

# INTERGROUP CONTACT THEORY

Based on the work of Gordon Allport (1954) and the work of Thomas Pettigrew and Linda Tropp (2008)  
Interpretation and application provided by Caliopy Glaros

**Intergroup Contact Theory:** positive effects of intergroup contact (encounters between groups of people who come from different life experiences ) *can* reduce prejudice if four key conditions are met

## 4 CONDITIONS

**EQUAL STATUS** members of the different groups do not have a hierarchical, unequal relationship

- introduce travelers to local people who share some overlapping experiences and identities in terms of education, employment, wealth, etc.
- strive to rebalance power dynamics by engaging people outside of customer-service roles

**COOPERATION** members of the different groups work together in a non-competitive environment

- offer opportunities for travelers to learn new skills from local people
- offer activities which produce results collaboratively, such as cooking a meal to be shared among the group

**COMMON GOALS** members of the different groups share and discuss common goals

- offer opportunities for discussion around peace, sustainability, and equity, since most people share these common goals

**LEGAL INTEGRATION** social and institutional authorities support contact between these groups

- contact between groups should be sanctioned legally and culturally
- it is difficult to achieve these ideal conditions in places with legalized segregation (in terms of race, gender, homophobia, etc.)

## 3 MEDIATING MECHANISMS

**Mediating mechanisms:** the mechanisms or processes by which contact achieves positive effect

### NEW KNOWLEDGE ABOUT THE GROUP

New knowledge about the group is shown to be the *least* effective in reducing prejudice. Simply put, facts don't change feelings.

### EMAPTHY

Empathy is very effective in reducing prejudice, so long as it is "activated" through participatory experiences. Empathy is not activated simply by passively receiving information, such as watching a documentary about a tragedy. Empathy is activated through participation, such as sharing your experience of a tragedy, and listening to others share their experiences in turn. To activate empathy, there must be participation and mutual exchange.

### REDUCTION OF ANXIETY

Reducing anxiety is the most effective mechanism in reducing prejudice. The more we can reduce the anxiety of our travelers and guests before a particular encounter, the more successful we will be in ensuring the encounter is positive.

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## Question to Transform your Site Visits:

1. Who are the groups you most engage with through your site visits and what prejudices might they hold about others? (Consider the intersectional identities of donors, as well as program participants and local communities.)
2. What barriers exist in the locations you working in? Are there any forms of institutionalized (legal or widely practiced) segregation in those places? (Consider segregation of race, gender, age, sexuality, ability, etc.)

With respect to your target audience, the locations where you work, and the safety and security of your guests and local community, answer the questions below.

1. In what ways can you rebalance power dynamics (gaps in wealth, lived experience, education, colonial legacies, etc.) that are inherent when two dissimilar groups come into contact?
2. In what ways can donors engage with the local community that subvert existing power dynamics?
3. What are some activities you could offer that would allow different groups to work together collaboratively to achieve a shared result?
4. How could a discussion of common goals (peace, sustainability, and equity) be woven in to your site visit?
5. What opportunities exist for empathy-building that are both participatory and involve mutual exchange and learning?
6. What are some ways you can reduce your guests' anxiety before, during, and after they meet?