of ourselves and each other.

5. Maintaining the confidentiality of our peers

While the themes of our conversations will (should!) carry forward beyond our group, community members may choose to share experiences that are unique to them, whether positive, negative, or neutral in nature; let's honour each other's right to privacy by not sharing unique and identifiable experiences beyond our group.

6. Leaning into and embracing discomfort

While talking about access and disability justice, we will confront and discuss challenging subjects and complex problems. This process will not always be comfortable, but learning and growing can require stretching our own perspectives and stances over time. At the same time, we should make space for self and community care during this process (e.g., taking breaks individually or collectively as needed).

7. Being mindful of the ways that it is not just the intent of our words that matter but also the impact

Even when we are careful to frame our experiences and perspectives using "I" statements, we may find ourselves expressing an idea or using language that is harmful, especially to equity-denied groups. As we engage in our community, we will remain mindful of not just the intent, but also the impact of our language. In our community, we will seek intentional learning and make space for growth, rather than seeking perfection. However, when we realize that something we have said is harmful (e.g., racist, ableist, sanist, misogynist, Islamophobic, homophobic, transphobic, etc. / trauma-dumping) - whether we realize this on our own or because someone has taken the time to challenge our claim and language - we will be open to critique, apologize when appropriate, and take accountability for our words, actions, and ongoing learning. Critical feedback is a form of community care.

8. Reflecting on and brainstorming ways we can move our conversations and learning forward into our work and teaching/learning communities

As we share throughout the term, we will take the time to reflect - both as a part of the community and on our own - on how we can move our thoughts, values, and learning into action in our classrooms and beyond.