

A BLACK FUTURES PROJECT

LIBERATORY LEADERSHIP

**COHORT 2026
WORKBOOK**



Liberatory Leadership Cohort Workbook

*A COMPANION FOR REFLECTION, PRACTICE, AND
PRO-BLACK LEADERSHIP DESIGN*

HOW TO USE THIS WORKBOOK

This workbook is an invitational space for reflection, experimentation, and integration.

- You are never required to complete every prompt
- You may write, draw, map, or sit quietly
- You may return to pages over time
- Your body and nervous system are guides

Trauma-informed note:

Engage at a pace that feels safe enough for you. Pause, skip, or modify any exercise.

GUIDING PRINCIPLES

This cohort and workbook are grounded in:

- Black futurity and dignity
- Anti-Blackness awareness
- Liberatory organizational design
- Emergent strategy
- Somatic and trauma-informed leadership
- Relationship over extraction
- Rest as a birthright



SESSION 1:

Liberating our Relationship to Time

REFLECTION:

When you think about time at work, what do you feel in your body?

- ☐ TIGHT
- ☐ RUSHED
- ☐ SPACIOUS
- ☐ HEAVY
- ☐ CALM
- ☐ OTHER: _____

REIMAGING OUR RELATIONSHIP TO TIME

Time is a social construct established during the industrial revolution to organize productivity and extraction of human labour for capital. Many dominant culture workplaces carry forward this legacy of time as a mechanism to monitor, surveil and control human resources - creating culture that perpetuates systemic oppression by separating individuals from their own bodies, relationships, and landscapes through:

- Urgency: demanding we override our natural rhythms and needs to produce
- Productivity policing: equating our value to production
- Surveillance of labour: tracking and monitoring the performance of labour
- Rigid schedules: assuming a default way of working, and prioritizing maximizing production over people
- Lack of recovery time: viewing rest as a privilege rather than a physical need and right
- Devaluing relational work: valuing products or outcomes over historical context of people and process

Many Black and Indigenous cultures have a relational orientation to time, allowing plans and activities to be shaped in response to the natural rhythms of bodies, relationships, landscapes, and seasons. This liberatory approach prioritizes connection and relationality through:

- Trust: aligning on agreements and outcomes, allowing for multiple truths, ways of knowing and being
- Humanity: recognizing and making space for dignity, safety and wellbeing
- Relationship: informed by the local contextual bodies, people and land
- Rest: as necessary part of natural cycles for regeneration, restoration
- Flexibility: adapts to different needs, ways of being and contexts
- Emergence: responds to what is present, rather than trying to control towards an outcome



So how might we move from.....

From Dominant Time Culture		To Liberatory Time Culture	
Practice	What it Looks Like	Practice	What it Looks Like
Time tracking	Logging hours in detail; justifying how every hour is spent	Outcome tracking and recognizing not all time is equal	Align on desired deliverables and action steps required to get outcomes
Visibility = value	Being seen online / in meetings = being productive	Valuing and visualizing different types of work	Naming emotional labour, creative work flow, relationship building
Micromanagement	Frequent check-ins focused on status, not support	Create feedback loops	Align on priorities and provide positive and corrective feedback during regular 1:1
Output policing	Scrutiny of how long tasks “should” take	Allowing for different ways of doing things	Co-create goals and timelines
Tone surveillance	Monitoring how people express frustration, passion, or emotion	Welcoming diversity of emotional expression	Discuss and share different cultural communication styles
Presence policing	Judging commitment based on camera use, in-office time, length of response times	Honor different ways of being, working, learning	Normalizing off camera and hybrid work arrangements
Over-documentation	Requiring excessive proof or written justification	Invite storysharing and other forms of translating knowledge	Normalize async communication, voice notes, etc.
Reactive urgency	“I need this now” without context or consent	Create expectations of longer response times	Out of office message that says, thank you, please expect a response within 48-72 hours
Performance metrics	Measuring productivity over impact or care	Impact metrics	Track process against values and capture impact via learning debriefs
Informal monitoring	Side comments like “Are they really working?”	Trust the people and the people become trustworthy	Clarify your expectations and accountabilities during relational, coaching check ins

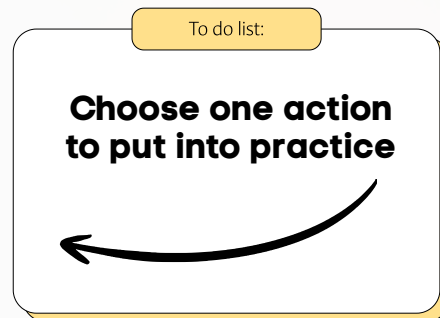
SHIFTING OUR RELATIONSHIP TO TIME

REFLECTION:

- Where did my sense of "good" and "bad" time management come from?
- Where have I internalized urgency or productivity pressure?
- What beliefs keep me overworking?
- How does my body signal time stress?

Invitation to Possibility Practice:

- ☐ Build 10-minute buffers between meetings
 - ☐ Practice saying "Let me get back to you"
 - ☐ Schedule one self meeting hour per week
 - ☐ Take breaks or time off without justification
 - ☐ Model logging off on time
 - ☐ Use an out of office response that tells people to expect a response within 42-72hrs
- Other: _____



Commitment - One way I will practice liberatory time as a leader this month:

SHIFTING TIME Culture & Norms

REFLECTION:

- How is time valued in my organization or team?
- Whose time is most protected? Whose is most vulnerable?
- Who is most impacted by pace and expectations?

Invitation to Possibility Practice:

What is one 10% change you could make to support a shift from productivity to relationality?

- Reduce agenda items
- Negotiate or co-create deadlines
- Normalize starting meetings "on time" and trusting those who are late to catch up
- Add relational check-in to meetings
- Build in breathing/grounding to meetings
- Ask for a pause or to slow things down

Commitment - One time norm I will change with my team:

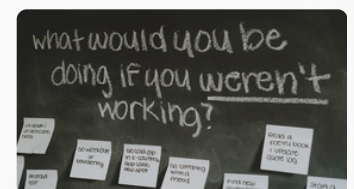
Additional Reading & Resources



[Off the Clock: Exploring our Relationship with Time & Work](#)



[Resisting a Rest: How Urgency Culture Polices our Work](#)



[Temporal \(de\)colonization & reimagining our relationship with time](#)

SESSION 2:

Identity, Masking & Embodied Leadership



Place a hand on your chest, belly, or anywhere that feels grounding for you.

- When you think about your leadership, where do you feel it in your body?
 - Does it feel strong, cautious, constrained, expansive, or tired?
- Ask yourself: What would leadership feel like if I didn't have to prove myself?
 - What do you notice?

MASKING AS SURVIVAL

Masking is a protective survival strategy of withholding different parts of your identity in the workplace when your body perceives a lack of safety. Masking can include:

- code-switching
- tone policing oneself
- hiding emotion
- minimizing brilliance
- over-preparing
- shrinking presence

MY MASKING PATTERNS

REFLECTION:

- Where do I feel pressure to mask at work to feel safe or accepted?
- What does masking cost me?
- How does my body respond?
- What does my body want instead?



Liberation Consideration:

To foster greater belonging and psychological safety in the workplace, provide staff with opportunities to:

- Share about their lived experiences, communication styles and cultural backgrounds
- Celebrate individual's gifts, strengths and contributions

Invitation to Possibility Practice:

What is a 10% liberatory shift you could make?

- ☐ Name one boundary around emotional labour you will hold
- ☐ Practice “less prep, more presence” to reduce over-preparing
- ☐ Take up space intentionally, share more and speak longer
- ☐ Invite your team to complete Working Styles Guide to learn more about each other

Commitment - One way I will practice embodied leadership (with choice):

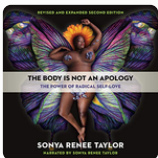
Additional
Reading &
Resources

Liberatory Workplace Tools:

- [IONS Relational Check in for Staff Engagement](#)
- [IONS User Guide to Working with Me](#)
- [Understanding Team Working Styles](#)



Book: “My Grandmother’s Hands” by Resmaa Menakem



Book: “The Body is not an Apology” by Sonya Renee Taylor

SESSION 3: Liberatory Futures - Belonging is a Vibe

Purpose:
Identify different cues that shape belonging and design culturally attuned, liberatory workplaces and gatherings.

SOMATIC CHECK IN:
Imagine a moment when you felt you truly belonged. What does that feel like in your body?

Reflection Prompt: - Recall a work meeting, gathering or event where you felt deep belonging. What cues signaled that you were welcome?

Belonging is created through intentional cues.

How might we shift Dominant culture norms that provide belonging for a select few to a Liberatory culture that invites belonging for many multitudes?

Cues	Dominant Culture - Limited Belonging	Liberatory Culture - Radical Belonging
Representation and expression	All or most leaders come from majority culture and reflect dominant culture norms of traditional leadership and expression Professionalism is narrowly defined and aligned Eurocentric standards and style Tokenization - e.g. only one Black person who has pressure of representing and/or educating on behalf of their entire community	Multiple approaches to leadership and communication styles are represented and valued People can dress and style themselves for comfort, confidence, and cultural expression Leadership and staff represents diversity of society and/or communities served
Culture Elements Music, visual materials, storytelling and food set the tone and energy of a space. It can signal whose care, culture, and connection are important and relevant. These elements contribute to the “felt sense” of the vibe.	Reflects majority culture or cultural elements are not present at all Language includes jargon, many acronyms or is very technical	Reflects different cultures that are present and locally resonate, inclusive of different dietary needs, and communication styles Language is accessible to a wide range of audiences (e.g. deaf, newcomer, various different education backgrounds, etc.) • Use plain language • Storytelling • Avoid acronyms or write out the entire word
Space and Location Equipment, materials, gathering space, lighting, tech needs etc send cues about whose comfort and capacity are valued The location and setting (land, building, online) can impact nervous system regulation, trauma responses and send signals about who can safely participate and belong	Design for “standard person” or dominant norms prioritized (e.g. chairs with arm rests, florescent lighting) History and story of buildings or locations reflect colonial history	Accounts for different access needs and abilities for physical and tech accessibility (e.g. transcription on zoom, ramps and elevators) Location and land are chosen with intention and relevant histories or stories of reclamation are shared Creates affinity spaces to support equity deserving groups with unmasking, nervous system regulation, creativity, and risk-taking
Time and Process Cues about how time, energy, relationship, bodies and outcomes are valued (or not).	Reflects culture of urgency and production - focus on status, time worked, outcomes Time is something to be controlled, rigid planning and defined outcomes There is no space for emotional expression, limited accommodations or attention to body needs Meetings have limited methods of participation (e.g. mostly group conversation, lots of talking)	Integrates breaks for rest, movement, relationship building, storytelling and celebration, wellbeing Practices of emergence, responsive to needs of staff and community Welcomes emotions and checking in with bodies, movement Acknowledges traumatic social or political events and provides space to reflect or resources for support Uses different structures for different learning styles (e.g. small group, large group, writing, speaking, listening)

REIMAGINE: NORMS, PRACTICES AND SPACES FOR BELONGING

REFLECTION:

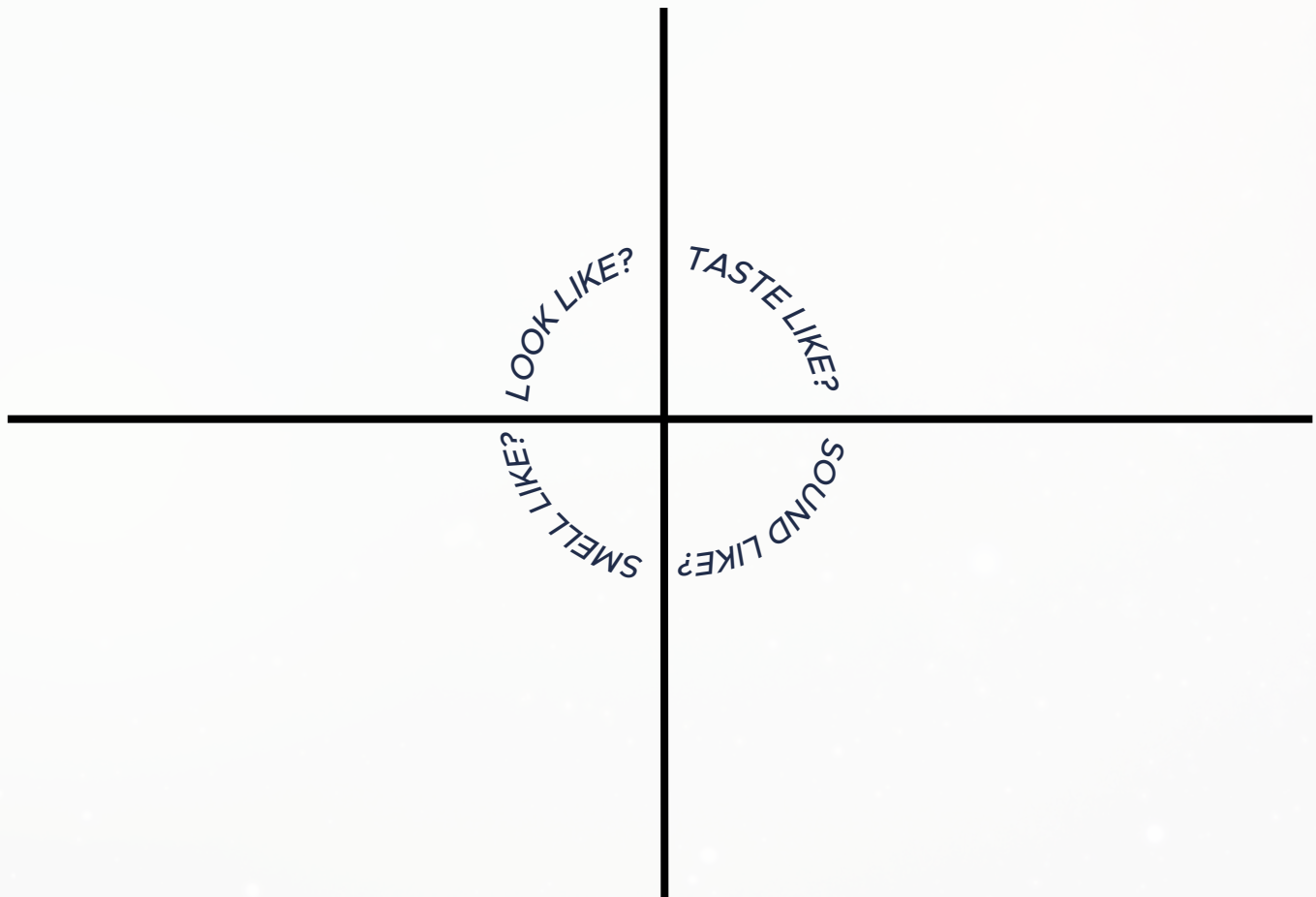
Creating a sense of belonging at an event or gathering starts long before the event begins. It starts with your design.

Consider meetings, events or gatherings you host, what do they currently reflect about your organization's culture and values?

What if we had workplaces that welcomed all of who we are, including our different cultural practices, ways of being and multitudes?

ACTIVITY: WHAT DOES BELONGING...

Fill out the following chart. You can use pictures, words, icons, sounds, songs, etc.





LIBERATORY GATHERING DESIGN CHECKLIST

Purpose: Small, intentional cues create belonging, safety, and engagement. Use this checklist when planning meetings, trainings, or gatherings.

Land-Based Reflection:

- ☐ Move beyond performative land acknowledgements
- ☐ Invite awareness of participants' relationship to the land
- ☐ Consider outdoor activities or land-based reflection to support grounding

Visuals & Materials:

- ☐ Include visuals, colors, quotes, or artwork that reflect participants' cultures
- ☐ Ensure materials are accessible (large font, colorblind-friendly, captions)
- ☐ Share materials in advance to support diverse learning needs

Space & Layout:

- ☐ Choose a layout that supports connection (e.g., circle vs theatre)
- ☐ Consider safety and comfort (e.g., visibility of exits, movement access)
- ☐ Check for accessibility needs (mobility, sensory, seating, bathrooms)
- ☐ Use soft lighting to support comfort and focus
- ☐ Consider needs of participants sensitive to bright or fluorescent light

Music:

- ☐ Play music during arrival, breaks, or reflection
- ☐ Reflect cultures of participants and communities served
- ☐ Consider the energy you want to invite (grounding, joy, focus, rest)
- ☐ Use instrumental music during reflection or offer a quiet space

Food:

- ☐ Offer options that accommodate dietary restrictions
- ☐ Provide both warm and cold options when possible
- ☐ Use food to convey care and inclusion

Story & Relational Practices:

- ☐ Create space for story-sharing in pairs, small groups, or plenary
- ☐ Build time for relational connection and reflection

Movement:

- ☐ Schedule movement breaks every ~90 minutes (stretch, walk, stand)
- ☐ Adapt movement opportunities for different abilities

Affinity Spaces:

- ☐ Offer spaces for participants with shared experiences to gather to accommodate for differentiated needs and experiences related to systemic oppression

POSSIBILITY PRACTICE:

Consider an upcoming gathering or engagement event. What is one element of the event that you can design to make a 10% shift that fosters greater inclusivity and belonging?

Commitment - One culturally attuned practice I will introduce:



WORKPLACE WELLBEING SYSTEMS & POLICIES CHECKLIST

Inclusive Hiring & Onboarding

- ☐ Redefine professionalism—allow staff to wear what makes them feel confident and comfortable
- ☐ Set clear expectations upfront (e.g., share interview questions, describe physical setup, request accommodations)
- ☐ Provide a 90-day plan for new hires to learn job expectations, team norms, and organizational policies

Team Capacity & Affinity Spaces

- ☐ Offer regular learning and reflection opportunities to advance decolonization work
- ☐ Create spaces for staff to share, connect, and engage in affinity groups
- ☐ If you are a small team, connect staff to affinity via external networks, mentors, or community resources

Budget and WorkPlan for Cultural & Relational Practices

- ☐ Allocate funds and time for team building, cultural practices, and relational learning
- ☐ Ensure budgets reflect organizational values and support welcoming, inclusive workplaces

Personalized Professional Development

- ☐ Provide support tailored to staff needs, lived experiences, & accommodations. Examples:
 - Coaching for equity-deserving leaders or those with limited mentorship access
 - Extra time or resources for neurodivergent staff to complete tasks

POSSIBILITY PRACTICE:

What is one area of organizational systems or policies you can make a 10% shift in?

- ☐ Hiring and Onboarding
- ☐ Team Culture
- ☐ Budget & Workplanning
- ☐ Professional Development

Commitment - One structural belonging shift I will advocate for:

Additional Reading & Resources

Templates:

- [Shifting Power Dynamics in the Hiring Process](#)
- [IONS Pre Interview Hiring Package](#)
- [IONS Professional Development Policy Considerations](#)

Article:

[The Power of Affinity Spaces](#)



Book: "Emergent Strategy" by adrienne maree brown

SESSION 4:

Workplace Wellbeing Policy & Organizational Design

Purpose: identify opportunities to embed rest into policy and to design structures to create cultures of wellbeing and places where everyone can thrive

COLLECTIVE CARE & SUSTAINABILITY

REFLECTION:

How might we shift from becoming more resilient as individuals to noticing what the body reveals about systems that need redesign?

- What expectations or norms at work make it hard for my body to rest?
- How do workloads get distributed?
- What types of work are seen as valuable?

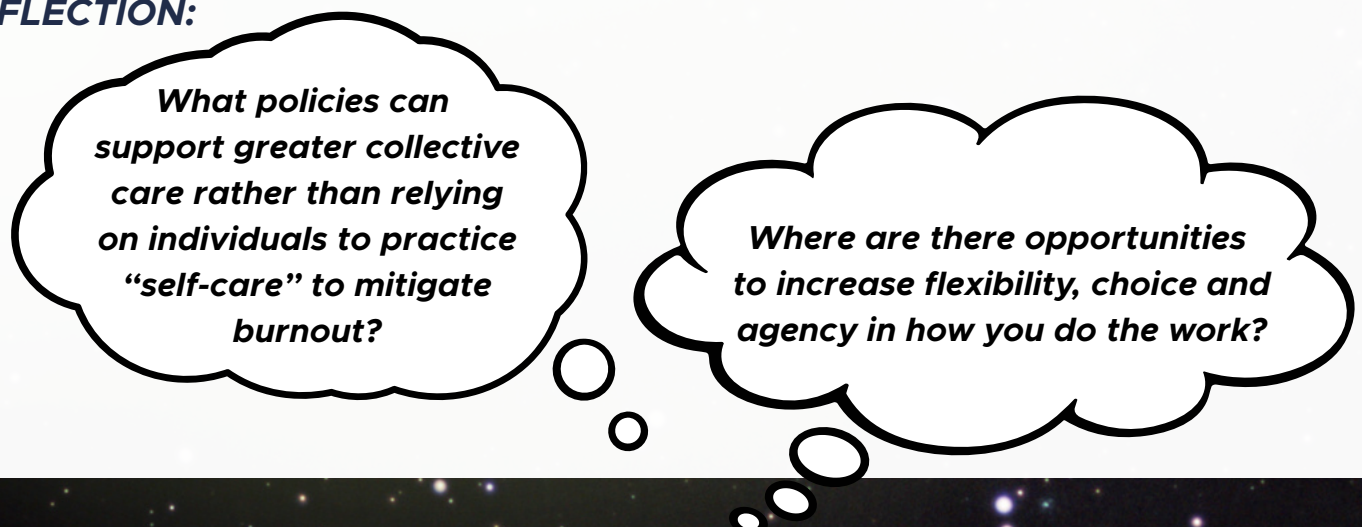
POSSIBILITY PRACTICE: *Make the invisible visible*

- Normalize collective pacing - reframe workplanning as a collective care tool - how does visabilizing the work flow and expectations support each person individually and collectively to meet your shared purpose?
- Introduce no-meeting time - hold sacred space for deep thinking, creativity and flexibility in how work gets done
- Redistribute invisible labour - check in on different labour being done. How might you recognize and acknowledge the different impacts of different types of work?

Commitment - One team-level care practice I will introduce:

REIMAINGE: WORKPLACE WELLBEING DESIGN

REFLECTION:



POSSIBILITY PRACTICE:

- Clear flexibility guidelines - allows for greater self determination in how people do the work.
- Trauma-informed and trust based leave - making space for the ways life can impact individuals and therefore their needs and how they show up to work. What practices can foster a culture of trust and care for individuals beyond the value of what they produce?
- Low-surveillance work norms - what is truly necessary to be known? What level of detail do you require? How might your management practices (e.g. regular check ins) center relationality over surveillance?

What is one Organizational Policy or Practice for Collective Care that you could try?

- ☐ Seasonal Work Flows
- ☐ Flexible start/end times
- ☐ Remote work options
- ☐ Trauma or care leave
- ☐ Meeting Free Fridays (or other times)
- ☐ 4 Day work Week or
- ☐ Other _____

To do list:

First step or action I can take toward this practice:

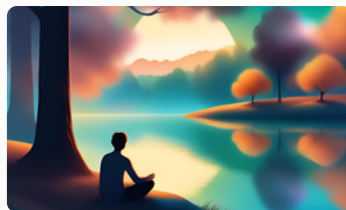
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Commitment - One policy I will help redesign or pilot:

Additional Reading & Resources



Book: "Rest is Resistance: A Manifesto" by Tricia Hershey



[Creating Space with Seasonal Work Cycles](#)



[Welcome Aboard: How Organizations Create Belonging for new Hires](#)



[Doing more with less: Positive Results of a 4-day Work Week](#)



["What's Your Biggest Weakness?" Reimagining the Traditional Interview](#)

Carrying This Forward Together

"What we pay attention to grows" - adrienne maree brown

"The kind of change we are after is cellular as well as institutional, is personal and intimate, is collective as well as cultural. We are making love synonymous with justice." - Prentis Hemphill

Integrating the lessons, stories and models you have gained from this practice relies on our individual and collective commitments and practice of doing this work.

REFLECTION:

- What shifted in me over these four weeks?
- What kind of leader am I becoming?
- What kind of workplace do I want to co-create?
- What kind of nonprofit sector do I want to help build in Nova Scotia?

COMMUNITY COMMITMENT:

One way I will stay in relationship and accountability with others in this work:

One practice I want to keep alive with others:

Thank you for showing up to this practice.

