



Browning the Green Space

RESPECTFUL WORKPLACE BEST PRACTICES

FOCUS GROUP GUIDE

July 2023

Browning the Green Space
50 Milk St, 15th Floor, Boston, MA 02109
info@browningthegreenspace.org
www.browningthegreenspace.org

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We thank the National Renewable Energy Laboratory for the opportunity to develop this Respectful Workplace Program Design Focus Group Guide.

Prior Research

[Zheng Consulting](#) created a 2-page Inclusion Guidance Document for Elevate in advance of this engagement. The document included select best practices for building cultures of inclusion and focus on driving higher response rates to incidents of mistreatment, discrimination, or misconduct, focusing on blue collar business owners without formal HR. This document helped inform our focus group questions.

Interviewees & Pilot Focus Group Participants

We are grateful for the time, transparency, and openness shared by the participants of our research interviews and pilot focus groups that informed the design and development of this focus group guide.

Authors

Alisha Harrington, Deputy Director of Workforce Development, Browning the Green Space
Hadas Webb, Deputy Director of Business Development, Browning the Green Space

Contributors

Karl Von Weissenbeck, Intern, Browning the Green Space

TABLE OF CONTENTS

- INTRODUCTION..... 4**
 - Background & Challenge..... 4
 - Approach to focus group design strategy and methodology..... 5
- PREPARATION & LOGISTICS..... 6**
- INTERVIEW QUESTIONS..... 7**
 - Introduction..... 7
 - Real-World Scenario Analysis..... 7
 - Focus Group Questions & Discussion..... 7
 - Implementation..... 8
- APPENDIX..... 9**
 - Focus Group Participant Recruitment Email Template..... 9
 - Focus Group Background Material..... 10

INTRODUCTION

Background & Challenge

There is a critical need to create safe and respectful workplaces for Black and Brown tradespeople and tradeswomen as the energy economy uplifts a more equitable and diverse workforce. Elevate, a non-profit organization headquartered in Chicago, IL working to increase equity in the clean energy economy, articulated the challenge facing the construction sector to create a more diverse, equitable and inclusive environment:

“Increasingly, there are efforts to accelerate the number of women, Black, Indigenous, and other people of color (BIPOC) joining the clean energy economy workforce, particularly in the building trades. Yet, a persistent culture of harassment and discrimination has long been present on construction worksites, notably towards women and BIPOC. This culture is present today and it directly hampers diversification efforts and harms individual workers. An inclusive and respectful worksite free from harassment and discrimination strengthens safety, improves performance, and supports retention of a skilled diverse workforce, allowing women and BIPOC to thrive and advance to leadership positions.”

“Shifting construction site culture requires trust-building, training, and the implementation of processes for identifying, reporting, and holding people accountable for harassment and discrimination. To address these needs, some Respectful Workplace programs have been created specifically for the construction industry. Elevate sees a need for programs like these to be analyzed, made available, and implemented more broadly.”

“In addition to implementing programs that help transform construction industry culture, Elevate sees a need to prepare BIPOC and women working in or entering the construction industry with tools to protect themselves from and take action against the harassment and discrimination they may face.”

Browning the Green Space (BGS) has developed this Focus Group Guide to facilitate Elevate’s goal of creating a toolkit (training and resources) for project owners and general contractors to implement on their construction projects.

Browning the Green Space is a nonprofit coalition of leaders and organizations that share the passion to advance Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) in clean energy. We seek to facilitate a just energy transition by putting Black and Brown communities first, and enabling systems change at the intersection of social, environmental, and economic justice. We are powering a just energy transition by creating jobs, building wealth, and reducing energy burden in Black and Brown communities. By removing barriers and expanding access, we seek to close the racial wealth gap while combating climate change.

Approach to focus group design strategy and methodology

BGS approaches our work with a “Community First” lens stemming from our values as an organization. Putting community first means centering Black and Brown voices and putting Black and Brown peoples’ needs first as we consider program design, resource distribution, and the impact of our work. In supporting the development of a respectful workplace toolkit, we centered the lived experiences of Black and Brown construction contracting business owners and employees as we seek to accurately identify the challenges, unearth real world examples and scenarios for analysis, and test hypotheses for potential best practice solutions.

In preparation for the development of this Focus Group Guide, BGS reviewed existing respectful workplace and DEI guidance documents, including its own Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Justice Pledge, and curated a set of guidelines and questions to identify the most effective approaches to developing a respectful workplace program. Additionally, BGS interviewed clean energy construction practitioners with lived experiences in the construction workplace to gain feedback on how respectful workplace approaches apply to real work scenarios. These discussions included experiences with disrespectful workplace behavior, how the situation was handled, and what, if anything, could have prevented that situation from happening in the first place or would have helped the subjects respond to the situation.

Our focus group design methodology consisted of 4 phases:

1. Reviewing existing best practice research, recommendations, and materials;
2. Conducting initial interviews with Black and Brown clean energy contractors/owners and employees to understand the barriers and challenges from those most impacted;
3. Conducting pilot focus groups consisting of interviews with DEI experts and community based organizations who have developed DEI expertise in order to discuss best practices and the lived experience scenarios identified in the initial interviews for feedback and analysis;
4. Reflection and feedback interviews with Black and Brown contractors/owners and employees to share preliminary best practices identified in the initial focus groups.

This Focus Group Guide is intended to be used to interview clean energy construction contractors of color and community-based organizations who have developed DEI expertise in this sector in order to develop best practices for instituting a toolkit. It is assumed that the organizations and staff that conduct additional focus group sessions have an understanding of cultural competency, stakeholder and community engagement practices, and industry awareness and knowledge.

By using this Focus Group Guide to interview additional respectful workplace experts, we hope that Elevate will have an understanding of best practices to implement a Respectful Workplace Program that can be used to design their toolkit. Building and implementing respectful workplace practices can be daunting and nebulous, but can be facilitated by leveraging the work that has already been done to understand and bring awareness to the challenges and barriers faced by BIPOC and women tradespeople.

PREPARATION & LOGISTICS

1. Identify participants
 - a. Small clean energy construction business owners/leaders and employees of color
 - b. DEI experts and leaders of community based organizations who have developed DEI expertise.
2. Meeting length & number of attendees:
 - a. 1.5 - 2 hours
 - b. 1-3 organization representatives
 - c. Agenda:
 - i. Introduction & Background (20 minutes)
 - ii. Interview Questions (60+ minutes)
 - iii. Next Steps & Timeframe (5 minutes)
3. Group agreements:
 - a. Meeting will not be recorded
 - b. Chatham House Rules: focus group participants are free to use information from the discussion, but are not allowed to reveal who made any particular comment.
 - c. General profile of focus group participants will be shared in the report (no names or company identification)
4. Anonymized note taking is recommend
5. Send outreach/intro email to frame the goal of the meeting and identify interested organizations/participants
6. Send agenda and interview questions in advance of meeting to confirmed participants
7. Suggested participant compensation: \$50 per participant
8. Offer to share the outcomes of the focus groups

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

The following questions were designed to gather general feedback on existing recommendations, understand how those recommendations would come into practice given real-world scenarios, and allow for exploratory discussions.

Introduction

1. Focus group organizer introductions
 - a. Name, pronouns and racial/ethnic and gender identity
 - b. Job title and description
 - c. Role in this project
2. Participant introductions
 - a. Name, pronouns and racial/ethnic and gender identity
 - b. Current job/title and organization
 - c. Briefly describe the various ways you've intersected with contractors and the construction industry throughout your working career. For example, company owner, organization leader, employee/worker, etc.
 - d. Briefly describe the various ways you've intersected with DEI work. For example, in charge of DEI initiatives at a company, advocated for DEI initiatives on a job site, helped create or run a program on a job site, work with employers and employees on DEI topics, etc.

Real-World Scenario Analysis

In advance of these focus groups, BGS sought input from professionals who have lived experience in small construction workplaces to discuss the experiences and challenges facing women and people of color in these workplaces. A few real world scenarios below were taken from those discussions. For each scenario, we would like to hear what approaches you have implemented or would you suggest to prevent this from happening, and what approaches you have implemented or would you suggest to respond to this scenario if it happened?

1. Scenario 1: A female employee on a job site is engaged in a conversation with another female colleague and a male colleague. Another male colleague walks up to the group and asks the male colleague in front of everyone "who are these beautiful women you are talking to?"
2. Scenario 2: A Black engineer arrives for an energy audit at a residence. The contractor on site tells them they need to wait for the engineer to arrive before they get started.

Focus Group Questions & Discussion

The following best practices have been curated from professional DEI consultant recommendations for cultivating and reinforcing a respectful workplace. This discussion is designed to gather general feedback on these existing recommendations, understand how

those recommendations would come into practice given real-world scenarios, and allow for exploratory discussions.

For each recommendation, we would like to hear whether you agree with the approach. If applicable, did you try to implement any of these recommendations and was it successful? If not, why not? In responding to the recommendations, feel free to also comment on whether they align with your experiences and perspective as well as add any additional recommendations.

1. Research the laws in your state around discrimination and harassment. Communicate those laws with all staff.
2. Assess the organization's starting point on DEI.
3. Provide mandatory DEI trainings (e.g. bystander intervention, unconscious bias, cultural competency).
4. Communicate unacceptable behaviors clearly to all staff. Ensure there are clear consequences for violating behaviors. Communicate the actions you want to see and ask for feedback from employees on issues that affect them.
5. Provide a resource for reporting and conflict resolution.
6. Create a culture of respectful interpersonal relationships.
7. Make behaviors associated with maintaining a respectful workplace easy, convenient, and common. i.e. Make the desired behavior the easier option.
8. Make sure rewards and punishments line up with expectations about behaviors.
9. Establish a culture in which decision making extends down throughout the organization.
10. Create opportunities for community building among employees.
11. Implement a mentoring/professional development program.

Implementation

1. What barriers have you seen in implementing a respectful workplace practice?
2. How would you track success/impact? What would you measure?
3. What can federal, state, municipal, and philanthropy do to facilitate the implementation of respectful workplace practices?

APPENDIX

Focus Group Participant Recruitment Email Template

Subject line: Participation in respectful workplace focus group

Hello [*Contact Name*],

Hope all has been well since [*last engagement with Contact/highlight other relevant recent news/your own intro*].

Elevate is a Chicago-based nonprofit whose work includes providing workforce and business support to contractors participating in or interested in the clean energy economy. Elevate is working to create a respectful workplace toolkit (training and resources) for project owners and general contractors to implement on their construction projects. To support this effort, Elevate is conducting focus groups to understand best practices around creating a respectful workplace framework. For these focus groups, Elevate is seeking small clean energy construction business owners/leaders and employees of color, as well as DEI experts and leaders of community based organizations who have developed DEI expertise.

Would you be interested to participate in a 1.5-hour conversation on this topic over Zoom with us? Below are a few times we are available; if these don't work for you, we would be happy to propose alternatives. We would like to provide you with a \$50 Amazon gift card for your time participating in this conversation.

Thank you in advance for considering it!

Best,

Focus Group Background Material

The following overview material is sent to focus group participants ahead of the meeting as preparation material and includes the background information, agenda, and questions to be covered.

RESPECTFUL WORKPLACE BEST PRACTICES **Focus Group**

AGENDA

1. Introductions [10 min]
2. Meeting agreements [2 min]
3. Overview of the project and context setting [3 min]
4. Sharing of real world scenarios [5 min]
5. Focus group questions and discussion [60 min]
6. Wrap up and next steps [5 min]

INTRODUCTIONS

1. Focus group organizer introductions
 - a. Name, pronouns and racial/ethnic and gender identity
 - b. Job title and description
 - c. Role in this project
2. Participant introductions
 - a. Name, pronouns and racial/ethnic and gender identity
 - b. Current job/title and organization
 - c. Briefly describe the various ways you've intersected with contractors and the construction industry throughout your working career. For example, company owner, organization leader, employee/worker, etc.
 - d. Briefly describe the various ways you've intersected with DEI work. For example, in charge of DEI initiatives at a company, advocated for DEI initiatives on a job site, helped create or run a program on a job site, work with employers and employees on DEI topics, etc.

MEETING AGREEMENTS

1. Meeting will not be recorded
2. Anonymized note taking
3. Chatham House Rules: focus group participants are free to use information from the discussion, but are not allowed to reveal who made any particular comment.
4. General profile of focus group participants will be shared in the report (no names or company identification)

OVERVIEW OF PROJECT & CONTEXT SETTING

Who is Elevate: Elevate is a Chicago-based nonprofit whose work includes providing workforce and business support to contractors participating in or interested in the clean energy economy. Elevate is working to create a respectful workplace toolkit (training and resources) for project owners and general contractors to implement on their construction projects.

BGS' role: Browning the Green Space (BGS) has been contracted to provide technical assistance through NREL to Elevate to help support their toolkit development. The specific technical assistance provided is to design a focus group guide that Elevate can use to help them further understand best practices around creating a respectful workplace.

REAL WORLD SCENARIOS

In advance of these focus groups, BGS sought input from professionals who have lived experience in small construction workplaces to discuss the experiences and challenges facing women and people of color in these workplaces. A few real world scenarios below were taken from those discussions. For each scenario, we would like to hear what approaches you have implemented or would you suggest to prevent this from happening, and what approaches you have implemented or would you suggest to respond to this scenario if it happened?

1. Scenario 1: A female employee on a job site is engaged in a conversation with another female colleague and a male colleague. Another male colleague walks up to the group and asks the male colleague in front of everyone “who are these beautiful women you are talking to?”
2. Scenario 2: A Black engineer arrives for an energy audit at a residence. The contractor on site tells them they need to wait for the engineer to arrive before they get started.

FOCUS GROUP QUESTIONS & DISCUSSION

The following best practices have been curated from professional DEI consultant recommendations for cultivating and reinforcing a respectful workplace. This discussion is designed to gather general feedback on these existing recommendations, understand how those recommendations would come into practice given real-world scenarios, and allow for exploratory discussions.

For each recommendation, we would like to hear whether you agree with the approach. If applicable, did you try to implement any of these recommendations and was it successful? If not, why not? In responding to the recommendations, feel free to also comment on whether they align with your experiences and perspective as well as add any additional recommendations.

1. Research the laws in your state around discrimination and harassment. Communicate those laws with all staff.
2. Assess the organization's starting point on DEI.
3. Provide mandatory DEI trainings (e.g. bystander intervention, unconscious bias, cultural competency).

4. Communicate unacceptable behaviors clearly to everyone. Ensure there are clear consequences for violating behaviors. Communicate the actions you want to see and ask for feedback from employees on issues that affect them.
5. Provide a resource for reporting and conflict resolution.
6. Create a culture of respectful interpersonal relationships.
7. Make behaviors associated with maintaining a respectful workplace easy, convenient, and common. i.e. Make the desired behavior the easier option.
8. Make sure rewards and punishments line up with expectations about behaviors.
9. Establish a culture in which decision making extends down throughout the organization.
10. Create opportunities for community building among employees.
11. Implement a mentoring/professional development program.

IMPLEMENTATION

1. What barriers have you seen in implementing a respectful workplace practice?
2. How would you track success/impact? What would you measure?
3. What can federal, state, municipal, and philanthropy do to facilitate the implementation of respectful workplace practices?

WRAP UP AND NEXT STEPS

Thank you for participating in this focus group conversation. BGS and Elevate are conducting additional focus groups to continue understanding best practices to help inform the development of a respectful workplace toolkit for their contractors. The final product will be made available to focus group participants.