

Understanding the Impacts of REASN

Findings from Ripple Effects Mapping Discussions

In February 2020, Wilder Research worked with facilitators to implement Ripple Effects Mapping (REM) discussions to better understand the impact of their Racial Equity Action and Support Network (REASN). REASN is a network of racial equity champions working in settings such as government agencies, education, health care, or as freelance consultants. Those who participate in REASN can work in many different fields, but the core of their work is racial equity. REASN was developed as a place for those working for racial equity to come together to examine the root causes of racial disparities, create and practice tools and strategies for their work, and provide support for each other. In previous evaluations, people identified REASN as a space for emotional support and a place for people to bring in new ideas and learn concrete tools to bring to their work. The REM discussions were intended to build upon these previous findings, providing participants a chance to reflect on how REASN has impacted their racial equity work, but also to identify the indirect or unexpected outcomes from participating in REASN.

During discussions, participants from REASN gathered to discuss the impacts of their time in the network. The questions asked during the REM discussions focused on participants' personal and professional growth, how REASN supports their racial equity work, and observations about outcomes of their work. The facilitators invited people with a range of participation levels in REASN; some have been a part of the network since its creation and others are recent participants. Fourteen people attended the discussions and represented a variety of professions, races, ages, and gender-identities. The REASN network is made up of 170 people with a core group of 40 people who consistently attend. The REASN has engaged over 1000 people through presentations, forums, and sharing of resources.

What is Ripple Effects Mapping?

Ripple Effects Mapping (REM) is an evaluation tool used to better understand the intended and unintended impacts of a project. It is particularly helpful when evaluating complex initiatives that both influence, and are impacted by, the community. REM is a facilitated discussion with project staff and local stakeholders that creates a visual "mind map" during the discussion that shows the linkages between program activities and resulting changes in the community.

This approach is intended to help demonstrate the project's impacts more holistically and to describe the degree to which different types of impacts are observed by project staff and community stakeholders.

Project impacts

During the discussions, participants had opportunities to describe the key ways REASN has supported their racial equity work. The observed impacts were grouped into five main types of changes that had taken place because of participating in REASN:

- Building courage and confidence
- Fostering connections and support
- Fostering new ways of thinking
- Impacting how people are as practitioners
- Building a healing space

A summary of the discussion related to each area of change is included in this report, and the specific impacts identified by participants during the mind mapping exercise are listed in the Appendix.

Ripple Effects Mapping: Racial Equity Action and Support Network (REASN)

IMPACTING HOW MEMBERS SHOW UP AS PRACTITIONERS

REASN has supported people in changing how they approach their current work. They have adopted new ways of facilitation, implemented new tools such as “Mental Models,” and developed better skills in navigating complex systems and bureaucracies. People are better equipped to advance racial equity efforts because of what they have learned in REASN.

Having a tangible resource like the Mental Models, I've been able to use them in trainings and in reflection and beyond. Once you name and see your conditioning, you can't stop.

I work in the bureaucracy and this was a safe space where I could get my reality check about the way the system operates or when you're hitting your head against something. It's really a clarity for me and guides my work.

The philosophy or approach to facilitating this space is not Western. There's a real intentionality to organizing the space and activities in ways that aren't linear and white. I think just the practice of doing what you're doing is disruptive because it models something else. There's a way for us to connect with a different model.

FOSTERING CONNECTIONS AND SUPPORT AMONG PEOPLE DOING RACIAL EQUITY WORK

REASN has helped people develop new relationships with other people doing racial equity work. These relationships have fostered a coalition of support for them to strengthen their efforts in this field.

The coalitions that we're building go against the hopelessness I was feeling. REASN is dynamic, caring, and cooperative.

The urgency of this work has been validated and emphasized and it has led to a more courageous work knowing there is a support network behind me. I have a group of individuals behind me to gain pointers or support.



REASN



BUILDING COURAGE AND CONFIDENCE TO DO RACIAL EQUITY WORK OUTSIDE OF REASN

REASN has contributed to shifts in understanding racial equity work and has supported people in building their confidence to initiate conversations around racism and white supremacy in their professional work.

I have more language and confidence with talking about and naming white supremacy. The more I'm able to talk about it, the more I'm able to say this is a real thing.

One of the impacts I have felt is going into a new space to see if people are talking about equity, if it's ever been on an agenda or ever come up. If not, being the one to raise it or ask “can we talk about it?” I don't know if I would have been listening for it or thinking about it.

FOSTERING NEW AND DEEPENED WAYS OF THINKING ABOUT RACIAL EQUITY WORK

REASN has supported people in developing a deeper understanding of systems, white supremacy, and colonization. This knowledge development has helped to shift their mindsets about racial equity and strengthen their approaches to this work.

Communal analysis and collective meaning making. Decolonizing our thinking and zooming out to see things systematically leads to insights for more effective action, different starting place.

BUILDING A HEALING SPACE FOR PEOPLE DOING RACIAL EQUITY WORK

REASN is a source of emotional support for people working for racial equity. Participants in REASN have built trust and safety among themselves and with the facilitators, and are able to have open conversations about the struggles they have in their work.

REASN provides a nurturing space where we can be our whole selves, grapple with hard things and still come out more optimistic than before.

People I trust in this work are here. I value the pushback and welcome the feedback. I was not prepared for this type of conversation and now I can bring this stuff in. You leave here feeling better than when you came.

Discussion themes



Impacting how members show up as practitioners

REASN has supported people in changing how they approach their current work. REM participants said they have adopted new ways of facilitation, implemented new tools such as “Mental Models,” and developed better skills in navigating complex systems and bureaucracies. People now believe they are better equipped to advance racial equity efforts because of what they have learned in REASN.

Applying tools learned in REASN in members' work

Many participants mentioned learning and using concrete tools in REASN that have helped them advance their racial equity work. The facilitators introduced some of these tools (“radical listening” and “The Nest”) and others were developed collectively in REASN (“Mental Models”). Participants have applied these tools in their work and have shared them with their own networks. The tools have helped change how participants view partnerships and relationship building, and how they approach racial equity and addressing racial disparities with a systems-focused framework. REASN is viewed as a place for people to bring ideas for further refinement with feedback from the network. It is a space for innovation and experimentation to create tools for furthering racial equity.

Doing the Mental Models work in particular, the “us versus them” has had a huge impact in my work. We've had a lot of projects where we're noticing we're doing that and can be a team and stand side-by-side with people.

The most important change for me personally was integrating the concept of "The Nest" into my approach to racial equity work. This model helps me realize that good relationships are the foundation.

Listening exercises and radical listening has been so key and I'm trying to do that in most spaces.

Experiencing new models of facilitation

Participants noted that the facilitation of REASN gatherings is different than what they experience in other networks or professional meetings. All aspects of the facilitation of these gatherings were commented on as visible examples of decolonization and ways to integrate racial equity values into practice. Participants shared that the facilitation of REASN is why this network is a supportive place for them to build skills to implement their work. The facilitators were recognized for their role in teaching and modeling new ways of facilitation for people to adopt into their own work. Multiple participants

commented that they now facilitate differently because of their time in REASN. Some of these facilitation practices include “radical hospitality” principles that focus on welcoming people to bring their full selves to REASN gatherings and creating a space that intentionally de-centers whiteness and uplifts BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, people of color) experiences. Facilitators also collectively create agendas with REASN participants and support them in facilitating activities with the group.

One thing that comes to mind as a facilitator, part of the best practices is being mindful of the space, food, how it's organized. I think the leaders of REASN take it to another level of hospitality and attentiveness. I'm always learning about how I can be more hospitable and inviting in REASN.

The facilitators of REASN, you couldn't easily swap the people out. Your skill, your passion, it's an institute, you study, you practice, you go deep. But also how do you bottle it and replicate it? I don't think you can just put any two people, we're all better because of this experience and your leadership.

With our format and the people here, I never leave here feeling defeated.

Providing support and resources to do racial equity work

Multiple participants shared that they are embedded in government agencies, health care institutions, or nonprofit organizations and that implementing racial equity work is challenging and draining. REASN has provided them with tools and emotional support for working in these places. Some topics that were mentioned as helpful resources were navigating bureaucracies and identifying racial equity allies at work.

I work in government and how fantastic to have that juxtaposition. Not all colonization was from the government but a lot of it was. Being in that pattern at work and then coming to this space allows me to bring more possibilities to my work.



Fostering connections and support among people doing racial equity work

REASN has helped people develop new relationships with others doing racial equity work. These relationships have fostered a coalition of support for them to strengthen their efforts in this field. Participants commented that they are oftentimes the only people in their workplaces that are focused on addressing racial equity, so they do not have sources of support in doing this work. REASN helps connect them with others who are doing similar work which opens up opportunities to learn new tools or strategies from one another and have emotional support when their work becomes challenging. A few participants said that just knowing

that there are other people like them trying to eliminate racial disparities gives them confidence and strength to continue their own work.

I have a team to reach out to when I'm tackling new or hard or big equity challenges. There are people - I have a squad.

REASN is a space for support for talking, learning, reflecting, and moving together for action that yields results.

I appreciate the relationship I've built with [a group member], as two people who get read as white but who have people of color (POC) identities to do racial equity work together and go to conferences together.

REASN participants' backgrounds are varied and this is seen as a positive in building a network of diverse experiences and skills. There was some discussion about the benefits of bringing together people of different ages and races to REASN. Intergenerational connections in REASN were mentioned as a way to ensure the future of racial equity work by understanding that these efforts have a history in the community.

REASN honors those folks who were pioneers who were planting these seeds 30-40 years ago. Thinking about these generations, and knowing some of the fighting we had to do just to speak this language. It does my heart good—I see this intergenerational work and I know it will continue and grow.



Fostering new and deepened ways of thinking about racial equity work

REASN has supported people in developing a deeper understanding of systems, white supremacy, and colonization. This knowledge development has helped to shift their mindsets about racial equity and strengthen their approaches to this work.

Disrupting myths of white supremacy and colonization

Multiple participants discussed how they have changed the way they think about white supremacy culture and colonization and how these changes have helped them understand why achieving racial equity is so challenging. Some mentioned how they have been “trained” to center whiteness, but have not been able to recognize and shift away from that way of thinking. The facilitation and workshops with REASN have introduced new ways to approach decentering whiteness and decolonizing in the way they work with other people. Participants acknowledged that they have built new ways of thinking and have changed how they build relationships and develop plans together. Some practices that have helped with decolonizing their approach are communal analysis of information and collectively making meaning of that data, developing strategies to navigate through

“fatality mindsets” or belief that their efforts will not succeed, and uplifting community experiences and wisdom.

One of the myths is expertise. Community wisdom is just as much an area of expertise as a keynote speaker or primary article. Through REASN, I now listen in groups or with strangers with the same intensity as I would read a book.

I think of what [group member] said: 'We've been set up!' I am growing in my systematic understanding of why this work is so hard.

An important personal change is that REASN has expanded my approach to resistance, both building and navigating. I come from people who were colonized, we have this thinking that when we're receiving resistance, we have this fatality mindset that all is done and you don't do anything else. REASN has been that space to help think about how we can find hope. What can we do to navigate this, through it, or ways to leverage it?

Other ways of sharpening thinking

Participants also highlighted other ways they have changed their thinking. A few shared that they used to engage in “call out” practices that focused on binary ways of thinking (one person is right and the other person is wrong). From their time in REASN, they now approach conflict differently and use humility and listening before assuming other people are wrong. There are multiple ways of engaging with people, and that is the focus of many conversations in REASN. Other concepts that have been helpful in changing how they implement racial equity work are intersectionality and viewpoint “shape-shifting,” or being able to see different perspectives. These help to build stronger relationships and coalitions by having a deeper understanding of where other people in REASN are coming from.

Gaining an understanding that I have a lot to learn and a desire to continue the conversations. If we're not talking about it then it becomes unimportant.

[I have learned] how to not engage in and [to] disrupt “call out” spaces that I have found over time that do not move us closer to the goal... What is fundamental is humanity and where we can remember and connect on that.



Building courage and confidence to do racial equity work outside of REASN

REASN has contributed to shifts in understanding racial equity work and has supported people in building their confidence to initiate conversations around racism and white supremacy in their professional work. Many participants shared that they feel equipped to initiate conversations about racial equity and white supremacy. Through REASN they now have the terminology, historical knowledge of these concepts, and concrete tools, which help them feel confident in raising these racial equity issues in professional spaces.

In my volunteer work, it has given me the courage to have those conversations and to not give up when facing barriers. I can think of another way of getting to it.

It has given me the patience and perseverance to do this work in spaces where it's not prioritized. I have more confidence and patience to keep at it even when it's not prioritized or others.

I have never been in a video and then suddenly it was let's make a video about the Mental Models and hire a videographer. The expectation [was] that I would present it and show it at my work. I had to take myself so much more seriously.



Building a healing space for people doing racial equity work

REASN is a source of emotional support for people working for racial equity. They have built trust and safety among themselves and with the facilitators, and are able to have open conversations about the struggles they have in their work. All participants had positive experiences to share about their time in REASN gatherings. Most acknowledged the challenges they face in implementing their work and have felt defeated at times. REASN has become a place for them to be their authentic selves, where they can be vulnerable and honest about the struggles they have in working toward racial equity. Even when people participate in a REASN gathering after not attending for months, they feel welcomed and able to re-engage with the group. Some participants shared that they may feel hopeless at the start of a REASN gathering, but always leave with energy and motivation to continue their work.

REASN is a nurturing space where we can do the hard things. There's still so much hope and action and optimism. It's been nurturing.

This isn't therapy but it's therapeutic. It's disruptive because in a lot of predominantly white spaces emotion isn't okay. You don't get angry or upset... REASN creates the space where we can actually be normal because we are human and have emotions. There are going to be things people say here where the environment is therapeutic.

The REASN space is the only space I experience where we can "risk-free" be ourselves and grapple with issues that are so important. And the space is positive during a time when it is difficult to feel positive.

Opportunities moving forward

Participants had multiple ideas on how they envision REASN moving forward that included expanding the group, sharing what they have learned to the wider community, and continuing the gatherings. Thoughts about expansion included bringing in different people to the group who might be connected to current participants' work places so they can have allies in their efforts. There is also a desire to share more widely what they are learning in REASN and the tools they have developed to further racial equity work happening in other places. This was mentioned as an opportunity to introduce these topics to institutions that are not engaged in racial equity work. In general, participants want to see REASN gatherings continue as they are a strong source of support and skill development for their work.

Starting with the first set of questions is how do we expand REASN principles to the wider networks that need it, to make change, to go there as a cohort, not me sitting in my organization individually. We're still isolated but here's a group that when we come together, there's excitement and energy and strategy. How does that get translated to the institutions where there needs to be more change in those institutions?

Something that I wish REASN could help the wider community, particularly the institutions, there needs to be less top-down decision-making. Right now, it's lip service that is paid to community.

Participants highlighted a number of impacts as a result of their involvement in REASN. The supportive nature of REASN gatherings and the shifts in their ways of thinking have changed the way in which people implement their racial equity work. The following questions may be helpful for the facilitators and REASN participants to consider in planning future gatherings:

- What opportunities exist to engage institutions in REASN who are not involved or are new to implementing racial equity efforts?
- How can the tools or strategies developed in REASN be shared more widely?
- How can the relationships built in REASN be supported outside of the regular gatherings? In what ways can the network be strengthened?

Appendix: Impacts identified by discussion participants



IMPACTING HOW MEMBERS SHOW UP AS PRACTITIONERS

Applying tools learned in REASN in members' work.

REASN is a place to learn new tools.

Having a tangible resource like the mental models, I've been able to use them in trainings and in reflection and beyond. Once you name and see your conditioning you can't stop.

I've been going back and revamping tools and language for my program. For me that happened after diving into the mental models, for example, us vs. them, and gray thinking. I've used them as a lens to see the tools I had inherited coming into the job. I could look through things that were lukewarm and shift them to be more challenging and also take this challenging material and make it not threatening or "othering." I've been able to use this in my work and ask "where is this inclusive middle-ground and supporting grace and accountability?"

Doing the mental models work in particular, the "us versus them" has had a huge impact in my work. We've had a lot of projects where we're noticing we're doing that and can be a team and stand side by side with people.

Strategies to more effectively meet people where they're at and move towards change (Mental Models).

All of my facilitations/handouts are totally different as a result of the graphic facilitation.

Listening exercises and radical listening has been so key and I'm trying to do that in most spaces.

When I think of this work one thing that I try to be better at is listening to people. When I say listen we are often in the discussion trying to think of what to say back; but really to just sit there and listen and hear them talk and be in that moment and try not to respond right away. I really try to work on that in this work and it's hard to do all the time.

I am building muscles around emotional release and paired listening and trust.

REASN is a place to test ideas and concepts.

The most important change for me personally was integrating the concept of "The Nest" into my approach to racial equity work. This model helps me realize that good relationships are the foundation.

Experiencing new models of facilitation.

The facilitators of REASN, you couldn't easily swap the people out. Your skill, your passion, it's an institute, you study, you practice, you go deep. But also how do you bottle it and replicate it? I don't think you can just put any two people, we're all better because of this experience and your leadership.

REASN models inclusion and accessibility. I can know what that feels like in my body and use it and shape it in my work.

With our format and the people here, I never leave here feeling defeated.

One thing that comes to mind as a facilitator, part of the best practices is being mindful of the space, food, how it's organized. I think the leaders of REASN take it to another level of hospitality and attentiveness. I'm always learning about how I can be more hospitable and inviting in REASN.

As a facilitator, thinking about disruptors and Mental Models, I have learned tangible things I can do as a facilitator that will prevent things from coming up or if they do, how to deal with it - for both me and participants.

The philosophy or approach to facilitating this space is not Western. There's a real intentionality to organizing the space and activities in ways that aren't linear and white. I think just the practice of doing what you're doing is disruptive because it models something else. There's a way for us to connect with a different model.

The work we do in my department, it's known for providing quality facilitation and experiences. Facilitation is often about remaining neutral and I struggle with that constantly. Neutrality is a white dominant framework. That's been really important to me too.

Providing support and resources to do racial equity work in large or bureaucratic agencies.

I work in government and how fantastic to have that juxtaposition. Not all colonization was from the government, but a lot of it was. Being in that pattern at work and then coming to this space allows me to bring more possibilities to my work.

I work in the bureaucracy and this was a safe space where I could get my reality check about the way the system operates or when you're hitting your head against something. It's really a clarity for me and guides my work.

I work in a government agency. I don't trust that racial equity or radical change happens in a hierarchical fashion. My thinking is sharpened around how to do this work with other people in a non-hierarchical way, which is not from my historical position so it's new to me but I don't know how we can do this in ways where we're not connected. Working in state government is so challenging because I don't trust it because it's so hierarchical. But I'm paid by it. So it's a matter of how to introduce those ways of working into those spaces. There is a need for insurgency racial equity work as opposed to authority.

Even with hierarchy, in five years, the organizations we're working with are going to adopt these principles and say it's theirs. The arc is getting shorter.

From the Wilder rationale, as an organization committed to better reflecting Saint Paul and be a more diverse and inclusive organization, Wilder needs a group like REASN because it aligns with its stated values.

In this room, DHS used to host a community council created by legislators. The group I had the good fortune of staffing grew into a powerful group. We didn't always use the word white supremacy or colonization. If DHS proposed a grant, we could count on someone from the indigenous community or communities of color to ask, have you thought about this? The power of the voice, it was democracy in action. The officials became somewhat accustomed to listening or hearing... somewhat. All of this work has no meaning if it doesn't impact the work of people leave behind. We witnessed many of those occasions here. DHS staff might say we got beaten up or raked over the coals but I said thank you for coming. All of this work here is the work we're doing. It's the foundation.

One thing that we talk about at the county is how do you work with people and assume the best intentions? One thing that I do is not think about an individual problem, but the system that creates the environment. Individuals are taught and grow up in the system. How do I still try to engage with that individual? If I don't, then that is one less potential person that I can work with and understand and we can begin to have some kind of relationships and understanding. How do we get to that point? One thought that I have in bringing out best selves forward. How do we value that individual person?



FOSTERING CONNECTIONS AND SUPPORT AMONG PEOPLE DOING RACIAL EQUITY WORK

Through REASN, I am working with other social and racial justice champions

I have a team to reach out to when I'm tackling new or hard or big equity challenges. There are people - I have a squad.

I have built connections with colleagues to problem solve and move from seeing pain as a burden to sign of liberation.

The coalitions that we're building go against the hopelessness I was feeling. REASN is dynamic, caring, and cooperative.

Reduced the isolation of people doing this work. A lot of folks may be the only people in their organizations doing this work.

The urgency of this work has been validated and emphasized and it has led to a more courageous work knowing there is a support network behind me. I have a group of individuals behind me to gain pointers or support.

I appreciate the relationship I've built with [group member], as two people who get read as white but who have people of color (POC) identities to do racial equity work together and go to conferences together.

I have more confidence of knowing there's a community of support.

REASN is a space for support for talking, learning, reflecting, and moving together for action that yields results.

When people make requests of me I often link them to someone for REASN. REASN had provided me with a team who I can count on when trying to think about big and hard things.

Connections are made through REASN.

REASN's and my role in making the mindset video helped deepen connections.

I have seen a reconnection of relationship with some people through REASN.

I have deepened connections with Wilder colleagues.

Connections to other champions working in primarily white spaces.

There have been unexpected connections made available to me by attending REASN.

I don't remember how it came up but I happened to be sitting next to [group member] and he turned to me and I was questioning something about Judaism or Jewish stories and I said it's not there, and he said yes it is. We got into this great conversation about it and it raised the bar for me about what to expect from a gentile, that gentiles know something about Judaism in the Midwest and that we were in a racial equity space and it made complete sense that we were doing a Talmudic study. Something about getting to be more 3D that I get to bring all of the knowledge of my peoples and I don't need a translator and [group member] could pick up what I was putting down and go brain to brain with me. It was fantastic.

Relationships are the foundation of doing this work - REASN models and nurtures this value.

Accountability happens with small and big steps and with partners. REASN has gotten me thinking about how action happens with accountability and in small and big steps and with partners. How can we do this incrementally or strategically or thoughtfully?

Keeping the connection inside and outside the network. Here and outside there I see people on Facebook and I see them doing the work. But to see what they are doing on Facebook is a false reality, so I look at the experience and the acceptance and I point to them and say hey they are doing it. And keeping those connections.

Building intergenerational connections

REASN honors those folks who were pioneers who were planting these seeds 30-40 years ago. Thinking about these generations, and knowing some of the fighting we had to do just to speak this language. It does my heart good - I see this intergenerational work and I know it will continue and grow.

Because it feels like racial equity work can feel slow, the notion around confidence and courage is so important so the people doing this work stay doing it and newer folks can learn it from the get-go and learn from people who have been doing it for a while.

The decolonizing piece is one we need to do [with intergenerational mindset]. It's hard to do when you just have your generation's story.

In a coaching session I was doing with youngish activist in the UK, she is Black Caribbean identified. She was saying that she is reluctant to do the work she is asked to do at white organizations that want her to talk with them about racism. And she doesn't want to. And I said right it is not your job to educate us white people about racism. And how that is mostly what happens. And I am thinking about how else do I support her in taking the jobs and money and how to disrupt the situation as this identity in the UK by asking organizations the questions or taking the job and still feeling grounded and not feel drained/extracted. How can she disrupt the whole thing and have power being in the head of the room? That's a way that the space we have here can directly impact the way I coach people. We can all get stuck in what we know and what we think, I get angry at my people, white people, but I need to do more to support this person in feeling more powerful.



FOSTERING NEW AND DEEPENED WAYS OF THINKING ABOUT RACIAL EQUITY WORK

Disrupting myths of white supremacy and colonization

An important personal change is that REASN has expanded my approach to resistance, both building and navigating. I come from people who were colonized, we have this thinking that when we're receiving resistance, we have this fatality mindset that all is done and you don't do anything else. REASN has been that space to help think about how we can find hope. What can we do to navigate this, through it, or ways to leverage it?

Just thinking about how hard it can be to stick to that commitment to decenter whiteness. You can be a group that talks about it without deeply decentering whiteness. We've had to slow down and we've asked why because we're afraid to offend white folks. I've been so deeply trained to cater to and take care of white people. I haven't even realized that's what I'm doing. I'm siphoning off the power because we're attending to that. When white fragility is appearing, when you have a team to facilitate, who is attending to that and how counter-intuitive it is for all of us to decenter whiteness. It's ancestral. We're developing new muscle-memory together. I appreciate that in terms of who we invite in and who we don't. I've done a lot of vetting because this space isn't for everyone.

In decolonizing our thinking, we can't do that alone. We've talked about, should we do caucusing at REASN? Let's think about that. What experiences have we had with caucusing? A lot of hard experiences with that. We're so rooted into that divide-and-conquer approach. We are yearning for healing but in the shadow of the divide-and-conquer strategy. How do we do that in a way that doesn't feed into that because this is a multi-racial space? A [group member] was talking about as a white person, she grew up during segregation and was trying to hold on to people of color because we've been separated from each other. We needed to unravel our thinking instead of just jumping into a tool that was created at the hands of colonization. This conversation where there may be times where people of color and indigenous folks can talk to each other.

Communal analysis and collective meaning making. Decolonizing our thinking and zooming out to see things systematically leads to insights for more effective action, different starting place.

I think of what [group member] said: "We've been set up!" I am growing in my systematic understanding of why this work is so hard.

White supremacy and white nationalism is what is resurging in militant groups. Connections between those terms is important to understand how these are connected since leaders in this office (Presidential office) are essentially these. The interweaving of those and how that can inform our work here and outside.

It was helpful to be reminded I don't always have to be first to talk. I'm an extrovert and I don't like silence. It's been a good reminder - its self-discipline and awareness.

I valued [group member] for lifting up anti-Semitism. That isn't always named and centered.

One of the myths is expertise. Community wisdom is just as much an area of expertise as a keynote speaker or primary article. Through REASN, I now listen in groups or with strangers with the same intensity as I would read a book.

I love getting to draw the difference between white supremacy and white nationalism with a stranger and talking about our drawings and coming up with our own ways of talking about it and getting really clear on a body level. Getting to draw and have that conversation with a stranger and getting to own my intellectual property. There are experts and dictionary definitions and I am as smart as any thinker.

We don't over-rely on the written word, that's not how we have knowledge. What other narratives are there and how can we expand it? And also acknowledge what narratives have been really oppressive.

Other ways of sharpening thinking

Gaining an understanding that I have a lot to learn and a desire to continue the conversations. If we're not talking about it then it becomes unimportant.

Listening and understanding. And this space helps me to understand. What I was lacking was understanding. Working in these sessions, if you just look at something at the first comment without their background or what else they bring to the table, then your knowledge just stops there. An example someone gave once was that they did not like their colleague and thought he was a thorn in progress. But then you dug in deeper and learn he was the son of immigrants and the first thing he was taught was to lose their language. He is living his experience and we are living ours. Try to understand doesn't mean to accept or just stay there. But to understand where others are coming from.

[I have learned] how to not engage in and [to] disrupt "call out" spaces that I have found over time that do not move us closer to the goal... What is fundamental is humanity and where we can remember and connect on that.

I am embracing this practice of unlimited grace and unlimited accountability.

Intersectionality affects all of us. Can't dismantle racism without knowing that.

Now when I think we talk about intersectionality it's just "that" group. But the intersectionality affects everyone. And you described that in anti-Semitism and being female and of Middle Eastern culture. And if we don't understand that, how can we dismantle that? We try to make this an intersectional space, and get skilled on how to do that in this space.

REASN supports viewpoint shape-shifting to create better outcomes.

REASN has been a space where I come to reconnect with other racial equity champions from different sectors and positionalities. The relationships and ideas help me recognize common patterns and tendencies (Mental Models) operating in systems of oppression. I think I am more strategic in recognizing the complexities of situations and I try to avoid following these mental models when taking action.



BUILDING COURAGE AND CONFIDENCE TO DO RACIAL EQUITY WORK OUTSIDE OF REASN

I have more language and confidence with talking about and naming white supremacy. The more I'm able to talk about it, the more I'm able to say this is a real thing.

It's allowed me to take more risks because I'm realizing the idea of perfection is a myth. I can speak up anyway because there's no perfect wording or way of doing it. You get to still speak up and show up knowing there's a myth of perfection so you need to take the first step.

It has given me the patience and perseverance to do this work in spaces where it's not prioritized. I have more confidence and patience to keep at it even when it's not prioritized for others.

In my volunteer work, it has given me the courage to have those conversations and to not give up when facing barriers. I can think of another way of getting to it.

I have never been in a video and then suddenly it was let's make a video about the Mental Models and hire a videographer. The expectation [was] that I would present it and show it at my work. I had to take myself so much more seriously.

One of the impacts I have felt is going into a new space to see if people are talking about equity, if it's ever been on an agenda or ever come up. If not, being the one to raise it or ask "can we talk about it?" I don't know if I would have been listening for it or thinking about it.

Something someone was sharing with me resonated with me: being brave in new spaces. I was working in the fitness industry, most were in all white spaces. It was weird having a place where no one looked like me. Now being at the county, it's much more diverse. Now my team is all different ages and races. I was missing [ethnic community] connection and community before this. My role now is to uplift their concerns and experiences into the room. And bring this to my staff and putting it in the room and influencing decision-making.



BUILDING A HEALING SPACE FOR PEOPLE DOING RACIAL EQUITY WORK

REASN is a nurturing space where we can do the hard things. There's still so much hope and action and optimism. It's been nurturing.

REASN provides a nurturing space where we can be our whole selves, grapple with hard things and still come out more optimistic than before.

REASN is a space to relax, breathe, and just be.

This isn't therapy but it's therapeutic. It's a disruptive because in a lot of predominantly white space emotion isn't okay. You don't get angry or upset. Unless it's white women tears. Those are always okay. REASN creates the space where we can actually be normal because we are human and have emotions. There are going to be things people say here where the environment is therapeutic.

I need everyone's help on understanding this. I never felt when I left here defeated or weighed down. I don't know if it is how we open and close our time here. We hosted another group and it was meant for white people to understand racism. But I didn't feel this way there... But there is something about this space where people do not want to leave. That is special. This should be funded. Many people are struggling. But there is something about how this is done to make people think this way.

Creating spaces more frequently. We just gave new recent examples. How do we create this space and place for creative conversations of learning? I am struggling with this and I need help. People I trust in this work are here. I value the pushback and welcome the feedback. I was not prepared for this type of conversation and now I can bring this stuff in. How do we get beyond that to do the work? You leave here feeling better than when you came. We need a dialogue ongoing.

The REASN space is the only space I experience where we can "risk-free" be ourselves and grapple with issues that are so important. And the space is positive during a time when it is difficult to feel positive.

REASN is helpful because it's an ongoing process.

There's still a lot of fear or wanting to stick with the status quo or avoidance of putting attention on violence happening toward people of color in the world. This is a space with people where there can place some attention to the reality and not try to avoid it, but sit with it, deal with it.

I appreciate the approach to planning and how the space is set up - physical and psychological space. I don't think I've experienced or witnessed people being hurt here which means maybe healing has happened.

There's been conversations that help us deal with confusion about experiences that happen outside of REASN. The feelings you're having are tied to early stuff that are coming out because of current realities.

The way that we listen to each other in this space is very nutritious. I don't know what to call it because we have that experience of being listened to through the pair and shares and other ways of listening to each other and together. As we're listening or talking, there are questions we're invited to respond to, but also reflect. To remember to reflect in our listening.

We have to do that type of video in the spirit we're sitting in - joy. Part of the hardest thing in my 20s was someone looking like me asking what I wanted and being told it's not going to happen. I'm so grateful to be here.

I was going through a horrible break up with my partner and it happened to be that I came to a meeting so upset and sobbing. And it was in this particular group who so deeply understands the damage oppression does to oppressed groups. And my birthday was the day of a session a year later. So I had the full spectrum and a wonderful way to celebrate. That whole range of support and cultivating radical love.

OPPORTUNITIES MOVING FORWARD

Starting with the first set of questions is how do we expand REASN principles to the wider networks that need it, to make change, to go there as a cohort, not me sitting in my organization individually, but what are the changes I can make. We're still isolated but here's a group that when we come together, there's excitement and energy and strategy. How does that get translated to the institutions where there needs to be more change in those institutions?

Working within a government org that surprisingly talks about race and equity a lot theoretically, that's a big topic that comes up, but what I'm beginning to realize is the expectation for what gets done around that comes from, in my mind, the top down. Something that I wish REASN could help the wider community, particularly the institutions, there needs to be less top-down decision-making. Right now, it's lip service that is paid to community.

I have a thought about connecting with folks – one thing that we value is relationships and what does that mean? For me it means more than one and done. How do you make it sustainable and valuable for both parties, we try to get together to hang out, get coffee and just bounce ideas with each other. Can you just listen to me? Is it just me who is experiencing that? How do you take these relationships to the next level?

I really think that you have to save space and time to meet people where they are, but don't let them stay there. Some people feel that this is not their jobs not their role. And we are not meeting the needs of grassroots and not doing your part. And there is time and space that needs to be allowed. As a practitioner, how do I disrupt that and make space for that. And normally people of color (POC) have to disrupt. And we have changed so much at [my organization]. But to some new partners, we are not doing enough and how do we challenge that? How do we change the space and bring in new people?

How can we be better people without being good neighbors? I started a year ago a happy hour in Eden Prairie. It was polarized, and current national landscape has changed and they are supporters of the occupant in DC. But we didn't know each other and I wanted to get to know their hearts and their experiences. We had a happy hour and each person brought a cultural dish and explaining why it was important in the culture. Some people said, "we don't have a culture", but they do and it was taken from you. We are having a seeding party soon and everyone will bring a plant and share why they want to plant it. Why they want to bring it. Like bringing collard greens and why this is important to me. We have come a long way in understanding the work and why it is important.



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