Facilitating cross-movement dialogues about lived experience expertise

Guidance for individuals who facilitate dialogues about lived experience across movements.

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Introduction

All systems of oppression are interconnected.

They all rely on keeping some people 'on top' of society, with greater access to institutional power, wealth, and rest, and keeping other people 'on the bottom' with less access to resources. The systems that oppress us are often intertwined, and our oppressors are often the same people working with the same understanding of power. Part of how they maintain oppression is by pitting us against each other and encouraging us to fight over what little scraps they offer. Cross-movement collaboration disrupts and resists this dynamic, and yet collaborators often come to shared tables carrying the same assumptions of division and difference that we were taught by our oppressors in order to keep us in check! Convenors may unintentionally bring oppressive models of 'leadership', 'power', and 'collaboration' into their work. Collaborators conditioned to compete rather than partner may fear being taken advantage of or may have been taken advantage of in the past, making trust difficult.

Facilitating a group of partners moving through this thinking and into equitable co-creation and shared implementation is more than a logistical task – it can begin to heal the rifts created by historical trauma and colonial control of movements. Practically, it can increase our impact by combining our resources and strengthening our coalitions.

This document will provide an overview of considerations for facilitating cross-movement dialogues that involve individuals' lived experience expertise. It will:

- Outline the benefits of cross-movement dialogue, distinguish between cross-movement collaboration and mission creep, and offer practical examples of collaboration;
- Share about two of Collective Threads Initiatives' activities that engaged activists with lived and activist or professional experience in multiple movements in dialogues that included their lived experiences, including lessons

learned;

- Provide worksheets that can be used to identify and plan for common cross-movement dialogue challenges;
- Offer a series of suggested guidelines for facilitators;
- And share additional reading or resources that may support convenors, planners, and facilitators of cross-movement collaborations.

> *As you read this guide, we encourage you to remember that the work of cross-movement facilitation is sacred work. We hope you find this guide useful, and encourage you to keep us in the loop if you use it in your work.*

Contents

1 What do we mean by dialogues about lived experience across movements?

Often, dialogues about lived experience expertise happen within the confines of the movement or sector addressing one kind of lived experience. For example, conversations about sexual violence often include discussions of the importance of centring the lived and learned expertise of survivors of sexual violence. Homelessness responses are improved by integrating the expertise and leadership of individuals who have been unhoused. Dialogues about racism and caste must necessarily centre the lived experiences of people who have experienced race- and caste-based systemic exclusion and marginalisation.

But what happens when we enter cross-movement spaces, where leaders from multiple fields come together to co-create solutions? Without planning for cross-movement facilitation, lived experience may be decentred in order to 'level the playing field'. Alternatively, participants may attempt to leverage lived experience of one of the movement issues to silence concerns from another. **When such lived experience hierarchies are invoked, cross-movement dialogue is disrupted.**[1] Participants feel invalidated, unheard, and hurt in collaborations that were presented specifically as opportunities to share their perspectives. They grow distrustful of other movements, which disrupts solidarity and collective power.

Lived experience hierarchies also disregard the deeply intersectional[2] nature of people's experiences of abuse and oppression. For example, a survivor of gender-based violence working in the feminist space may also have lived experience as a migrant worker, and a sex-working adult working in harm reduction spaces may also have lived experience of childhood exploitation. **Our assumptions about the lived experiences of people working in other movement spaces may often be incorrect.**

EXAMPLE ONE · TINA

Tina has devoted the last 8 years of her life to improving conditions for migrant domestic workers and raising awareness of common risks they face. When she joins a collaborative action group addressing exploitation, everyone seems to speak about human trafficking as if it is the most extreme and traumatic of all the forms of violence represented in the room. Because of this, she often finds her expertise is considered less impactful than the expertise of those who experienced human trafficking. Tina had exploitative experiences in three different countries and she knows that her experiences in Qatar fit the definition of human trafficking, but she refuses to disclose this to the rest of the group because she feels she shouldn't have to justify her belonging and value in this space in order to be treated with respect. After all, it was presented as a cross-movement collaborative action group. Just because she isn't working in the 'Anti-Trafficking Space' doesn't mean she isn't working to address human trafficking, and she wants to be honoured for her expertise rather than treated as secondary to the discussion.

EXAMPLE TWO · GABRIEL

Gabriel worked under harsh and often extremely exploitative conditions on the farm alongside his uncle when he was a kid. He now is a powerful advocate in the farmworker rights movement. When he joins a collaborative action group addressing exploitation, he is excited to work across movements on efforts to create dignified work and ethical child protections. However, he finds that most of the discussions around preventing youth exploitation focus on sexual exploitation of children. Some of the people in the collaboration suggest that all other forms of exploitation are less important than the sexual exploitation of youth because sexual violation of children is so heinous. Gabriel doesn't tell them about the sexual abuse that his uncle and two of the other farmworkers subjected him to during his time on the farm. It's hard for him to talk about anywhere, much less in a work environment. He feels excluded from contributing to decisions about issues that also impacted him because of the way certain kinds of lived experience are leveraged to invalidate others.

Remember, people can have different kinds of expertise:

LIVED	experience expertise about their own lives that they learned through their personal experiences with different forms of trauma, violence, or privilege;
COMMUNITY	expertise learned through community engagement, activism, organising, and solidarity practices;
LEARNED	expertise that they developed through being mentored, on-the-ground learning, books, documentaries, and attending workshops or trainings;
EDUCATIONAL	expertise developed through formal education (such as degrees or certificates);
PROFESSIONAL	expertise developed through doing something as a career or vocation over a period of time.

All of these can bring benefits and essential insights, and all of them have limitations to their relevance. Most people have a mix of different kinds of expertise, and it is best to avoid assumptions about which forms of expertise any one partner has.

2 The Benefits of Cross-Movement Dialogue

Cross-movement dialogues are essential and can offer many benefits. All of these benefits are more likely when the cross-movement collaboration is supported by a skilled facilitator who is willing to put aside their own ranking of movement issues in order to hold space for many movement issues in a non-hierarchical way. When we collaborate across movements:

> **Some of our work can happen outside of silos, rather than in spite of them.**
>
> Silos and other rigid distinctions about what types of work address which kinds of issues simplify grant applications, organisational charts, and project planning. They do not, however, ensure success or impact. Silos serve systems; community, collaboration, and collective action serve movements.

> **People with lived experience don't have to compartmentalise the elements of their experiential wisdom deemed 'irrelevant' by one movement or sector.**
>
> When we work together across movements, organisers are not themselves forced to prioritise one aspect of their lived experiences while minimising others, and also our organisations are not required to abandon impactful efforts due to being unclear or confused about what is or isn't 'mission creep'.

WHAT ABOUT MISSION CREEP?

Equitable cross-movement collaboration is not mission creep.

When people advocate for more equitable partnerships, they may be cautioned to avoid 'mission creep' or told "We can't work on everything at once!" This kind of resistance may come from not understanding collaborative principles, lack of skills for equitable cross-movement facilitation, misunderstanding movements, or fears of losing control or funding. Ultimately, the desire for ongoing access to power and funding drives mission creep, but it often leverages fears of mission creep to reduce collaboration, too.

Learn more at CTI's glossary entry on Mission Creep.

Our work is more impactful.

For some anti-violence practitioners, cross-movement thinking comes naturally and collaborations feel inherent to the process of anti-violence work. For others, it may feel overwhelming. A helpful way to think about it is the public health 'shared risk and protective factors' framework, in which activists and advocates from different movements can collaborate on the risk and protective factors they have in common. For more details, including practical examples, see CTI's glossary entry on Shared Risk and Protective Factors.

We are better able to show up for each other.

When we focus on the goals we have in common rather than the concerns and competition that keep us apart, we are better able to show up for each other in solidarity. We are better able to understand the intersectionality of our experiences, and more likely to advocate for each other.

Examples of movements showing up for each other without losing focus:

1. Global North governments justify recent violent attacks on Global South countries in part by noting that these countries have horrible records of protecting women's and LGBTQ rights. When women and LGBTQ individuals engage in advocacy with peace movement activists to end crises such as those in Palestine and Iran, they are told "Those people would kill you if you were there anyway". This practice (using claims of another country's misogyny or homophobia to justify violence and oppression) is often referred to as femonationalism or homonationalism.

   That year, organisers of the annual feminist march decided on a theme of 'March Against Femonationalism', and highlighted messages such as 'not in our name', 'Iranian girls deserve rights, too', and 'Standing with all women means standing with our Palestinian sisters'. In this way, they highlight both a specific intersectional form of misogyny rooted in Islamophobia, but also the harms of leveraging 'concern' for women to justify actions that indiscriminately kill women and their children.

2. A local LGBTQ center in a larger city learns that many LGBTQ refugees and asylum-seekers settle there while awaiting their status decisions. They add support for asylum cases to their monthly legal clinic, and begin offering language classes to help asylum-seekers meet the language requirement for status.

3. In Argentina the Ni Una Menos movement, which began in 2015 as a campaign against femicide, has consistently modeled cross-movement solidarity without losing its feminist focus. The movement has so far aligned itself with the environmental movement, labor unions, and struggles for expanded sexual, economic, and social rights. It most recently showed solidarity with the Mapuche people,[3] connecting the dispossession of indigenous territories to its broader critique of development models that harm marginalized populations.

The feminist march isn't turning its back on women to advocate for all women – it's widening the circle by focusing on those who are often left at the margins. Similarly, the LGBTQ center's support of asylum-seekers doesn't detract from its support of LGBTQ individuals in the area – it makes it more comprehensive and equitable. The Ni Una Menos movement's work to end femicide is strengthened by cross-movement collaboration. In all these cases, organisers decentered the core issue at the centre of their own movements in order to show solidarity across silos and implement a cross-movement action.

3 CTI's experiences with cross-movement facilitation

Because of Collective Threads Initiative's commitment to cross-movement mobilisation, all of our work happens across different movements. For us, this conversation is not hypothetical or intellectual – it's practical and necessary. Following are examples of activities in two of CTI's workstreams that involved cross-movement facilitation of dialogues about lived experiences. We share these here with hope that our learnings can spark ideas for your practice.

a Care and Healing Justice Fellowship

The CTI Care and Wellbeing Fellowship is an 18-month-long program designed to address the unique psychological and emotional strains faced by activists and survivor leaders combating human trafficking. This fellowship moves beyond traditional human rights programming by centering care and wellbeing as foundational elements of resilient and sustainable activism. Through a holistic approach that includes two in-person retreats, ongoing mentorship, and community-building, the fellowship aims to equip participants with essential coping mechanisms, foster robust peer support networks, and develop a replicable curriculum for integrating care into activism.

Due to the trust required for care work, applicants were initially nominated through our existing organisational and activist networks. After a series of interviews, 12 young activists from three different African countries were selected. Fellows work in feminist movements, youth rights, anti-trafficking, worker rights, LGBTQ+, and peacebuilding movements, and all have lived experiences of the harms they are working to address. This cross-movement lens was intentional: different movements may have siloed dialogues about care and burnout prevention, and we wanted fellows to benefit from a space where multiple perspectives could be shared.

The fellowship kicked off in late 2025 with a week-long retreat outside of Nairobi, where fellows could gather for shared reflections, activities, and community to foster deeper connection to who they are and whose they are as activists. By

reflecting on whose they are, fellows were able to connect to deep lineages of creativity, strength, and wisdom they have inherited. Throughout the remainder of the fellowship, fellows are continuing to meet online in small groups with various combinations for peer-sharing, mentoring, and learning, and the fellowship will conclude with another in-person event.

BENEFITS WE'VE SEEN SO FAR

- The fellowship's emphasis on lineage and inheritance has helped fellows reconnect to sources of meaning and motivation that predate their activism, providing a more stable foundation for sustaining their work than commitment to a cause alone.
- Fellows have begun naming and articulating the specific forms of burnout and emotional strain unique to their movement contexts, creating a shared vocabulary for care that transcends the boundaries of any single cause.

BENEFITS WE ANTICIPATE

- Fellows will carry a replicable care curriculum back into their home organizations and movements, multiplying the impact of the fellowship beyond the participants and seeding a broader culture of wellbeing across African activist networks.
- The peer support relationships formed during the fellowship will outlast the program itself, creating an informal mutual aid infrastructure among frontline activists across three countries that can be activated during future periods of crisis or burnout.
- As fellows with lived experience of the harms they address, participants will be better equipped to model and advocate for trauma-informed practices within their movements, helping shift organizational cultures toward sustainability rather than martyrdom.

b Meaningful Engagement Organisational Coach Training

The Meaningful Engagement Organisational Coach Training is an 18-hour-long training of trainers that prepares people with lived experience of an issue to coach organisations working on that issue about how to improve their meaningful engagement practices. In nonprofit lingo, it prepares people from impacted communities to be 'technical assistance providers'. Through a combination of presentations, group discussions, and scenario-based practice in small groups, this training supports deeper reflection on what it means to build relationships that allow for effective technical assistance. Simultaneously, it fosters the development of necessary soft skills as well as concrete strategies for organisational change.

This training was offered by one of CTI's Weavers in the past – three full cohorts in 2023 and two in 2024. Over the course of these five cohorts, over 40 individuals with lived experience of human trafficking were trained, and in our second year we instituted the practice of inviting all past attendees to attend any open cohorts to create richer dialogues. The training was revised in 2024 and 2025 as part of the revision of the Meaningful Engagement Toolbox, and in 2026, two new cohorts were offered through CTI – both co-facilitated entirely by past attendees with minimal support from CTI. In line with the revision of the Toolbox to incorporate a cross-movement lens, the Coach Training was revised to focus on lived experience broadly rather than only of one form of violence.

Our 2026 cohorts included organisers working in anti-trafficking, substance use harm reduction, sex worker organising, child domestic worker rights, feminist movements, labour movements, LGBTQ rights, and as clinicians and practitioners working with adult and child survivors of trauma. Participants were from Kenya, Uganda, South Sudan, Nigeria, Uruguay, and the United States, and all had lived experience of the issues they are working to address. Like with past years, everyone who completed the training was invited to join a monthly peer-learning session with other trainees from this and past years' cohorts.

Shifting this training to a cross-movement lens on lived experience provided many benefits and insights. Through our dialogues we discovered that different movements have adopted different approaches to lived experience engagement and yet all still share similar challenges of tokenism and institutional/structural resistance to change, even if it shows up a little differently in each context. Additionally, participants were able to shift away from a rigid distinction between

'survivors' and 'allies' since everyone had lived experience of their issue even if they didn't have lived experience of all the same issues. This meant that instead of leaning into movement-specific assumptions about what a 'survivor' or 'ally' does, they could focus more broadly on what it means to be working at the impact site of your experiences, and what that means people might need in their organisational engagements. We expect that this will continue to help coaches move out of thinking about lived experience frameworks only in the terms of any one siloed movement, and into thinking broadly and intersectionally in their framings and their strategies.

C Lessons Learned

We recognise that perfection is part of white supremacy culture in organisations and practice, and thus we reflect openly on our experiences – expected and unexpected – so that our learnings can support others in this work. While this is not a comprehensive list of learnings, these learnings were key to our facilitation of the Fellowship and Coach Training and their associated, ongoing peer learning spaces.

LESSON ONE

Language matters.

A lot of the language we take for granted when working in our own fields or regions may mean something entirely different in another region. For example, people working within sexual or intimate partner violence or human trafficking may be more comfortable using the term 'survivor' while those working in worker rights or LGBTQ rights may not typically employ that word for someone who has experienced harm. Some people may think of a 'coach' as a supportive mentor for sports practice, while others may think of high-control, professional sporting coaches who employ shaming and rigidity. Reflect on language as part of planning any cross-movement work to begin with as inclusive of a beginning as possible, and then dedicate time at the beginning of the action and with the introduction of each new concept to reflect on words so that participants can develop a shared vocabulary for the work.

LESSON TWO

Conflict thrives in hierarchical models, but is typically glossed over or silenced.

In order to be addressed openly, conflict and disagreement must be able to be named, heard, and understood. This cannot happen when hierarchies of lived experience continually validate one form of lived experience wisdom over another. For example, during the Coach Training some individuals shared insights about organisational practices based on their own experiences of working with organisations in their field. Other participants then shared directly contradictory insights based on their own lived experiences. The facilitators articulated that this shows different people may have different needs and experiences, and connected that to the need for thoughtful technical assistance that avoids overgeneralisations. Participants were able to honour that multiple lived experience perspectives can be true at the same time, and that lived experiences are as diverse as the people who have them. By naming the contradiction out loud, rather than using one experience to shut down the other or debating until One Right Way is found, participants left the training better able to hold multiple experiences with respect. This also highlights the importance of maintaining checks and balances to ensure that no one partner, field, or movement exclusively steers the collaboration.

LESSON THREE

No space is immune from conflict.

Rather than planning with an expectation that conflict does not occur, we have found it useful to develop a plan for when conflict does occur so that we are prepared. Conflict among participants and/or organisers is not a sign of failure, and does not necessarily mean that the space was not facilitated appropriately (although healing-centred spaces are less likely to provoke conflict or trauma responses). Conflict can happen within movements (and may be provoked by competition over a smaller pool of resources or a limited or individualistic perception of power), and it can also happen across movements when our frameworks and expectations do not align. Conflict can happen when one collaboration partner feels unheard, invalidated, or less valued in a collaboration. Plan in advance both for how a healing-centred growth and learning space will be prepared, but also for how conflict will be addressed when it occurs.

4 Positionality Worksheet for Facilitators and Organisations

FILLABLE WORKSHEET

This worksheet is designed to support organisations planning cross-movement collaborations and/or facilitators of such collaborations to reflect on power dynamics and silos that may impact participants' experiences of the collaboration. Parts of it are adapted from the Power Analysis Workbook in the Meaningful Engagement Toolbox.

STEP 1 Fill out the name, structure, and primary movement/field columns in the following chart with the names of participants and potential collaborators. See guidance below the chart for assistance. Use multiple pages as needed.

Name	Structure / Role	Primary movement / field	Notes
Host(s) / Convenor(s) / Coordinator(s)			
Groups or Organisational Participants			
Individual Participants			

Guidance for filling out the chart:

- Structure/Role for organisations or groups may include things like 'nonprofit organisation', 'local government agency', 'local business', 'multinational corporation', or 'intergovernmental agency'. Structure/Role for individual participants may include things like 'mental health clinician', 'lived experience expert', 'subject matter expert', 'grassroots activist', 'public speaker', or 'community business leader.'
- For Structure/Role, be clear and detailed about the position – for example, an unpaid grassroots activist has a different positionality than a full-time, paid national policy strategist, even though they may both identify as activists from impacted communities. Similarly, a small business owner has a different positionality than the founder of a multinational corporation, even though they both represent business concerns.
- Primary movement/field may refer to the main movement issue the organisation or person works on, like 'labour rights', 'human trafficking', 'gender-based violence', or 'early childhood trauma'. For businesses, this may list the sector or industry, such as 'marketing and communications', 'fishing', or 'finance'.
- Registered organisations have more institutional power in collaborations, and often have significantly more funding than loosely-structured collectives or individual organisers.
- People from communities impacted by marginalisation often have less institutional power than people with experiences of fewer marginalisations.
- Organisations often have more institutional power than individuals, particularly when it is individuals without access to significant resources or who have historically been excluded from organisational leadership.
- 'Celebrity', even within certain movement- or field-specific niches, can bring a power imbalance. Similarly, speaking the language the collaboration is hosted in, being from a 'Global North' country, or having access to wealth (even if only through your institutional role) can create a power imbalance.

STEP 2

Look over your chart and reflect on power imbalances. Jot down some notes in the Notes column that capture what you notice about potential power imbalances or belonging concerns. Use additional pages if necessary.

Consider:

STEP 3

What is the overall goal or purpose of this collaboration? How was this goal or purpose identified, and who was part of (or not part of) that process?

STEP 4

Reflecting on the chart above, is the host or convenor the right host, convenor, or coordinator for this kind of collaboration? Can the existing power imbalances be mitigated through careful planning or facilitation, or are they too significant? Would it make sense to bring on additional co-hosts, co-convenors, or co-coordinators? Should the current convenor step down and instead resource a different convenor to fill this role?

STEP 5

Reflect on the invitation process: How are/were potential collaborators selected for invitation? Who did/will do the inviting? Using that process, who is likely to be privileged in selection? Who is likely to be excluded or deprioritised? Are there any other groups or individuals we should consider inviting to increase parity and the richness of the dialogue?

Consider: If everyone is invited by one person or organisation, it is likely that that person or organisation's positionality influenced participant selection. Either provide a clear justification for why that was necessary or consider an alternative model for participant selection. Alternative models may include a nomination process with a cross-movement selection board, or a snowball model in which each group invited by the coordinator may invite one of their other trusted collaborative partners. For alternative models, clear guidance around the core function of the collaboration is still important. For example, the cross-movement selection board may develop a rubric for evaluating nominees to clarify their own criteria, or the invited group may discuss criteria that are necessary to the project (e.g. 'willingness to commit to one 3-hour meeting per month' or 'ability to navigate challenging conversations across differences').

5 Cross-Movement Facilitation Planning Worksheet

FILLABLE WORKSHEET

This worksheet is designed to support organisations planning cross-movement collaborations and/or facilitators of such collaborations to plan facilitation strategies that support equitable cross-movement partnerships. It is designed to be the next step following the Positionality Worksheet for Facilitators and Organisations and refers to the notes.

Reflect on your notes column in the Positionality Worksheet, then fill in your responses to the following questions. Consider engaging any co-hosts or co-coordinators to discuss and respond together.

1 How familiar are the convenor(s) and facilitator(s) with the history and norms of the other movements represented in the collaboration? Is there anything facilitators will want to learn before the collaboration begins?

Remember that different movements may have different historical relationships to government systems and 'charity', and that even within movements, experiences and norms may differ based on racial, gendered, or other differences.

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2 What safeguards could be established to ensure that the host or coordinator's structure/role, movement, and lived experiences are not prioritised above others throughout the collaboration?

Don't assume it won't happen. Create a plan to help prevent it, and checks and balances to address it when it does. One example might be that if a collaboration has three co-coordinators from different movements, they include a 'power dynamics and equitable

dialogue' debrief and opportunity for course-correction in the regular agenda for their weekly co-coordinator check-in.

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3 **How will facilitators involve participants in developing the norms, agreements, and expectations for cross-movement dialogue that everyone will be expected to honour? Are there any agreements that are non-negotiable, and how can those be communicated to participants in advance?**

For example, facilitators might consider recreating the Positionality Worksheet as a group activity[4] and discussing potential challenges and/or co-creating group agreements during the first meeting. An example of a non-negotiable agreement might be that a collaboration focused on ending racist policing articulates in advance that no proposals for increased criminalisation will be considered or supported.

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4 **How confident are facilitators that they will recognise when one movement's or structure's norms (or one kind of lived experience) are dominating the dialogue or being taken for granted as 'just how we do things'? How might you invite participants to help facilitators recognise when it is happening?**

For example, facilitators might offer participants a simple (and potentially light-hearted) way to indicate when the dialogue feels off-balance — such as holding up a green card to indicate 'something is being assumed to be a norm that isn't a norm for my work' or a yellow card to indicate 'I'm not feeling like my insights are being included'. Another example is reminding participants at the beginning of each meeting of how to share challenging feedback with the co-coordinators.

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5 **How will facilitators foster an environment that earns trust among collaborators? How will facilitators agree to manage their own feelings and reactions when receiving feedback during or between collaborative meetings?**

Even with systems in place, participants are unlikely to share concerns or feel heard if there is no trust that facilitators will receive and respond to feedback, and expect other participants to engage thoughtfully with difficult feedback. One example: when challenging feedback is shared, facilitators invite the whole group (and themselves) to take a 'three-beat pause', allowing a few seconds of silence to connect with or calm their nervous system before difficult discussions, to minimise reactivity.

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6 **When you have collaborators from contexts with contradictory expectations, how will you navigate establishing and working together on shared goals?**

Collaborative partners may have policy or practice assumptions and norms in direct tension with each other. For example, domestic violence organisations and child advocacy organisations often find themselves in tension when both a child and one of their parents are being abused by the other parent. Some organisations led by survivors of violence in the sex trades advocate for partial criminalisation, and others similarly led by survivors advocate for full decriminalisation, with each saying the other is harming survivors. Some systems focusing on violence against migrants attempt to steer migrants away from moving across borders, while many organisations working on violence against migrants focus instead on fostering safety and addressing xenophobic actions and policies in the destination country. And some partners advocate for increased criminalisation for certain acts, while others advocate to end mass incarceration of marginalised groups. How will facilitators navigate this?

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7 **Considering the fundamental values of the work proposed, are there any potential collaborative partners who might not be appropriate for this work? What are the 'hard lines' convenors will maintain for ensuring a space where violence, oppression, and abuse are not tolerated in the name of honouring difference?**

It may be that one or more of the potential collaborators initially envisioned might create more harm in the space in a way that cannot be managed at this time even through strong facilitation. It also sometimes happens that these things may not become apparent until the collaboration is already underway.

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8 **Outside of broad categories of structural power dynamics, reflect on the positionality of the individual representatives at the collaborative table. What can facilitators do to remain aware of these dynamics?**

For example, is one the funder of another? Does one work for the government agency that regulates or monitors another? Is one a former client or participant in another's programs? Does one regularly advocate for policies that impede another's work or advocacy? How will facilitators navigate this?

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6 Guidelines and Tips for Cross-Movement Facilitators

Every cross-movement collaboration will be different, and yet many of the themes experienced by facilitators will be similar. Consider these seven guidelines, understanding that not all will be appropriate for every collaboration and you may need to adapt them for your particular region, context, and partners. This section first introduces seven guiding practices and a series of practical tips, then goes into each in more detail.

Seven Guiding Practices for Cross-Movement Facilitation

1. Approach the facilitation of cross-movement conversations about lived experience as sacred work, with care.
2. Prioritise the relational foundation of sustainable cross-movement partnerships.
3. Lead from open, nonjudgmental curiosity rather than assumptions about other movements, organisational structures, and people.
4. Recognise that different partners will have different backgrounds, knowledge, wants, and needs.
5. Honour the deep expertise each person has about their own lived experiences.
6. Hold boundaries around how lived experience expertise is leveraged in the space.
7. Listen for the collective lived experience and draw it out for participants.

Tips for Cross-Movement Facilitation

- Create routines and rituals that set the tone for the work.
- Find out what potential partners want to contribute, what their unique expertise and skills are, and what they find joy in doing.
- Draw collaborators' focus to the issues behind the issue.
- Remember that the role of the facilitator is to facilitate the dialogue, not to know everything.
- Practise in advance for how you will handle invalidating comments or microaggressions.
- Plan and practise in advance for how you will respond — in the moment and after the fact — if someone lets you know you've made an error, committed a microaggression, or invalidated someone's experiences.
- Develop and plan for (ideally co-creating with your partners) the conditions under which someone might be asked to leave, and the safeguarding and grievance protocols that will be followed.

Seven Guiding Practices: A Deeper Dive

1. **Approach the facilitation of cross-movement conversations about lived experience as sacred work, with care.**

   Consider how you prepare for sacred reflection or care work in your own life – what helps you, as a facilitator, to get grounded and into the right frame of mind and somatic space to do deep work? Bring this self-preparation and spirit of rooted openness into your cross-movement collaborations, even if the collaboration itself has no overtly 'sacred' elements. Encourage participants to approach this work with care, compassion, and love, and remember that kindness and niceness are not the same thing.

2. **Prioritise the relational foundation of sustainable cross-movement partnerships.**

   People look forward to partnerships when they feel connected to the vision and a sense of belonging in the group. Co-creation can foster both. Involve collaborative partners in developing the agenda, group norms, and structure of the partnership, rather than just its content. Remember that time spent fostering genuine human connection (beyond any initial superficial ice-breakers) is an essential part of the work, and not a distraction from it. Incorporate this model into the development of timelines. Co-creation is also possible when partners have access to the same foundational information; be transparent upfront about any limitations or non-negotiable, externally-imposed expectations.

3 **Lead from open, nonjudgmental curiosity rather than assumptions about other movements, organisational structures, and people.**

Different movements have different norms about how we approach the work (as do different individuals and collectives within movements), and what is assumed to be standard or even unquestionable in one might be alien to how others work. Our assumptions may not always be correct either – some individual activists may have internalised many oppressive practices, and not all people representing systems are strategically or philosophically aligned with the systems. Ask questions about the process without assuming everyone supports the same strategies or has the same foundational knowledge. Nonjudgmental questions support both the facilitators and the participants – they can assist facilitators in better understanding dynamics that don't initially make sense, and support participants in considering the rationale behind their commitments and strategies.

4 **Recognise that different partners will have different backgrounds, knowledge, wants, and needs.**

People don't know what they don't know, and so people who have not lived, learned, or deeply engaged with a topic may not even know that they are not aware of it, particularly when they are on the more privileged end of a particular spectrum of experience. Even within similar categories of experience (such as racism, misogyny, or xenophobia), different people will have different backgrounds, knowledge, wants, and needs because of intersectionality, particularly in global collaborations. It is especially important for facilitators to realise that there may be things they, too, do not know or understand about the issues their collaborative partners are working on. A willingness to be humble and curious is an effective part of any cross-movement collaboration.

5 Honour the deep expertise each person has about their own lived experiences.

All the peer-reviewed articles in the world saying that the vast majority of people who received a certain treatment for an illness recover doesn't invalidate the lived experience of the person the treatment failed. Similarly, intellectual, academic, and professional knowledge of violence and oppression cannot invalidate or counter the lived experiences of people who have been oppressed or harmed. People with lived experience are the absolute experts in their own experiences, even if what is currently understood 'in the field' paints a different picture. Finally, remember that while people's past lived experiences do not change over time, their interpretations of them may. Allow space for collaborators' reflections on their experiences to change as they learn and grow, without pressure, expectation, condescension, or shame.

6 Hold boundaries around how lived experience expertise is leveraged in spaces you facilitate.

An individualist approach to lived experience expertise suggests incorporating the insights and stories of one person with lived experience into your work is sufficient. However, different people have different experiences, and this is especially true in cross-movement spaces. One person's lived experience can't negate another person's, even if it points to a need for a broader interpretation or framework. For example, if one person says being arrested was the best thing that ever happened to them and the other says it ruined their life, we don't facilitate a debate to determine who is right. We may, however, facilitate a thoughtful discussion about how no one solution is right for everyone, and discuss what broader community experiences with arrest might reveal. One person's lived experience should never be used to shut down another person's, or to contradict collective realities.

7 **Listen for the collective lived experience and draw it out for participants.**

Part of skillful facilitation is good listening and strong pattern recognition. When you notice common threads among the stories, needs, and wants of collaborators, take note. Consider resharing for the participants, then giving them an opportunity to shape the reflection. For example: "I'm hearing that many of you have experienced inconsistencies in service availability and feel that services often have strings attached. Am I getting that right? Is there anything you'd add?" One person's lived experience is that person's, and for them it is sacred. In the context of communities and collective power, it is one data point in research language, or one thread of the collective fabric in CTI's language. Find collective stories and shared experiences to build solidarity and solutions around.

Facilitation Tips: A Deeper Dive

Create routines and rituals that set the tone for the work. Develop a rhythm for each gathering – for how it opens, and for an intentional closing. This can remind people that they are entering into work that matters – work that is sacred – and that it requires a different frame-of-mind and thoughtful awareness than everyday mundane tasks.

Find out what potential partners want to contribute, what their unique expertise and skills are, and what they find joy in doing. Ask them what parts they might want to co-create for their own contextual awareness. Not everyone wants to be part of co-creating every element of the collaboration. Be transparent about what co-creation means, and about how much flexibility there will be for later adaptations of the co-creation work of those who do participate.

Draw collaborators' focus to the issues behind the issue. For example, if you asked activists against sexual violence to describe their goal without using words like 'sexual violence', 'rape', or 'sexual abuse', they might say something like "a world where children can be children without their innocence being violated, and where everyone can expect to have their choices about their own bodies honoured and their boundaries respected". This cuts across movements, and can build solidarity.

Remember that the role of the facilitator is to facilitate the dialogue, not to know everything. Invite the group into adding complexity and alternatives to issues raised by asking nonjudgmental questions such as, "Has anyone else had a similar experience?" or "How does that land for you?" See the resources section of this guide for resources with sample facilitation questions.

Practise in advance for how you will handle invalidating comments or microaggressions. For the moment, let's assume that any invalidating comments or microaggressions are unintentional. Because silence is often understood as complicity or agreement, it is important for facilitators to name what is happening. This lets the person who said the inappropriate comment know that harm has happened and that it has been noticed, and it lets the person who was harmed know that it was noticed and named. Consider following up one-on-one to see if additional support is needed.

Plan and practise in advance for how you will respond if someone lets you know you've made an error, committed a microaggression, or invalidated someone's experiences. Remember that you don't have to 'catch' everything that is tossed at you, and you definitely don't have to allow someone else to lie about you or abuse you. And it is important to reflect on your own biases, behaviours, and patterns on your own and with your accountability partners[5] to make sure you take responsibility for what you have done.

Develop and plan for (and ideally co-create with your partners) the conditions under which someone might be asked to leave the collaboration, and the safeguarding and grievance protocols that will be followed. Ensure that all collaborators have a copy of and know how to access this protocol, and consider an external facilitator skilled in mediation and transformative justice to support any accountability concerns.

7 Resources and Further Reading

We hope that reading this guide has sparked many of your own insights, and that it may have even led to new, original-to-your-group ideas that will enrich your work together. Following is a list of resources that cross-movement facilitators might find helpful, and remember to explore Collective Threads Initiative's Tools Library for even more resources to support your work.

GENERAL FACILITATION RESOURCES

Emergent Space

An accessible guide drawing on the Emergent Strategy framework to support creating spaces for dialogue that are both brave and safe.

Facilitation prompts to support opening dialogue: **Useful Questions for Dialogue Facilitation**, and an adapted version of this document for training use: **Facilitation Prompts**.

Active listening as a support person

National Survivor Network training offering concrete skills for non-directive active listening.

EVENT FACILITATION GUIDELINES FOR OPEN OR PUBLIC EVENTS

HEAL-NSN Event Host Guidelines

ACCOUNTABILITY AND APOLOGY RESOURCES

The four parts of accountability and how to give a genuine apology

by Mia Mingus.

Accountability pods and pod mapping

by SOIL Transformative Justice Project.

Notes

1. Note that lived experience hierarchies, and their accompanying incorrect assumptions, can happen within one movement or sector as well. For example, one person who openly shares about their familial childhood sexual exploitation (CSE) may assume that their experiences were more extreme than those of a collaborator who identifies as a survivor of CSE but never indicates that it was familial. This hierarchy is built upon a foundational assumption that the person who does not routinely include "familial" in their description of their experiences was not exploited by a family member, which may be untrue. ↩
2. 'Intersectionality' is a concept developed in Black feminist activism and later named by Kimberlé Crenshaw to describe how multiple kinds of marginalisation compound and intersect to create additional and unique harms and barriers to care and justice. ↩
3. The Mapuche are the largest Indigenous group in South America, primarily inhabiting south-central Chile and southwestern Argentina. ↩
4. This may mean that some of the reflection and planning activities prepared early on by convenors to get a sense of who to bring to the collaboration may need to be repeated once the group is convened, adapted for the size of the group and stage of the collaboration. ↩
5. Consider learning about the concept of 'Accountability Pods' and incorporating pods and similar concepts into your facilitation practice: soiltjp.org/our-work/resources/pods. Who can the facilitators rely on to help them stay accountable to their collaborators? ↩

COLLECTIVE THREADS INITIATIVE

RECOMMENDED CITATION

Ash, C., Maina, E., and Otiende, S. (2026). *Facilitating cross-movement dialogues about lived experience expertise: Guidance for individuals who facilitate dialogues about lived experience across movements.* Collective Threads Initiative, Nairobi, Kenya. Available from: collectivethreads.org/tools-library