

ORGANIZING CULTURE, PRINCIPLES & VALUES [1-2 HOURS]

OVERVIEW

Knowing that many regular, every day folks come to movement and then promptly leave again because it is so inhospitable, *how do we take active part in creating a group culture that reflects our values?* This session gives people a chance to identify their values and core collective practices they can use to live into them.

GOALS

- To explore and define our values
- To reflect on traits of 'activist' cultures and challenges and opportunities
- To explore ways to line up our organizational culture and practices with our values (i.e., walk our talk)

TIME NEEDED

1-2 hours

MATERIALS NEEDED

Flip chart, tape, markers, printer paper or construction paper, and **Our Feminist Values** (p.98) handout

FRAMING

"What we say and what we do ultimately comes back to us so let us own our responsibility, place it in our hands, and carry it with dignity and strength."
-Gloria E. Anzaldúa

"Identity doesn't dictate behavior or values. We learn values and choose political commitments. Just because a person is Black, a woman, and queer or transgender (or both) does not mean one is automatically radical or revolutionary. Being radical is a choice and it takes work."

- Charlene Carruthers, *Unapologetic* (p. 7)

ORGANIZING CULTURES

Ask the group to list: *What are the characteristics of organizing or activist culture? Which of these are legitimate and which are rooted in stereotypes? Scribe for the group on a flip chart.*

Consider:

- Small
- Fundamentalist
- Dream-filled and unpragmatic
- Episodic
- Lots of talk (and talk is cheap)

Solo Reflection and/or Pair Share:

- So despite that unappealing list, *why are we here to do this work?*
- *What is calling your name? What is driving you? What is driving us?*

Popcorn back answers and discuss in the full group.

Solo Reflection and Writing Time:

- *When has someone or something broken their word or promise to you?*
- *When have you broken your word?*
- *When have you been impeccable with your word and held your integrity?*

As members of communities who are marginalized, experience various forms of oppression, and/or are living in red states, many of us have become accustomed to people not keeping their word. Institutions, families, synagogues, and other places of worship turn their backs. We experience betrayal and contradiction. Then we do it with each other. *What would it mean if we could figure out how to honor and build agreements we can keep?*

DREAMING INTO OUR VALUES

When you picture a militant, courageous, feminist organizing culture, what does it look, sound like, and smell like in a meeting? What about at an action debrief, or at City Hall? Is there food? What is the tone? What is the quality of the relationships between people? Does it smell like sweaty punks, or your lesbian auntie's cologne, or birthday cake, or something else?

1. Give people a moment to envision this with closed eyes. Then, **invite them to bring this scene to paper** with an illustration, a short script, or a recipe (see p. 88 for recipe card).
2. Returning to the full group, ask: **What are some of the values people would need to be putting in practice to make that vision come true?** Scribe up values in the middle column of a three-column chart as people share.
3. **Reveal the Feminist Values list** (p. 98). Read these additional (or repeat) values and ask: *What practices drive us toward living into these values? What practices slow us down or have to be overcome to be able to live these values? Using both lists, scribe these practices on either side of the values.*
4. **Dot vote as a full group to select the top 5 values** your group will prioritize workshopping. Decide how many votes each person has (based on the size of your group, usually 1 or 2 or 3), then have people mark their priorities with a dot or star (or a sticker). You can see where the energy is or narrow priorities without talking.
5. **Break folks out into small groups** with one or two of these values to discuss how to make these manifest, both internally, externally, and in your vision. *How does this get built or (re)created? What holds us back? Where does this break down?*
6. **Have groups report back and share out insights.**

OUR FEMINIST VALUES

PRACTICES THAT DRIVE US
TOWARDS OUR VALUES

OUR VALUES

PRACTICES THAT DRIVE US
AWAY FROM OUR VALUES

- ACCOUNTABILITY TO LEGACY
- MOVEMENT FIRST, NOT ACCOLADES
- COLLABORATIVE
- INTERDEPENDENT
- GROUNDED IN A BELIEF IN REDEMPTION AND REGENERATION
- ANTI-FRAGILE
- EQUITY
- EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE
- SELF-RESPONSIBILITY AND INITIATIVE
- SHARING POWER AND CARETAKING/COLLECTIVE ORIENTATION
- ANTI-ELITISM
- COMMITMENT TO GLOBAL CROSS-POLLINATION
- A FORMULA FOR LEADERSHIP OF IDENTITY, VISION, CONSCIOUSNESS, AND WORK
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Optional role play:

Using the values that you have identified together, have the group enact a meeting in which participants are randomly assigned and evenly divided into one of three roles: **newcomers, welcomers, or regular participants.** *What does it look like to live out those values in this situation?* Have fun acting out different ways our feminist values can show up at an organizing meeting.

WRAP UP

Our values are a core part of the fabric that holds us together, beyond identity, beyond liking or disliking each other. Too often, they become wallpaper when in practice we really need them to be a touchstone informing our covenant, practices, protocol, and vision.

To close out, ask:

- *Who do you do this for?*
- *Who keeps you going?*
- *Whose legacy are you continuing?*
- *Who are you leaving a legacy for?*

HOMEWORK

How will we practice these values collectively? Will we sign a covenant? Have accountability buddies? Bring ideas for ways to commit to the next meeting.