RIGHT-SIZED BELONGING

SIX PRACTICES FOR ORGANIZERS

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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INTRODUCTION

WHAT IS BELONGING

Belonging is a fundamental human need that shapes our motivations and actions. In a social movement context, belonging can be defined as people feeling that they are seen, valued, and recognized as part of a larger system or organization.

Belonging is nearly invisible to us when it exists. Just as with other basic needs such as safety and dignity, our need for belonging is most heightened when we feel its absence. The severity with which this absence is felt influences what we do and why. Crises of belonging (or dynamic belonging) can be felt in different nested dimensions: internally, in interpersonal relationships, in communities, and in broader ideas.

Image Description: Atop a sky blue square quilt patch is a sewn sunflower surrounded by broken lined, different colored solar rings. Each ring contains different icons representing what the sunflower needs, including love, a home, a watering can, rain, sun, community. The icons are nested in order to show the the rings of support each individual needs.

"We show up in movement expecting belonging. Movements need to be spaces that get good at belonging, cultivating belonging, because we want to be an invitation, and we want to be a sanctuary, and we want to be a space that can hold and grow the future."

—adrienne maree brown, Distinguished and Singing

Our movement's ability to create the conditions for belonging, without perpetuating subordination and coercion, will determine our strength and cohesion moving forward.

This project is the culmination of a lifetime of wrestling with belonging and a decade of organizing experiments with transgender and queer Asians and Pacific Islanders in Lavender Phoenix[1]. Over the last 18 months I've spoken with over 25 organizers, leaders, facilitators, and strategists across the so-called United States. From these conversations and reflections come six suggested practices for organizations to implement in their own bases and spaces.

TAKING IT HOME

At 17 I was convinced that there was no place for me in this world. Growing up working poor, mentally ill, queer, gender nonconforming, and mixed race–I was told, implicitly and explicitly, that I did not belong.

This understanding remained central even once I got involved in social movement work. As I started to get activated by anti-imperialism organizations and labor solidarity groups, my actions, my drive, my attempts to be perfect were influenced by the fear that I would be cast out at any moment. My belonging was so fragile I felt like I had to perform in order to earn my spot to stay.

My fear-based sense of accountability deeply impacted how I moved throughout the work. I avoided conflict, acted as a people-pleaser, swallowed my emotions and analysis, made excuses for others' misaligned behavior, and minimized myself.

When I joined Lavender Phoenix in 2013 to organize with other transgender and queer Asian and Pacific Islander people, I finally felt a sense of fullness and belonging. We came together as queerdos, gender outlaws, leftists amongst liberals, heart-forward softies, and introverted leaders. We formed relationships as the basis of our organizing, learned how to tell our stories, and emphasized the need to ask for help. The work was personal in the ways that second wave feminists taught us: the personal is political.

And yet, even though I felt a great sense of belonging in our work, to the organization, and with a community that taught me how to trust, it all still felt fragile. Many of the

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1. Lavender Phoenix is a base building organization in the San Francisco Bay Area working towards healing justice, community safety, and strategic movement ecosystems. Through relational organizing, LavNix supports transgender and queer Asian Pacific Islanders to come into their personal and collective power. I was involved in LavNix first as a Summer Intern in 2013, and stayed on staff as an organizer until I served as Executive Director from 2016-2021.

people that came to LavNix questioned their ability to belong anywhere, holding the weight of painful exclusion from families or other political spaces. As staff and core leaders who knew this same pain, we focused our efforts on holding our base in a supportive community. We wanted people to belong so badly that we feared the impact of any discomfort or rupture. We feared that if we held people accountable, said "no" in favor of a stronger "yes," or drew firm boundaries around our work, we would break the belonging that we worked so hard to build. This over-prioritization didn't serve our work. It also didn't serve our members, or the broader community of people that we fight for. Instead, we were left with the very fragility we tried to avoid.

By 2018, LavNix was near collapse. Our staff were burning out and our core leadership felt disempowered. Over the course of the following year, in partnership with the Wildfire Project, our staff and core reflected on our tendencies and addressed our fears head on. We needed to address how we balanced purpose, belonging, accountability, rigor, and care. We made hard asks of our volunteer leaders, gave up parts of our work to strengthen our core programs, and grew our ability to give critical feedback and take accountability.

Through this process, our belonging expanded from being about comfort and identity to instead being about honesty, resilience, and dedication to seeing things through. This newly cultivated belonging was a grounding force to do the things we were most scared to do–interpersonally, in the organization, and in our broader world. Our belonging reminded us that even through mistakes and disagreements, we always had a purpose to return to, with people who care about us.

WHY WE SHOULD THINK ABOUT BELONGING

We're living in a belonging-starved culture, where alienation and individualism are in full force. People are either struggling to find belonging due to very real constraints on their time and energy (working multiple jobs, constant upheaval, etc.), or they're finding belonging in fear-based economies (conspiracy theories, alt-Right and neo-fascism, men's rights groups, etc.).

Historically, neoliberal and nationalist forces have manipulated belonging in order to coerce oppressed people into assimilation and conformity to colonizer nation-states,

heteronormative family structures, and genocidal governments. Over the past few decades, infrastructure to create resilient belonging in our schools, meeting places, organizations, cultural hubs, and broader communities has been dismantled.

At the root, the layered violences of capitalism, colonialism, and white supremacy have severed our inherent belongings to the land and to each other. Violence continues through forced migration, family separation, displacement, and economic scarcity. People come to our movements believing that they don't belong in their schools, communities, and families–their current pains built on a chain of broken belonging that goes back hundreds of years. These wounds make it so that many are fearful of the ramifications of the type of vulnerability that could meet this need.

Despite all this, we know that people need each other.

No organization can tackle this fundamental wound on its own–no one organization can create ultimate belonging. And, we do have a duty to right-size our response to this very real rupture and need. Who people belong to, how they belong, and where they belong is profoundly political. If we believe that we need all of us to build the power necessary to win, we need to understand how a belonging-need shapes actions and steers motivation. We need to see this as part of our organizing, not outside of it.

CULTIVATING RIGHT-SIZED BELONGING

When I talked to organizers, leaders, and facilitators about the nature of belonging in their work, they spoke to common themes of conflict, boundaries, shared expectations, trauma, and transformation. Across movements for workers' rights, environmental justice, disability justice, housing justice, sex worker rights, and trans justice (to name a few), many cited a tension between over- and under- belonging.

In groups where belonging was under-prioritized, it looked like:
- An ongoing sense of urgency, that the work is always behind or never ending
- Members (and staff) constantly burning out or leaving the work
- Emphasis on numbers, turnout, or one-time events rather than relationships
- Fear, hesitation, or inability to be emotionally vulnerable or hold space for emotions

- Avoiding or brushing off conflict as a distraction
- A felt sense of disposability when making mistakes or adjustments

In groups where belonging was over-prioritized, it looked like:
- Reluctance to name or address conflicts, out of fear of alienating certain individuals (sometimes to the detriment of others)
- Constantly saying 'yes' to more ideas or tactics, even when it detracts from the core organizational purpose
- Never ending conversations about process, structure, or interpersonal dynamics that halt any externally facing work
- Discomfort with giving feedback or holding people accountable to mutually agreed upon responsibilities
- Organizations taking up an inappropriate role in tending to the mental, spiritual, or physical health of a member, when needs should be shared by a wider ecosystem
- Built-up resentment for work not shared equitably
- Constant shifting of timelines or goalposts due to inability to give feedback or hold others accountable

Image Description: Atop a green square is a sewn set of three opaque vases from smallest to largest. The smallest on the far left is tipped over from the excess of water. The largest vase on the far right stands tall but holds too little water. The middle vase is the perfect size and in turn able to support an assortment of different types of flowers. A tiny figure, a South Asian person, embraces the center vase.

Between those poles, we can find "right-sized belonging" – a type of belonging that is properly balanced, so that people in our organizations feel both their internal agency and humanhood AND a resilient commitment to a collective purpose.

Cultivating such belonging is more than making people feel comfortable or included, it's a set of practices that are politically necessary to create deeply democratic and resilient communities. These practices can be transformative, show people that generative conflict is possible, and give folks a sense of life-saving purpose.

The rest of this toolkit & website tries to answer the question, how can base-building organizations cultivate right-sized belonging in service of strategy and sustainability?

PRACTICES

THAT CREATE BELONGING

"A culture of belonging recognizes that we are always in a state of dynamic action and reaction. Belonging is never done and will constantly have to be remade. We're in the midst of constructing new ways to see and new ways to be. This is not always comfortable, but it is part of our human experience."

–Evan Bissell
Notes on a Cultural Strategy for Belonging

Belonging is a verb.[3] It's not a static destination, but rather something that is cultivated and cultivated again through iterative practice. Simply talking about belonging, an idea full of abstractions, isn't enough. To enact change in our groups and create opportunities for belonging, we must commit ourselves to practices that become our culture.

Intentional practice interrupts conditioning and constructs new ways of being. Just as we consider dialectical materialism in our organizing, we must see the dialectical processes of our groups. Each of us must create a hypothesis of how we need to grow right-sized belonging, test it through practices, evaluate our culture, and test it again. Our world and our work are always in motion, and our practices towards belonging must reflect this motion.

Practicing belonging should be integral to the fabric of our organizations, not an additive to our work that fuels non-profit culture and never-ending 'bureaucratic

inertia.'[4] Rather than creating new work on top of our ultimate goals, I'm asking our movements to consider what a belonging-based approach to organizing looks like. When our staff, leaders, and members engage in these practices, how does it improve our ability to build trusting relationships and meet our goals?

Below I'll focus on six practices that can cultivate belonging. Within each practice I'll provide a brief description, risks of neglecting the practice, and opportunities that arise if we choose to move deeper. I'll also include assessment questions and suggested implementations for each practice. Although this is geared towards base-building organizations, each of our groups will be different in terms of goals, size, and constituency. Folks are encouraged to spend time adapting to their unique location and culture.

The six practices are:
- Anchor your purpose
- Approach problems with collective governance
- Set boundaries and expectations
- Understand trauma and build emotional skill
- Increase conflict-resilience
- Connect to a broader movement ecosystem

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3. Not grammatically, but for the purposes of this workbook I'm thinking of belonging as an ongoing set of actions and reactions. For the people still getting caught up on this, think of it as Gopal Dayaneni taught me: "belonging is energy, it's neither created nor destroyed. It flows through everything and it changes form under different conditions."

4. Bureaucratic inertia describes the tendency within organizations to develop and perpetuate neverending operational procedures. These procedures can become so complex and time consuming that they override the core purpose of the organization.

ANCHOR YOUR PURPOSE

Image Description: Atop a light blue square quilt patch is a sewn orange boat with a yellow sail anchored by a large blue anchor in the ocean. The anchor is covered in yellow and white seaweed and plant life. In the boat are three individuals.

ANCHOR YOUR PURPOSE

"In a time when people are thirsty and alienated and don't feel like they belong, you can't get around it. [However] power works in any constituency, your base building is going to be ineffective unless you're intentionally doing things that build connection and belonging, and navigating that contradiction between the need for belonging and the need for political purpose. If you're not intentionally navigating that contradiction you're going to either do things that make people feel disconnected or you're going to stray from your political purpose."

-NTanya Lee

Ensure the organizational purpose is clear, motivating, and aligned with the material needs of your membership. Purpose is the other side of the belonging coin. According to the Wildfire Project, people come to social movement organizations seeking to fulfill two key drives: purpose (making an impact in the world), and belonging (feeling part of something bigger). These drives are what guide and motivate peoples actions.

Having a sharp purpose to anchor our political vehicle is what makes an organization an organization. Across the organization, people need to understand how their work contributes to the whole. Staff, members, and volunteers should be able to think critically about how they connect to the purpose and engage in ongoing action towards it–even when there is disagreement along the way.

RISK

When we deemphasize our organizational purpose in order to keep the peace or avoid conflict (under the guise of building belonging), it can take a toll on the day to day functions of our work and ultimately demotivate our members.

If our purpose is easily swayed, ungrounded, or unactionable, there is no central force for people to belong to. People may forget why they come together to do the often difficult and strenuous work of social change. They may invest energy into work with no outcome, or pour their efforts into never ending processes. When that work becomes too hard or uncomfortable, they will leave. Aimlessness is often demoralizing and discouraging.

Without having a purpose to belong to, people can stake their belonging in other things, such as individual feelings, isolated conflicts, or recurring trauma.

In Healthy Group Accountability, Michael Strom and Joshua Kahn Russell speak to the impact of following-through on our purpose: "Sometimes we imagine that believing in the group is what drives action, that if the mission and vision are compelling enough, people will reliably participate. But it can actually work the other way around: when a group does what it says it will do, members often come to believe its vision and mission are possible and worthwhile."

OPPORTUNITY

When we effectively create and sustain a motivating purpose, we create a grounding force that anchors people during times of confusion or distress.

More than building an individual sense of belonging, working towards a larger purpose can create a resilient collective identity that is willing to engage in a long-term power struggle. Beyond the limits of individual identity, collective identity brings people together with the understanding that we struggle together towards a common goal. It contextualizes our relations and drives our work.

CHALLENGE

Each person in our organizations will contribute to the purpose in different ways. We must encourage people to get in where they fit in–supporting people to identify the role that allows them to draw from personal strengths, grow their capacities, and carry out said purpose.

To do this, we have to effectively organize. In the spirit of Marta Harnecker, "convince, not impose." Without relying on dogma, there should be appropriate time given to training staff and members in the underlying ideology and history that led to the purpose.

ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS

- Can members of the organization state the purpose of the work in their own words? Are they able to articulate their role in moving that purpose forward?

- Can people identify what isn't in the realm of the organization's purpose, as well as what's in it? Do people understand what issues and people sit at the center of the organization?

- Are there opportunities to learn the lineage of the organizational purpose, discuss how it manifests in the work, and debate and refine it where appropriate?

IMPLEMENTATION

- Clarify the organization's purpose and trace the lineage that brought you to this moment. Encourage staff and members to situate themselves as part of this lineage.

- Map different avenues towards contributing to the purpose. Provide space for people to see how their protagonism moves the purpose forward. Evaluate how members see their own impact and provide opportunities to strengthen that impact.

- Build consistent social units that help new members connect as humans and go on the 'journey' of connecting to purpose together. These units, such as membership cohorts, neighborhood groups, or buddy systems, can support people to build relationships, reflect on the impact of their actions, and share stories.

- Practice managing the potential discomfort of prioritizing purpose, even when everyone's individual wishes may not be met.

- Without falling into liberal traps of disposability, develop strategies for meaningfully and compassionately parting ways with people if there are irreconcilable disagreements with the fundamental purpose.

APPROACH PROBLEMS WITH COLLECTIVE GOVERNANCE

Image Description: Atop cool-toned green patch is a group working together to build a community. In the front right, a light-skinned Southwest asian person sits to talk and plan and dream together with their community member, a dark skinned Black person. In the back a dark-skinned South Asian person carries a building block. In the front left, two Latinx elders carry a building block together.

APPROACH PROBLEMS WITH COLLECTIVE GOVERNANCE

"What does it mean to be in deep collaboration? What does it mean to practice democracy together; the actual, technical definition of democracy, not the manipulated term utilized in the United States? … We're responsible for supporting people in practicing what it means for their opinions and decisions to matter, and to disrupt social hierarchies that our lives often exist within."

-Ejeris Dixon, Ejerie Labs

Meet collective problems with collective practice. Identify places where people can create culture and practice governance together. Often, the degree to which people feel belonging is the degree to which people feel power.

Even in organizations with hierarchy, ensure there are ways to collectively hold different parts of the work so that everyone can build a just relationship to power. This can strengthen personal investment and overall alignment. Encourage people to be part of processes to build emotional skill, address conflict, and shape how the organization operates.

Sustainable and powerful movements across the world understand that when shared problems are addressed collectively, people belong to the process of building solutions. Individual housing needs are best addressed by organizing the whole

building. Personal burnout is best addressed by group processes that make the work more feasible for all.

Strong relationships are necessary for collective work and governance, and organizations should focus on ways to build mutual understanding, trust, and resilience.

RISK

If our processes are not democratic and human-centered, our movements will not truly be liberatory. When people don't have opportunities for governance or material decision making power[5], they can revert to tendencies that displace their agency, even around their ability to belong, onto those who do have perceived power. They will passively receive and do the work, rather than shape and be shaped by it.

Without collective practices, our members can feel confused or disempowered about how the work has come to be. Although this work demands all of us, people may never feel truly responsible for, or accountable to, a project that is larger than themself.

OPPORTUNITY

When people see and feel the impacts of their work, their sense of investment grows. People are more likely to feel a sense of belonging to something they are invested in and responsible for.

Marx asserted that revolutionary practice is the simultaneous changing of circumstance and human activity. When we collectively govern, we become more human. In our organizations, this can look like emphasizing and enabling participation, encouraging ownership of the work, and democratizing expertise.

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5. I'm naming 'material' decision making to acknowledge the tendency towards 'artificial' decision making: decisions that have no real impact on the work, but give the illusion of power and choice. Groups should interrogate if there are avenues for people to learn, debate, and give input on things that actually shift the course of the work, campaigns, or organization as a whole. Importantly, this is not to say that every decision gets to be made by everyone.

This very governance mirrors what we want to see in our future communities, giving us a valuable practice ground to learn how to wield, shape, and share power.

CHALLENGE

Many people have internalized individualism from the dominant and activist ethos surrounding us. Amy Halsted, Ben Chin, and Jesse Graham detail the characteristics of activist culture and nonprofit culture in their piece, <u>Nuts and Bolts for Building Resilient Organizations</u>. These cultures, fueled by meritocracy, scarcity, and white supremacy do not foster the skills or mindset for collective work.

People may be coming to movement building experiencing either obsessively hierarchical organizations where they hold no decision making power, or understanding social change to be about strong, unwavering individual voices that never back down.

Reframing social change and organizing work as highly iterative teamwork will take time. We must be patient with people as we re-learn how to be in connection, struggle, trust, and practice.

ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS

- Do people have meaningful ways to make decisions that impact the direction of campaigns, projects, or the organization at large? Do they see themselves as stewards of the work of the organization?

- Are there avenues for members to surface needs and ask for help from peers or staff? Are there containers for members to hear organizational challenges and contribute to collective solutions?

- Can people contribute to the organization at different levels, depending on their capacity or proximity to the organization?

IMPLEMENTATION

- Evaluate your current structures of governance, formal and informal. Interrogate whose voice is often heard and who makes decisions that impact groups of people. Consider where trust can be extended and built with more people, to widen the practice of governance.

- Identify where 'culture' is created in the organization. Culture may be in rituals, recurring practices, traditions, unspoken agreements, or standards. Set, evaluate, and maintain these practices collectively.

- Bring shared problems to collective attention. Address recurring conflicts, sustainability, and moments of crisis in large groups as a way of building decision making skills and sharing power.

- Create regular spaces for people to share stories, surface needs, and ask for help. By humanizing ourselves and each other, we create better opportunities for curious and compassionate connection. These relationships form the foundation of strong governance.

- Encourage collective memory by supporting long-term members to tell stories about the history of the organization. Guide people to imagine their work as contributing to that lineage.

SET BOUNDARIES & EXPECTATIONS

Image Description: Atop a light grey-blue patch is a sewn turquoise sieve held by two community members. They sieve sand from earth, working together to filter out what does not work and keeping what does work in their connection, leaving behind beautiful gems. The person on the left is a medium-toned South Asian person, the person on the right is a Black Latinx person.

SET BOUNDARIES & EXPECTATIONS

"If I break my leg, it is reasonable for me to expect that when I come into any of our political orgs, that somebody's going to come downstairs, carry my bag, and help me up. When I come in, somebody will put out a chair so I can put my leg up. Somebody will go get me water. But it's not reasonable to expect that somebody will put my bones back, set them, and then put a cast or splint on my leg. But, for some reason, around emotional health, people are expecting our political spaces to be their places of healing outright. And that's just not possible."

-Fahd Ahmed

Organizational boundaries are the parameters that define what we work on, how we operate, who we are accountable to, and what we will or will not do.

Evaluate and communicate organizational boundaries to avoid confusion and detract from purpose. Share expectations for how people work together, who makes decisions, and what makes the work possible.

Effective belonging comes with boundaries. If we try to do everything, we become nothing. For people to feel as if they belong, they need to understand the dimensions of what they belong to. This includes clarifying expectations for how we treat each other, illuminating where and why hierarchies exist, and re-constructing boundaries or possibilities as conditions change.

RISK

Without clear expectations, people will make assumptions around which needs get met, who holds what power, and who is responsible for others' pain and belonging. These assumptions are informed by our broader dominant culture of individualism and neoliberalism, and may manifest in our groups as:

- people assuming that all of their needs will be met in one space;
- asserting that every moment is the right moment for an emotion to be heard;
- expecting the politics of the organization to completely overlap with their own;
- believing every experience will be fully seen and understood by people of the same identity;
- asserting that every single decision should be made by the collective, and all work should be shared.

This misalignment can manifest as conflict, creating more hurt and halting organizational progress.

OPPORTUNITY

Setting and communicating boundaries – our yesses and nos – is a practice of effective organizing. Once we make decisions about what we will and won't do, we can more clearly look at what is possible. As Yotam Marom shares in his piece, Moving Toward Conflict for the Sake of Good Strategy: "Strategy is all about choice. It is about saying no, sharpening a position through disagreement, narrowing focus. It requires the will to remain in tension long enough to expose the deepest misalignments, the skill to actually enter into serious disagreement and emerge from it stronger. It requires letting go and facing loss, giving up pieces of oneself and one's dreams and sometimes even people on one's team or one's own place in it, in order to create something healthy and clear and powerful enough to have an impact."

When we know what is expected of us, of the space, and of others, we can more effectively move with integrity and clarity. In our groups, this opens up opportunities for people to give and receive support, rely on a wider ecosystem of resources, and participate in work at the right level of challenge[6].

Inevitably, when mistakes are made and slip-ups occur, grounded and communicated expectations can help our groups engage in transformative accountability. Rather than dwelling on the mistake, we can instead focus on how we get back in alignment or shift expectations to meet the moment. These processes build on an understanding of not only 'what' we belong to, but 'how' we belong to each other.

CHALLENGE

Setting and communicating expectations is not a one-and-done situation. Boundaries need to be responsive to our conditions. Overcommitment to boundaries that are outdated or out of alignment with our values or context can make people feel alienated and subject to disempowering 'rules.'

Groups need to be mindful of the relationship between their organizational boundaries and peoples' personal boundaries, as they can often become conflated. People may believe that their personal boundary or capacity should be the boundary of the group, and when they don't match, misattribute this to an ideological misalignment. For example, if someone cannot or does not want to door knock, they argue that the action of doing so is politically impure. Other times, people with high rank or status within the organization can set group boundaries through the enforcement of their own. For instance, if a director has a tendency towards over-accountability in conflict, the organization will be expected to have the same response.

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6. 'Right level of challenge' describes work that is difficult enough to inspire learning and growth, without being 'too difficult' OR 'too easy.' This work could be right outside someone's capabilities, but is still possible to achieve with support or guidance. Challenging ourselves and each other at the right level gives us the greatest opportunity for growth and motivates new action.

SET BOUNDARIES & EXPECTATIONS

ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS

- Can people across the organization name what is expected of them in their role? Do they understand what they can expect from others, and from the organization as a whole?

- Do people in the organization understand how decisions are made? Do they see their place in the decision making process?

- Is it clear that the organization is trying to be a social space, political home, cultural community, healing center, movement building project, or something else?

IMPLEMENTATION

- Clarify the boundaries of what the organization does on the day-to-day, as well as in moments of crisis. Work with members to identify potential needs or scenarios, and map which are met in the organization, and which are met elsewhere.

- Design clear resources and trainings to illustrate how people in the organization are expected to relate to each other, work together, and make decisions.

- When conditions shift, work with members to identify how this changes any organizational boundaries or expectations.

- When members join the organization, create opportunities to learn about the context of organizational boundaries and how decisions get made.

- Practice holding people accountable to shared expectations in moments of conflict or when work is left incomplete. If a consistent challenge, shift expectations in line with group needs and organizational values.

UNDERSTAND TRAUMA & BUILD EMOTIONAL SKILL

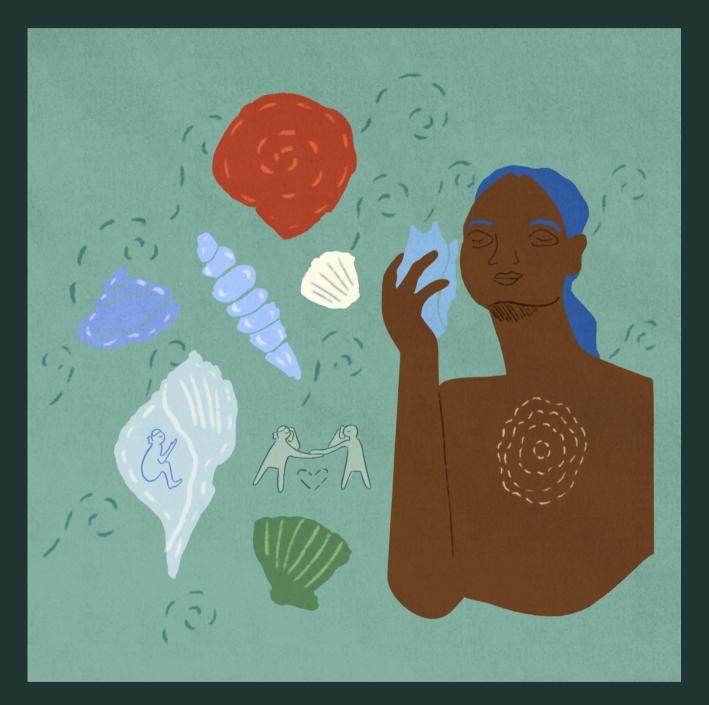Image Description: Atop a green-blue quilt patch is an array of differently colored and shaped shells. The shells hold different people. A larger figure, a dark skinned Black person with tied dark blue hair, on the right holds a shell to their ear to listen. In the center of their chest is nested circles. Two smaller doodled figures to their left hold each-other's hands and shells to listen to one another.

UNDERSTAND TRAUMA & BUILD EMOTIONAL SKILL

"A lot of times there is some point, some part, something that has been "disavowed" in some way. There is a story about the point where they stopped belonging. You know, like when I asked for too much, or when I set a boundary, or when I really told people who I am, or whatever. I think that a lot of us arrive to organizations bracing against, disavowing even, parts of ourselves out of fear that if they're revealed, we won't belong."

-Michael Strom

Meet the emotional moment by understanding the ways trauma impacts key membership, and clarify how the organization addresses and holds that trauma.

People come to our organizations with deep wounds caused by separation, disavowal, exclusion, abandonment, disposability, violence, and death. Enmasse, people are experiencing social exclusion, a process of rupture that detaches people from one another and larger institutions, preventing them from living a full life. For some, a need for belonging has been tenuous since before birth.

We cannot expect trauma to be "solved" or "absent" or "fully held elsewhere" before we engage with our members.

Educate staff and leaders on how trauma impacts people's actions, behaviors, and beliefs. Use an understanding of trauma to demonstrate and build supportive emotional skills such as self-awareness, discernment, adaptability, and principled struggle, in order to support healing.

RISK

When trauma is unaddressed or ignored, we are neglecting a key reality and experience of many of the people that come to our work. Trauma can manifest in our organizations in many ways, including:

- Attachment to certain aspects of a group's culture or practices;
- Fearing activities that could lead to rejection;
- Overestimating connection with people of the same identity background OR underestimating the possibility of connection with others;
- Over reliance on separatism or political purity as a way to avoid discomfort;
- Strategizing with an "all or nothing" approach;
- Heightening the severity of conflicts, making all things seem urgent.

Without understanding, support, and skills development, traumas and violences can replicate themselves into culture in our groups and broader movements.

Historically, our movements have underperformed at recognizing and addressing the impacts of trauma. Similarly, as a social movement left, we have yet to reckon with how to hold space for trauma caused from movement spaces themselves. This under accountability has left us underdeveloped in this practice.

OPPORTUNITY

While every organization cannot be expected to be the primary site of people's healing, organizations can define their role in their members' healing journeys. When organizations can demonstrate and develop emotional skillfulness (how we understand ourselves, treat each other, and move the work forward), our groups will be better equipped to share power, form sharp strategy, and maintain sustainable, invested leadership.

If capitalism fragments people, organizing can support people to tune into their inherent wholeness.

UNDERSTAND TRAUMA & BUILD EMOTIONAL SKILL

CHALLENGE

If people are used to unbelonging in their lives, they will likely struggle with this feeling in our groups. They may even believe it's not possible to belong at all.

As social structures and institutions continue to crumble, the 'all or nothing' approach to belonging and healing has an even stronger grip. People may believe that all of their healing needs should be met in one space, or that 'belonging' to a space means always feeling good in that space. Practicing this aspect of belonging also means relying on practices of purpose and boundaries, and making clear what is possible within the limits of the organization. It's not about every single person being healed, or every single person being a healer. It's about addressing the material needs of the membership in the unique way each of our groups can.

ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS

- Can staff members and organizational leaders articulate how cycles of violence impact members?

- Do members understand that emotional skillfulness is an important aspect of doing the work in the organization?

- Does the organization have fluency in the emotional skills that best support your organizing? Are there deliberate trainings and practice opportunities to build these skills?

IMPLEMENTATION

- Map the emotional landscape of your community. Identify key traumas, going to the source, and work to understand how those traumas manifest in actions and beliefs. Where necessary, consult and build with movement-aligned healers to bridge understanding.

- Train staff to balance challenge and support with members. Staff should understand how to build trust through curiosity, push at peoples' growing edge, create opportunities for debrief and feedback, and affirm where transformation is taking place.

- Encourage regular self-reflection on personal patterns, reactions, needs, emotions, self-perceptions, limits, and capacity. Ensure that people are able to recognize their feelings, and, where appropriate, connect them to a broader moment or purpose.

- Support people across the organization to create sustainability, healing, and crisis plans, and identify resources within and outside of the organization to nurture that healing.

- Evaluate emotional skillfulness throughout the organization, and plan to create ways to practice key skills where necessary. These skills can be incorporated into existing meetings, campaigns, committees, or gatherings.

UNDERSTAND TRAUMA & BUILD EMOTIONAL SKILL

- Skills may include:
  - self awareness - understanding one's own thoughts, actions, feelings, and beliefs
  - emotional discernment - ability to decide when to share feelings and thoughts, holding and letting go when needed
  - adaptability - returning to center when methods, plans, or practices change
  - conflict mindfulness - choosing when to engage in conflict, and understanding why
  - principled struggle - engaging in thoughtful disagreement or dialogue with others for the sake of political clarity
  - strategic visioning - guiding decisions for the future without pessimism or unanchored optimism
  - balancing individual needs and collective purpose
  - principled and direct communication

INCREASE CONFLICT RESILIENCE

Image Description: Atop a color blocked terracotta and tan square quilt is a sewn large 3 strand braid, with the ends of two of its strands held by small figures. The two individuals face away from each other, although they will have to return to complete the braid and build something stronger. In the background are two completed braided baskets holding an abundance of fruits.

INCREASE CONFLICT RESILIENCE

"In conflict, everyone will fall back on our own patterns, our own histories, our own family ways. We need to be building the skills to ask, what does transformative justice look like in a lived way? It's about skill building and it's about relationship building. We have to keep building trust with each other enough so that we can have the hard conversations, because when conflict comes up, there's so much deeply personal stuff involved and people are triggered. You really do need skills to deal with that. We each need skills to deal with it in ourselves, and hold other people in that conflict. It's about skill building and about trying to build practice into your everyday work together."

-Max Airborne

Create conditions that enable people to practice disagreement and generative conflict. Design channels for regular feedback, debate, accountability, and recommitment.

People are coming to social movements with experiences of conflict that have led to further rupture and violence. Conflict resolution, in a punitive society, has often meant silencing and punishing, without any real transformation.

Organizations must set the tone for a new way forward. We must boldly show that generative conflict moves us closer to purpose. Leaders need to model principled

struggle, and organizations should have processes that support people to get more and more comfortable with conflict and disagreement over time. Accountability[7] should be collectively defined, practiced, and normalized.

Organizing itself is inherently conflictual–the power struggles we engage in are the things that bring our people together, strengthening our internal solidarity. Our work towards belonging will always be a conflicting process of negotiation.

RISK

When conflict is not addressed, it festers, manifesting as fear and resentment. When organizations don't skillfully, meaningfully, and directly address conflict, it becomes a thing to fear or a thing that brings our work to a halt. Without addressing the conditioned tendencies of people in our groups, their conflict patterns can become the norm. Historically, underinvesting in generative conflict has led to overwhelming ruptures in movements, pulling focus and energy from our purpose.

OPPORTUNITY

When our members, leaders, and staff experience the process of rupture and repair, they understand that their belonging isn't contingent on "being nice" or always agreeing. Our belonging deepens when people understand that disagreement and struggle don't mean something fatal. Instead, conflict can lead to our sharpest strategy.

If our groups can effectively build the skills of generative conflict, we'll build more spaces for people to debate, take accountability, and land on decisions that expand a sense of collective responsibility.

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7. Within organizations, accountability begins with transparency about what has happened and why. Groups should work together to determine what accountability looks like when it is practiced for the sake of purpose and belonging. In one definition from this series hosted by the Barnard Center for Research on Women, accountability is "self-reflecting, apologizing, making amends, and changing your behavior so the harm you caused doesn't happen again."

INCREASE CONFLICT RESILIENCE

CHALLENGE

Social movements have existing cultures of conflict that are not generative. Our organizations may pander to peoples' whims instead of struggling with them. They may maintain silence to protect themselves or some notion of peace. Beyond any one organization, call-outs are used to escalate conflict into the public domain.

Addressing these tendencies, and moving to a style of conflict that is more rigorous, grounded, and emotionally skillful, will take deep unlearning and intention setting for everyone involved.

ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS

- Can members and staff openly disagree in meetings and discussion spaces? If they disagree, will they still work together towards a common goal?

- Do staff and leaders feel equipped to create containers for feedback, disagreement, and principled struggle?

- Over the course of their involvement, do members generally have more skillfulness and comfort with conflict?

IMPLEMENTATION

- Reflect on organizational tendencies when it comes to conflict. What stories are at the root of those tendencies? Are organizational practices in line with your values? Identify how you may want to change your processes.

- Identify what "safety" means for people across the organization. Create a felt sense of safety by fostering ways to move through processes of rupture and repair, reinforcing the normalcy of such processes. Ensure your understanding of safety is informed by an analysis of who wields power in the organization and how.

- Titrate conflict by creating progressively deeper ways for people to engage in debate and disagreement. Get people more comfortable with conflict over time by creating spaces for collective decision making and dissent.

- Promote and define collective accountability across teams and working groups. Explore peoples' past experiences with punitive accountability or avoidant tendencies to land on a grounded accountability. Generate processes that are rooted in your values, shared agreements, and fair consequences.

- Acknowledge and celebrate when conflict has been resolved. Uplift the ways people practiced skillfulness and vulnerability, and put words to lessons learned through the process.

- Build critical conflict skills, such as:
  - approaching conflict from your values – asking "how do we want to be" rather than "what do we want to do?"
  - discernment - picking and choosing which battles to wage
  - communication - directly and compassionately sharing analysis, needs, observations, thoughts, and feelings (as needed)
  - embodiment - identifying emotions and returning to center when activated
  - principled struggle - debating different ideas or tactics, backed by studied analysis, with the goal of building our strongest possible collective action and unity
  - regular feedback - giving and receiving critique and appreciation for the sake of growth
  - grounded accountability - being able to be responsible for one's own actions or inactions, taking steps to repair, ask for help, and make amends where needed
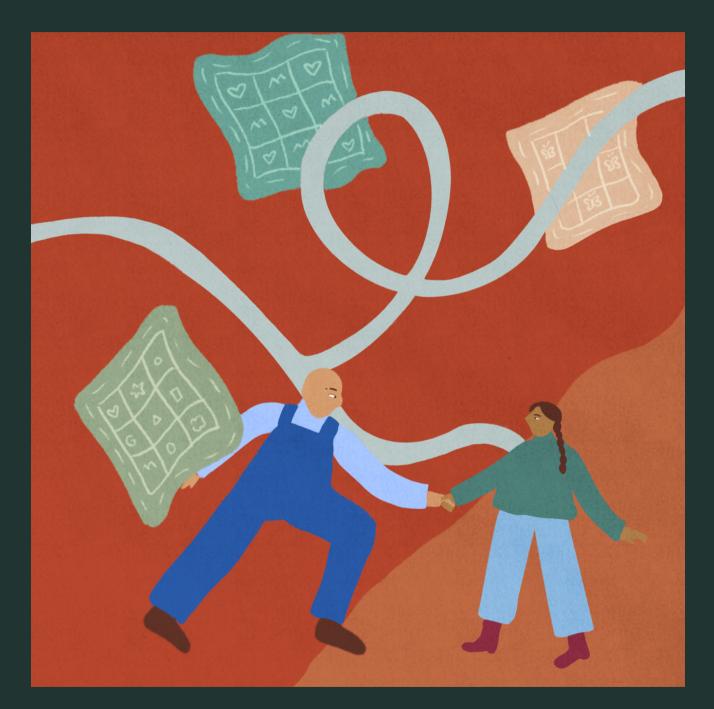
CONNECT TO A BROADER MOVEMENT ECOSYSTEM

Image Description: Atop a color blocked deep and light orange square quilt is two sewn individuals holding hands. Above them are three different quilts, showing the many quilts and microcosms within our movement ecosystems. A fabric that the person at the center of the quilt is sewing.

CONNECT TO A BROADER MOVEMENT ECOSYSTEM

"Belonging isn't just something that makes us feel good, right? It's something that makes us act better and be better people. Actual belonging means that you understand you're a part of an ecosystem and that you have an impact on that ecosystem. And if you don't take care of yourself, your ecosystem suffers. And if your ecosystem is suffering, that's attached to other ecosystems, and we're all interconnected."

-Elliott Fukui

Build strong organizational connections with other groups, healers, and resources to strengthen our movement ecosystem. Be clear about how these connections grow strategy and support staff and members to widen their knowledge and sense of belonging.

Belonging is a nested system, and needs to exist at multiple levels. Organizations cannot be expected to fulfill every need. Instead, anticipate the needs that the organization cannot meet, and find substantive resources where people can meet those needs. Expand people's understanding of where they can go for resources, connection, and purpose. Encourage everyone in the organization to ground in a vision of justice that goes beyond any one space.

RISK

When members aren't connected to resources and work in a wider ecosystem, they can stake all of their needs in one organization. Their involvement in 'movement work' can be conflated with their involvement in the organization, heightening the stress of conflict or mismatched expectations. If our work stays in silos, we miss valuable opportunities to strengthen our power and capacity.

OPPORTUNITY

When we effectively connect with healers, social hubs, and other groups, members will be better resourced and can carry a wider vision. People who have found belonging in different relationships, spaces, or communities don't cling to belonging permanence, and can adapt to change over time. Ruptures or separations in our organization won't mean fatalism, but instead opportunity for exchange and further growth.

CHALLENGE

Social movement organizations are subject to external and internal pressures to focus on our own particular issue area and constituency. Demands from foundations and funders emphasize individual organizational progress and growth. Organization building overtakes resource sharing and collaboration, and purity politics halts potential partnership. Dogmatic politics and reductionist 'all-or-nothing' tactics have left people working in isolation if they cannot fit neatly into one space.

Individuals feel and feed this pressure too. With less time outside of paid work and a declining social infrastructure, many people come to spaces wanting multiple needs to be met at once. Untangling overwhelming strain on organizations to be everything will take intention, patience, and clear bridge building. We must actively encourage our members to live full lives outside of our own groups. We must recognize what our organizations cannot do, and find the people who are doing it well, even–and especially when–it isn't our predisposition.

This work of connection must happen consistently, in recognition of the natural fluidity of people entering and leaving roles and spaces.

ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS

- Do you know of resources, organizations, and people that can help meet the needs of members when those needs are outside of the scope of your work?

- Can members of the organization identify other meaningful places of their own belonging?

- Are there opportunities to exchange, learn, and build relationships with people from other organizations? Are these opportunities available to people at different levels of involvement?

IMPLEMENTATION

- Assess the common needs of the membership–such as housing, mental healthcare, trauma support, job preparedness–and proactively find resources to meet those needs.

- Encourage people to reflect on how they get their belonging needs met at different levels, and celebrate their work towards nested belonging. How do they belong to themselves? What relationships or communities do they belong to? What movements, values, or ideas do they belong to? What histories do they belong to?

- Build ongoing relationships with other organizations, groups, and healers that can assist the community during acute crises or with ongoing needs. Resource and sustain those relationships often. Make these relationships known throughout the organization.

- Provide opportunities to situate the organization within a larger lineage and ecosystem. Ensure people across the organization can study how the work compliments, compares, and flanks other organizations in the past and present.

- Create a position or group in the organization that can regularly research additional resources, and act as a connector to the membership.

CONCLUSION

CULTIVATING A CULTURE OF BELONGING

These practices are designed so that organizations can build a culture in which belonging is a consistent throughline. Ultimately, our future success in being able to grow our power and sustain a resilient movement depends on the intentionality with which we build the culture of our organizations.

If we are not intentional about our culture, it will be formed from the conditioned tendencies and habits that we have learned through capitalism, white supremacy, patriarchy, and the resulting traumas that come from such violence. It is not enough to rely on culture built from tradition–as our conditions change, we must be able to truly examine ourselves, see our weaknesses, and implement practices that make our movements worthwhile and irresistible.

Practicing belonging is but one element of a strong organizational culture. When Lavender Phoenix took a hard look at ourselves in 2018 and peeled back the facade of niceness, we found ourselves face to face with our own fears. We had to recognize that for people to truly belong, we needed clear expectations for what that belonging meant. We had a duty to get more specific about our strategy, build skills to say the hard thing and disagree, and let go of the idea that we could be everything for everyone.

Over five years later, as new people join the organization and many of us who were involved in 2018 cycle out, I'm reminded that the work of creating culture must happen iteratively. The dormant forces that refuse our inherent belonging are strong. Memory can be short. We're learning how to tell the story of our work to people who haven't experienced it themselves. I watch from my role as alumni of the organization with excitement and curiosity. I know we can do it, because we've done it before. And I know that we, as a movement, can do it, because we must.

"Not only do we belong, we belong here. On this earth with each other. We belong to each other, and to this earth. I think it's a very small number of people who have organized in a very crafty way to disrupt that belonging. Capitalism is really young. Capitalism didn't exist 500 years ago. With its rise came the rise of modern day chattel slavery and genocide and colonization in modern forms. I'm not saying there isn't a culture of white supremacy, or there isn't a culture of colonization and resource extraction through capitalism, I'm saying there is a small number of people that orchestrated this, and we outnumber them by far. I have to believe that."

-Patty Berne
Executive and Artistic Director, Sins Invalid

APPENDIX 1: ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS & IMPLEMENTATION SUGGESTIONS

In this appendix you'll find a consolidated list of all the assessment questions and implementation suggestions from each practice.

Assessment: Use these questions to identify where belonging is scaffolded, supported, or undermined within the organization. These questions are an invitation to share stories about how you powerfully cultivate each practice and where you may need more attention.

Implementation: Based on your assessment and areas of interest, try out the following implementation suggestions. Which could help your organization grow a right-sized belonging?

ANCHOR YOUR PURPOSE

Assessment Questions
- Can members of the organization state the purpose of the work in their own words? Are they able to articulate their role in moving that purpose forward?
- Can people identify what isn't in the realm of the organization's purpose, as well as what's in it? Do people understand what issues and people sit at the center of the organization?
- Are there opportunities to learn the lineage of the organizational purpose, discuss how it manifests in the work, and debate and refine it where appropriate?

Implementation
- Clarify the organization's purpose and trace the lineage that brought you to this moment. Encourage staff and members to situate themselves as part of this lineage.
- Map different avenues towards contributing to the purpose. Provide space for people to see how their protagonism moves the purpose forward. Evaluate how members see their own impact and provide opportunities to strengthen that impact.

- Build consistent social units that help new members connect as humans and go on the 'journey' of connecting to purpose together. These units, such as membership cohorts, neighborhood groups, or buddy systems, can support people to build relationships, reflect on the impact of their actions, and share stories.
- Practice managing the potential discomfort of prioritizing purpose, even when everyone's individual wishes may not be met.
- Without falling into liberal traps of disposability, develop strategies for meaningfully and compassionately parting ways with people if there are irreconcilable disagreements with the fundamental purpose.

APPROACH PROBLEMS WITH COLLECTIVE GOVERNANCE

Assessment Questions
- Do people have meaningful ways to make decisions that impact the direction of campaigns, projects, or the organization at large? Do they see themselves as stewards of the work of the organization?
- Are there avenues for members to surface needs and ask for help from peers or staff? Are there containers for members to hear organizational challenges and contribute to collective solutions?
- Can people contribute to the organization at different levels, depending on their capacity or proximity to the organization?

Implementation
- Evaluate your current structures of governance, formal and informal. Interrogate whose voice is often heard and who makes decisions that impact groups of people. Consider where trust can be extended and built with more people, to widen the practice of governance.
- Identify where 'culture' is created in the organization. Culture may be in rituals, recurring practices, traditions, unspoken agreements, or standards. Set, evaluate, and maintain these practices collectively.
- Bring shared problems to collective attention. Address recurring conflicts, sustainability, and moments of crisis in large groups as a way of building decision making skills and sharing power.
- Create regular spaces for people to share stories, surface needs, and ask for help. By humanizing ourselves and each other, we create better opportunities for curious and compassionate connection. These relationships form the foundation of strong governance.

- Encourage collective memory by supporting long-term members to tell stories about the history of the organization. Guide people to imagine their work as contributing to that lineage.

SET BOUNDARIES & EXPECTATIONS

Assessment Questions
- Can people across the organization name what is expected of them in their role? Do they understand what they can expect from others, and from the organization as a whole?
- Do people in the organization understand how decisions are made? Do they see their place in the decision making process?
- Is it clear that the organization is trying to be a social space, political home, cultural community, healing center, movement building project, or something else?

Implementation
- Clarify the boundaries of what the organization does on the day-to-day, as well as in moments of crisis. Work with members to identify potential needs or scenarios, and map which are met in the organization, and which are met elsewhere.
- Design clear resources and trainings to illustrate how people in the organization are expected to relate to each other, work together, and make decisions.
- When conditions shift, work with members to identify how this changes any organizational boundaries or expectations.
- When members join the organization, create opportunities to learn about the context of organizational boundaries and how decisions get made.
- Practice holding people accountable to shared expectations in moments of conflict or when work is left incomplete. If a consistent challenge, shift expectations in line with group needs and organizational values.

UNDERSTAND TRAUMA & BUILD EMOTIONAL SKILL

Assessment Questions
- Can staff members and organizational leaders articulate how cycles of violence impact members?
- Do members understand that emotional skillfulness is an important aspect of doing the work in the organization?

- Does the organization have fluency in the emotional skills that best support your organizing? Are there deliberate trainings and practice opportunities to build these skills?

Implementation
- Map the emotional landscape of your community. Identify key traumas, going to the source, and work to understand how those traumas manifest in actions and beliefs. Where necessary, consult and build with movement-aligned healers to bridge understanding.
- Train staff to balance challenge and support with members. Staff should understand how to build trust through curiosity, push at peoples' growing edge, create opportunities for debrief and feedback, and affirm where transformation is taking place.
- Encourage regular self-reflection on personal patterns, reactions, needs, emotions, self-perceptions, limits, and capacity. Ensure that people are able to recognize their feelings, and, where appropriate, connect them to a broader moment or purpose.
- Support people across the organization to create sustainability, healing, and crisis plans, and identify resources within and outside of the organization to nurture that healing.
- Evaluate emotional skillfulness throughout the organization, and plan to create ways to practice key skills where necessary. These skills can be incorporated into existing meetings, campaigns, committees, or gatherings. Skills may include:
  - self awareness - understanding one's own thoughts, actions, feelings, and beliefs
  - emotional discernment - ability to decide when to share feelings and thoughts, holding and letting go when needed
  - adaptability - returning to center when methods, plans, or practices change
  - conflict mindfulness - choosing when to engage in conflict, and understanding why
  - principled struggle - engaging in thoughtful disagreement or dialogue with others for the sake of political clarity
  - strategic visioning - guiding decisions for the future without pessimism or unanchored optimism
  - balancing individual needs and collective purpose
  - principled and direct communication

INCREASE CONFLICT RESILIENCE

Assessment Questions
- Can members and staff openly disagree in meetings and discussion spaces? If they disagree, will they still work together towards a common goal?
- Do staff and leaders feel equipped to create containers for feedback, disagreement, and principled struggle?
- Over the course of their involvement, do members generally have more skillfulness and comfort with conflict?

Implementation
- Reflect on organizational tendencies when it comes to conflict. What stories are at the root of those tendencies? Are organizational practices in line with your values? Identify how you may want to change your processes.
- Identify what "safety" means for people across the organization. Create a felt sense of safety by fostering ways to move through processes of rupture and repair, reinforcing the normalcy of such processes. Ensure your understanding of safety is informed by an analysis of who wields power in the organization and how.
- Titrate conflict by creating progressively deeper ways for people to engage in debate and disagreement. Get people more comfortable with conflict over time by creating spaces for collective decision making and dissent.
- Promote and define collective accountability across teams and working groups. Explore peoples' past experiences with punitive accountability or avoidant tendencies to land on a grounded accountability. Generate processes that are rooted in your values, shared agreements, and fair consequences.
- Acknowledge and celebrate when conflict has been resolved. Uplift the ways people practiced skillfulness and vulnerability, and put words to lessons learned through the process.
- Build critical conflict skills, such as:
  - approaching conflict from your values – asking "how do we want to be" rather than "what do we want to do?"
  - discernment - picking and choosing which battles to wage
  - communication - directly and compassionately sharing analysis, needs, observations, thoughts, and feelings (as needed)
  - embodiment - identifying emotions and returning to center when activated
  - principled struggle - debating different ideas or tactics, backed by studied

analysis, with the goal of building our strongest possible collective action and unity
- regular feedback - giving and receiving critique and appreciation for the sake of growth
- grounded accountability - being able to be responsible for one's own actions or inactions, taking steps to repair, ask for help, and make amends where needed

CONNECT TO A BROADER MOVEMENT ECOSYSTEM

Assessment Questions
- Do you know of resources, organizations, and people that can help meet the needs of members when those needs are outside of the scope of your work?
- Can members of the organization identify other meaningful places of their own belonging?
- Are there opportunities to exchange, learn, and build relationships with people from other organizations? Are these opportunities available to people at different levels of involvement?

Implementation
- Assess the common needs of the membership–such as housing, mental healthcare, trauma support, job preparedness–and proactively find resources to meet those needs.
- Encourage people to reflect on how they get their belonging needs met at different levels, and celebrate their work towards nested belonging. How do they belong to themselves? What relationships or communities do they belong to? What movements, values, or ideas do they belong to? What histories do they belong to?
- Build ongoing relationships with other organizations, groups, and healers that can assist the community during acute crises or with ongoing needs. Resource and sustain those relationships often. Make these relationships known throughout the organization.
- Provide opportunities to situate the organization within a larger lineage and ecosystem. Ensure people across the organization can study how the work compliments, compares, and flanks other organizations in the past and present.
- Create a position or group in the organization that can regularly research additional resources, and act as a connector to the membership.

APPENDIX 2: METHODS

This project was first conceptualized after many informal conversations with others in social movements, as we grappled with how to address this current moment of crisis. With support and challenge, my peers encouraged me to dig deep on the question of belonging, a question that can often be deprioritized for the sake of "more urgent" or timely needs.

Although this project was not a formal or academic research endeavor, I've used practices from qualitative research to inform the process. It was my intention to ask reflection-provoking questions, look across conversations for commonalities and differences, and glean practical insights as to how we can best cultivate belonging.

The project started in early 2022 with a review of existing literature and scholarship on belonging and social movements. I then had an initial, informal round of conversations to fine tune the project's key question, preliminary conversation prompts, and outreach list.

I'm extremely grateful to all the leaders and strategists who trusted me with their time and experiences. Many of the people I talked to are people I have known through social movement work, and many of them then recommended others. I consider these people "conversation partners" rather than interviewees, as we often exchanged experiences and questions. I did not aim to be purely objective, and instead focussed on bringing earnest curiosity to each conversation. Unlike institutionalized research projects, I do not claim neutrality in this process.

Across the 26 people I spoke with, I sought to connect with people across movement sectors, who each have unique experiences moving culture and people forward. I prioritized people who have worked in base-building organizations, in addition to a few who directly address movement culture. Of course, this is no perfect sample of the diversity of left movement culture in the United States.

Conversations occurred in the first half of 2023, with a few at the very end of 2022. All but one meeting happened over Zoom. Given the personal nature of the topic,

many conversations strayed away from one singular set of questions, but ultimately came back to the questions of belonging and strategy in Left movements. Following each talk, interviews were transcribed through Otter.ai, and cleaned up by myself (the computer did not know what dialectical materialism is!).

To select key quotes and identify major themes, I used Dedoose to code all interviews. Codes were created after a preliminary read through of interviews, and checked against existing literature. Some codes emerged in vivo during the coding process. In total, each interview was coded twice using 33 codes. With the same software I looked into common and uncommon code co-occurrences, and synthesized as much data as possible to identify the practices listed in this workbook.

At each step of the process I received feedback on my work (reading lists, conversation questions, outreach list, codes, analysis) from trusted peers who helped to highlight any gaps or refine key ideas.

APPENDIX 3: LIST OF CONVERSATION PARTNERS

1. Fahd Ahmed
2. Max Airborne
3. Patty Berne
4. Zahra Billoo
5. adrienne maree brown
6. Jeff Chang
7. Gopal Dayaneni
8. Ejeris Dixon
9. Bran Fenner
10. Kiyomi Fujikawa
11. Elliott Fukui
12. Kris Hayashi
13. Leo Hegde
14. Jasmin Hoo
15. Linda Lee
16. NTanya Lee
17. Katie Loncke
18. Denise Perry
19. Irma Shauf-Bajar
20. Hyejin Shim
21. Michael Strom
22. Alex Tom
23. Tré Vasquez
24. Yuan Wang
25. ill Weaver
26. Sasha Wijeyeratne

Although many conversation partners spoke from their personal experiences in organizations, no one formally represented their organization's practices or stance, and so I've omitted any affiliations.

ON LINEAGE

In no way am I the first person to think about the importance of belonging in the world or in social movements. I give much reverence to movements led by trans people of color, youth and elders, and disabled people for modeling this culture throughout history. I've learned greatly from generative somatics and called on resources from the Othering and Belonging Institute, as well as many others, to understand the fundamental need of belonging. I've found belonging directly and indirectly from historical and contemporary formations such as Street Transvestite Action Revolutionaries (STAR), the International Hotel, the Combahee River Collective, the 504 sit-in, the Third World Liberation Front, Lavender Phoenix, Movement Generation, Disability Justice Culture Club, and so many more. This topic has been explored thoroughly, and I hope to contribute by speaking directly to the potential for belonging within base building organizations.

BIOGRAPHY

Sammie Ablaza Wills is an organizer and community archivist that has worked in transgender, queer, and racial justice movements for a decade. Serving as Executive Director of Lavender Phoenix from 2016-2021, Sammie organized alongside members to hone the focus of the organization on trans justice, community safety, and healing justice. Primarily working on Ohlone Land (the Bay Area), Sammie has trained hundreds of people on queer and trans history, direct action strategy, and grassroots organizing. Ultimately, Sammie wants to grow a just transition free from extraction, binaries, and false solutions.