

# **Working to Create Anti-Racist Spaces**

**A Practical Guide for White Dominated Social Justice Groups**

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## ★ Introduction

Anti-racism workshops are increasingly used by social justice organizations and activist groups to confront racism within their work. Forming an important component of anti-racist practice, such workshops often focus on changing individual attitudes or setting anti-racist goals for the organization (e.g., creating an anti-racism policy, or increasing the number of events with an anti-racism focus).

While institutional change is becoming a greater priority within organizations, most anti-racism workshops devote little attention to the structural impacts of the physical spaces that groups use. Accordingly, office areas, meeting spaces, event venues, libraries and social spaces may be neglected in anti-racism work.

This guide has been designed to address questions of race and space within white-dominated activist organizations. It starts from an assumption that confronting racism “means challenging all sorts of cultural ideas that exist not only within us as individuals, but are entrenched in the way we do things, think about the world, and the organizations we are part of” (OPIRG-Peterborough, p 7). The exercises included in this guide are designed to initiate thinking about how physical spaces perpetuate or challenge racism.

This guide has been developed as one resource to be used in the ongoing struggle for systemic change. However, the tools provided in the following pages cannot substitute the need for a long-term, ongoing anti-racism action plan. Although this guide serves as an educational tool for addressing racism, it cannot make individuals commit to anti-racism, it cannot ensure that people of colour will join organization, and it will not provide you with a racism-free space. Accordingly, this guide should not be used to justify an end to further discussion and action on anti-racism; rather, this guide is part of an ongoing anti-racism process.

This guide emerged as a project for a university course on feminist geography. Although there is an increasing amount of academic work being done on race and space, much of this work lacks direct links with anti-racism activism outside of the academy. We developed this guide as a means of bringing some of the theoretical work being done in the classroom to our social justice work in activist communities. This project also emerged from our own experiences as white activists struggling against racism. Accordingly, we have tried to structure the guide through a series of interrogations and guidelines rather than answers or conclusions.

While designed for white-dominated activist organizations and social justice groups, we hope this guide will be useful for a broader audience. It may be modified to address the needs of other community spaces such as schools and classrooms, community centres or service agencies and clubs. Feel free to make copies of the materials provided in the guide, but in order to maintain accountability, we ask that you cite our project and credit the original sources where possible.

## Part One: Anti-Racism 101

### ★ A Few Definitions

**race:** the concept of race is linked to the categorization of the human species into biologically distinct groups. Racial classifications were based on genetic or physical similarities of people who were also thought to share similar cultural and social traits. Most scientists, however, have discredited the concept of biological race, as it is impossible to separate people into clearly defined races. Nevertheless, people continue to be socially and culturally defined as a racial group based on physical markers. Race persists as a powerful concept used to categorize people based on perceived differences in physical appearance and intellectual, moral and behavioural characteristics. Race can best be understood as a culturally constructed and historically specific system of categorization used to justify the subordination of a group defined by perceived racial difference.

**racism:** the assertion of superiority by one racial group over another. It is the exercising of power that abuses or disadvantages people on the basis of their perceived racial difference, while the dominant group maintains privileges and advantages through racist and discriminatory practices. Racism is perpetuated at the individual level, but the accumulated effect of centuries of white racism have left it deeply entrenched at the systemic and institutional levels. Racism cannot be reduced to an individual psychological phenomenon. It is a historical development. Racism had a beginning and it can have an end.

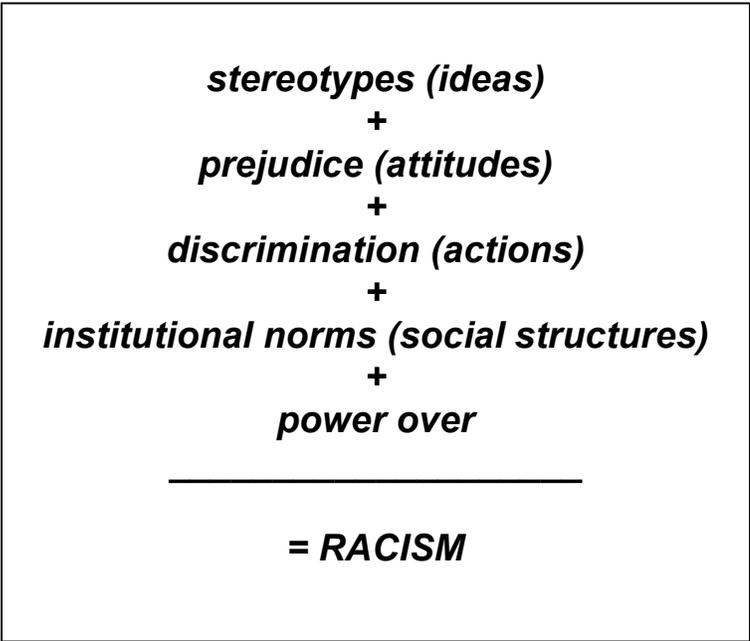
**whiteness:** a historical and cultural category. Because whiteness is constructed as the norm or centre, it is often invisible or seen as neutral. Indeed, it is rarely even considered to be a race. This implies that white people are not affected by racism, and don't have to think about it. But racism is based on the concept of whiteness. Not addressing racism is a form of white privilege.

**white privilege:** a term that describes the benefits white people accrue from discrimination and racism. Peggy McIntosh describes white privilege as "an invisible package of unearned assets which I can count on cashing in each day, but about which I was 'meant' to remain oblivious. White privilege is like a weightless knapsack of special provisions, assurances, tools, maps, guides, code books, passports, visas, clothes, compass, emergency gear, and bank cheques." Privilege is augmented or diminished by factors such as sex, gender, ability, nationality, age and class. Privilege is not always predictable and it is very context specific, but certain patterns often occur so that privilege tends to build up over time for particular groups of people. In other words, privilege can have a snowball effect: often the more you have, the more you get.

**people of colour:** originating in the United States, this term has been used by people(s) deemed as “non-white” to identify themselves. The benefits of its use are debated. It can be seen as a claim to a positive identity in alterity or opposition to the status quo. Its use is often justified for its common intelligibility. However, it also implies that white people don’t have colour (i.e., race) and reiterates categorization based on colour or race. The term also risks a homogenizing effect that erases class, cultural or ethnic differences.

**tokenism:** describes a situation where people of colour are utilized, integrated, included, respected, or listened to only for “display” purposes, and to deflect concerns about discrimination. Tokenism is a way of creating the effect or impression that people of colour are included in decision making processes, that anti-racism has been fully integrated into the organization, and that the group works in solidarity with people of colour. Meanwhile, a situation is maintained where white people continue to have all the power to make and carry out important decisions.

**anti-racism:** an ongoing, action-oriented project that identifies racism as a systemic problem and as a link in an intersecting system of oppression. Through policies, practices and interventions, anti-racism seeks to challenge and address the various forms of racism through strategies for individual, institutional and systemic change.



*Note: The above definitions have been adapted from the following sources listed in Part Four:  
Anti-Racist Media Education; Kivel; McCaskell; McIntosh; OPIRG-Peterborough*

## ★ Individual Challenges in Confronting Racism

Confronting racism can be a challenging process. Individuals may find that anti-racism initiatives invoke intense emotions. Fear, guilt, shame, avoidance, defensiveness and anger are common responses among white people to discussions about racism.

These feelings often arise from white people's fear of losing the benefits of white privilege, but they can also emerge from well-intentioned motives that still perpetuate racism. For example, many white folks feel they are unqualified to do anti-racism work so they expect others to take the initiative or ask people of colour to "teach them" about racism. Certainly, most white folks have much to learn about anti-racism, but rather than asking people of colour to do the work for them, white people need to educate themselves. Anti-racism work does involve listening to, learning from, and working in solidarity with people of colour, but this needs to happen on terms that don't replicate patterns of expecting people of colour to always be the ones addressing racism.

Part of this self-education process involves addressing feelings that prevent active anti-racism work. Some common feelings are outlined below.

### **Denial and Defensiveness: avoiding responsibility**

"I'm not racist."

"I have friends who are people of colour."

"I do anti-racism work."

"I don't see colour. I'm colour blind."

"Racial discrimination occurs because of a few bad people."

"I don't know why people of colour are so sensitive / divisive / angry all the time"

"I'm so tired of people imposing their 'politically correct' agendas on me."

Denial and defensiveness enable us to blame others for racism, rather than taking responsibility ourselves. Whether or not you are racist is beside the point; because we live in a racist society, confronting racism is everyone's responsibility. It may feel hard not to be defensive, particularly as no one likes to be accused of racism. But engaging in anti-racism means learning to listen, take seriously and respond respectfully when issues of racism are raised, particularly by people of colour.

### **Fear: excusing inaction**

- Fear of offending people, saying the wrong thing
- Fear of not being accepted by white people when dealing with this issue
- Fear of not being accepted by people of colour when dealing with this issue
- Fear of our own stereotypes, prejudices and complicity with racism
- Fear of dealing with strong emotions
- Fear of conflict we won't be able to deal with
- Fear of not having all the answers

Fear can become an excuse for inaction. Keep in mind that anti-racism is an ongoing learning process - everyone is going to make mistakes along the way. Learning to accept criticism is an important part of anti-racist work. While it is important to be careful about the things we choose to do and say, it is often better to make a mistake and learn from it, than to do nothing. Inaction is a form of complicity with racism.

### **Guilt: preventing action**

White people often let their guilt about racism become a force that prevents action. Anti-racism goals then get sidelined when white people simply “confess” all the ways they are guilty of racism or acknowledge their privilege without actually changing behaviour. While such confessionals may make white folks feel better initially, this is not an effective means to address racism. It is not enough to simply note one’s privilege; it is essential to change behaviours and challenge institutionalized racism. Transforming difficult feelings into positive change is a key part of anti-racism work.

### **Things to keep in mind:**

- Accept that anti-racism work is likely to invoke many strong feelings. Rather than avoiding these emotions or feeling guilty about them, it can be helpful to work through these feelings in productive ways, which lead to social change.
- Try not to take things too personally; you did not create racism. Taking responsibility for your role in perpetuating racism is different from blaming yourself.
- Hosting regular anti-racism discussion forums within your organization can be helpful in addressing difficult emotions. You may choose to divide these forums into caucuses of white and non-white groups. This does not mean that mixed discussions are not helpful, but don’t assume that people of colour want to deal with white people’s fears and anxieties.
- There are lots of great books, web sites and resources that can help white people work on these issues (see the list of resources in Part Four). Educate yourself.
- Remember - it’s okay to make mistakes! As long as you don’t keep repeating the same patterns, making mistakes is an important part of the learning process.

*Note: The above section uses information from the following sources listed in Part Four:  
Anti-Racist Media Education; Kivel; OPIRG-Peterborough*

## ★ Key Anti-Racist Principles

While there are no easy rules to follow that will end racism, there are some helpful starting points, which can serve as useful tools for engaging in anti-racist practice. The following are a few basic assumptions and principles of anti-racism to consider:

- Race is a historically specific and culturally constructed concept. It cannot be reduced to biology. Although race is a social construction, its effects are real and have severe material consequences.
- Racism should be understood as one aspect of a system of interconnected oppressions. Anti-racism cannot be simply “added-on” to other issues, but must be integrated into all aspects of social justice and environmental activism. Anti-racism must address systemic/institutional racism as well as individual attitudes.
- Anti-racism does not mean “no racism.” Anti-racism means challenging racism and white privilege wherever and whenever it surfaces. It is an ongoing project that challenges how we think about, understand and conceptualize the world. It means changing the way we do things.
- Everyone has a responsibility to challenge racism, not only those people who are targeted by it. White people have a responsibility to work in solidarity with people of colour. Anti-racism benefits everyone.
- Anti-racism is not about erasing or assimilating difference but about acknowledging, recognizing and celebrating difference. We are not all same and this is good!
- Colour-blindness is not anti-racism. Colour-blindness can deny a persons history and culture, and can erase enduring legacies of racism. By identifying the problem as “seeing difference,” colour-blindness obscures institutionalized racism and de-legitimizes anti-racist activism.
- Official (state-defined) multiculturalism, which suggests a mosaic where all cultures are already equal and free, is not anti-racism. Anti-racist multiculturalism recognizes history and contemporary social life from the perspective of the radical equality of peoples in status, social position and rights. This vision of multiculturalism “is not about ‘touchy-feely’ sensitivity toward sentimentalized “others”; it is about dispersing power, about empowering the disempowered, about transforming institutions and discourses.”\*

*The above principles have been adapted from the following sources listed in Part Four: McCaskell; OPIRG-Peterborough; \*Robert Stam and Ella Shohat. “Contested Histories; Eurocentrism, Multiculturalism and the Media” Multiculturalism: A Critical Reader ed. David Goldberg. (1994) 296-324*

## Part Two: Thinking through Race and Space

### ★ Race and Space: What's the relationship?

Acknowledging that we live in a racist society means identifying the ways that racism is socially organized. Because space plays a major role in the organization of social, cultural and political relations in our communities, the physical locations that we inhabit can have an enormous impact on the organization and maintenance of racism. The legacy of legally enforced racial segregation in Canada and the U.S. provides a prime example of the social impacts of racialized space.

Racism through spatial arrangements, however, goes far beyond the segregation of different groups of people. The ways in which physical spaces are organized through social relations (e.g., what people say and do in a particular space) and the ways that social relations are organized through particular spaces (e.g., how spaces are designed for specific uses) can contribute to hierarchies of race-based oppression.

This means that the relationship between race and space is not unidirectional. Race and space affect each other; race is spatialized and space is racialized. As soon as a person enters a room, for example, the dynamic of that room changes. At the same time, the physical structure of room can alter the way in which that person relates to others around them (e.g., a person may communicate differently in a library than in a sports arena).

Accounting for the complex relationship between race and space means that anti-racist initiatives cannot be unidirectional; anti-racism initiatives must address the simultaneous interactions between social and spatial relations. Anti-racist spatial changes must be also flexible enough to respond to different contexts, situations and spatial uses.

“Space” itself is also a complex term because it can mean so many things. For the purposes of this guidebook, space will be considered in three overlapping ways:

1. Physical space: the physical location of a building or space; its architecture, design and arrangement; the layout of furniture, lighting, washroom facilities
2. Cultural space: the cultural norms, practices and customs practiced within the space; the language that is spoken in the space; the images that are used to represent the space and the various forms of knowledge expressed in the space
3. Political-institutional space: way a space is organized politically and institutionally; the policies that govern the space; employment structures; decision-making systems; hierarchies of authority

Using these three definitions helps to recognize the dynamic and complex character of space. Rather than thinking of a physical space as a fixed location that is enclosed within concrete boundaries, it is helpful to think of space as something that is constantly negotiated by social factors: people who use the space, ideas about the space, demographic, political and environmental changes. Because spatial and racial social relations are so fluid, there are many opportunities to work to change those relations in accordance with anti-racist principles.

## ★ Questioning the racial “neutrality” of community spaces

Physical community spaces are often assumed to be politically and racially neutral, particularly when there are no seemingly “explicit” cultural markings (e.g. a classroom with bare walls, chairs and tables). In a racist culture, however, it is important to question the racial dynamics of all spaces, particularly those used predominantly by white folks.

Spaces are also affected by their histories. Just because a building is no longer named after a colonial slave owner, or no longer used as a residential school for aboriginal children, does not mean that the cultural meanings attached to that building have been erased from community memory.

Likewise, if the bare walls, tables and desks have been a trademark of particular institutions that have a legacy of racism (e.g., public schools, prisons, government buildings) these seemingly “neutral” structures are not devoid of (racist) cultural meanings.

Within this context, it is important to recognize that classrooms, community centres, activist convergence centres, libraries, and clubs spaces are not immune to dominant (racist) social relations.

If anti-racism work is to go beyond changing individual attitudes to addressing systemic problems, we must critically assess questions of race and space in everyday locations. This means challenging conventional assumptions about what is “neutral” space.

General questions to consider:

*What is the history of this space?*

*What is the gender, race and class composition of people in the space?*

*Who does what in the space?*

*Are some people more “visible” in the space than others?*

*Who uses this space? Who doesn't? How is the space used?*

*What can you tell about the organization from the way the space is organized?*

## ★ Representing Space: Thinking through graphics / images

How a space is represented can be just as important as how the space is organized. Accordingly, graphics used to represent a space (both in and out of its physical location) can play a major role in confronting or perpetuating racism.

Note, however, that graphics cannot be considered in isolation; plastering the walls with images of people of colour will not automatically translate into a “racism-free” space. Without an active anti-racism plan, graphics may become little more than token gestures. When used in token ways, graphics simply “cover up” the power structures and racial dynamics of the organization without actually changing them. Accordingly, using images for anti-racism purposes will only be successful if coinciding with a larger anti-racism action plan.

Because the messages that are conveyed by graphics can be subtle (and can always be interpreted in multiple ways), it is important to choose graphics carefully. The goal of choosing graphics critically is not to censor graphics or control people’s interpretation of images (this is neither possible nor desirable). Rather, the intent is to critically assess the context and usage of a particular graphic to ensure that the image does not follow historical patterns of racist images.

It is important to recognize that no image is inherently racist. Rather, the use, context and social meanings associated with that image are what can make an image support or contest racist ideas. It may be helpful to ask: *Is this image appropriate to context in which it is being used? Does this image include negative representations or stereotypes about historically marginalized groups?* Accordingly, images should be selected in accordance with the context that they are used. Universal rules do not apply.

## Part Three: Practical Anti-Racism Tools

The following exercises have been designed for white-dominated activist groups to help address issues of space and race within their organization. A member of the organization or an external facilitator can facilitate these exercises. While designed to offer practical ways for integrating anti-racist principles and spatial practices, these exercises integrate issues of linked oppressions.

### ★ Exercise 1: Unpacking White Privilege (Excerpted/modified from Abboud)

*Purpose of Exercise:* This exercise helps white folks understand the ways in which they benefit from race privilege and systemic racism. As a starting point for awareness, this activity can help motivate white people to work to end unfair privilege based on skin colour.

*Background:* Most white people in Canada think that racism doesn't affect them, because they are not people of colour. They do not see "whiteness" as a racial identity. It is often easier for white people to look at the disadvantages of racism for people of colour than to recognize the advantages of racism for white people. This activity turns things around and assesses how white people benefit from discrimination on a daily basis. This exercise helps to demonstrate that the impact of racism for people of colour does not simply arise from individual actions, but from the way that society is structured.

*Approximate Time Required:* 40 - 60 minutes

*Materials needed:* copies of the "White Benefits Checklist" for each participant

#### *Process:*

1. Distribute copies of the "White Benefits Checklist" to each participant to read over. Ask participants to add any other examples they can think of.
2. Break into small groups or pairs. Ask participants to look through the list and discuss what some of these race privileges do for them. For example:

*Some privileges make me feel at home in the world, for example...*

*Some of these privileges allow others to escape fear, anxiety, and the sense of not being welcome or not real, for example...*

*Some allow me to escape dangers or penalties that others suffer, for example....*

3. Bring participants back into a large group for a debriefing discussion. Some questions that could be posed to the group:

*How hard was it to fill-out the list?*

*What did you feel? (e.g., disbelief, anger, guilt, etc.)*

*Are there areas where there are different opinions, different degrees of privilege?*

*How are these benefits from racism amplified or diminished by other factors (i.e., class, gender, ability, sexuality, age, etc.)?*

*Is it easier to talk about the consequences of racial disadvantage than of the consequences of racial privilege? Why?*

*What do these privileges do for white people?*

*What kinds of social changes can be made to "level out the playing field"?*

### **White Benefits Checklist**

(Adapted from Paul Kivel's *Uprooting Racism* and Peggy McIntosh's *Unpacking the invisible knapsack*.)

- I can, if I wish, arrange to be in the company of people of my race most of the time
- When I am told about our national heritage or "civilization," I am shown that people of my colour made it what it is
- My ancestors were legal immigrants to this country during a period when immigrants from Asia, South and Central America or Africa were restricted.
- My ancestors came to this country of their own free will and have never had to relocate unwillingly once here.
- I live on land that once belonged to Aboriginal peoples.
- My ancestors received homesteading or landstaking claims from the government.
- I live in a school district or metropolitan area where more money is spent on the schools attended by white children than those that children of colour attend.
- I went to a school where the textbooks and other classroom materials reflected my race as normal, heroes and builders of this country, and there was little mention of the contributions of people of colour to society.
- I was encouraged to go to college or university by parents, teachers and advisors.
- I have received a job, job interview, job training or internship through personal connections of family and friends.

- I have a job where people of colour were hired last, or fired first.
- I can always vote in elections for people who reflect my race.
- I can swear, dress in second hand clothes or not answer letters without people associating these choices with the bad morals, poverty or illiteracy of my race
- I am never asked to speak for all the people of my racial group
- I can do well in a challenging situation without being called a credit to my race
- I can criticize the government and talk about how much I fear its policies and behaviour without being seen as a cultural outsider
- I can be pretty sure that if I ask to see "the person in charge" I will be facing a person of my race
- If a cop sees me, I can be sure that I haven't been singled out because of my race
- I can go shopping alone, fairly well assured that I won't be followed or harassed
- I can turn on the television or open to the front page of the paper and see people of my race widely represented
- I can easily buy posters, post cards, picture books, greeting cards, dolls, toys, magazines featuring people of my race
- I can choose makeup or bandages in "flesh" tone that more or less matches my skin
- I can go home from most meetings of organizations I am involved in feeling somewhat tied in rather than isolated, out of place, outnumbered, not heard, held at a distance, or feared
- If my day, week or year is going badly, I need not ask of each negative episode or situation whether it has racial overtones
- My race needn't be a factor in where I choose to live.
- I don't need to think about race and racism every day. I can choose when and where I want to respond to racism

## ★ Exercise 2: Systemic Barriers – How Accessible is your Space?

(Excerpted/modified from OPIRG's anti-Racism Workbook)

Purpose of Exercise: The purpose of this activity is to think about what institutional, social and cultural barriers people face in their everyday lives, in accessing your organization.

Background: People who enjoy privileges based on race, class, ability, sex/gender, etc., often take for granted their capacity to attend events or meetings, and even to get involved with an organization more generally. We live in a society that is physically and culturally constructed to be fully accessible to an idealized white, able-bodied, middle-class male. Consequently, our society is full of barriers to anybody who does not meet that description. Because of this, physical location, space design or layout, and the way we use space (i.e., how we decorate it, what we do in it) can often reproduce, within our organizations, the same barriers constructed by mainstream dominant culture.

Approximate Time Required: 60 minutes

Materials Needed: Flip chart paper and marker.

Process: Draw a stick figure on one side, and your organization on the other side. In between draw a line. Ask participants to brainstorm some barriers that a person might face in attempting to get to your organization. Consider barriers a person might face before they leave the house and once they arrive. A possible list might include the following:



- ✗ no money to take the bus
- ✗ no reason to go / not sure their issues will be important
- ✗ lack of opportunities to get involved
- ✗ don't know where it is
- ✗ language barriers
- ✗ sees racist graffiti on the way
- ✗ not wheelchair accessible
- ✗ not familiar with the community culture
- ✗ no people of colour when they arrive
- ✗ not child-friendly: no toys, no child care provided
- ✗ not open when they can go (not the same holidays, etc.)

Next, make a list of reasonable solutions that your organization could take up to address the issues you have just identified. You might develop a plan of action, and form committees or working groups to further research the issues and come up with ways to deal with them.

## ★ Exercise 3: Anti-Racism Spatial Audit

*Purpose of Exercise:* To facilitate discussion about the dynamics of racism within your organization's meeting and events space(s). To prompt active anti-racism initiatives to make community spaces welcoming and safe for everyone.

*Approximate Time Required:* 1-3 hours, depending on the size and composition of your space, and number of participants.

*Materials Needed:* Copies of the questionnaire for each participant, paper and pens for noting observations and brainstorming solutions, flip chart and markers.

*Background:* Even if your organization has a social justice mandate, it is not immune to the influence of the dominant white supremacist culture. Although perhaps assumed to be "neutral," community spaces are often sites where dominant (racist) social relations are reproduced. This exercise helps identify ways that racism is reproduced in the physical space(s) used by your organization.

*Process:* These questions can be used as a survey which different members of your organization can complete, or as a collaborative exercise where small groups work through the questions together. It is best to conduct this exercise in your space so you can move through it and make visual reference as you work through the questions.

1. Review the background and purpose of the exercise. Before distributing the questionnaire, you might consider beginning the exercise by asking participants to take a "critical tour" of the space. Make a list of participants' observations and impressions of the space.
2. Move on to a more detailed and systemic analysis of the space. Use the questionnaire to identify problem areas particular to your organization and its space. Be sure that participants take detailed notes about their observations
3. When the questionnaire is completed, gather as a group to discuss the problem areas. What problems need to be prioritized? What issues are most urgent?
4. Brainstorm practical solutions to address problems. Develop long/short term goals.

*In what areas do the changes need to be made (i.e., policy, physical renovations, cultural practices, membership education, etc.)?*

*What resources are required to implement these changes (i.e. time, money, external support, educational resources, etc.)?*

*What is a reasonable time frame to enact these changes?*

*How will the organization ensure that these changes are carried through?*

## Anti-Racism Spatial Audit Questions

### Physical Location:

- Where is your organization located? What does the neighbourhood look like? Is it centrally located and accessible by public transportation?
- What is the social, racial, and economic impact of where your organization is located? For example, does the presence of your organization contribute to gentrification in a low income, people of colour neighbourhood? Do you ever hold events which would bring police or immigration officials into the neighbourhood?
- Is there a safe, accessible route (i.e., pathways, sidewalks) to the location?
- What other organizations and agencies are in the immediate vicinity of the space? How might these groups affect the perception or usage of your space?
- Is the entrance to your space clearly identified?
- Are outside entrances and pathways clear of obstructions? Are outside entrances, pathways and signs well lit during evening and early morning hours?

### Accessibility:

- Is your space fully accessible to people who use mobility devices (e.g., wheelchairs, canes, guide dogs)? Are your washrooms accessible?
- Do you have gender-neutral washrooms (i.e., spaces where individuals are not required to identify as either male or female)?
- Is your space welcoming to children? Do you provide childcare or things for children to do like games, safe toys, crafts, or books? Is the space accessible to strollers? Is there space for diaper changing? Is the space breast-feeding friendly?

- Is your space well advertised in the community using a diversity of outreach and promotional strategies?
- Are there (hidden) costs involved with joining your organization? (e.g. membership fees? Are members required to supply materials? Are meetings held in venues where people are expected to purchase food/beverages)?

### **Social and Cultural Relations:**

- When you first enter the space, how do you know if you are welcome there? What is the first thing you notice?
- Who has ready access to the space? (I.e., who has keys to un/lock the space?)
- What is the gender, race and class composition of people in this space? What groups of people are doing what?
- If you are holding a meeting or an event, do you pay attention to where people choose to locate themselves in the space? Is everybody encouraged to move to a forward or central position, or do some people tend to be marginalized?
- If your organization hosts an event where food is being served, does it reflect the tastes and dietary restrictions of various cultural and religious groups?

### **Political-institutional relations**

- Which people make the decisions about how the room is organized, how the group uses funds and what projects are prioritized?
- Are there "invisible" workers who care for the space (i.e., people who cook, clean or do maintenance) who are not generally noticed or not paid well?
- How are books and resources organized? What topics are most readily visible and accessible? What topics are not covered?

- What materials are accessible to the public? Are these materials clearly labelled and easy to access?
- Are anti-racism materials clearly visible in the room and easy to access?
- Are there accessible opportunities to provide feedback about the organization (e.g. staff review processes, event feedback forms, yearly evaluation discussions, long and short-term goal assessments)?
- How does your group deal with complaints or concerns raised about discrimination, harassment or poor treatment? Are people aware of those processes or policies and does they work effectively?

### **Events and Actions associated with the Space**

- What kinds of events/activities/actions has your group organized or attended over the past 6 months or year? Do these events reflect white dominated priorities or agendas?
- What kinds of events/actions/activities have people who are affiliated with your group most often attended? What priorities get the most energy?

### **Images in the Space** (see also Graphics Audit in Exercise 4)

- What images and graphics appear in the space?
- What images and graphics are used on publications that are connected to the space but may also travel outside its physical boundaries (i.e., posters which advertise the space or its activities, organizational pamphlets, flyers)?
- Are visible posters and images that represent people of colour used for tokenist or display purposes? Or is the space organized according to an active anti-racism agenda or plan?
- Do posters, announcements and publications appear in a variety of languages common to your area?

## ★ Exercise 4: Anti-Racism Graphics Audit

Purpose of Exercise: This activity encourages organizations to critically assess the graphics that are used to represent the organization both inside their space (e.g., posters and images in a meeting room) and outside their space (e.g., flyers and promotional materials which advertise the organization in the community).

Background: Representing a space can be just as important as how a space is organized. Accordingly, the graphics and images that appear in a space, or are used to promote a space can be a powerful means of communication. Because the messages that are conveyed by graphics can be subtle or interpreted in multiple ways, it is important to choose graphics carefully. This exercise provides questions to help guide the selection of images.

Approximate Time Required: 60 -90 minutes

Materials needed: copies of the “Images and Graphics Questionnaire” for all participants; copies of promotional materials which represent the organization

Process:

1. Gather copies of materials that are used to represent the organization (i.e. logos, flyers, brochures, posters, pamphlets, etc.) If possible, host the exercise in the space that the organization uses most often so that images in the room are easily visible for reference. If this is not possible, bring detailed photographs of the space that make visible the images that appear in the space.
2. As individuals, or in small groups, ask participants to consider the questions in the “Images and Graphics Questionnaire” in relation to all images that represent the organization and images which are found in the organization’s space. Ask participants to make notes of common themes or recurring images and to document any concerns they have about images.
3. Bring all participants back into the larger group for a debriefing discussion. The following questions can be posed to the group:

*What images are most prominent/dominant in the organizational space?*

*What do the images reveal about the organization?*

*What messages are conveyed by the images?*

*Are there important messages the organization wishes to convey that are absent from currently used graphics?*

4. If your organization has an existing graphics policy, you may choose to review the policy in relation to the graphics presently used by the organization.

Consider the following questions:

*Do the graphics currently used by the organization reflect the existing policy?  
Are most members of your organization familiar with the policy?  
Does the policy need to be updated or changed?  
Does the policy allow for open discussion of images rather than censorship of  
avoidance of difficult/uncomfortable issues?*

5. If your organization does not have a graphics policy, consider developing one. A sample policy is available below:

**ONTARIO PUBLIC INTEREST RESEARCH GROUP (OPIRG)  
PROVINCIAL POLICY  
Graphics Policy**

Approved: 25 October 1998

**Purpose**

To provide a general philosophy regarding the use of drawings, photos or other images (and visual representations of people in particular) in all OPIRG-related materials. They are a supplement to the Policy on Representing OPIRG; and should be included in the "administrative policies" section of every local's Policy Manual.

**Guidelines for the use of graphics and other images**

These guidelines should be made available to and reviewed by people who choose or create graphics for OPIRG posters, pamphlets and publications. They are intended to promote artistic creativity and are necessarily general. Not only the content but also the context in which a graphic is used and the intent of the artist affect the overall message of an image and its impact upon viewers.

In the case of disagreements about the use of a graphic, final decisions should be reached through discussion about the content, quality and message of an image in a process appropriate to the procedures of a local and the nature of the project. These guidelines can be used as a reference point for evaluating such decisions.

Complaints about the use of a particular graphic should follow the normal steps of a chapter's complaints processes.

**Guidelines**

1. In general, graphics used by OPIRG in its publications, pamphlets and posters should reflect the mandate of the organization. They should convey a progressive, diverse, inclusive and/or critical view of society. They should strive to avoid being or appearing exclusionary and condescending.

2. Images should not convey negative representations or stereotypes about marginalized groups. Graphics should not be racist, sexist, homophobic or classist. The message conveyed should not be discriminatory in a direct or indirect manner, nor should it contravene the chapter's discrimination or harassment policies.

Continued on next page....

### **OPIRG PROVINCIAL GRAPHICS POLICY (continued)**

3. Graphics should not mirror dominant mainstream culture and social power structures without some form of analysis, deconstruction or criticism. They shouldn't reinforce traditional or restrictive roles assigned to certain groups in society. They should strive to more accurately reflect the diversity that exists, or should exist, around us.

4. People of various racial, cultural & religious backgrounds, sexualities, ages, etc. should be used as subjects and portrayed in many different shapes, sizes, abilities, styles of dress and activities.

4a. Graphics should not be ethnocentric (contain the assumption that dominant cultural values are superior, natural, universal or normal as compared to others').

4b. Graphics should not be heterosexist: (contain the assumption that everyone is, or should be, heterosexual; that the nuclear family unit or marriage are normal, natural or superior relationships)

4c. Graphics should avoid the objectification of women and of the human body (egg. extremely pronounced breasts are not an appropriate method to distinguish between male & female figures).

5. The use of satire, irony or humour to make a point should be given due consideration when assessing a particular graphic or cartoon.

#### **Tips to implement guidelines when assigning or choosing graphics:**

Inclusion of all a wide variety of characters is more easily accomplished for a series of graphics (for a pamphlet series or a lengthy publication). When choosing one graphic at a time (for example, on a poster), images and graphics can be chosen within the context of others recently used by the chapter.

The best way to ensure a healthy and positive selection of graphics is have an inclusive array of sources/artists. People who identify with a certain group of people are more likely to portray individuals from that group in a realistic, understanding or appropriate manner. An effort should be made to seek out graphics from many different sources and to keep them readily accessible.

Successful, appropriate and/or popular graphics should be kept on file and also shared with the PIRG network at meetings and conferences (or via email when possible).

#### **Crediting graphics:**

Art belongs to the artist who created it. Whenever possible, the artist(s) who produced a graphic should receive credit. If it is borrowed from another publication, that may also be mentioned. Many graphics (and characters) are copyrighted, and they are supposed to be reproduced only with the permission of the copyright holder. While it may help to credit the artist, you will have still violated the copyright unless you receive prior permission to reprint.

## Anti-Racist Graphics Questionnaire

(The following questions are adapted from the OPIRG Provincial Graphics Policy)

- Do images reflect the cultural, racial, class, ability and gender diversity of your community? Or do images primarily reflect individuals who are most dominant in your community?
- Do images convey negative representations or stereotypes about oppressed or marginalized groups?
- Do images mirror dominant mainstream culture and social power structures?
- Do images reinforce traditional or restrictive roles assigned to certain groups in society?
- Are people of various racial, cultural and religious backgrounds, sexualities, ages, etc. portrayed in different shapes, sizes, abilities, clothing and activities?
- Are graphics Eurocentric or ethnocentric (contain the assumption that particular cultural values, especially European or Anglo-American ones, are superior, natural, universal or normal as compared to others)?
- Are graphics heterosexist (contain the assumption that everyone is, or should be, heterosexual, or that the nuclear family unit is natural or superior)?
- Do graphics objectify people or the human body (e.g. extremely pronounced breasts to distinguish between male and female figures)?
- Do graphics reflect a diversity of sources and artists? Are graphics credited to the artist who designed them?
- Are culturally specific images appropriated in ways that do not account for their history or context?
- Does your organization have a policy on graphics and images? Is there a formal process in place to address complaints if concerns are raised about an image?
- Are decisions made collectively about what graphics will represent the organization? Or do a few individuals make decisions?

## Part Four: Anti-Racism Resources for White Folks

The following list compiles some key resources that we have found most helpful in our own anti-racist struggles. These materials focus on the work that white people can do to challenge racism. We have chosen resources that address change at the individual, societal and institutional levels. Most are written in simple, easy-to-understand language and focus on practical tools and activities. Each resource listed below has its own list of materials for those looking for further reading.

Please note that the following list does not include all the sources used in developing this guide. See notes throughout the guide for specific references within each section.

\* \* \* \* \*

Abboud, Rida, et al. The Kit: a manual by youth to combat racism through education Ottawa: Anti-Racism Education, United Nations Association in Canada, March 2002. Available online in PDF format: [http://www.unac.org/yfar/The\\_KIT.pdf](http://www.unac.org/yfar/The_KIT.pdf)

“Challenging White Supremacy Workshop.” *A US-based group which believes that the most effective way to create fundamental social change is by building mass-based, multi-racial grassroots movements led by radical activists of color. Website has lots of great resources.* <http://www.csworkshop.org/>

“Colours of Resistance Web-Site” Colours of Resistance (COR) is a grassroots network of people who consciously work to develop anti-racist, multiracial politics in the movement against global capitalism. The website has a section on “Organizing Tools” which is geared towards white folks. <http://colours.mahost.org/>

Hoffman, Jessica. “On Prisons, Borders, Safety, and Privilege: An Open Letter to White Feminists. *make/shift* magazine: reposted at: <http://www.alternet.org/story/81260/>

Kivel, Paul. Uprooting Racism: how white people can work for racial justice. Gabriola, BC: New Society Publishers, 1996.

Kivel, Paul. “Guidelines for Being Strong White Allies.” Available online: <http://www.paulkivel.com/articles/guidelinesforbeingstrongwhiteallies.pdf>  
Other great resources available at: <http://www.paulkivel.com/resources.php>

McCaskell, Tim. Toward Racial Equality: materials for secondary school teachers  
Toronto: Equity Studies Centre, Toronto District School Board, 1999.

McIntosh, P. "White Privilege: unpacking the invisible knapsack." Peace and Freedom.  
July/August 1989.

Ontario Public Interest Research Group (OPIRG) - Peterborough. Anti-Racism  
Workbook: Structural change for grassroots organizations. Peterborough: Trent  
University Publishing, nd.

Thompson, B. W. A Promise and a Way of Life: White Antiracist Activism.  
Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001

"White Studies: Deconstructing (the) Race Website." Includes lots of resources  
including bibliographies on whiteness. <http://www.uwm.edu/~gjay/Whiteness/>