

An Exploration of Individual and Collective Practices for Community-Based Leaders in Times of Transition



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Who is this workbook for?

This workbook is for any staff in community-based organizations, but is geared towards leaders.

How to use this workbook?

As the leader of a community-based organization, you can use this workbook to explore and reflect on the inner and collective practices that support you and your organization through transition — including, but not limited to, shifts to leadership changes, organizational restructures, reductions in funding or other changes. Throughout the workbook, there are reflection prompts and exercises, case examples from ProInspire, and “try it” exercises.

Introduction



Founded in 2009, **ProInspire** is a nonprofit that uses consulting, capacity building, research and thought leadership to activate leaders at all levels to accelerate racial equity from self to systems. ProInspire partners with social change leaders, teams, and organizations to co-create conditions in themselves and society for all people to live thriving and abundant lives.

As part of the National Council for Environmental Health and Equity's Advancing Environmental Justice through Technical Assistance Mini-Grants Program, ProInspire provided coaching support for community-based environmental justice organization grantees with a focus on organizational effectiveness and impact. What emerged from these conversations, as well as our observations from across the field and research on thriving, was a need to strengthen and reorient our leaders and organizations' relationship to transitions.

Community-based leaders are facing a tumultuous landscape with many concurrent changes and challenges, ranging from safety concerns to threatened litigation to reduction in funding [**Social Justice Nonprofits Facing Multiple Threats Need Solidarity and Support**]. Burnout, trauma and grief among leaders and staff are taking a significant toll on morale, sustainability and organizational effectiveness.

We're finding that community-based leaders' ability to tap into their inner wisdom and liberatory practices is crucial for sustaining themselves, their organizations, and their communities to thrive in uncertain times.

ProInspire hosted a **webinar** on navigating transitions and is sharing inner work and collective practices, reflection prompts, and other resources in this workbook to seed or deepen community-based leaders' capacity to show up grounded and guide their organizations and communities in times of transition. We are intentionally focusing on inner work practices for leaders because we believe that when leaders are centered and able to operate from a place of wholeness, they are better equipped to guide their teams through transitions and improve their overall organizational effectiveness.

This workbook is an offering, and we want to acknowledge that there is no "right way" or checklist that will resolve the tensions and uncertainty in moments of transition. We invite you to use this guide like a buffet: take what serves you and leave what doesn't — small tastes or large scoops welcome.

We also want to acknowledge that in this current climate, nonprofit organizations are facing serious threats, while at the same time continuing to fight for their communities to advance equity and justice. These are intense realities that a workbook will not magically put right. But, we believe community-based leaders tuning into their relationship with change will create impactful ripple effects across our sector, leading to more imaginative, nimble and effective organizations ready to take on the challenges of our world.

Transition is a necessity in world-building and transformation. It can be stressful, hopeful, bittersweet, destabilizing, affirming and heartbreaking. We want to honor all of these truths.



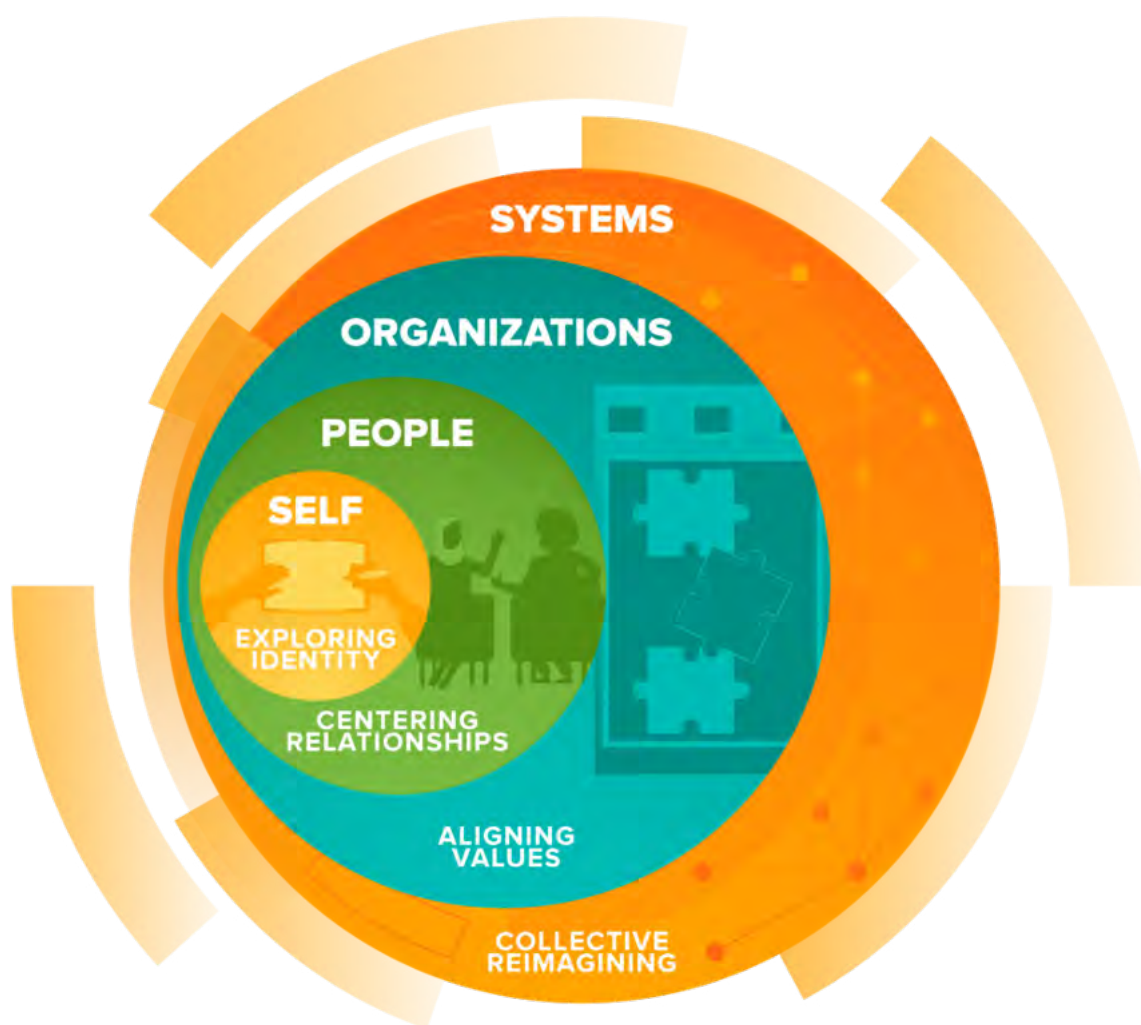
**“All that you touch You Change.
All that you Change Changes you.
The only lasting truth Is Change.”**

– Octavia E. Butler, Parable of the Sower

Anchoring in Self to Systems: Leading for Race Equity Impact



Prolnspire's approach to advancing racial equity is grounded in its Leadership Model, a tool to support individuals and organizations with core commitments, corresponding practices and reflection questions that can create and sustain racially equitable experiences and outcomes within the social sector. This Model is based on Prolnspire's collective experience, research and perspectives, and informed by our thought partners, advisors and community. [Download the full model.](#)



Foundational Principles of the Model

- One can operate as a leader from any position within an organization.
- Leaders within the social sector must prioritize the advancement of racial equity from self to systems.
- The process for individuals to advance racial equity includes committing to actively learning and unlearning, taking intentional action, and building processes for accountability.

Windows of Leadership and Core Commitments

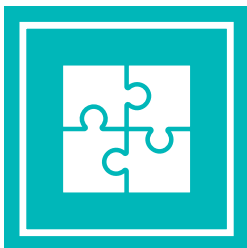
Windows of Leadership is ProInspire's term for the perspectives or levels from which leaders can create impact — namely leadership of Self, People, Organizations, and Systems. Accompanying each window is a Core Commitment, which captures the nature of the practices in each level of leadership.



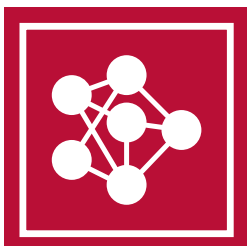
When leading Self, you commit to Exploring Identity. In the leadership of Self, we can disrupt internalized racism and internalized racial superiority by compassionately working to raise self-awareness and cultivate inner well-being.



When leading People, you commit to Centering Relationships. In the leadership of People, we can disrupt interpersonal racism and experiences of exclusion and bias by building trust across identities and navigating through friction, disagreement and conflict with care.



When leading Organizations, you commit to Aligning Values. In the leadership of Organizations, we can disrupt institutional racism and cultural norms and policies of dominant culture by aligning stated values, beliefs and mission statements at the organizational level.



When leading Systems, you commit to Collective Reimagining. In the leadership of Systems, we can disrupt systemic racism through individuals, organizations and communities working together to challenge dominant norms, shift outcomes and create lasting change.



The following terms and concepts are referenced in this guide.

Emergence » Emergence occurs when a complex system or pattern arises from small actions and connections, interacting in a wider whole. Writer, activist and facilitator adrienne maree brown uses emergence as a strategic framing for understanding and practicing our ability to adapt to changing conditions while still moving toward a liberated future. How might developing the skill of emergence sustain our movements in critical moments of transition?

Liberatory Leadership » There are many ways to define liberation. In fact, the ability to define it for yourself is an embodiment of it. That being said, we offer this version for your consideration:

Liberation is the experience of justice, wholeness, and thriving. Liberatory Leadership asks leaders to move from a constructed story of powerlessness to believing they are powerful, and create this vision of liberation through their individual approaches and through their organizational values, practices and culture. In the context of transition, we believe liberatory leadership takes a stance that we can be active agents within change, rather than change happening to us passively.

Thriving » Prolnspire offers the following definitions of thriving, based on research from *Thriving Leaders & Communities: Recommendations from Nonprofit Leaders of Color*. [Download the report](#).

- › **Individual Thriving:** The ability to lead with expertise, innovation, trust and collaboration that centers relationships and supports organizational and community transformation.
- › **Organizational Thriving:** The ability to positively impact communities by creating a liberatory infrastructure that prioritizes community trust, resource sharing, lived experience and innovation.
- › **Community Thriving:** The ability to access and share resources to create conditions that support equitable living and outcomes for all.

Inner Practices for Organizational & Systems Change



We believe that a Self to Systems lens can guide leaders through moments of transitions. Cultivating the liberatory leadership practices that leaders, organizations and communities use to cope with, adapt to, or even thrive during transition is necessary — in order to not only stay the course, but also sustain their wholeness and remain hopeful and experimental in our transforming and building of a world rooted in equity.

Below, we offer a range of practices and examples of how they might be adopted by a leader within an organization: Compassionate Awareness of our Body, Breath & Emotions; Connecting with Nature; Cultural, Ancestral, Earth-Honoring Rituals; Art & Imagination; and Tending to Grief.

Our hope is that leaders and organizations will utilize these practices to move through transitions with intention and generate new futures. Note that these categories are not distinctive, and we invite you to reflect, add, share, remix and reimagine these practices with your people, organizations, and communities, particularly during moments of transition that feel stressful.





Compassionate Awareness of Body, Breath, & Emotions

We start our work towards liberation with the fundamentals of the sensations of our body, our breath and our emotions. The interchange of these human elements gives us a way to perceive the world around us, and ourselves in relationship to that external world. Our emotions are expressed through our body and breath, and in turn, our breath can nourish our body and tend to our emotions.

In Resmaa Menakem's book, [My Grandmother's Hands](#), he discusses the ways traumatic impacts of historical racism, genocide, colonization and other violence live within each of our bodies today. Even in a subsequent generation, the trauma response can emerge as a reflexive reaction to fight, flee, or freeze — without an understanding of its source — and the pattern can stay stuck in our bodies until it is acknowledged and metabolized. When we examine and pay attention to those reactions, in whatever doses we are able, we begin to practice somatic abolition — liberation in our bodies from those historical and ancestral responses, so we can be intentional in the present moment.

“**There is deep wisdom within our very flesh, if we can only come to our senses and feel it.**

- Elizabeth A. Behnke



This deep interconnectedness among humans is the vision of collective liberation — that as humanity, we are not separate from one another, but that actions to one of us impact all of us. It is this interconnectedness that prompts us to stand in solidarity when we observe inequities and injustices, and fuels us to stand up, speak out, and take action.

Start by noticing, with compassion and without judgment, the sensations of your body, the quality of your breath and the flow of your emotions. Below are some practices that help develop that compassionate awareness.

1. A practice of synchronizing Breath and Body is offered here with 3 poses from the practice of **yoga**, which originated in Hinduism, but can be modified to work with any sequences of poses or stretches.



- Stand with your hands to your side, in **Tadasana** (Mountain pose). Begin to notice your breath.
- On an inhale, raise your arms up to **Urdhva Hastasana**, (Volcano Pose).
- On an exhale, bring your hands together in front of your heart, (Namaste pose).
- On an inhale, raise your arms up to **Urdhva Hastasana**, (Volcano Pose).
- On an exhale, bring your arms to your side, in Tadasana (Mountain pose). Repeat.

 **Try It**

Annual performance reviews can be an anchoring ritual for an organization, as it often includes a time for reflection on the previous year’s work, and looking ahead and setting goals for what is to come. These conversations can also bring up tensions or anxiety, as well as memories of workplace trauma from other work experiences, for both the staff person and the supervisor.

To create a more care-oriented experience, the supervisor can consider naming at the start of the discussion that we may be bringing previous negative experiences with us, especially those with marginalized identities. While you cannot remove the impact of those experiences, you can offer a way to calm the nervous system before entering this particular conversation.

Invite staff the option to practice the Breath and Body meditation along with you, with cameras off if it is a virtual meeting. When the practice is complete, ask if there is anything they would like to share prior to beginning the performance review conversation.

2. Body and Emotions:

- Gather pen and paper or your journal, find a comfortable position, either sitting or lying down, and ease into your breath.
- Next, bring to mind an uncomfortable transition from your past. Recall a moment from that transition, where you were and what was around you.
- Then, notice what emotions stir within you and attune to where in your body you are sensing them. Describe the texture of the sensations with three words (for example: tender, sharp, warm, tingly, tense...) and note them in your journal.
- Next, repeat the same exercise by recalling a transition experience that was positive or fruitful in some way.
- Read in your journal the set of words you used to describe the two transition experiences you recalled. Notice where there were similarities and where there were differences. What meaning can you make of the distinctions you notice in the sets of words? How might these realizations about your body and sensations provide insights into how you might enter into any transition that is happening right now in your life?

Try It

This practice can be used if your organization is going through or anticipating a transition — a leadership transition, change in strategic direction, or internal restructuring.

At the start of a meeting when discussing the transition, begin with a breathing or grounding exercise. Then, facilitate this Body and Emotions journal exercise. Ask your team to share what they noticed, first in small groups, and then in the larger group.

The debrief can illuminate the complex and nuanced emotions that arise with transitions that span from negative to positive, and identify how emotions show for each of us in our body. Wrap the conversation by offering some strategies, and perhaps even resources, for people to care for their bodies through the transition.

Consider offering a wellness stipend so people can get a massage, a meal delivered, or a caretaker for their child while they care for themselves.





Connecting with Nature

In adrienne maree brown's book **Emergent Strategy**, she invites readers to consider the natural universe and its swirling patterns around us as guides for how to adapt with change, rather than resist. What lessons does nature offer us in moments of transition or struggle? How might nature be a grounding source for you and your organization in transition?

1. Spend time connecting with the world around you, whether gazing out a window, sitting outside, or taking a walk around your neighborhood. Be as present as you can be and notice any stories of transition.

- Who/what did you hear, see, or sense?
- Are there lessons that live in who/what you observed?

Try It

Invite a colleague on a phone or in-person "walk & talk," rather than a traditional meeting, or host a team meeting outside. If virtual, you can invite your team to take the call from a different location or change the direction of their video to share the environment they're calling from.

2. There are endless lessons that nature offers us about emergence, adaptability, and interdependence. We invite you to reflect on the below quotes and consider how you might emulate the butterfly, tree, or water to guide you and your community in transition.



The Butterfly

“**And then there is the butterfly, a most magical creature. The wings of the butterfly are already held inside the caterpillar, and as it breaks down its old self into goo, the wings emerge ready to go. That process is amazing and teaches me that as we change and transform, we also have everything we need already right inside of us. So my organizing and healing work becomes about building the cocoon that can hold the goo so that the wings can emerge.**

- Micah Hobbes Frazier



Reflection: *What strengths are inside you right now to steward you through this change? What strengths are inside your organization or community?*



Try It

The butterfly exercise is a great way to ease fears or concerns among staff, and take an asset-based framing towards an organization transition like a change in leadership or strategic direction. At ProInspire, we did a version of this exercise during our first team meeting after founder and former co-CEO Monisha Kapila transitioned from the organization. As a team, we watched a short video of a butterfly emerging from its chrysalis for its first flight and then discussed what we noticed about the process. We left the meeting with a new shared appreciation for the change process: Change can include struggle, messiness, and persistence — and, we will emerge stronger, ready for flight!



The Tree



When a tree is cut down in the forest, other trees reach out to the victim with their root tips, and send lifesaving sustenance, water, sugar, and other nutrients via the mycelium. This continuous IV drip from neighboring trees can keep the stump alive for decades, and even centuries. And they don't only do it for their own kind. They do it for the trees of other species. Why? Is it because they know that their lives depend on the health of the whole forest? And even on beings very different from themselves? Is it possible that trees can think in longer terms than we do?"

- Neil deGrasse Tyson



Reflection: *How might you change the scope or scale of transition in your thinking? Is there a longer term future this transition is stewarding? Who are the other trees in your network that you can lean on during this transition?*



Reflection: *What sustenance might you need from your team to sustain during this transition? What sustenance can you offer?*



Try It

If your organization is in a crisis – like a loss of funding source, displacement from your office site, or other external threat to your sustainability – assessing and mapping your trees, in other words the community ecosystem your organization is a part of, can reveal connections or opportunities for coalition that can build your organization's resiliency. For instance, you might consider using a geographic map of where your organization is located and plot the individual, organizational, and community relationships that you can reach out to for support. Are there opportunities to organize with each other? Knowing what you need from your ecosystem and what you can offer will become essential for this kind of collective care. For more information about ecosystem mapping, see the resource section of this workbook.



Art & Imagination

When transition invokes emotions and sensations of fear, anger, overwhelm, resistance, or paralysis (among other tender human elements), shifting orientation and perspective through art-making and imagination can unlock new possibilities. There can also be a great release and joy found in the playfulness and experimentation of art and imagination.

Stretching our imagination muscles and leaping with creative courage builds skills and mindsets of adaptability, curiosity, and intuitive problem-solving beyond perfectionism, “either/or” mentality, and “one right way” of thinking. Nurturing your imagination and creative spirit through metaphor, art and other creative ways can also restore and affirm what keeps you whole, especially in difficult moments of transition. As a leader, you can also foster your team’s creative courage by inviting or modeling play and art-making regularly in your team time.

For many of us, art-making can activate an inner critic, fear, or inadequacy that stops us from even starting. With these examples below, we invite you to move through the kaleidoscope and let go with childlike inhibition. Play for the purpose of the process, rather than the outcome of what your creation will look like

1. Visual Storytelling & Reimagination

- a. Grab a crayon, marker, or colored pencil and paper. With an art utensil in hand, close your eyes, and draw your transition journey as a doodle.
- b. Open your eyes and reflect on your doodle. Is it jagged? Swirly? A continuous line or breaks? Consider, what story does it tell? What sensations do you notice as you reflect?
- c. Next, like reimagining a cloud’s shape, transform your doodle into something else — an animal, plant, or object. What does this transformation tell you about your transition journey?


Try It

Use this exercise as an opening to check in with your group and see how they are experiencing the transition in your organization. Invite your team to share their doodle, and ultimately, their experience of the transition. Listen. Where are there similarities? Where are there differences? This exercise is also powerful in moments of conflict. As a leader, if you're noticing some group tension, you might consider pausing, taking a collective breath and then inviting folks to draw the transition journey from their perspective. Making space for team members across the organization to share back and respecting what is true for them through generous listening builds empathy, risk-taking and collaboration.

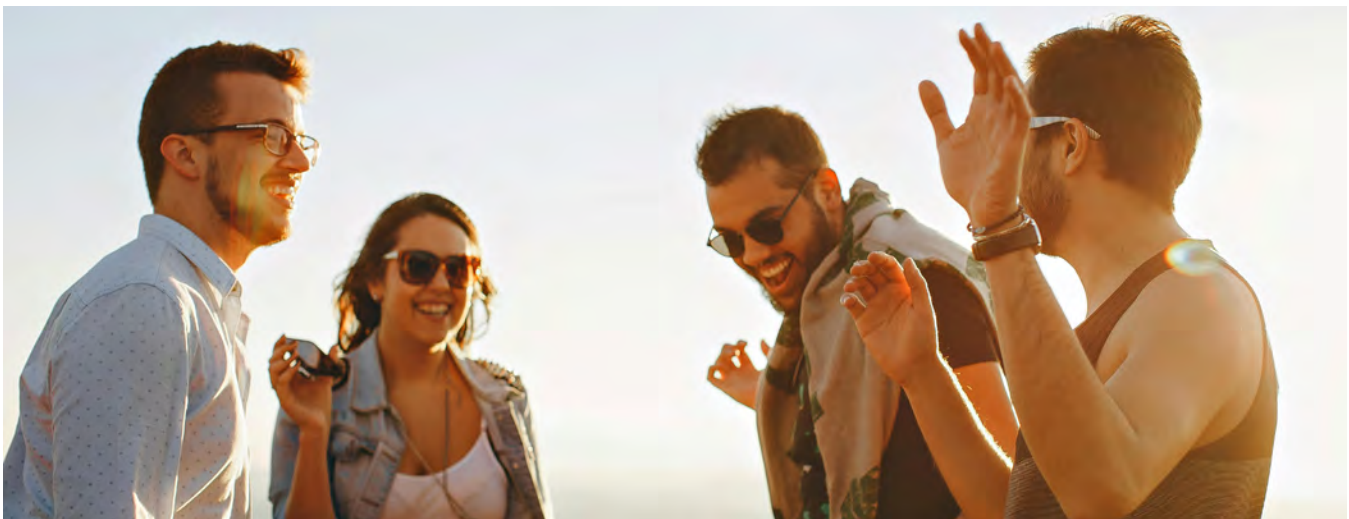
2. Music & Movement

Choose a song or make a playlist that fills your cup and makes you feel relaxed, joyful, energized, or something similar. In moments of unease, listen to it and sway, tap, clap, or full-body dance!


Try It

Make an organization playlist with all staff contributing a song that never fails to make them smile. Play it before meetings begin.

Reflection: *What do you need to experiment and play through transition? How can you have creative courage in this moment?*





Cultural, Ancestral, Earth-Honoring Rituals

Rituals are a feature of almost all human societies, past and present. They are a set of actions, often intentional or architected, that carry symbolic or meaningful value. They may be shared across members of a community and serve to affirm a sense of belonging to the community.

In times of transition, which may bring uncertainty and discomfort, long held rituals can provide a sense of ease, solidarity, and strength. Below are examples of rituals or practices that honor the earth or connect with ancestors.

“ Social, ritual and festive practices may help to mark the passing of the seasons, events in the agricultural calendar or the stages of a person’s life.

[source - UNESCO]





Earth-Honoring Rituals

1. Connecting and reflecting with the phases of the moon

- a. The monthly cycle of the moon's phases offers an opportunity for a regular rhythm of reflection and ritual that can be grounding even amid change and transition.
- b. Note the dates of the upcoming new moon (when the moon is not visible to us on earth) and full moon. On the evenings of the new moon and full moon, create space and time for yourself to pause, reflect and journal. Lighting a candle or incense may be supportive to create a reflective environment.
- c. During the new moon, journal and set an intention for the upcoming month. Refrain from leaning into productivity-related goals, and instead allow whatever desire or inner spark emerges from within you.
- d. During the full moon, return to your new moon intention, then journal about the emotions or sensations that arise.
- e. Repeat this during each new moon and full moon. After six months, review the journal entries and reflect on the experience to see. What, if anything, has shifted for you as you have aligned yourself with the rhythm



Connecting with Ancestors

“Ancestor reverence and veneration is a practice as old as humanity itself, deeply rooted in the belief that those who have passed continue to influence the living.”

- *The Honey Pot Energy and Art*



1. **Reflect on an ancestor** (they may be biologically-related, chosen family, or a historic figure) who exemplified a way of being that reflects how you want to be in transition
 - a. Imagine and journal: What were their practices and habits?
 - b. Write an expression of gratitude or love letter to them. Share with them how they have supported or grounded you through transition.


Try It

If your organization is transitioning towards a new structure, for example a co-leadership or leadership team, consider developing a ritual for this shared leadership relationship. Ask each member of the leadership team to share with the group a ritual that has been an anchor for them in their life. If available, they can also share or demonstrate with any artifacts that accompany the ritual (i.e. incense, photographs, book or readings, etc). Then, open a conversation about what nurturing or inspiration is needed at this moment for the new partnership or team. What is needed will vary for each team, but could include healing, bridging, resilience, expanding and aligning. Notice what symbols or metaphors might emerge in the conversation. Then lean into creativity to build a ritual that honors this exploration! Consider what would open or begin the ritual, what materials or symbols you want to incorporate, and how to close out the ritual.

If intentional rituals are a new experience for your team and you are finding it hard to begin, consider leading one of the rituals listed above as a place to start. With practice, developing a ritual might come with more ease. Our resources section also has more information and tools for building rituals for co-leaders. Please know that there is no right or wrong way to develop a ritual practice, only what feels resonant for your collective.

How do we practice ritual at ProInspire?

After several new hires and changes to the ProInspire team in a short period of time, our organization was feeling disconnected from each other. We realized that we needed more time to just “be” with each other, especially as each of us works virtually. As a result, we decided to shift our weekly team meeting agenda and build in more time at the front of each meeting for everyone to respond to a prompt or tell a story. This new ritual, beginning our weekly staff meeting with an extended check-in, has helped us as a collective to feel closer to each other. Some prompts we’ve answered include: Time travel back to one act of kindness or nurturing moment, big or small — by your mom, auntie, grandma, caregivers, mother figure, matriarchs, etc. — that helped shape or inspire the person you are today. If you were a storm, what type of storm would you be and why? Tell us about a time when you were an underdog.



Tending to Grief

A transition cycle necessitates an end, a liminality, and a beginning. Rather than powering forward, pausing and honoring what was lost in transition can open us up for healing and, eventually, moving forward with wholeness, clarity and courage.

“Don’t rush to escape the dissonance. You can bear witness to pain without being consumed by it. Lament is sacred. Grief is an honoring.”

- Cole Arthur Riley, *Black Liturgies*

There are many ways to honor and make space for what was before, what was lost, and the emotions that arise with that — including through the offerings in this workbook like art-making, being in nature, ritual, breath, or movement. Other supports might include meditation, journaling, song and prayer, or simply being with your emotions. You might consider writing down what was lost, or what you want to let go of, and honor and release it through a ritual, such as burning.

Tending to grief as a communal practice is also needed. bell hooks reminds us, “Rarely, if ever, are any of us healed in isolation. Healing is an act of communion.”

What do you desire to practice with your organization or community to honor and tend to grief in this transition?



 **Try It**

The reality of our current climate is that many community-based leaders are contending with a barrage of multi-crises impacting organizational effectiveness: burnout, trauma, additional burdens of addressing threats to organizational safety and security, not to mention the ever-present need to fundraise and be responsive to community needs. Rather than operating as business as usual, as a leader, you might consider slowing down and acknowledging all that your team is holding in an upcoming team meeting, bringing in the practices from this workbook or other sources of wisdom. Consider keeping the agenda open in order to allow for spaciousness and breathing room for whatever emerges in the meeting. You might also suggest blocking time before and after the meeting so team members are able to care for themselves without back-to-back work. As a leader, also be real about what your team can contribute in its current capacity. What might you need to sunset in order to move forward? How could a ritual help you to honor the past and look towards the future?



Setting Intentions



Reflection: What is one practice from this workbook that you want to carry with you as you shepherd your community or organization through transitions? Consider writing it down as an intention, beginning with, “I will...”



Try It

Intention-setting is a practice you can bring to your teams in many settings. You might consider inviting staff to write individual or group intentions when beginning or closing a team retreat, during the process of setting annual goals, or when anticipating an upcoming transition, such as a leadership change or change in strategic direction. Consider what you hope to accomplish, what behaviors you hope to lead with when things are going well and when things are more stressful. For more guidance on developing group intentions and examples, see our resource section.



Sources of Wisdom and Additional Resources



Prolnspire's work is part of a long tradition and lineage of racial equity and justice efforts. Below are the wisdom resources and other knowledge that helped inform and shape this guide, and offered for your deeper exploration.

- adrienne maree brown: [Emergent Strategy](#)
- Resmaa Menakem: [My Grandmother's Hands, somatic abolition](#)
- Cyndi Suerz: [The Power Manual](#)
- Tema Okun: [White Supremacy Culture](#)
- Food Culture Collective: [Story, Power, Place](#)

Tools, Practices, & Resources

- Writer & Poet [Cole Arthur Riley](#)'s Black Liturgies: Prayers, Poems, and Meditations for Staying Human
- [Emotion Wheel by Abby Vanmuijen](#)
- [Intactness for the Long Haul, Change Elemental](#)
- [How to Process Our Collective Grief](#), by Gabes Torres
- ["Weaving Together a World Without Violence Medicine Deck: Invocations, principles, ingredients, and recipes,"](#) card deck by Change Elemental, CompassPoint, and the Network Weaver Learning Lab
- [A Veneration Prayer to Invoke the Ancestral Spirits](#), [theafromystic.com](#)
- [Ancient and Modern Ritual: A Creative Approach to Working with Grief, Loss, and Change](#)
- [6 Reasons Why Liberatory Leaders Need to Take Play Seriously](#), by Nikki Dinh and Erika Stallings
- [Mapping Community Ecosystems of Collective Care Toolkit](#), by Shannon Perez-Darby and Andrea J. Ritchie.
- [Building Rituals](#), by Feminist Co-Leadership
- [Setting Group Intentions for Brave Spaces](#), by The d.school

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