



THE JUNIOR LEAGUE 21-DAY RACIAL EQUITY CHALLENGE

Participant Guide

INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

Acknowledgement

The 21-Day Racial Equity Challenge grew out of the positive experiences of an AJLI staff team who participated in the Food Solutions New England's 21 Day Racial Equity Challenge in April 2020. This content is being used with permission from Food Solutions New England and their 21-Day Habit Building Racial Equity Challenge and Challenge Discussion Guide, from which our Challenge and this Participant Guide are adapted. This content is owned by Food Solutions New England and is used exclusively for learning and educational purposes.¹ We also credit them for their wisdom in preparing a highly effective learning tool on a multi-faceted topic.

Food Solutions New England (FSNE) is a University of New Hampshire-based regional, collaborative network that serves as a convener, cultivator, and champion of regional food systems'. FSNE believes that New England can be substantially food self-reliant producing as much as 50% of the food we eat by 2060. Racial equity and food justice are fundamental guiding principles for restoring and improving healthy ecosystems and a working landscape that supports our quality of life and diverse, thriving communities.

To learn more about Food Solutions New England, [visit their website](#).

Purpose

To offer Junior League members an intensive learning experience with other members in a small group setting to engage in discussions about racism and their individual role in achieving racial equity in their communities.

As noted by Food Solutions New England, "We knew that starting with individual awareness-raising and evolutions— as the Challenge has always done— prepares a foundation for collective commitment, thus multiplying the numbers of advocates, allies and accomplices."

Goals

The goals of the 21-Day Racial Equity Challenge for participants are to:

- Hold ourselves accountable for completing the 21-Day Racial Equity Challenge by participating in the daily and community discussions and exercises.
- Have honest and thoughtful discussion on racial equity with your team every day of the 21-Day Racial Equity Challenge.

¹ Note: Some of the content has been reworded and/or altered in order to make it more relevant to the Junior League.



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- Come together as an organization every Friday of the Challenge to collectively reflect and learn.
- Normalize every-day conversations on racial equity.
- Be accountable for practicing racial equity beyond the 21-Day Racial Equity Challenge.
- Learn how to be an advocate and an ally for racial equity.
- Consider how your organizations can be an ally in making racial justice a reality every day.

How to participate: commitments and expectations

To make the most out of the experience, it is important to commit to the entire 21-day process. As a participant, you are expected to:

- Complete the entire 21-Day Racial Equity Challenge to the best of your ability and read the recommended resources each day.
- Engage in a daily discussion with your team using the reflection questions to guide you.
- Attend Friday AJLI-facilitated community discussions from 1-2:30pm (EST) so we can collectively reflect and learn as an organization.
- Be introspective and investigate your own feelings about race, gender, and other intersections of identity, even if it is uncomfortable.
- Be vulnerable, and if you are willing, share your feelings on what you are experiencing in the day-to-day Challenge.

Skills and competencies

The 21-Day Racial Equity Challenge will enable members to develop a number of critical civic leadership skills and competencies including:

Skills	Competencies
Advancing equity, diversity and inclusion, Member training, Program development and evaluation, Project management, Strategic planning,	Accountability, Active listening, Advocacy, Change capacity and management, Equity, diversity and inclusion practice, Community insight, Conflict management, Cultural competency, Emotional intelligence and interpersonal skills, Evaluation and assessment, Managing logistics, Meeting facilitation, Strategic thinking, Subject matter knowledge, Teamwork and team building,



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Glossary of Terms and Shared Vocabulary

We acknowledge that all participants engaging in the 21-Day Racial Equity Challenge bring with them different bodies of knowledge and experiences. Terms used in the 21-Day Racial Equity Challenge and by participants may be unfamiliar or misinterpreted by others. There are fantastic resources, such as the [Racial Equity Tool Glossary of Terms](#), which offer comprehensive definitions of relevant terms. We encourage participants to consult this glossary and pay special attention to less familiar terms.

It would also be helpful to create some type of rule (more on ground rules for discussion in the next section), for example having a participant say “Definition Check” when they do not understand a word used by another participant.

Language and Terminology Used in Challenge

We believe it is important to clarify the language and terminology used throughout the Challenge.

- People of Color refers to any ethnic or racial group that is not considered “White”. We always write out “People of Color” and do not abbreviate to POC.
- We will not use “Black” and “African American” interchangeably because they are not entirely the same. An “African American” person can trace their lineage directly from Africa to the United States, while a “Black” person could have lineage anywhere in the world. Throughout the Challenge, there will be times when it is not necessary to differentiate these two terms and times when it is very necessary to make the distinction.
- We will use “Indigenous” and “Native American” interchangeably throughout the Challenge to refer to all Indigenous persons in North America. However, it is important to note that whenever possible, we should use a specific tribal or First Nation name (such as Lakota) as there are 574 federally recognized tribes in the United States alone.
- We capitalize “Indigenous” and “Black” in order to show that we are discussing a group of people and to be consistent with the capitalization of “African American” or “White”.



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WORKING WITH YOUR TEAM

Before beginning the 21-Day Racial Equity Challenge

Before the Challenge begins on Monday, your team should meet together to:

- Decide as a newly formed team whether you would like to appoint a convener or elect one through an anonymous poll.
- Determine the time of your daily discussion. (Participants should expect to spend 40-60 minutes a day reflecting and discussing as a team).
- Go through the Orientation section (below) and establish ground rules for discussion and group and individual intent.

Role of the Convener

Being a convener does not require any previous training or experience. The role of the convener is primarily to bring the team together by:

- Getting agreement on when the team will meet at the same time every day for the next fifteen business days.
- Organizing the Zoom set up and scheduling (or another interactive platform).
- Getting agreement on ground rules that are designed to maximize the experience while remaining supportive, respectful, productive, and open.
- It may be prudent to select an individual who is not currently in a leadership role.

Role of the Team

The team is a self-managed group who will collectively share the responsibility of holding each other accountable.

It is the responsibility of the whole team to:

- Read this Guide before the Challenge begins.
- Moderate or manage the group conversations.
- Ensure everyone has a chance to speak and inhibit any single person from dominating.
- Hold participants accountable and conform to the ground rules of discussion
- Keep the conversation respectful, on topic and productive.
- Do the work ahead of the meeting,
- Be fully present.



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TEAM ORIENTATION

Introduction

The 21-Day Racial Equity Challenge is designed to push participants outside of their comfort and knowledge zone. By participating in the Challenge, we hope participants will learn and work together to produce actionable and collaborative solutions towards greater racial equity.

Daily group discussions are critical to individual and collective learning and sense-making, opening everyone up to different perspectives and ways of thinking.

In order to make sure all participants feel comfortable and solidify a foundation for collective commitment to racial equity, your team must create and accept ground rules for discussion and share your individual and group intent.

Ground Rules for Discussion

Ground rules for discussion help create an environment that values the diversity of thought and experience. It places the utmost importance on shared respect and productive experiences for all Team members. (Note: A respectful and productive discussion can still be difficult or emotionally draining.)

Creating ground rules of discussion together, and agreeing on them as a group, allows for greater trust. Some examples of discussion rules include:

- Using “I” statements rather than generalized “We” statements
- 3 Before Me – let three other people talk before you talk again
- Try to keep to succinct comments
- Keep conversations here
- Expect and accept a lack of closure

Please visit Resource B in the Appendices for more examples of ground rules of discussion, if needed.

The Feelings Wheel

[The Feelings Wheel](#) is an important tool used to track the “internal weather” of your Team throughout the challenge. Referring back to the feelings wheel during each reflection day offers important insight into group and individual feelings.

Furthermore, by acknowledging our feelings we work to step out of White dominant professional/cultural norms (more on that in the Challenge) that minimize emotional



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responses. The convener should ask each team member to check in at the end of the discussion.

- How are you feeling? How has this discussion affected your feelings?

Setting Individual and Group Intentions

It is important to center ourselves and our Team on why we decided to participate in the 21-Day Racial Equity Challenge. It may be helpful to keep a journal throughout the Challenge so you can reconnect everyday with your experiences, feelings and emotions.

Each Team member should share their individual and group intentions. (Note: Although it should be emphasized that the point of sharing your feelings is to be vulnerable and honest, Team members should also be allowed to just sit with their feelings and not answer immediately).

- Why did you decide to participate?
- What are you willing and able to give to this year's Challenge in terms of time and commitment so that you get the most out of it?
- What scares you the most about racial equity conversations?
- What do you want for others to whom you are connected and with whom you may be interacting over the course of and after Challenge?
- What do you want to accomplish by the end of the Challenge?

For group intentions:

- What are you willing and able to give this Challenge in terms of time and commitment so that you, and the group, can get the most out of it?



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APPENDICES

Resources for Teams



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Resource A: Sample Agenda for a Discussion

You can use this guide to structure your 40-60 minute daily discussions, adjust as needed for your Team.

Topic	Daily Meeting Process	Timing
Start-Ups	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Welcome• Go around the group with a check-in question: How are you/What is one word to describe how you're feeling today/What's something you are bringing to today's discussion? (<i>Encourage Team members to keep their responses brief</i>).• Review rules of discussion as needed. (Convener)	5 minutes
Discussion	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Present the daily objectives and learning from the 21-Day Habit Building Challenge. (Convener)• Invite Team members to reflect silently.• Open up the discussion (Remind team to ensure that everyone gets a chance to speak, reminding people that pauses and silence are okay)	30-45 minutes
Closing	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Check-Out: What is one thing you are taking from today's discussion/What is something you are committing to further your learning or take action around?• Evaluation of Discussion: What worked today in our discussion? What could we do to make our next discussion even better? Remind participants of next meeting date, time and any prep work needed.	5-10 minutes



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Resource B: Sample Ground Rules

- Take space/make space – if you are usually quiet challenge yourself to take more space, and if you usually talk a lot be mindful to leave room for quieter voices.
- We don't have to agree.
- Criticize ideas, not individuals.
- Do not interrupt one another.
- Avoid put-downs.
- Notice intent vs. impact (Use "oops" and "ouch" as in "I made a mistake" and "I am hurt").
- Be willing to be uncomfortable.
- Expect and accept a lack of closure (i.e. we won't figure this all out today).
- All voices are heard.
- Take responsibility for the quality of discussion.
- If you are offended by anything said during discussion, acknowledge it immediately.
- Appreciate each others' differences and values.
- Avoid jargon, acronyms, and industry language – use inclusive language that is accessible for people with varying inside knowledge.
- Be aware of time.
- Speak from your own experience.
- Challenge assumptions and avoid assumptions about others, especially based on their perceived social group.
- Avoiding using isms without explaining what you mean.
- Take/Share what you're learned (without attribution or with permission).
- Be curious, open and respectful.
- Acknowledge that no one knows everything.
- Confidentiality



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Resource C: Facilitation Tips that can be applied by group members

Conveners can employ different techniques to help guide a group towards a goal or learning point in a respectful and inclusive discussion. Some of these skills are outlined below, along with several examples. These phrases and techniques are not intended to be exact “scripts” and should be adapted to your own voice and situation.

For this particular circumstance (The Challenge), no single member serves as a convener. Therefore, it may be helpful that all members learn techniques to keep discussions vibrant where all team members have a fair opportunity to participate

- **Addressing behavior** – acknowledging behaviors in the room.
 - **Examples:** There seems to be a lot of side conversation. Is that okay with everyone? There is low energy in the room. Should we take a stretch break? There’s a lot of emotion building right now that is interfering with productive discussion. Let’s take a few deep breaths and a moment to remember the ground rules and that we are all here for a common purpose
- **Bridging** – making connections, tying one learning point to another.
 - **Examples:** We started to talk about ally-building earlier, and now we’re getting into some more concrete ideas of how to be an effective ally.
- **Checking for understanding** – making sure directions and questions are clear.
 - **Examples:** Does everyone understand? Is that question clear?
- **Clarifying** – interpreting, clarifying misunderstandings, defining terms.
 - **Examples:** There seems to be some miscommunication happening here; maybe we should take a step back. Who needs more clarification before we move on?
- **Encouraging** – prompting, nonjudgmental responses, open-ended questions, respectful probing.
 - **Examples:** “We’re all learners in this process. This can be a hard topic to discuss. Thank you for sharing that story.”
- **Evaluating** – asking questions that encourage group members to examine an issue from a different perspective.
 - **Examples:** “What’s another way to look at this issue? A different take might be; “I appreciate Joseph sharing his perspective on the matter; do others have a similar or different perspective?”



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- **Gatekeeping** – managing time and group participation.
 - **Examples:** “Let’s hear from some of the people who we haven’t heard from.... Let’s take two more responses, and then we’ll move on
- **Giving** – judiciously offering facts or personal experiences to clarify a point.
 - **Examples:** “Thank you for that observation. I had a similar experience at a meeting.”
- **Naming feelings** – interpreting and acknowledging feelings.
 - **Examples:** “It sounds like you might be frustrated with this conversation. Is that correct?”
- **Re-framing** - helping to find opportunities out of challenges.
 - **Example:** “That sounds challenging/difficult. What could it look like if it were different in the future, so that it would work better/help us meet the goals better?” “So what needs to happen to turn that around? What resources do we need to move that in a different direction?”
- **Orienting** – bringing the group back to task, reiterating the question or topic.
 - **Examples:** “This is a really interesting discussion, hopefully that will continue after our discussion. The piece we need to focus our attention on now is.... Let’s go back to the original question.”
- **Paraphrasing** – seeking clarity, promoting group understanding.
 - **Examples:** “A number of different ideas are emerging; let me try to synthesize them into three major points. They are.... “
- **Resolving** – conciliating differences, cooperative problem solving.
 - **Examples:** “Even though you feel that way, Donna, can you understand what Naomi is saying? This is a complex issue with a lot of different perspectives.”
- **Remaining** – honoring silence, allowing participants enough time to reflect and formulate thoughts.
 - **Examples:** “Let’s take a few more minutes before we begin so that everyone can gather their thoughts.” Allow the silence to exist. Count to 10 silently before asking another question.



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- **Returning** – keeping all participants engaged in the dialogue, putting the conversation back to the whole group.
 - **Examples:** “Does anyone have a different perspective? What feelings did this activity bring up for others? What do others think about this issue?”
- **Seeking** – asking for clarification, suggestions, more information.
 - **Examples:** “What has your experience been? Can you say more about that? What does that term mean to you?”



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Resource D: Planning Ahead for Follow-Up

Think about ways to keep the conversation and relationship-building moving toward action, to move beyond our 'comfort' zones into our 'stretch' (sometimes less comfortable) zones. Consider how your team can support one another to push ourselves, our partners, our tribes, further than we have before. How can we create the individual, community and workplace supports in order to center racial equity in decisions-making and activities, including policies, practices, programs and budgets and day-to-day happenings?

All team members should continue to ground the team in potential next steps. Invite an opportunity for ongoing dialogue or issue-focused meet-ups to extend the learning and action community. Invite articles and blogs from the team into each other's networks. This multiplies and diversifies voices with shared values and messages. Always ask 'What's next?' and 'What's possible now?'



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Resource E: Preparing Yourself for the Discussion

- Center yourself. Connect to your values and what gives you strength and support (other people, places, activities). Forgive yourself and others in advance for your own and their imperfections. Also remember that racism is, as Jay Smooth says, “a concept that is designed to trip us up.”
- Keep doing your own personal work on understanding your own racial identity, your worldview regarding race, racism and other forms of oppression, and your understanding of how your identity impacts your conversations about and work for racial equity. As humans, we all carry biases that we may not even realize we have.
- Be willing to meet people where they are; try to understand people who are in different stages of their own journey on these issues. But also be thinking about how we can support each other to get beyond “where we already are.”
- Challenge yourself to listen to others non-judgmentally.
- Be willing to learn, acknowledging that any one person has only a partial grasp on the truth.
- Be willing to be challenged, to change your mind and to deal with uncertainty.
- Envision yourself handling challenging situations with grace and effectiveness, building trust by being, at times, transparent and vulnerable when you are able.



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Resource F: Important Acknowledgements for Group Discussions

1. Acknowledge the purpose of the group at the outset.
2. Acknowledge that power dynamics are always in the room. This is not necessarily a bad thing. Power can be used for good and for ill. And it is important to acknowledge that different power dynamics may be at play and affecting the conversation.
3. Acknowledge that everyone is unique and no one speaks for all other people of their race or ethnic group. Invite a spirit of curiosity and for learning from each other as individuals with different experiences.
4. Acknowledge that the point of these discussions is to help one another grow, to learn and commit to taking action to undo racism. This is difficult to do when we are completely comfortable and things are familiar and easy. It is also difficult to do when we are feeling panicky and worried, whether true or not, about our safety. The work of these discussions is to get us into the “stretch zone,” where we experience some discomfort. It is important to make this experience - of stretching into some discomfort in order to learn, okay for people.



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Resource G: Navigating Challenging Conversations

Conveners often have to navigate challenging conversations. As noted above, no single member serves as a convener for this Challenge. Therefore, it may be helpful for all members to learn how to navigate challenging conversations about race.

Some of these challenging conversations are outlined below, along with several example answers.

“What about reverse discrimination?” (“What about white people who work real hard...now they can’t get jobs. That’s not fair. Why should whites be punished?”)

- **Consider:** Reverse racism and discrimination are not possible given the history of oppression and power structures that has been core to the making of this country.
 - All people can be unfair and treat others badly, but that is not the same thing as being racist.
 - Racism is by definition a form of oppression based on the socially constructed concept of race used by the dominant racial group (whites) over non-dominant racial groups.

“We need to lower our standards so that people of color can get in/advance/make it.”

- **Consider:** Lowering standards is not what it means to work for equity, and is essentially giving into myths of racial inferiority.
 - Standards may be culturally/racially biased and changed to be more inclusive, but not “lowered.”

“Can people of color be racist?”

- **Consider:** No. Racism is used to justify the position of the dominant group, white people in this case, and to uphold white supremacy and superiority.
 - Everyone can be biased, and engage in bigoted and belittling behavior that is intolerant of other perspectives. But racism is by definition a form of oppression exercised by the dominant racial group (whites).

“Why aren’t we talking about the oppression of women/LGBTQ?”

- **Consider:** We can be explicit about racism and at the same time not exclusive of other forms of oppression, which do exist and can compound (through what is known as “intersectionality”).



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- It can be important to lead with racism and the oppression of people of color because race continues to be most predictive of opportunity and outcomes in this country and one of the hardest things to talk about in productive ways.
- And when we dive wholeheartedly into conversations about racism, they naturally lead to other forms of oppression.

“I’m tired of talking about white power/privilege/supremacy. What really needs to happen is we need to learn to have constructive relationships, learn to communicate, try to help them...!”

- **Consider:** It is true that we have to learn to have more constructive relationships and communication. AND we have to recognize that racism is a system of oppression that is used to uphold the power of the dominant racial group, in this case white people. It is used to preserve unearned privilege and the myth of white superiority.
 - This is the water in which we swim in this country, so failing to see it, talk about it, and working actively to shift it essentially helps to keep racism in place.

“People of color have to take some responsibility too. I haven’t had it easy and I am white. I overcame many obstacles in my life through hard work and a positive attitude.”

- **Consider:** Many people struggle and suffer, because of poverty, gender and other forms of oppression. We don’t want to deny that. And we don’t want to suggest that individual effort and hard work isn’t important. And we also do not want to diminish the real structural barriers that exist for people of color in this country that often means they have to work many times harder to “succeed” or survive.
 - Think about how white dominant cultural norms can make it easier for white people to progress, like being on an escalator going up, white presenting a counter-force for people of color, like trying to run up an escalator going down.
 - Individual effort matters, and so does addressing societal structures and norms.

“I just see people as people. I don’t see Black, or White or green or purple.”

- **Consider:** Science suggests otherwise. Implicit bias has been proven to play out in everyone’s minds to some degree and at a level of consciousness that can be very subtle but still impact our actions in the world.
 - Microaggressions, a statement, action, or incident regarded as an instance of indirect, subtle, or unintentional discrimination against members of a



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marginalized group such as a racial or ethnic minority are a phenomenon we should discuss and be aware of.

- And you can take an implicit association test to see about your own biases. It is best that we be humble about this fact and actively work to counter these unconscious biases and stereotypes.

<https://implicit.harvard.edu/implicit/takeatest.html>

“Why use the word “racism”? Couldn’t we find a gentler, less negative word?”

- **Consider:** Who are we trying to protect by being “gentler” and less negative? Often we privilege the comfort of the privileged (white people), at the ongoing expense of people of color.
 - We have to be bold, courageous and truthful, and recognize that there is a difference between discomfort and outright panic. Unless we name racism, how will we be able to work to undo or dismantle it?

“It seems that you are saying all white folks are racist? I am not a racist.”

- **Consider:** There is a difference between saying that an individual is “a racist” (by malicious intent) and that someone lives in and is influenced by a racist system.
 - It is very difficult for white people in this country not to have some internalized sense of superiority and bias vis-a-vis people of color because of how systems have been rigged in their favor.
 - This does not mean that white people can’t work hard to overcome these internalized sensibilities, and it requires ongoing commitment, awareness building and action. And even better if we do this in community together, like this group.

“This doesn’t impact me. Racism does not impact me.” (person of color saying this)

- **Consider:** Racism can be more and less obvious. As Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. once said, “Everything we see is a shadow cast by that which we do not see.”
 - Racism can be interpersonal and institutional (more obvious) and internalized and structural (perhaps less obvious). Research is showing how much of a psychological burden racism is for people of color, even being passed down through genes, and how things as subtle as narrative and primes create barriers for people of color.
 - We do not mean to make this overwhelming, but if we do not name these dynamics, we cannot address them. And the good news is that there are more and more tools for addressing how racism operates at different levels, and this Challenge will point us in the direction of many of them.

THE ASSOCIATION OF JUNIOR LEAGUES INTERNATIONAL

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