PRACTICE GUIDE

SOLIDARITY IS

Building Movement Project

Activating Nonprofits | Fueling Change

2024

TRANSFORMATIVE SOLIDARITY PRINCIPLES

CONNECTIONS

COMMONALITIES

CENTERING

CO-CONSPIRATORSHIP

CO-LIBERATION

CAPACITY & CONFLICT

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About Building Movement Project and SolidarityIs

The Building Movement Project (BMP) is a national non-profit organization that catalyzes social change through research, relationships, and resources that strengthen the nonprofit sector.

A program of the Building Movement Project, SolidarityIs generates tools, trainings, and narratives to facilitate transformative solidarity practices for movement building organizations and activists who are invested in meaningful social change.

Acknowledgements

The Solidarity Is Practice Guide draws upon a wide breadth of resources, from historical traditions to organizing campaigns to lived experiences. The principles described in this practice guide are rooted in Black radical tradition, Indigenous storytelling, ancestral knowledge, transnational movements for dignity and equality, and contemporary multi-issue organizing. At SolidarityIs, we have been conducting trainings and workshops on solidarity practice since 2017. Over the past seven years, we have honed our praxis through the contributions of members of the SolidarityIs community, from movement leaders who have participated in Solidarity Summits to former and current team members including Anna Castro, Catherine Foley, Kitty Hu, Shelby House, and Priti Nemani.

The Solidarity Is Practice Guide was written by Adaku Utah, Deepa Iyer, Héctor Malvido, and UyenThi Tran Myhre and designed by Jennifer Kotting.

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INTRODUCTION

Throughout history, human beings have built and relied on connections with each other to survive. From the earliest days of our existence, we learned that we could increase our chances of survival in an often harsh and unpredictable world by forming necessary bonds and collaborations. We gathered in groups to hunt, share resources, and protect each other from environmental and predatory threats. These connections existed and extended beyond immediate family and kinship ties. Many of these connections have lasted for generations. In fact, each of us is alive today because of the myriad connections in our legacies that cultivated cultures of belonging, interdependence, and shared responsibility.

For people living at the intersections of multiple sites of terror and the violence of oppression and white supremacy every day, building connections is crucial not only for survival but for challenging and dismantling systems of injustice. Often, it is through our connections with each other that we build power, deepen empathy, and create sustainable collective movements.

About the Solidarity Is Practice Guide

The Solidarity Is Practice Guide is an offering from Building Movement Project and SolidarityIs that enables individuals and organizations to engage in transformative solidarity practice. When we engage in transformative practices (as opposed to transactional ones that are geared towards a one-off action that obtains a temporary benefit), we have an opportunity to change ourselves, our communities, systems, institutions, and cultural norms.

This practice guide provides:

- A starting point to learn about basic principles, values, and practices that undergird solidarity practice
- A resource for facilitators and organizers to use in community conversations, workshops, and trainings
- A tool to learn about field studies and historical references around solidarity

We hope that the Solidarity Is Practice Guide adds to the rich and vibrant body of work, knowledge, and resources that have been produced by organizations and individuals about solidarity practice.

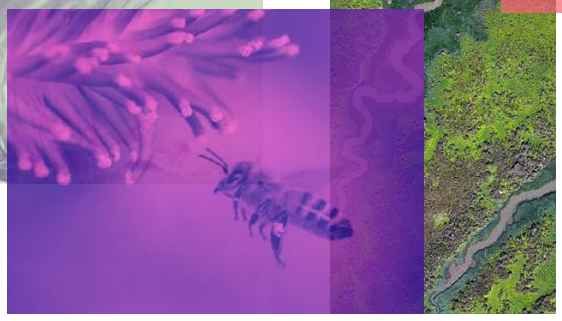
How to Read and Use the Solidarity Is Practice Guide

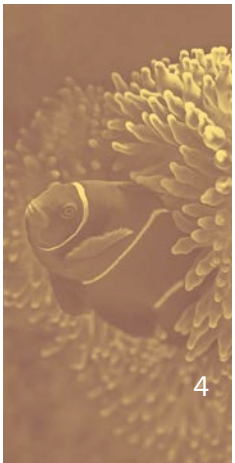
The Solidarity Is Practice Guide is divided into four core sections highlighting each Transformative Solidarity principle. Each section is introduced with an explanation of the principle and its significance and relevance. You'll find working definitions, key concepts, and organizational examples illustrating how these principles can be applied in different contexts. Each section also provides field studies that illuminate common challenges and possible solutions generated through the lens of each principle. Throughout the guide, you'll find reflection questions and practice exercises designed to encourage introspection and practical application. These exercises are intended to help you and your organization reflect on current practices, identify areas for growth, and co-create actionable steps toward transformative solidarity.

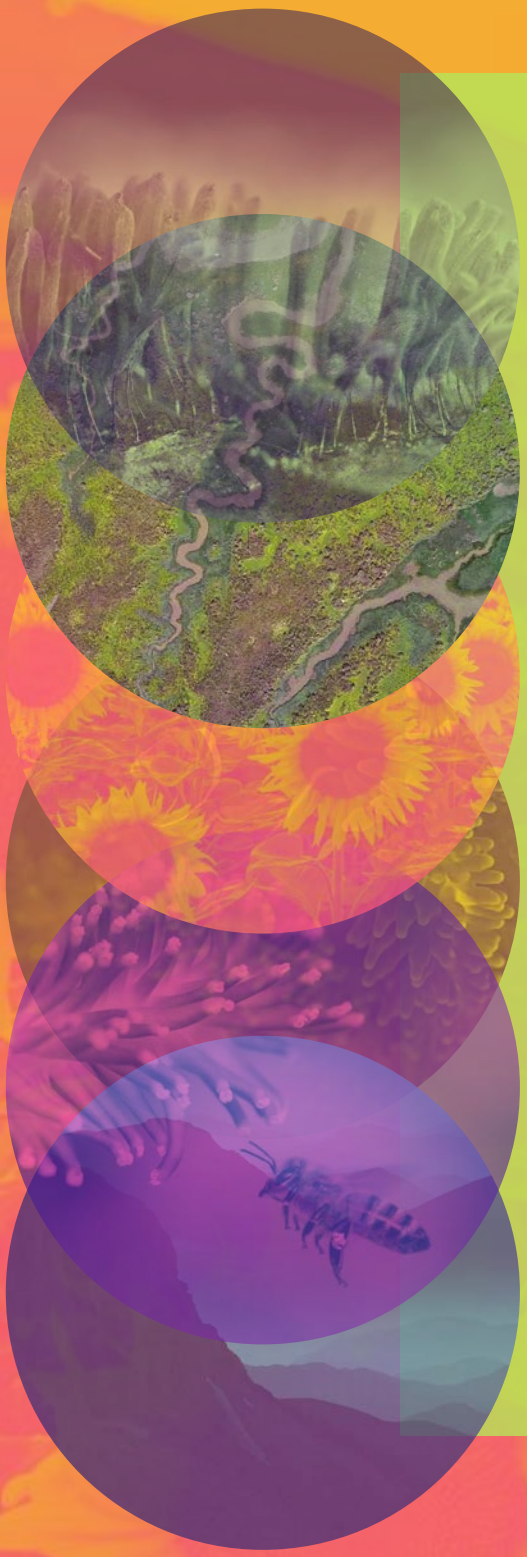
At the end of each section, you'll also find a curated list of additional resources, including books, articles, podcasts, and online tools. These resources are selected to deepen your knowledge and provide additional support as you implement each principle.

This practice guide is designed to be flexible and adaptable to your learning needs. You can move through the guide in a linear way, starting from the introduction and moving through each section in sequence. You can also explore the guide in a non-linear way, focusing on the sections most relevant to your current interests or challenges. Whether you're drawn to specific principles like "Connections & Commonalities," want to delve into practical exercises and tools, or are interested in field studies, you can navigate directly to those parts that resonate most with you and your organization.

We hope that this guide will be a resource for ongoing learning and reflection, allowing you to revisit and engage with different sections as your learning journey evolves. Whether you choose a linear or non-linear path, we encourage you to use this guide as a living document that grows with you and your organizational needs.







CONNECTIONS

COMMONALITIES

CENTERING

CO-CONSPIRATORSHIP

CO-LIBERATION

CAPACITY & CONFLICT

CONNECTIONS & COMMONALITIES

WHAT IS THIS PRINCIPLE?

Connections and commonalities are foundational principles of transformative solidarity. When we highlight our connections and commonalities, we reinforce the shared experiences, values, struggles, and liberatory visions that can bridge individuals and communities across diverse backgrounds. People from marginalized groups often experience commonalities across our shared experiences of inequity, oppression, and violence. Commonalities can include the overlapping systems of oppression and discrimination, as well as the histories of resistance and resilience that transcend our individual differences. These principles weave throughlines between issues, geographies, communities, and movements. By acknowledging our connections and commonalities, our organizations and coalitions can build bridges, amplify voices, and ignite collaborative efforts to confront division and polarization that seek to divide us.

Building connections and commonalities can empower more of us to move together, leverage our collective power to dismantle oppressive systems, and co-create a world where our rights, dignity, and well-being are honored and celebrated. A just and equitable society needs our connections to thrive.

CONNECTIONS & COMMONALITIES

When identifying connections and commonalities, it is important to recognize that such similarities are not identical across individuals or groups. Often, there is a tendency to flatten or equate common experiences, or even an inclination to render them in a hierarchy (sometimes referred to as the "Oppression Olympics"). These narratives tend to create distance and divide community members. Practicing transformative solidarity based on commonalities and connections requires us to acknowledge that each story has unique experiences and perspectives, while recognizing that inequitable systems and policies are at the root of oppression and trauma. Connections are possible through meaningful relationship building within our communities, where we ground in our shared experiences of both oppression and liberation without flattening or equating them.

RESOURCES FOR FURTHER READING

- The Combahee River Collective, a Black feminist lesbian organization active in the United States from 1974 to 1980, has long emphasized the significance of intersectionality as a guiding principle and practice in movement work: *"We realize that the liberation of all oppressed peoples necessitates the destruction of the political-economic systems of capitalism and imperialism as well as patriarchy."*

- Palestinian and Black movements for liberation have long been connected due to deliberate efforts by Palestinian and Black organizers to build relationships, trust, shared analyses, and similar narratives. In *Ferguson Is Everywhere*, Deepa Iyer highlights the Palestinian American solidarity that she witnessed in Ferguson in the wake of the murder of Michael Brown. The chapter is part of Iyer's book, *We Too Sing America: South Asian, Arab, Muslim, and Sikh Immigrants Shape Our Multiracial Future* (The New Press, 2015).

CONNECTIONS & COMMONALITIES

EXAMPLES

CONSIDER THIS:

CONNECTIONS

People with disabilities may share experiences of ableism and discrimination in a society that often fails to listen to bodies. We rarely create accessibility with care and without punishment. Our bodies and abilities are diverse, yet we frequently face social and healthcare barriers that try to contort and shrink our varied individual experiences into a narrow, ableist understanding of bodies. These barriers often create connected experiences of inequitable access to education, employment, public space, and community among people with and without disabilities, opening the door for deeper understanding.

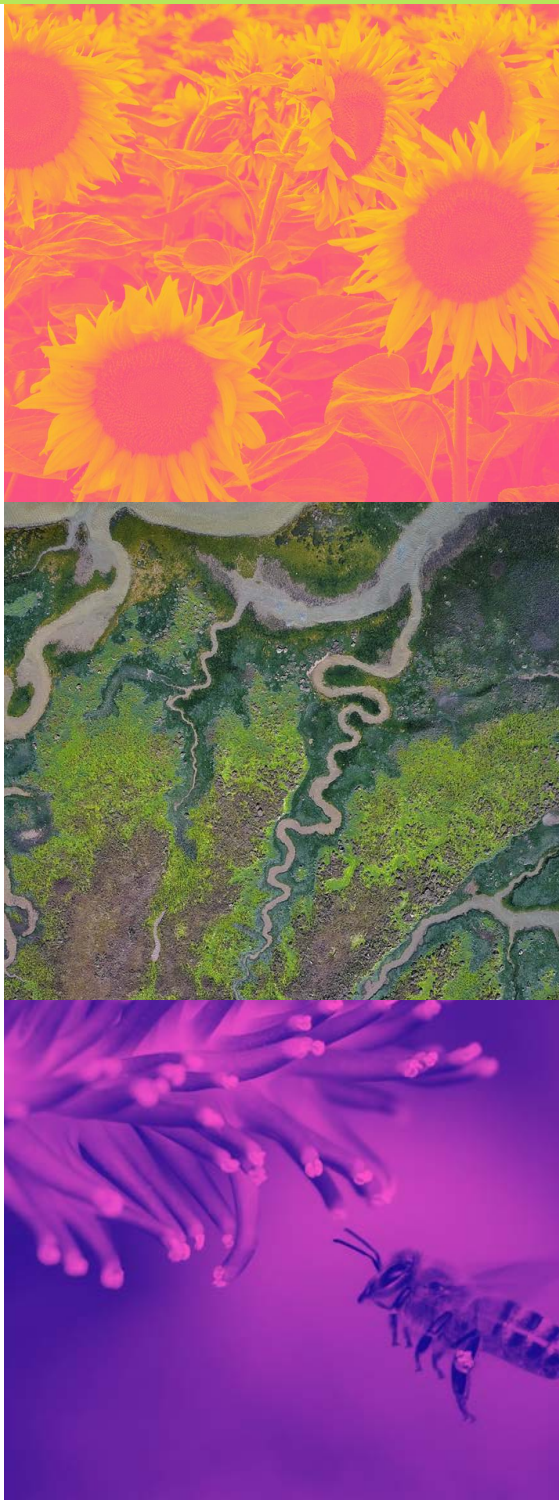
COMMONALITIES

Organizations in the immigrant rights movement bring together different immigrant communities, from undocumented students to LGBTQ migrants to workers on H1B visas. What do these communities have in common? Immigrant rights organizers emphasize that the challenging and traumatic migration experiences shared by people of different immigration statuses often share roots in the inequitable and unjust immigration system. These commonalities - both in terms of personal experience and in relation to an oppressive institution - can be opportunities to bridge differences and can even draw attention to whose stories are allowed to be centered or addressed and whose stories are invisibilized and ignored.

WHAT HAPPENS WHEN WE DON'T HAVE CONNECTIONS AND COMMONALITIES?

When communities, social justice organizations, and coalitions lack connections and commonalities, our collective impact can be significantly hindered. The absence of connections can lead to fragmented efforts, duplicated initiatives, and diluted messages, ultimately undermining our collective ability to create powerful and cohesive movements. In a political landscape where collaboration is vital, the absence of connections and commonalities among social justice organizations can impede our collective capacity to win.

For example, imagine a coalition of organizations working to address climate change. Suppose the groups within the coalition do not establish connections and commonalities among themselves in terms of understanding their core values, personal and collective histories, analyses, and motivations. Their collective advocacy efforts might lack a unified front when engaging with policymakers, the media, and local communities. The absence of cohesive messages relevant to the communities they serve could lead to confusion and dilution of the coalition's core outcomes. This leaves room for opponents and infiltrators to exploit divisions and undermine the coalition's collective power. We can look to real-world examples like Mijente and Familia: Trans Queer Liberation Movement, who share a vision of dismantling the systems of oppression we live under to radically transform our world for the better.



WHAT CONNECTIONS ARE ALREADY GROWING IN YOUR COMMUNITY?

WHO ELSE IS GROWING CONNECTIONS WITH YOUR COMMUNITY?

WHAT ARE THEY WORKING TOWARDS?

HOW IT'S DONE: EXPERIENCES FROM THE FIELD

FIELD STUDY #1

SUPREME COURT OVERTURNS AFFIRMATIVE ACTION

For nearly 50 years, the Supreme Court affirmed that race can be one of many factors considered in college admissions to create diverse campus communities that benefit all students. But, in June 2023, the United States Supreme Court ruled that race-conscious admissions programs at Harvard and the University of North Carolina are unconstitutional. The decision was the culmination of a long-standing campaign against affirmative action.

The conservative groups behind the effort to dismantle affirmative action in the education context intentionally used some Asian Americans as part of their strategy, pushing harmful tropes such as the model minority myth to sell a story that affirmative action hurts Asian American students. From a solidarity perspective, these messages fueled tensions between Black and Asian American communities. In response, a wide coalition of groups - including Asian American organizations - pushed back. They called out the use of affirmative action as a racial wedge, a device commonly used by oppressive systems and actors to pit communities against one another (in most instances, harming Black communities). Groups such as Chinese for Affirmative Action, Southeast Asia Resource Action Center (SEARAC), and Empowering Pacific Islander Communities (EPIC) highlighted the fact that while all students deserve the opportunity to access higher education, Black, Latinx, Indigenous, Southeast Asian, Native Hawaiian, and Pacific Islander students are more frequently denied a fair shot because of systemic racism in the U.S. education system - and that affirmative action is a necessary step towards addressing these generational iniquities.

HOW IT'S DONE: EXPERIENCES FROM THE FIELD

FIELD STUDY #2

IMMIGRANT RIGHTS GROUPS ADVOCATE FOR REFUGE FOR ALL ASYLUM-SEEKERS

In April 2022, the Biden administration unveiled Uniting for Ukraine, a program welcoming Ukrainians fleeing the war waged by Russia and providing a pathway for Ukrainian citizens and their immediate family members to come to the U.S. and stay temporarily in a 2-year period of parole. Immigrant and human rights advocates celebrated the decision, noting that Ukrainians deserve the chance to seek safety in the U.S.

At the same time, groups such as the Haitian Bridge Alliance pointed out the racist double standard with which the U.S. government treats migrants from other parts of the world, particularly in countries with non-white populations. Guerline Jozef, Co-founder and Executive Director of Haitian Bridge Alliance, said in a statement: *"We welcome the announcement that humanitarian parole has been extended to Ukrainians and the Ukrainian community; no person or family should ever live in fear of being sent back to danger—and in some cases, death. We call on the administration to live up to its commitment to racial justice and ensure that this welcoming gesture is extended to countries that have also been ravaged by extreme violence, war, and poverty including Haiti, Cameroon, Nicaragua and Somalia, among others."*

This statement highlights how it is vital to understand the connections that force migrants to flee their own countries to seek protection in the United States - and underscores the importance of treating all migrants fairly and equitably.

Practice: How to Build Solidarity via Connections and Commonalities

When seeking to bring together community members of different backgrounds - class, caste, race, gender identity, immigration status, for example - start by identifying what individuals might have in common.

Activity: Consider a timeline exercise (see below) that identifies different historical events of significance to various communities. Engage in a conversation that acknowledges what community members might have in common. For example, a timeline around the global War on Terror in the wake of the September 11th attacks might find that as Muslim and Arab community members experienced profiling and hate violence, Latinx community members navigated immigration enforcement at the borders. What commonalities might these differing experiences share in response to a historic event such as 9/11? What was the role of the state in creating situations that affected Muslim, Arab, and Latinx communities?

Facilitating an interactive timeline exercise can be one method to build connections and commonalities across social identities, from ethnic/racial groups, class, caste, geography, generations, and beyond.

Materials needed:

- Pre-populated community history moments (see facilitator prep below)
- If virtual: Padlet or another interactive platform
- If in-person: flipchart paper or butcher paper and painter tape, post-its, pens

BUILDING CONNECTIONS AND COMMONALITIES ACROSS COMMUNITY MEMBERS: TIMELINE EXERCISE

Facilitator prep:

1) Choose a community and timeframe to focus on. For example, in a workshop with Asian American youth, facilitators might research moments from Asian American community history and solidarity for each decade between the 1960s and present-day.
2) Choose 2 or 3 moments per decade. Pre-populate a timeline (on flipchart paper along a wall, if in-person; or using virtual tools such as a Padlet or Jamboard if virtual) with short summaries of each moment.

Facilitate the activity:

1) Initial gallery walk - Invite participants to do a "gallery walk" and review the timeline as is, with the pre-populated moments (sharing the caveat that the timeline is not comprehensive).
2) Add to the timeline - After participants complete their gallery walk, they can use post-it notes to add their thoughts in response to the pre-populated events, as well as their own personal and community histories.

   Sample prompts:

   a) What additional history or solidarity moments are meaningful to you or your community?
   b) What are important milestone moments from your personal/family/community history?
   c) How did specific moments/events affect you, your family, and/or your community?

3) Final gallery walk - participants review the collaborative timeline one more time.

4) Debrief - facilitators lead the participants in a discussion on what connections and commonalities they noticed or learned about during the activity.

BUILDING CONNECTIONS ACROSS ORGANIZATIONS

GUIDED QUESTIONS & REFLECTIONS

Articulating who is a part of your community, what they do, and if they are aligned with your mission can be a huge asset for an organization. The following questions and points of reflection can be answered at all levels of the organization. The goal of these questions is to:

- **Assess current connections:** Identify existing connections within your community, including other movement groups, business owners, community leaders, etc.
- **Find opportunities:** Explore areas and opportunities to build new connections and strengthen solidarity with potential partners and allies.

CONNECTIONS

- **Who in your community is already building connections? What are their goals?**
- **Who are your close partners? What do you offer each other?**
- **Who do you regularly collaborate with? What are the strengths and growth edges of your partnership?**
- **Who could you collaborate with more? Why are they valuable?**
- **Who is your dream collaborator(s)? Why are they a good fit?**

CONNECTIONS

COMMONALITIES

CENTERING

CO-CONSPIRATORSHIP

CO-LIBERATION

CAPACITY & CONFLICT

CENTERING

WHAT IS THIS PRINCIPLE?

Individuals often describe centering as an experience of being seen, heard, acknowledged, and validated. In social movements, when we practice centering for solidarity, we listen, validate, and follow the lead of those closest to the experiences of inequity and injustice in developing campaign demands and systemic solutions. This approach respects the dignity and humanity of marginalized communities and recognizes the profound wisdom that arises from their lived experiences and histories. The practice of centering also ensures that the leadership, demands and solutions of a campaign, policy, or practice are grounded in the realities faced by communities who are most impacted, thereby making them more effective, relevant, and sustainable. Centering is not just a moral imperative; rather, it is a strategic and transformative approach to social change that makes liberation possible for more of us and, ultimately, all of us.

DESCRIBE A TIME WHEN YOU EXPERIENCED BEING CENTERED. HOW DID THAT EXPERIENCE MAKE YOU FEEL?

COME UP WITH A FEW EXAMPLES OF HOW MOVEMENTS OR ORGANIZATIONS CENTER COMMUNITIES AND ISSUES. FOR EXAMPLE, WHAT DO HASHTAGS LIKE #BLACKLIVESMATTER AND #NOMUSLIMBANEVER SIGNIFY IN TERMS OF WHO IS BEING CENTERED?

CENTERING REQUIRES US TO...

CO-LEARN

An ongoing commitment to understanding the root causes of injustice, acknowledging historical contexts and learning from the lived experiences of marginalized groups. Co-learning encourages empathy, compassion, and shared political alignment. It means that we wait to respond or take action, in order to invest time in understanding the perspectives, histories, and demands of the communities we wish to center.

CO-DESIGN

Acknowledges that those closest to the issues often hold the most valuable insights and need to actively participate in designing and implementing collaborative interventions that lead to meaningful change.

CO-GOVERN AND SHARE POWER

Highlights the need to shift harmful power dynamics within social justice movements by redistributing power to ensure that marginalized communities comprise a significant part of decision-making processes, leadership roles, and resource allocation.

DEDICATE TIME

Recognizes that we need dedicated time to build relationships, foster trust, and develop shared vision and practice. This precious resource in the fast-paced world of movement-building opens up more space for us to proactively and strategically plan for the path ahead and cultivate sustainable ways of being that support our movements in existing long-term.

SIT WITH DISCOMFORT

While centering seems like an easy practice to adopt, it can sometimes be uncomfortable. For example, there might be times when two marginalized communities with opposing asks seek out your organization's support. How would you navigate that situation?

EXAMPLES

HERE ARE SOME REAL-LIFE ORGANIZATIONAL EXAMPLES OF CENTERING...

A neighborhood-based organization is asked to respond to hate violence.

→ The organization asks survivors to share their needs and demands before taking a policy position on investigating or prosecuting hate violence.

A regional public health and racial equity organization is researching the impact of COVID-19.

→ The organization pays stipends to focus group and survey participants; asks participants for questions that should be asked; and returns to participants with results before sharing publicly.

A national policy organization is asked to support a bill in Congress.

→ The organization builds relationships with trusted community groups who bring constituent voices to help make Beltway decisions.

An organization works with various groups under a broad umbrella race "category."

→ Instead of relying on the broad umbrella, the organization explicitly names the communities they serve.

ORGANIZATIONAL CENTERING DO'S AND DON'TS

WHAT ARE COMMON MISSTEPS AROUND CENTERING?

Even when our organizations and movements hold the intention to center communities closest to injustice, we are prone to making missteps. Here are some examples of common organizational missteps.

INFORMING COMMUNITY VS. BEING INFORMED BY COMMUNITY

- Bringing community in and prescribing organization's solutions
- Erasing or rewriting community histories and stories
- Being guided by the goals and timelines of philanthropic institutions and funders

MARGINALIZING VS. INCLUDING

- Using staff, board members or social media as proxies for community input
- Extracting information, history, and stories from community members
- Using surveys and focus groups as proxies for community engagement

EXCLUDING VS. MAKING SPACE AND CREATING ACCESS

- Gatekeeping information and relationships
- Not providing meaningful access (i.e. linguistic access, paid stipends, meeting times to accommodate people's work and family schedules)
- Leaving once the engagement is over and not returning
- Taking shortcuts because of external drivers and deadlines (i.e. philanthropic timelines, movement moments and crises that require immediate responses in terms of policy or media)

WHO DOES YOUR ORGANIZATION CENTER IN YOUR WORK AND WHY?

WHO GETS CENTERED ON PAPER? WHO GETS CENTERED IN PRACTICE? ARE THESE ANSWERS THE SAME? WHY OR WHY NOT?

IN REVIEWING THE COMMON ORGANIZATIONAL MISSTEPS, WHICH ONES RESONATE?

WHAT COULD YOU/YOUR ORGANIZATION/COALITION DO TO BE MORE AWARE OF THESE MISSTEPS AND TO PREVENT THEM FROM OCCURRING FREQUENTLY?

GUIDING QUESTIONS TO STRENGTHEN ORGANIZATIONAL PRACTICES

CLARIFY WHO OUR ORGANIZATION CENTERS AND WHY

- How do we articulate or express whom we center?
- Who is not centered? Do we need to make clear why?
- Does our organization's name/vision/purpose statements contain accurate information about whom we center?

STRENGTHEN OUR RELATIONSHIPS WITH CENTERED COMMUNITY MEMBERS

- Where do we get our information?
- What feedback loop do we have that engages community members to share input?
- How do we shift power to centered community members so we aren't showing up in extractive or transactional ways?

CLARIFY OUR VALUES AND PRINCIPLES WHEN BEGINNING A CAMPAIGN OR RESPONDING TO A MOVEMENT MOMENT

- Who is informing/shaping the goals or narratives?
- Are centered community members at decision-making tables with a voice?
- What support and resources do community member-leaders need?

FIELD STUDY #1

CENTERING THE LEADERSHIP OF NATIVE RESIDENTS OF THE LITTLE EARTH COMMUNITY, EAST PHILLIPS NEIGHBORHOOD IN MINNEAPOLIS, MINNESOTA

The East Phillips neighborhood in Minneapolis, Minnesota, is one of the city's most diverse neighborhoods, and includes Little Earth Community, an Indigenous-preference housing complex that has its roots in the American Indian Movement in the 1970s. Unsurprisingly, the area is one of the most polluted neighborhoods in the state: bordered by two major highways, a foundry, and an asphalt mixing plant, it was declared a federal superfund site from 2007-2017. East Phillips' residents have some of the state's highest levels of asthma, lead poisoning, and heart disease.

When the Roof Depot warehouse building in the heart of East Phillips went up for sale in 2014, residents envisioned turning the structure into a space that would serve the community, with an indoor urban farm, local businesses, and affordable housing. While Minneapolis had committed to reducing pollution in its most diverse neighborhoods like East Phillips, the city instead purchased the Roof Depot in 2016, with plans to demolish it and expand its public works facility, which would have brought more city vehicles and pollution to the area.

As residents continued to push back against the city's plans, the East Phillips Neighborhood Institute (EPNI) was eventually formed to advocate a vision informed by the community closest to the issue. Over the years, a diverse coalition of Native, Latino, Somali, and other local community groups organized, door knocked across the city, built relationships and gained support from teacher and labor unions, nonprofit groups, health organizations and arts and cultural organizations, as well as elected officials.

Photo credit: Earth Day march on April 22, 2023. Photo by Devon Young Cupery.

FIELD STUDY #1, CONTINUED

In February 2023, six days before demolition was scheduled to begin, a group of East Phillips community members and supporters staged a peaceful protest at the Roof Depot site, setting up Camp Nenookaasi (Ojibwe for hummingbird) during a snowstorm. Shortly after, the city of Minneapolis was ordered by a court to halt its demolition plans, giving EPNI time to advocate for state funding to buy the land and Roof Depot back from the city. In May 2023, the Minnesota state legislature agreed to allocate about $6.5 million in funding to purchase the site and relocate the city's proposed public works facility.

By centering the leadership of Native residents of the Little Earth community in East Phillips, including mothers, grandmas, and aunties, EPNI was able to envision, organize, and win their campaign to keep the Roof Depot and begin developing a cooperatively owned, solar-powered indoor farm, housing complex, and community hub. As of fall 2024, EPNI is raising funds towards development of the site, and seeking volunteers to support translating and interpreting, solidarity work with other local environmental justice movements, and more.

Photo credit: Nicole Perez with her granddaughter. Photo by Drew Arrieta, 2023.

DO/EMBODY: PRACTICE

A lot of wisdom already lives in our organizations around centering. One of the best ways to access this wisdom is by asking and listening deeply to what our communities might need to feel seen, heard, acknowledged, and validated. While it might sound obvious, many organizations skip this critical step or rush through it quickly because it might not align with the immediacy of organizational goals or timelines.

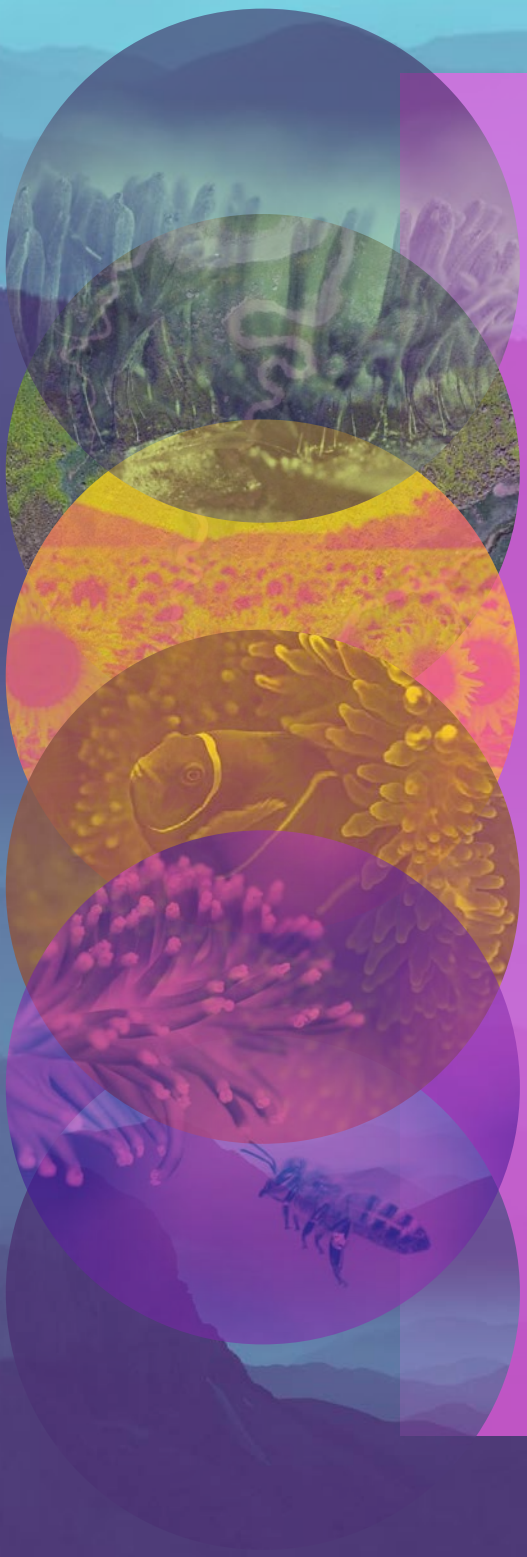
Incorporating the experiences of marginalized communities is not just about ticking off a box; it's about building trust and genuine partnerships. It's about acknowledging that the best solutions often emerge when those closest to the issues are heard and honored. So, let's linger in this crucial phase, engaging in sincere connections that harness the collective wisdom that resides both within our organizations and the communities we aim to serve, forging a path towards more inclusive and effective change.

Below are some additional examples and a worksheet on how you might practice centering better in your organizations

- Identify pathways for meaningful presence and participation by centered communities
- Provide centered communities with full information about issues, options & resources to engage and open doors
- Provide feedback loops & accountability mechanism
- Co-learning, Co-designing, Co-decision making
- Include and empower community members in leadership positions (ie. advisory groups/ boards)
- Be aware of positional power
- Being in "right relationship": showing up time and again; recognizing complexity and intersectionality; expressing empathy
- Sharing power, information, resources
- Creating containers/ infrastructure for community engagement
- Practicing empathy, active listening, humility.
- Using organizational status/ reputation/ weight to push others
- Showing up when community invites you to show up
- Asking for space and time with external stakeholders
- Put resources into centering. For example, in multilingual communities, allocate budget for in-language resources, interpreters, translators.
- Developing a trauma-informed lens when centering community and for org staff (being mindful of "vicarious trauma", for example)
- Build relationships before moments of crisis
- Developing an organizational crisis response plan that leans on relationships already built with community
- Balance a healthy skepticism of tools, systems, status with openness to trying new ways of working

CENTERING WORKSHEET

SOLIDARITY SUMMITS CENTERING REFLECTION HANDOUT



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CO-CONSPIRATORSHIP & CO-LIBERATION

WHAT ARE THE PRINCIPLES?

"IF YOU HAVE COME HERE TO HELP ME, YOU ARE WASTING YOUR TIME. BUT IF YOU HAVE COME BECAUSE YOUR LIBERATION IS BOUND UP WITH MINE, THEN LET US WORK TOGETHER."
— ABORIGINAL RIGHTS ACTIVISTS, QUEENSLAND, AUSTRALIA, 1970S

CO-CONSPIRATORSHIP

In the journey toward justice, we need co-conspirators committed to the collective struggle for liberation. This path calls for a deep understanding of our interconnected struggles, an openness to listen and learn, a commitment to accountability, and an allegiance to working together with empathy and shared purpose.

Consider This:
All three words have been interchangeably used by movements to describe how people who are not directly affected by a type of harm can step forward to take action in some shape or form. Co-conspirators, allies, and accomplices are not bystanders or fence-sitters. They are not neutral or silent. Instead, they take actions that can sometimes put them at physical, reputational, financial, or positional risk because they believe strongly in a broader vision for justice and liberation.

CO-CONSPIRATORSHIP & CO-LIBERATION

WHAT ARE THE PRINCIPLES?

CO-CONSPIRATORSHIP, CONTINUED

We practice co-conspiratorship by moving from acknowledging and rejecting our privileges to actively using the resources at our disposal to redistribute power. This requires taking risks and working to shift power to directly affected communities. In the words of Bettina Love, abolitionist academic and writer, "to be a co-conspirator is to take risks for somebody. To put something on the line."

Co-conspirators practice active listening and follow the lead of those most directly impacted by systems of oppression. Understanding that mistakes are part of the journey, we prioritize learning and adapting over defensiveness or shame. This means we engage in the work continuously, not just in moments of crisis, but fostering relationships before, during, and after a movement moment. Co-conspirators recognize the need for co-liberation and approach solidarity with respect and humility.

The commitment to co-conspiratorship is deeply rooted in the wisdom of Black and Indigenous communities, who have long used these strategies for mutual survival. For centuries, our ancestors have taught us that we can practice co-conspiratorship by proactively embracing, uplifting, and creating space for Black and Indigenous leadership, experience, and demands. Historically, white abolitionists like John Brown and William Lloyd Garrison actively worked alongside Black leaders like Harriet Tubman and Frederick Douglass. They took significant risks, including participating in armed resistance, to challenge the institution of slavery and support the liberation of enslaved African Americans.

Similarly, modern co-conspirators must be willing to take risks and make sacrifices by using their positions of privilege to challenge oppressive systems and give up comfort for the pursuit of justice and equality. For example, white women in Louisville, Kentucky, formed a barrier between Black activists and local police in the wake of the murder of Breonna Taylor, risking arrest and bodily harm. Jewish Americans stopped traffic on highways and disrupted business as usual in Congress to call attention to the genocide in Palestine, risking reputational and personal attacks. In the campaigns to pass anti-caste discrimination bills around the United States, many people, including Hindus, contributed testimony, wrote op-eds, and advocated within their own communities to highlight the harmful impact of the caste system. These are just some of the many examples of how co-conspirators can utilize their privilege and take reputational risks in order to bring about co-liberation.

CO-LIBERATION

Imagine a world where we receive what we need to survive and thrive.
What do you see? What is possible? Who do we become?

Co-liberation invites us to foster spaces for dialogue, understanding, and shared learning. This enables us to explore our differences and similarities, allowing for a more profound connection based on mutual respect and empathy. The journey to co-liberation not only addresses external inequities; it is a path that calls for internal transformation. Co-liberation involves re-evaluating our beliefs and biases, understanding how we contribute to systemic injustices, and actively working to make changes within ourselves, even while we work in partnership with each other.

For all of us to be free, we must challenge and unlearn the oppressive systems within and around us. This is not a one-time act but a continuous process of reflection, accountability, and action. Our commitment to co-liberation requires facing uncomfortable truths and showing up for justice over and over and over again.

For over three decades, the Combahee River Collective has inspired movements to practice co-liberation by moving beyond single-issue movements and advocating for solidarity across different yet connected struggles. They have taught us to practice co-liberation by believing in the collective 'us' - recognizing that our liberation is intertwined, and we must work together towards our mutual freedom and redistribution of power. This means acknowledging the multi-generational consequences of white supremacy, anti-Black racism, and settler colonialism.

One powerful embodiment of this principle is the Transgender Law Center's Trans Agenda for Liberation, which addresses the urgent political, legal, and social violence enacted against trans communities while channeling trans imagination to bring bold and liberatory visions to life. They do this by recognizing the inextricable links between migrant justice, disability justice, racial justice, environmental justice, reproductive justice, economic justice, and gender justice and illuminating how an agenda for trans liberation is a blueprint for liberation for all.

RESOURCES

In this IG live, Deepa Iyer spoke with Janeen Comenote of the National Urban Indian Family Coalition. They discussed the impact of #COVID19 on Native communities, the voting power of Native folks, the ingenuity of youth activists and leaders, and the concept of co-liberation.

In this Solidarity Story, Tavae Samuelu of Empowering Pacific Islander Communities names that in practicing co-liberation across Asian American and Pacific Islander communities, “empire and imperialism cannot be the thing that connects us. It cannot be the thing that we share. So when we talk about co-liberation... freedom has to be the thing that we share.”

RESOURCES FOR FURTHER READING:

- *The Difference Between Allies, Accomplices, and Co-Conspirators May Surprise You*
- *How White Americans can Fight Racism*
- *Making The Transition from Ally to Co-conspirator - MJ Kinell*
- *Punished for Dreaming by Bettina Love is an invitation to listen, critique, heal, and fight for the world we deserve.*

FREEDOM RIDERS, 1961

In the spring of 1961, student activists from the Congress of Racial Equity (CORE) launched the Freedom Rides to challenge segregation on interstate buses and bus terminals. From May until November of that year, more than 400 Black and white Americans from all over the U.S. traveled together on buses and trains throughout southern cities, where they were met with brutal and violent opposition by white residents, the KKK, and police. While the U.S. Supreme Court had ruled segregation illegal, segregation was still actively enforced in southern cities, and the Freedom Riders' commitment to non-violent direct action forced a national reckoning with the Jim Crow South. Black and white students were eventually joined by teachers, housewives, and ministers, sitting together on interstate buses and trains, public spaces in terminals, and whites-only restaurants in the South.

U.S. National Park Service, CC0, via Wikimedia Commons

Ser Amantio di Nicolao, CC BY-SA 4.0, via Wikimedia Commons

FIELD STUDY

Volunteers who answered the call for riders underwent nonviolent direct action training, and those "who could not refrain from striking back when pushed, hit, spit on or doused with liquids while racial epithets rang in their ears were rejected." Police arrested Black activists who used white restrooms and waiting rooms at bus depots and arrested whites if they used "colored" facilities. The Freedom Riders, who anticipated these arrests, responded with a strategy they called "jail, no bail." This was an intentional effort to fill prison cells and create chaos in the "justice" system, with the greater aim of pressuring the government to enforce desegregation in the South. In Jackson, Mississippi, most of the 300 riders "would endure six weeks in sweltering jail or prison cells rife with mice, insects, soiled mattresses and open toilets."

Throughout the South, the Freedom Riders endured savage beatings, fire bombings, arrest, and imprisonment. Because of the commitment made by both Black and white riders taking interstate buses together, entering bus depots together, and getting arrested together, the movement soon gained the attention of media across the U.S. and the world, leading to increased involvement of northerners joining the rides. In May 1961, U.S. Attorney General Robert F. Kennedy petitioned the Interstate Commerce Commission to draw up national rules guaranteeing "the unquestioned right of all persons to travel through the various states without being subjected to discrimination." The rules took effect that November. Even after the Freedom Rides concluded, the campaign continued to raise consciousness. The Freedom Riders, who were led by Black students from the South and joined as co-conspirators by Northern riders and white riders, show us what non-violent direct action can accomplish when risks are made and movements follow the lead of those most impacted by violent and oppressive systems.

Creating a New World through Co-Liberation & Co-Conspiratorship

This worksheet is designed to help you:

- Dream up world, a vision in which we've won the liberation of all peoples
- Understand what this vision requires us to do to make it a reality

"There is no single answer that will solve all of our future problems. There's no magic bullet. Instead there are thousands of answers–at least. You can be one of them if you choose to be." - Octavia Butler

Co-liberation invites us to foster spaces for dialogue, understanding and shared learning. This enables us to explore our differences and similarities, allowing for a more profound connection based on mutual respect and empathy. This journey is not just about addressing external inequities but also about internal transformation. It involves re-evaluating our own beliefs and biases, understanding how they contribute to systemic injustices, and actively working to change them.

Creating a New Future

Using the Vision of your organization let's take a moment to imagine what a World 200 years in the future looks like in which all people are liberated and are thriving.

Drawing inspiration from Octavia Butler's "Rules for Predicting the Future," take a moment to answer the following questions. The rules she outlines are:

1. Learn from the past
2. Respect the law of consequence
3. Be aware of your perspective
4. Count on the Surprises

CO-CONSPIRATORSHIP & CO-LIBERATION WORKSHEET

CONNECTIONS

COMMONALITIES

CENTERING

CO-CONSPIRATORSHIP

CO-LIBERATION

CAPACITY & CONFLICT

CONFLICT & CAPACITY

WHAT ARE THESE PRINCIPLES?

As we work to transform the violent conditions that impact our communities, we can get caught in the crossfire between justice and oppression. Surviving within and fighting against a capitalistic, white supremacist society impacts us--from the stress that fundamentally modifies the makeup of our cells to the trauma that reshapes entire generations to the burnout that diminishes our capacity to organize. Changemakers within social movements are experiencing a crisis of well-being, with an alarming increase in suicide, depression, and long-term illnesses among organizers, many of whom lack access to health insurance or adequate care. The crisis is compounded by systemic conditions of trauma, violence, and conflict in communities that are under-resourced and often alienated from healing practices due to the privatization and profit-driven motives of Western health models.

Despite these hurdles, there is immense power in building our collective capacity. Growing our capacity for sustainability in our movements means prioritizing our well-being not just as a personal act, but as a political one. The resilience of each member of our organization is integral to our movement's overall strength and sustainability in doing our work both today and decades from now with interconnectedness, community and individual care, patience, grace, and joy. Centering our capacity invites us to re-evaluate how we structure our movement-building efforts and campaigns, urging a move away from glorifying overwork and self-sacrifice towards practices that honor care, sustainability, and healing as revolutionary acts. By embedding these values into the fabric of our movements, we enhance our capacity not only to organize but to model the transformation we are fighting for.

CONFLICT & CAPACITY, CONTINUED

Kindred, one of the leading organizations that have helped our movements recenter healing and sustainability, is a Southern healing justice collective formed in 2005. The organization emerged as a response to the crisis of trauma, violence, and systemic social conditions in the South, spearheaded by Cara Page and other Atlanta-based healers and organizers. Following Hurricane Katrina's devastation, the urgency to address the emotional, physical, and spiritual impacts of trauma intensified. Kindred's mission, developed during the 2006 Southeast Social Forum and the 2007 US Social Forum, focuses on honoring healing traditions as liberation tools, envisioning a world free from trauma, violence, and abuse, and creating sustainable, transformative healing models for the physical, environmental, spiritual, and emotional well-being of communities and movements. The collective aims to centralize healing resources, respond to trauma in Southern movements through holistic healing models, and create new healing models within a social justice framework to support organizer well-being and the sustenance of movement organizations.

Building our capacity also includes growing our ability to navigate conflict. Too often, we can wield tools from racial capitalism to fight against each other in ways that breed more punishment, competition, and violence. Conflicts are inevitable in movement organizations. They can create challenges such as distrust, fragmented relationships, stagnation, and lack of accountability. Conflict can also open up pathways that fortify how organizations are able to clarify their values and goals, innovate, deepen trust and relationships, and be accountable.

WHAT CAUSES CONFLICT IN ORGANIZATIONS?

Conflicts in organizations often arise from incompatible, ambiguous, and/or disagreeing perspectives on values, leadership styles, decision-making authority, resource allocation, pace, strategy, and skills and competence. Which of these do you see practiced in your organization?

WHAT CAUSES CONFLICT IN ORGANIZATIONS?

- **Values:** When individuals and/or organizations have different values and ideas about what's most important, it can cause disagreements about where the organization needs to be headed.
- **Leadership styles**: When leaders don't make their expectations clear or are often inconsistent, it can potentially create confusion and make staff members feel uncertain and ungrounded. Leaders might also disagree on what kinds of styles might be most supportive for the organization; more hands-on or hands-off, hierarchical or collective, more or less community-centered etc.
- **Decision-making authority**: Conflicts can arise when it's not clear who makes what decision and/or who makes the final call. This can lead to power struggles and indifference.
- **Pace:** People work at different speeds. Some might feel rushed by others, while others might get frustrated if work moves too slowly.
- **Strategy and tactics:** Differing opinions on the best path forward, including short—and long-term goals and how to achieve them, can create conflict, especially when there is no straightforward consensus or strategies are not communicated widely and clearly.
- **Skills and competence:** Conflicts can arise when there are real or perceived misalignments around skills and competency, leading to tensions around roles, responsibilities, and contributions to the organization
- **Resource allocation:** When resources are scarce and allocation is not transparent or fair, conflicts can arise that impact how resources are distributed and shared.

Understanding conflict through a transformative justice lens invites us to consider not just our personal responses but also the systemic and organizational approaches to navigating and transforming conflicts. Transformative justice, rooted deeply in principles of healing and restoration, differs significantly from restorative justice by focusing on the transformation of the conditions that enable harm, rather than primarily repairing relationships. This generative approach invites us to understand our individual and organizational conflict styles while building up practices that can support how we are able to meet conflict when it arises.

WHEN CONFLICTS ARISE, WHAT DO YOU AND/OR YOUR ORGANIZATION TEND TO DO?

WHAT IS THIS CONFLICT STYLE TRYING TO TAKE CARE OF (SAFETY, BELONGING, DIGNITY, CONNECTION ETC.)?

HOW HAS THIS CONFLICT STYLE SERVED YOU AND YOUR COMMUNITIES?

HOW HAS THIS CONFLICT STYLE HARMED YOU AND YOUR COMMUNITIES?

CAPACITY FOR GENERATIVE CONFLICT

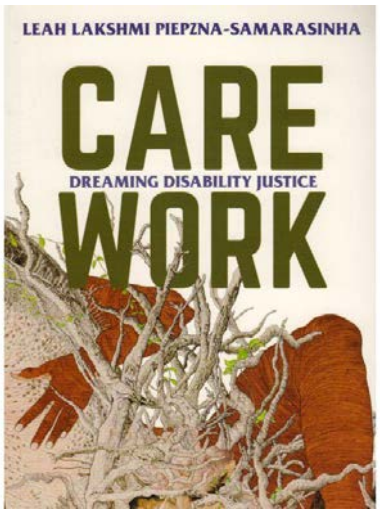
Conflict can be generative. When it takes on this form, it invites individuals and organizations to engage in ways that cultivate more connection, understanding, adaptation, accountability, and healing.

To build up your organization's capacity to be in generative conflict, here are some things to practice. What else would you add?

CAPACITY FOR GENERATIVE CONFLICT

- VISION & VALUES ALIGNMENT
- ROLE CLARIFICATION
- SKILLS & COMPETENCY DEVELOPMENT
- CLEAR DECISION MAKING PROCESS
- BOUNDARIES CLARIFICATION
- ACCOUNTABILITY PROCESS
- FEEDBACK LOOPS
- RELATIONSHIP BUILDING
- INDIVIDUAL/COLLECTIVE HEALING & RESILIENCE PRACTICES

Solidarity Is This podcast episode with Cara Page: *What if we could return to our ancestors who have been left and mismemoried? … We're doing this work together to build a story that we hope ripples into what are the ways we can reckon with past and present to imagine what the future is that we are trying to build… For my other political work* ***as a disruptor of the NIC and as an abolitionist organizer seeking to build collective care as integral to our political liberation****, I wanted to create a ritual, a psalm for these ancestors that wake me up, that I wonder how many stories are untold. What are we willing to grapple with so that we can actually change the points and directions and fractals, if you will, of what's going to happen in the future to our communities and these institutions? How do we make sure we do not disappear our people again? That is the core of this work and of the work of Changing Frequencies* ***to really understand generational trauma can only be reshaped if we can remember what that trauma has been, but also the resilience and the possibility of healing the harm****, whether it's in a more esoteric way through a cultural story or literally going to find our people to take them back.*



Care Work: Dreaming Disability Justice
by Leah Lakshmi Piepzna Samarasinha

Reckoning with Sustainability: Black Leaders Reflect on 2020, the Funding Cliff and Organizing Infrastructure

FIELD STUDY

MINNEAPOLIS, RELATIONSHIPS EVOLVING POSSIBILITIES

In Minneapolis, Relationships Evolving Possibilities (REP) is growing community capacity to respond to crises and care for each other instead of relying on police. They trace their origin story to 2020, when community members Jason Sole and Signe Harriday worked together on crisis response in the early days of the uprising after Minneapolis police murdered George Floyd. Jason and Signe saw a need to make this work more sustainable and strategic, and with fellow organizers, they began to experiment and grow the capacity for collective care, inspired by abolitionist groups in Minneapolis like MPD150 and projects in other cities, like the Bay Area Transformative Justice Collective. Guided by their core values of Black love and liberation, ancestral knowledge, and radical consent, REP supports the formation and fortification of Radical Ecosystem Pods, which are networks of neighbors who can help each other when the need arises. And, through ongoing trainings called "studios," REP supports neighbors in building skills like de-escalation, mental health support, and situational awareness. The group also runs Revolutionary Emergency Partners, a secure community hotline for folks in Minneapolis, as well as a training program for BIPOC community members to gain certified skills in first aid, violence prevention, crisis response, and emergency planning.

DO/EMBODY:
PRACTICE CAPACITY

ECOSYSTEM OF WELL-BEING

COMMUNITIES OF SUPPORT

- Squads
- Spaces
- Education and skills development
- Relationship building
- Coaches
- Peer Support
- Mentors

ORGANIZATIONAL PRACTICES

- Material support (time, funding) for mental health
- Practicing generative conflict
- Naming and dismantling white dominant cultural norms
- Building a culture of equity, inclusion, healing
- Well-being committees
- Sabbaticals

INDIVIDUAL PRACTICES

- Self-care
- Rest
- Reflection
- Creativity
- Joy
- Setting boundaries
- CLarifying own roles

HOW DO WE DEFINE SUSTAINABILITY?

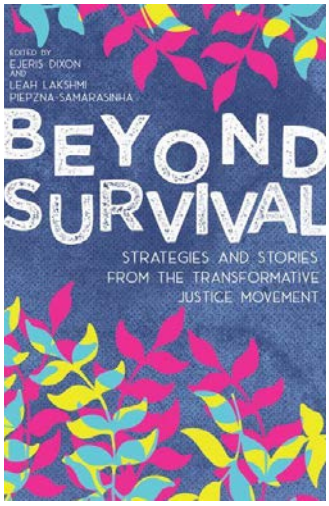
WHAT CONDITIONS NEED TO BE PRESENT FOR SUSTAINABILITY TO BE PRESENT?

WHAT ASSUMPTIONS DO WE MAKE ABOUT SUSTAINABILITY AS IT RELATES TO OUR WORK, OUR COLLEAGUES, AND OUR PARTNERS?

HOW IT'S DONE: EXPERIENCES FROM THE FIELD

Solidarity Is Episode

[Is Generative Conflict Possible?]
"I see accountability as holding people responsible for what they've done, but with a lot of encouragement and support, so that it is not a negation, it is not a punishment... the way that our culture is right now, accountability has become terrifying. When you are held accountable, it feels like, 'wow, this is huge. If I don't do it right, I'm going to be excommunicated from my community that I love.'" - Yuko Uchikawa



Beyond Survival

Strategies and Stories from the Transformative Justice Movement; Ejeris Dixon (Editor); Leah Lakshmi Piepzna-Samarasinha (Editor)

Building Accountable Communities | Barnard Center for Research on Women

Creating Conflict Infrastructure

A group workbook a 90-page workbook for organizations who are considering implementing conflict infrastructure (policies, practices, resources to address conflicts).
In It Together A Framework for Conflict Transformation In Movement-Building Groups

In a two-part series published at *Convergence*, Bryan Mercer and Hannah Sassaman, current and former leaders at Movement Alliance Project (MAP) in Philadelphia, share the process they went through to navigate the conflict, confusion, and tension they were experiencing, both as an organization and as leaders. As MAP struggled to respond to the cycle of crises in 2020, Mercer and Sassaman and their team realized that the organization was at a breaking point, having grown rapidly over the last five years. They had over a dozen different areas of work within the organization, and staff not only felt stretched in many different directions, but also confused about the purpose of the organization. This confusion, which was also shared by the organization's external partners, helped MAP realize that instead of building the capacity of other organizations in the Philadelphia ecosystem, they were "shapeshifting into different forms" in order to be the capacity. MAP made the difficult decision to pause their external work for four months. With the support of an outside facilitator (BJ STAR from Wildfire Project), MAP put trust and strategy at the center of their conversations. By confronting this pattern of conflict avoidance as leaders and as organizational staff and inviting the entire team to be part of this process, MAP was able to get to the root of the issue, eventually emerging transformed and stronger than before.

THE GROWS MODEL

The GROWS model is an adapted framework from coaches Graham Alexander, Alan Fine and Sir John Whitmore that we designed to support how individuals and organizations approach conflicts with more clarity, structure, and alignment. You can modify this tool by adding or removing your own questions as needed.

THE GROWS MODEL

GOALS

What do we value? What are our goals? Why is transforming conflict important to us? What will it make possible? What outcome do we want in our organization and broader community?

REALITY

What social conditions & power dynamics created the conflict? Who are we centering? What capacity do we have? How am I/we contributing to this conflict?

OBSTACLES/OPPORTUNITIES

What obstacles or risks are or could get in the way? What possibilities exist? What do we need to stop, start, or continue doing?

WAY FORWARD

What are our next steps? What is a radically doable timeline? How will we know we are successful? What are our conditions of satisfaction?

SUPPORT

What offers of support have we received? What healing and support do we need? From whom and where? Who needs to know what our plans are? What resistance do I/we have?

PRACTICE GUIDE

SOLIDARITY IS

Building Movement Project

Activating Nonprofits | Fueling Change