

## ACTIVITY 6

# Equity Fishbowl

### TIMING

Allot at least **90 minutes**.

### EXPERTISE

This exercise is not recommended for a facilitation team that is not deeply committed to its own exploration of how race impacts its work together. The facilitators do not have to be experts on issues of equity. Rather they have to be comfortable talking about their own journey around issues of equity, power, and racism as a team.

## PURPOSE

To equip leaders to surface and address issues of equity, power, and racism within systems.

## USE

This exercise can be used to jump-start a group conversation about structural racism. Often this deepens leaders' understanding of how racism shows up in their relationships and work.

## FACILITATION

This exercise works best when the group is already in deep relationship with one another and clear on the community agreements. It should also happen as part of a larger conversation about the role of systemic racism and power dynamics in the work itself and in the larger community.

**What's needed:** It's important that the room be closed to outside interference. The group should be sitting in a circle. The facilitation team will sit in a "fishbowl" inside that circle so that the group can observe the conversation from the outside.

### Instructions:

- 1 Tell the group that they are going to witness a conversation between the facilitators about how issues of racism and equity play out in the facilitation team. Make it clear that the conversation is not staged, and that it might be difficult to hear us speak about sensitive issues present in our dynamic.
- 2 Let them know that after the conversation, they will be invited to ask questions, react, or reflect on its relevance to the group itself.
- 3 Speak to the dynamics present in your team. We often begin by telling our team's history, starting as an all-white group. Over time and with much work, we became a multiracial team, work that continues to this day. This conversation can go for up to 30 minutes.

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**Instructions (continued):**

- ④ At the end of the conversation, participants are invited into the “fishbowl” to ask questions or make comments. Often this begins an important conversation about the racial dynamics in the room.
- ⑤ The full circle is re-created and the facilitators lead a debrief.

## WHAT WE'RE LEARNING

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- ✓ This is a risky moment for both the facilitation team and the group. It's safer to have conversations about equity and racism that are abstract, but harder to look at how racial dynamics are playing out among trusted colleagues. And, it is even rarer for a team be honest about their struggles and still be in productive relationship with one another.
- ✓ Even when this exercise has resulted in strong emotions and hard feelings, it has always laid the groundwork for greater honesty. With the facilitation team as a proxy, this exercise often enables discomfort and anger to come to the surface and be acknowledged. When done with support, leaders get practice at expressing discomfort around issues of power and racial inequity.

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