

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

- Google Jamboard of Hopes and Fears of everyone in the group

### 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

- *Black Faces, White Spaces*; Chapter 2 by Dr. Carolyn Finney
- "[Meet the Chicagoan Who's Working to Change the Face of Urban Ecology](#)" by Patti Wetli in the Chicago News on June 15, 2020
  - <https://news.wttw.com/2020/06/15/meet-chicagoan-deja-perkins-urban-ecology>
- "['Being very frank about our history': As Sierra Club acknowledges racist past, Indigenous communities look for reckoning](#)" by Debra Utacia Krol in the AZ Central Newspaper on June 26, 2020
  - <https://www.azcentral.com/story/news/local/arizona-environment/2020/07/26/sierra-club-confronts-its-racist-history-tribes-see-reckoning/5494294002/>
- 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](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

- *Black Faces, White Spaces*; Chapters 3 & 4 by Dr. Carolyn Finney
- [“Where We Belong: Is there room for African Americans Outdoors?”](#) by Nicole Anderson Cobb by Smile Politely in September 28, 2018
  - [http://smilepolitely.com/opinion/where\\_we\\_belong\\_is\\_there\\_room\\_for\\_african\\_americans\\_outdoors/](http://smilepolitely.com/opinion/where_we_belong_is_there_room_for_african_americans_outdoors/)
- Optional: “Ecological and evolutionary consequences of systemic racism” by Schell et al, 2020

### 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?

## June Discussion

### Goals

- Discuss experiences of folks of color with nature. How does racism impact relationships with nature?
- Consider ways that you can create more racially inclusive programming
- Investigate racial/ethnic diversity in your Extension unit

### Readings

- *Black Faces, White Spaces*; Chapter 5 by Dr. Carolyn Finney
- [Nine Rules for the Woke Birdwatcher](#) by J. Drew Lanham in Orion Magazine, Dec 3, 2020
  - <https://orionmagazine.org/article/9-rules-for-the-woke-birdwatcher/>
- [Things I Wish My White Outdoorsy Friends Knew](#) by Eugene Pak on Melanin Basecamp, Feb 7, 2021
  - <https://www.melaninbasecamp.com/around-the-bonfire/2021/2/7/things-i-wish-my-white-outdoorsy-friends-knew>
- [Ways to Build a More Racially Inclusive Hiking Community](#) by David Robles on Melanin Basecamp, Sept 30, 2020
  - <https://www.melaninbasecamp.com/trip-reports/2020/9/29/5-ways-to-build-a-more-racially-inclusive-hiking-community>
- <http://racialdotmap.demographics.coopercenter.org/> from the University of Virginia, the Racial Dot Map
- Census Quick Facts Race Estimates- (<https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/IL/PST045219>)

### Discussion Questions

- In Chapter 5, Finney says “[R]acism is a process that at best limits opportunities and stifles potential collaborative efforts and at worst creates a negative space of hatred and mistrust that can lead to violence and even death.” (94) What do you imagine are some of the direct and indirect impacts of racism on the Master Naturalist program? How can you counter and address the impact of racism?
- Finney also talks about the importance of listening to multiple stories about how communities of color create spaces of resistance and reconnection to the environment. Where do you see these stories in your communities? How could you make more connections and learn more about your local communities of color relationship to the environment?
- The articles talk about enhancing awareness about the experiences of people of color in nature. What surprised you in reading these? What are some tips that you found useful? How could you incorporate these insights into your work?
- We've provided data on the racial/ethnic diversity in your unit's area from US census data, as well as a dot map showing diversity by household across the United States. Examine the data for your unit area and discuss with your peers in this group. Are there any surprises in the data or areas you think you could target for any future Extension programming?

# Quarterly Training

## End of June

- Looking Back & Reflecting Together- small group & whole group discussions
  - Reflecting on DMN project so far
  - Barriers to involvement
  - Current strategies for Diversifying Master Naturalist program
  - Looking forward to address these barriers & future goals
- Strategies for Building Relationships
  - Exploring communities: <http://racialdotmap.demographics.coopercenter.org/>
  - Mapping publicly available natural spaces and pollution/negative environmental factors
- Create an Eco-Network Map
  - List community specific resources and organizations within under-served communities in your area
  - Draw lines to show relationships between organizations
  - List people you know and potential connections between them
- Homework: Build Intentional Relationships
  - Select 1-2 people on this list to speak with
  - Interview them to find out more about individuals and communities of color in your area, focusing on the strengths and resilience of the communities

## July Discussion

### Goals

- Readings focused on the work of individuals and communities of color in environmental justice, ecology, natural science, etc.
- Discuss the different relationships and conceptualizations of nature/natural in relationship to race, community

### Readings

- *Black Faces, White Spaces* Chapter 6 & Epilogue by Dr. Carolyn Finney
- “[Start Where You Are](#)” by Biomimicry Institute, Jul 22, 2020
  - <https://biomimicry.org/start-where-you-are/>
- “[Seeing Himself in the Science](#)” by Julie Davidow in the UW Magazine, Dec 2019
  - <https://magazine.washington.edu/feature/ecologist-christopher-schell-sees-himself-in-the-science/>
- Optional Readings
  - “Black Americans Attitudes toward Wildlife” by Dolin, 1988
  - “Science in the Learning Gardens (SciLG): a study of students’ motivation, achievement, and science identity in low-income middle schools” by Williams et al, 2018
  - [Greening the Ghetto](#) Ted Talk by Majora Carter
    - [https://www.ted.com/talks/majora\\_carter\\_greening\\_the\\_ghetto?language=en](https://www.ted.com/talks/majora_carter_greening_the_ghetto?language=en)

### Discussion Questions

- During this program, we have read much about negative experiences of people of color in natural environments. Finney intentionally decenters these experiences of fear in book (Chapter 6), preferring instead to focus on resistance, strength, ingenuity, and resilience. What would it mean to center these values in our work with communities and individuals of color? How might that change what collaboration looks like?
- Often, we approach issues from our own perspective and experience, and it may be difficult to ask the right questions to learn about another person’s different perspectives or experiences. In reflecting on these readings, what would be some of the questions you would want to ask these authors? How would you make sure your questions are open and non-judgmental? How might this be similar or different than the local community member(s) you will talk with about DMN?
- Who did you select to speak with and why? How do you think you might approach the conversation? What is the absolute best thing that could happen in this conversation? The worst?

Appendix A: Discussion Summary

<b>Summary Questions:</b>
<b>How long was your meeting? -</b>
<b>How many people attended? -</b>
<b>Was an hour enough time:</b>
<b>Write 3 main insights from your group discussion:</b>
1.
2.
3.
<b>What expanded perspectives or Ah-ha moments did you experience today?</b>
<b>What questions does your group have after today's discussion?</b>
<b>What did your group like best about today's discussion and readings?</b>
<b>Any improvements or changes you would like to see from the community of practice, discussions, or readings?</b>

