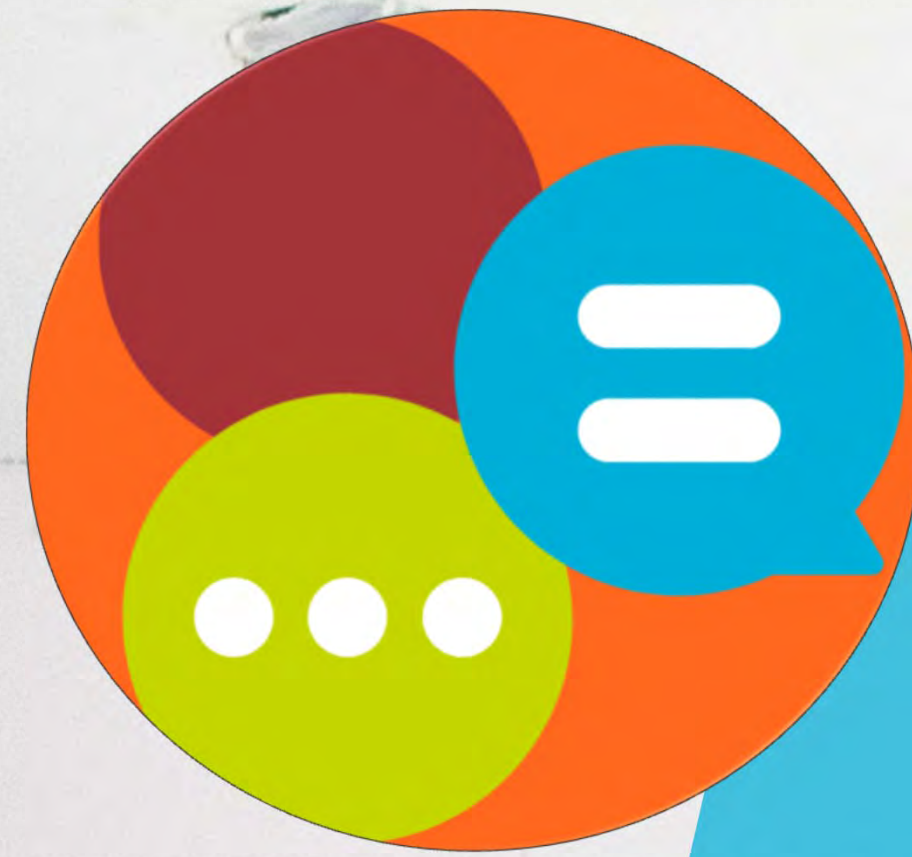




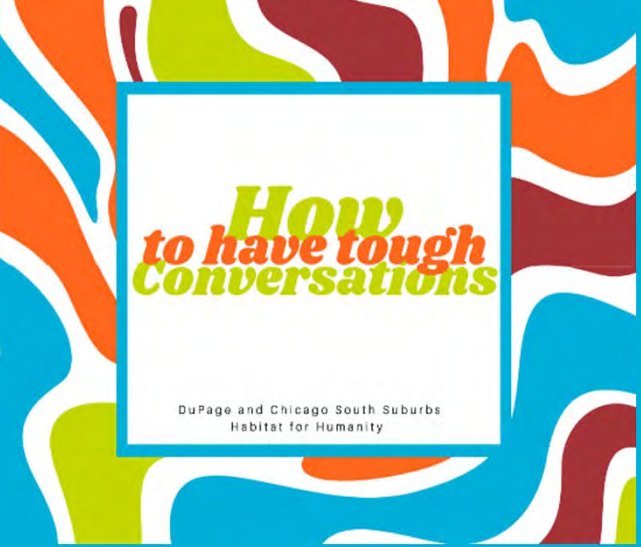
# DISCLAIMER



If you're in this session it's because you're an advocate and advocates use their voices...so this is an interactive session.

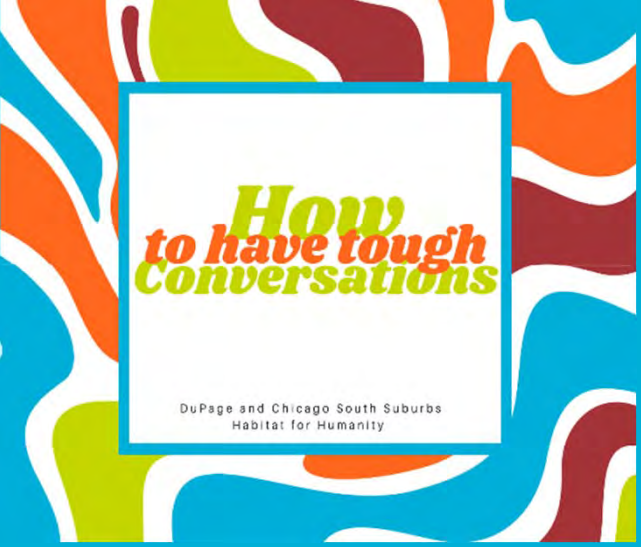
Go ahead and introduce yourselves to the people around you.





# What might be considered a tough conversation?

This can be a personal or professional conversation – this presentation will help you with both!



# EXAMPLES:

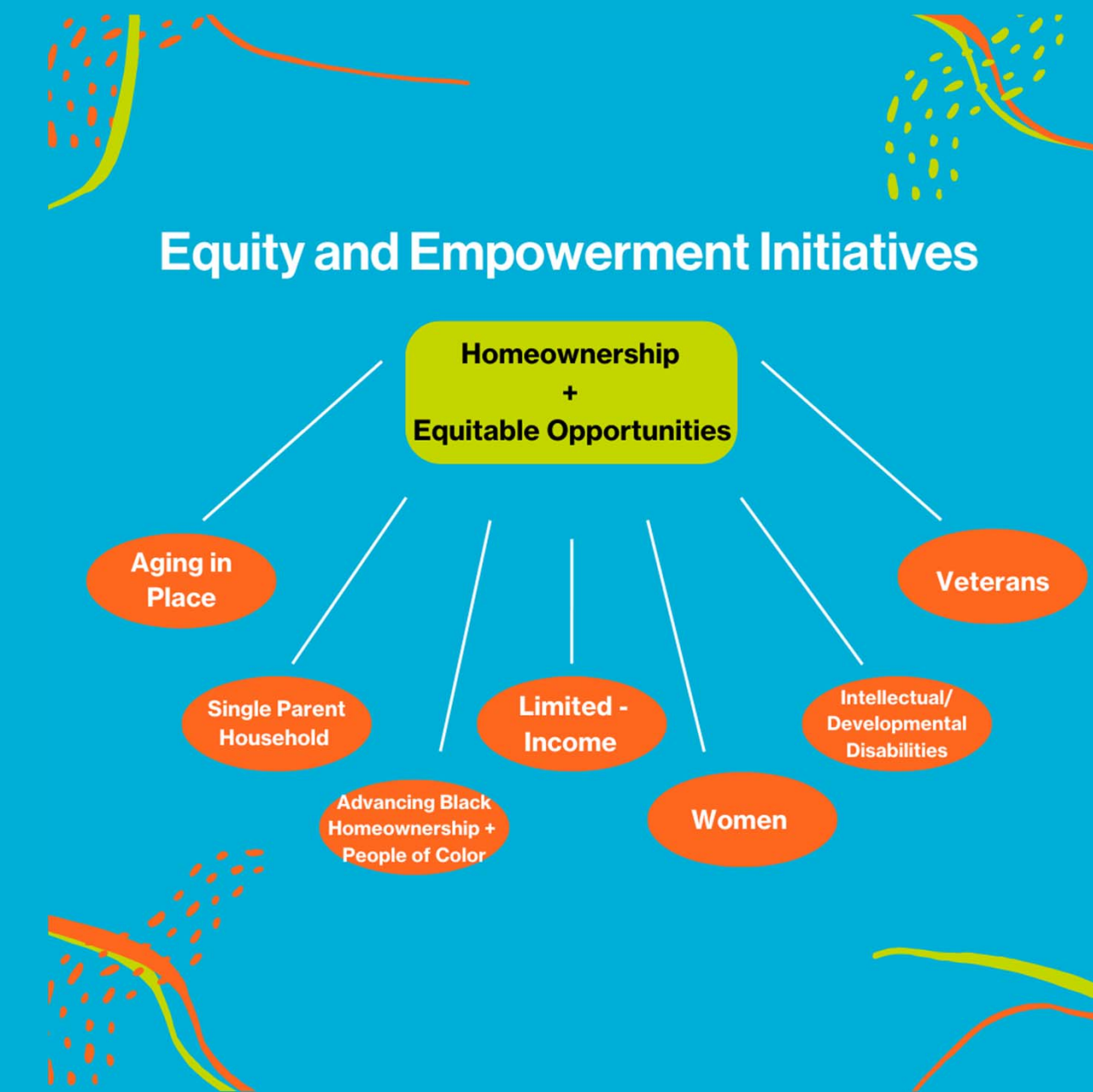
## Internal

## External

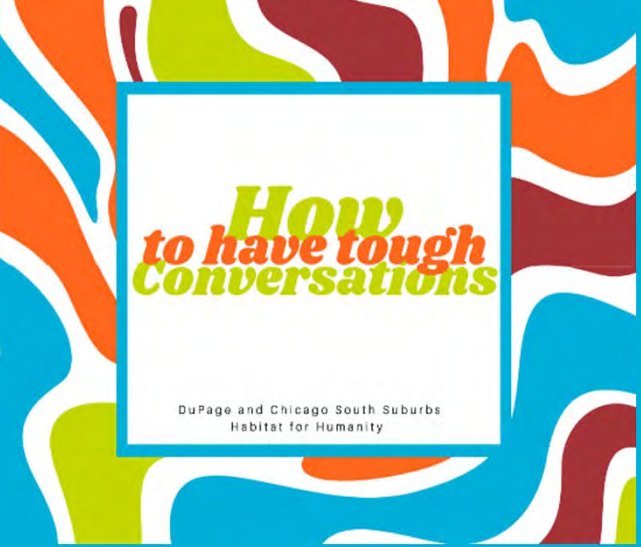
- Affordable housing in a particular neighborhood
- Working across the aisle to advance affordable housing
- Unhappy volunteers/donors

# Our Core Values May be Seen as Polarizing (Habitat's and Individual Affiliates) – this could lead to conflict in our conversations.

- Our History (Koinonia)
- Our Programs (Women Build, ABH)
- Affordable Housing
- Eco Friendly
- Existing







# How did leadership decide to stand behind the choice to advocate for our core values and history?

Once this decision is made, we begin to look at places you may run into having tough conversations...

# What can lead to tough conversations externally?

- Communicating core values to the public
- Coalition Building
- Municipality Conversations (public comment)
- Funding Sources (Habitat on the Hill and Federal Funds, State Funds, etc.)
- Backed Legislation
- Core Programming (Women Build)
- Participating in Working Groups
- Existing



# The Psychology of Tough Conversations





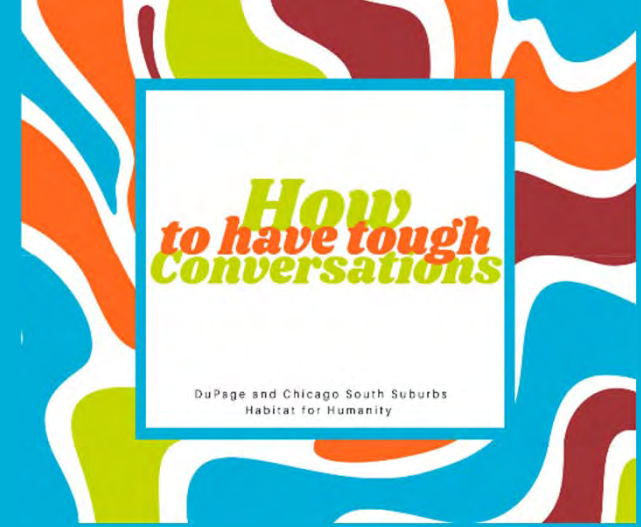
# Iceberg Theory:

- What's your favorite movie or musical artist or album?
  - Why?
  - Does it trigger a memory for you?
  - Identify with a belief you hold?





# Iceberg Theory:



**1. Remember that everyone's opinion can come from a deep belief system and their opposition could be for an underlying reason. Think of people as icebergs, oftentimes, you're only seeing the tip of who they are.**





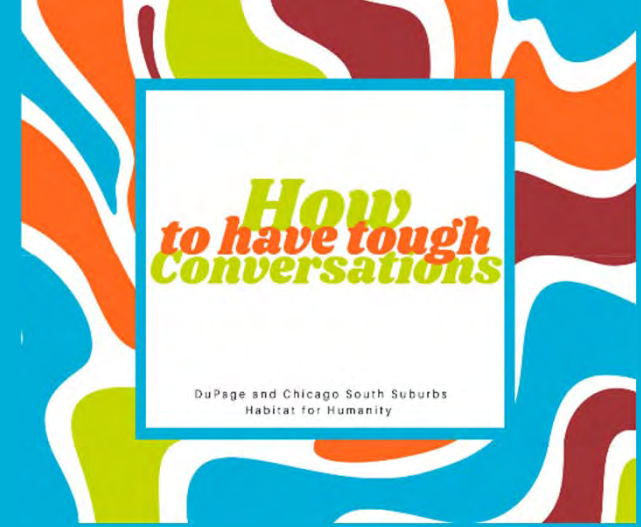
# Handover of Power:

- How many people feel personally uncomfortable when engaging across the aisle? (political, religious, between sectors. etc.?)
- Though willing to, who feels uncomfortable with power?





# Handover of Power:



**2. When you ask someone to change an opinion or consider a different one, this can often feel like a handover of power. Remember this when your results are not immediate.**





# Power Exercise

- Partner up
- One of you is advocating for HFH in a neighborhood
- One of you is opposed
- Spend 3 minutes convincing each other of your POV



# Observation Exercise





# Listen and Observe

**3. Conflict can be healthy.  
Commit to hearing with  
intent to listen. Don't listen to  
rebut, listen to understand,  
deepening your ability to  
relate.**





# Combative Language

4. Language is important. Combative language can sound like “Don’t you think it’s important that everyone has a home regardless of income?” While healthy language might sound like, “What do you like most about where you live/your home? In what situations has it brought you the most stability?”



This gives the other person an opportunity to connect more deeply with your point and builds trust.





# COVID EXAMPLE



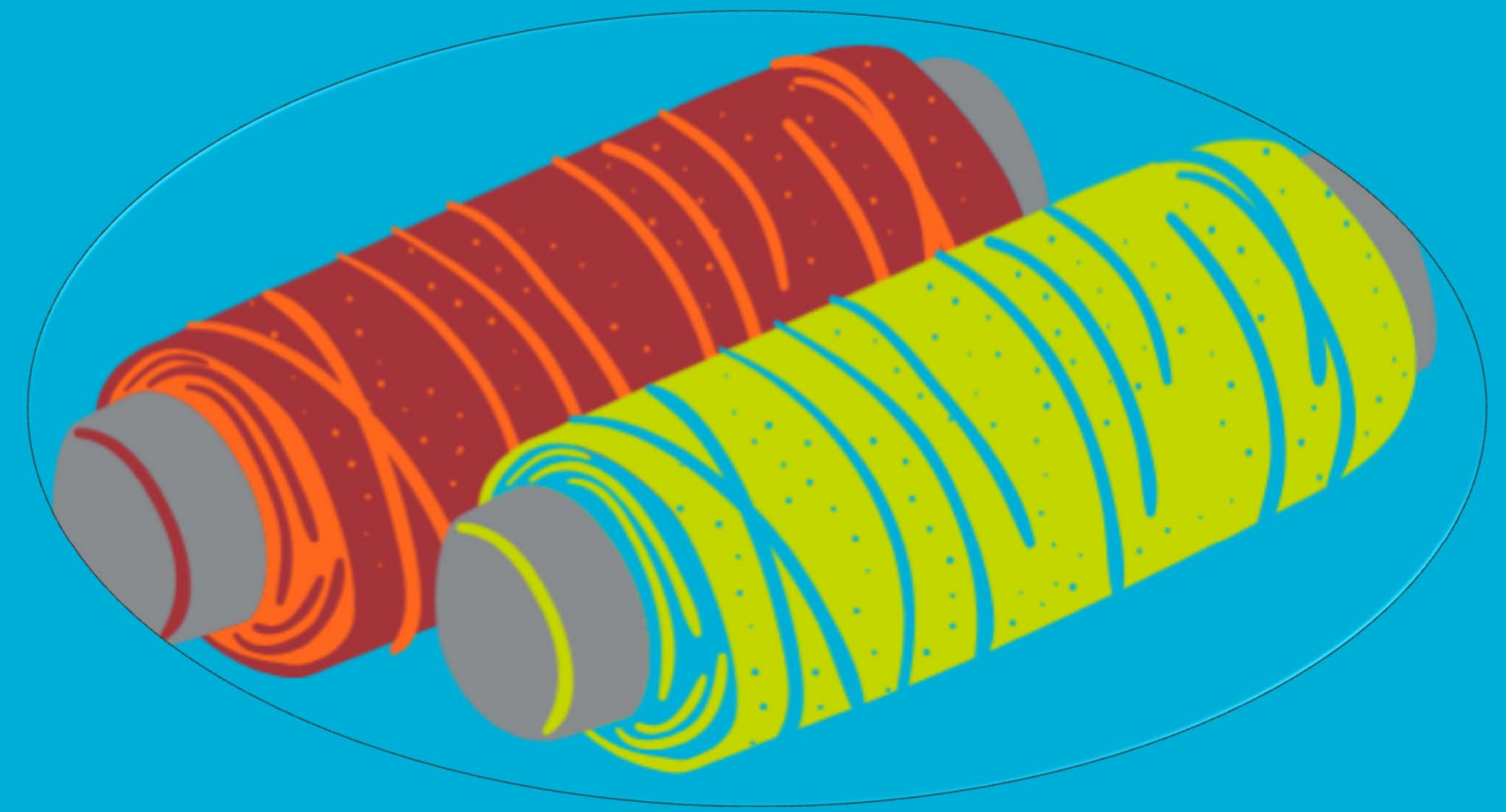
# Observations?





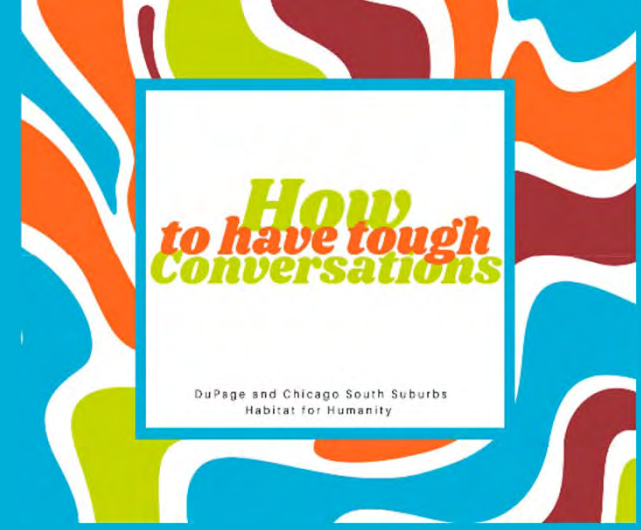
# Finding the Common Thread

**5. Most people have a common thread. When the conversation gets hard, always remember what is similar about you and the other person.**

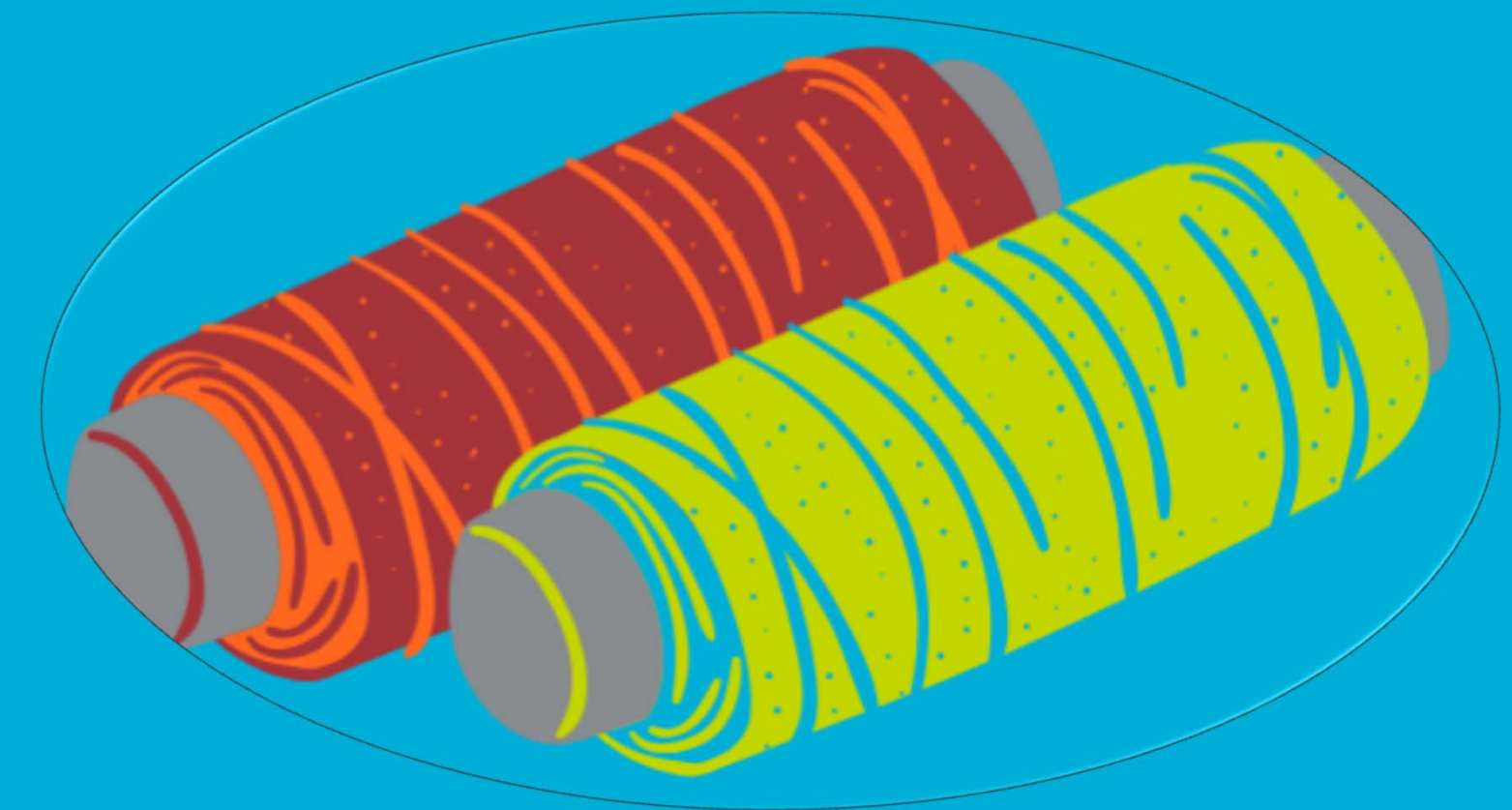




# Common Thread



- Keep the other person human
- Are they protecting someone? Are you protecting someone?
- Is their bag green? Is your favorite color green?
- You can use anything as a grounding mechanism





# COVID EXAMPLE 2





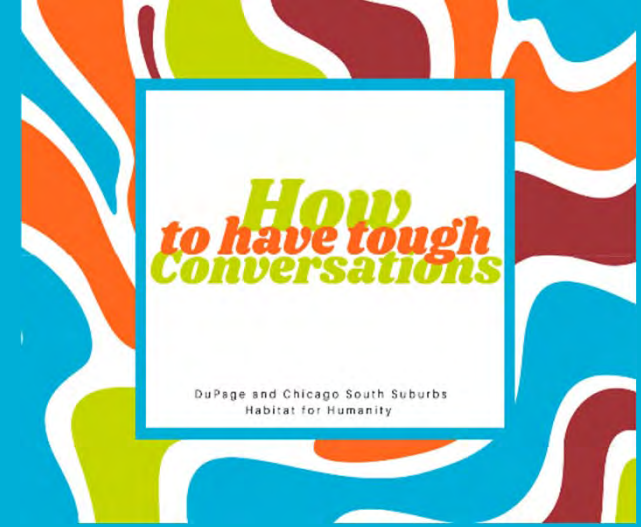
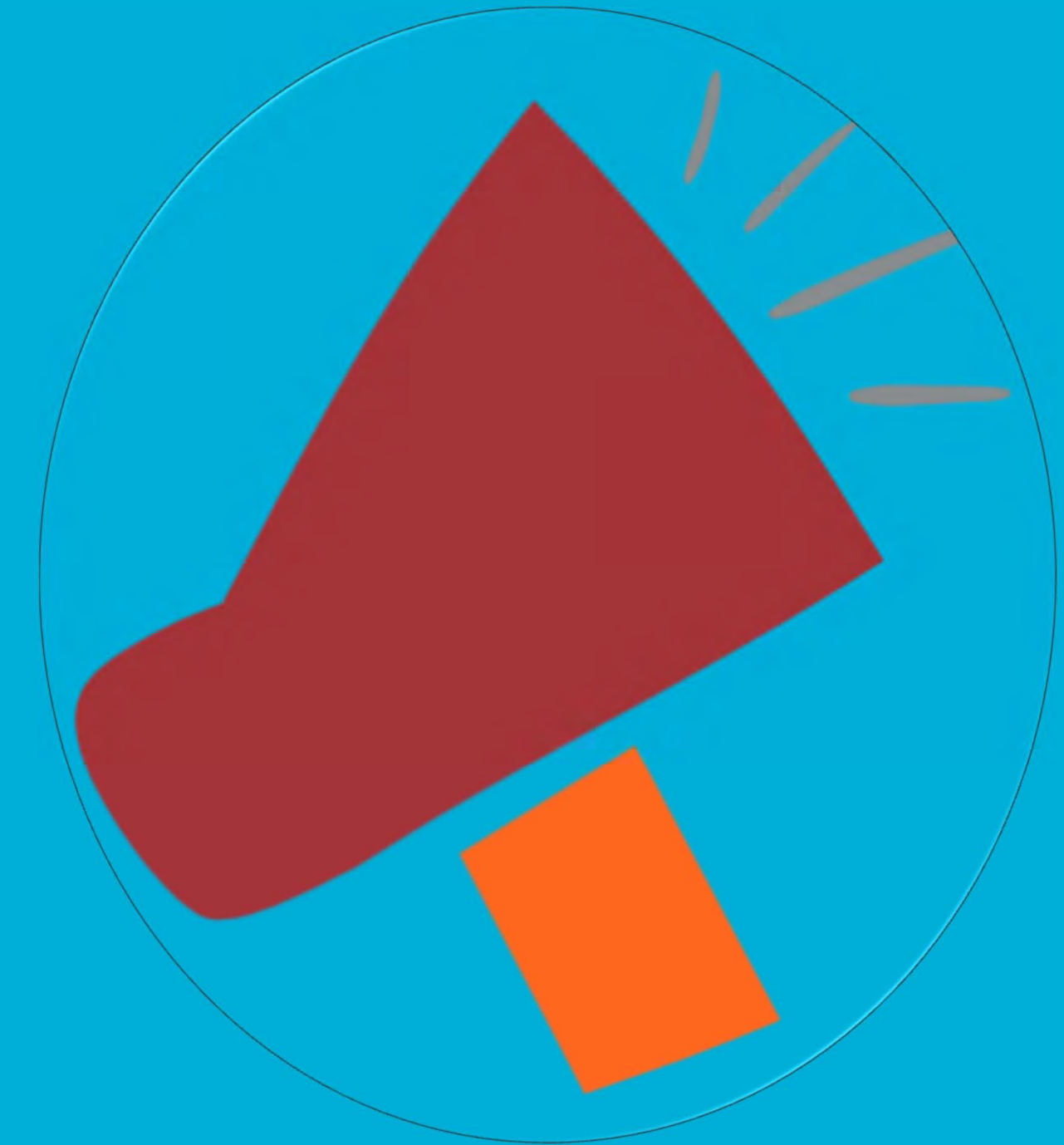
# Observations?





# Your Turn!

- Left side and right side of the room, please pick a representative to come up and have a conversation with us
- The topic: “We should be building more affordable housing in our county”



# REMINDERS:

- Lean on your organization's history and HFHI's history
- Koinonia
- Mission, vision, programming
- Don't mistake respect for weakness
- Who went to HOTH?



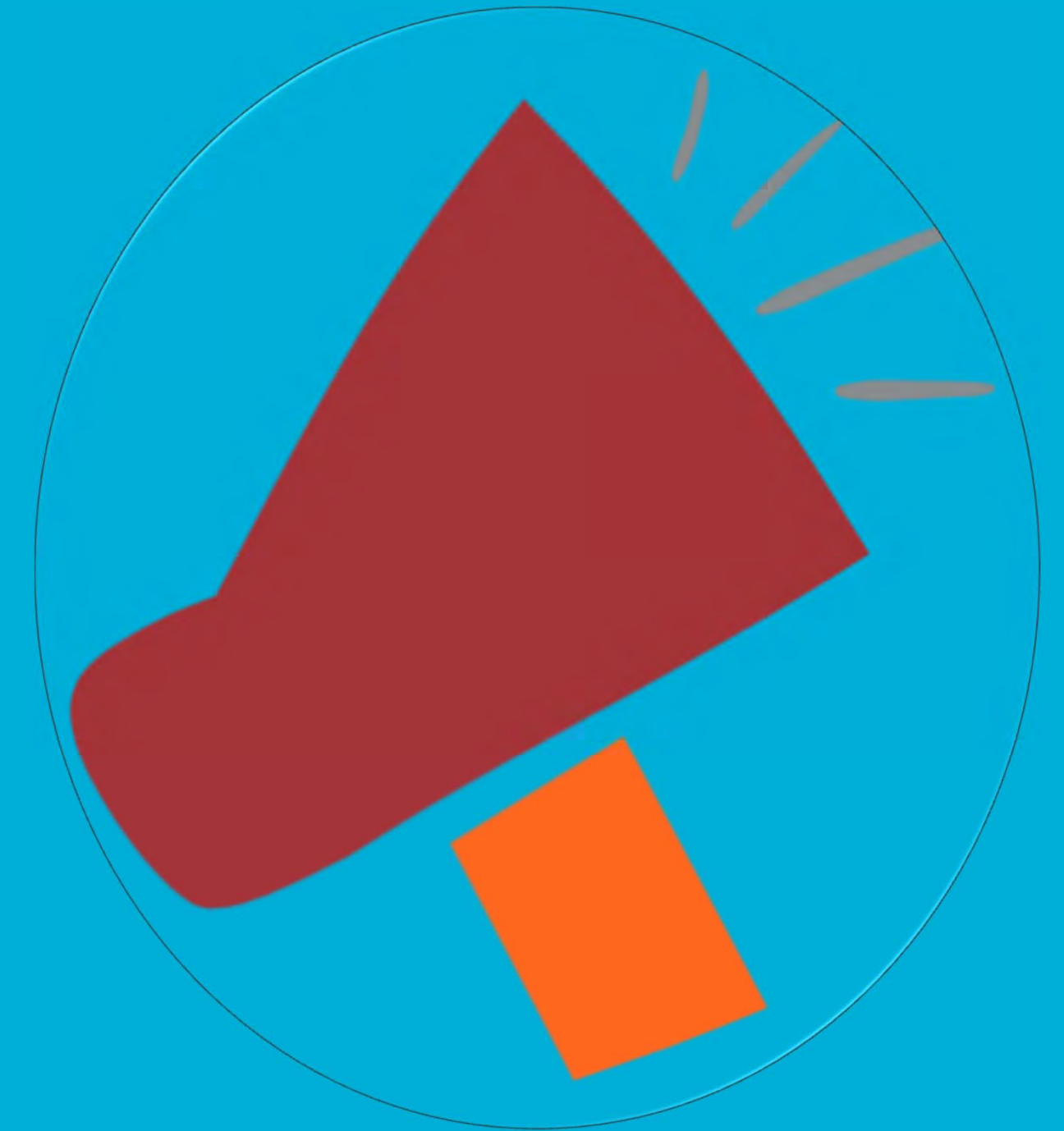


# Observations?

## Let's Try it Again!



# Next Side!





# Observations?

## Let's Try it Again!



# Overall Observations?

- What went well?
- What felt natural (from the viewer and from the speaker)?
- What felt unnatural (from the viewer and from the speaker)?
- Tips and tricks?

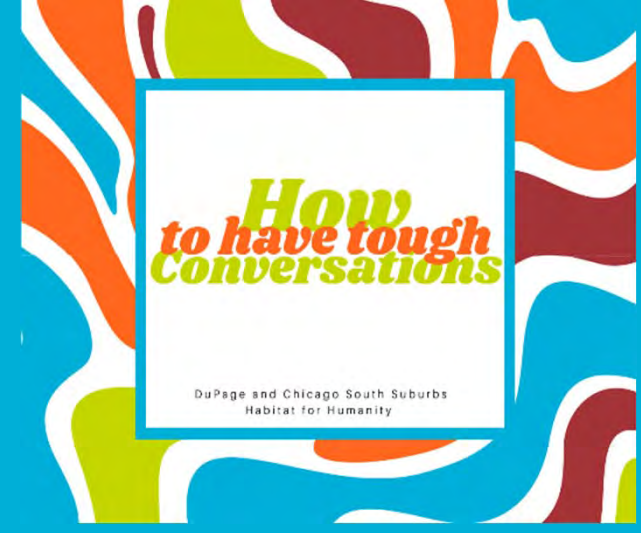
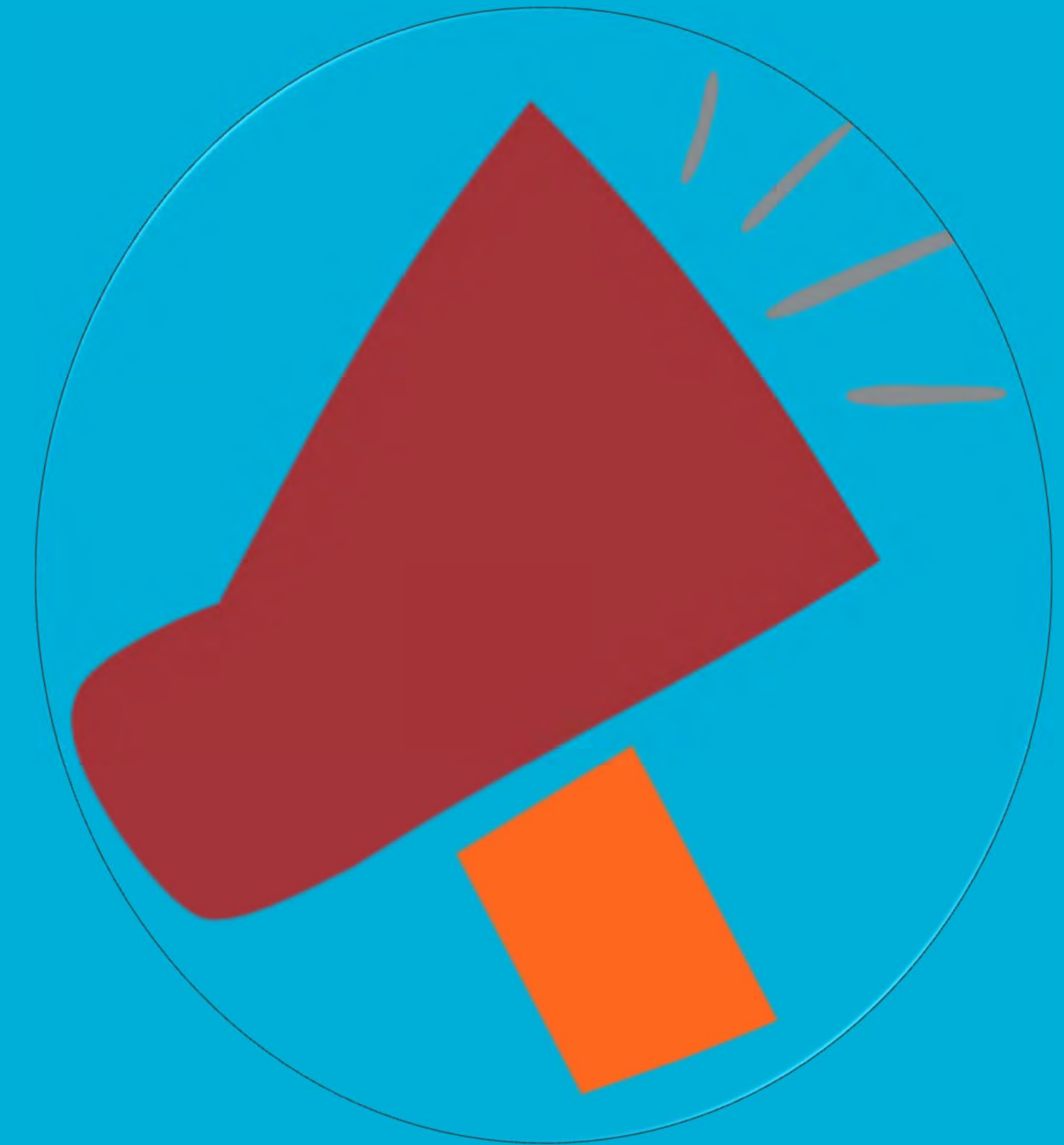




# Expectations

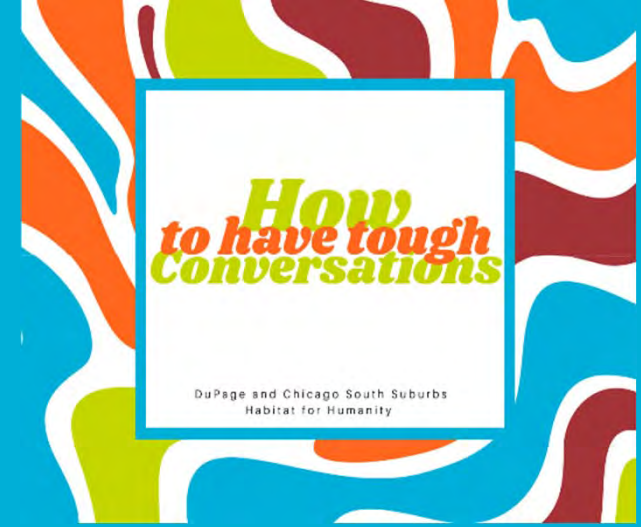
**6. Don't expect a  
solution or shift in  
opinion after one  
conversation.**

**Advocacy is about the  
long game.**





# Taking a Break



**7. When the conflict bridges on combative, institute a boundary. This boundary could sound like...**

**“I hear you and I think I need a moment to collect my thoughts and step away. I am going to grab myself some water and I’ll be back in 10 minutes.”**

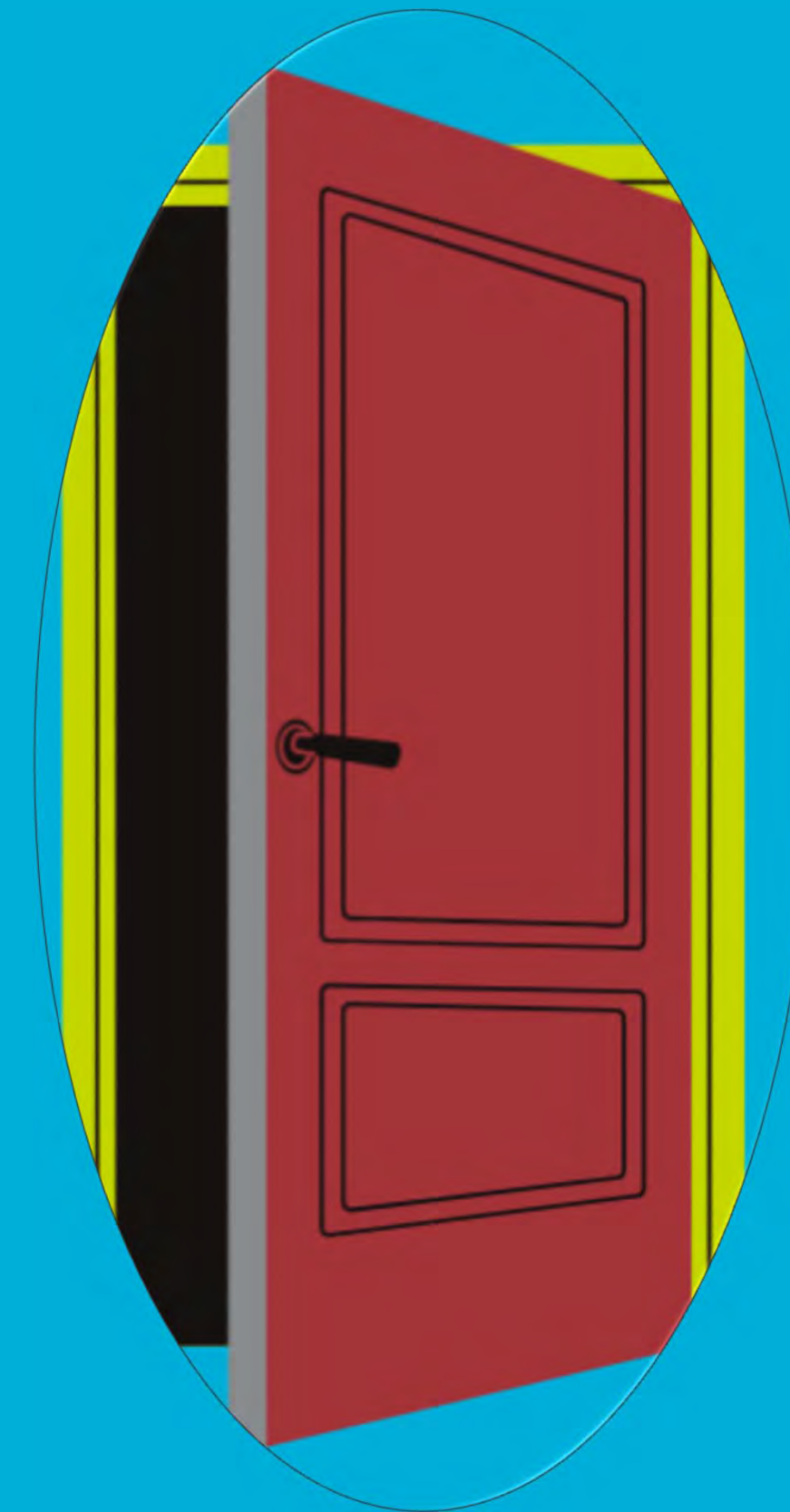
**“I think we had a great conversation today, I’d love some time to really think about what you’ve said, do you think we could schedule another time to meet in the coming weeks?”**





# Open Door?

**8. If the door is open and the conversation is still tough but productive, keep engaging in it. If the conversation is not constructive and one party is unwilling to respectfully engage, it is okay to walk away.**





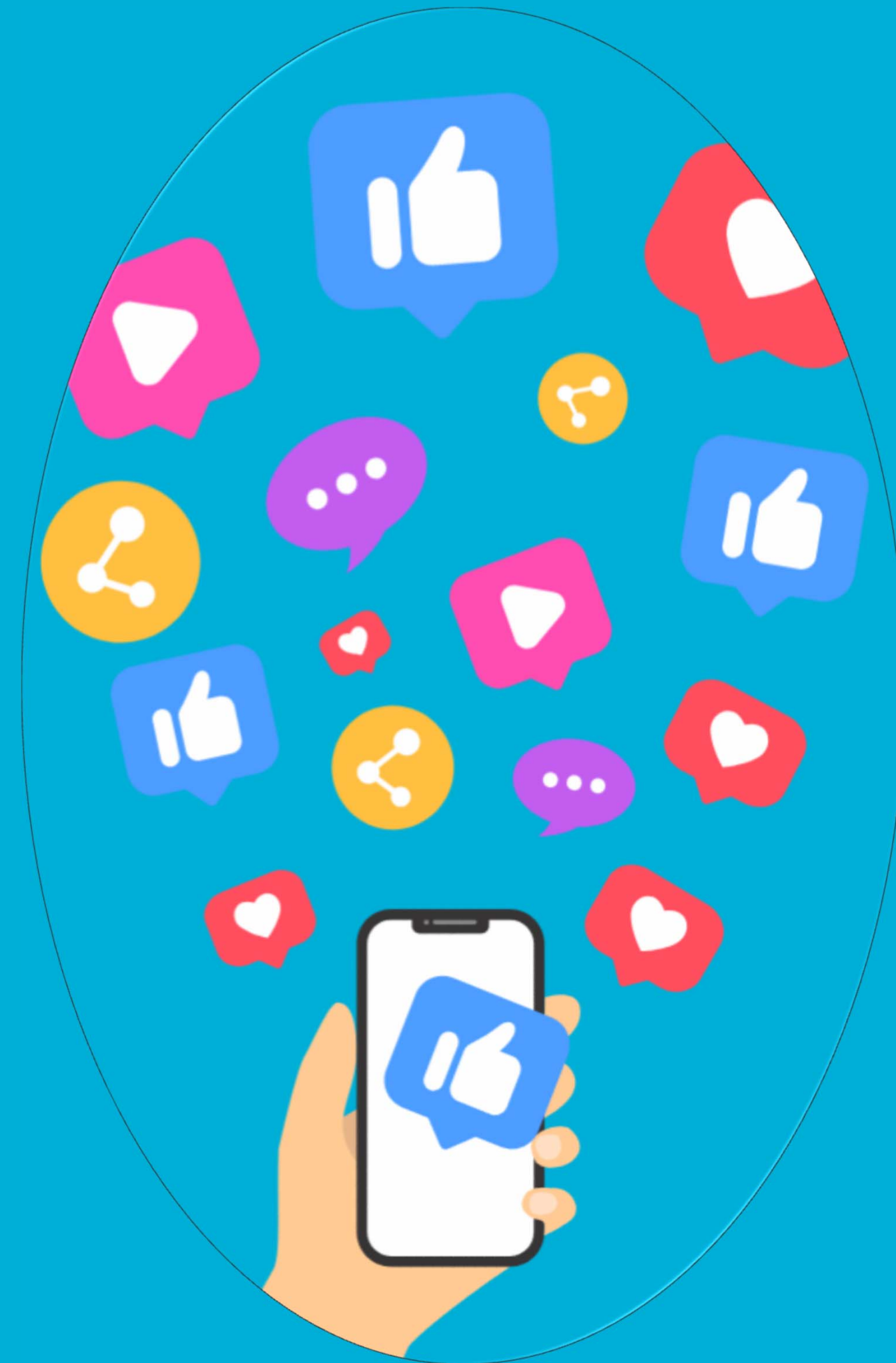
# Questions to Consider on the “Open Door”:

- Does this person/group/partnership add to the integrity of our organization/affiliate?





# Digital Responses



# Real Life Email Example:

**“I am so disappointed that you are falling into the trap of DEI and black lives matter. When I was involved in the program things were different. You weren’t racist against white people. This is disgusting.”**



# How should we respond?

- Thank them for their perspective
- Point to HFH/affiliate history and programs
- Validate
- Inquire
- Offer a more in-depth conversation
- Offer them a way out

# Real Life Email Response Example:

Dear \_\_\_\_\_,

Thank you for reaching out and giving your candid feedback. We appreciate that you feel comfortable enough to let us know your perspective and we believe you are entitled to it. If you read about our history starting at Koinonia Farms, you'll find that we have always had an unwavering commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion. I have attached a link [here](#) if you'd like to learn more.

I understand that you are upset. I am curious, as a valued supporter, how do you believe that this takes away from our vision of “a world where everyone has a decent place to live?” I welcome your feedback. If you would like to chat more about this topic, I would love to set up some time. Please let me know what is convenient for you. Additionally, if you feel we are no longer a good fit for you, you will find an unsubscribe button [here](#).

I look forward to your response,

\_\_\_\_\_

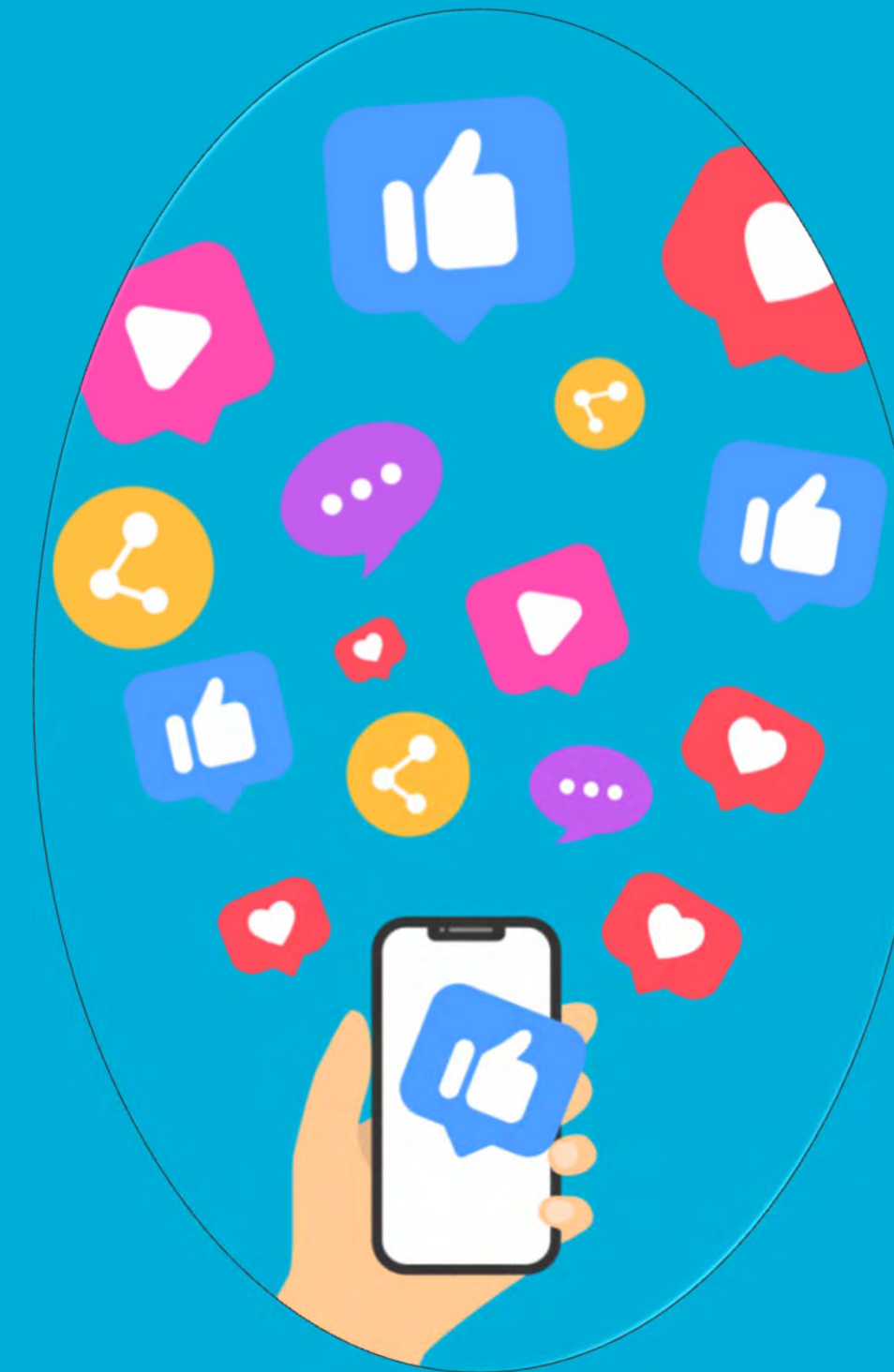


# This person.....BACKPEDALED.

- They may also just go away
- Unsubscribe
- Or take you up on your offer to chat (this has only happened to me one time)

# LEADERSHIP!:

- Thoughts from an Executive Director's POV
- How do you support your staff through this?





# Always Remember:

- No matter the conversation, no matter the situation, it is always possible to be unwavering in your belief system and values while keeping the humanity of the opposition in mind.
- To be convincing you must also show up ready to be convinced. This is an authentic interaction.

# Questions?





# THANK YOU!

Amanda Zahorak:  
[azahorak@gohabitat.org](mailto:azahorak@gohabitat.org)

Jennifer Taff:  
[jtaff@gohabitat.org](mailto:jtaff@gohabitat.org)



Beyond the Blueprint

2025 Habitat for Humanity Midwest Regional Conference

