EN/GAGE3/C

A COMMUNITY PRACTICE BOOK

EMBODYING CARING, CURIOUS, COLLABORATIVE ARTS ECOSYSTEMS

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Embodying Caring, Curious, Collaborative Arts Ecosystems –
EN/GAGE 3/C: A Community Practice Book

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Embodying Caring, Curious, Collaborative Arts Ecosystems

EN/GAGE 3/C

A COMMUNITY PRACTICE BOOK

DEDICATION

Fariha M. Koshul
For the artists, storytellers and cultural stewards of Chicago and beyond – those who nurture community, creativity, and liberation across borders and generations, honoring the past, engaging the present, and shaping the future.

Lee Nah
To my halabuji, Hyun Beum Park, whose steadfast love and pride taught me everything I know about the practice of care. To my family, Albany Park, and the city of Chicago, all of whom I am honored to call home.

Pascale Ife Williams
To the ancestors and the future ancestors,
whose memories of Earth and Sky mold our living dreams.

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SECTION 1

AN INVITATION TO THE KITCHEN TABLE

WHO IS YOUR COMMUNITY?

ARE YOU...

CREATING NEW INTERESTS?

BRINGING EXISTING INTERESTS TOGETHER?

ARE PEOPLE CONNECTED BY...

IDENTITY?

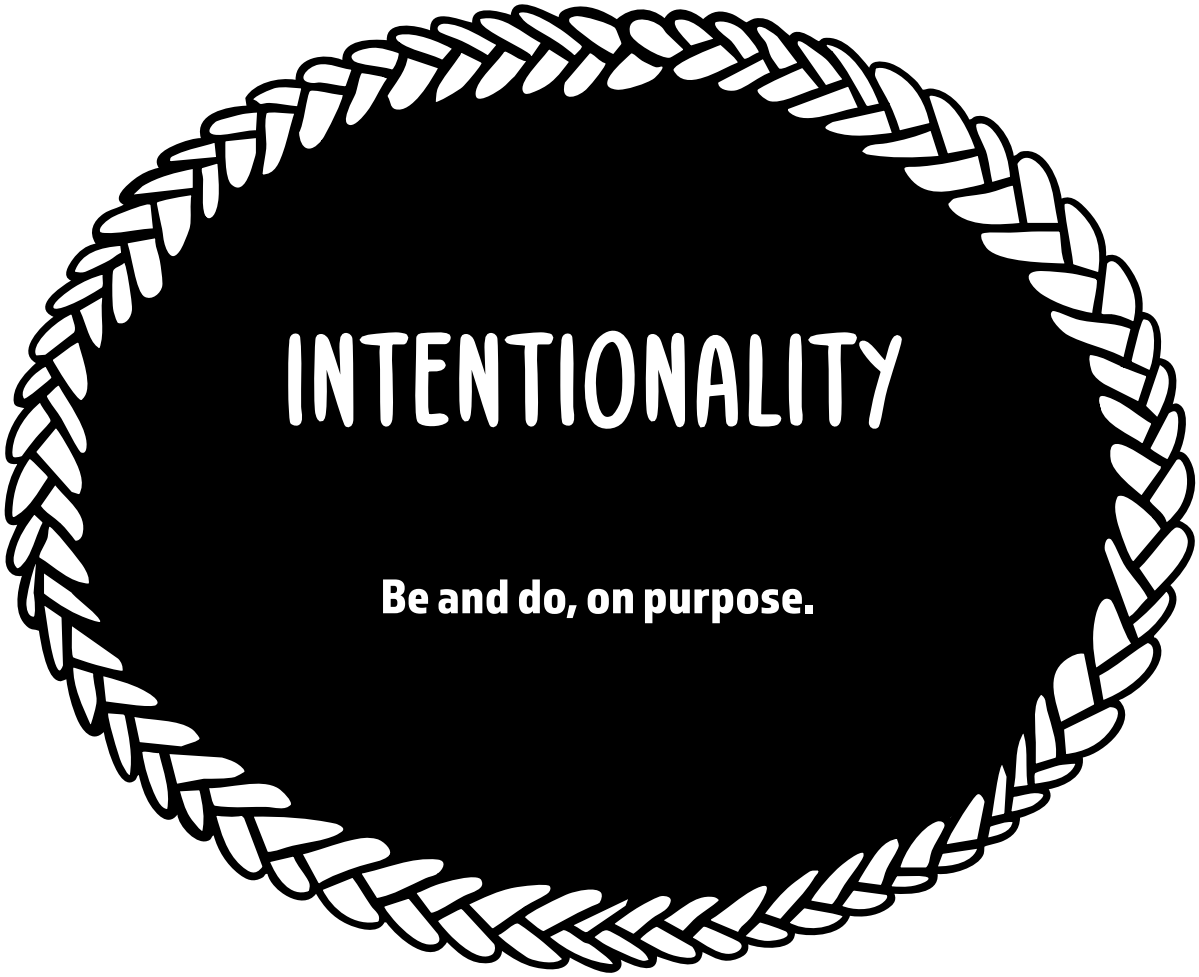
ACTION?

INTRODUCTION

Being in community necessitates a commitment to deepen: our capacity to feel, our tolerance for discomfort, our gift of vulnerability, our modeling of accountability, our critique of institutional harm alongside a breadth for demanding community repair, our willingness to be wrong, to fail, to try again. Rooted in the wisdom of community-centered cultural practitioners in the Chicago arts ecosystem, this book intends to generate creative, intentional, and deepened discussion and practice for anyone committed to ritualizing the work of community engagement. This gift, in the form of a Practice Book, is woven as a thoughtful invitation to embody the building of community from a praxis of care, curiosity, and collaboration.

We understand praxis to be the process of turning knowledge, methods and practices into embodied action. It's the bridge between theory and practice, where ideas take root through repetition, ritual, and lived experience. *Embodying Caring, Curious, Collaborative Arts Ecosystems – Engage 3/C: A Community Practice Book*, henceforth referred to as the "Practice Book" and its creators as "the EN/GAGE 3/C[1]" team, is a living resource to explore the sensorial elements of community-engaged arts. The Practice Book is rooted in and guided by three grounding values: care, curiosity, and collaboration. *Care* draws from frameworks of disability justice, Black queer feminism, and lineages of harm reduction.[2] *Curiosity* centers the integration of creativity, playfulness, and childlike inquisitiveness as a method and honors innovation and imagination as a tool for survival for many communities. *Collaboration* takes inspiration from principles of Design Justice and exemplary models of co-creation, lovingly situated in imagery of cross-pollination drawn from the natural world.

We believe all community engagement, whether it be arts-based or otherwise, is activated and sustained by these intentional values and praxes. **Throughout the Practice Book you will find values offered by our contributors that you should consider integrating, discussing, and expanding.** We have taken the liberty to animate the description of each value. Such as the two values introduced on the next page: "Intentionality" and "Creativity".



Interwoven in the pages of this book are frameworks drawing from a number of fields of scholarship and practice. This includes an **ecological perspective** — which asks that we position the individual lived experience in the context of the collective (e.g. small group, project team, organization) and the larger community/society. Also imperative to this project are tenets of the Black radical tradition[3], a liberatory anti-colonial, action-based, cultural, and intellectual movement. The Black radical tradition proposes that the promise of liberation is activated by freedom dreams[4] visualized through the word, the brushstroke, and the creative configurations our bodies take on as artist-freedom-fighters. These praxes reveal that dignified living for all, but especially for those most historically impacted by intersectional identities and systems of racial, environmental, cultural, economic, and sociopolitical oppression, is everyone's duty (we promise that this is the most academic jargon you will read here!). And that justice-oriented cultural work, and our memories of it, are transmuted ancestrally in our bodies.

It is in our body that we integrate *knowing* with *living*. **Embodiment combines a somatic awareness (sensations felt in the body) and the sensorial information (sounds, smells, tastes, sights, feelings, movements) from our environment.** The body is a human-flesh container that requires that we trust in our sensations, feelings, and physical presence as sources of insight that inform both personal and collective liberation. To embody caring, curious, collaborative community engagement is to engage in a rhythmic practice expressed through the actions of our everyday life. It's attempting to match how you say you are going to show up with how you *actually* show up. For example, the embodiment of *care* might look like taking the time to check in with your team before every meeting. Embodied *curiosity* might sound like community stories and narrative mapping being used to situate your upcoming exhibition. *Collaboration* might move like collectively identifying how decisions will be made as a group across your partnership. Embodiment is developing the capacity to feel. It must include the practice of being with each other through sensorial activations — *feels*, *looks*, *moves*, *sounds*, *smells*, *tastes like.*

In the context of this Practice Book, we come to embodiment through a healing justice[5] lens: a holistic somatic healing framework that speaks to the collective body in all its forms of oppressive disruption. Embodiment considers the awe-inspiring nature of our bodies, including our limitations, and holds at its center an awareness of those with chronic pain and illness or who navigate residual generational trauma[6] in their bodies. Through this lens we acknowledge that our bodies are sites of meaning-making, connection, and resistance. Embodiment is also the work of aligning our ethical values with our lived values, including healing justice.

This resource is about ***practice* — the repeated, intentional actions that shape how we move through the world. Practice is more than just doing – it is a ritual, a rhythm, a way of embodying values over time.** Through repetition, reflection, and adjustment, practice becomes a living commitment to growth, care, and community.

Who Is the Practice Book For?

This Practice Book is for everyone committed to sharing embodied wisdom through living and collectively dreaming into more creative and liberated spaces. In particular, it is an offering for, but not limited to, cultural organizers, artists, arts educators, arts administrators, and museum teams. It is also meant to be a resource for cultural institutions with existing practices that have expressed their commitment to refine and sustain community engagement and collaboration strategies.

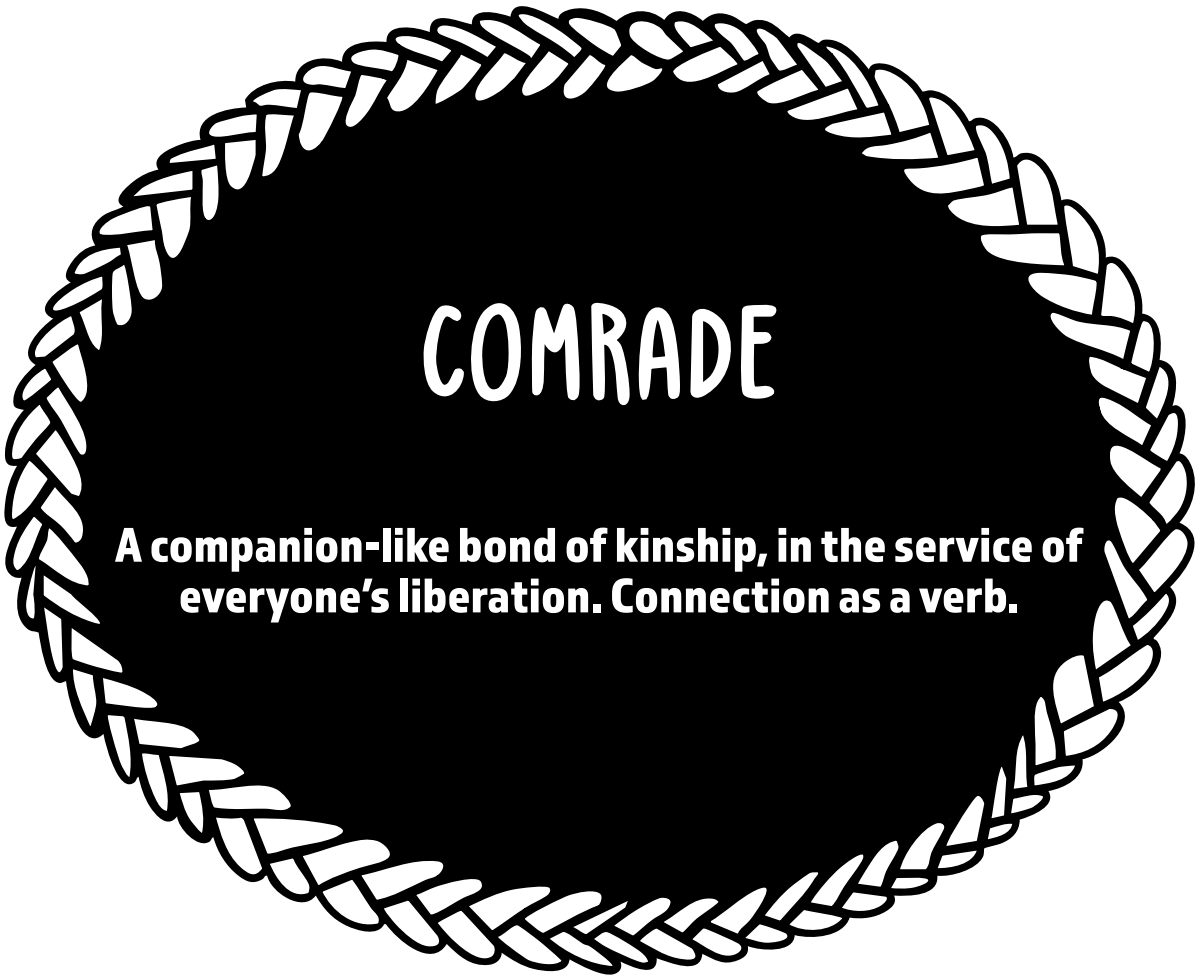
How Is the Practice Book Meant To Be Used?

Use this book as a living document and working resource. Write in the margins, underline interesting statements, color in the images and posters. Use the Practice Book like a tool to offer a fresh perspective when confronted with new challenges that you come back to to create a new "something."

> **We define a Practice Book** as a living document that holds shared wisdom, reflections, and tools for engaging in meaningful work. More than a handbook, it's a space for collective learning – capturing what has been tried, what has been learned, and what is still unfolding.

Proceeding the introduction to the Practice Book, there are six thematic sections: Community/Engagement; Values: Care, Curiosity, Collaboration; Assessing/Alignment; Harm/Accountability; Institutional Obligations/Offerings; and Lessons Learned: Navigating Challenges and Growth. These sections offer content populated with direct quotes from our contributors, thoughtful theoretical interpretations from our Research Team, graphic illustrations created during our Kitchen Table Cyphers drawn by Julie M Creates, suggested community engagement values, and **distinct co-created Practice Labs drawing inspiration from our conversations and lived experiences** (detailed in the following section). The Practice Book is not meant to be prescriptive; rather, it is meant to be a malleable document that creates generative containers for you and your teams, collaborators, and friends – so that you can be more reflective, more embodied, and more ethically aligned in the ways that we work alongside and with the community.

Throughout your reading and engagement with the Practice Book, we invite you to return to the figurative and material kitchen table: a place where banter meets wit and, most importantly, where communities are built.



PRACTICE LAB GUIDANCE

Each Practice Lab includes open space for reflections and notetaking. We encourage you to use this space creatively and freely.

SENSORIAL ACTIVATION: The invitation for embodied praxis is to deepen our capacity to feel, in community. This happens through somatic awareness (sensations felt in the body) and the sensory information (sounds, smells, tastes, sights, feelings, movements) we bring our attention to and take in from our environment. Embodiment requires deep presence. It is a practice of awareness beyond the mind and into the body/heart. An attunement to the sensations of how you are feeling, what you are hearing, what you are seeing, and more.

For example, try sensing into how you show up in community spaces — when you are leading, when you are the guest, and when you are invited in as a collaborator. Do you expand (lengthen) your breath? Does the tension in your body release? Do you shrink yourself and feel your breath quicken? What sounds and other sensations are you most aware of? Begin to track your somatic and environmental sensations. This information is worth learning from, spending time with, and celebrating. Remember, an awareness of the embodied and the sensorial requires pause, presence, breath.

GROUNDING BREATHING TECHNIQUE

Breathe in and out at your normal pace.
Now breathe in and lengthen your breath going out.

This technique should help provide calm and an immediate awareness of your body. Now try repeating this practice three or four times. We invite you to ritualize using this simple grounding breathing technique throughout your engagement with the Practice Book, particularly if you feel dysregulated or are needing extra tenderness.

INDIVIDUAL REFLECTION: The reflection prompts are intended for individuals to sit with independently. You may choose to journal, draw, or record an audio message to yourself to document your thoughts. You may also choose to share your reflections with someone, but you do not have to.

KITCHEN TABLE CYPHER: These invitations are for groups. Your discussion may be with one other person, your project team, community advisory council, collaborators, existing relationships, burgeoning friends. Discussion questions are meant to elicit honest dialogue, "playful banter back and forth." You may be inspired from the Kitchen Table Cypher method [detailed below in the "Research Process" section] and choose to co-create the container for discussion and sensorial activations over a shared family-style meal.

PRACTICE: Think about these invitations as ***rituals*** — an intentional approach in the form of an activity, exercise, or movement – that you choose to return to over and over (repetition sustains embodiment): **a practice wherein culture is created.**

BACKGROUND FOR THE PRACTICE BOOK: ART DESIGN CHICAGO ENGAGEMENT LEARNING COMMUNITY

In 2021, Pascale Ife Williams, PhD, lovingly referred to in the community simply as Ife, joined the Terra Foundation for American Art as the Senior Engagement Fellow for Art Design Chicago, an initiative to support "the creation of exhibitions, public programs, and publications that amplify the voices of the city's diverse artists and designers – past and present."[7] Together, more than 75 participating Chicago museums and cultural centers gathered over a span of four years for cooperative idea-generation, knowledge exchange, consensus building, and collective problem-solving to explore and refine more inclusive and "innovative engagement strategies aimed at building meaningful relationships with community partners." Ife played an integral role in the development of the Engagement Learning Community.

The institutions, and the individuals leading them, all came from diverse disciplines, backgrounds, arts modalities, organizational sizes, resources, visions, and familiarities and approaches to community engagement. However, everyone arrived with an eagerness to deepen their ability to be in community-centered collaboration and to explore more ethical models of engagement rooted in mutually beneficial partnerships. Ife reflects, "I kept hearing in the intimate conversations I was having with teams and smaller groups, and even in the larger Learning Communities, that some folks felt well versed in their

ability to be in community engaged practice. And some folks felt like they were at the beginning of their journey. But ultimately, [everyone] wanted to continue to deepen an understanding of what it means to be an individual within an institution, or an institution, that proposes to collaborate with the community" — and does so with care and intentionality at the center. This realization led Ife to propose developing a research-based resource: Embodying Caring, Curious, Collaborative Arts Ecosystems – EN/GAGE 3/C: A Community Practice Book.

Rooted in a cultural organizing and a healing justice background, Ife embedded her lived understanding of the foundational principles of community engaged work – care, curiosity, and collaboration – into the formation of the project. All its elements, from the proposal to the story collection to the Research Team Labs, seek to reflect a commitment to implementing those values, all the while centering the wisdom of folks in deep, intentional, community-engaged praxis. We hope our collective offerings speak to these intentions.

NARRATIVE VOICE OF THE PRACTICE BOOK

The narratives and stories in this Practice Book reflect the intimate vulnerabilities, reflections, and lived experiences of the contributors – offering lessons learned, risks taken, and values embodied. Grounded in intersectional feminist praxis, this book emerges from a shared commitment to collective liberation. As fellow community members, we hope to provide clarity about the intentions that guided both the writing and the interpretation of this work.

The narrative voice intentionally shifts throughout the book, amplifying collective meaning-making through practices of sharing, listening, and engaging with tensions. While discussions of institutions are present, these communal offerings regarding the operationalization of community engagement are made with a sense of precarity, informed by skepticism, institutional critique, and the necessity of strategic plotting.

We hope the same care and intentionality through which these perspectives have been shared is met with reciprocity from the reader. **Ultimately, this book is an offering created by the community, for the community.** We invite you to engage with its knowledge and insights with this shared commitment in mind.

KITCHEN TABLE CYPHER

THE RESEARCH PROCESS

The EN/GAGE 3/C research project is a labor of love, care, and curiosity that reimagines how we create, connect, and collaborate within Chicago's arts ecologies. Grounded in the lived realities of artists, cultural organizers, and institutions, this initiative embraces sensorial and embodied practices of engagement as tools for building relationships that are liberatory, intentional, and rooted in justice. A **community-based research project,** EN/GAGE 3/C centers the voices, knowledge, and expertise of those who live and create within the ecologies of curiosity, care, and collaboration through listening and being in dialogue with the people who are already doing the work.

This framework allows us to hold space for these conversations with care and curiosity, to co-create shared language, guiding principles, and sustainable partnerships. The **interviews** we conduct are not traditional data-collection moments — they are spaces for mutual exchange. We invite participants to bring their full selves to these conversations, knowing that their stories, tensions, and dreams are vital to shaping a collective narrative. This approach, rooted in horizontal exchange, ensures that every voice is valued and every experience is treated as essential wisdom.

At the heart of this journey is the **Kitchen Table Cypher (KTC)**, a generative methodology coined by Dr. Pascale Ife Williams and shaped by three powerful lineages: Black radical traditions, the hip-hop cypher and the Black feminist tradition of the kitchen table.[8] The cypher is a vibrant, cyclical space where people gather to share ideas, challenge one another, and build something greater together. It is a space to be present, to celebrate, to converse, and to feel the texture of engagement – an invitation in itself. The kitchen table, meanwhile, embodies intimacy, vulnerability, and world-building – a site deeply rooted in Black radical traditions where conversations are both nourishing and transformative. Together, these two traditions merge to create a dynamic space for collective meaning-making, where intellectual rigor and lived experiences are equally valued.

Our **analysis approach** of engaging with the material from the interviews reflects this collaborative ethos. Rather than imposing hierarchical

interpretations, we embrace collective reflection, allowing the insights shared by participants to guide our understanding. Our approach was a multilayered process that blended individual reflection with collaborative consensus-building, ensuring the complexity and richness of the data were honored. Working as a three-member research team, we began with the review and analysis of individual transcripts that involved coding for thematic patterns in community engagement practices.

Following this preparation, we moved into collaborative analysis through research labs where individual insights were synthesized into a collective thematic codebook. Each team member coded themes independently, identifying patterns, nuances, and standout quotes, then shared their findings in iterative discussions. These labs emphasized horizontal exchange and collective reflection. Together, we refined themes into a cohesive framework, culminating in a Practice Book that embodies the care, curiosity, and collaboration central to the EN/GAGE 3/C project. The Practice Book we are creating is a living resource — a reflection of the community's wisdom, ready to be used by cultural workers, artists, and institutions in Chicago and beyond seeking more equitable, imaginative futures.

KITCHEN TABLE CYPHER CONTRIBUTORS

Alexandra Antoine, Chef (she/her) is a visual artist and community chef specializing in food collage art and meals inspired from her Haitian Creole descent. Alexandra loves everything having to do with food, whether it's planting it, growing it, harvesting it, seed saving, or traveling the African Diaspora to learn about it. Her delicious contributions to the Kitchen Table Cyphers included lemon honey hibiscus tea, "sauce pois" (Haitian bean sauce), and "legumes" – a veggie stew with carrots, cabbages, and eggplant. She comes from a long lineage of farmers, holding dear memories of watching her mom in her garden. She proclaims, "You just got to remember whether it's healing herbs or nourishing food, [that's] how we gather people together." Alexandra assures you, you will have no choice but to fall in love with food once you have tried a Haitian dish.

Amber Ginsburg (she/her) is a community-centered artist, organizer, and educator of sculpting at the University of Chicago. Co-leader of Project Fielding, a femme-identified woodworking collective, Amber is committed to creating justice-oriented spaces like the upcoming mourning altar collaboration with the Chicago Torture Justice Center, centering conversations with survivors of torture and carceral harm. Also the co-founder of Narrow Bridge Arts Club, a shared art-making space reimagining the private studio as a communal practice, art spaces for Amber feel like "really good soil – productive, with a little rot, dirt, and sand. It's all part of something bigger."

Lily Be (she/her) is a student of life, narrative care provider, and connector. Traveling across the country in her van, she has created a pedagogy that allows us to connect the world of healers and community leaders through centering storytelling. Community engagement to Lily sounds like "water in all." Crashing waves, flowing streams, or the soothing raindrops on her van: community is like water, a "form of life."

Bri Robinson (they/them) is a Black digital griot and Midwestern propagandist committed to creating affirming spaces. They define community engagement as "the virtue by which seedlings of care are planted, nurtured and shared with others" and believe community should sound like an affirmative hum. When asked what they have been dreaming for their community, Bri shared, "I'm always dreaming of spaces of intentional vulnerability. I'm excited to connect to people in a way that really prioritizes safety."

Candace Bey (she/her) is a very curious Chicago native who sees herself as a connector. For her, community engagement sounds like "the kids that play in the alley outside of my house [...] they're laughing and you can hear the basketballs bouncing [...] But then also they're really, really, really good at mimicking the sound of a police car. And that's a complicated feeling. Those successful spaces kind of hold all those things together." Candace is as equally committed to respecting youth as she is to leading with an open heart. She gets excited about DIY spaces, home galleries, and Chicago history, particularly the stories and contributions of Black Chicagoans.

Garrett Johnson (he/him) is a "tinkerer in the arts community." He co-runs the Center for Concrete and Abstract Machines and believes that "the health of an organization or the health of community is something that is wrapped and potentialized by the possibility for being in community with each other." Garrett believes community is a verb, an invitation.

Gillian Giles (they/them) is an inquisitive, community-centered researcher, writer, and community member. A Bronzeville native, Gillian allows curiosity and listening to understand and serve community needs. Committed to creating non-hierarchical, resonant collaborations, Gillian envisions community as "showing up. It's colorful."

Juarez Hawkins (she/her) is an artist, educator, and curator. Juarez says, "to quote Sade," that community engagement "dives and it jumps back and forth. Motion of ideas, facilitation. Seems jagged, but it's just zigzagged because there's so many components, so many moving parts that must align. And at its best, it's like a chacha or salsa." Juarez dreams of having a community arts center in her neighborhood of Roseland, somewhere where "people can go and kind of expand their touch with the culture."

Julie Merrell, Graphic Notetaker (they/them) is an Asian-American queer and disabled educator living on ancestral Neshnabé lands. Julie is a special educator, community organizer, and movement artist. In all work, dreaming and collaborations, Julie strives to move closer to a liberatory future rooted in community care. To Julie, community engagement looks like "creating intentionally child-friendly spaces and providing childcare when that's not possible." Julie's artistic practices have been shaped by the artists they are in community with: their wife/editor, Ama; their graphic notes inspiration, Cori Nakamura Lin; and other members of Artists for Radical Imagination, including Chi Nwosu, who connected them to this project. (*Please refer to Section III: Ingredients 'Reflections from The Artist: Julie M Creates' to learn more about Julie's practice and process.*)

Jordan Martins (he/him) is a collage artist whose practice has been at the core of his creative life since his teenage years. He sees his roles as curator, educator, organizer, and parent as extensions of this practice, saying, "It's all about figuring out how things meld together, even when it seems like they shouldn't – like a Renaissance painting on top of a lasagna picture." For Jordan, the challenges of collaboration mirror the art of collage: "Sometimes things don't align right away, but that process is essential and opens the door to deeper connections."

LaLa Bolander (he/she) is a Chicana community artist and educator from Pilsen who uses art as a tool of connection and empowerment. Play is a big part of LaLa's creative process, which is deeply connected to her role as a parent. LaLa believes all community art spaces should be "welcoming, safe, playful, accessible, and generative." You can see his work at lalanomada.com

Maimuna Touray (they/them) is a cultural organizer, community artist, and someone committed to sharing embodied wisdom through living and collectively dreaming into liberated spaces. Guided by carework, Black Queer, and Crip liberation, Maimuna views their work as a bridge between the individual and the collective, where personal narratives and communal experiences intersect to inspire and co-create change. Resisting ableism, Maimuna affirms that "knowing one's capacity is actually a really beautiful skill and a great gift that you can offer your community and yourself."

nick adler (they/themme) is a community practitioner originally from New York and now based in Chicago. Over the years, they have focused on arts and community programming through collectives and collaborations. A student of Black feminist creative practices, nick thinks a lot about co-creation and "how community arts spaces can feel like the right place for people to collaborate and cross-pollinate, creating the world we want to see." With a background in mental health as a psychologist, nick shifted focus during the pandemic to support community-based arts programming. For the past three years, they have worked independently, centering interdependence and collaboration in all they do; for additional reference: http://wordtodrnick.notion.site

Nour Arafat (we/them) is a Palestinian cultural worker, designer, and organizer. They believe community should feel "easy to connect with and engage with and activate parts of you that you like to have inspired." Nour helps lead the Design Justice Network, an organization committed to principles of transformation that hosts "discotechs" and supports care-pod initiatives among other endeavors. Nour affirms that "the kitchen table will forever be one of the most sacred places for connection."

Tanner Woodford (he/him) is a graphic designer, mural painter, and dad to a 6-year-old. As the founder and executive director of the Design Museum of Chicago, he applies his love of typography to foster collaborative, inclusive environments where art and design catalyze social change and collective empowerment. When asked to describe community engagement through our senses, he replied, "I'll answer smells, because it was the hardest one for me. And I'll say sweaty."

Teagan Harris (she/her) is an artist and museum practitioner belonging to the Cherokee Nation in Oklahoma. Currently working with the Block Museum on the Woven Being exhibition centering Indigenous art, Teagan moved to Chicago eight years ago to learn about museum work and bring that knowledge back to her community. For Teagan, community spaces are deeply rooted in the familiar: "When I walk in and it smells of sweetgrass or sage, there's this moment of a breath out – it's grounding." Through this kind of familiarity and grounding, Teagan aims to resist the sterile feeling museum spaces can create while honoring the lived experiences of her community and creating spaces that are both culturally resonant and transformative.

SECTION II

PRAXIS

DEFINING "COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT"

AS IT OFTEN FEELS NOW:

THE PROFESSIONALIZATION & OPERATIONALIZATION OF BEING A PERSON

WHAT IT CAN BE:

COMMUNITY / ENGAGEMENT

"I define community really closely to how I understand commons [...] I consider myself to be a common scholar and practitioner, and I define the commons as a social process where people share resources collectively, govern those resources, make collective decision-making, and then also exist in common with land and more than human beings. As someone who is Afro indigenous, who grew up with a very strong sense of connection to place and land as being kind of inseparable from my kin, my understanding of kinship. I really define community as a feeling, as a state of being when you are with people and other beings in a reciprocal social responsibility."

—Maimuna Touray

Engaging with a community is an invitation to think about the action of *communing* with—people, ideas, feelings, things. Community functions within multiple spheres and operates through varying levels of intimacy, extending outward in concentric circles. Consider the breadth of communities *you* are in, including the length and depth of each relationship, its shared discipline, or its purpose. Community is something that emerges and is continually being transformed. It is a process of being and co-creating as we figure out our intersections with people. Sometimes these relationships span years; at other times they act as short-term temporal activations. We build communities based on identity, shared interest, location and geography, and/or goal and action-based endeavors. Lala Bolander offers the insight, "You can be identity-based communities or you can be action-based communities. Those are sometimes really separate things. If I'm going to engage an identity-based community, I want to belong to that community. [...] But if it's going to be aligned on some type of action, we don't necessarily have to share any identities. So the engagement of that community is going to look different." **These distinctions are not intended to emphasize one particular community over another but are rather meant to highlight the importance of defining the scope of the communities you are seeking to engage and to build.** For example, you may belong to a Chicago-based queer parent biking group with the goals of connection and wellness, *or* you might be part of a zine makers and collectors' guild based on your interest in the craft.

Community, and the stories and wisdom that arise from it, have been a crucial source of worldbuilding for many cultures for centuries. This long history counts among its participants the rich lineages of Griots, storytellers, community historians, poets, musicians, and praise singers who preserve the oral traditions and genealogies of their communities (as noted by Bri Robinson). While there are ephemeral and fleeting ways we exist in community, Bri Robinson suggests, "these [are all] divine happenings that bring people closer to one another with the practice of healing one another. I think community exists with the purpose of mutual nurturing." **Community is kinship in practice.** It often includes navigating moments of tension and building in pauses in relationship-building to ensure you belong. Asking yourself, "Is there a space for my child here? Is there a space for my chosen family here?" Lala Bolander reflects, "It's a skillset that is even more developed sometimes in other people to grab at each other and to remind them 'oh, yeah, there's enough space for you here." Perhaps in its most intimate manifestation, a community can become a found family, an evolving container in which people are "choosing to continue to put the work in and create new relationships and experiences out of that" (Teagan Harris). It is

important to acknowledge how many different spheres of community we are in and how many different relationships we attend to.

Community is not an abstract metaphor. ***Community is a conversation. Community is a verb.***

> *"I first think about not the community around us, but the community of conversation because it's itself this network of programmers and volunteers and people who want to do things in this building [Comfort Station]. It's mostly, how can I funnel resources and functionality into that space such that the people who want to do things there have an easier time, have more opportunities, have more connections, and have more resources and have more equitable pay."*
>
> *—Jordan Martins*

At the **institutional level**, "community" is often defined based on preexisting structural frameworks or definitions shaped by the institution's specific objectives. Gillian Giles reminds us that "the ability to define community holds a lot of power. A lot of power to support whoever you're defining [a] community to be, but also a lot of power to exclude and to be narrow in that definition. And so I can't give one definition, but I can tell you how I approach definitions and different forms of community." The work of defining "community/engagement" requires that the people working within the institutions thoughtfully navigate the complexities of power and formal research methods that operationalize community in contrast to the ways community is practiced and embodied at the grassroots level. It is important to explore what kind of research might be required to operationalize your terms and scope while also deepening and humanizing your community engagement practices. Genuine community engagement at the institutional level must begin with the internal "why." Especially if intending to build a relationship with a new community, institutions must think about why they are now seeking to connect with this new group of people and why it hasn't happened before. Why now? Consider the question: **Are your intentions for engaging a community genuine?** Also ask yourselves:

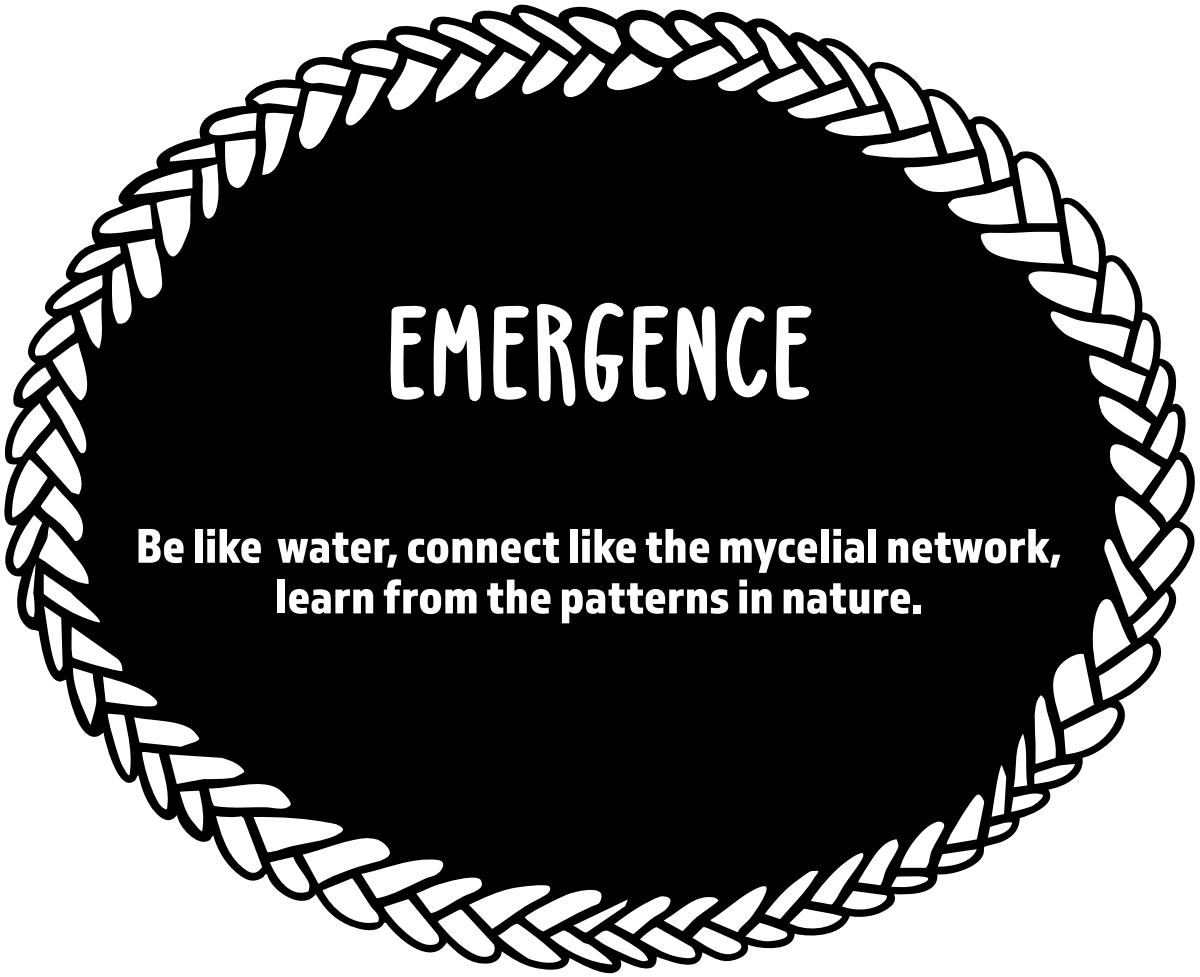
> Do we/I have the cultural competence and somatic intelligence to work with/collaborate with this community?
>
> If not, can we/I find and sustain the cultural competence and somatic intelligence to do so?

As Candace Bey tells us: "If the why is not genuine then I feel like that means it's not aligned." **Remember: not every project is meant for everyone.**

Given the innate precarity of community-engaged work, it is especially crucial to ensure that institutions intentionally prepare their staff to ethically work alongside new communities of people. Teagan Harris speaks directly to the importance of naming the Indigenous roots of these sorts of humanizing practices:

> It'd be really lovely to see some of the really great curators and artists in this community [The Block Museum] be able to talk deeply about their practice and engage further in dialogue with other cultural movements or with the wider culture in a way that we don't have to constantly explain "Native 101". That has been a huge stopper for creating community, you can invite an amazing artist or curator, but they may still be asked, 'where'd you get your jewelry and what tribe are you from?' Those aren't bad questions, but it is maybe outside of what you might ask a [non-Native] artist that you see as a person. I would love to see a growth there; that might come from a little bit of extra knowledge from others, but I wonder too if there's a way to manufacture good questions or create spaces that people can feel like they don't have that dread of what people are going to ask or say.

Community is our commitment to one another—a tangible space to explore relationality and a tool of survival for those most impacted by systems of oppression. Part of the work of genuine relationship-building is showing up and supporting people in their own element, meaning supporting the work and dreams of people outside of the work you may do together. **Community-centered practitioners** must consider their role(s) as **connectors** while also acknowledging the positionality they hold, whether that be a representative or member of a group, an advocate for another group, and/or a liaison between a community and an institution. It is equally important to remember, as Garrett Johnson reminds us, that **"the face to face is incredibly precious."** Ultimately, community engagement is a nuanced skill that is practiced and refined over time, a commitment to developing trust and building relationships with an open heart.


EMERGENCE
Be like water, connect like the mycelial network,
learn from the patterns in nature.

COMMUNITY/ENGAGEMENT PRACTICE LAB

SENSORIAL ACTIVATION:

Community feels like ...

"*It's easy to connect with and engage with and it activates parts of you that you like to have inspired*" -Nour Arafat

"A *space that feels right for people to collaborate and cross-pollinate to just bring the world that we want to see*" -nick adler

A "*[whoo!] feeling*" (*Lily Be*); *unseen but felt connection and comfortability, an essence that is embodied and sometimes cannot be defined*

Pause, breathe, ground, and feel.

What does community feel like to you?

Where in your body can you locate a sensation of connection and belonging?

INDIVIDUAL REFLECTION:

Community can be best defined by the people we are intentionally in conversation with. One of the goals for these spaces is to have conversations without fear or shame that support open expression. It is important to include ourselves when defining our various communities is an aspect of the conversation:

> **How do you define yourself outside of your role and the work you are paid to do?**

KITCHEN TABLE CYPHER:

There is a precarity to defining "community" particularly in the context of organizational engagement goals. We must bring forth a carefulness, like "oscillating between two hands". In your group or team, discuss the following:

> **How are we defining community within the scope of this collaboration? What type(s) of community are we engaging with?** (identity-based, action-based, etc)
>
> **How is the community/communities we are engaging/building mutually resourced by our goals?**
>
> **What are the levels of intimacy that we are willing to share and hold?** (e.g. mutual aid, shared struggle and necessity of coalition as consequence of systems failure, temporal, etc).

PRACTICE:

Rituals help cultivate the practice of listening and feeling, in community. Consider how you can listen more deeply to the communities you are in. Ask people questions that begin to highlight their values, commitments, and ideas. An example of a ritual is:

> "So *guess what we're going to do? We're going to talk about our feelings. And so if I'm in a meeting and someone skips a check-in, that's not my people.*"
> *- LaLa Bolander*

1. **Checking-in.** Depending on how much time you have, this can look like beginning your meetings with a prompt such as,

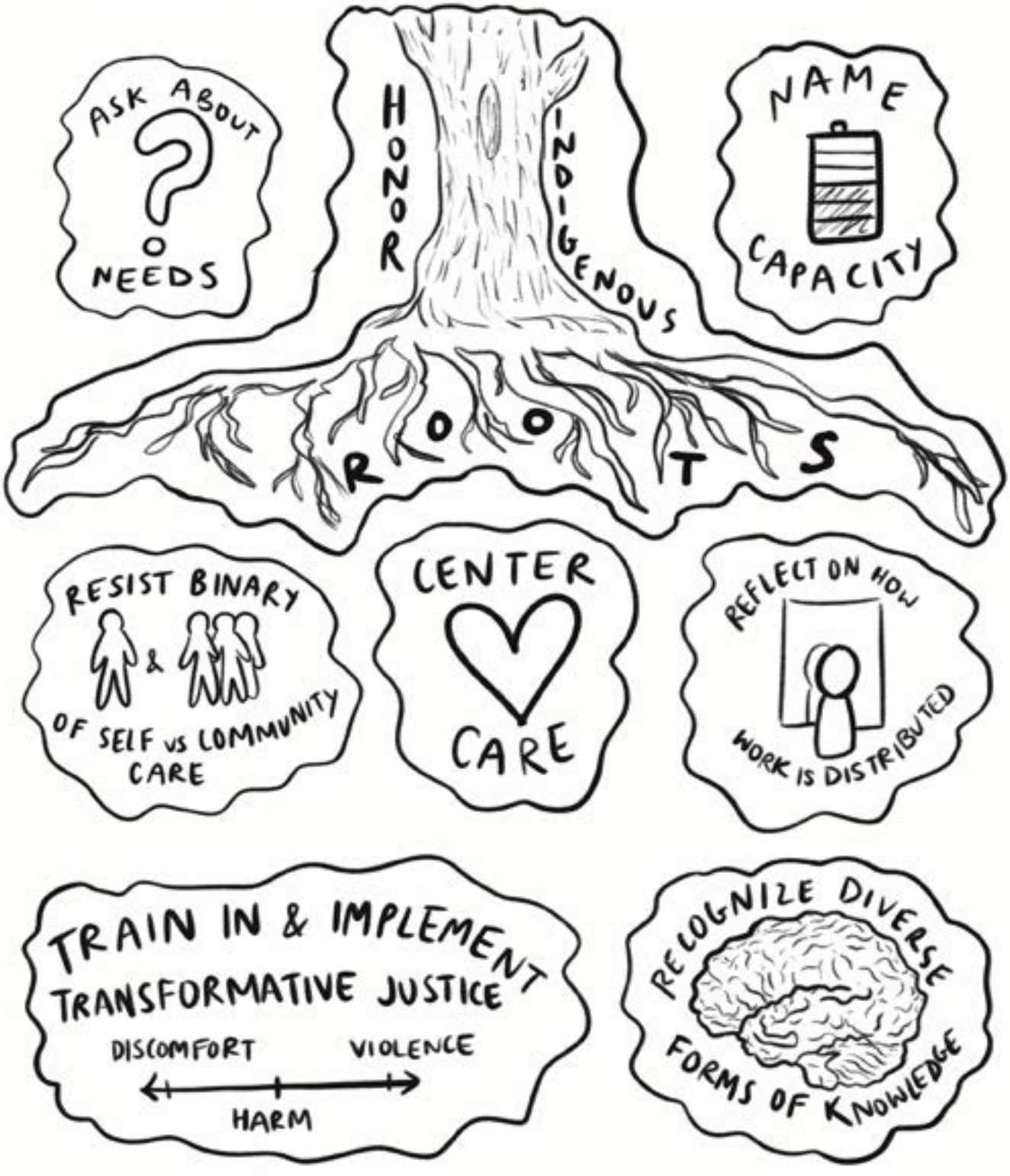
    - "On a scale of 1 to 10, what is your current energy level?"
    - "How are you doing today?"
    - "What intentions do you have for our time together?"
    - "How are you hoping to feel during our time together?"

2. **Gratitude Practice.** Expressing gratitude is an extremely meaningful way to connect and affirm the collective's mutual commitment to each other and in navigating any tensions that may have emerged.

    "*The gratitudes are there, but they're not without sorrow or complexity around anything that actually happened in that day or in that working session. And so just having a regular practice of being able to have a reflexive moment in every working day.*" - *Amber Ginsburg*

    - I am grateful for_____.
    - I affirm [comrades name] for_____.
    - I appreciate [comrades name] for_____.

BRINGING CARE INTO COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT



VALUES: CARE / CURIOSITY / COLLABORATION

How we grew up, the histories from which our life stories branch off and inspire from, and the context of our lived experience and environment all shape our core values. **What are the values that inform how you move through the world?** Those values are worth contemplating. In conversation with Nour Arafat, Nour shared the impact of the city of Detroit—site, place, people—and how it was a part of the lineage of how they've come to the values they hold. Values are not a set of rules; rather they are a set of principles meant to inform, challenge, and expand the ways we act and show up for ourselves, each other, the land, our non-human relatives, and beyond. We should expect our values to have a fluidity over time, and it can be helpful to come back to strategies to articulate our values as they evolve and change.

The following section offers an invitation to explore in greater depth the 3/Cs, the three values that are embedded in the EN/GAGE 3/C framework and that informed the approach to developing this Practice Book. Here we explore **care** and **curiosity** as prerequisites to meaningful **collaboration**.

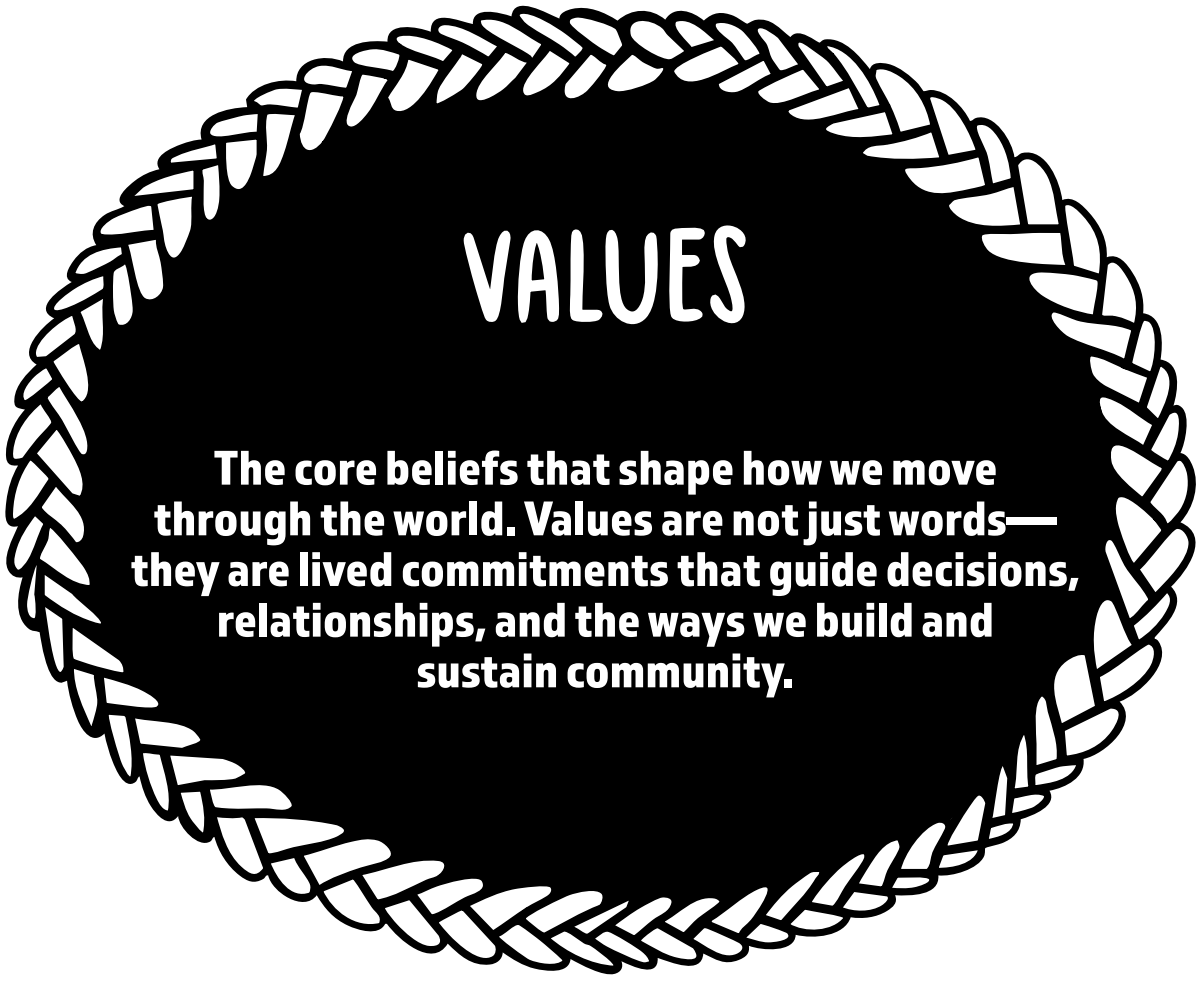
Care

> *"There's a comfort, like home peace—and not a peace that comes from, 'I don't want to say no harm. Not a peace that comes from toxic positivity, but of realness. A peace that comes from knowing that you're cared for in the best way. Where it's like you might have to hear some hard truths, but you're*

definitely cared for. For me, community is definitely a caring of us. And whatever that looks like, whatever needs caring, whatever needs to be cared for. That's what a community steps up to. That's how I see it. It's all care [laughter]."

—*Lily Be*

Just like the practice of community, care is not a metaphor or an abstract theme. ***Care is a verb.*** Community and care are not transactional processes; they are a form of reciprocity and presence. Hierarchies of care and barriers to care are woven into the fabric of many of our current systems, such as our medical system, our housing system, our education system, and our means of access to institutional arts and cultural experiences. Care necessitates an acknowledgment of every person's humanity and requires that we admit to and disrupt the systemic discrepancies between those who receive care and those who do not, those who have access to resources and those who do not.



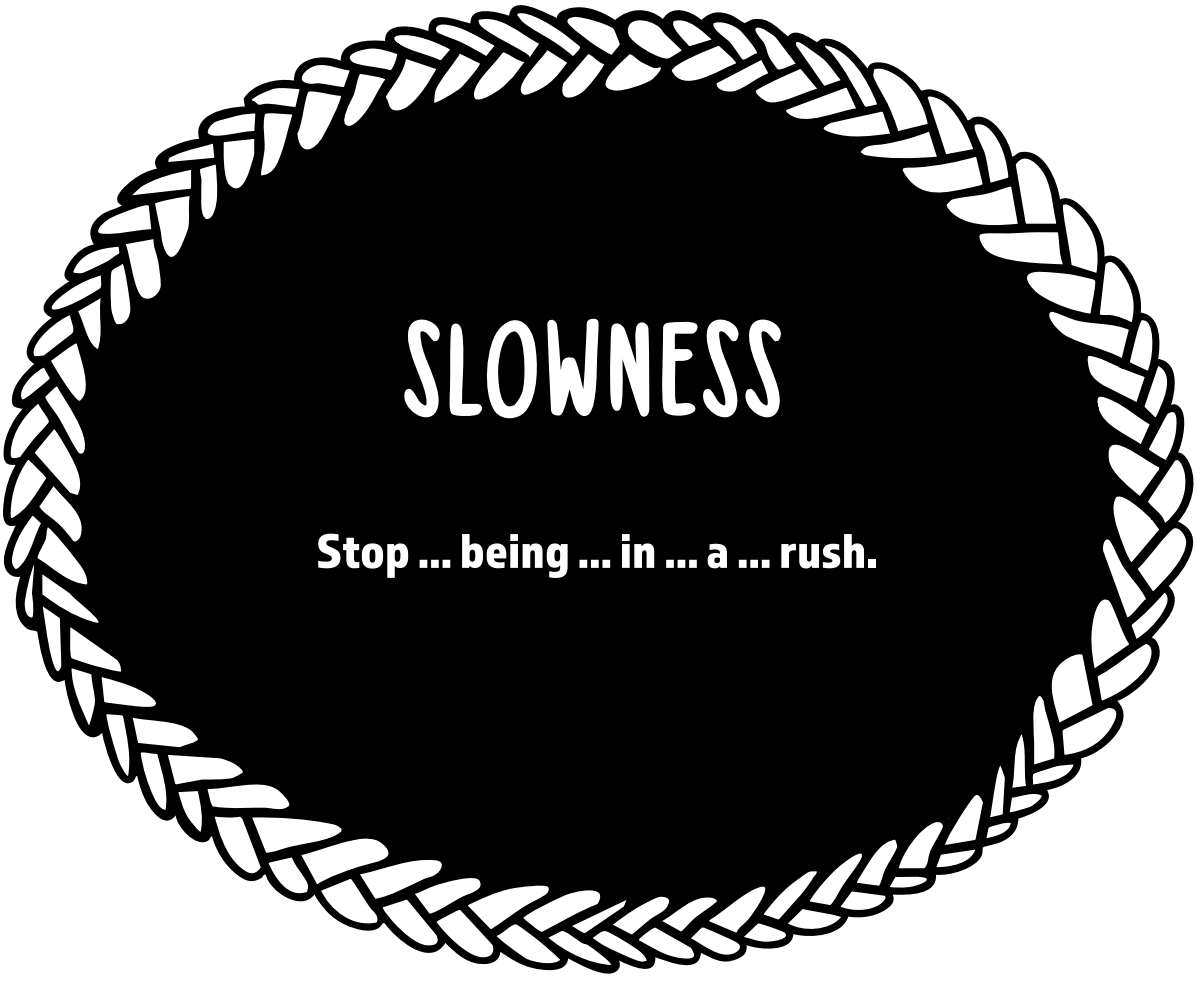
Community care draws us into the praxis of reciprocal care and highlights what it means to engage in the process of care across space and context (not just in specific places, institutions, and for specific people) in tangible ways and in action that meet the actual needs of those you are seeking to care for. Care must also happen *in* community. The means to practicing care are often learned, inherited, cultural, ancestral. Dr. nick adler reflects, "The pandemic made it very apparent that community care was what we needed [...]. And it wasn't just from my lived experience, it was also my ancestral knowledge and coming back to my family's grounding. My family's from the West Indies and has a long immigration history, but without a community of care, I don't know if I would actually be at the place that I'm currently at. And so it wasn't just my lived experience, but the experience of my ancestors, my culture. [...] This moment in our recent history just showed me that we really just needed multi levels of community care." As nick suggests, in addition to the cultural and learned expressions of care as forms both of survival and resistance, there are the realities of the multilayeredness of care. Fariah Koshul further contributes to the conversation, offering a reflection on the false binary and hierarchy of self-care over collective care: "I think it's definitely a binary that I don't believe should be fed into, but I would say the way I was raised is there's definitely more of a push towards or a centering of the way that the self is healthy and happy and feels cared for and nurtured is when it is in engagement with those around you. Whether that's family, whether that's friends, whether that's whatever makes up your community."

Individuals seeking to **infuse a care practice at the institutional level** must remember that care is a collective value. It is a commitment to the diffusion of the practice of care across every step of the process, imbuing it with a self-sustaining life of its own. As Teagan Harris teaches us, a strategy of non-diffusive care is unstable:

I kept coming back to **diffusive care**. It's in every step with every person, whether or not it's being watched or unwatched. It's more than just an individual value, it's a collective value of care, otherwise it falls through the cracks. Or one person provides the care for an entire institution and then that's like a farce, right? It is fake. If it's just one person showing care to their community, then it's on really shaky ground for the long term. And care is something that should have longevity and not be a risk.

Considering someone's comfort, access needs, childcare needs, learning style,

and communication preferences are all examples of tangible reflections of a care-infused environment. Choosing to center care in your practice, whether as an individual practitioner or as an institutional value, requires an intentional commitment – **care requires that we move at a slower pace.**



PRACTICING CURIOSITY

SPACE TO TRULY NOT KNOW

CURIOSITY FOR ITS OWN SAKE
NOT INSTRUMENTALIZED

DO WE HAVE TO DO IT THIS WAY?

WHY?

HOW DO YOU FEEL?

MAKE SPACE TO LISTEN

WAIT TIME

Curiosity

"*Curiosity does so much because it disrupts the drives of professionalization.*"
—*Garrett Johnson*

Curiosity is a practice of listening to see what comes from simply listening. Imagine yourself in a state of childlike inquisitiveness as an embodiment of curiosity. This is curiosity for the sake of curiosity, without being extractive of your environment or situation, and being engaged without regard to some desired outcome or ulterior motive. A curious lens can support us in assessing generative risks in support of the collective. Asking ourselves, "*What am I willing to do to see what I am truly motivated by? Is it the curiosity of knowing something, or do I want a concrete answer or a certain result?*"

Curiosity as an applied value is activated through a ritualistic cycle of:

Pausing for ….
self-reflection,
Pausing for space,
questioning,
pausing for more space,

And then following up with discussion and taking aligned action(s).

In our Kitchen Table Cypher grounded in the theme of curiosity, the participants arrived at an agreement that **prescribed goals closes down curiosity.**

Lala Bolander reflects:

"Curiosity implies that you have space and not only space, but that you're open to making that space even more spacious when you receive a response. [...] Curiosity to me implies that I don't have a desired outcome. I'm curious to know just for the fact of knowing. My kid will ask me, why do butts jiggle? She don't have a desired outcome. She wants to know why they jiggle because she likes the way they jiggle. [...] I love to be a curious person in an adult space because I love to remind people of the children we have inside. [...] When you set up a meeting asking: **Do we have to do it this way?** I think people stop themselves so much from being curious because they're scared about what's on the other side."

Thoughtfully creating a container for open discussion without a desired outcome is a value; learning together can be an approach to the practice of curiosity. **A community of learning not only activates our curious selves but also facilitates relationship-building.** "What are we reading? Are we reading similar things? Are we able to read different things and have interesting conversations about them?" Garrett Johnson continues: "It's generative to be navigating those tensions. [For example,] a reading group is something that allows you to name [tensions] and also to call into question your own situatedness too. And to actually say, I'm actually going to try. I feel comfortable. I trust these people. I'm going to try something [new] out." Committing to curious conversations that are woven with spaciousness for silence and pauses allows us to be at ease with the discomfort that may come alongside the questions. Consider the unique context of the community you are building a relationship with and the questions that invite people to connect through stories of cultural memories at the individual, communal, and national levels. Showing curiosity about one's personhood, position, place, drive, alignment also allows us to know where we stand. Consider the space(s) that you want to co-create. Does that space include: learning together and working together? What is the intention for the space?

Ask: Can you share a story about a time when_____.

Curiosity is a discipline of genuine interest and openness, devoted to a deeper learning of your own and others' pursuits.


MOVE INTENTIONALLY & SLOWLY
REVIEW CAPACITY & BOUNDARIES
START WITH CHECK INS
BUILD TWO-WAY RELATIONSHIPS
COMMUNICATE OPENLY
BUILDING COLLABORATIONS
SHARE EXPECTATIONS
DISCUSS SUSTAINABILITY
GET TO KNOW EACH OTHER
LEAD WITH CONSENT
END WITH GRATITUDE

Collaboration

A commitment to implementing care-centered and curiosity-fueled community engagement creates a dynamic incubator space for collaboration. Think about this caring, curious container as our new entry-point to whatever shape(s) your collaboration may take. Collaboration is an opportunity for cross-pollination; it is an act of gathering multiple seeds germinated by diverse ideas, backgrounds, skill sets, dreams, and approaches to planting those visions. It is an invitation to **weave together** those threads to create something bigger/whole. Lily B shares, "My collaborations are always short, but I like to think of myself as a thread and a fabric of society that can be woven into whatever needs to be woven."

Visualize your unique contribution woven in service of _____.

She continues: "In certain parts of this big fabric, I am a stronger piece of thread. And in other parts, I'm a little piece of thread; but the connections that we make from these I feel are all longstanding. They're part of my narrative now. They're part of me. Even the ones that don't work out are part of that growth and evolution of the ones I do want to work out." (Lily B)

We can often trace the origins of our collaborative tendencies in the very first experiences we have had working with others; our collaborations mirror how we worked together within our own family dynamic or were challenged to do so. We can also think about our educational experiences. Certainly the term "group project" elicits an array of memories and emotions for everyone. Amber Ginsburg reflects on how her sense of working together originated organically in her family's rituals. "I didn't have the words 'gratitude practice' when I was raising my kids [...]. We might have called them 'highs and lows.' Then I saw them happening in these other collaborative spaces in a much more intentionally articulated way with a stronger history; finding these overlaps where family and parenting intersect with other movement building has always been really profound."

Collaborations allow us to take on new shapes and explore new models (sometimes familiar, sometimes unfamiliar and uncomfortable) and experiment with new practices of relationship-building. Entering into a **collaboration should always be a choice,** one that is enthusiastically consented to and considers capacity, points of delegation, communication preferences, and relationship-building activities such as gratitude practices that sustain a caring culture for

the work being done together.

It is equally imperative to consider **power dynamics** (positionality based on race, sex, gender; tensions of authorship, credit, ownership) and **boundaries** (soft boundaries, such as a willingness to hug a close friend but not always a stranger, or hard boundaries, such as "I am unavailable on Sundays").

Entering into a collaboration with others means that you must allow for flexibility/malleability in your approach and strategy. Consider the following approaches and models of collaboration to experiment with as you assess the shape that's best suited to sustain the visions for your work, your group, project, or idea.

Team/collaborative partnership choices — Begin by practicing collective decision-making within your team. Be intentional in your collaborative efforts both internally and externally.

> In terms of choosing the partners, it is very much a team collaborative effort. And we will get together and talk about what we know about people. And that decision is not made on my own. I had to make sure that we're all putting in information and then moving forward from there. And we're very careful about it. (Gillian Giles)

Prototyping collaborations – Do a test run. Explore the alignment and synergy for collaboration and partnership through a "trial run" by first proposing a small project to explore the collaborative cohesion before committing to a larger project.

> I don't enter any creative partnerships lightly for sure. **I like to prototype. Maybe it would be really cool to work with you on this big thing, but also can we work on a small thing and see how that goes?** I don't like engaging in big ideas unless it's someone who I'm deeply in collaboration with already. [As far as values] I will never collaborate with anyone who is Zionist adjacent. And I could say that for a lot of various values I hold. (Nour Arafat)

Sharing space and melding audiences – Consider collaborative efforts that include melding audiences and merging events. This can be something planned or can occur more spontaneously.

> We have [an event] coming up right now where the date I was scheduled to do a workshop coincides with another partner event. So we reached out to them and said, "Well, you mind if we bring a flock of young adults to your event and we'll open up the project, Recycled Art Project, to anybody who's there that wants to do it, and they were down for it. So this kind of collaboration. (Juarez Hawkins)

Youth collaborations – Listen to youth, let youth lead.

> Students designed the most interesting rooms. One student mentioned that there are fewer trees in their neighborhood than there are in wealthy neighborhoods. And talked about the racist practices and the interstate and how that all came to be. So one of the students just decided to do a seed giveaway where he is designing a room and had a tree and talked about why this is all important. Another student was like, "Man, I just want to learn how to use spray paint without getting hassled by the cops." And I was like, "boy, for $500 we can get a shipping container out back and some spray paint and just let you go to town. This is a solvable problem. (Tanner Woodford)

Parallel collaboration – Define collaboration under your own terms. For example, earmarking funding for a partner to lead their own project under the framework of your organization.

> We want to give you all a chunk of [money] to then insert what you want to do under the framework of what we're doing. We have a big lawn installation of programming. Instead of us having a bunch of meetings where we decide what we're going to do together, we're just going to earmark some funds. You tell us what you want to do, we'll fund it, great collaboration. And I think that will maybe build really nice long-term relationships that will allow us to kind of get in there a little bit more eventually. [...] Let's just break off a piece and let them do what they want to do. (Jordan Martins)

Cross-sectoral collaboration – Think boldly and creatively about your collaborations by exploring cross-disciplinary and cross-sectoral partnerships. Consider a diverse network of thinkers and practitioners outside of your field – the designers, the planners, the educators, the students, the social workers - to develop a more holistic, comprehensive program in support of your original

idea, question, or concern.

> I always ask, what are you trying to accomplish? What problems are you facing? Even if they don't feel like they're related to this program. Or what aren't your students learning that we could help with? (Tanner Woodford)

Collaborative feedback loops and stakeholder engagement – Consider a collaborative model that incorporates a continuous feedback loop with the community. Create the space for feedback and integration. Asking:

> How'd that go for you? What did you learn? What didn't work? And then being able to guide the conversation from that point and take good notes so that you remember to incorporate them the next time you work with that particular school or client. (Tanner Woodford)

Solidarity as "collaboration" – Collaboration can look like boldly and unapologetically standing in solidarity and advocating for a partner organization.

> Sometimes not everyone's supposed to partner. Maybe you're just not. So you don't always have to, you can just really love the work that someone's doing and it still not be in alignment for you to partner, and that's okay. You can stand in solidarity with them in other ways, and we are certain about that too. It's like, well, let's collaborate, find fruitful ways to collaborate at what level, but actually let's just stand in solidarity with them when they're out there organizing in the community to get this certain thing passed. We're going to show up, we're going to blast it. We're going to support their work. That's not collaborating, that's just boosting their work and they boost ours. (Jordan Martins)

Declining collaborations/closing collaborations – Collaboration as an embodied praxis includes recognizing when to reorient because of friction or an embedded misalignment in the partnership. Not all potential partners are well-aligned collaborators. **Develop the practice of saying no to collaborations** or of intentionally and caringly ending collaborations that no longer bring you joy, support your vision, or align with the community's needs.

If you and your team have agreed to pursue collaboration with an external partner, begin by acknowledging the lifespace of the collaboration. then discuss how best to sustain the collaboration for the duration of the initial scope of work. Remember that adaptability and flexibility allows for sustainability.

VALUES: CARE / CURIOSITY / COLLABORATION PRACTICE LAB

SENSORIAL ACTIVATION:

"For me, arts-based community engagement smells like really good soil. Which is a little bit productive. It's got a little rot in it, it's got a little dirt in it, a little sand. There's some irritants. It's got kind of all of it together." –Amber Ginsburg

Pause, breathe, ground, and feel.

What does *care* **feel, sound, look like?** What does it look like for you to **be caring** in your community-engagement approaches?

What does *curiosity* **taste, smell, move like**? What does it **sound like for you to be curious** in your community-engagement approaches?

INDIVIDUAL REFLECTION:

Trace your cultural practices of care.

What traditions and lineages are your care practices rooted in?

How do you care for yourself? Your family? Your community?

How can you deepen your capacity to care (beginning with self)?

What are you curious about?

KITCHEN TABLE CYPHER:

What are the collective values that inform how you approach your work in the community?

Discuss care with your team. How can we integrate diffusive care in our collaborative/team dynamic? How do we center care in our work at all times as opposed to having it be an afterthought?

Discuss the embodiment of curiosity. How can curiosity inform your community-engagement strategies?

Define collaboration for your group. What particular collaborative structure are you curious about? What difficult collaborative experiences can you learn from?

PRACTICE:

1. **Create a collaborative playlist that supports your moments of celebration!** Ask all of your collaborators to share two-three songs that make them happy. Identify someone on your team to gather the songs and create a shared playlist.

2. "**Discotechs**"

"A lot of people have really incredible skills to share. Help them get to a point where they can form a learning module and have a co-learning space that feels fun [...]. We started the process a good month and a half before the discotech. We'd have working sessions to just talk with people and give them confidence. 'You don't have to come up with something, we asked you to be here because you've already done the work to be here. We just want to help you take one of these things and make it something that you can feel good sharing and teaching." Nour Arafet

How can skillsharing and co-creation become more of an active value in your work? How can your team become more expansive in your caring, curious, collaborative community-engagement? Explore various structures such as "discotechs." Here are some things to consider:

- Employ community skillshares that offer facilitation coaching to all participants
- Work with community to support them in refining and being confident in the skills/knowledge they already have
- Build relationships and confidence leading up to the skillshare through community dinners
- “Always have a facilitation guide”

ASSESSING CAPACITY

INDIVIDUAL

vs.

INSTITUTIONAL

NAME THE

ASKS

COMMUNICATE

TRANSPARENTLY

UNDERSTAND

WHEN  TO

LET GO

DELEGATE!

BALANCE

DETAILS

BIG PICTURE

BALANCE

FLUIDITY

&

STRUCTURE

ASSESSING / ALIGNMENT

Alignment requires intention, focus, direction. Where are we going? What are we doing? If it doesn't feel aligned, if there's no direction, then what are we doing? And if it's just me pushing us there, is that partnership?

—*Bri Robinson*

Values Alignment

Our values align our actions.

Every individual, institution, or group has a set of values they are aligned to, whether or not they are aware of these values. The process of community engagement and partnership collaboration requires evaluating whether the internal values of each stakeholder align with one another so that collaborative work can proceed. Consider the question offered previously in the "Practice Lab" - Values, Care, Curiosity, Collaboration: *What are the values that inform how you approach your work in the community?* Truly take time to struggle and find your way to clarity regarding this question. Doing so prepares us to assess our **internal values** and **align them with the mission-based values and goals of a project.**

In addition to articulating values, it is important to identify and provide attribution for the frameworks and political praxis in which your values are situated. We are rooted in:

anti-racism, anti-state surveillance, transnational solidarity/liberation, queer liberation, disability justice, radical openness, transformative justice, environmental justice, abolition feminisms, land rights, indigenous liberation, Black radical traditions, healing justice, ancestral and spiritual lineages, multi-denominational faith practices, anti-capitalist, anti-colonial, anti-Zionism, pro-resistance.

Nour Arafet says, "I actually want to know your politics at this point. That's going to matter way more to me than if we have this shared identity. [It informs] how we're going to show up for each other in community. Of course, it's culturally

informed, and so that's why I'm not throwing away the importance of identity in all of this."

Who you are and the values you hold — and act upon – are undeniable components of any internal assessment of alignment as a metric to evaluate institutional fit. Your identity and values also crucially inform which collaborations you choose to say yes to and which you confidently decline.

Belonging, Connection, and Relational Alignment

Embodied collaborative alignment can be sensed through the lens of belonging. Whether we seek to find community and worldbuild based on shared identity, action-based goals, or other considerations, it is imperative that we reflect upon experiences of belonging and connection when assessing collaborative and engagement pursuits. Lala Bolander offers, "I want to engage a community I belong to, but if it's going to align on some type of action, we don't necessarily have to share any identities." Our collaborators may be our friends, and such

friendships offer a preexisting relational familiarity. *Sometimes* our collaborators and the communities we engage with will become our friends. However, neither of these relational attributes are necessary for a generative collaboration or to assess the potential for one.

The presence of relationality and/or the desire for belonging becomes more complex when considering the dualistic positions we often hold as individuals working for or representing institutions. This highlights the need to integrate the important practice of pausing to consider authentic avenues of belonging as well as identities or ways of being that may conflict with potential collaborators. Teagan Harris reflects, "I think it's really important to take a step back for a moment and really review the parts of you that belong to the community and the parts of you that are outside and how to be with both of those things comfortably. For me, I am both a member of the Native community and someone who is seeking to engage with them on behalf of an institution that I don't always fully agree with." Consider what that means for how to comfortably hold both at once or to assess a good fit for institutional collaboration. As will be described in

the next section, this requires reflecting on and discussing individual (and group) capacity and boundaries, especially when representing an institution.

Capacity

Capacity should be considered at both the individual and the institutional level; holding onto an ethos of "labor and leisure" (Candace Bey) is always welcome! Assessing individual capacity requires that we set, communicate, and keep firm personal *and* work boundaries and expectations. While capacity is fluid and will shift based on the varying responsibilities we hold across the seasons of a project or collaboration, cultivating a practice to realistically **gauge our capacity based on time, energy, and fulfillment** (*does this fill my cup or deplete it?*) is crucial to developing an aligned scope of work for ourselves and our teams. Learning to say no builds longevity. Knowing one's own capacity is a communal offering toward sustainability and a modeling of self-care by responding with compassion and curiosity. Pascale Ife Williams reflects on the challenge of taking the time for the conversation, which is also a necessity:

> Assessing capacity for oneself can be so challenging. If we don't have practices of capacity assessment at the individual level, how do we have it at the organizational level? Surrounding ourselves with people who are either very in tune and communicative about what they have capacity for or not, folks who are planning and folks who have different skills or can work well together in that space. It is such an important component of doing community work, right? If you're overworking folks, things are going to fall through the cracks, and that might cause harm, in whatever way. So being real about questions like, What will this project take? And what does that mean for what we can take on? What we can't take on? That feels important.

In collaborations we must remember that we are working with and caring for "whole people," who come to the table with their own set of emotional and physical needs. Building trust-filled and reciprocal relationships also creates the conditions to assist the extension of capacity by delegating tasks. Consider having a conversation and documenting your capacity guide in writing, in a written assessment that considers individual and group capacity and will also ensure that plans can pivot. When pursuing institutional collaborations, considering the scope of capacity as it relates to the sustainability of a program or partnership is also vital to reducing potential harm and setting expectations for the communities involved.

Aligning Collaborative Style(s)

What is your ideal collaborative working style? Relevant here are communication preferences, the desire for co-created making and/or learning containers, the ideal meeting cadence, how you like to be approached, capacity intake, conflict style and level of commitment to navigate conflict together, and the actual shape of the collaboration as discussed previously (e.g. parallel collaboration; solidarity collaboration; defining your own collaboration shape). Also consider good-fit as it relates to the aligned season (time) for collaboration and your collaborators' commitment to ensuring iterative internal feedback loops throughout the process.

Shared Vision (Community Vision + Team Vision)

Another salient guide for collaborative alignment is a shared vision for the project and the collective work ahead. This longer-term vision can often

be uncovered by taking the time to explore the group members' histories and communities. Gillian Giles says, "I think about history and community personally. That's really important to me. What are people's histories and communities? What are their goals and desires for working together? And then my team members bring different criteria and that criteria kind of shifts depending on the person, depending on what our conversations would look like."

Ultimately a team's approach reflects the individual team members' histories and communities; consider intentionally integrating these elements into the team's perspective/ethic. The practice of assessing alignment is an invitation to strategically and intentionally level-set at both the individual and the group level around various components: values, belonging, connection, capacity, collaborative working style, vision, and likely other considerations unique to your context.

ASSESSING / ALIGNMENT PRACTICE LAB

SENSORIAL ACTIVATION:

"As I'm feeling into and experiencing my disabilities with more compassion and curiosity and a less internally ableist approach, I am realizing that knowing one's capacity is actually a really beautiful skill and a great gift that you can offer your community and yourself. [...] Sometimes doing my best is thinking about the longevity of myself, about the longevity of my capacity and my ability to contribute to this project or community." —Maimuna Touray

Pause, breathe, ground, and feel.

Begin to build an awareness of your embodied cues as indications of your capacity; track the sensations in your body alongside your task(s).
For example: Does your eye twitch? Is your heart rate elevated? Does your chest feel heavy?

How do you know (feel) you have the capacity to extend care beyond yourself?

What are the signs from your body when you are experiencing connection? Calm? Joy? Excitement? Slowly begin to develop an awareness of all of the sensations and environmental conditions that support your well-being and your enthusiastic "yes's!"

INDIVIDUAL REFLECTION:

What communities do you feel most connected to? How important is it to you to belong to the communities you work in and with?
Map your capacity. What is my current capacity for collaboration? When do I anticipate my capacity will shift? Consider asking yourself: What is the compensation (not just financial compensation, but what mutual exchange is occuring)?

KITCHEN TABLE CYPHER:

"There's some pull in care between labor and capacity and bodies and feeling safe enough to say 'I'm tired or I need a break' and someone else can tap in knowing that we're actually all one body toward the thing. –Amber Ginsburg

Where do our values align? Who are we collectively in service to?

How does our project align with the community's needs and vision? What assets/resources do we have to put toward our community collaboration?

Discuss your preferred collaborative working styles among your group members. What does our collaborative style(s) mean for how we want to structure our relation to your partner?

How do you assess your interpersonal/collective capacity? Discuss individuals' anticipated capacity within the project timeline (anticipate changes in capacity). Consider integrating organizational checks and balances and a communication loop to gauge capacity and address shifts.

"*Vibes are everything, it's a vibe.*" –*Bri Robinson*

Vibes are a practice of discernment and intuitive sensing. People can feel when a vibe is off or when an interaction is disingenuous. Developing a practice of "vibe checking" as a method of gathering information and determining needs can support more sustainable and honest collaborations.

How can your team integrate a capacity to vibe check?

This may look like integrating:

- Breaks for bodily capacity
- Pauses in discussion for various processing times and learning styles
- Considering external responsibilities and labor
- Listening to the project without immediately thinking about building it up
- Optimizing for the things you really want
- Checking in about being open to options/what options are a possibility
- Articulating what form those possibilities can be expressed in

What is your team's capacity for being in relationship with others, and how is sustainable relationship-building being ensured (for example, through clearly defined limits, compartmentalization, capacity feedback loops, etc.)?

PRACTICE:

1. **Skill Mapping and Growth Goals.** Consider mapping your team's existing skills and goals for growth. Express them as a set of mantras to guide and sustain your work throughout the scope of the project. Here is an example from the EN/GAGE 3/C Team:

   Project Goal: Complete Practice Book

   Skillset: Care: expressing and practicing care through offering to take the lead on tasks at times when others had lowered capacity. Communication: open, honest, and consistent communication via inviting the team to express their needs, schedule conflicts, and challenges in meeting the requirements of the deliverables. A commitment to Research Lab check-ins regardless of the time constraints, energy levels, or tasks at hand.

   Mantra: Our team honors slowness and reverence toward one another's presence and capacity.

"*Everything that I feel called to do comes from a place of excitement. If I'm not excited about doing something, I'm not going to do it because if I don't have*

the enthusiasm to do it, it won't be done well. So that's how I like to navigate singularly, and I feel like that then ripples into the projects that I commit to, because to me, that's the difference between commitment and obligation." –*Bri Robinson*

2. Practice "**gut checks**" at the individual level by sensing into the sacral energy center (located approximately two fingers below your belly button). This practice can support building the somatic awareness of alignment and finding your enthusiastic "yes!" that comes from a place of excitement rather than obligation.

WHAT MAKES COMMUNITY CARE POSSIBLE

FOREGROUNDING

EMBODIED NEEDS

TAKING

BREAKS

TAKING

INVENTORY

REFLECTING

MAKING TIME & SPACE TO UNEARTH HARMS

HARM / ACCOUNTABILITY

"With accountability, knowing that if harm is caused, because harm will happen and does happen in community, there will be processes and approaches to addressing that harm and folks will be willing to put in the hard work to be accountable to showing up for the people that they're in community with. And I think that's what accountability is: it is something that can't be necessarily forced onto somebody. You can't make accountability happen. Accountability has to be taken. And so there's that level of social responsibility that comes into it where it's like I'm in a community, so I know that my responsibility to the people around me is to show up and be open to hearing how to best respond to the harm that I may have caused, and to also be able to share that I feel harmed in that situation."

–Maimuna Touray

Accountability and harm reduction are not simply principles; they are lived practices shaped by experience, power dynamics, and the histories that precede us. When institutions and individuals commit to community engagement, they step into an ongoing story, one in which harm is not just possible but inevitable. What matters is not whether harm occurs, but how we acknowledge, address, and repair it. Accountability is not about avoiding mistakes – it's about taking responsibility when they happen, understanding their impact, and ensuring that those most affected have a voice in the reparative process.

Consent and Agency

At the heart of accountability is the practice of consent — a practice that extends beyond individual decisions to collective agency. Community engagement often assumes a willing audience rather than actively securing consent, treating participation as implicit rather than intentional. But real consent requires transparency, respect for boundaries, and the creation of conditions where people feel safe and encouraged to say no.

Institutions, in particular, must examine how they show up in communities: Are they offering an invitation or imposing their presence? Are they ensuring that communities have the ability to opt in or opt out? Power imbalances often make it difficult for communities to say no to institutional engagement, especially

when resources and funding are at stake. Without meaningful consent, engagement risks becoming another form of coercion.

"I often try to come to a collective understanding of 'what do we mean by consent?' What does consent mean to you? Sharing what consent means to me and then starting to build from there … Then how do we build a collective sense of consent?... So being able to understand, how do you know if you're in consent with somebody? What does that feel like for you as an individual? And then sharing what that feels like for me. Then starting to build, okay, what then do we collectively define consent as? [That] would be my approach."

–Maimuna Touray

Tending to Conflict

Conflict is a natural part of community engagement, but how it is handled determines whether it leads to rupture or repair. Too often, discomfort is

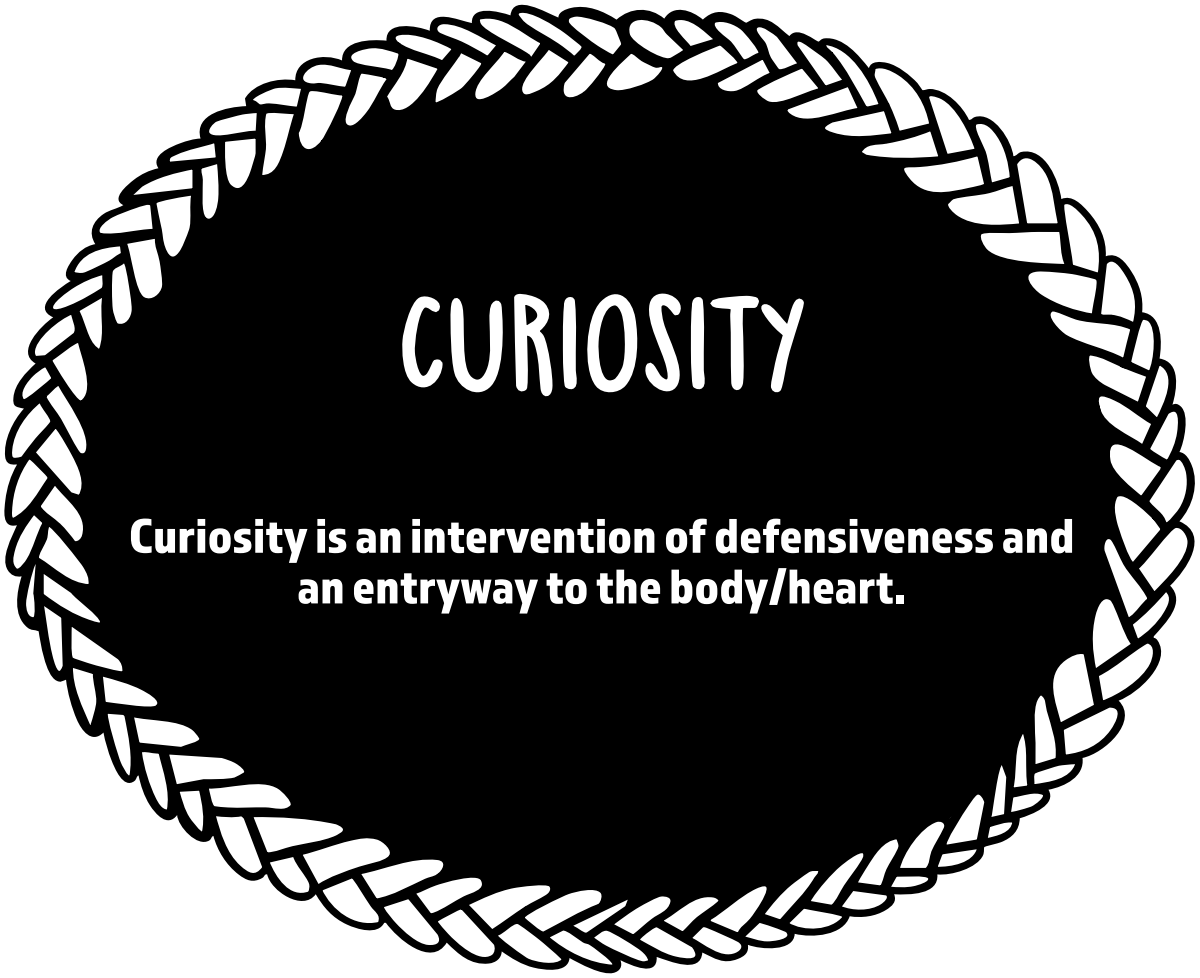
treated as harm, and harm is dismissed as mere discomfort. Institutions, in particular, must develop the ability to sit with tension rather than silence its expression. Conflict avoidance does not prevent harm — it deepens harm by allowing unresolved tensions to fester.

Community engagement is not about the absence of conflict — it's about learning how to move through it with care. Conflict, when approached with intentionality, can be generative. As Lala Bolander reminds us, ***"Sitting in discomfort does not have to be conflict. The goal is to get to the other side of discomfort."*** It is through conflict that trust is built, provided that those involved commit to working through tensions rather than avoiding them.

Harm reduction in this context means creating conditions that allow difficult conversations to happen without fear of retribution. Gillian Giles offers a way to distinguish between different types of discomfort: "Here's a story of a time I felt uncomfortable. Here's a story of a time I felt harmed. Here's a story of a time I witnessed violence." These distinctions matter. Without them, accountability can

become an empty gesture — one that acknowledges harm without making space for meaningful repair.

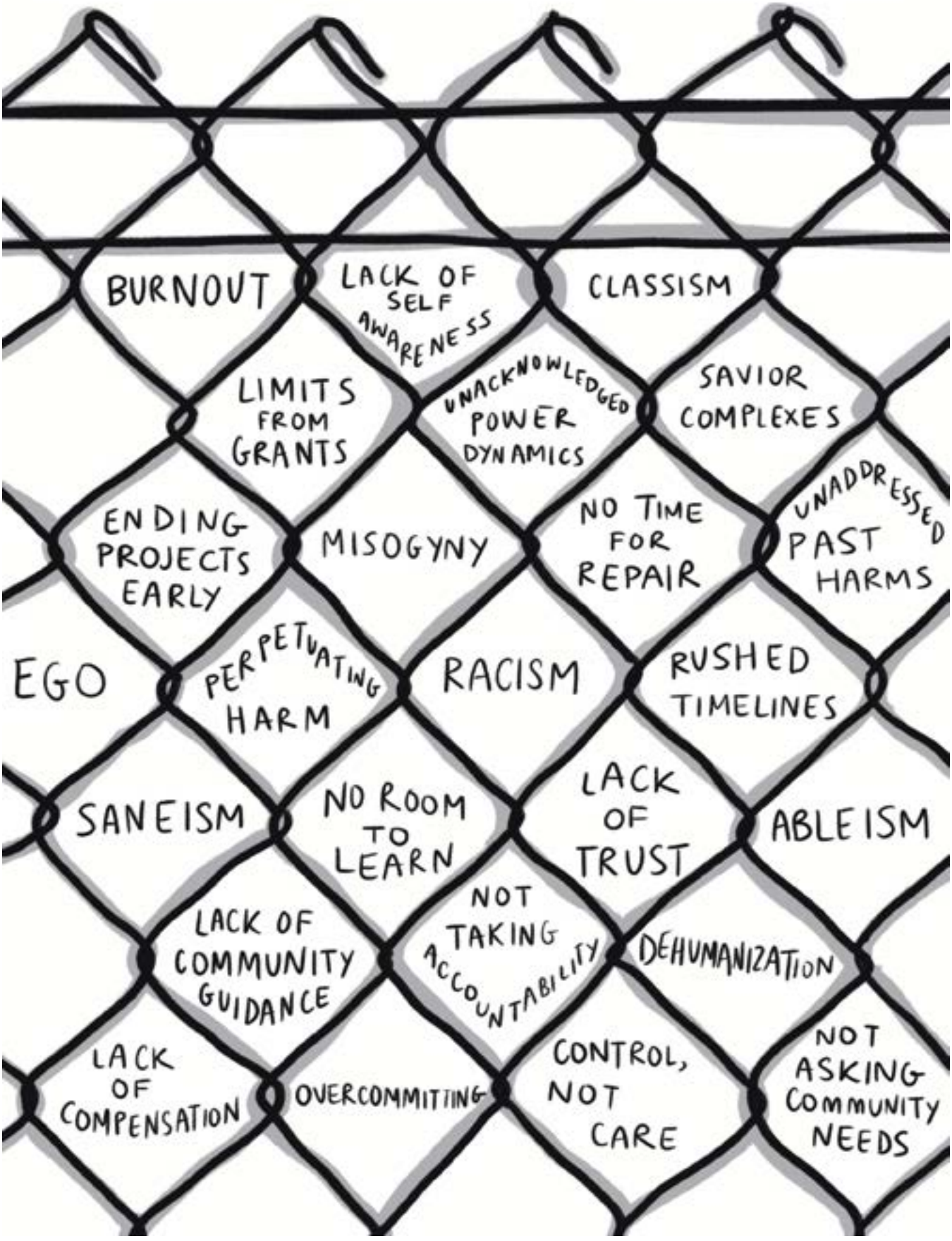
Effectively addressing harm means creating environments for difficult conversations to happen without fear of punishment or dismissal. It requires institutions and individuals to practice self-awareness, recognizing when their reactions are driven by defensiveness rather than accountability. “We have to have an awareness of ourselves and how we show up in community before we can even begin to understand how to be accountable as a collective,” says Pascale Ife Williams. Listening deeply, acknowledging harm, and committing to repair must involve more than words — they must manifest themselves in actions that demonstrate a willingness to change. True accountability requires institutions to move beyond self-preservation. Tanner Woodford states, “If you come back with an evaluation or feedback and people don’t like it, that puts you at risk, too. It puts community at risk.” Institutions must normalize self-reflection and embrace accountability not as a threat but as a necessary process of growth and repair.



Generative Risk-Taking

Engaging with community is inherently **risky** — not because communities are dangerous, but because true engagement requires stepping into uncertainty, relinquishing control, and being open to transformation. Many institutions are risk-averse and prioritize their own stability as more important than meaningful relationships. But risk cannot be avoided if the goal is real accountability. The true risk is not discomfort or uncertainty — it is the perpetuation of harm. When institutions take on community engagement without a long-term commitment, they create cycles of harm through disinvestment. Promises are made, relationships are built, and then, when funding ends or leadership shifts, the institution disappears, leaving communities to deal with the aftermath. "The biggest failure of community engagement is that it's on a timeline and has an ending point," observes Lala Bolander. True accountability means taking responsibility for the long-term impact of engagement and ensuring that commitments are not abandoned when priorities shift.

BARRIERS TO COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT



HARM / ACCOUNTABILITY PRACTICE LAB

SENSORIAL ACTIVATIONS:

"If harm is caused; when it is caused, because harm will happen and does happen in community, there will be processes and approaches to addressing that harm. It's important that folks are willing to put in the hard work to be accountable to showing up for the people that they're in community with. I think that's what accountability is; it is something that can't be necessarily forced onto somebody. You can't make accountability happen. Accountability has to be taken. So there's that level of social responsibility that comes into it where it's like, 'I'm in a community, so I know that my responsibility to the people around me is to show up and be open to hearing how to best respond to the harm that I may have caused, and to also be able to share that I feel harmed in that situation.'" -Maimuna Touray

Pause, breathe, ground, and feel.

Before engaging with the concept of accountability, take a moment to ground yourself. Reflect on the following:

What does accountability feel like in your body?

Where do you feel tension when thinking about harm and responsibility?

What does it sound like when someone truly listens and takes responsibility?

What does it look like when accountability is practiced with care?

Take a few deep breaths and hold the sensations you feel in your awareness as we move into reflection.

INDIVIDUAL REFLECTION:

Accountability is a practice, not a reaction. It requires individuals and institutions to show up, listen, and take responsibility for harm when it occurs. Avoiding harm entirely is impossible, but committing to repair is necessary. True accountability is not about assigning blame — it is about being willing to do the hard work of making things right. Similarly, conflict is not the same as harm. Learning to sit with discomfort — without dismissing harm — allows for real transformation.

"Sitting in discomfort does not have to be conflict. The goal is to get to the other side of discomfort." –Lala Bolander

Recall a time when you felt harmed in a professional or communal setting. What happened?

What did accountability look like in that situation (or do you hope it would have looked like)?

How did power dynamics shape the way harm was addressed or ignored?

KITCHEN TABLE CYPHER:

Defining/Acquiring Consent in Accountability

Normalize the acquisition of consent as a formal preventative practice built into your process rather than simply as an interventional mitigative measure. For example, consider the practice of consent regarding not only touch, conversation, or group activities (e.g. identifying a restaurant that meets the dietary needs of everyone) but also information, data and technology. Consent is central to accountability. Community engagement often assumes participation

rather than securing it. Without meaningful consent, engagement can become extractive, reinforcing power imbalances rather than addressing them. Institutions must recognize when their presence is an invitation and when it is an imposition.

> *"How do you know if you're in consent with somebody? What does that feel like for you? And then sharing what that feels like for me. Then starting to build a collective sense of consent." –Maimuna Touray*

In small groups or pairs, discuss the following:

How do you define consent in your work?

What does collective consent look like in community engagement?

How do power imbalances affect whether consent is truly given or just assumed?

Distinguishing Harm from Discomfort

> *"Here's a story of a time I felt uncomfortable. Here's a story of a time I felt harmed. Here's a story of a time I witnessed violence." –Gillian Giles*

Think about a time when you felt uncomfortable but not harmed. How did you navigate it?

How can we create spaces where discomfort is generative rather than silencing?

What is the difference between feeling accountable and feeling defensive?

Navigating Conflict with Care

What would it look like to embrace conflict as a necessary part of accountability?

What is one situation in which your collaborative partnership handled conflict well? What is one situation in which your collaborative

partnership did not handle conflict well?

What structures or practices can help prevent conflict from escalating into harm? Who are the point-people to communicate with in these moments?

PRACTICE:

1. **"Tracing Accountability" – A Collective Mapping Practice**

   Using a large sheet of paper, begin by identifying a moment when you witnessed or experienced harm in a community or institutional setting. Place a mark at the center to represent this moment. From there, map out the connections — who was involved, who held power, who took (or avoided) responsibility, and how responses unfolded. Use lines, colors, or symbols to illustrate the pathways of accountability, or what accountability could have looked like. As you step back and reflect, consider the patterns that emerge: Where did power sit? How did harm ripple outward? What was missing in the response? **This exercise invites you to visualize accountability as a practice — one that requires intention, action, and repair.**

2. **Creating Space for Team Disagreements**

"That internal conversation, I'm glad you mentioned it, and that is incredibly important. I can't even begin to tell you the amount of times that I disagree with my team or they disagree with me, or if there's disagreements among the team.... I think that internal conversation is where most of that work happens." -*Tanner Woodford*

Internal conversations are essential to working around the consent, capacity, and discernment of others. Inviting disagreements as opportunities for collective solution making is necessary for teams to build norms and practices around communication and accountability. Consider how spaces are being made for these conversations:

What is the team's culture of confidentiality, honesty, and respect?

Who is tasked with facilitating these spaces for open feedback sessions?

Is there a time, place, and forum for these internal conversations to occur?

How can the team set a tone (both vocally and environmentally) for internal conversations?

3. **Addressing the Risk of Burnout**

In the context of this Practice Book, risk has been presented as an avenue for what might be possible. Burnout is not a worthwhile risk. Our approach to addressing burnout centers the well-being of the individual as a collective consideration.

Mediating burnout requires an intentional commitment to practices that sustain you. You may consider activities such as: meditation, breathing practices, unplugging (temporarily deactivating your social media, turning off your phone, being in nature), taking regular breaks throughout your day (setting a five-minute timer for a dance break).

Ultimately, burnout cannot be resolved by a set of prescriptive practices or measures. If you have been engaged in community work, you know intimately its capacity to exhaust. However, we invite you to leverage your unique perspectives as artists to imagine approaches to burnout that others may not see. Connect with elders and figures in your community who can offer support and guidance on how they were able to sustain their practices. Be forgiving and offer yourself grace.

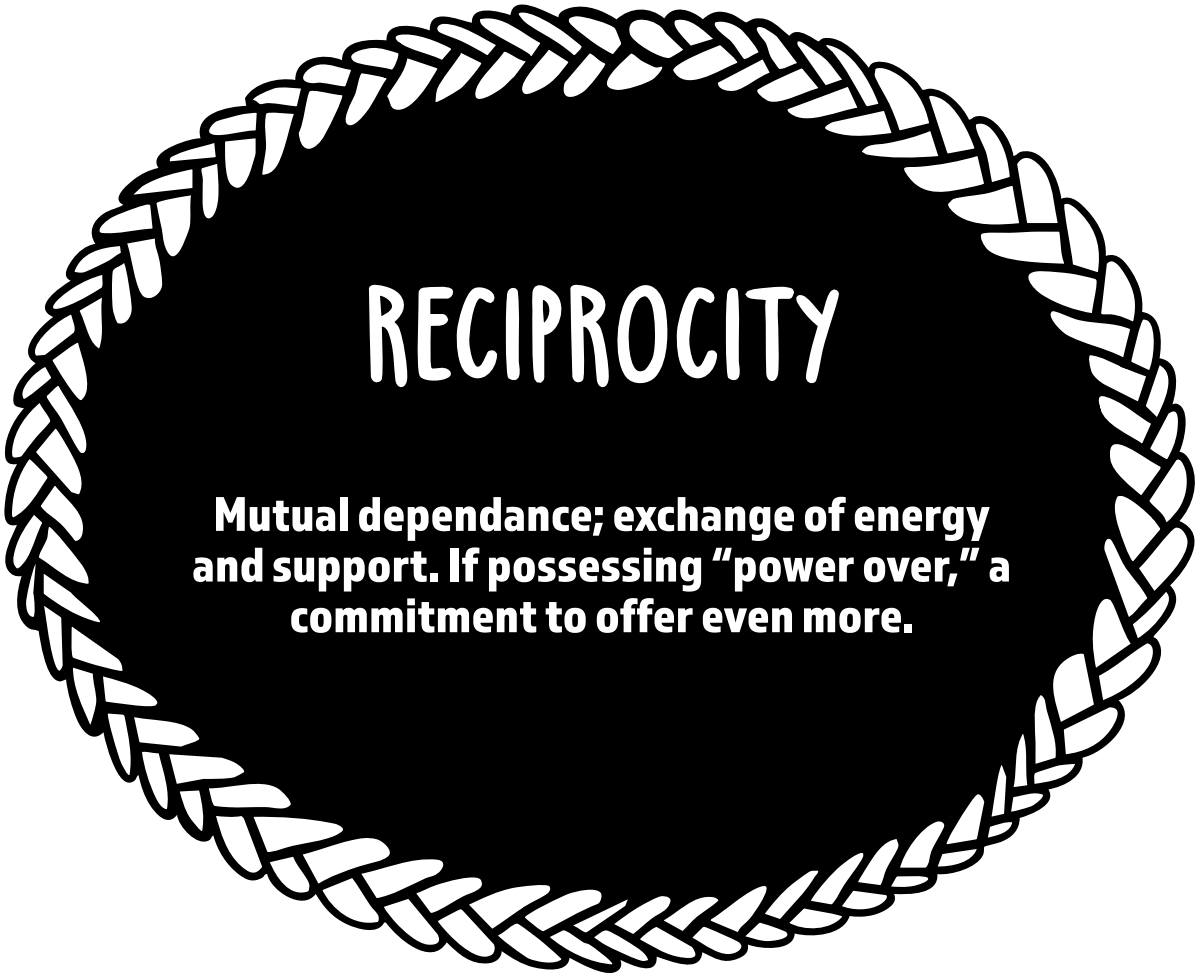
INSTITUTIONAL OBLIGATIONS / OFFERINGS

"Is it the job of the individual to fix the system to better serve community or is it important to find the right ingredients to serve community within the systems that already exist and will continue to push forward with or without careful, community-engaged people?"

–Teagan Harris

This section of the Practice Book offers space for reflection, critical engagement, and practical strategies for working with or within institutions. If you are skeptical, ***hold onto that skepticism.*** Institutions and community engagement have a long, contentious history of harm, exploitation, commodification, and failure that shapes how institutions approach engagement today. Work with institutions are just one way to engage in community work. The ideas shared here recognize that tension while simultaneously acknowledging that we engage with institutions in our daily work and lives. Rather than viewing community engagement as marginal to an institutional whole, these strategies work to assert institutional obligations that must be honored to reduce the possibility of further harm.

Community voices are essential to ensuring that institutions, rather than dictating relationships, collaborate meaningfully, in the kind of engagement that has to be intentional. As Candace Bey offers, "We can't make changes without the community, but the community has to come into a place that needs to be changed in order to make the changes." The opportunity to access communal knowledge is never a given for institutions, and it always a privilege. In order not to perpetuate or repeat harm, institutions must be **transparent, self-critical, and accountable.** Although these offerings may be presented as recommendations, we encourage you to address them as **commitments.**



Reflexivity in Institutional Engagement

Addressing Hierarchies

Institutions must recognize their inherent privilege and the power dynamics at play in their relationship with a community **before** engaging with that community. Many institutions are risk-averse and prioritize their own stability as more important than meaningful communal relationships. However, a reciprocal relationship requires that an institution's works not only for its own benefit but for the community's as well. This means that the institution must be just as accessible to the community as the community has been to the institution. Transparency about who the institution engages with, how they are in dialogue with community members, and the hierarchies that contextualize these relationships are critical to successful community engagement. Institutions should acknowledge that they are the beneficiaries of community engagement: communities always have **more to lose** and the institution always has **more to gain in these sorts of relationships,** and therefore the institution must work to mitigate this scale of risk at stake.

ISSUES WITH COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

HIRED, FUNDED, DESIGNED BY INSTITUTIONS

↓

HOW CAN ACCESS, BENEFITS, & OWNERSHIP FLOW BOTH WAYS?

↑

PRIMARILY BENEFITS INSTITUTIONS

RELIANT ON OUTSIDE FUNDING & GRANTS

↘

HOW CAN FUNDING SUPPORT IMAGINATIVE PROJECTS, NOT LIMIT THEM?

↗

LIMITED & INFLEXIBLE SCOPE OF PROJECTS

FELLOWSHIPS, INTERNSHIPS, GRANTS

ISOLATION WITHIN INSTITUTIONS

HOW CAN COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT BE WOVEN THROUGHOUT INSTITUTIONS?

INTERCONNECTED SYSTEMS OF OPPRESSION

HOW CAN THE MOST MARGINALIZED BE AUTHENTICALLY INCLUDED?

HIERARCHIES & EXCLUSION OF COMMUNITIES ENGAGED

ARE WE TRYING TO FIX BROKEN SYSTEMS OR WORK WITHIN THEM?

Historical Accountability

One way to practice institutional reflexivity is by acknowledging past harms and considering your institution's histories of harm before engaging with communities. Addressing the institutional level, Pascale Ife Williams asks: ***"What is your history with this community? How have you harmed this community in the past? What conversations are you having before you even attempt to collaborate or be in the space to understand that positionality internally? And then, how can you have some kind of transparency appropriate around what that means?"*** Moving with awareness means addressing the institution's historical positioning *before* engaging, and holding ongoing commitments to repairing past injustices.

Institutional Self-Awareness

Ultimately a lack of self-awareness can stunt the institution's ability to generate new ideas, solutions, and goals through collaborations. As learned from examples where individuals in power fail to listen, institutions must foster an openness to learning and changing in order to progress. Jordan Martins emphasizes the need for flexibility: "Institutions have to have the openness to be like, 'We don't know what's going to happen.' There's going to be surprises. And it's so easy to have really pigeonholed outcomes or an idea of what it'll look like and then make sure it looks like that, and the fluidity of true creativity and collaboration comes from not knowing all the possibilities that can emerge in that collaboration." Institutional openness not only strengthens the engagement itself but also creates the potential for fruitful, continued partnerships and emergent organizational structures.

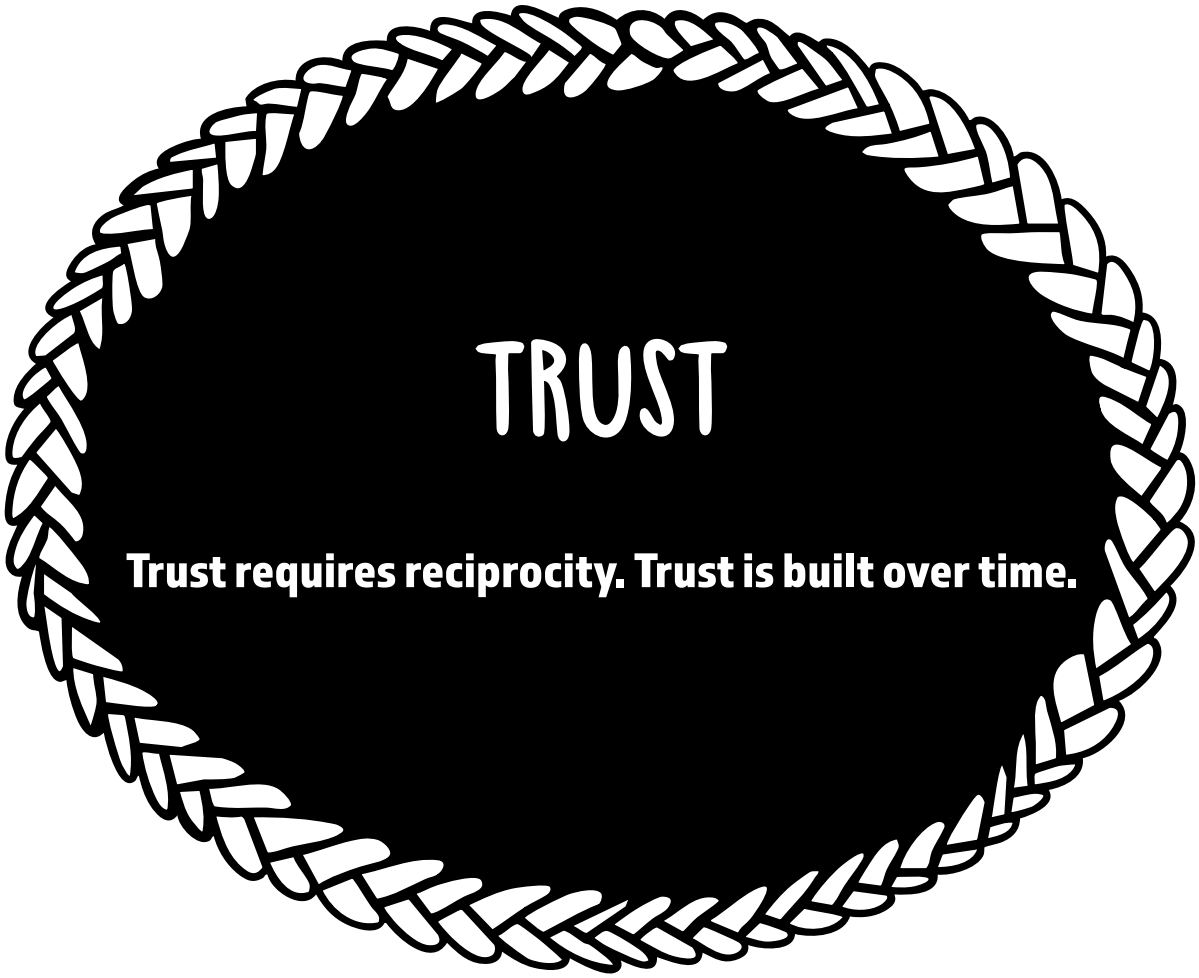
Considerations and Practices

Asking Before Assuming Needs

Institutions have a historical tendency to assume and impose the needs of communities rather than simply **asking** the community itself what it needs. For collaboration to occur, there must be a relationship in place. As Lala Bolander offers, **"If you're unsure, ask again before making decisions for communities."** This exercise of asking as a practice of institutional reflexivity helps institutions intentionally move toward community-defined goals that work towards fulfilling the needs of communities, rather than of the institution.

Aligning Institutional Vision with Community Needs

Before starting projects, institutions must assess their alignment with the community's vision. As Lala Bolander reflects, "If the community's vision is not aligned with theirs that's the corner where discomfort and harm becomes just harm. Okay, this is our vision of the community project. And then you get the input from community, and the community is like, 'Hell no.' That project sucks and you decide to do it anyways. That's crazy. It's harmful." If and when misalignment occurs, institutions must be willing to stop production to prevent harm. Knowing when to relinquish the institutional vision, *hearing when to stop*, is the responsibility of the institution, not the community.



Resourceful Compensation

Institutions must ensure fair compensation for community engagement. Compensation comes in diverse forms, including monetary payment and an understanding of resourceful, reciprocal economies. Reciprocal economies function in a variety of ways in communal settings — through time, care, and, as Lala Bolander summarizes, "compensat[ion of] people for their energy." In terms of financial compensation, resources should be allocated with trust, with bureaucratic restrictions minimized. Lasondra Kern, Art Design Chicago Partner Engagement Associate, offers a pertinent example when she speaks about the checks and balances involved in institutional funding, "When we give people that need the money the money, we don't need to be running behind them being like, 'Oh, you can only spend this money on this.' Because then we're telling people how to live, and we already got enough people trying to tell other people how to live." Restrictive compensation is not only patronizing but can be an institutional hazard, via its assertion of bureaucratic control. Adopting compensation frameworks from reparations-based models such as a CBA (Community Benefits

Agreement) or MOU (Memorandum of Understanding) can address these institutional commitments to reciprocal and fair compensation.

Community Presence as a Success Indicator

The presence and comfort of community members within institutional spaces serve as a key barometer of success. Institutions must approach engagement in the role of guests entering a community's space — waiting for an invitation and coming bearing gifts (Candace Bey). As Pascale Ife Williams asks, ""If folks on the block are not showing up for the event, then what are we doing? What are we not doing?" This attitude highlights the importance of mutual respect and reciprocity.

Sustainability and Addressing Future Harms

Addressing Institutional Impermanence

Institutions must be honest about the impermanence of their engagements, the extent of their relationships with a particular community, and their capacity for long-term commitments. As Teagan Harris observes in the context of critical engagement with Indigenous populations, "I also just don't think it's good to promise people native land when you know that that's not the case, that it gets returned to the museum to do their next project and that this is not a permanent commitment that they've made." Overpromising creates harm, while transparency fosters trust and addresses the institutional limitations of curated community spaces.

Continuous Engagement and Preservation

Institutions must recognize communities as *partners* and prioritize long-term, sustainable engagement. When institutions take on community engagement without preservation in mind, they create cycles of harm through their eventual disinvestment. Promises are made, relationships are built, and then, when funding ends or leadership shifts, the institution disappears, leaving communities to deal with the aftermath. As Gillian Giles reflects, continuous engagement can look like many different things: "Maybe it's just about inviting people to the table continuously. Even If there's no funding to support collaboration. Maybe just 'Hey, how are you doing?' Oh, we're doing this. Whatcha you guys doing? Oh, we'll come to say hi." Every once in a while, that

check-in. Because things change and what people are focusing on changes. But if you have that communication in a different way, that can be a way of preserving it. [...] **Folks need more time, relationship building takes years.**" Engagement should be an ongoing process rather than a one-time effort. A continuous, open-table approach embodies advocacy for a long-term and genuine invitation, ensuring that community voices are included at every stage of future planning.

Returning to Alignment: Relinquishing Institutional Vision

Institutions must be prepared to let go of their vision if it no longer aligns with the community's or has been exhausted beyond serving its initial goals. **Recognizing when to step back is critical in preventing institutional harm.** By centering community voices, being willing to disrupt hierarchical power dynamics, and committing to accountable and sustainable relationships, institutions can foster effective and meaningful partnerships. However, only through this commitment to being willing to relinquish — even if that mean failure or disruption — can institutions genuinely support the communities they seek to engage.

INSTITUTIONAL OBLIGATIONS / OFFERINGS PRACTICE LAB

Shifting from considerations meant for the institution, this sensorial activation and reflection is intended for those of us going in to work with institutions.

SENSORIAL ACTIVATION:

"Museums are like stone land or artificially built land. They are unnatural feeling. And I think a lot of Native folks have negative experiences in those environments as a feeling of being studied or not being seen or not being the intended audience."
–Teagan Harris

Pause, breathe, ground, and feel.

Teagan Harris reflects on the Indigenous community's specific history of "being studied" by institutions, and how that feeling of uneasiness and observation contextualizes how Native communities respond to cultural institutions that promise to address harm. Mindful of the distinct differences that contextualize this harm specific to Indigenous communities, this sensation of "being observed" has often preceded many communities' hesitations toward institutional community engagement.

The significance of *naming* sensations is important to recognizing how your body may be cueing embodied histories of trust and mistrust:

What does trust feel like? What does mistrust feel like?

What does the physical space or environment of the institution make you feel? Does it welcome your presence, or does it indicate otherwise?

Lean into your intuition. Do you feel uneasy? Tired? Skeptical? Nervous? Hopeful? Invigorated?

Institutional engagement cannot be at the risk of your safety, wellness, or capacity. If you are feeling a sense of exhaustion, paranoia, or uneasiness, it may be a sign to disengage. Embrace and honor these sensations in your awareness as we move into reflection.

INDIVIDUAL REFLECTION:

Institutional reflexivity is required before an attempt is made to reach the community. Gaining context for your position is the first way to begin addressing the hierarchies present in your situation — where you fit outside the institution or within it. Often cultural workers are tasked with leveraging their communal knowledge to support the institution's needs. This potentially dangerous imposition prompts reflection:

What is your relationship to the institution?

What is your relationship with the community?

How do your values align/misalign with the institution's values?

KITCHEN TABLE CYPHER:

When institutional partnerships with community are attempted, the relationship must be prefaced with open conversation. In your group or team, ask the following:

Imagine YOU (the institution) are the guests in someone else's home or space. First, wait to receive an invitation or ask to come over, and then, when you arrive, do not come empty-handed.

As a *guest*, what offerings are we bringing to the table? How are we thinking of hospitality as prospective hosts to community?

What do we assume are the needs of the community? Why do we assume what we assume? Have we asked directly what the *community* needs?

How is the community's vision being prioritized in this project? What are the organizational values that we share with the community's goals?

Holistic Hiring Practices – Consider structuring your hiring practices around not only the skills that are lacking in your team but also cultural competency and communal contexts. Can you fill an important position based on a job description and interview criteria that consider the heart (passion), care, and curiosity someone exhibits in addition to (or even over) the technical skills you deem necessary to complete a task?

What skills are lacking on your team?

What things do you really want to work on?

What are your ambitions for the future?

PRACTICE:

Consider what measures are in place to keep your institution responsible for respecting the community's terms of how you hope to engage. Remember, relationships take time, and trust comes slowly. As you move intentionally toward action, it is essential to plan for the following agreements:

Does your compensation to the community reflect the labor you expect them to provide? Are you considering how you are compensating the expenditure of people's energy? (Lala Bolander)

Two examples of tangible institutional practices are **CBA (Community Benefits Agreement)** or an **MOU (Memorandum of Understanding)**. These agreements function as a written document that solidifies the institution's commitments to the community. Be certain to do further research to ensure the best fit agreement for your partnership.

The function of a MOU is to get the institution and community's "ingredients" on the same page:

"Imagine building a meal where we all know what ingredients we have access to and then we ask, 'What does this mean for what deliciousness we create?' You know what I mean? That's the image that I just saw. 'Oh, that pepper is going to be a little too much [group laughing]. We're going to pull that back a little bit.' If you are truly integrating folks' contributions, folks' wisdom, folks' capacity, folks ability. Even in the MOU, the agreement, you're starting off strong in the foundation of how we're going to work together." –Pascale Ife Williams

1. **MOU Recipe:** A MOU is essential to holding the institution responsible for what it has promised to do. It is a form of agreement that serves as a recipe for how we will move forward together. Imagine forming the agreement in the same way you would cook a shared meal in the community. Here are some components to consider:

    - Project Title and Introduction: *What is your dish called?* Describe your meal and give context around its origins.
    - Purpose and Shared Vision: Co-define the goals and vision of the project.
    - Roles and Responsibilities: *What ingredients does each individual/ institution offer?* Discuss and detail roles and responsibilities; consider equitable delegation. Begin by determining the skillsets and desired areas of growth [see Skill Mapping and Growth Goals in Assessing/ Alignment Practice Lab].
    - Scope of Work: *What does the project look, sound, taste, smell, feel, move like?* Define the scope of the collaboration. Consider discussing the collaborative style, geographic or temporal boundaries, and any limitations or exclusions to the scope.
    - Meetings, Communication Cadence, and Capacity: Outline the communication and meeting agreements, including considerations of capacity and work distribution.
    - Financial Agreements: *Who is paying for the ingredients for the meal?* Detail the allocated budget, the projected expenses, and any flexible funds meant to address unexpected community or partnership needs.
    - Duration and Ending(s): *How long is the cookout?* State the expected length of the agreement or the conditions under which the collaboration/partnership will continue. Prepare to end partnerships with grace.

- Signatures (Co-Authorship): Include space in the agreement for *everyone*, not just leadership or "authorized representatives" to review and agree to the scope of the project and to sign the MOU.

If at any point these considerations are unanswered or are unable to be met, think of stopping to pause or stepping back. Remember that the willingness to relinquish— even if that means disruption or failure — is important to prevent further harm to the community.

COLLECTIVE OFFERINGS

LESSONS LEARNED: NAVIGATING CHALLENGES AND GROWTH

Community engagement is an evolving practice — one that requires ongoing reflection, adaptation, and a deep commitment to care. This work is full of uncertainty, risk, and complexity, yet in these moments of challenge the most valuable lessons emerge. Relationships shift, institutions impose limits, and harm can occur despite the best of intentions. What matters is how we hold ourselves accountable, how we navigate discomfort, and how we center community needs over institutional convenience.

This section includes lessons drawn from real experiences — moments of conflict, risk-taking, and learning that have shaped the work of those deeply engaged in community practice. These examples serve as both guidance and points for reflection, emphasizing that true engagement is not about perfection but is about showing up, listening, and being willing to adjust course when needed.

Navigating Relationships and Collaboration

1. Accept Discomfort in Partnerships
   Misalignment and friction are natural in collaborative work; work through them thoughtfully.

   "*The uncertainty of so many people plugging into this space, there's going to be weird potential for misunderstandings or things breaking beyond that […]. There's a little bit of discomfort here and a little bit of crossed wires.*" – Jordan Martins

2. Trust and Verify When Sharing Histories
   Ensure accuracy when representing others' stories and be open to corrections.

   "*It's assessing risk. Whose story are we telling? How are we telling their story? And are they consenting to their story being told?*" –Tanner Woodford

3. Honor the Power of Naming Closed Spaces
   Defining who a space serves is a political act and establishes a necessary boundary. This entails the risk of being "explicit" with who/what you serve and honoring that container.

   "*I also heard what you're sharing around the tension that existed with people being like, 'Well, an exclusively Black space is not inclusive. You all held strong to that [...]. It was also okay for you'all to be like, 'We are [inclusive] in all these ways, but in the people that we're centering and serving and in the community that we've defined, it is what it is.'*" –Pascale Ife Williams

4. End Relationships with Grace
   Accept that not all collaborations will work out and prioritize care even in separation. Strive for boundaried care and respect for each other's work when collaborations and relationships diverge.

   "*Sometimes there's no apologies that are going to make it so that you can work together again. And that's okay. We don't all need to work together. Whenever we're working with people, we really need to make sure that we think about care before this even starts.*" –Nour Arafat

Risk-Taking, Uncertainty, and Growth

5. Take Risks with Mindfulness
   Understand the precariousness of taking risks given the potential for harm and adopt the mindful intention to reduce harm through centering personal values.

   "*Sometimes taking risks is helpful and then sometimes it is not always helpful [...]. I've had many, many times when risks have not gone well or*

they've been changed by things out of my control. But whenever I take a risk, I try and center my values. It is hard for me when they don't pay off though, but I will continue to try." –Gillian Giles

6. Step Into the Abyss
   Push past fear and perfectionism and risk being uncomfortable, stepping into the unknown, and embracing uncertainty in partnership with a collaborator.

   "*I've been risk-averse, avoiding discomfort. Collaboration helps push through that.*" –Bri Robinson

7. Engage in Generative Risk-Taking
   Difficult conversations and questions can uncover new creative practices and modes of being.

   "*How do we evolve and question our modes of living in our family, in our work, and in our art practices to make different decisions that don't just reproduce the same models over and over again.*

   "*In my projects, I take risks to have very difficult conversations and bring up really difficult topics, and imagine that the beautiful things that hold those stories can draw people into really, really complex and difficult conversations.*" –Amber Ginsburg

Boundaries, Capacity, and Institutional Responsibility

8. Balance Systemic Engagement and Resistance
   Weigh the risks of working within the system or outside the system while maintaining personal commitments. Ask yourself, "What has to happen for the most change to occur with the least risk?" What are the risks and possibilities (e.g. leveraging the benefits, peacekeeping strategies, engagement models) of working within the system while honoring individual/personal/communal commitments? What is the individual's role in that?

   "*Is it the job of the individual to fix the system to better serve community or is it important to find the right ingredients to serve community within the systems that already exist and will continue to push forward with or without careful community engaged people*?" –Teagan Harris

9. Confront the Harm of Finitude and Rigid Timelines

   "*If you're talking about institutions or organizations doing community engagement with communities that they aren't deeply invested in, harm is the biggest risk because they're there for a specific period of time with a specific goal in mind. So I am actively committing harm because I'm going to disinvest in them in the very near future.*" –LaLa Bolander

10. Set Attainable Visions to Prevent Burnout
    Overcommitting can harm individuals and communities alike. Not being able to follow through on agreed-upon deliverables can also cause harm and mistrust with the community/partners.

    "*I might cut back on partners to be more effective.*" –Juarez Hawkins

    "*The tension between optimism and paralyzation – setting goals that are most likely unattainable while also knowing they might not happen.*" –Amber Ginsburg

11. Be Flexible to Support Partners in Crisis
    Institutions must consider their willingness and ability to pivot to support their partner/collaborator amid unexpected changes or a crisis in the community, and to evaluate how best to meet urgent community needs.

"*One of our partners faced a hate crime, and I wanted to help, even if it was outside our original intent. Where it was a concern for me is again, not trying to be condescending, not trying to pretend I'm a savior or anything like that, but coming back to that, well, what can we really do?*" –Juarez Hawkins

12. Avoid Instrumentalizing Community
    Institutions must resist reducing engagement to numbers and outputs.

    "*Smaller situations have the agility to be like, 'I don't know what this could turn into. I'm showing up with this openness and humanness and conversation knowing that what it can organically be if we create space for that is the best thing, not what maybe we wanted to have as an instrumentalized output of this.' Which, again, as you get bigger, it gets* a little harder, but when you're smaller, you can take advantage of that agility." –Jordan Martins

13. Recognize the Limits of Individualized Care
    Acknowledge systemic failures, fragility, and the structural weaknesses of individualized care; the pandemic exposed the limitations of "band-aid" mental healthcare that considers only the individual, as well as the need for social cohesion and the fulfillment of community needs and care.

    "*I had sort of feelings about the way that the work centered the individual. And I think the pandemic made it very apparent that community care was what we needed. And me sitting with individual clients without addressing any of the structural C community based, all of these different inequities and so forth, that the work that I was doing was a bandaid on wounds that were not just present wounds but generational.*" –nick adler

Learning from Failure and Criticism

14. Tell the Truth Unapologetically
    Do not censor or dilute the truth, especially in radical and anti-colonial work.

    "*For me, I'm speaking to an anti-colonial, decolonial politic. I'm speaking to an anti-racist politic. I'm speaking to a feminism that's centering black and brown women of color from what for better or worse, is known as the*

global south. I'm thinking about being an anti-capitalist. To me, that is what radical is. [...] Pro resistance." –Nour Arafat

15. Be Willing to Share Failures
    Create space to share and learn from failures without fear of being seen as illegitimate or losing credibility.

    "*They're like, we're going to have a party, you guys just tell us what happened. And it was very open. People were sharing their failures openly, which I don't do often. I'm scared to share our failures openly, but it was really amazing to be in a context where they're like, no, no, we really, we just want to hear how it went. We want to learn more. And whatever you say is great. I don't always feel that way. There's not always that open set of trust and faith that might not look the way that we wanted it to or you think it was just space.*" – Jordan Martins

16. Be Open to Criticism
    Receiving feedback, even when difficult, is crucial for growth and accountability.

    "A*side from the internal strife of being criticized, you also could offend somebody else in the world that somebody else sees and hurts them in some way you didn't expect. I've done that too, where the show [has] been offensive and I didn't realize it. I didn't do community engagement, but I didn't know going into it. And then there's a racist object in the exhibition all of a sudden. So then we've got to respond to that and take it out and change it and then talk about it and learn from it.*" –Tanner Woodford

17. Embody a Willingness to Be Wrong
    Accept that mistakes and misunderstandings are inevitable; handle them with grace.

    "*If you have to be the bearer of bad news, sometimes you may bear the brunt of other people's frustrations. And being able to handle that with a certain amount of grace. Takes grace and takes graciousness and understanding that it's not personal. It's that, well, I'm having frustrations with how this project is going.*" –Juarez Hawkins

18. Care, Community, and Ethical Engagement
    Center Care in Community Engagement
    Institutions must recognize their responsibility in caring for communities.

    "*By chance, they found someone that cared. But that shouldn't be left to chance.*" –LaLa Bolander

19. Be Patient with Yourself
    Community-building is a long process filled with mistakes and learning.

    "*The things that we pick up and the kinds of practices we develop to make community and make the conditions for community; we're going to make mistakes, we're not going to solve it all, right? I would encourage people or encourage myself, too, to try to attune to what is it that we, in our city, in the people who show up here, what are the differences that we can make and what's outside of our control?*" –Garrett Johnson

20. Embrace Reality Checks
    Distinguish between what can and cannot be controlled; be willing to adapt and come up with an entirely new set of possibilities or be willing to let someone down.

    "*There's a lot that's outside of our control and I think that's a hard lesson.... What is the difference that we can make? That's a hard question, but one worth asking. There's a reality check there. Don't be afraid of reality checks, right?*" –Garrett Johnson

    "*You can just tell people what you're able to actually hold space for, and then they can decide, okay, this is how much of myself I'm going to bring to that space.*" – LaLa Bolander

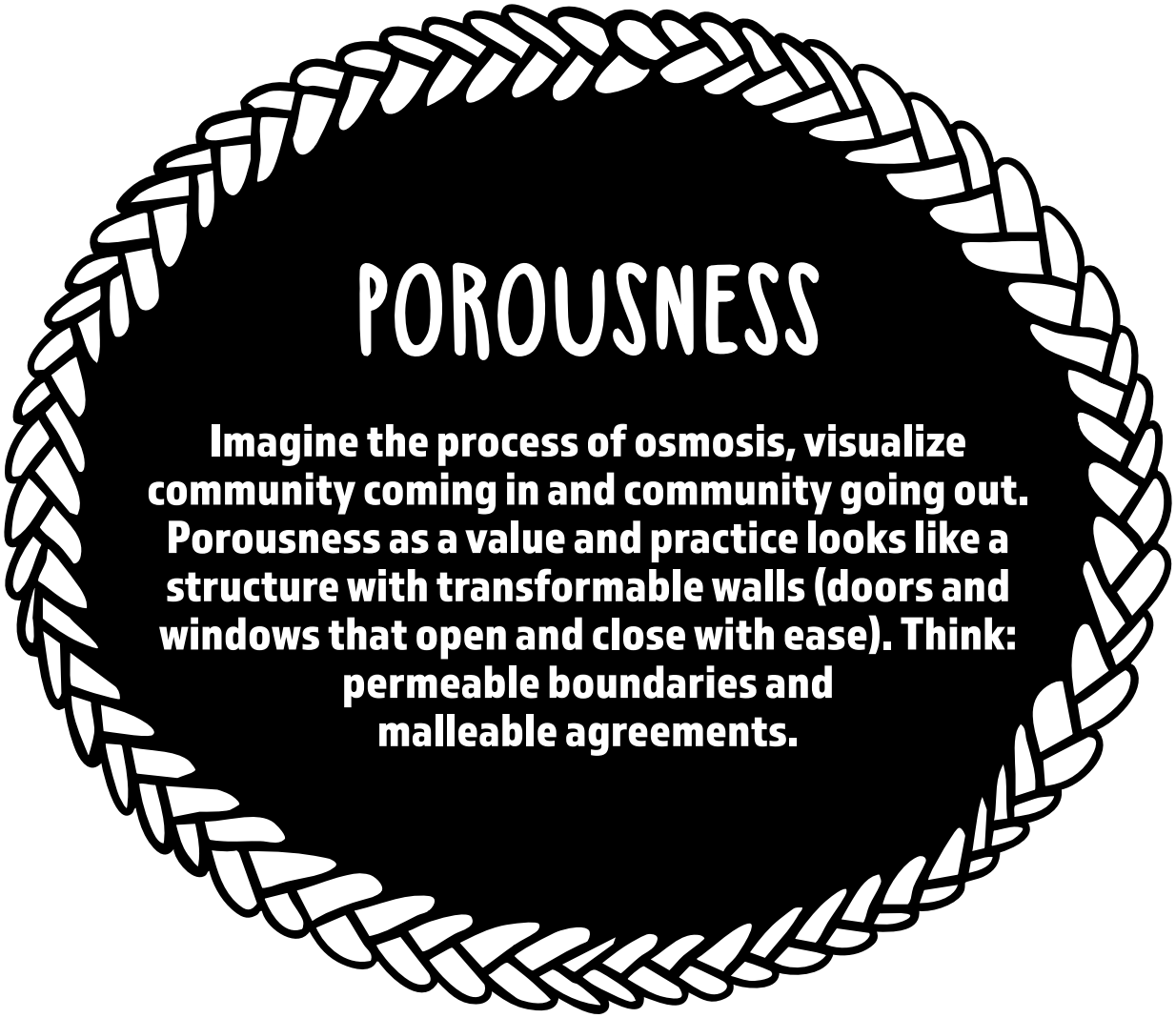
21. Acknowledge the Risks of Openness
    Fluidity in structure carries inherent risks that must be considered.

    "*There's so much stuff happening and you're putting your work in here. We're going to do everything we can to protect it, but there's a risk that with all the 30 events happening in October, one concert might have someone*

lean against your work in a way that's not great. So the uncertainty that comes with doing so much with that porousness is itself a huge risk."
–Jordan Martins

22. Value Softness, Vulnerability, and Slowness
Recognizing and respecting personal limits strengthens community work.

"*Be vulnerable, which kind of goes into being wrong, but to be soft, to be slow. These are things that I struggle with, so they feel like risks to me or I feel like moments where I'm stretching [...] and sometimes that is also doing a disservice to myself, but it's also doing a disservice to the community because we connect by being able to hold each other.*" –Maimuna Touray



FINAL REFLECTIONS

The urgency of community-engaged artistic and cultural production grows daily, as this work is increasingly under threat. The considerations we offer in the Practice Book are more consequential than ever given the new political administration's suppression of arts and cultural work through the cutting of resources and funding, as well as its mandating of DEI policy changes. Given the ongoing genocide in Palestine, the escalating threats to marginalized communities, and the expanding power of the surveillance state, we see this book as a tool to bring cultural workers and artists into conversation about the stakes of community engagement in our current sociopolitical landscape. In these precarious times, we share this book as a space for collective meaning-making to translate experiential knowledge, wisdoms, and theory into action alongside our comrades. As national and global crises demand renewed calls for solidarity, centering community is necessary for our survival.

This means grounding ourselves in home – and for us as contributors, that is Chicago. Rooted within the Terra Foundation's Art Design Chicago initiative, EN/GAGE 3/C affirms that the communal knowledge in this book is site-specific and has been deeply shaped by the ways we understand and engage in community within this city. Chicago — its history, its youth, its arts, its resistance, and its unwavering commitment to the future — sustains our daily hustle (and rest) and dedication to this work.

With this in mind, we invite readers to take what resonates from this book and put it into practice. Find care, curiosity, and collaboration in your homes, workplaces, parks, libraries, museums, street corners, and CTA bus stops. Be assured that this work is crucial to our self-preservation and political resistance, and remember it can be accomplished only in collaboration with others.[10] Whatever can be gained from these pages, we hope will ultimately serve us all, as a thread woven into the fabric that makes this city who we are.

SECTION III

INGREDIENTS

ENDNOTES

1. "EN/GAGE" is a playful way to combine two verbs: *engage* – participating or becoming involved in; and *gage* – to determine the capacity or content of. Together these two words orient us toward the building of action-oriented caring, curious, and collaborative community-engagement strategies.
2. The term "harm reduction" reflects a set of principles and resistance practices rooted in self-determination and non-condemning access to resources (such as safer-sex supplies and drug-use test kits). While the term has been adopted by the social work and public health fields, it is "gifted to us by Queer and Transgender people of color, drug users, people in the sex trade and survivors of the HIV/AIDS epidemic." Kaba, Mariam, and Shira Hassan. *Fumbling Towards Repair: A Workbook for Community Accountability Facilitators*. Project Nia and Just Practice, 2019, p. 7.
3. For more information on the Black Radical Tradition, read: Robinson, Cedric. *Black Marxism: The Making of the Black Radical Tradition*. Zeb Books, 1983.
   Vogel, Shane. "Lorraine Hansberry and the Black Radical Tradition." *Black Perspectives*, 2022.
   For a more contemporary perspective, watch: "Between the Black Radical Tradition and the Digital," Haymarket Books, February 23, 2022. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kiuv7W4gNqo
4. Robin D.G. Kelley articulates the promise and challenges of the Black imagination in *Freedom Dreams: The Black Radical Imagination*. Kelley, Robin D.G. *Freedom Dreams: The Black Radical Imagination*. Beacon Press, 2002.
5. The term "healing justice" was first coined in 2007 by Cara Page and the Kindred Southern Healing Justice Collective. Introduced during a panel covering reproductive justice and disability justice, the framework seeks to address the intersection of healing and justice to identify "how we can holistically respond to and intervene on generational trauma and violence and bring collective practices that can impact and transform the consequences of oppression on our bodies, hearts and minds" (Prentis Hemphill, *Healing Justice is How We Can Sustain Black Lives*, Huffington

Post, https://www.huffpost.com/entry/healing-justice_b_5899e8ade4b0c1284f282ffe). For a deeper dive, read: Page, Cara, and Erica Woodland. *Healing Justice Lineages: Dreaming at the Crossroads of Liberation, Collective Care, and Safety*. North Atlantic Books, 2023.

6. Lakota scholar Maria Yellow Horse Brave Heart first coined the term "historical trauma" – cumulative emotional and psychological wounding extending over an individual lifespace and across generations – to denote the impact of colonial racism and apartheid on Indigenous Peoples of North America. Other scholars have expanded on this framework through the study of intergenerational, generational trauma, and transgenerational trauma. See:
   Menakem, Resmaa. *My Grandmother's Hands: Racialized Trauma and the Pathway to Mending Our Hearts and Bodies*. Central Recovery Press, 2017.
   DeGruy, Joy. *Post-Traumatic Slave Syndrome: America's Legacy of Enduring Injury and Healing*. HarperCollins, 2005.
   Brave Heart, Maria Yellow Horse. "The Return to the Sacred Path: Healing the Historical Trauma and Historical Unresolved Grief Response Among the Lakota Through a Psychoeducational Group Intervention." *Smith College Studies in Social Work* 68, no. 3 (1998): 287-305.
7. Terra Foundation for American Art, "About Art Design Chicago," http://www.artdesignchicago.com, February 20, 2025.
8. The tradition of intellectual discourse and world-building at the kitchen table has a rich history. In 1980, Kitchen Table: Women of Color Press was founded by Barbara Smith after a conversation with her friend Audre Lorde. Robin D.G. Kelley reengages the notion of the "table," "the corner," and other familial sites of Black discourse and information exchange in his text *This battlefield called life: Black feminist dreams in Freedom dreams: the Black radical imagination*. Beacon Press, 2002. Feminist scholar and fandango practitioner Martha Gonzales activates her community-scholarship and builds solidarity with women and families through songwriting that always happens in the kitchen (Carolina Sarmiento, PhD [doctoral advisor] in direct communication with Pascale Ife Williams, September 2017).
9. Lamar, Kendrick. "HUMBLE." *DAMN*. Top Dawg Entertainment, Aftermath, Interscope, 2017.
10. Lorde, Audre. *A Burst of Light: Essays*, London: Sheba Feminist Publishers, 1988.
11. Wisdom Seeds Collective, Pascale Ife Williams, and E. Morales-Williams. *The Spectrum of Interpersonal Conflict to Violence*, 2024.

12. Detroit is the birthplace of the term "emergent strategy." Practitioners across many intersections of social-justice movement organizing refined the practice through a yearly gathering called The Allied Media Conference (AMC) which ran for more than 23 years. While adrienne maree brown is most recognized for her resource-full book *Emergent Strategy* (AK Press, 2017), it is important to acknowledge the contributions of the beloved ancestor Grace Lee Boggs and other folks continuing the work on the ground.
13. Wisdom Seeds Collective, Pascale Ife Williams, and E Morales-Williams, *The Spectrum of Interpersonal Conflict to Violence*, 2024.

GLOSSARY

Accountability - A willingness to be responsible and make amends with respect to the moments when your values misalign with your actions. Integrity, repair.

Agency - A bi-directional process of dignified choice. The practice of allowing yourself and others to center, in all decisions, consent and autonomy. Agency gives individuals and the community the power to make informed choices and decide whether to opt in or opt out, based on what they wish to be exposed to or participate in.

Alignment - The embodiment of agreement, in the shape of balance and internal stability. Considering and assessing individual as well as collective values, identities, and boundaries in relation to community engagement and collaboration. Requires assessing internal values, mission, and politics.

Boundaries - Boundaries are a set of actions that you take to care for yourself amid defined circumstances. Boundaries can support you to honor your capacity, in matters such as the depth of relationship you are open to pursuing with someone. In collaborative environments, distinguish between the needs you have of others (which is not a boundary), for example "I need you to check in with me when you have completed this task," versus functional boundaries that you set for yourself, such as, "If you do not check in with me after one week, I will use our check-in word 'purple' to initiate the check-in" or "I am unavailable on Saturdays and Sundays."

Care - Not a metaphor or abstraction, but a verb. Community and care are not transactional; they are rooted in reciprocity and presence. Care demands an acknowledgment of each person's humanity and calls for us to recognize and challenge the systemic disparities between those who receive care and those who do not, those who have access to resources and those who lack them.

Collaboration - A foundational value in community engagement, shaped by our relational tendencies and reflected through lineages like our family, offering models of how we learned to work together or were challenged to do so. Sites, origins, and practices serve as entry points for collaboration and collective world-building, reinforced by a commitment to adaptability and longevity.

Community - Community operates across multiple spheres and varying levels of intimacy, extending outward in concentric circles. Communities range in their duration, depth, shared discipline, or purpose. Communities are built based on identity, shared interest, location and geography, and/or goal- and action-based endeavors. Community is something that emerges and evolves, a process of being and co-creating as we navigate our intersections with others.

Community Engagement - Community engagement is community in conversation and practice. A nuanced skill that is strengthened and refined over time, rooted in a commitment to developing trust and building relationships in community with an open heart and a willingness to serve one another.

Comrade - A bond of trust, care, and accountability that does not depend on deep familiarity but on a shared commitment to showing up. Could mean anything from helping get you out of jail to simply remembering your name or your grandmother's name — whatever it takes to support one another in ways that institutions fail to. Being a comrade means embracing flexibility, consent, and agency, trusting your collaborators, and prioritizing care in the present moment. It is kinship in action, rooted in accountability and the understanding that solidarity is a practice, not just an ideal.

Conflict - Conflict exists on a spectrum, ranging from discomfort to harm to violence, requiring nuanced responses that acknowledge these distinctions while prioritizing accountability and care. Often arises when discomfort is mistaken for harm. "A disagreement on issues that may or may not cause tension. You may feel yourself shut down if you tend to be conflict avoidant or puff up/become defensive."[11] In community, there is no fixed measure for navigating conflict; but it requires asking, reassessing, and remaining in dialogue. Openness to discomfort is essential, as not all discomfort equates to harm. [See "failure" in relationship to conflict.]

Connector - A person or system whose collectivist values and praxis is creating a web of knowledge and resource-sharing. Looks like holding a deep desire to connect, to be in service of, to collaborate or simply be the person who stewards those networks of connection. The role of gathering ingredients from everyone to make the gumbo, together. Sounds like generosity: "I have a whole range of people I could help pull in."

Consent - Consent is the active, ongoing, and informed agreement to engage in any interaction, recognizing the autonomy of each person over their body, choices, and experiences. The absence of consent, whether through coercion, force, or systemic harm, can cause deep disruption to a person's well-being, sense of safety, and ability to trust. Centering consent means respecting boundaries, fostering mutual understanding, and creating spaces where individuals feel safe and empowered in their interactions. Only an embodied and enthusiastic "yes!" is asked for and must be given continuously in order to proceed. Not a no, not a maybe, not silence.

Curiosity - A practice rooted in a spirit of inquiry, where attention and presence are offered without imposing a desired outcome. To care is to engage with openness, allowing things to exist and unfold on their own terms. Curiosity and care go together; listening, observing, and nurturing without expectation.

Decolonize - Not just an abstract concept or theoretical idea. A continuous process of dismantling colonial systems, narratives, and ways of being by centering care, consent, and collective liberation. It involves concrete actions to return land, resources, and autonomy to Indigenous peoples, as well as challenging and transforming the ongoing legacies of colonialism in institutions, knowledge, and our daily lives. An active commitment to relational ways of knowing, and a practice of imagining and building futures beyond colonial frameworks.

Diffusive Care - A form of care that is adaptive and spreads and flows freely, rejecting hierarchical structures and emphasizing instead collective well-being, shared responsibility, and mutual support. Dismantles boundaries that often isolate individuals and communities, fostering interconnectedness and breadth. Embodiment - Integrates knowing with living. Embodiment requires deep presence and somatic awareness (sensations felt in the body) beyond the mind and into the body/heart. Acknowledges that our bodies are sites of meaning-making, connection, and resistance. Requires honor and trust in our sensations, feelings, and physical presence as sources of insight that inform both personal and collective liberation.

Emergent Strategy - A framework popularized by adrienne maree brown[12] that embraces adaptability, relationality, and decentralized change. Rooted in nature's patterns, Emergent Strategy recognizes that small, intentional actions create ripple effects, leading to transformative systemic shifts. It values fluidity, iterative growth, and collective wisdom, emphasizing that change happens in relationships, through trust, care, and responsiveness to the present moment.

Failure - Essential to all learning, failure is an opportunity to deepen connections with one another. Rather than being dismissed or feared, it should be embraced. Failure requires creating space for individuals to share, learn, and move forward with greater trust.

Flexibility - The ability to adapt, evolve, and respond without being bound by rigid expectations or norms. Flexibility is not about compromising values but about maintaining the capacity to adjust and evolve based on the needs of individuals and communities.

Harm - The impact of a boundary being repeatedly crossed despite the intention to maintain such a boundary. You may feel a loss of power, a sense of deep overwhelm, intense discomfort, and even physical pain.[13] Harm may sound like "You asked me to do this, but we're going to do this," causing a loss of dignity and power. In community, institutional harm looks like non-reciprocal partnerships, not compensating the community for their contributions, overpromising, and under-servicing.

Institutionalization - The process of embedding practices, structures, or concepts into formal systems governed by hierarchies, power dynamics, and bureaucratic frameworks. While it can provide structure and sustainability, institutionalization often risks becoming disconnected from its original intent — especially in community engagement — by prioritizing rigid definitions and organizational goals over genuine connection and malleability.

Institution – In the context of this Practice Book, an institution is any organized structure – whether a museum, university, nonprofit, or foundation –that holds power and resources within community engagement work. Institutions shape the conditions of access, funding, and decision-making, often operating with their own timelines, priorities, and bureaucratic constraints. While they can provide support and legitimacy, they can also perpetuate harm through extractive practices, rigid professionalism, and a lack of accountability to the

communities they claim to serve. This book approaches institutions with both critique and strategy, recognizing the need to navigate, challenge, and, when necessary, reimagine their roles in fostering ethical, reciprocal relationships with communities.

Kinship - A relational framework that centers connection and mutual care; grounded in the belief that we are all responsible for one another's well-being. Kinship transcends biological ties, extending to chosen families and communities that are mutually supportive. Rooted in interdependence, kinship emphasizes that justice is built on relationships of care, solidarity, and the refusal of individualism or abandonment.

Kitchen Table Cypher – A dynamic, communal space for conversation, learning, and meaning-making, rooted in Black feminism, Black radical traditions and hip-hop culture. The kitchen table represents an intimate site of care, vulnerability, and critical dialogue – a place where stories are shared, knowledge is built, and world-making happens. The cypher, drawn from hip-hop culture, is an energetic, improvisational space of intellectual and creative exchange, where participants challenge, sharpen, and uplift one another through dialogue, play, and critique. Together, the Kitchen Table Cypher, developed by Pascale Ife Williams, merges these traditions, creating a space that honors Black feminist thought, collective wisdom, and the embodied practice of justice. It is a space to gather, to listen, to challenge, and to build –holding both the rigor of intellectual exchange and the ease of communal flow.

Level Setting – The practice of making sure everyone in a space is on the same page. It's about checking in –on knowledge, expectations, and emotional presence –so that conversations start from a place of shared understanding rather than assumptions.

Liberation - Liberation for all, requires: anti-racism, anti-state surveillance, transnational solidarity/liberation, queer liberation, disability justice, radical openness, transformative justice, environmental justice, abolition feminisms, land rights, indigenous liberation, Black radical traditions, healing justice, ancestral and spiritual lineages, multi-denominational faith practices, anti-Zionism, anti-capitalist, anti-colonial, anti-settler, pro-resistance.

Mutuality – A way of being in relationship where care, effort, and accountability flow in both directions. It's not about keeping score, but about honoring the fact that true connection is sustained through shared investment, trust, and reciprocity.

Narrative Voice – The shifting, collective tone that shapes how stories and insights are shared. In this Practice Book, it reflects multiple lived experiences, balancing vulnerability, institutional critique, and community wisdom. Rather than being a singular authority, it emerges through sharing, listening, and engaging with tensions – offering a communal approach to meaning-making.

Operationalize – Taking an idea or value and putting it into motion. It's about turning intentions into action –making things real by embedding them into daily practices, structures, and relationships.
Practice Book – A living document that holds shared wisdom, reflections, and tools for engaging in meaningful work. More than a handbook, it's a space for collective learning – capturing what has been tried, what has been learned, and what is still unfolding.

Practice – The repeated, intentional actions that shape how we move through the world. Practice is more than just doing – it is a ritual, a rhythm, a way of embodying values over time. Through repetition, reflection, and adjustment, practice becomes a living commitment to growth, care, and community.

Praxis - The process by which a thought, knowing, skill, or value becomes embodied through ritualistic practice over time. The process of turning knowledge, methods, and practices into embodied action. It's the bridge between theory and practice, where ideas take root through repetition, ritual, and lived experience.

Precarity – The uncertainty and instability that shapes so much of our work and lives. It's the feeling of being on unsteady ground – whether financially, socially, or structurally – and the need for care and support in navigating that uncertainty.

Professionalization – The process of shaping work, knowledge, and ways of being to fit institutional or industry standards – often in ways that prioritize legitimacy, efficiency, and expertise over relational, community-driven approaches. While professionalization can offer structure and resources, it can

also create barriers, thus limiting access, creativity, and the informal, care-based practices that sustain communities. It's worth asking: Who gets to define what is "professional," and at what cost? True professionalism should not require abandoning the values, fluidity, and accountability that make community work meaningful.

Programming – The events, gatherings, and offerings that bring people together. Good programming isn't just about filling a calendar – it's about creating space for connection, learning, and possibility.

Radical – Rooted in the Latin radix, meaning "root," radical movements seek to address the fundamental causes of injustice rather than just their symptoms. Across history, radicalism has been a force for transformative change, challenging entrenched power structures in the struggles for abolition, decolonization, labor rights, Black liberation, feminist movements, queer activism, and environmental justice. To be radical is not simply to resist but to reimagine – to push beyond reform and toward structural shifts that center equity, collective care, and liberation. Radical work often emerges from the margins, embracing strategies of disruption, community organizing, and world-building that refuse to accept oppression as inevitable.

Reciprocal Relationship – A relationship built on mutual care and accountability, where giving and receiving are in balance. It's about being in community in a way that recognizes everyone's contributions and needs.

Risk - The audacious boldness to confront the unknown/fear of failure. Stretching into new shapes and building a tolerance and willingness to be uncomfortable. Not risks as in harm, but risks as in opening up to what's possible – a mindfulness of things that will be harmful inside the intention of being at the edges of our comfort to work with community outside of what we might have previously imagined.

Ritual/s - An intentional practice in the form of an activity, exercise, or movement. One that you choose to return to over and over rhythmically, with care and intention. A ritual wherein culture is created. Ritualizing a practice in your work for living more lovingly and reciprocally among each other and in relationship to the elements around us is how it becomes embodied (repetition sustains embodiment).

Success – Not a fixed outcome, but a feeling – of alignment, of impact, of knowing you've shown up with integrity. Success isn't about meeting external benchmarks, but about moving with purpose, learning from failure, and staying true to your values.

Values – The core beliefs that shape how we move through the world. Values are not just words—they are lived commitments that guide decisions, relationships, and the ways we build and sustain community.

Vibe Check - A practice of discernment and intuitive sensing. "Vibe checking" can be utilized as a method to gather information and determine needs to support alignment with individual decisions and collaborations.

Weaving - the methodological practice of making something bigger; the process of bringing together diverse people, ideas, and experiences to form a connected and meaningful whole. It's about collaboration, where each thread – whether successful or challenging – contributes to a shared story of growth, creativity, and collective world-building.

VISUAL GLOSSARY: SENSORIAL ACTIVATIONS

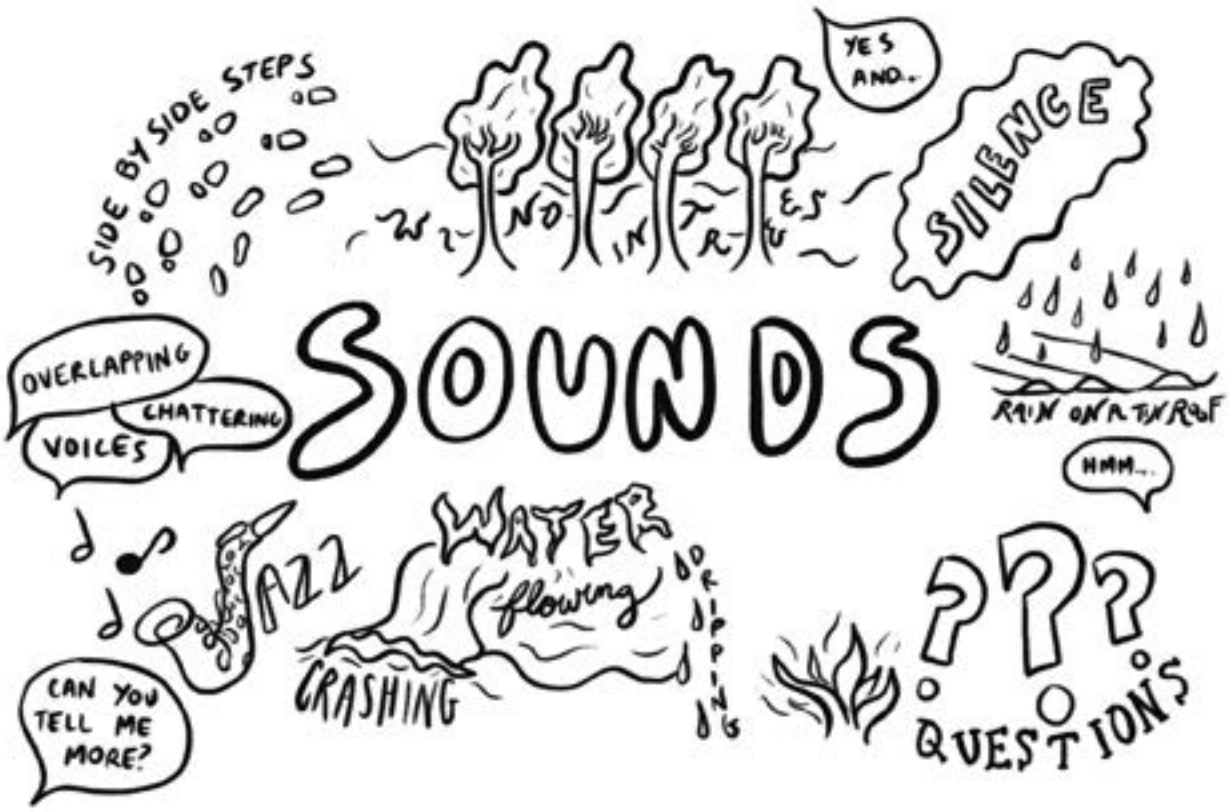
The following images were created by Julie M Creates during the Kitchen Table Cyphers on September 18, 2024 and October 23, 2024. The sensorial activations depict the contributors' responses to the question: How does intentionally collaborative arts-based community engagement — *feel*, *move*, *look*, *taste*, *smell*, *sound*?


ZIG REVERB
like a cha cha or salsa
ZAG
PURPOSEFULLY
PIVOTS
MOVES
FLUCTUATES
responsively
OPENLY
SWIFTLY
FORWARD
MORE COMPLICATED THAN WE MIGHT THINK


SMOOTH
JOYFUL
accessible
SITTING TOGETHER
WELL-DOCUMENTED
LOOKS
EASIER
THAN IT MOVES
ORGANIZED &
WELL-PLANNED
seamless
FUN
DISCUSSION
THOUGHTFUL
COMMUNITY
SHOWING UP
DIVERSE
CO-LEADERSHIP


NOURISHING
LOTS OF HISTORY
LIKE A DISH COOKED TOGETHER
NO BITTERNESS
FULL OF FLAVOR
TASTES
DELICIOUS
FRESHLY HARVESTED
ANCESTRAL & CULTURALLY
PLEASANT
COMMUNITY
INVITING


INVITING
SWEET
INCENSE
SMELLS
FOOD FOR COMMUNITY
GRILLING
HOT DOGS & MEAT
COFFEE
BUFFET
GRASSY
SWEATY
EARTHY
SOIL


SIDE BY SIDE STEPS
WIND
NOISY TREES
YES AND..
SILENCE
SOUNDS
OVERLAPPING
CHATTERING
VOICES
RAIN ON A TIN ROOF
HMM...
JAZZ
WATER
flowing
DRIPPING
CRASHING
???
QUESTIONS
CAN YOU TELL ME MORE?

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EN/GAGE 3/C TEAM

EN/GAGE 3/C Research Team Bios

Fariha M. Koshul (she/her) is a researcher, writer, and student of knowledge exploring heritage preservation, cultural memory, and artistic resistance. Moving between Pakistan and the U.S., she grew up navigating the worlds of Urdu, Punjabi, and English, shaping her approach to history, identity, and storytelling. Her work moves through museums, libraries, and community spaces, searching for the quiet revolutions in art, archives, and collective memory. She has worked with institutions such as the Terra Foundation for American Art, the University of Chicago Library, and community-based arts organizations, engaging in research, collections care, exhibition development, and community-centered storytelling. She is invested in how institutions engage with histories of harm and accountability, exploring their responsibilities in reckoning with their legacies and relationships to the communities they serve. To her, community engagement looks like "a garden—something that requires ongoing effort to grow. It's about intentionally making space for different voices, then nurturing those voices so they can thrive. Like any garden, it takes time, care, and the right conditions to make it work." The EN/GAGE 3/C research team describe Fariha as astute, generous, insightful. A deep listener, always keen, with unfiltered clarity around values and motives.

Lee Nah (she/they) is a community-engaged scholar and painter/printmaker guided by queer of color critique and women of color feminisms. Raised in Albany Park's Korean-American immigrant community on Chicago's North Side, she identifies deeply as a lifelong student of the city. As a Beinecke Scholar and Obama-Chesky Voyager, she is committed to understanding how arts and cultural engagement strengthen social cohesion and holistic well-being in communities of color. To her, community engagement sounds like "the daily conversing, shuffling of kids' shoes, flipping of pages, and music of any volume on any given day at the Harold Washington Library." The EN/GAGE 3/C team collaborators describe Lee Nah as enthusiastic, dedicated, cheerful, and exceptionally thoughtful. A deeply reflective thinker who moves with care and intention and whose work honors the slow, relational nature of knowledge-building.

Pascale Ife Williams (she/they) is a cultural organizer, disruptor, healing justice practitioner, researcher and community scholar. Ife infuses her love for the city of Chicago into her commitment to justice-driven arts and community-engaged work that explores and engages racial, gender, and wellness equity. Through strategic visioning, radical imagination, and creative healing practices, she invites communities to co-create their realities and community care systems that sustain us. Ife is a commitment to liberation through somatics. To her, community engagement moves like a living room dance party "exuberant, laborious, yet fun. An adventure that leaves you feeling life flowing through your body. Requiring moments to pause for rest; knowing you must move through the space with care to make room for others." EN/GAGE 3/C team collaborators describe Ife as a generous and deeply warm and compassionate leader. Dr. Williams embodies a rare clarity of vision, reflected in her intentional facilitation and grounding presence. With a keen ability to listen deeply, she cultivates spaces of trust and creativity, inspiring those around her not just through her words and ideas but through the authenticity of her presence.

You can learn more about Ife's work on her website www.pascaleifewilliams.com and through her consulting, community research, and facilitation practice with Wisdom Seeds Collective.

Reflections from the Artist: Julie M Creates

Julie M Creates Artist Statement: Graphic notes and scribing can be a difficult balance between using visuals to reinforce ideas from the text and using visuals to introduce new ideas or imagery. This balance can be made more difficult when many visual shorthands in contemporary culture reinforce oppressive histories and carceral logics. In illustrating both the sensorial activations and conversations from the Kitchen Table Cyphers, I sought to bring the vivid language offered by contributors to life without defaulting into imagery that upholds oppressive systems, such as evoking policing or prisons. I opted away from illustrating many people, which might seem odd in a book all about people, but I sought to leave space for readers and viewers to imagine their own communities, rather than sticking to imagery based on my community or imagined communities. I was struck by how often contributors brought up roots and rooting in their work and in their collaborations. I hope these illustrations, notes, and activities help artists, institutions, and communities strengthen existing roots & put down new roots.

Process Statement: It was a unique opportunity to engage in a collaborative process to create works about collaborative processes. I am thankful for the experience not only of creating these images, but of listening to conversations at the Kitchen Table Cyphers, growing the scope of my contributions to the project alongside Ife, strengthening my work from the feedback of my wife and the team, learning about the layout process from Amira, and receiving support from Lasondra and others at the Terra Foundation. This process made me believe that it is possible to create collaborations that align with the values laid out in this book. I hope that other collaborations bloom from this work.

Design reflection from Amira Hegazy

This book was designed to empashize the usefulness of this content and create a friendly and effective way to move through scholarly concepts. The combination of the Julie Hand typeface that I created for this project alongside the Lora and Almaq typefaces balance seriousness with playfulness. As the content also reflects the way we must hold often contradictory ideas side by side and move forward together, the type and design do as well.

Decorative braid elements were created to link the illustrations with the design and carry the concept of weaving and braiding ideas and communities together. This concept is also mirrored in the cover art, and inspired by the waves on Lake Michigan.

The process of desinging this book was deeply collaborative with the EN/GAGE 3/C team and bears the marks of their taste, input, and creativity as much as it does my own.

This is the second book published by my imprint a mirror which aims to reflect the ideas of life, art, and criticality back into the worlds that foster it.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

To the Terra Foundation for American Arts, whose vision and commitment to equity in the arts supported this project. I am especially appreciative to the Arts Design Chicago Team: Eva Silverman, Lasondra Kern, Jennifer Siegenthaler, Deniseya Hall, and Stephanie Munoz. Your support, encouragement, and flexibility throughout the four years of our working partnership were unwavering and deeply felt. Thank you for trusting me to help support, facilitate, and co-create spaces for and with the beloved Chicago arts community we all hold near and dear to our hearts.

Collaborating with Julie was such a joyful and insightful practice in merging the worlds of imagery, story collection, and knowledge-building. It was a gift to collaboratively develop a values-aligned gift by and for the community. Amira, your enthusiasm and knowledge of all things design are inspiring. The opportunity to collaborate with you on a book project for the second time is affirmation of more co-dreaming to come. Thank you, Sarah Rose Sykes-Goldsmith, for guiding me in formulating the grounding breathwork exercise in the Practice Lab introduction. To my writing accountability partner and friend, Z! Haukeness, our years-long dedication to Monday through Friday 8:15-9:00 a.m. writing sessions is a beautiful ritual. Thank you, Selma Hudson, for loving me and supporting me so tenderly. Kamari, my little son/shine, I appreciate your patience and your cuddles. Thank you for helping Alexandra Antoine serve us her delicious food during the Kitchen Table Cypher in October (sparked by a humble monetary incentive). A special thank you to Ross Jordan, Curatorial Manager at the Jane Addams Hull-House Museum, for your curiosity about my proposal and for taking the time to speak with me about your thoughts when I was in the initial stages of imagining what this project might become.

I hold a profound space of gratitude for my Research Assistants, Fariha Koshul and Lee Nah. You two are brilliant, truly. Your enthusiasm, insightfulness, and diligent commitment to holding this project with care and curiosity kept me grounded and motivated. We saw so much of one another in the months leading up this Practice Book launch. Our biweekly Research Labs are a space I looked forward to. While we sometimes extended our meetings to three hours, we always took care to check in, to include significant breaks and end with

affirmations. You both have my infinite and steadfast support into the future for all the amazing good you will do in this world.

Many deep thanks to the people and communities of Chicago who raised me and continue to transform me, everyday. To all those who came before me and who will continue the call for more liberated futures: creatives, dreamers, disruptors, community builders – may we continue to be rooted in our disciple of hope and creation.

COLOPHON

This book was designed by Amira Hegazy of A Mirror and published under an imprint of the same name. It is risograph printed by Spudnik Press in Chicago, IL on Royal Sundance Fiber Text 70 lb paper. The covers are risograph printed by a mirror in 6 colors. The included posters are digitally printed by Classic Color. This book was set in Lora, a font designed by Cyreal. This typeface is based on calligraphic letterforms with variations in strokes and brushed serifs. The title face Almaq was used for titles and headers in each section. Almaq is designed by Dalton Maag and is a strong, friendly, and clear typeface. Additionally, a new typeface, Julie Hand, was created for this project based off of the illustrative hand utilized in the included illustrations from Julie M Creates.

This book is printed in an edition of 150 for the occassion of the closing of Art Design Chicago to commemorate and bring together the learnings from within the Art Deisgn Chicago Learning Community. It is a project led by Dr. Pascale Ife Williams who served as the Terra Foundation Senior Engagement Fellow for Art Design Chicago. It was distributed freely to partners and collaborators in Art Design Chicago on March 20, 2025.

SHARE YOUR STORIES WITH US!

We would love to hear how this Practice Book has informed and helped shape your Community/Engagement work.

https://forms.gle/NJsXbm5V54AXvdpo7