



Four Corners: Building Appreciation for Diverse Ideas and Dialogue

Overview:

The Four Corners activity engages participants in reflecting on and articulating their own viewpoints. It also provides a structure for participants to learn, through dialogue, about viewpoints that may differ from their own. This activity fosters communication, listening, and leadership skills. By using statements that are designed to be intentionally ambiguous and effective at dividing the group by different perspectives, this activity encourages participants to engage in a dialogue. This workshop can work well for a variety of settings and purposes, most often to focus on issues of cultural backgrounds, political viewpoints, values, race, class, gender, religion, and other issues. It promotes active listening and helps with community building skills.

This is an excellent activity for use in meetings of formed or forming coalitions, in order to introduce dialogue related to important issues.

Category:

Self-efficacy; diversity; communication skills; dialogue; facilitation; advocacy

Level:

Suitable for all levels but may require more skillful facilitators and students at a level that they are ready to articulate points of view on topics. It is recommended to use this activity following other more general team building and introductory diversity activities.

Recommended

Bonner Sequence: This training can be used at any point during the Bonner experience but is recommended for Bonner students during the sophomore and junior year in particular. It could be helpful as part of the enrichment activities for campuses that have selected diversity awareness as a baseline/intention for sophomore year, or for leading inquiry as a baseline/intention for junior year. It is a highly recommended activity to be done by the senior year.

Learning Outcomes:

- Participants will engage in dialogue about their own points of view and beliefs in relation to a set of statements.
- Participants will discuss issues related to diversity, to build skills in listening, dialogue, self-reflection, and critical thinking.
- Participants will deepen their understanding of each other and create a space that respects diversity of ideas and perspectives.

Materials:

- Golf pencils or writing instruments
- Handouts with 3-5 prepared statements (depending on length and focus areas of session) and multiple choice A – B – C – D responses (see template)
- Signs labeling four areas (corners, or spaces with circles of chairs or seating) of the room A - B - C - D

How to Prepare

In this guide, you will find instructions for how to use the Four Corners exercise, which is a guided facilitation activity that allows for participants to articulate, clarify, and dialogue about their own views. This exercise can be used for a range of topics (you will find a range of sample statements enclosed at the end of this workshop). The statements are designed to be open for interpretation in a way that “splits” the group along four corners (and can be somewhat ambiguous). Examples are:

- “People of different gender/sexual orientation are more alike than different.”
- “Undocumented immigrants should have access to schooling and health care.”
- “America is the most diverse country in the world.”
- “What is often interpreted as racism is really classism.”

As facilitator, you need to prepare the statements in advance, and have them printed on paper (small pages) to distribute to participants at the beginning of the workshop. The facilitator could use statements from this guide. It is recommended to have three to five statements for a two-hour workshop.

The facilitator should be prepared to be an objective, non-biased participant, ready to use effective facilitation techniques to bring about deeper sharing and dialogue. The purpose of this exercise is not about making one perspective right. Rather, the exercise gives participants a chance to truly reflect on what they think and believe, communicate it to others who may or may not share their views, and exercise communication and listening skills. In the best sense, this is about diversity of ideas.

Brief Outline:

The basic outline for the session is:

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|--|---------------------------|
| 1) Focus the group and set a tone | suggested time 5 minutes |
| 2) Set ground rules | suggested time 5 minutes |
| 3) Present "Statements" handout | suggested time 5 minutes |
| 4) First round: small group discussion | suggested time 10 minutes |
| 5) First round: small groups report back | suggested time 10 minutes |
| 6) First round: whole group dialogue | suggested time 10 minutes |
| 7) Closing | suggested time 10 minutes |

Part 1) Get the Group Focused

Suggested time 5 minutes

You probably want to begin with a welcome. Introduce yourself and provide an overview of the workshop. The overview can include a description of the workshop, why you're doing it, and what your expectations are.

If you are short on time, you may want to move very quickly into the statements. As people enter the room, provide each with a handout (see attached) and a golf pencil. Ask people to quietly take a seat and begin by reading the statements to themselves. Explain that you want the group to focus and move quickly into the discussion part of the workshop. Set a tone that is calm, polite, centered, welcoming, reflective. As the facilitator, you have a lot of power that will be important in establishing a safe climate for the exercise.

Part 2) Set Ground Rules

Suggested time 5 minutes

In a workshop like this, making clear expectations for participants' comments and actions is important. You can do this by presenting ground rules.

As a facilitator, you could start by reading out loud the following quote, and invite participants to interpret it.

"No idea is above scrutiny; no people are below dignity." Maajid Nawaz

If time permits, show the video "[Does Freedom of Speech Give Us The Right to Offend?](#)"

Then, introduce some ground rules and also invite participants to elicit additional ground rules, and ask folks for accord with the ground rules.

Some suggested Ground Rules:

- This workshop requires you to think about your own thoughts, feelings, and beliefs and articulate them. Please use "I" statements and speak for yourself, not for any group.
- In the smaller groupings, you want to articulate your own point of view and listen to others' points of view. Even though you are in the same 'corner' you may not all have the same ideas.
- As the facilitator, my job is to provide a space where all can feel comfortable speaking. If anyone's statements or actions begin to infringe on that, I will ask you to leave.
- Everyone is encouraged to speak at least once. Yet, we won't be enforcing anyone to speak unless they want to.
- The success of this activity depends on your honesty and open mind. There are no wrong answers or questions.

Part 3) Present "Statements" Handout

Suggested time 5 minutes

Keep the handouts ready with statements, and give one copy to each participant.

Explain the following: With each statement, there are four responses: 1 = strongly agree; 2 = agree; 3 = disagree; 4 = strongly disagree.

For each statement, you must choose one of four responses:

A- strongly agree

B- agree

C- disagree

D- strongly disagree

Give participants three to four minutes to choose their response for each statement and make a note. **See the sample statements at the end of this guide.** Read over the statements for people and clarify any questions about language. Do not, however, tell people how to select a response or remove the ambiguity of statements; the success of the workshop relies upon the ability to interpret the statements in different ways. People may express anxiety, which is normal, but simply reinforce that each person should choose a response and will have the opportunity to explain why he/she did so.

When everyone has finished, ask them to sign the paper and put their pencils away.

Part 4) First Round: Small Group Discussion

Suggested time 10 minutes

Now that people have marked off their private responses, read over the first statement.

Ask people to note that each corner of the room is designated as on the sheet:

1 = strongly agree; 2 = agree; 3 = disagree; 4 = strongly disagree.

Ask people to physically move themselves and their chair to the number that corresponds to their response. They should form a circle (or 2 or 3 depending on the size of the group) at that location. Reinforce that people move quickly and without talking.

Limit the size of small groupings to 8, so that all will have time to share. If necessary, ask the group to break into two circles.

Set the stage for dialogue:

Give the groups designated time in which to discuss the following:

- “Why did you go to the response you did?; How did you interpret and respond to the statement?”
- Explain that each person within the group should be able to talk. Request that each group select one person to keep notes and report back on behalf of the entire group after the discussion.

As facilitator, you want to simply observe the various dialogues, not participate. Observe and make note of what you see, hear, and perceive and think about how to engage the group in dialogue after report backs.

Part 5) Small Groups Report Back

Suggested time 5 minutes

The facilitator can use a technique like “Hands Up” to call the group to attention and do report backs. Invite one representative from each group to report what members of that group discussed, not simply one’s own thoughts. One person from each group can add things that they think might have been left out.

Give each group a designated time (for example 2 minutes) to report back.

Part 6) Whole Group Questions and Dialogue

Suggested time 7-12 minutes

As facilitator, your job is to ensure that each group has the opportunity to present their views while the other participants listen. Do not allow questions until that has happened. Then, open the floor for questions and comments. Use questions that raise dialogue between the groups, not seeking to resolve differences but to draw them out, including hidden similarities or fundamentally different points of view. You can give people the opportunity to ask questions across groups, as well. Observe the ground rules.

After each group has spoken, ask if anyone would like to change their group based on what they have heard. If anyone changes, ask them if they would like to share briefly why they switched. Then, move onto the next round.

NOTE: This exercise is as much about listening and how differences can often arise from misunderstanding as much as they can arise from genuine differences. Many

people who go to the same corner may find out during group discussion that they are there for very different reasons.

Part 7) Closing

This is your opportunity as facilitator to make observations, summaries of what has been seen and heard, allow participants to assess their own learning or attitudes, or lay out next steps.

SAMPLE STATEMENTS FOR FOUR CORNERS:

NOTE: You can switch the "is" or "is not" in the statements so that your group of 3-5 statements is not all pointing in one direction!

For best results, combine statements from more than one topic area.

Statements that get at multiple issues:

- "America is the most diverse country in the world."
- "Anyone who is from a marginalized community cannot be prejudiced."
- "Lack of family values is responsible for the crisis in America today."
- "Globalization, including free and open markets without any barriers to trade, is a good way for underdeveloped countries to build their economies, even if that means jobs in sweatshops."

Statements that get at race and ethnicity:

- "Anyone can be racist."
- "My racial identity is most important in defining who I am."
- "People of color cannot be racist."
- "Race is the most important part of one's identity in America."
- "Race is the most important factor in defining one's experiences in America."

Statements that get at class:

- "What is often interpreted as racism is really classism."
- "Materialistic items (like clothes, cars, etc.) are an accurate indication of one's class."
- "My class background is most important in defining who I am."
- "Day to day, my class background is more important to me than any other aspect of my identity."

Statements that get at gender and (biological) sex:

- "People of different gender/sexual orientation are more alike than different."
- "Gender differences will always exist."

Statements that get at sexual orientation and preferences:

- "People can choose what sexual preference they have."
- "A person should be able to love and marry a person of any gender/race legally."

Statements that get at views on diversity:

- "In our campus/organization, there is more talk about appreciating diversity than action."
- "The campus community/organization/team I work in appreciates diverse definitions of leadership."

Statements that get at citizenship and rights:

- "People should be allowed to say whatever they want."
- "Free speech is a critical foundation in a fair society."
- "Undocumented immigrants should have access to schooling and healthcare." (OR)
- "All U.S. residents have a right to education and healthcare."
- "Most people need to be led."
- "In a just society, all citizens should be guaranteed basic human rights (food, healthcare, housing)." (OR)
- "No one should be denied basic human rights."

Statements that get at culture:

- "People should accept the cultural practices of groups they don't belong to, even if they don't agree with them."
- "I consider my cultural background much more important than my gender and race in defining who I am."
- People are only as strong as their ability to resist indoctrination by their surrounding culture.

Four Corners: Cards for adding statements and cutting

<p><u>Statement:</u></p> <p>"I consider my cultural background much more important than my gender and race in defining who I am."</p> <p><u>My response:</u> (Circle one)</p> <p>A = Strongly agree</p> <p>B = Agree</p> <p>C = Disagree</p> <p>D = Strongly Disagree</p>	<p><u>Statement:</u></p> <p>"In a just society, all citizens should be guaranteed basic human rights (food, healthcare, housing)."</p> <p><u>My response:</u> (Circle one)</p> <p>A = Strongly agree</p> <p>B = Agree</p> <p>C = Disagree</p> <p>D = Strongly Disagree</p>
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