

# Unpacking White Saviorism in Service

**COLORADO YOUTH FOR A CHANGE  
CORPS FOR A CHANGE AMERICORPS PROGRAM**

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**AmeriCorps**



# Community Agreements

- Speak Your Truth
- Stay Engaged
- Expect to Experience Discomfort
- Accept and Expect Non-Closure
- Be Aware of Intent; Own Your Impact
- Maintain a learner stance (even when it's hard!)
- Approach discomfort with curiosity, not fear, judgement, or defensiveness
- Notice flushes – where do you feel it, why are you feeling it, what are the emotions behind the reaction
- Balance Accountability & Grace
- This is A LOT – especially if this is new to you!

# AN INVITATION TO BRAVE SPACE



Together we will create *brave space*.  
Because there is no such thing as a “safe space” —  
We exist in the real world.  
We all carry scars and we have all caused wounds.  
In this space  
We seek to turn down the volume of the outside world,  
We amplify voices that fight to be heard elsewhere,  
We call each other to more truth and love.  
We have the right to start somewhere and continue to grow.  
We have the responsibility to examine what we think we know.  
We will not be perfect.  
This space will not be perfect.  
It will not always be what we wish it to be.  
But  
It will be *our brave space together*,  
*and*  
*We will work on it side by side.*

by Micky ScottBey Jones

[www.thepeoplesupper.org](http://www.thepeoplesupper.org)

# Acknowledgements for our BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, People of Color) in this space:

- We recognize these conversations are tough and might be triggering - take a break if you need!
- We are not expecting you to teach or educate your white peers.
- We appreciate you being in this space with us as we unpack the ways in which white saviorism impacts our work.

# A CALL TO ACTION

- Take out a piece of paper and number it 1-5
  - Anytime you feel the following, write it on your list to revisit:
    - When you are feeling "flushed" from something we've said (maybe you really love a movie we have mentioned that perpetuates a white saviorism narrative)
    - Feel yourself disengaging
    - Want to learn more about something



## Intention vs. Impact

White folks, think of your  
Whiteness as an elephant.

Whiteness takes up a lot of space,  
even though it feels normal to us.

When we take a step, we may not  
realize how big our footprint is.

We can unknowingly harm  
everything in our path.

It's time to start looking at where  
we put our feet down,  
rather than excusing ourselves  
for just walking.

# Why are we talking about this?

White people hold power and privilege over BIPOC. Systemic racism has led to BIPOC having less access to wealth, opportunities, etc.

Due to the wealth/access gap, often times white folks are hired into program staff/service roles because they are able to live on the stipend/low salaries.

There is then often lack of representation of BIPOC in AmeriCorps Programs.

These white members/program staff are often disconnected from the communities they are serving.

In order to obtain operational funding, organizations will often tokenize and exploit the story of the community, often centering the narrative around the white led organization who is supporting the community.

All of these actions harm BIPOC AmeriCorps members, staff and BIPOC communities we are serving.

# Your identity and your experience with AmeriCorps:

- ▶ What is your race?
- ▶ How is your race perceived by the world? (i.e. latinx but white “passing”)
- ▶ What is your socio-economic status? What is your access to familial wealth?
- ▶ **How have these pieces of your identity impacted your experience with AmeriCorps?**



# Shared Language and Definitions

## ▶ Anti-Racism

- ▶ Anti-racism is a process of actively identifying and opposing racism. The goal of anti-racism is to challenge racism and actively change the policies, behaviors, and beliefs that perpetuate racist ideas and actions. Anti-racism is rooted in **action**. It is about taking steps to eliminate racism at the **individual, institutional, and structural levels**.

# Shared Language and Definitions

- ▶ White Privilege

- ▶ is **not** the assumption that everything a white person has accomplished is unearned. Instead, white privilege should be viewed as a built-in advantage, for simply being white.

# Shared Language and Definitions

## ▶ White Fragility

- ▶ Term has been popularized by Robin DiAngelo's book "White Fragility".
- ▶ Refers to feelings of discomfort or defensiveness a white person experiences when they witness discussions around racial inequality and injustice.

### White Fragility (n):

"A state in which even a minimum amount of racial stress becomes intolerable, triggering a range of defensive moves.

These moves include outward display of emotions such as fear and guilt, and behaviors such as argumentation, silence and leaving the stress-inducing situation."

# Shared Language and Definitions

- ▶ White Supremacy
  - ▶ Often thought of as individuals who are outwardly racist in their behaviors, beliefs, etc. While these individuals are undoubtedly racist, white supremacy is much larger. White supremacy captures the all-encompassing centrality and assumed superiority of people defined and perceived as white.



THE LONGER YOU SWIM  
IN A CULTURE, THE MORE  
INVISIBLE IT BECOMES

# White Supremacy 101

## OVERT WHITE SUPREMACY (Socially Unacceptable)

Lynching

Hate Crimes Swastikas

KKK

Burning  
Crosses

The N-Word

Jokes

Neo-Nazis

## COVERT WHITE SUPREMACY (Socially Acceptable)

"Make America Great Again"

Hiring Discrimination

Police murdering POC

School-to-Prison Pipeline

Confederate Flags

Discriminatory Lending

Mass Incarceration

Racial Profiling

Not Believing Experiences of POC

Police Brutality

Paternalism

Virtuous Victim Narrative

Euro-centric Curriculum

Anti-Immigration Policies/Practices

Denial of White Privilege

English-only Initiatives

Housing Discrimination

Fearing People of Color

Self-appointed White Ally

Denial of Racism

Expecting POC to Teach White People

Believing we are "Post-Racial"

"Don't blame me, I never owned slaves"

Celebration of Columbus Day

"But what about me?"

Blaming the Victim

"But we're just one human family"

Bootstrap Theory

Tokenism

Racist Mascots

Cultural Appropriation

Colorblindness

Claiming Reverse Racism

Not Challenging Racist Jokes

White Savior Complex

"It is just a joke!"

## Exploring Cultural Values & Habits

*Cultural competence is having the self-awareness to make choices about when to reach for which cultural tool. Often in the US we are habitualized around left column attitudes and behaviors at the expense of those in the right column, those most needed to understand and navigate complex relationships across difference to build thriving, cohesive communities.*

*Dominant white cultural values and habits can be internalized by people of all racial and ethnic identities. We all need to know, use, and – when possible, subvert – these norms to navigate and survive everyday life in US dominant culture.*

<b>Dominant (White) Cultural Values &amp; Habits</b>	<b>Transformational Cultural Values &amp; Habits</b>
Perfectionism	Learning from mistakes
Sense of urgency, Fix now	Faster not always better, Understand
Defensiveness, Denial	Owning Impact, Acknowledgement
Quantity	Quality
Worship of the written word	Value placed on transmitting info orally, visually
Only one right way, one right perspective	Multiple approaches, multiple perspectives
Paternalism	Shared leadership and decision-making
Objectivity, prefer absolutes	Subjectivity, Can tolerate ambiguity
Comfort is my right	Discomfort leads to growth
Either/or	Both/and
Hoarding/withholding (empathy, power, \$, knowledge)	Generosity (empathy, power, \$, knowledge)
Conflict Avoidance	Conflict navigation & resolution skills
Individualism, Self-sufficiency	Interdependence, Community
Progress = bigger, more	Progress = process, sustainability
Transactional	Relational
Hierarchical, authoritative	Collaborative, negotiation
Dominated space	Shared space
Eurocentric, American Exceptionalism	Global Community, Global Citizenship
Formal education is best knowledge	Lived experience is essential knowledge
Emotional Restraint	Emotional honesty

# What is White Saviorism?

- ▶ “A white person who provides help or ‘aid’ to non-white people in a self-serving manner while simultaneously dehumanizing those they set out to ‘help’”.
- ▶ White saviorism or “white savior complex”, has deep roots in colonialism when native populations being colonized all around the world were assumed to be in need of “saving” by white European Christian missionaries.



THE WHITE SAVIOR COMPLEX  
CONVINCES YOU  
THAT YOU MUST BE THE  
VOICE FOR THE “VOICELESS”.  
RESPONSIBLE PARTNERSHIP  
REQUIRES THAT YOU  
PASS THE MIC TO THE UNHEARD  
IT MEANS REALIZING  
THAT WE ARE NOT VOICELESS,  
YOU’VE JUST BEEN  
TALKING OVER US  
FOR FAR TOO LONG.

# White Saviorism Can Look Like...

- ▶ The Classic Hollywood Trope – do you recognize these movies?
- ▶ Assuming you know best, when you come from a completely different community
- ▶ Using people of color as “props” in social media posts
- ▶ Desiring an emotional experience to feel validated
- ▶ Feeling guilty for having more privilege
- ▶ Seeing something done differently in a culture and wanting to “fix it” to make it more like our own culture
- ▶ “They are happy with so little”
- ▶ Poverty or Trauma “Porn”

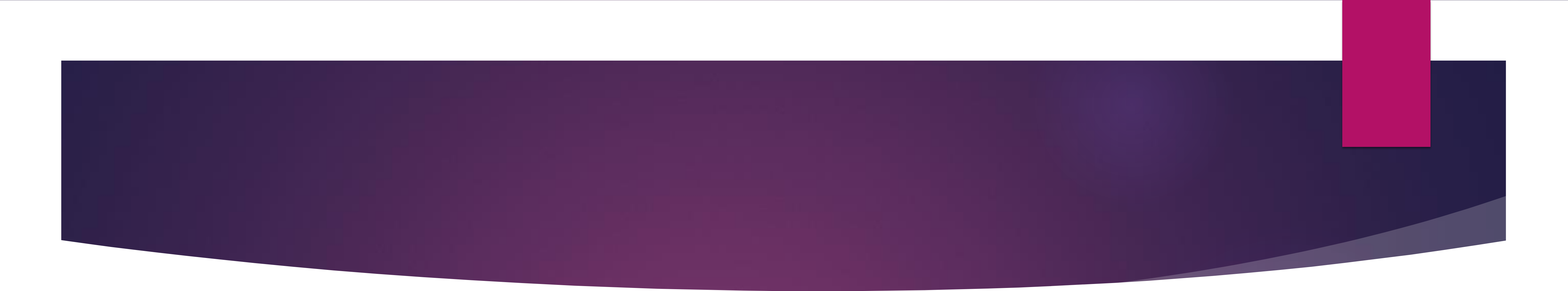




# Voluntourism

- ▶ PeaceCorps is an international example but we know this happens domestically as well
- ▶ Volunteers are (sometimes) inexperienced
- ▶ Quick transitions in and out of the role (i.e. year long terms of service)
- ▶ How many of your members are local vs. from outside the community you are serving?





**“Different cultures do not exist for your consumption, someone else’s way of living is not there for you to ‘experience’”.**

- @nowwhitesaviors



**“If you’re coming into a place to save somebody then you’ve already lost because young people don’t need saving.”**

- Kenya Downs

So... What Now?



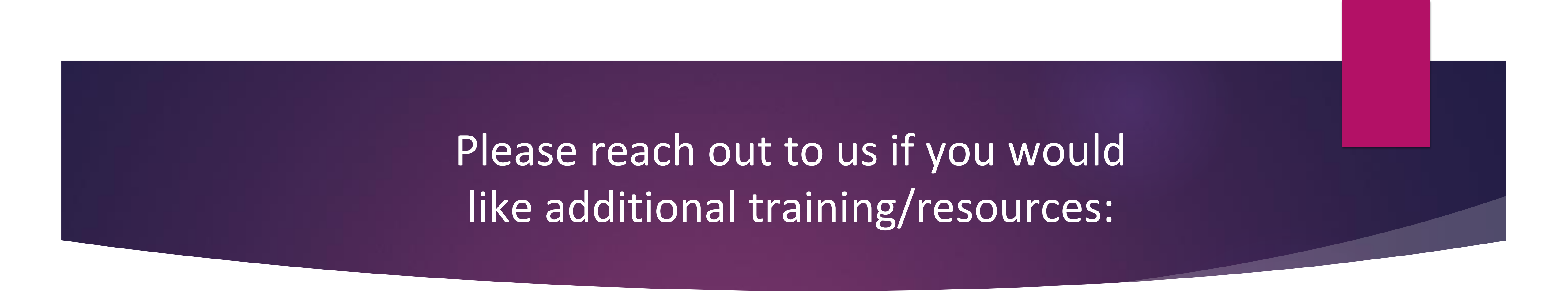
# Anti-Racism Assessment Tool for Organizations & AmeriCorps Programs

## Member/Staff Recruitment

- How are you intentionally recruiting members/staff that reflect the community you serve? Are you recruiting members/staff that are from the community you serve?
- How is your organization doing its best to provide a living wage to members/staff in order to recruit folks with less socio-economic privilege?
- How do your interview questions communicate to applicants that your organization values anti-racism?
- How do your interview questions allow for applicants to describe their commitment to anti-racism?
- What is your process for checking your implicit biases that inevitably will come up during an interview? What conversations or systems are in place to do this?

# Resources

- ▶ @nowwhitesaviors
- ▶ @sylviaaduckworth
- ▶ “Me and White Supremacy” by Lalya Saad
- ▶ “Social Service or Social Change? Who Benefits from your Work?” by Paul Kivel
- ▶ “The Characteristics of White Supremacy Culture” from Dismantling Racism: A Workbook for Social Change Groups, by Kenneth Jones and Tema Okun



Please reach out to us if you would  
like additional training/resources:

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