Facilitator Guide: Conversations on Open & Ethical Communication

This guide can be used whole or in parts to facilitate conversations with staff at your coalition or with your membership. This is the guide used for the RSP ED Roundtable in Atlanta, GA in March, 2018.

"Facilitating is like communism for learning: it's decentralized, it requires everyone's involvement and Sam's uncle will get mad if you bring it up at dinner"
– Unlocking the Magic of Facilitation (2016)

Framing: Create framing/group agreements for your discussion

These are some that the RSP likes to use:

- **Critical Thinking:** attempts to reason at the highest level of quality in a fair-minded way. The ideal critical thinker is inquisitive, well-informed, trustful of reason, open-minded, flexible, fair-minded in evaluation, honest in facing personal biases, willing to reconsider, clear about issues, orderly in complex matters, diligent in seeking relevant information, and empathic.

- **Emergent Strategy:** Principles for facilitation based on Emergent Strategy (Brown, 2017) include:
    1.) Small is good (large is reflection of small)
    2.) Change is constant (be like water)
    3.) There is always enough time for the right work
    4.) There is a conversation in the room that wants and needs to be had. Don't force it, don't deny it. Help it come forth.
    5.) Never a failure, always a lesson
    6.) Trust the people (and they will become trustworthy)
    7.) Move at the speed of trust
    8.) Less prep, more presence and
    9.) What you pay attention to grows.

- **Love with Accountability:** Accountability is the greatest form of love (Simmons, 2016).

- **Radical Candor:** Radical Candor really just means saying what you think while also caring personally about the person you're saying it to (Scott, 2017).

Defining Open and Ethical Communication:

Start with the following:

> The National Communication Association (1999) states: *"ethical communication enhances human worth and dignity by fostering truthfulness, fairness, responsibility, personal integrity, and respect for self and other."* We can think of it as being in 'right relationship' with ourselves, each other and the world around us in order to model a different (non-violent, empowerment based) way.

Ask your team what else they feel defines open and ethical communication. Discuss how open and ethical communication is essential to ending sexual violence and all forms of oppression, in order to make the immediate ties to our daily work. Ask why we need skills and practice in open and ethical communication – use flipchart paper to capture notes to remind the group of the value of this work throughout the process and in our daily lives.

Listen for some specific things like: modeling the paradigm of non-violence through communication, addressing racism and other forms of oppression through courageous conversations, being able to hear and sit with truths different from your own, transformative justice processes, being able to address and prevent organizational trauma, having the skills to navigate systems work/collaboration with multiple roles and priorities, trauma informed supervision, navigating conflict on staff/in teams/between individuals, trust-building, etc.

Introduce the concept that cultural expectations and norms will differ within many different groups/cultures. Racial and ethnic cultures, linguistically specific cultures (including non-spoken language such as ASL), identity cultures (LGBT, generational, rural/urban, etc.) and other cultures that have their own norms around what constitutes good communication.

Discuss the difference between using open/ethical communication models to navigate difference and conflict, as opposed to the unrealistic expectation that those experiencing bullying/oppressive/abusive behaviors be accountable for engaging in a process of communication to alleviate their own oppression or abuse. There are different expectations of how to navigate those situations, and the responsibility should ultimately be with the organization/leadership to address such abuses.

There are three major arenas for skill-building around practicing open and honest communication:
1. The internal work
2. The interpersonal work
3. The organizational work

We will use different conversations to help us identify strategies and skills for each area in our time together.

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Discussion: Internal Work

"All conversations are with myself, and sometimes they involve other people."

-Susan Scott (2002)

Almost all good communication starts with internal work – both big picture and immediately. Clarity about what the conflict/dialogue/crucial conversation is for you is an essential piece of good communication. There are many approaches to the internal work that is required in order to show up for conversations that are important. Some of the ways that people do their internal work include practices such as:

1. Critical self-reflection and honest self-assessment – what are my strengths and challenges in communication, what skills should I invest in developing, how do I lower defensiveness and stay vulnerable?
2. Honestly acknowledging power – structural, cultural, or interpersonal. How will I work to make power imbalances transparent and equalize opportunity?
3. The rumble/five whys/self-awareness beyond the surface – Asking yourself WHY this is a crucial conversation? Is there an aspect that is internal that should be addressed before the conversation? What is the story I am telling myself?
4. Anti-racism and anti-oppression commitments, learning, and practice – what are the places that my privilege shows up in the conversation? What does that mean for how I approach the work?
5. Management training and philosophy – as an ED or influencer, YOU are the model – show that you value the ways that stable and empowering leadership supports open and ethical communication. Do the work of thinking about your role in the organization/in the conversation, etc

What else contributes? What else have folks used to do the work long term or in the immediate preparation for crucial conversations?

Activity: Personal reflection

Distribute handouts for 'Fierce Conversations with Myself' (at the end of this guide, p. 12) and ask participants to complete it in silence. Give participants at least 10-15 minutes for writing and reflection.

Ask if there are any reflections that people would like to share aloud.

Activity: Shared Agreements/Interpersonal Work

At times it can be helpful to create shared/co-created working agreements within the group as you begin to explore organizational commitment to open and ethical communication.

Start by asking folks to journal for 10-15 minutes or so. Ask them to:
1. Identify a time that they felt heard in a difficult conversation and what made that possible.
2. Identify supports and barriers to their own ability to show up in crucial conversations – things like being well-rested or feeling that they were 'invited' to have the conversation are examples of supports, while hungry/tired or feeling pigeon-holed would be examples of barriers to having intentional and courageous conversations.
3. What does transparency mean to you and how have you seen it show up in your work?

After folks have journaled about some combination of the questions above, ask them to have a whole group conversation about what commitments they are willing to make/need from others in order to have open and honest communication that supports our work to end sexual violence.

"When forced into a binary, you always choose wrong"
– Jelani Wilson (as quoted in brown, 2017)

Some concepts/agreements to prompt your conversation if folks are struggling:

- Start with goodwill and loving kindness whenever possible
- Acknowledge multiple truths. *Both/and* thinking will always move us farther
- Speak positively about each other and about the organization at every opportunity
- Depersonalize – make it about the work, not the person
- Demonstrate gratitude for disagreement/courageous conversations
- Emphasize one on one communication wherever that is possible – no triangulation, gathering forces, etc
- Recognize places of disagreement vs. places of power imbalance or oppression – these require different responses and processes

Write on flip chart paper the items that people brainstorm for agreements. Decide on a process for creation of agreements that work for your group/organization/coalition.

Facilitate World Café: Write each agreement on a piece of flipchart paper and place on different tables (you may need to assign more than one agreement per table). Have markers and each paper at different tables. Ask participants to select an agreement table to start at. Give each group about 15-20 minutes to discuss the agreements that have been shared and the ways they show up in action. Then have participants select another agreement table and repeat.

Activity: Different Audiences/Different Comfort

Being aware of places/relationships where you are already comfortable with some of the concepts/skills of open and ethical communication will also help us identify those places where we may need more practice given old patterns, power differentials, or other unique relationship structures.

Create five tables for roundtable discussions. Use these questions as starting places for discussion.

1. Internal Communication (supervision, co-worker, ED/Board)
How do we practice ethical communication within a hierarchy? How do we approach it within staff meetings? How do we create internal organizational communication agreements? What is important to model as an ED?

2. Coalition & Membership
What are the avenues for direct and ethical communication with our membership? How are they communicating with us? How do we lead/influence when in disagreement in approaches with our membership?

3. Coalition & Systems
How do we approach the various systems that we work in partnership with? What about the relationships that are not collaborative but more forced relationships? Oppositional roles?

4. Advocate & Survivor
How does ethical communication look in the context of an advocate working with a survivor? What are the benefits of direct and ethical communication in this relationship? What are the challenges?

5. Anti-Oppression
How does ethical communication look in the context of anti-oppression work? How does it support strategies like "calling-in"? How do we manage social hierarchy while engaging in ethical communication?

After about 15-20 minutes, have participants rotate to another table to discuss conversations in a new context. After at least one rotation, engage the large group in some report back on some broad themes, challenges, and strategies.

Activity: Facilitating Structures/Organizational Work

Have the group sit in groups of four to eight people. Participants will need paper and pen; the facilitator will need a timer (30-45 minutes).

Questions to explore:

- What are the spoken or unspoken agreements that we already have about communication within our coalition/organization?
- What is my role (as leadership/as influencer/as board member, etc.) in upholding positive norms and facilitating structures for good communication?

First, have participants take a piece of paper and write to themselves for one minute. Then have them turn to the person next to them to share their thoughts from their writing for two minutes. Then for five minutes talk to the small group. Debrief as a large group in the end.

Make a list of facilitating structures within your coalition/organization

Use flip chart paper and make a list as a large group or in smaller groups. (30 min)

Question: In our agency, how do we create processes and policies that support open and ethical communication as a part of our organizational work and culture?

Some ideas to start the ball rolling may include:
1. Role clarity – helps us understand limitations/priorities/responsibilities
2. Transparency about decision making processes and policies
3. Surfacing tensions and soliciting feedback
4. Regular communication/meetings/other ways of information sharing
5. Training on courageous communication and anti-oppression

Examine this list together. The next question for us to ask ourselves is: Where do we need to build new structural supports or fortify existing ones? How do we help ourselves and our staff/board acquire new skills and practice them?

Activity: World Café

In many highly mission-driven cultures, norms about what is discussable and how conflict is managed prevent open conversation about painful topics. Ironically, despite the fact that many of these organizations support their clients' facing their traumas and painful experiences, the organizations do not do this for themselves.

--Vivian & Hormann (2013)

Gather themes from *Facilitating Structures* and/or *Agreements* activities. Create 3-5 tables with flip chart papers and markers with the theme/prompting question listed. (60 – 90 min) Some examples might be:

- How does open and ethical communication support organizational wellness and staff resilience? How does it help ameliorate and prevent organizational trauma?
- Are we using good communication in our everyday work? On our staff? In supervision structures? With our systems or other collaborative partners?
- In what ways does open/ethical communication serve survivors of sexual violence directly or indirectly?

Participants choose the table of interest to get started. Allow 20 minutes for discussion and then rotate groups to other tables.

Facilitate a large group report-back.

Activity: Tools for Generative Conflict

How do we view conflict in our mainstream culture? How does your family of origin/upbringing/worldview affect how you experience conflict? What do we need to unlearn/relearn to be able to harness the generative power of conflict for our work?

A reminder that when we talk about generative or positive conflict, we mean conflict that is about differing opinions, beliefs, or ways of moving through this work, etc. Oppressive, abusive, or toxic conflict is dysfunctional, whereas generative conflict is functional. Generative conflict does not mean a free-for-all where you can say unkind things, attack an individual, or exercise positional power in inappropriate ways. But it does mean that you can speak your mind – if you think someone is wrong, you can say "I think you are wrong."

Ask the group to list ways that they have helped their organization/coalition work through conflict. What was effective? What are the things that we should remember as we move through conflict?

Using the following quote from Liane Davey in a Harvard Business Review article (2017) on conflict and collaboration, ask the group to list strategies to have productive conflict:

> *"Giving people permission to challenge, disagree, and argue isn't enough. After all, giving someone permission to do something they don't want to do is no guarantee that they'll do it. If you want to create productive conflict on your team and use it to generate better ideas, you need to move beyond permission to making productive conflict an obligation."*

Listen for and help bring up strategies such as:

1. Dedicate time to trust-building in order to create the best foundation for dealing with conflict. 'moving at the speed of trust'
2. Surface conflict intentionally. Make time and space for conflict specifically.
3. Name the dynamic. Make the conflict explicit. (Stone et al, 1999)
4. Help your team to gain skills necessary to navigate conflict effectively – recognizing and regulating emotion, approaching from a place of "yes, and..", staying curious rather than defensive, expect respect, actively listen and make people feel heard, make it clear that surfacing conflict and navigating it are just a part of the job/team/culture from the outset (clear expectations), and bring in outside help.
5. Set ground rules around dissension and how conflict is handled
6. Take a problem-solving stance and search for integrative solutions – think in both/and

Discussion: Communication and anti-racism/anti-oppression

"When staff take the personal risk to speak up about barriers, implicit biases, and experiences of tokenism, they are only bringing the discomfort and tension that exists within organizations to the surface. The ability of decision makers to hear that their organizations are not living up to their ideals is a crucial leadership capacity, and internal assessments of organizational climate are a powerful tool for starting the kind of honest discussions that are needed to make change."
--Sean Thomas-Breitfeld (2017)

Creating real opportunities to address America's continuing racial inequality and oppression is going to require conflict.

How are we showing up for that conflict and what are the tools we need to more effectively intervene in systemic and individual conflict around racism and oppression?

Using the handout from dRworks on White Supremacy Culture (available at http://www.westernstatescenter.org/tools-and-resources/Tools/Dismantling%20Racism) or a listing of some of the issues that the facilitator puts up on a flipchart, identify some of the ways that the open and ethical communication skills that we have been discussing are antidotes to mainstream organizational cultures that prioritize racist norms and standards.

Ask the following questions of the group and list on a sheet of paper:

How do you prioritize the work of dismantling racism and oppression in your organizational commitments? Facilitating structures? Internal work?

What is next? How can each person help your team/organization/coalition to best integrate open and ethical communication within your work on dismantling racism and oppression?

Now spend some time in small groups (at your tables) sharing the commitments/structures that you already have in place and those that you are aspiring to create. You can do a large group report back if there is sufficient time and capture the repeated themes on flipcharts.

Activity: Beautiful questions

A beautiful question (Berger, 2014) is an ambitious yet actionable question that can begin to shift the way we perceive or think about something--and what might serve as a catalyst to bring about change. It is followed by a saying that well informed people often try to solve a problem by answering the wrong question.

Think as a group about a more beautiful question for this discussion about good communication and the personal, organizational, and cultural supports for it. (30 min)

Here are some examples to consider as you find your own beautiful questions:
- How might we, the collective, change rape culture by practicing non-violent communication?
- What would happen if every conversation we had and every person we spoke with used these tools for open and ethical communication?

Once you decide on a more beautiful question(s), try answering it or talk about what you would need to know and do to be able to answer it.

Activity: Liberating Structures

Have the group sit in groups of four to eight people. Participants will need paper and pen; the facilitator will need a timer (30-45 minutes).

To end your meeting, ask participants to be bold: Think about the most important/ courageous/difficult conversation that you have been avoiding or that you believe is necessary.

First, have participants take a piece of paper and write to themselves for one minute. Then have them turn to the person next to them to share their thoughts from their writing for two minutes. Then for five minutes talk to the small group.

To end the meeting go around the room and ask participants: What might change if you/we committed to engaging in that conversation?

Resources & References:

brown, am (2017). *Emergent strategy: Shaping change, changing worlds*. AK Press, Chico, CA.

Brown, B. (2015) . *Rising strong: The reckoning, the rumble, the revolution*. Spiegel & Grau: New York, NY.

Davey, L (2017). If your team agrees on everything, working together is pointless. *Harvard Business Review*. Retrieved March 15, 2018 from https://hbr.org/2017/01/if-your-team-agrees-on-everything-working-together-is-pointless

Jones, K. and Okun, T (2001). White supremacy culture. *Dismantling racism: A workbook for social change groups*, by Kenneth Jones and Tema Okun, Change Work.

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Ramsey, V. J., & Latting, J. K. (2005). A typology of intergroup competencies. Journal of Applied Behavioral Science, 41(3), 265-284.

Scott, S (2002). *Fierce conversations: Achieving success at work & in life, one conversation at a time*. Berkley Books, New York.

Scott, K. M. (2017). Radical candor: How to be a kickass boss without losing your humanity (First edition.). New York: St. Martin's Press.
See also https://www.radicalcandor.com/about-radical-candor/

Simmons, A.S. (2016). http://www.lovewithaccountability.com/home.
See also https://www.nsvrc.org/news/resource/accountability-radical-form-love

Stone, D., Heen, S., & Patton, B. (2010). Difficult conversations: How to discuss what matters most. New York: Penguin Books. Chicago

Thomas-Breitfeld, S. (2017). How to think differently about diversity in nonprofit leadership: get comfortable with discomfort. *Nonprofit Quarterly*. Retrieved March 15, 2018 from https://nonprofitquarterly.org/2017/04/10/think-differently-diversity-nonprofit-leadership-get-comfortable-discomfort/.

Vermont Network Against Domestic & Sexual Violence (2010). Constructive communication: The VT Network approach.

Vivian, P. & Hormann, S. (2013). Organizational trauma and healing. North Charleston, SC: CreateSpace.

More Resources!

http://amorebeautifulquestion.com/

http://www.facilitationmagic.com/

https://ideas.ted.com/6-tips-for-dealing-with-conflict/

http://communitytechnology.github.io/docs/facilitation/collaborative_visioning_processes/

https://vimeo.com/180153629 - Brené Brown on leadership

Resources for all aspects of coalition work are available at www.resourcesharingproject.org

To the degree that you are fierce with yourself—passionate, real, unbridled, uncensored—a Mineral Rights conversation will help you explore issues by mining for greater clarity, improved understanding, and impetus for change. It will shine a bright light on that issue of yours, the one growling in you, and you'll live to tell about it. So now it's time to begin. Write down (or otherwise engage with) your response to each of the following questions. Do not edit your responses. Just write.

Step 1: Identify your most pressing issue.
The issue that I most need to address is:

Step 2: Clarify the issue.
What is going on?

How long has this been going on?

How serious are things?

Step 3: Determine the current impact
How is this issue currently impacting me?

How is this issue currently impacting others?

When I consider the impact on myself and others, what are my emotions?

Step 4: Determine the future implications.
If nothing changes, what's likely to happen?

What's at stake for me and for others relative to this issue?

When I consider these possible outcomes, what are my emotions?

Step 5: Examine your personal contribution to this issue.
What is my contribution to this issue?

Are there areas of accountability for me?

Step 6: Describe the ideal outcome.
If this issue is resolved, what difference will that make?

What results will I or others enjoy?

When I imagine this resolution, what are my emotions?

Is there a positive version of this outcome that leaves the conversation unresolved?

Step 7: Commit to action.
What is the most potent step I could take to move this issue toward resolution?

What are my barriers – internal or external – and how do I navigate them?

When will I take this step?

During this fierce conversation with myself, I've identified a potent step to take to begin to resolve this issue. I have chosen the date by which I will take this step. There will be other steps, perhaps many of them. This is the first. I commit to taking it.

Now take a break. Look around. Be in nature. Breathe. Breathing is good.

Modified version of 'Mineral Rights' by Susan Scott from <u>Fierce Conversations</u> (2002).