



Youth Engagement: Creating Safe Space

What is a safe space and why is it important?

A safe space is the metaphysical intersection between environment and culture in and outside of an organization's physical space. A safe space encourages its members to feel at home and to own the organization and the work. It is a healthy space for challenging and celebrating one another, evaluating oneself and the group, where everyone feels safe from judgment. A safe space promotes group cohesion and fosters youth development. Creating a safe space is essential for youth leaders to grow.

How do you do create a safe space?

Although you can provide training to create a safe space, a safe space cannot be achieved through a one-time training. A safe space is a *culture*. And cultures are not stagnant; they are a constant work-in-progress that changes and adapts to and for its constituents and their individual and collective goals. To continue to grow our space space, we make Community Agreements and practice consensus-driven decision-making.

Community Agreements are similar to "ground rules" in a way. Both are tools for group accountability. Unlike ground rules, community agreements are made up, approved, and followed by everyone in the group, including the facilitator. A community agreement is a living document to which individual group members can add or subtract from to best fit the needs of the group. For example:



- **Land the Plane** - Get to the point! Don't circle around the airport, just land your plane!
- **Be a croissant, not a donut** - Be open to new ideas like a croissant, not closed like a donut.
- **Don't Yuck My Yum** - If I like Justin Bieber, don't say "ewww!" You can make constructive criticism, like sharing your reasons of why you don't like his music, but be supportive of others and do not shut down ideas.
- **Demand clarity** - If you have any questions, ask them because chances are someone else in the group will have the same questions too.

Consensus-based Decision-making ensures that everyone contributes to group process and management. Once a Community Agreement has been drafted, everyone in the group must approve it through an open, simultaneous voting process.

What are best practices for community agreements?

- Everyone has different definitions and interpretations of words. When making community agreements, it is important that the facilitator ask each member of the the group what each agreement means to them.
- Community agreements work best when each group member holds one another accountable, rather than relying on the facilitator to enforce each agreement.
- Because it takes time for groups and facilitators to become used to community agreements, it is important to incorporate community agreements whenever possible.
- Consensus is a tool used for decision-making across all contexts, from the passage of community agreements to decisions about events or actions.