**Origins**
In 2004, community stakeholders in Philadelphia, Mississippi, where the 1964 Freedom Summer murders occurred, asked the William Winter Institute for Racial Reconciliation to help their town confront its dark history.

After the Welcome Table process, the Philadelphia Coalition issued a call for justice in the unresolved murders; a year later, as a direct result of community efforts, Edgar Ray Killen was convicted.

The Winter Institute has since used the Welcome Table process in 18 communities seeking to overcome socioeconomic problems born from race-inflected decisions and policies.

**Notable Elements**
Trust building: One goal is “to build a bridge of trust strong enough to hold the weight of the truths that community participants tell.”

Welcome Table Guideposts provide an encouraging structure for sharing and listening.

The circle provides an important parity among participants. Nobody stands above listeners, telling how to solve their community’s problems. The answers come from within the group. The circle helps the group listen to and trust one another.

**Philosophy**
What’s unique about the Welcome Table?
Many terrific organizations focus on systemic change without including relationship and trust building. As a result, their accomplishments often aren’t sustainable because community leaders refuse to continue working with those whom they do not trust. Others focus on relationship building, but do not carry their successes into work for social justice and toward increasing the understanding of structural racism. Relationship building and work for positive social change are the hallmarks of the Welcome Table.

“I came to understand the only reason you’re not my friend: You haven’t heard my story.”

“There’s a lot of room to have things organically develop. I never felt that you guys come in with an agenda.”
Graduation and implementation of the equity plan

Each phase lasts about six months

**Phase 1**
Self-reflection & relationship building
Monthly community meetings focused on relationships and trust building

**Phase 2**
Education & discernment
- A group project
- Monthly trainings and workshops

**Phase 3**
Equity plan development
Training to identify community structures and develop an equity plan

**Impacts & Successes**

- Public ceremonies to acknowledge painful racial histories in ways that encourage the community to learn and grow together
- Oral history projects exploring a community’s racial histories
- Civil rights driving tours, memorial highways, and historic markers of civil rights and African-American history
- After-school and summer mentoring and tutoring programs for children
- The creation of a local “Excel by Five” program to support pre-K education
- Civil and human rights curricula in local schools that include after-school programs and oral history projects; local students’ test scores have improved, as have graduation rates
- Scholarships for local children to enroll in previously unaffordable summer enrichment programs
- Development of a city/county/university coalition that created affordable housing options and homeowner training
- Playgrounds in neighborhoods that had none
- Community gardens
- A rural youth community center with computer labs, a library, and arts programs
**objectives**

*The Welcome Table assists partner communities to:*

- Understand the importance of listening, storytelling, and relationship building as prerequisites to producing real and measurable change
- Understand the consequences of the systems we have inherited in order to develop, together, community-specific initiatives to redress inequities
- Become equipped with the communication tools to accomplish the goals stakeholders identify together to improve their communities

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**What participants say about the Welcome Table**

“Everyone learns something new about themselves and others.”

“Rich dialogue that causes us to be more understanding and empathetic to all of the people we encounter in life.”

“One of the things the circle provides is healing. It’s a place to share thoughts and experiences across lines.”

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**The Winter Institute**

The William Winter Institute for Racial Reconciliation

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