

WON TOOLS

Leadership Support Process

Description

The Leadership Support Process (LSP) is a simple group process whereby participants share equal time listening to one another in order to process experiences and develop new thinking about their leadership. Each participant gets some time to be listened to and reflect on their experience in relation to whatever topic is chosen. The tool serves to deepen relationships, develop an anti-oppression analysis based on their own experiences and move toward action. Finally, the process encourages participants to be supportive of one another's leadership. This support can contradict tendencies to be competitive with one another, or for leaders to feel they need to keep their guard up and distance themselves from others, in order to maintain their leadership status. LSP supports leaders to help one another, to be honestly reflective and for their leadership to be more transformational.

LSP was designed to support women's leadership but can also be applied in mixed gender settings. The National Congress of Neighborhood Women created LSP in the 1980s by drawing on a number of other methods, including the feminist consciousness-raising groups of the 70s, the Institute for Cultural Affairs, the 12-step movements (e.g. Alcoholics Anonymous) and community organizing practice.

***The Women's Organizing Network** adapted this process for our leadership development program, WON Leadership Circles, for women and non-binary community organizers and for addressing sexism within their organizations.*

The reflection questions, or "vision questions," are designed to uplift both the positive and the negative, while seeking a path forward. We use this structure so that people don't simply vent, and so they don't leave feeling stuck in their anger or upset. We want them to leave feeling that they've been heard, and with a shift to a hopeful and proactive perspective.

The Women's Organizing Network has adapted and implemented this methodology to be used in the WON Leadership Circle program and to be used with members or staff of community organizing groups to reflect on their leadership and gender dynamics in the group.

Purpose

To develop collective consciousness on experiences of oppression.

- *To practice deep listening where each person gets a turn to listen and be fully listened to.*
- *To provide mutual support to each other and build relationships.*
- *To elicit each person's analysis of their own experiences.*
- *To emotionally process and heal from hurtful experiences.*
- *To move toward proactive action steps on the challenges we are facing.*

How it works

Basic Agreements for Leadership Support Groups

- *Equal time for each person to share (use a timer that beeps)*
- *We give each other our full attention*
- *We refrain from interrupting or commenting during each other's time*
- *Accept and encourage emotional expression*
- *Confidentiality (and ask permission to refer back to, even when speaking with the person who shared it)*
- *Be thoughtful about how deeply you want to share, given that this is a new space, not a perfectly safe space to share your hardest experiences.*

Facilitator divides participants into groups, pairs, or facilitates the listening time in a go-round circle with the entire group. Facilitator hands out the "vision questions" to reflect on for each person's turn, and makes additional recommendations on how to get the most out of the process.

Group Reflection after using the process

Sample questions

- *How did that feel to be listened to? How did it feel to be the listener?*
- *Did anyone have a new idea or thought they'd like to share?*
- *In the small groups, or in the larger group, facilitators might ask participants to discuss and common themes they heard from each other. Or pull out potential action steps to take individually or collectively.*

Grounding

Facilitators can use grounding techniques to help participants transition out of the Leadership Support Process and into another part of the agenda. For example, put on a soothing song and ask participants to draw an image that comes to mind as they listen. Take a few deep breaths together – one short breath in and a long breath out.

Tips for developing questions: vision questions have three components:

- 1. The first component reminds us of the values, strengths and experiences of ourselves or others. (Remember the Positive)*
- 2. The second component acknowledges the inner and outer obstacles, the hurts and oppression that may be holding us back. (Acknowledge the Negative)*
- 3. Push us to dream and to think about the future in positive ways, and to not walk away from this group feeling stuck in feelings of sadness, anger, etc. (Envision the future)*

Sample Vision Questions

On women's liberation:

1. *Who is a woman leader you know and admire?*
2. *What is something you would like to see change for women?*

On experiences of gender and other forms of oppression in organizing:

1. *What is something you like about being a ___ woman/nonbinary organizer? (insert any other identity you want to reflect on, for example, Black queer woman, immigrant, trans, autistic, etc.)*
2. *Something that's challenging or difficult for you, personally, about being a ___ woman/nonbinary organizer?*
3. *What would support look like? (if you had all the support that you wanted, what might it look like? from friends, family, us in this circle here)*

On leadership:

1. *What would it look like for you to exert your full leadership potential on behalf of your deepest values?*
2. *What would that be like?*
3. *What has held you back?*
4. *What support would make a difference?*

On confronting sexism:

1. *What specific challenges do I face in communicating or working with the men in my organization?*
2. *What might I say or do in this situation if I knew I had the support of others, or if I could react in the way I'd like to?*
3. *What support would I like from others?*

How do you think that other identities you hold have impacted your experience in this situation?

How has your experience reflected both sexism and other forms of oppression?

For men reflecting on sexism and gender oppression:

1. *What is something I appreciate about the women and trans people in my organization?*
2. *What is something that's difficult for me in the leadership dynamics of my organization?*
3. *What is something I'd like to do to better support the leadership of women and trans people in my organization?*