

(Based on "Norms Construction: A Process of Negotiation," by Betty Bisplinghoff - for full protocol, see <https://www.schoolreforminitiative.org/download/norms-construction-a-process-of-negotiation/> )

### **Background Information:**

- Norms are behaviors and attitudes that are typical of or approved within a group. Generally speaking, anything that most members of a group consider to be normal, right, correct, proper and/or appropriate is a norm.
- Because every group has unspoken norms for behavior, groups need to work at being explicit about what they expect from each other.
- Among other reasons, groups set norms...
  - To arrive at agreement among community members about how they will treat each other, based on how they want to be treated;
  - To ensure that all individuals have the opportunity to contribute in the meeting;
  - To increase productivity and effectiveness;
  - To help hold all members accountable to the community and act on the pro-social values of responsibility, respect, fairness, caring and helpfulness;
  - and to facilitate the achievement of its goals.

**Prep:** It may help to use a talking stick to insure equity of voice during group discussion portion

**Purpose:** To build consensus around behavioral norms

**Time:** 30 minutes

1. **Independent Reflection (2 minutes):** Distribute a sheet of paper with the following prompt to each participant. Give members 2 minutes to silently journal their responses on the paper.

"What do you remember about times when you experienced powerful collaboration and learning in a group? What was present?"

2. **Proposing what I need (1 minute):** SAY "Based on your insights gained from journaling, list 3 things you need in to be at your best in this group. Write those 3 things on your paper."

3. **Proposing what we need (1 minute):** Distribute 3 sticky notes to each member.  
**SAY:** "Now think about how these personal needs translate to group needs. In order to do our best work together in this community we need to..." Write a 1-2 word response on each sticky note."

4. **Negotiation with a partner (5 minutes):** Pair up. Each person shares their 3 sticky notes, then they work together to identify 3 (or 1) shared sticky notes to bring to the whole group.

5. **Negotiations with the group (flexible timing):**

- Each pair takes a turn sharing their 3 sticky notes with the whole group. While 1 group speaks, everyone else listens. The facilitator writes the 3 proposed norms down on a chart paper. If a norm (or very similar norm) is already recorded, the facilitator will mark a check next to it.
- Group members read over the norms.
- Facilitator asks members to determine whether the number of norms is realistic (Can you commit to following all of these norms, or are there certain ones that take priority?) The facilitator then asks participants to respond one by one. Once consensus is achieved, facilitator reminds group that norms are living and can be continuously revisited and re-negotiated.

Share this quote at the end:

True belonging is not passive.

It's not the belonging that  
comes with just joining a group.

It's not fitting in or pretending  
or selling out because it's safer.

It's a practice that requires us  
to be vulnerable, get  
uncomfortable, and learn how  
to be present with people  
without sacrificing who we are.

BRENÉ BROWN

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