

McGill Sustainable Events Certification Program

Community Agreements

What?

Community agreements, sometimes referred to as “community norms,” are guidelines given to a group of people in order to ensure open, active, inclusive, and respectful dialogue and participation. Here are some ground rules widely used in group activities for reference:

- Listen actively and respect others when they are talking.
- Participate to the fullest of your ability without taking up too much space – community growth depends on the inclusion of every individual voice.
- Speak from your own experience instead of generalizing (“I” instead of “we”).
- Do not be afraid to respectfully challenge one another by asking questions but refrain from personal attacks – focus on ideas.
- Be conscious of body language and nonverbal responses – they can be as disrespectful as words.

[Source]

Some additional agreements:

- Invite participants to share any personal access needs with the facilitator and/or the group whenever necessary. Some examples of access needs include getting up and stretch every 20 minutes, lowering the lights to avoid headaches, participating less for health reasons, etc.
- Invite participants to share their preferred gender pronoun(s) with the group. These include gender binary pronouns (he, she) and gender-neutral ones (they, ze), and are used when an attendant is referred to as a third person.

Why?

Event attendees come from a wide variety of backgrounds and lived experiences. In order to provide everyone an equally interactive and engaging learning space – one where participants and facilitators can address topics openly and honestly – it is important to provide structures and opportunities for safe self-expression.

How?

We recommend setting community agreements prior to any activity that involves conversations, discussions, and participation of some kind. The facilitator may start by listing a set of agreements prepared beforehand, then ask for additional contributions to the list from the attendees and participants if time allows. It is important to ensure these guidelines are observed throughout the activity, so it may be useful to reiterate them with the group from time to time.