

### ***Sharing Your Personal Diversity Story at Work – A Few Reminders and a Few Tips***

The Foraker Group did not invent this concept, but we are true believers. Sharing personal stories about one's own diversity and experience with equity and inclusion are not just "a nice touch," they set the stage for everyone in the room to get grounded to the real world experiences of why diversity, equity, and inclusion matters to us as humans, to our missions, and to our work with and within communities.

The whole experience is 10-15 minutes of a meeting and during that time someone is setting the stage for why this conversation matters. Additional time can be added for small group reflection, but this is not always the right next step or necessary in all cases. The most important part is the space for a single person to be fully heard.

#### **A sharing experience can have these results:**

- It inspires us to think about another person's experience and world view.
- It connects us to our feelings as humans and can create more empathy.
- It brings us closer to the truth about why dismantling systems of oppression matter in peoples' lived experience.
- It holds us together for the difficult decisions we have to make.
- It engages everyone in the room in concrete ways
- It can show us how to create safe space or reinforce our practice.
- It lets people know we hear them. We see them. They matter.

#### **Tips:**

- Be sure to place time on the agenda and assign a discussion leader, which is often the CEO or the board chair, but not always.
- There is power in the invitation. This means that who does the inviting and who gets invited matters. Watch for power imbalance that creates "have to" situations for the personal storyteller. You are on track if it feels like a "want to" moment for the storyteller.
- Create a frame and context for the story sharing. Help the board, staff, and those assembled know why personal story sharing like this adds value to your commitment to learning and

growing your commitment to diversity and equity, and how it can create a more inclusive and welcoming environment.

- Set a time limit to help the storyteller and the listeners know what to expect.
- Create safe space by asking for agreements about listening. Also ask the storyteller what they need to feel welcome and more comfortable. It can be scary even among friends and peers to share one's own personal story. Be generous and allow follow through for what they need. Safe space can also be an acknowledgement of silent space. Sometimes quiet is exactly what is needed to make room for emotions, feelings, and just to catch one's breath before moving on to the next thing.
- Say thank you. Beyond being polite, this is a reminder as the person who made the invitation that you asked someone to take a risk in the name of making the world a more equitable place. Honor that risk with kindness in return.

**Remember:**

- Don't EVER ask a person or suggest to them that their story "represents" anything. You are inviting them to share because of who they are. They don't speak for others. Their story is theirs to tell.
- Their story time is not yours. Everyone else's job is to listen. If you decide to build in reflection time, make sure that time is spent on more fully understanding an issue that was raised or an idea that was shared and not time sharing your opinions or reflections of the person's story or what it meant to your story.

**Sample invitation:**

There are so many ways to invite a person to share their story. Here is one short example that touches on a few of the tips and the reminders. Above all else, be sincere and honor the values of your organization.

Dear \_\_\_\_\_

I know you have expressed an interest in helping our organization expand our efforts to create a more welcoming and inclusive environment while we continue with our commitment to a more diverse team. To that purpose, are you willing to share your personal story of diversity at our next board meeting? I know the diversity task force wants to help personalize the topic of diversity so we can get out of our philosophical heads and stay grounded in real life.

I invite you to share your story your way. You can connect it to the larger movement, but you don't have to. You can share your own journey in this work or not. You can share from a personal perspective or a professional one or both. You can share visuals or words or other creative ways to express yourself. To make it manageable, please plan for 5-10 minutes of sharing. If you think your story will encourage a specific generative conversation, I welcome that reflection, too. Please feel no pressure to say yes.

I know you will be amazing, and I am ready to support you in whatever way makes it feel more comfortable for you. Let me know, and thanks for considering my request.