

ONE MILITARY COMMUNITY

*Creating a more equitable place for all
service members and their families to call home.*

Community Partnership Listening Session Guide

One Military, One Community





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Background

- On October 1, 2020, the Association of Defense Communities, with support from Booz Allen Hamilton, launched *One Military, One Community* (OMOC), a nationwide effort focused on creating equitable and inclusive environments for all service members and their families to call home.
- OMOC seeks to ensure that defense communities are diverse and inclusive, and that no individuals in the community face racism and inequality.
- ADC is taking the following actions to accomplish this goal:
 - Conduct community partnership listening sessions in defense communities to understand individuals' experiences and ground OMOC's efforts.
 - Develop a strong analytical foundation about existing racism and inequality issues in defense communities by gathering and synthesizing data from listening sessions and community surveys.
 - Plan for collective action by creating roadmaps that defense communities can implement to move this dialogue forward.
 - Provide learning resources to increase understanding of diversity, equity, and inclusion issues in defense communities.

Purpose of the Guide

- This guide was created to support OMOC's execution of community partnership listening sessions.
- The guide is intended to be a resource for military and community leaders who want to facilitate listening sessions and explore issues of diversity, equity, and inclusion in their communities.
- This guide provides information to plan and execute listening sessions and includes the following resources:
 - Listening session guidelines
 - Sample agendas
 - Questions for small and large group listening sessions
 - Sample invitations for participants

Purpose of Listening Sessions

- Convene diverse participants to exchange information, share personal experiences, and express perspectives.
- Identify and discuss issues and solutions that are unique to a community.
- Provide safe environment to have relevant, candid, and effective discussions.
- Enable community leaders to gather information to understand nuanced issues related to DEI in defense communities.
- Develop collaborative partnerships between the military and community to collectively address racial and social equity challenges.
- Build relational trust between participants and community leaders.
- Provide actionable steps to enhance military and community efforts to create strong defense communities that support America's military.

Types of Listening Sessions



Small-Group Discussion

(Less than 10 participants)

Gather community members to listen and understand individuals' personal experiences and perspectives

- Take community members' pulse on DEI
- Provide rich narrative and nuanced perspective
- Contextualize qualitative data from community assessment
- Involve minimal preparation and logistical planning



Large-Group Discussion

(Up to 75 participants)

Create a forum (e.g., townhall, local meetings) to increase military-community collaboration and build partnerships focused on DEI in defense communities

- Educate military and community members on current DEI programs
- Identify points of intersection between military and community actions
- Plan for future engagement and initiatives
- Involve greater preparation and logistics



Part 2: General Resources for All Listening Sessions

Steps to Plan Listening Session

Week	Lead	Task
Week 1	Community lead & OMOC	Hold planning meeting with OMOC team.
Week 1	Community lead	Form a planning group. Include representatives from community organizations, local installations, and government to ensure various perspectives are represented.
Week 2	Community lead	Hold meeting with planning group to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establish goals and purpose of listening session • Determine whether large or small listening sessions would be better to accomplish goals. • Draft agenda (including topics and questions to achieve session's goals) • Identify a facilitator • Identify prospective participants • Discuss logistics (date, time, forum, participants, note takers)
Week 3	Community lead	Invite participants via email
Week 4	Community lead	Send pre-meeting materials to participants (e.g., agenda, topics to consider)
Week 5	All	Execute listening session
Week 5	Community lead	Depending on type of listening session, send meeting summary, thank you note, or after action report to participants
Week 6	Community lead & OMOC	Hold follow-up meeting with OMOC to discuss major take-aways and next steps

Proposed Guiding Principles

Below are proposed guiding principles for a listening session. The facilitator can also ask participants to contribute additional principles at the beginning of the session.

- Clearly state whether someone is taking notes and how they are being taken. This can affect the candor of the group.
- Respect others' opinions and perspectives, even if you do not agree with their views.
- Share time equitably among participants.
- Keep others' personal stories confidential.
- Do not use harmful, offensive, or dismissive language.
- Listen carefully and avoid interruptions.
- Keep comments on topic.
- Use "I" instead of "you" statements.
- Keep an open mind and be open to learn from others.
- Practice taking others' perspectives (i.e., step into another person's experience).
- Ask for the group to take a pause if needed.

Tips for Facilitators

- Clearly define the role of the facilitator. A facilitator can simply guide the conversation and not share personal views or join the conversation and add personal views. Decide which approach is best and notify the group at the outset.
- Establish guiding principles at the outset of the session. A facilitator may propose several principles and ask participants if they would like to add any others before starting.
- Set a relaxed and open tone that fosters a friendly and welcoming atmosphere.
- Keep track of who is participating and who is not. A listening session is more productive when more people share different perspectives and experiences. Encourage all members to participate and remind participants that it is a safe environment to share their ideas.
- Follow and focus the conversation. Carefully listen to the conversation and restate key questions or insights. Guide gently and persistently. Keep track of time.
- Do not fear silence. It's okay if members are quiet for a bit. Members may need some time to think about the conversation or prompt.
- Accept and summarize opinions. This practice shows respect for participants and demonstrates that there are no right or wrong responses.
- Understand that conversations about race are emotional and difficult. If conflict arises, remind the group of the guiding principles and reinforce that respect for others is paramount.

Facilitator Strategies

Challenge: The group is slow to respond.

- Check-in with participants to determine whether the questions and instructions are clear.
- Restate the purpose of the conversation and explain how it should be carried out.
- Assure the group that part of the process is to share different experiences and insights.
- Let there be silence until someone else is ready to speak.

Challenge: A few members dominate the conversation.

- Remind participant to be conscious of each person having time to share experiences, reflections, ideas.
- Establish ground rules about respecting time limits.
- Tell the group that it is important to hear from members who have not said much.

Challenge: The facilitator has trouble staying impartial about an issue.

- Remind yourself that the facilitator's role is to elicit participants' perspectives.

Challenge: A participant leaves the conversation.

- Tactfully address the situation.
- Understand that conversations about race are often emotional, so someone may need a moment to regroup.
- Remind participants to address differences respectfully.

Listening Best Practices

Practice active and empathetic listening.

- Restate what the speaker said without judgment.
- Put yourself in the place of the speaker and listen to the message and meaning.

Listen with all your senses.

- What words do you hear?
- What emotions are being expressed?
- What is the tone?
- What words do you not hear?
- What body language do you observe?

Listen with intention and focus.

- Practice active listening.
- Confirm understanding.

Use silence and pause.

- Emotions may run high, so a pause may be helpful for participants to regroup.
- The group may need a moment to process the information shared.



Part 3: Resources for Small-Group Sessions

Small-Group: Sample Agenda

Welcome and introductions

- Facilitator background, organizational affiliation, and role
- Participant introductions (e.g., affiliation, # of years living in community)

Session overview and purpose

- Review background, purpose, and objectives of session

Establish guiding principles for session

- Introduce proposed guiding principles
- Invite participants to contribute new guiding principles

Discussion

- Introductory questions
- Transition and personal experience questions
- Community challenges and barrier questions
- Community improvement and actions
- Ending questions

Closing remarks

Small-Group: Sample Questions

Introductory questions:

- How long have you lived in this community?
- Where did you live before moving here?
- What does diversity mean or look like to you? Inclusion? Equity?

Transition and personal experience questions:

- How would you describe the current environment for you with respect to DEI?
- Have you personally experienced discrimination? What happened?
- Do you feel safe in your community?
- Do you feel welcome in your community?
- In what ways is your community welcoming and inclusive?
- Do you think the community promotes an inclusive environment?
- What has been your experience as a military member, Veteran, spouse/partner, dependent living in this community?

Community challenges and barrier questions:

- Do you think the military promotes an inclusive environment?
- What are some of the underlying conditions affecting DEI in your community?
- Are there DEI challenges and/or barriers in your community? If so, please describe.

Small-Group: Sample Questions (Cont.)

Community improvement and action questions:

- If your community had excellent racial relations, what would that look like?
- If your community had racial equity, what would that look like?
- What ideas and suggestions do you have as actions to advance DEI?
- What actions are you personally willing to take to improve diversity, equity, and inclusion in your community?
- What actions can be taken to encourage better representation of Black, Indigenous, People of Color in your community?
- When it comes to strategies to improve equity and to eliminate discrimination, what types of actions can we take?
- What values and goals should shape our actions?

Ending questions:

- Is there anything regarding DEI that you would like to talk about?
- Is there anything else I as a facilitator should know?
- How did you feel about this session?
- Is there anything you would like to change?



Part 4: Resources for Large-Group Sessions

Large-Group: Sample Agenda

Welcome

Overview and purpose of session

- Listen and learn about DEI efforts and initiatives in defense communities; identify ways to further collaborate
- Further military–community conversations to ensure our communities are equitable and inclusive, especially for Black, indigenous, and people of color citizens

Military leader briefings (local installation/base commanders)

- Demographics and how they reflect the local community
- Current DEI programs that address DEI on and off installation
- Current military–community outreach and engagements related to DEI

Community leader briefings (state and/or local DEI leaders)

- Demographics of community
- Current DEI programs that address DEI
- Military–community outreach, partnerships, and opportunities related to DEI

Discussion

- Points of intersection for collaboration and partnership
- Key concerns and barriers
- Next steps and key actions (Short-, mid-, and long-term)

Framing Questions for Military Leaders

- What are the demographics associated with your installation population?
- How does your installation reflect the demographics of the surrounding community?
- What programs are in place at your installation to address DEI and racial issues?
- How has the national discussion on racial injustice affected conversations within your community? What types of conversations are occurring?
- Have any efforts been made to integrate community members off the installation into the conversations you are having addressing racial and social equity?
- What are key concerns that you are addressing, and where do you need help from the surrounding communities?
- Are there any aspects of the relationship between your installation and the surrounding community that you feel encourage or discourage feelings of inclusion and equity among military and civilian members?





Framing Questions for Community Leaders

- What are the demographics associated with your jurisdiction? Please include information on the overall population and the number of military and civilians living in your jurisdiction.
- What programs are in place in your jurisdiction for addressing DEI and racial issues?
- Does your jurisdiction already collaborate with the military installation in your community? Are there any specific programs or policies that target the defense community?
- How has the national discussion on racial injustice affected conversations within your jurisdiction? What types of conversations are occurring?
- Cities and counties are home to military installations, military and civilian members, and their families. Are you aware of how military and civilian members of your community have encountered racial and social injustice, or not experienced inclusion? If so, can you provide examples and how these might be addressed or have been addressed in the past?
- Can you give examples of how your community could further partner with the military to address issues of racial injustice and equity?



Appendix: Planning Resources

Listening Session Planning Resources

Resources	Link
Email to invite military leaders to present at listening session	 Invitation - Military.msg
Email to invite community leaders to present at listening session	 Invitation - Community.msg
Meeting invite for all participants	 Save the Date Message.msg
After action report template	 Microsoft Word Document