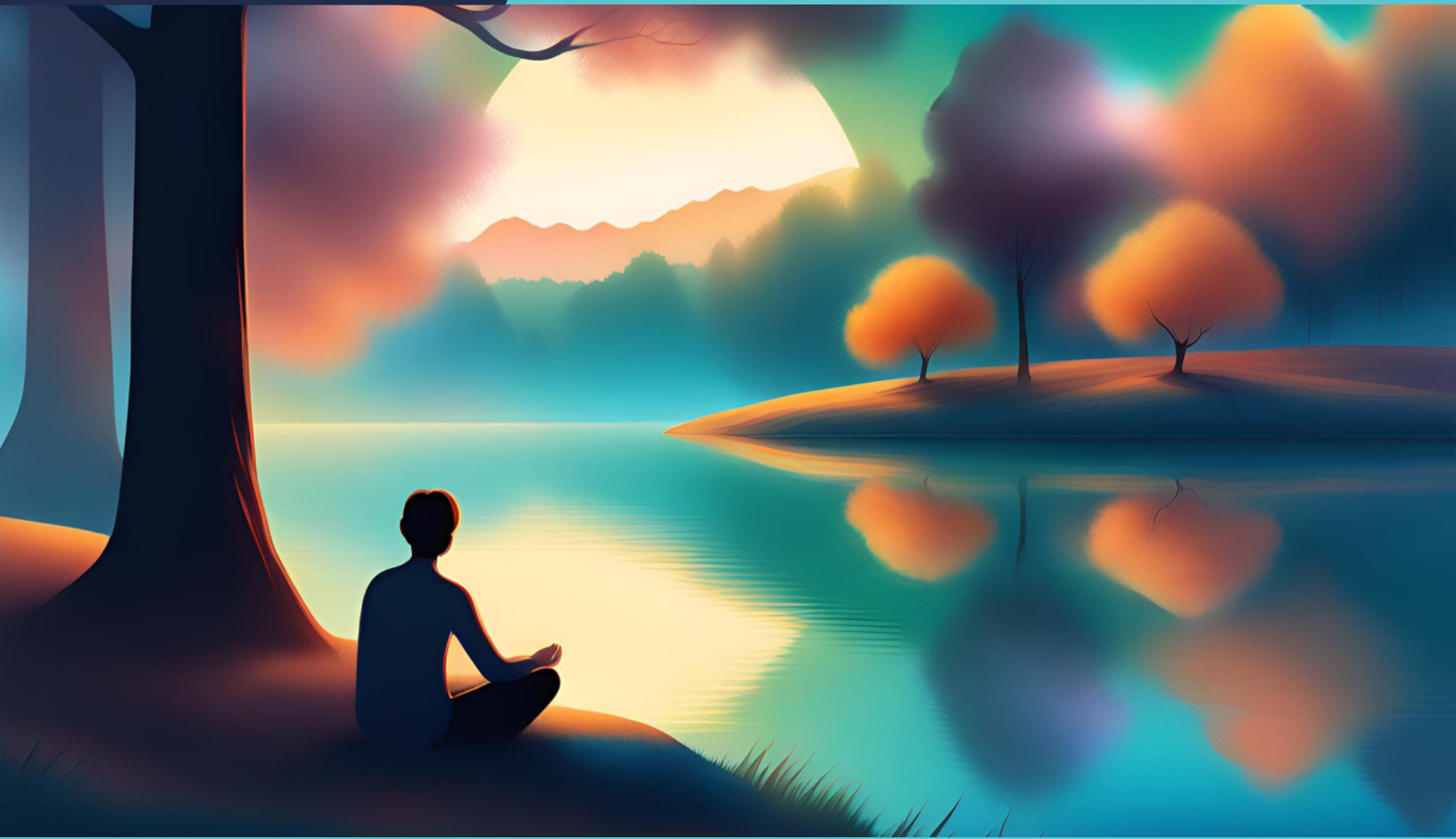


# CREATING SPACE WITH SEASONAL WORK CYCLES



Throughout our work processes, we have recognized the importance of spaciousness and forming new mentalities around “time” in a productivity-driven society. The practice of slowing down is widely recognized as necessary in the Community Impact Sector, but far harder to implement. IONS has been practicing different ways of being with time through seasonal work cycles to help prioritize rest, creativity, and relationality while combatting urgency culture and burnout. These seasons have helped to organize our work and reflect on our intended impact in a way that encourages natural flow and rhythm.

## **This resource will include:**

- **An example of IONS Seasonal Work Cycles**
- **A guide to determine your work and reflection season schedule**
- **Debrief Template**
- **Suggested activities for the reflection season**
- **Personal Reflection prompts**



# Creating Space to Reflect

At IONS we prioritize evaluation and learning across almost everything that we do. This means that we often have to try to fit in time to debrief projects or activities while we're actively trying to deliver on others. Balancing this work can be very challenging and can contribute to a feeling of overwhelm across the team. In the fall of 2023, IONS decided to trial a new "seasonal" workflow that was made up of "work" and "reflection" seasons to try to give us a break on needing to both deliver and evaluate at the same time and also to create protected pockets of time throughout the year for the team to reflect and strategize.

## Work Seasons

Typically ~3 months long

### Work as usual:

- Regular meetings (internal and external)
- Project work
- Delivering external programming
- Collecting ongoing data to support ongoing evaluation



### Prioritize slowing down:

- Pause meetings, project work, or external program delivery\*
- Debriefs and Analyzing Evaluation Data
- Team Learning, Reflection, and Feedback
- Celebrating achievements!



## Reflection Seasons

Typically 2-3 weeks long

Inspired by nature's cycles, these seasons are determined by the natural flow of our work. We've noticed over time that things tend to slow down around June and December each year so scheduling those reflection seasons is fairly easy. The spring reflection season (between March and April) is often the hardest season to protect since so much work is happening however we felt it needed to be prioritized because when we work flat out between January to June, the whole team ends up feeling burnt out and overwhelmed by the time things do slow down. By protecting or forcing a break in the middle, we hope to interrupt that burnout cycle and get a bit of a breather between the winter and spring seasons.



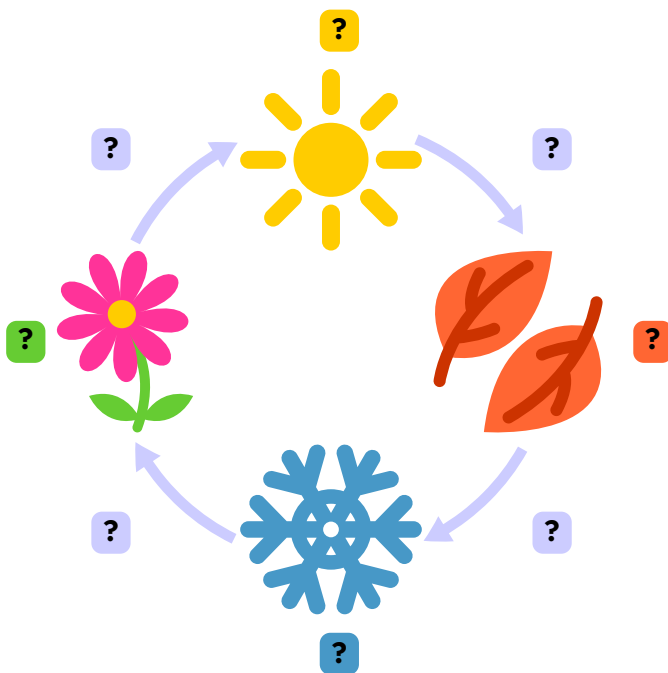
# IONS' Seasons of Work

Below we've outlined the seasons of work that we're trialing along with what we're focusing on in each season and when the season happens.

| Spring<br>April - June  | Summer<br>July - August  | Fall<br>September - December   | Winter<br>January - March   |
|---|--|--|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Deliver Programming</li> <li>• Impact Reporting</li> <li>• Kick off a new Fiscal Year</li> </ul> | <p>This season covers July and August which is usually when most of the team (and many in the sector) take vacation or pause work.</p> <p>We take advantage of the slower pace to rest ourselves and plan for the future work seasons.</p> <p>There is no "reflection" season at the end of this season since it's slower already.</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Launch new programming</li> <li>• Restart regular meetings (internal and external)</li> <li>• Kick off Projects</li> </ul>        | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Deliver programming</li> <li>• Collect Fiscal Year-end data for reporting</li> <li>• Wrap up any annual projects / agreements</li> </ul> |
| <p><b>Reflection</b><br/>Late June</p>  |  | <p><b>Reflection</b><br/>Early December</p>  | <p><b>Reflection</b><br/>Late March / Early April</p>   |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reflecting on Learning from the Spring</li> <li>• Space for formal feedback process</li> </ul>   |  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reflecting on learning from the Fall</li> <li>• Team Retreat</li> <li>• Space for personal goal setting and reflection</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reflecting on learning from the Winter and Overall Fiscal Year</li> </ul>  |

## How to determine your seasons

Below are some things to consider when planning when your work and reflection seasons may fall within the year.



### Guiding Questions:

- How would you define your purpose of seasonal work? What are your goals?
- When do you have the most programming?
- What is your fiscal year start/end?
- What are the start/end dates of your funding agreements?
- What budget and/or resource considerations are relevant for your organization?
- When does your team / the people you work with tend to take vacation?
- When do you start to feel overwhelmed?
- What are some of your big commitments scheduled (i.e., key dates, events, programs, or services)?



# IONS' Reflective Activities

Each Reflection season looks a little bit different depending on the time of the year and the priorities that emerge at the time however there are some activities that are common throughout each season:

- Formal Debriefs (of projects or activities)
- Individual Reflection Day (at least 1 day with shared reflection prompts)
- Collective Debrief and Learning Sessions (bringing the debriefs & reflections together and holding space for shared learning)
- Team Social Activities

## Formal Debriefs of activities

At the end of each work/programming season, we capture a list of the activities that have either ended or have been making significant progress during that season and schedule formal debrief meetings with the team involved.

These debriefs follow a shared template and help us:

- collect qualitative and quantitative data to support our impact reporting;
- identify things that worked well that we should continue (in this project/future) along with things we could change; and
- offer each other feedback and determine our next steps.

## Individual Reflection Day(s)

So much of our work requires space to reflect - individually and as a team. By providing the team with at least one day in the reflection season to unplug from the work and reflect, we hope to give space for each person to:

- take a break and rest from the busy season;
- be in nature or grounding spaces
- generate new ideas for future work;
- gain some insights into their own way of working; and
- support the overall impact reporting for the organization.

## Collective Debrief and Learning

Near the end of each reflection season, we host full team meetings - ideally with outside help - to:

- bring all of our reflections and debriefs together to help us see common themes and opportunities; and
- have time for group learning and training on a topic or area of work that's relevant to the team (i.e., generative conflict, giving and receiving feedback, etc.)

## Team Social Activities

Since we're all together, we try to organize some fun and social time - this can look like facilitated activities lead by someone on the team or simply going for a nice meal together.

- prioritizing in-person time with remote team members
- 1:1 meetings with each other (going for a walk or a coffee, etc.).
- group photo scavenger hunt, team lunch, creating art together, etc.



# Defining Your Priorities & Purpose

Now that you've determined your seasons, we've created some activities to help you plan and prepare for what you want to do and achieve in your reflection seasons.

## Input your work seasons

|                                   | Season 1 | Season 2 | Season 3 | Season 4 |
|-----------------------------------|----------|----------|----------|----------|
| Work period<br><i>(Dates)</i>     |          |          |          |          |
| Reflection Time<br><i>(Dates)</i> |          |          |          |          |

## Defining Your Reflection Seasons

For the above Reflection Seasons that you've identified, use the following sections to determine the goals you would like to achieve or work toward during that time.

**Place a checkmark next to each activity that you'd like to prioritize for that season. We've added space to input your own activities.**

| 1                        | 2                        | 3                        | 4                        | ACTIVITIES                 |
|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|----------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Formal Debriefs            |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Individual Reflection Days |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Group Learning             |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Team Social Activities     |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |                            |
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| <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |                            |

### Activities Brainstorm

Here are some prompts to help you and your team choose what activities you can lean into to achieve your goals for this time:

- How does your team like to learn?
- What data should you be collecting to support your reporting?
- What learning or growth supports are needed for teams and individuals?
- Are there events that you would all benefit from attending?
- How could your board be involved?
- What do you have budget to support?
- How will you give your team permission to participate?



# Project / Activity Debrief

|                              |   |
|------------------------------|---|
| <b>Debrief Topic:</b>        | <i>Project or activity name</i>   |
| <b>Date:</b>                 | <i>Date of the debrief meeting</i>  |
| <b>Type:</b>                 | <i>Is project/activity complete or is this a mid-point debrief?</i>         |
| <b>Team:</b>                 | <i>Who is the team working on this project/activity?</i>                    |
| <b>Activity Description:</b> | <i>Give a brief description or “elevator pitch” of the project/activity</i> |

## BEFORE THE MEETING

### Reflect on the following questions:

- How are we modelling the change (justice and equity/ innovation practices and mindsets) from the inside out?
- How are we embedding justice and equity in everything we do?
- How are we creating generative spaces for connection, learning, and co-creation?
- How are we connecting the dots to someplace new?

## DEBRIEF MEETING PROMPTS + NOTES

### What evaluation data do we have about this project/activity?

#### Do we have the following:

- 1 paragraph description of the project/activity
- 1 quote/testimonial
- 2-3 key statistics (e.g., rating on feedback form, # attendees, etc.)
- 2-3 photos
- 1 story of impact

### What went well?

*(reflect on both the process and results)*

### What felt hard or sticky? What could have been better?

*(reflect on both the process and results)*

### What were the top sector needs, challenges, trends, and opportunities that came up?

### What did we learn? What could we change for next time?

### What are our next steps?





# Individual Reflection Day(s)

As a team during each reflection season, we agree on a day (or two) to hold as a “Personal Reflection Day”. For these days, we encourage the team to set an out of office message, cancel or decline any meetings, and do something that energizes them that day (i.e., take a hike, work from home, etc.). We all have an agreed upon list of prompts for us all to reflect on or journal about which are tied to our evaluation and impact reporting.



No meetings

Limited emails

Work Somewhere Different

Capture your reflections

## Sample Reflection Prompts

Below are some examples of prompts we have used to guide the individual reflection days:

**What are you most proud of this season/year? I.e. greatest accomplishment, important learning, or moment of growth?**

**What were the top 2-3 needs you heard across the sector?**

**What are the top 2-3 trends or opportunities you are noticing that are most relevant for the sector?**

**Since [FY start/season start/etc.], in what ways have you noticed yourself and the team...**

- model the change from the inside out?
- embed justice and equity in everything we do?
- create generative spaces for connection, learning, and co-creation?
- connect the dots to someplace new?
- build a culture of learning, feedback, and iteration?
- adapt in real-time our work based on sector data?

**What are you feeling most excited about/what has the greatest potential impact for IONS in the coming year?**

### Sample “Out of Office” Message

Hello,  
Thank you for getting in touch - our team is taking time to reflect on our work these past few months, and so I may be slow to respond to your email between [dates]. If your email is time sensitive, please [action]. Best wishes.