



The Deceptive Barrier - Getting Connected

One of the biggest challenges for White people committing to challenge racism is to get connected – connected to other individuals for support and connected to groups and organizations to further their missions. This is a deceptively difficult barrier and one that can significantly undermine committed action.

Below are ten key points about connecting with other individuals and ten key points about connecting with groups and organizations. They are not a formula – they are just for guidance in dealing with a deceptively difficult challenge.



10 Key Points for Connecting with Other Individuals

“There are two questions that we have to ask ourselves. The first is ‘Where am I going?’ and the second is ‘Who will go with me?’”

Howard Thurman

#1 Keep it simple. You may not need more than one or two people to effectively support you (and each other) in acting to counter racism.

#2 Use your current network to start. You may already have almost everyone you need – family, friends, neighbors, co-workers, friends in community groups, etc.

#3. Look for people already engaged in countering racism and connect with them. These would be new connections and may or may not be obvious. Just stay alert to opportunities

#4. Get clear with others about what the purpose of the connection is – what might be achieved and how to support each other. You don't need to be "best friends forever", but it's good to know the "why?" of the connection.

#5. Focus on your qualities and strengths. Avoid the "aw shucks" pitfall – "Aw shucks, I don't have much to offer." There will be plenty to learn and growth is part of the value of engaging, but everyone brings capabilities and characteristics that can make a difference. You're not coming empty-handed to the connection.

#6. Set regular times to meet and have a simple agenda, which can change frequently. These agendas can be very simple and brief, but they need to be regular and have some structure. Why are we connecting?

#7. Take advantage of educational experiences together – online, in person, etc. Learning with others is always good for motivation and common ground, as well as a focus of support.

#8. Use "Dynamic Accountability" together to stay on track (frequent and informal): Celebrate small wins and progress; learn from the experience; and determine what to keep doing, start doing, or stop doing. Remember, this is a journey and we always "learn the way." This model of accountability (staying on the path) is good for friends, groups, organizations, and communities.

#9. Use the site to support you and your colleagues in committing, dealing with the natural barriers, choosing actions, answering questions, and finding resources. You can all focus on specific topics or each person can focus on specific topics and bring those to the relationship.

#10. Work together to connect to the right organizations. This can be surprisingly important. Connecting to the right groups or organizations can be a

difficult challenge and doing it with others can help – a lot. That can range from exploring possible organizations to connect with, preparing yourselves to connect, contributing fully and persevering.

10 Key Points for Connecting with Groups & Organizations

“There is no power for change greater than a community discovering what it cares about.”

Margaret J. Wheatley

#1 This is a deceptively tough challenge. There are not many communities where it will be easy to find the best places to make a difference. In some communities it is obvious which groups and organizations are most appropriate. However, that is not the case with most communities and even most of the national organizations have local chapters and affiliates that vary widely in their nature.

A significant amount of work may be required to find the right fit. This can be like looking for a job or the best school for kids.

#2 This searching and exploring is part of the challenge - part of the work. Finding the right connections is part of the journey and needs to be valued as such. You are not wasting time. You are doing what is naturally required to get connected to the right group or organization.

#3 This is a question of “Fit.” All relationships are a matter of fit and finding the right groups or organizations to counter racism is no exception. Unfortunately, most communities are not set up to make that easy in the case of

racism. Do your best to find a good fit – if it works, great. If it doesn't, keep looking.

There will be plenty of cases where there is a great organization and a great individual, but not a good fit. Do not be discouraged or feel diminished if a good fit is hard to find. This really is part of the challenge.

#4. Prep like a job search. Go wide in exploring the possibilities.

Cast a wide net and then zero in on where the best fit might be. Get to know the possible groups and organizations as you would for searching for a paid job. That can include general reputation, mission and vision, Board and staff, accomplishments, etc.

- Look for organizations
- Look for groups
- Form a group
- Look for initiatives that you can join that may involve multiple groups or organizations – focused on legislation, policy, laws, processes. This can focus on governmental, by industry (like real estate or finance), specific corporations (like DEI initiatives), etc.
- Your contribution can be direct – with advocacy organizations for instance
- Your contribution can be indirect – supporting the supporters, like funders

Note. Don't look for or require perfection. You just need a reasonably good fit and then experience will reinforce your choice or guide you to making a different one.

#5. Prep like a job search. Prepare your “resume” in order to introduce yourself. It's important to let people know who you are and what you can bring. Don't just show up as an “interested White person.”

Show up as a committed White person that has done their prep. That might include customizing your basic resume for a specific group or organization. It's important to demonstrate your potential value through prep and how you present yourself. That can include education, job history, qualities and characteristics, why you're interested in the group or organization, examples of

commitments, etc. The process of creating your “resume” also sharpens your sense of purpose and value.

#6. Make it easy for the group or organization to get a good sense of you – a focused snapshot – and respond to you. This snapshot demonstrates that you know yourself and that you have thought through why a group or organization would want you as an ally. You can also make it easy for them to respond to you. Below are some examples.

“I’m contacting you for three reasons”

1. I’m committed to being an anti-racist – acting with intention on a sustained basis
2. I’ve prepared myself to be an effective ally
3. I’m looking for the right fit – where I can make a significant difference

“I understand” that your mission is to ... and that your main streams of action are...

“What I can bring to the challenge is:”

You can pull from the Action Template in the Ally or Advocate section. You can also use a resume that you created in #5 above.

“Please let me know:”

- We have nothing that fits what you have to offer
- We have nothing that fits you, but recommend that you contact...
- There may be a good fit, please take the following action (i.e. call/email for an appointment/zoom, send more info about yourself...)
- Other

“Thank You”

#7. Expect natural ambivalence on their part. This is also a natural part of the challenge. It’s an early test of your commitment and wisdom. You can use it to deepen awareness of the challenge and grow personally as well as become a trusted member of the group or organization

This is part of the dynamics of racism. It’s part of many Black led organizations’ experience with White people coming in to “fix or save things”, and/or the

experience of White people not “holding the course” and retreating to comfort zones partway through the journey.

Consider

- It’s not personal – it’s an inescapable result of our history.
- You will be tested – hopefully, because that’s how we grow and mature.
- Don’t “play small” to be acceptable. The best that we can do as White allies is to bring all of our strengths with genuine humility. Our strengths are what our allies need.
- As White people we have things to offer, so offer them. We also have lots of things to learn, so learn them.
- It’s not universal. It’s common and should be anticipated, but it’s not a characteristic of all groups or organizations countering racism.
- It will vary in intensity. In extreme cases it can make it impossible for White people to be a significant part of the organization. In most cases it can be overcome with wisdom and perseverance

#8. Use the other parts of the site. This is a big site, and it has a lot of information that can support you in connecting. All of the sections provide common ground for connecting with others. Most of the sections also provide advantages for connecting with groups and organizations.

- **Commitment.** It is much easier to act with intention (being an anti-racists) and to persevere when it is clear what defines an anti-racist, what the possible benefits are, and what the journey is like. This section can help highlight your ability to commit, the basis for your commitment and your acceptance of the journey required. That helps make your case for acceptance in groups or organizations.
- **Barriers.** Dealing with the three “guardians of the threshold before connecting is important, but they can also be dealt with very well when dealt with directly. This also holds true for the six barriers encountered on the path. Being connected to others helps with all of the barriers. Dealing with the barriers also allows you to tell potential groups and organizations that you have dealt with them, which will increase your credibility.

- **Action Section.** There are lots of actions that you can take – individually and collectively along with guidance on how to be an effective ally and advocate. The sections on being an ally and advocate include a wide range of capabilities that can be brought to bear, which provide possible common ground with groups or organizations.
- **FAQs.** There are a lot of key FAQs that can generate clarity on a lot of issues – from White privilege and what happens if you are rejected to the difference between diversity, equity, and inclusion. The FAQs can provide a lot of confidence and focus.
- **Resources.** There are lots of groups and organizations noted in the resources section that can be explored as well as topics can lead to interests. Resources can also sharpen your sense of purpose as well as help identify your possible contributions.

#9. Combine your actions. Your contribution to groups or organizations can be a combination of financial, a role in general support, using your contacts, employing specific skills, etc. Don't just look for the "golden" placement." Your contribution may be a number of actions with one or more groups or organizations.

#10. Do this with others. Challenge and support each other. You may end up with the same connections. You may end up with different connections. Share the work of exploring and understanding the potential groups and organizations. Help each other with the resumes and snapshots. Keep up the commitment and energy – persevering and being resilient and remembering that t's a natural and inescapable part of the challenge

"A dream you dream alone is only a dream. A dream you dream together is reality."

John Lennon

