

Diversify Master Naturalists Project
Monthly Discussion Guide
2021

Discussion Guide Overview

Program Overview

The Diversify Master Naturalist program is a collaboration between the University of Illinois Natural Resources and Environmental Sciences Department, University Extension, and the Office of the Vice Chancellor for Diversity, Equity & Inclusion. The program is designed to make the Master Naturalist program more inclusive for all residents of Illinois through

- 1) Developing a community of practice around diversity issues and barriers to inclusion for leaders of the Master Naturalist program.
- 2) Engaging with leaders in communities of color in the areas served by the program to understand how the program can better serve those communities and invite some of those leaders to serve as members of an advisory board to the program. Building these relationships should allow us to develop more culturally responsive and intentional recruitment strategies for the program.
- 3) Develop a continuing education module to provide trained Master Naturalists with a foundational knowledge of diversity issues in natural resource conservation, tools for working with diverse communities, and resources for growth.
- 4) Modify the Master Naturalist manual, a central piece of the training program, so that it is more accessible and relevant to diverse communities in Illinois.

These objectives support the Extension mission, helping make the Master Naturalist program more accessible to a wider array of people, while also attracting more diverse participants to solve natural resource conservation problems.

Monthly Discussions

These monthly discussions are an opportunity for you to engage with your peers to better understand strategies for improving the diversity of the Master Naturalist program. During the next year several months, participants in the Diversify Master Naturalist (DMN) program will be teamed into monthly discussion groups, to provide a safe space for deeper dialogue on the topics. DMN teams are provided with this discussion guide to help provide structure for the monthly dialogues. While the DMN teams are encouraged to utilize the readings and activities provided in this guide, the DMN organizers also understand that each discussion will be unique to the team. Please use this document as a suggestion for a step-by-step approach to engaging in conversations about race, racism, and nature.

This discussion guide is a way for your group to focus your discussion on the readings and various topics. Each monthly session plan is written linearly, but each DMN team should feel free to hop around to the questions as they come up.

Monthly Discussion Recommendations

During the first session, your team will devise your own community guidelines to maintain a respectful, honest, and engaged environment. Below are some recommendations for your group:

- Please take this time to be present over the next hour and respect the members of the group.
- Please allow space for everyone in the group to speak on each of the questions if they feel so inclined.
- Listen to understand new perspectives

Discussion Summaries

It is not required to “document” or record your discussions. However, the DMN organizers ask that each group submit the summary questions (See Appendix A) on Moodle after each meeting. Please submit the group’s summary questions by the last day of the month (i.e. March’s meeting will be due by March 31st). The entire group only needs to submit one discussion summary in total, not one per group member.

March Discussion

Goals

- Spend time getting to know one another and understand your motivations for participating in the Diversify Master Naturalist program
- Identify community guidelines to help promote engaged dialogue together
- Begin to consider the forces that have limited the racial/ethnic diversity of programs like the Master Naturalists

Reading

- Introduction (pp. 1-20) from *Black Faces, White Spaces* by Carolyn Finney

Optional Activity: Hopes & Fears

Discussion Questions for March:

- What are some ways you and your group can ensure you are present and active in the meetings? (videos on, agreement not to be working on other things while you meet, etc.)
- What are some norms your community can establish to ensure this space is comfortable for all to share opinions and discuss?
- What is the place of this training for diversifying the Master Naturalist Program?
- What are your personal goals for this community of practice? Why did you want to participate and how do you hope to use this information? (What is your interest in participating in this Community of Practice and what do you hope to get out of it?)
- Why do you think there is a lack of representation among Master Naturalists?
- The introduction to *Black Faces, White Spaces* is quite dense, what are your thoughts on the introduction? (do you think it's necessary, did it place things in context)
- What does land mean to you?

April Discussion

Goals

- Understanding race & racism
- Discussion of personal experiences of race and racism
- Reading accounts from folks of color

Reading

- *BFWS* Chapters 2
- Meet the Chicagoan Who's Working to Change the Face of Urban Ecology- Chicago News
- Being Very Frank About Our History (Sierra Club)- Az Central Newspaper
- To Feel Safe in a Forest- Writeup by Cook Co, IL MN Intern

Discussion Questions and Activities

- 1) In the book and additional readings, we have begun to hear more about perspectives of individuals in relation to the natural world. When you think about "nature," what are some of the words that come to mind? Write these in the chat or share them aloud.
- 2) In the second chapter of *Black Faces, White Spaces*, Dr. Finney discusses the distance between the Civil Rights Act and the Wilderness Act, both of which were passed into law in 1964. Can you imagine a law that merges the two Acts into one? What elements would be critical for such a law?
- 3) Dr. Finney argues that the lack of access to natural spaces, whether public or private land, has a direct link to societal racism in America. The same argument is made in the Sierra Club's "Being Very Frank About Our History" article. Thinking of neighborhoods in the areas where you work, what are some examples of disparities in resources or access to spaces that are "wild" that might relate to racism?
- 4) In "Meet the Chicagoan..." Deja Perkins notes there was some pushback from the birding community at large when the Audubon Society and other groups promoted #BlackBirdersWeek. Why might conservationists bristle at highlighting the contributions of birders who are people of color?
- 5) Thinking back on the first question, what words or phrases might these authors use to describe "nature" (or their relationship to the natural world)? Generate as many words or phrases as you can.
- 6) Compare your list and the authors' list. How might race (or specifically our experiences related to race) affect how we experience nature? Which perspectives or values do you see reflected in the Master Naturalist program?

Quarterly Training Sessions

End of April

Diversify Master Naturalist Quarterly Training Agenda- Understanding Racism

- **Land Acknowledgment**
- **Welcome & Agenda**
- **My First Realization: Race and Nature (Small Group)**
 - “What is your earliest memory that people might have a different relationship (or experiences in) nature based on race?”
- **Danger of a Single Story- Ted Talk by Chimamanda Adichie**
 - https://www.ted.com/talks/chimamanda_ngozi_adichie_the_danger_of_a_single_story?language=en
 - Lee Ann Bell’s Storytelling for Social Justice model
- **Understanding Racism, Power & Privilege in the US**
 - Barriers to Discussing Race & Racism
 - Defining Race & Racism- which came first and what does it look like?
 - Understanding types of Racism- structural and systemic racism, internalized racism, racism without racists
 - Defining and Understanding white supremacy- three pillars of white supremacy
 - Privilege & Intent
 - Anti-racism- Developing and committing to our anti-racism personally and organizationally
- **Perspective Taking & Communication Skills: Hearing Stories from People of Color in Our Communities**
 - Listening to Communities of Color- who aren’t we seeing?
 - Building relationships with communities of color- asking good questions
 - Challenges for white folks
 - Intercultural communication, knowledge, competence
 - Ethnocentrism to ethnorelativism
 - Cultural empathy & understanding empathy
- **Next Steps & Closing**
 - Our work
 - Commitments to take before next meeting
 - Updates and next steps

May Discussion

Goals

- What are messages I have learned about race/racism?
- What are some challenges (I have to overcome?)
- Do some introspection about race/racism

Readings

- *BFWS* Chapters 3 & 4
- Anderson Cobb, Nicole. "Where We Belong: Is there room for African Americans Outdoors?"
- Optional: Schell et al 2020 Ecological and evolutionary consequences of systemic racism

Discussion Questions

- As a white person, what do you notice about your experiences with race? What – in your opinion – does it mean to be white? How do your experiences with race shape how you approach your work?
- In Chapter 3, Finney discusses the concept of "collective memory," that are "borrowed, inherited, and learned [as] part of a common experience kept alive by individuals, communities, cultures, and nations." (55) How do you think collective memory impacts how people interact with nature? How does racial collective memory impact how people of color in your community experience nature?
- Finney also offers that reclaiming processes must both honor a "'sense of history' while fostering a sense of peace." (56) How have you seen local or (inter)national communities honor the collective memory while building something new?
- One of Finney's sources in Chapter 4 says, "People of color don't see themselves in the picture." (79). Nicole Anderson Cobb also talks about this experience in her article about participating in a Master Naturalist training. How can you – as Master Naturalist coordinators – ensure that people of color "see themselves" in this program?
- Finney also talks about reactions that some African American participants identified when engaging in environmental education, specifically anger, fatigue, and mistrust. (65) Talk about a time when you encountered these reactions. How did you make sense of the interaction at the time? How do you make sense of it now?