

Coming Together for Racial Understanding



Coming Together for Racial Understanding (CTRU), seeded by the Extension Committee on Organization and Policy in 2016, has a vision to grow a community of Extension professionals well prepared to foster meaningful community conversations around race, leading to positive change. The foundation of the effort is built upon four major principles:

- Cooperative Extension Service (CES) is positioned to help organize and facilitate these challenging conversations, as they are viewed as trusted resources in some communities*.
- CES must demonstrate in our own practices what we seek for communities.
- CES must do our own work around race before we can effectively engage communities.
- Dialogues are vital to understanding, and understanding is vital to healing and enduring change.

CTRU embraces these principles by first identifying and training core state teams. To date, this training has taken the form of two weeklong face-to-face workshops (2018 and 2019) with a total of 26 states participating. State train-the-trainer teams consisted of three individuals with a strong foundation in one or both content circles described under what training entails. These core teams then lead two additional phases:

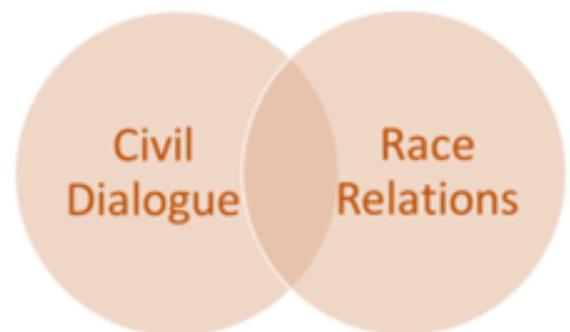
- **Build capacity within the CES system in the home state** through training a larger cohort of CES professionals, ensuring racial/ethnic diversity of the participants. Where applicable, this means working across the state's LGU systems where applicable (1862, 1890, 1994).
- **Facilitate community dialogues within the state.** These processes are typically spread out over 6-7 weeks meeting once a week, using one of two science-based community dialogue processes that culminate in informed community action:
 - Facing Racism in a Diverse Nation
 - Coming Together for Racial Healing

What CTRU training entails:

Becoming competent in facilitating civil dialogue around race relations requires a broad skill set drawn from two partially overlapping subsets of skills. One set of skills relates directly to the ability to organize, convene, and help lead an effort to bring people together for conversations around a challenging issue. The other skill set is directly related to competencies around multi-cultural communication and interaction. To effectively facilitate dialogue around the unique challenges of race relations involves the intersection of both sets of skills. To read the full set of related competencies see: <https://civildialogue.extension.org/competencies-framework/>

CTRU Train-the-Trainer includes:

- 14 hours of work around racial understanding
- 14 hours of guided experiential practice/participation in the two dialogue processes, giving CTRU teams the opportunity to select the process that is the best fit to their state/communities.
- 4 hours of guided planning
- Ongoing national community of practice support



How Can Administrators/Directors Help:

If you do not yet have a proactive effort focused on dialogues around race (such as CTRU):

- Put race dialogue efforts on the front burner and keep them there.
- Demonstrate your commitment to addressing racism by investing in team training that supports both deep learning and self-exploration on race as well as invests in meaningful dialogues.

*Welborn, R., Downey, L., Dyk, P., Monroe, P., Tyler-Mackey, C., & Worthy, S. L. (2016). Turning the Tide on Poverty: The role of Cooperative Extension Service in the initiative, Community Development.

If your state has a CTRU or related effort, CES Directors/Administrators can support this work by:

- Put race dialogue efforts on the front burner and keep them there.
- Adjusting the workload of those who will be providing instate training and program delivery, so they have adequate time to give to these priority responsibilities.
- Provide time for additional Extension employees to participate in CTRU trainings.
- Invest adequate resources to support dialogue efforts (including funding for travel, meeting costs, and materials).
- Demonstrate institutional support even in the face of dissension or risk.
- Actively communicate support for this work as an overall priority in Extension.
- Participate in training activities and dialogues.
- Value CTRU trainings and facilitation of dialogues in promotion and tenure processes.
- Make these efforts visible and accessible to communities through your communication platforms.
- Create time to meet and communicate regularly with your state teams as they plan and implement activities.

What CTRU has been accomplished as of December 2019:

- 26 states have sent teams to the training.
- 13 states sent multi-institutional state teams (1862/1890/1994).
- 83 participants completed the train-the-trainer events (2018 and 2019 combined).
- Participants reported advancement on all 16 competencies with both trainings.
- 14 states have launched training for Extension staff, with over 600 total participants.
- 6 states have begun to advance dialogues into communities.
- A multi-state research group has aligned with this effort to explore the ways this work advances.
- 9 other entities helped sponsor one of the two trainings, following ECOP's leadership.
- NACDEP awarded this effort the National Diversity Award for 2019.
- SRDC received funding to advance this effort for 2020. One of the reviewers specifically noted that the strength of the proposal was the groundwork already completed to date.

Why Dialogue Matters

Conversations about race and racism (and other issues related to human differences) can be very difficult. Many of us lack positive role models or very many opportunities to engage in discussions focused on complex issues in ways that lead to increased understanding and positive relationship-building across differences. In addition, conversations about race, gender, class and other differences can trigger strong emotions in people including guilt, shame, anger, trauma and despair

Deborah Flick, Ph.D. author of *From Debate to Dialogue: Using the Understanding Process to Transform Our Conversations* suggests that moving from debate to dialogue can increase our understanding of ourselves and others while improving our communication skills and relationships. Based on Flick's work, here are some differences between debate and dialogue.

Moving from Debate to Dialogue

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Conventional Process	Understanding Process
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• One right answer• Goal is to be right, win or persuade• Evaluating and critical• What's wrong with this picture?• Listen judgmentally, for errors and flaws• Plan your rebuttal	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Multiple and valid perspectives• Goal is to understand• Curious and open• What can I learn?• Listen for their story• Listen more than you talk• Reflect instead of react

Flick, 1998

Coming Together for Racial Understanding Website:

<http://srdc.msstate.edu/civildialogue/index.html>