

The Task of Hopeful Citizenship: Studying Leadership and Authority in Our Organizational Systems



Fall 2026 Group Relations Conference
Teachers College, Columbia University, NY
November 20-22, 2026

*This event is co-sponsored by Teachers College, Columbia University &
The Tavistock Institute of Human Relations*

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Dear prospective member:

The concept of "hopeful citizenship" preoccupied us last year as well. We believe this is the primary task of our times, and its exploration and study, using the group dynamics lens, continues to be important and relevant.

Being, or becoming, a Hopeful Citizen requires us to engage with the complex, often unseen forces that govern our groups and organizations. When we enter any social system, be it a workplace, community, or a nation, we carry an "organization in the mind." This internal picture shapes our expectations, our understanding of authority, and our sense of belonging. Yet, we often operate under the unconscious assumption that our peers and leaders hold the same picture. Only when these internal models inevitably collide does the profound tension between the individual, the group, and the wider system become fully visible.

In times of uncertainty or conflict, this tension creates anxiety, which groups frequently and unconsciously project onto "the Other," often the leaders or figures of authority. However, even here, our picture-in-the-mind of authority and leadership varies substantially depending on who we are, where we come from, and what our experiences have been in relation to those. One of our emerging core dilemmas is: how do we exercise hopeful citizenship when we feel disconnected from the very institutions that we rely upon?

This conference provides a temporary institution to study these conscious and unconscious dynamics, as they occur and unfold in the here-and-now. Our joint task is not to force a singular, unified vision upon the group, but rather to recognize, tolerate, and explore the different frames of reference we each hold. By examining how we project our emotional realities onto authority and how we navigate our disparate internal pictures, we hope that we can discover new ways to collaborate. We invite you to explore what it means to explore and experiment with hopeful citizenship (even as we realize we hold fundamentally different pictures of the system) and consider how we might find the capacity and courage to create something meaningful together.

Conference Directorate

Eliat Aram
Conference Director

Sasha Wells
Associate Director, Administration

Lamya Razzou
The Administrative Team

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Primary Task:

The primary task is to study the interpersonal, group-as-a-whole, inter-group, and organizational dynamics as they occur in the here-and-now of the conference.

You will have an opportunity to learn:

- Conscious and unconscious factors that shape participation in groups
- What roles do we take up, or are given to us, in groups and why
- How our own behavior shifts when we assume leadership
- How we relate to authority
- How aspects of our social identities influence role, leadership, and authority

Conference Design and Role of Staff:

The conference is designed as a temporary institution organized as a sequence of group and inter-group interactions that provide opportunities for learning. Staff manage the conference boundaries, but they do not manage people. Lectures and didactic presentations by staff are not part of the design. Staff consultations will focus primarily on group-level phenomena rather than individuals' behavior.

Please note:

This conference is available to all students of Teachers College, Columbia University, and other Columbia-affiliated schools, as well as any interested and willing members of the public. To preserve the integrity of the group dynamics, applicants should plan to attend all events. Those who know in advance that they may miss any significant portion of the conference are asked to forego attendance at this time.

The GRC is an experiential learning conference, and it is designed for members to learn about group and organizational processes. Experiential learning can be powerful, illuminating, and also tiring and sometimes stressful. Self-learning often also occurs in the GRC, but the conference is not meant to be a clinical or therapeutic offering. If you are currently undergoing significant stress or managing a difficult personal situation, you should forego attendance at this time.

Location:

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Teachers College, Columbia University
525 West 120th Street
New York, New York, 10027

Conference Times:

9:15 am – 6:45 pm Friday, November 20, 2026
9:00 am – 7:30 pm Saturday, November 21, 2026
9:00 am – 3:45 pm Sunday, November 22, 2026

*Registration takes place on Friday from 9:15 to 9:45 am.
A reception will be held on Sunday from 3:15 to 3:45 pm.*

Meals and Lodging:

Members are responsible for securing their own beverages, snacks, and meals throughout the conference. Members are expected to bring snacks/meals or purchase food at nearby cafes and restaurants.

The conference is **non-residential**. We provide housing recommendations upon request; contact the administrative team.

Conference Fees:

Regular rate – \$549
Not-for-profit rate – \$449
Student rate – \$399
Group Discount: 3+ Regular rate – \$449
Group Discount: 3+ Non-for-profit rate – \$399
Submit payment: [HERE](#)

Registration:

To secure your spot in the conference, please complete your [online registration](#) by 11:59 PM ET, November 6, 2026. (**No refunds are issued once the online registration closes.**)

If you have questions, please email the Administrative Team:
teacherscollegeGRC@gmail.com

This is a **paperless conference**. We will provide conference materials at check-in via a Google Drive link. We will update materials live as needed throughout the conference.