

# Race Conversations Guide

A guide to facilitating conversations about race

Facilitating discussions about *equity, allyship and change in the workplace.*

Companies are facing growing pressure from employees and other stakeholders to take action on racial inequity at work. Especially after the spring of 2020, when the world united against racial injustice and woke up to the gross inequity in our systems, society and workplaces.

At the time, 64% of Business Roundtable CEOs released statements supporting action to dismantle power and privilege, and to end racial justice. But, as important context to that statistic, 61% of Americans said that companies' commitments to advance racial equity ring hollow without any measures to hold them accountable.

In other words, returning to business as usual will not be good for business.

Which is exactly why we've created this guide.



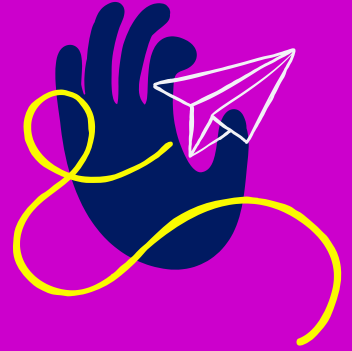
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# The role of this *guide*:

- ✓ To help facilitate meaningful, constructive race conversations within your company, so that your team can share, listen and reflect on racial equity and justice.
- ✓ To create a safe atmosphere where your team can learn from each other's experiences.
- ✓ To begin and continue the journey of creating lasting change.
- ✓ To provide you with actionable steps that you can take within your company to get executives involved; facilitate employee-led experiences; and inspire learning, commitment and action toward increasing empathy, understanding and allyship.
- ✓ To help you create clear connections between your corporate purpose and corporate social responsibility programs.



We've heard from many corporate purpose professionals like you. Your company has started a diversity, equity, inclusion and belonging program, or placed more emphasis on it. You've run successful giving and volunteering campaigns to support racial equity and justice. And now you're ready to take the next step in your racial equity and justice journey. Hosting conversations about race is that next step.

However, workplace conversations about racial equity, allyship and change aren't easy to navigate. We're here to provide guidance on how to start meaningful, and perhaps uncomfortable, conversations at your organization or how to keep the conversations going. And, most importantly, we want to help you facilitate the conversations that will contribute to real and lasting progress on racial equity within your workplace and your community.

We've developed this guide based on a Race Conversations Table Talks series hosted by Benevity's Black Employee Network & Friends (B.E.N.) employee resource group. The five-part series was designed to create a space for meaningful dialogue among Benevity-ites to explore, listen and share reflections on the topic of race while supporting and learning from each other and to set the foundation for our journey toward greater equity together. Over half of Benevity-ites attended this series, and these experiences were highly valued within our company, resulting in a shift of mindsets, increased empathy and understanding, and the creation of allies to support colleagues of different races.

In this race conversations guide, we're going to give you practical steps on how to facilitate conversations in your workplace that will not only open up a dialogue about racial inequality, but weave a commitment to racial justice and allyship into the fabric of your organization.

Because in order to create lasting change, the conversations must continue.

## **This guide will help you quickly and easily:**

- ✓ Design a program for your company to hold necessary conversations about racial equity.
- ✓ Train your conversation facilitators with helpful tips and resources.
- ✓ Hold meaningful conversations based on proven templates and prompts, so you can amplify your efforts and activate your employees.

# Planning for **success**

There are some important steps you should take to ensure your Race Conversations Table Talks are a success. In the following section, we'll share some best practices to help you plan your sessions.

## Understanding table talks

So, you may find yourself asking, "What is a table talk?" A table talk is a planned event where employees come together, either in person or virtually, to discuss important social issues. Table talks can range from multiple-speaker panel discussions where stories are shared with attendees to facilitated breakout sessions where attendees participate in smaller group discussions.

## Choosing a format that fits with your organization

There are many ways you can plan and facilitate these table talks. At Benevity, we held a series of one- to two-hour lunch and learns over the course of a couple of months. Most sessions had a topic that was listed in the meeting invite to ensure attendees were aware of the topic and if any pre-work was required. We also specified whether the session was appropriate for listening or active engagement.



### *Benevity Spark tip*

Publish these sessions as volunteer opportunities within Spark and allow your employees to track their time toward these initiatives. This is a great way for employees to hold themselves accountable for their learning! Be sure to promote these opportunities with news items and through your company communications channels to get the word out.

## Getting executives to demonstrate their support

Your executives approved your company DEIB program, so now it's time for them to demonstrate their support for your program's journey. Reach out to them and let them know how they can support this next step. They can help with your Race Conversations Table Talks series by doing the following:

1. Assisting with promotion and communication: Mentioning the event at a townhall, or via email or chat, to prompt employees to sign up.
2. Creating time and space for employees: Attending and sponsoring sessions.
3. Participating: Sharing stories or thoughts, and asking questions during Q&A sessions.



### *Consider power dynamics in these conversations*

To deal with this possibility, have a senior leader speak first, showing support, openness and empathy to set the tone. This will create a safe space for conversations and participants will follow their lead.

## Reaching out to internal and external speakers

There are benefits to using both internal and external speakers for your table talks panels. Internal speakers will feel relatable and relevant, while external speakers can bring important perspectives and ideas. Keep in mind, external speakers may require a fee to speak at your event.

For your first session, start with a panel of speakers to help break the ice, make sure executives show their support and involve your passionate employees. It can be quite powerful to start with internal stories, while bringing in outside perspectives in later sessions.

## Engaging employee facilitators

Facilitating these sessions adds some work to your plate, so don't hesitate to bring in some help. For example, if you have an employee resource group to lean on, be sure to engage them. Or, reach out to your employees for volunteers to help facilitate and run these sessions. You also may be fortunate to have a number of employees who reached out to be a part of the solution. Try to recruit facilitators from various teams so that there is representation across the business. Remember, facilitators are different from speakers. A facilitator is simply there to ensure the conversation stays on topic, stays respectful and stays on schedule.



### Tip

Use the [Call for volunteer facilitators email template](#) at the end of this guide to begin your search.

## Training facilitators

Be sure to schedule a preparation session to train your facilitators on the purpose and expectations for each table talk. Ensure they are comfortable with the content of each conversation, and help them prepare for any questions or discussion points that may come up throughout the session. Use the templates and resources provided at the end of this guide to help them create and guide their conversations.

### Quick tips for facilitators:

1. Guide the conversation, but let the participants do the majority of the talking.
2. Ask concise questions.
3. Silence is okay. If the silence becomes excruciating, count for another 10 seconds, then continue the conversation.



### Benevity Spark tip

Create a volunteer opportunity for your race conversations facilitators in Spark and reward their efforts with "dollars for doers"! You can even create a Mission to help support the training of your facilitators, so they feel equipped to lead an inclusive and productive conversation.

## Getting the word out

Once you have your facilitators selected, be sure to promote your sessions to the whole company!

### Here are a few ways you can promote your table talks series:

- Have a senior executive sponsor this initiative and send a companywide email announcement that links to a more detailed explanation on your program's intranet page. It's almost guaranteed that an email from a senior executive will get opened.
- Add a news article and cover story to your Spark site.
- Send a companywide email linking to your Spark site.
- Ensure the series is mentioned at a town hall, safety moment meeting or other team meetings.
- Send a message via your instant message channels (e.g., Slack, Yammer).
- Add electronic ads to LCD screens across your offices (if applicable).
- Ask your facilitators to reach out to their colleagues (as people are more likely to join a session on an uncomfortable topic if they've been invited by someone they know and trust).
- Distribute flyers/posters/table tents in communal areas at all of your locations (especially factories/manufacturing sites/retail outlets). Be sure to get permission from your facilities team before you post anything (if applicable).

# Getting *started*

## Planning meeting formats

Now that you've taken care of some of the session pre-planning, you will need to consider the format of your Race Conversations Table Talks. Will they be presentation style with Q&As, or guided facilitated sessions? If the latter, you will need to pre-plan breakout groups based on confirmed attendance. Think through what makes your employees feel most comfortable and use the tools available (e.g., advise employees it is OK to share their thoughts by chat or participate simply by listening).

## Hosting engaging virtual meetings

Benevity used Zoom to facilitate our online sessions. You can access many helpful tutorials on how to use their platform via their Help Center.

## Providing pre-work resources

To help participants prepare for the table talks sessions, we provided pre-work resources focusing on specific topics so they could come to the sessions informed. Recognizing people engage and learn in different ways, we selected and shared pre-work resources that participants could watch, listen to or read prior to the session.

This guide provides you with those resources and then gives you the conversational tools you need to run an effective conversation about race. So, let's get started!



## Principles for discussion

Now you and your team are ready to start scheduling this five-step Race Conversations Table Talks series. As a first step, it's important to set the tone. Listed below are some basic principles for discussion that are important to share with your facilitators to help them begin every new session. We recommend including a brief review of these ground rules at the beginning of every session.



Tip

Copy and paste into a presentation slide to display at the beginning of each session to level-set expectations for all participants.

**Reinforce the purpose.** Every conversation is an opportunity to explore, listen and learn from each other. Facilitators should steer participants away from blaming or belittling statements. The goal of these conversations is not to “solve” racism or even agree on everything that is said.

**Set agreements.** Encourage dialogue, mutual respect and deep listening to what others share. The following agreements should be in a prominent, visible place wherever the conversation is happening: “Practice Active Listening,” “Don’t Interrupt” and “Assume Good Intentions.”

**Encourage comfort.** Create a space for your participants to be relaxed with one another, especially as differences in beliefs and experiences emerge.

**Listen attentively.** A key for successful discussion is to be interested and deeply listen to what others have experienced and what they think.

**Respond thoughtfully.** Consider saying, “I’ve never thought of that before, could you explain why you think that?” rather than, “I don’t believe that; that’s never happened to me.”

**Listen with generosity.** Recognize that people with good intentions misspeak or make statements that can hurt or offend. Letting others know how their words affect you or might be misunderstood is useful, but ascribing intent is counterproductive.

**Explain your reactions.** Consider saying, “I feel frustrated when people say that because ...” rather than, “That makes me mad. That’s such a stupid thing to say.”

**Give everyone room.** Establish strategies for everyone to participate and be heard. Invite quieter participants to share and actively encourage talkative guests to give space for others.

**Have a reset button.** Introduce a strategy for breaks or restarts if the conversation veers into spaces that are too conflicted or unproductive.

**Take notes.** Identify a note taker and share key takeaways from the discussion with the larger group when appropriate.

# Five themes for *conversations about race*

- 1 Let's talk about race experiences
- 2 Practicing self-reflection
- 3 Understanding privilege
- 4 Challenging systems
- 5 Mobilizing for change together

## Meeting theme 1

### Let's talk about race experiences – panel discussion

The goal of this session is to raise awareness that racism is an everyday occurrence and not something that happens to someone else, somewhere else. Invite volunteer speakers of different racial backgrounds (employees or external speakers) to share their stories about or experiences with racism.



**Time:** 60 minutes (introduction, panelist discussion, Q&A)

**Meeting type:** Panel

**Number of facilitators:** 1

**Number of speakers:** 3–5

**Pre-reading requirements:** No

#### Agenda:

1. Facilitator: Explain the principles for discussion (on a presentation slide) and agenda, ensuring you let participants know they can ask questions at the end.
2. Introduce each speaker and have them explain their background.
3. Ask each speaker to explain their experience growing up as a visible minority or about a racist experience they have encountered.
4. Q&A: Open up to employee questions and reactions. Be sure to have a couple of prepared questions, just in case. An executive sponsor can also be prepared to ask the first question (e.g., What can **[insert company name]** do to support you? What can we do to be better allies?).



#### Take notes and record your sessions

Consider having a designated note taker and be sure to record these sessions. You can then share the meeting notes or the video recording with employees who either missed the sessions or want to re-watch them.



## Meeting theme 2

# Practicing self-reflection

The goal of this session is to have attendees reflect on the question, “How do I contribute to conversations about race?” We want to consider the roles of allyship and equity in the workplace, and how everyone can contribute to an inclusive work environment.



**Time:** 60 minutes (introduction, discussion, conclusion)

**Meeting type:** Breakout

**Number of facilitators:** Dependent on number of participants

**Number of speakers:** Optional — employee panel, guest panel, facilitated

**Pre-reading requirements:** Yes (see below)

**Agenda:** Facilitated open discussion

### Resources

Use some (or all) of the following resources as a form of pre-work for participants prior to the meeting. Be sure to send the selected resources in your meeting invitation.

#### Website

[The National Museum of African American History & Culture: Talking About Race](#)

#### TED Talks video

[Lori Mayo — Let's Get Uncomfortable: It's Time To Talk About Race](#)

#### TED Talks video

[Priya Vulchi and Winona Guo — What It Takes To Be Racially Literate](#)

#### Podcast

[Brené Brown: Unlocking Us](#)

### Conversation guide

Facilitators: Start with an icebreaker or ask if anyone is willing to share their self-reflection based on the following prompt.

Consider the following statements and select the one that describes how you feel:

- I would rather not talk about race and racism.
- I am very uncomfortable talking about race and racism.

- I am usually uncomfortable talking about race and racism.
- I am sometimes uncomfortable talking about race and racism.
- I am usually comfortable talking about race and racism.
- I am very comfortable talking about race and racism.

### Group discussion prompt:

- The hard part of talking about race and racism is ...
- The beneficial part of talking about race and racism is ...

### Questions to prompt discussion in smaller breakout groups or as a larger group:

- Describe current events related to race and racism. How have those events made you feel?
- How do you think we got here? How often do you think about your racial or ethnic identity?
- When you were reviewing the resource materials, what ideas came to you about how you could start making a change?
- What thoughts have been top of mind for you that you would like to share? They can be questions for a future date, other ideas, comments or reflections.

## Meeting theme 3

# Understanding *privilege*

The goal of this session is for attendees to think about privilege and power, and acknowledge how their privilege and power has played a role in their lives. An important part of this discussion is to develop the skill of sitting with discomfort, while opening oneself up to challenges and new perspectives.



**Time:** 60–90 minutes (introduction, discussion, conclusion)

**Meeting type:** Breakout

**Number of facilitators:** Dependent on number of participants

**Number of speakers:** Optional — employee panel, guest panel, facilitated

**Pre-reading requirements:** Yes (see below)

**Agenda:** Facilitated open discussion

### Resources

Use some (or all) of the following resources as a form of pre-work for participants prior to the meeting. Be sure to send the selected resources in your meeting invitation.

#### Article

[White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack](#)  
(The National SEED Project)

#### Book

[“White Fragility” by Robin DiAngelo](#)

#### Book reading

[“White Fragility” Discussion, With Robin DiAngelo](#)  
(at Seattle Central Library)

#### TED Talks video

[How To Recognize Your White Privilege —  
And Use It To Fight Inequality](#)

#### Netflix documentary

[“Hello Privilege, It’s Me, Chelsea”](#)

### Conversation guide

Facilitators: Start with an icebreaker or ask if anyone is willing to share their thoughts based on the following prompts.

- What is privilege?
- What are some of your privileges?
- Were you surprised by any of the privileges you found in your invisible knapsack? Or any of the suggested resources?
- What do you think about the concept of power as it relates to privilege?
- How can you use your privilege to advance the discussions on anti-Black racism?

## Meeting theme 4

# Challenging *systems*

The goal of this session is for attendees to come away with a deeper understanding of institutional racism and systemic inequality. Attendees will learn how racism is perpetuated invisibly within society and see how it shows up in our institutions and in our lives.



**Time:** 60–90 minutes (introduction, discussion, conclusion)

**Meeting type:** Breakout

**Number of facilitators:** Dependent on number of participants

**Number of speakers:** Optional — employee panel, guest panel, facilitated

**Pre-reading requirements:** Yes (see below)

**Agenda:** Facilitated open discussion

### Resources

Use some (or all) of the following resources as a form of pre-work for participants prior to the meeting. Be sure to send the selected resources in your meeting invitation.

#### Book

["Dying of Whiteness" by Jonathan M. Metz](#)

#### Netflix documentary

["13th"](#)

#### Video series

[What Is Systemic Racism?](#)

### Conversation guide

Facilitators: Start with an icebreaker or ask if anyone is willing to share their thoughts based on the following prompts.

- What did you learn about Black or Indigenous history in school?
- Why do you think those histories aren't represented in schools as much as European history?
- In learning about institutional racism, what elements surprised you the most?
- How have you, in your life, been affected by or benefited from institutional racism?
- How can you, and the organization you work for, work to challenge systems that promote inequality?

## Meeting theme 5

# Mobilizing for change *together*

The goal of this session is to hold the space to help employees reflect on the journey toward change and determine how they can advocate for change going forward in their everyday lives.



**Time:** 60–90 minutes (introduction, discussion, conclusion)

**Meeting type:** Breakout

**Number of facilitators:** Dependent on number of participants

**Number of speakers:** Optional — employee panel, guest panel, facilitated

**Pre-read:** Yes, see below

**Agenda:** Facilitated open discussion

### Resources

Use some (or all) of the following resources as a form of pre-work for participants prior to the meeting. Be sure to send the selected resources in your meeting invitation.

#### **Anti-Racism Guide:**

[Resources for Education and Action](#)

(UC San Diego)

#### **Web article**

[Korn Ferry – Being a True White Ally Against Racism](#)

#### **Google doc**

[Compilation of anti-racism resources](#)

#### **Mobilize Blog**

[Ways To Organize Against Racism and Injustice](#)

#### **Workshops**

[Hollaback Bystander Intervention Training](#)

### Conversation guide

Facilitators: Start with an icebreaker or ask if anyone is willing to share their thoughts based on the following prompts.

What are your reflections on the panelist discussion?

- Learn: How do we find the truth about our history?
- Act: Be an active bystander (distract, delegate, document)
- Share: How do you approach sensitive topics? What can you do to advance the discussions on anti-Black racism?

Empower your people to act by donating to or volunteering for racial equity and justice causes. We've developed a giving campaign kit that includes curated giving and volunteering opportunities, cause recommendations and news article templates to help your employees mobilize change.

# Following *through*

After the Race Conversations Table Talks series sessions are over, it's important to continue to imbue your company with efforts to keep the conversations going. Consider some of the following ideas on how to keep your employees engaged with conversations about equity, allyship and change in the workplace.

- ✓ Invite guest speakers such as business owners, community leaders and experts — explore dimensions of race and seek to break down barriers and build empathy and connection.
- ✓ Host a virtual cinema film screening with a collaborative movie discussion.
- ✓ Host a virtual cooking or dance class to expose your team to various cultures.
- ✓ Share information about unknown inventors and innovators who have significantly impacted our world today.
- ✓ Start a book club and invite your team to participate in the discussions; consider “How To Be an Antiracist.”
- ✓ Discuss allyship and intersectionality.
- ✓ Continue to challenge bias, privilege and difference and bring employees along a journey of unity through learning and self-expression.
- ✓ Examine your company policies, hiring practices and promotions to ensure all areas of your business operate from a lens of equity and inclusion.
- ✓ Engage in discussions with leaders if gaps are identified and build a business case to support change.
- ✓ Provide a medium for employees to lead the charge and collaborate (e.g., Benevity Affinity Groups).
- ✓ Empower employees to become change-makers.
- ✓ Continue to listen and learn from your employees to ensure their experiences at your workplace reflect the culture you are trying to create.
- ✓ Create the space for employees to share and meaningfully process the racist acts that continue to plague our world. We can be part of the change.



*Wondering how to engage future employees in these conversations?*

Record your sessions and upload to Missions for new hires to watch.



# Communications *templates*

## Call for volunteer facilitators Email template



Note: Copy and paste into an email.



**Subject line:** Call for Volunteers: Race Conversations Facilitators

**[insert program name]** is building on our commitment to diversity, equity, inclusion and belonging. We're planning a Race Conversations Table Talks series and we're looking for meeting facilitators!

What is a race conversations facilitator?

They are dedicated individuals who are passionate about making a difference at their company and beyond! These passionate folks listen, share and inspire their co-workers to make real and lasting progress on racial equity within their workplace and community.

You'd make a great addition to our team if:

- You are passionate about diversity, equity, inclusion and belonging and racial equality and justice.
- You are looking for a leadership opportunity that will have an impact, while helping us meet our annual goals.
- You are interested in and willing to learn new skills.

For more information on this opportunity, please join us for a lunch and learn on **[insert date]**, or email **[insert program manager's name and email]**.



## Race Conversations Table Talks series

### Meeting invitation templates

Benevity ran the Race Conversations Table Talks over a series of months. Listed below is the information we added to each meeting invite to provide context for participants. Some meetings required attendees to do some pre-work so they could come prepared to participate. Be sure to add those resources to the meeting invite.



Copy and paste into a meeting invite.

#### Meeting 1: Let's talk about race experiences — panel discussion

A platform for an open and honest discussion about race relations, racial tension and what's going on in the world today. Suggestions, solutions and what's needed as we move forward.

Part 1 of a 5-part series:

1. **Let's talk about race experiences**
2. Self-reflection
3. Understanding privilege and power
4. Challenging systems
5. Mobilizing for change together

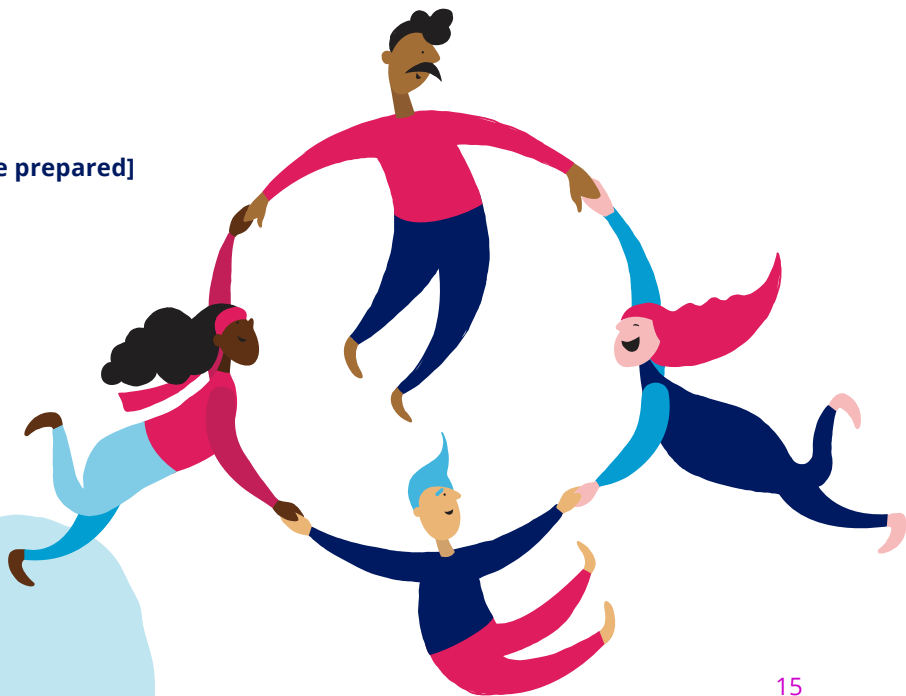
#### Meeting 2: Self-reflection

A platform for an open and honest discussion about race relations, racial tension and what's going on in the world today. Suggestions, solutions and what's needed as we move forward.

Part 2 of a 5-part series:

1. Let's talk about race experiences
2. **Self-reflection**
3. Understanding privilege and power
4. Challenging systems
5. Mobilizing for change together

[Add links for pre-read so participants can be prepared]



### Meeting 3: Understanding and acknowledging privilege

A platform for an open and honest discussion about race relations, racial tension and what's going on in the world today. Suggestions, solutions and what's needed as we move forward.

Part 3 of a 5-part series:

1. Let's talk about race experiences
2. Self-reflection
3. **Understanding privilege and power**
4. Challenging systems
5. Mobilizing for change together

We will begin with hearing three **[add workplace here]** sharing their diverse reflections on privilege. If you would like to submit anonymous questions on privilege to be answered during this session, please **[click here]**.

**[Add links for pre-read so participants can be prepared]**

### Meeting 4: Challenging systems

A platform for an open and honest discussion about race relations, racial tension and what's going on in the world today. Suggestions, solutions and what's needed as we move forward.

Part 4 of a 5-part series:

1. Let's talk about race experiences
2. Self-reflection
3. Understanding privilege and power
4. **Challenging systems**
5. Mobilizing for change together

This session will build off of the framework from our previous table talks. You can view the recording of those sessions at **[add link to your folder or channel here]**.

**[Add links for pre-read so participants can be prepared]**

### Meeting 5: Mobilizing for change together

A platform for an open and honest discussion about race relations, racial tension and what's going on in the world today. Suggestions, solutions and what's needed as we move forward.

Part 5 of a 5-part series:

1. Let's talk about race experiences
2. Self-reflection
3. Understanding privilege and power
4. Challenging systems
5. **Mobilizing for change together**

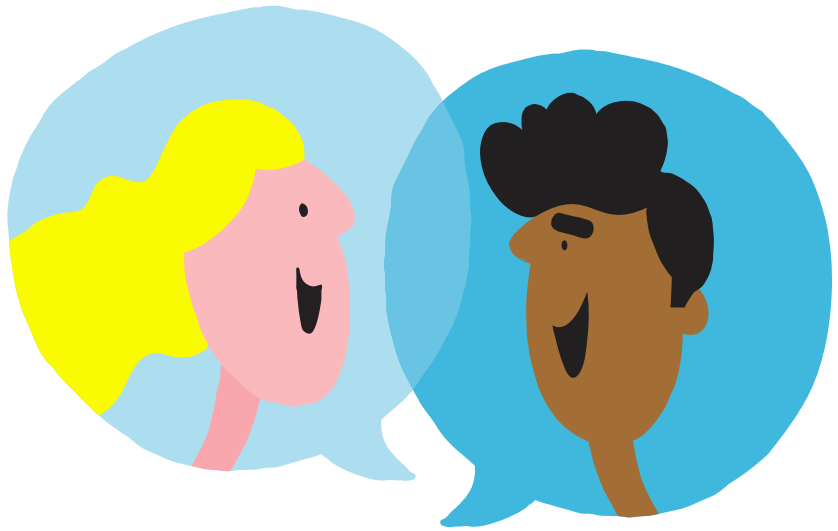
This session will build off of the framework from our previous table talks. You can view the recording of those sessions at **[add link to your folder or channel here]**.

**[Add links for pre-read so participants can be prepared]**



# Thank you!

Thanks for taking the time to read through this guide. We hope you use these tools to create a space for meaningful dialogue among your employees to contribute to real and lasting progress on racial equity within your workplace and your community.



Benevity, a certified B Corporation, is the leader in global corporate purpose software, providing the only integrated suite of community investment and employee, customer and nonprofit engagement solutions. Recognized as one of Fortune's Impact 20, Benevity offers cloud solutions that power purpose for many iconic brands in ways that better attract, retain and engage today's diverse workforce, embed social action into their customer experiences and positively impact their communities. With software that is available in 22 languages, Benevity has processed more than \$12 billion in donations and 58 million hours of volunteering time to support 418,000 nonprofits worldwide. The company's solutions have also facilitated 900,000 micro-actions and awarded 1.2 million grants worth \$18 billion. For more information, visit [www.benevity.com](http://www.benevity.com).