

"As the only African American in my group, I did not know what to expect. I, however, really appreciated the environment, which was inviting, candid and sincere. I am glad that I learned things about American history that helped me resolve some meaningful questions I had. I also appreciated the opportunity to build relationships with people who want to participate in positive change."

Francis Clement
Fee Based Fiduciary
Clement Wealth Management

"Learning to be uncomfortable...this was the incredibly valuable lesson I learned as I went through this program with a group of individuals that provided a safe place to share one's experiences and admit to one's biases without judgement. In the process you learn a whole lot about yourself and how important it is to challenge your own beliefs. This is an experience that leaders cannot afford to forgo if they are committed to understanding themselves and others"

Miguel Valazquez
Deputy CEO
Rochester-Greater Regional Transportation Authority

"The Exploring Racism Group helped me find a new level of understanding, not just of what it means to be Black in America, but also what it means to be white. I am much better equipped now to make a difference going forward."

Jennifer Leonard
President & CEO
Rochester Area Community Foundation

"Engaging with leaders to reflect, challenge and process events around us was invaluable to me. The Exploring Racism Group setting provided a safe space to talk deeply about issues of race that are often left unsaid. ERG materials and subsequent discussions dug deep and the more you put into it, the more you get out of the experience. Wrestling with such personal, historic, systemic and institutional issues of race is long overdue and a critical path to move from wanting to do better to actually being part of the change for the better."

Jaime Saunders
President & CEO
United Way of Greater Rochester and the Finger Lakes

"Thank you for leading us through these discussions. Out of a month of far too many Zoom meetings, this is the meeting from which I benefit the most and I look forward to most."

Alexis Vogt, Ph.D.
Professor & Endowed Chair of Optics

Monroe Community College

“The experience with my exploring racism group has enabled me to better understand racism (individual, structural, institutional), privilege, trauma, health impacts, redlining and so much more. Life experience by itself did not inform my understanding. Getting together with a trusted group to learn/share my role in how we got here and my role in how we move forward with the work required to dismantle racism has been very rich. I encourage you to invest in this work.”

Bill Carpenter
CEO
Regional Transit Service

“Exploring Racism has provided me the opportunity to learn about how racism permeates many parts of our society. My cohort consists of people that have opened their minds, hearts and souls to understand this issue from a personal point of view. Truly understanding the problem of racism is half the solution and more importantly fighting racism is everyone’s fight”

Pietro (Pete) Giovenco, PE
President/CEO
Bergmann

ERG helped me discover how I play a role in contributing to and perpetuating racism in my community. I have looked in the mirror and seen hypocrisy. A proud American, I believe in the ideals of liberty, justice and equality; yet, as a white man, I have unconsciously extracted unfair advantages from a system that was designed to exploit and disadvantage a group of people based on skin tone.

Henceforth, I am committed to do the work to heal the wounds and support positive change. I adopted an action plan and shared it with my ERG cohort. I report to them monthly, asking them to hold me accountable. I seek to make my small "ding" in the universe.

Richard Glaser
First Vice President/Senior Financial Advisor
Merrill

This course looks at the education and understanding of racism in a much different and very beneficial way. I learned so much and also realize how much more there is to learn -- and also to unlearn. This experience is a must for all leaders in our area and also for anyone that is interested in alleviating racism. Many thanks to the Tom Mitchell and Frank Staropoli and their team.

R. Scott Rasmussen
President Rochester Rotary 2021/22
SAVP Advancement Golisano Children’s Hospital/UR

"I thought I was a pretty rational and informed person. What I discovered: I never really took the time to dig in and interrogate my beliefs around race. This both surprised me and humbled me. I have much work to do.

I have been aware of "Scapegoating" in nature, in our political system. Through this work I now realize that institutional racism explains how Black Americans have been scapegoated through our laws and governance.

The beliefs I developed in part through my upbringing were influenced by this institutional bias. I am now working to revamp my thinking and beliefs with a more realistic view of the world."

Tom Merkel
Former President of Merkel-Donahue, Current Vistage Chair

"Exploring racism has enabled me to examine my own bias. In realizing my long-held positions regarding race were not valid and in fact, harmful to myself and others, it has enabled me to become more adept at not accepting the status quo. It has helped me be more curious, less judgmental and more able to question what I am hearing/seeing in a way that has been very helpful in day to day problem solving and relationship development.

I never considered that my thoughts were racist. Learning what racism truly is helped me understand the need to put myself in the shoes of others and experience life from a different and sometimes uncomfortable perspective."

Gary Domenico
Former Owner/CEO, General Code LLC

The value of a safe place to have honest and meaningful conversations about race cannot be underestimated. ERG creates small, intimate groups that develop a deep sense of trust that, frankly, are the only way to explore race and racism from a deeply personal vantage point. We all have family members, friends and colleagues, but Talking about race and the role of white people is extraordinarily difficult and full of personal risk. Most of us want real change to happen, but we lack the language and courage to act. ERG is one of the few places where powerful conversations with people you respect can take place. I have found it engaging and empowering, and strongly recommend the experience. It has prepared me to work for change!

Heidi N. Zimmer-Meyer
President
Rochester Downtown Development Corporation

ERG has been a unique opportunity to experience transformative change.

My participation has made me more aware of the prevalence and impacts of racism. It's expanded my awareness of how racism manifests itself in our community – in professional and personal settings alike. It's opened my eyes to the structural and institutional barriers to equity. And it's sharpened my toolbox to be an agent of change.

The format challenges in a way that promotes deeper understanding, and it does so in a safe, intimate space that promotes honest, authentic and impactful dialogue. As individual participants, the format deftly invites us on our own journey. As members of a discussion group, it encourages us to share that journey and learn from the respective journeys our fellow participants are taking – an invaluable opportunity to do such personal work in the context of a trusted “community.”

Every participant will take something different from their ERG experience – but in each case it will be profound.

ERG deepens the capacity of leaders in our community to drive change we so desperately need.

Joseph Stefko
President/CEO
ROC 2025

The Exploring Racism Group (ERG) provides a safe, collaborative framework to discuss and consider biases in our daily lives. We often walk through life with assumptions regarding race and the motivations driving behavior. ERG's facilitated process provides opportunities to learn, reflect and rethink the innate biases influencing our thinking and experiences. The time investment in ERG has improved my ability to remove unconscious assumptions and stereotypes and replace them with curiosity and empathy.

Andy Raus
Senior Vice President
Bergmann

For me, the ERG has provided an opportunity to speak openly and explore thoughts on racism with peers in a safe and confident setting. The sense of trust formed with fellow members while sharing ideas and experiences has been very rewarding.

Steven P. Metzger, PE
CEO
LaBella Associates