



Open Forum for Racial Discussion Template

We have heard that many of you, as our organizational leaders, would like to facilitate discussions about our current events with your staff and make sure they are doing okay. This is a basic template or guideline for how to introduce, coordinate and have a conversation with your staff.

Best practice suggests:

- That this be a town-hall type of session.
- This is open to everyone and not mandatory.
- You host multiple sessions so you can reach as many people as possible.
- Three or four leaders in the department start the dialogue in a panel style discussion but then listen.
- Panel members are diverse to ensure that different perspectives are represented.
- This is a conversation to talk and listen...it is unscripted...it needs to come from the heart.
- Follow ground rules regarding respect and civility to create a safe space.
- Sessions are recommended to be 30-45 minutes each.

Email Announcement

An example of what to write to your staff inviting them to the conversation is below. Please make it your own and from the heart.

Dear friends and colleagues:

The last several (or other timeframe) days have been difficult ones for those who work and live in Baltimore and other cities across the U.S. It was a stressful time. We want to do a check in to provide our staff the opportunity to share experiences and concerns.

After any trying experience, it is important to talk and share feelings, emotions and concerns. Many find it beneficial to discuss and share their personal experiences. We need to talk about our friends, children, neighbors and colleagues. We need to talk about why this is happening and what we can do.

To that end, on [date] between [time], we will be holding a series of voluntary mini-town hall meetings in the [location]. Your managers will work out a schedule for individual areas so that everyone who is interested can attend.

The mini-town hall meetings will:

- Be listening sessions to hear employee concerns. Do not expect leaders and facilitators to make major decisions during the course of the listening session.

- Be voluntary and not mandatory
- Follow ground rules regarding respect and civility to create a safe space
- Be smaller groups versus large groups (may require multiple sessions)

Although our primary mission is to serve our patients, we are also very committed to our employees, many who live in the neighboring communities. We need to remember that we do not exist in isolation from our local community. It is clear that many of our staff want to “help.” We put the word “help” in quotation marks because it means different things to different people. Some people help through their church. Some people help by mentoring. Some people help by volunteering in the local communities.

It is also important to remember that each of us is different. We come from diverse backgrounds and experiences. It is also important to remember that our security and police are not all the people we saw on our T.V. and phones.

Thank you for your dedication on all fronts.

Introductory Remarks by Leader

We have all been impacted by the recent events. Our staff are our most important priority and we want to provide an opportunity to check in on you, understand your concerns and give leadership an opportunity to listen. As far as the panel members go, none of us has expertise in facilitation and no one is expected to give advice. This is an opportunity to talk and listen. Everyone is good. We all provide value. We all see our world through our own lens.

Panel Member Remarks to Introduce Session

Allow panel members to start the conversation by relating a personal story that connects with the events of last week. This is often enough to get the participants to talk. Questions to ask after everyone has shared their thoughts and stories can include:

1. What are ways Johns Hopkins can help the community?
2. What are ways the department can help the community?

Note Taking/Charting

There is some concern about the best way to capture the information shared at these sessions. One way is to have someone taking notes on the side capturing thoughts and statement without noting who said what. Another way to capture the information is to have flip charts available to write suggestions on them. This method allows everyone to see what is being written down and provides more transparency. A third way is to not take notes at all and at the end write your own summary of the conversation. You will need to decide what is right for you and your team or department.

What's Next?

Have someone type up the notes from the flip charts. For question # 2, reconvene your leadership team to review and see what you might be able to do. For question #1, send your write up to Cheri Wilson, Training and Education Program Manager in the Office of Diversity, Inclusion, and Health Equity at cwilso42@jhmi.edu. Our office will compile what is received, present to JHM leadership, and use this information to inform a subsequent broader action-oriented town hall series.

Follow up after the Sessions

Best practice states that it is helpful to pull the panel members back together after the sessions are completed and each has had time to digest and process the conversation. The group can discuss any themes they noticed and follow up ideas on which to take action. You may find that you want to communicate some of this information back to staff. They will find this helpful and will go a long way toward building or maintaining trust.