

Example Ground Rules for Groups

Ground Rules are explicit agreements a group makes about how participants interact. These rules should be agreed to by the group and everyone should share in the responsibility in following and enforcing them. Ground rules help reduce or prevent misunderstandings and disagreements, and promote open, respectful dialogue while maximizing participation.

Example Ground Rules...

1. **Show up and listen actively** — respect others when they are talking and let them know they're heard and understood. Make an effort to attend meetings regularly as this helps with continuity. Everyone is invited to participate equally and avoid dominating conversations.
2. **Communicate with respect, fairness and honesty** — speak from your own experience by using "I" statements. Be conscious of body language and nonverbal responses — they can be as disrespectful as words. Do not be afraid to respectfully question one another, but refrain from personal attacks — focus on ideas or the shared goals. Disagreements provide opportunities to gain a deeper understanding and create better decisions.
3. **Remain open to new ideas, information, or perspectives** — Community growth depends on the inclusion of every individual voice. Share ideas and opinions and value one another's experiences.
4. **Stay on track and avoid interrupting others** — Wait until a speaker is finished before contributing your thoughts. Stay on topic and avoid invalidating or attacking others' ideas with your own spin; share your own idea, story, or experience.
5. **Respect time and value partnership** — Be clear about the meeting purpose so all can contribute. Think before speaking so what you share is focused on the point and brief. Look for suggestions and ways the group can work smarter. Make decisions by consensus.
6. **Open/close with action** – Meeting minutes and decisions are shared with participants and reflect the issues discussed, decisions made, and any tasks or next steps assigned.

Strategies to consider...

1. Post the ground rules somewhere visible during the entire class or workshop.
2. Invite participants to revisit the ground rules early and often. Setting ground rules early, and following them consistently is important. Include opportunities to add new items.
3. If you are using more than two or three ground rules, focus on particular items during appropriate activities or discussions. For example, if you are facilitating a discussion in a large group, before the discussion starts state that you would like to focus on active listening. Challenge participants to refrain from any side discussions.
4. Model your ground rules in your own participation. Be sure that your own language reflects ownership and responsibility by using as many "I" and "me" statements as possible.
5. If a particular ground rule is routinely broken, bounce it back to the participants. A fruitful discussion can often arise from a close review of why participants are not adhering to particular ground rules.

Adapted from EdChange: <http://www.edchange.org/multicultural/activities/groundrules.html>