# Lifehouse CG - Our ways of working

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| *With gratitude for the work of Chen Zvi who produced the original toolkit and Navigate who also offer a free 7 Living Systems Course online that we encourage people to engage with.* | |

Collapse is a result of the dominant ways in which the human family is currently organised from a place of scarcity, separation, powerlessness and soullessness. When we do not *consciously* choose how to be together, we risk inheriting the automatic practices of this prevailing, domination culture. And we also leave our spaces open to a confusion of different approaches by individuals. These practices are a way to walk towards the vision of co liberation: cultivating our interdependence, belonging, power-with and freedom.

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# 1. Decision making and membership practices

Across the L-CPC network, groups can establish practices that serve their/our purpose, they may start off light touch and develop as felt necessary.

**We want to establish consent in how we work together**: so we can operate more autonomously between meetings

**Creation of a new WG / activity, or delegation of a task to a person, or policy to guide how we do things:** can all come as a proposal by anyone who is an active member of the Lifehouse network for more than three months, and is accepted by the consent of the CG/WG members.

A reminder to use practices that bring life energy and wisdom to our processes and togetherness. These may be practices rooted in ritual, creativity, sharing, joy, grieving and 'somatic practices' (which reconnect us with the wisdom of our own bodies).

## 1.1 Meetings; making and processing proposals

Our simple decision making process for now:

- The CG makes all decisions until it decides to empower a working group to make specific decisions (and it can reverse that power if there is a good reason to do so).
- Proposals are brought to the group, generally in advance and in writing. The proposal should give a clear rationale for action. Getting input and advice from specific people before bringing the proposal to the full CG may improve the proposal.
- Timelines will be agreed in meetings or in the communications (currently whatsapp) channel about how long is needed to review the proposal before it is brought to a meeting.
- Proposals can be processed using sociocratic methods, which should be done more concretely and formally if the proposal is controversial.
- When proposals are accepted they should be minuted as such and documentation filed.
- We have sought consensus of all CG members to proceed with proposals and other foundational documentation. For future practice a 75% quorum is sufficient to make decisions, though we consider who is missing and whether specific decisions can be made in their absence without unduly creating tensions.
- WGs can bring proposals to the CG

If members have missed meetings, please refer to minutes to understand which action points have been agreed and also some work in progress is being tracked here. For those new to structuring and running meetings, section 2.5 of this document may help. When there is a need to find a solution to an issue, with no immediately obvious way forward, use this template to build proposals that harness collective wisdom. Advice on any proposals can be sought through the advice process and more information about this, how to work using sociocracy and convergent facilitation are given in the appendices.

## 1.2 Selecting new people for roles

Needs within the community might emerge over time and we hope to find people for roles within the national layer as needed (with a mindfulness of keeping our focus on local activity). The CG and specific WGs may look for people to fill necessary roles (This can be done by looking for people with specific skills and experience, by advertising a role, by seeing who has volunteered). If needed, there are more practices in the appendices for selection processes.

## 1.3 Adding a new member to the CG or a WG, inductions and support

We consent consciously to a person joining the CG or a WG (taking responsibility if it doesn't work out - see practices for separating in the appendix). Aim for 5-7 people in a working circle[1] - our team is built through strong relationships and agreement to shared principles and practice. When adding a new member, we use this induction ethos and process and we get to know them and make sure they have a one-on-one connection, be it a coordinator, or a buddy. We share and complete our "user manuals" as part of healthy team building.

## 1.4 Community spaces

Generally, community spaces will be open to all. They will have stated moderation guidelines and a moderation team, with a "three strikes and out" rule for anyone breaking moderation requests. Additional geographic and thematic groups may be formed as required, they must include

[1] There is a lot of research about teams of less than 10 people being more successful, having better work-life quality and better cohesion and communication.

moderators / convenors / coordinators (who are then members of a WG of the SG). For example, does someone share a lot on a specific topic? Perhaps a channel can be started on that topic. Does someone advertise tenuously relevant things (that they are part of) then we start a channel for wider network adverts.

When specific local groups or thematic groups have issues we will make available conflict practices and where possible signpost to more support. Developing local feedback and conflict skills is an essential part of building Lifehouse Communities.

## 2. Feedback principles and practices

### Why commit to giving and receiving feedback?

Feedback processes help us align our actions with our organisational purpose and guiding principles. This enables us to learn, develop, adapt, and navigate towards achieving what we set out to do. When feedback is given and received well, we will feel empowered to take the risk of trying new and different things.We create structures and processes for giving and receiving feedback that will best serve the group and its members, which in turn gives rise to the potential for more impactful action in the world.

Making an active commitment to creating and implementing feedback processes is necessary because feedback can be tough to give and receive, and because maintaining these processes takes energy and attention. A group or organisation is like a living organism, which continuously regulates itself, grows and evolves via the feedback received. Feedback loops are always happening, whether or not they are chosen. Consciously choosing and modifying the feedback processes that best support a group and what it is trying to do is therefore important.

| **We commit to the following feedback practices and details:** | |
|---|---|
| Short Feedback Loops, including as we close meetings | More info |
| A commitment to co liberation (tending “power and privilege”) | More info |
| Giving and receiving feedback with care | More info |
| Periodic feedback and review meetings (every 6 meetings) | More info |
| Ongoing feedback processes for the L-CPC Convening Group | see below |

### Ongoing feedback processes for the L-CPC Convening Group

The Convening Group needs to consider how best to create feedback processes that are appropriate to each area of its work, such as:

- Proposals for things we might do, e.g. actions or processes
- Reflection on how well an action or process has worked in practice.
- Developing and reviewing documents, feedback during meetings
- Maintaining relationships between members of the Convening Group
- Maintaining relationships between the Convening Group and wider L-CPC groups/groups we work in that have relevance to collapse awareness and community resilience.
- Maintaining relationships that are mediated by online platforms - e.g. Whatsapp and zoom.

**Giving feedback about how a meeting has gone in the checkout round**
We will make a habit of closing a meeting with one celebration or appreciation and one thing to improve for better meetings. This feedback is hard to give and easy to skip if it's not invited explicitly and repeatedly by the facilitator. A check-out round is an important opportunity for a 'short feedback loop' about our meetings. Maybe we notice that we need to prepare more for the meetings? Maybe have shorter ones or add movement breaks? Maybe we notice we tend to get caught by tangential discussions, or maybe we are too tight on the agenda? Any feedback can greatly improve the meetings over time.

**Feedback loop to track how things work in practice**
When a decision has been reached about an action/process to be implemented, a date should be decided to review how the decision works in practice, and a group member chosen who will be responsible for making sure that the review happens. In a periodic feedback/review section, this can be examined; how the decision works in practice and adjustments to make it more effective.

### Limitations of feedback

There are problems to be aware of that may emerge from feedback processes:

- Feedback may not always be valuable or relevant.
- Absorbing and responding to all feedback isn't possible.
- Feedback processes can become too long and weighty, inhibiting action.
- Feedback processes can be distorted by people acting without integrity or by people who aren't clear about the group's principles and purpose.
- Sometimes feedback needs to be thought through before being offered well.

To overcome these issues, it's important to:
- Have a good sense of discernment that is guided by the group's principles and purpose.
- Use the questions, 'Is it good enough for now? Is it safe enough to try?' This means that even if the feedback given about a process or planned action highlights the imperfections, there is a minimum baseline from which it is okay to go forwards with action.
- Implement and strengthen good feedback practices.

## 3. Addressing Tension & Conflict

### 3.1 Introduction

Differing opinions, preferences and needs are a normal and inevitable part of collaborating with others. **Tension** refers to a feeling of building strain or anticipation, while **conflict** is the actual clash or active struggle, signifying a more overt disagreement or confrontation. Often conflict emerges from a lack of shared understanding, from different perspectives or values, or from the pressures of a particular situation giving rise to behaviours that are very challenging for one another, which subside again once the pressure has passed. It's therefore highly important to commit to addressing tensions so as to prevent them boiling over into active/destructive conflict. Conversely, tensions that are effectively responded to can lead to mutual understanding, growth, trust building and updated agreements. To paraphrase Miki Kashtan, conflicts are feedback that

wasn't processed soon enough. Even when things tip over into conflict, engaging with the processing of conflict can be transformational and regenerative, especially when we can see them in the context of systemic patterns in the world (e.g. of oppression, of a lack of care) and are willing to be accountable to how we have contributed to strain. Conflict can highlight areas of "inner work" that are needed. It takes the willingness of those involved to work on getting to a better place.

However, conflict situations can also be 'toxic,' meaning that there may be abuse of some kind, or it can feel extremely difficult to see a way forward. There may be very different stories about what has happened and people may take sides. People may not be willing to engage in restorative practices, such as trying to see things from the other's point of view. Sometimes there are safety concerns about the behaviour of an individual. At other times, people may be accused of abusive behaviours and it is hard to be sure about what happened. These types of conflicts can put whole groups under strain. So while addressing and processing conflict should be a core element of Lifehouse work, it is not possible to resolve all conflicts.

Dealing with conflict can take volumes of time, energy and attention, which there may not be the collective capacity. A conflict may come to dominate a group, to the detriment of what the group is trying to do in the world. It is important to bear in mind that a group must attempt to create balance in different areas between the needs of the individuals involved in the conflict, the wellbeing of the group/organisation as a whole, and the purpose/mission of the group. It may not be the appropriate place to get to the bottom of trauma or people's conditioned tendencies to behave in certain ways. It may well be necessary to call in support from outside mediators who are skilled in navigating conflicts, or to make a judgement call based in the reality of a groups capacity, with regret for the imperfect ways of moving forwards.

**It takes discernment to understand which process to use to address conflict**. Is it:
(1) a tension which needs processing, (2) a conflict with the potential for transformation, or (3) a toxic conflict that's out of hand / risks specific harms (eg bullying, theft, racial or sexual harassment)? Sometimes, conflicts are construed as abuse situations. People may express that they feel unsafe, although when everything about a situation is taken into account, it is more likely that they feel uncomfortable rather than are actually unsafe.

Conversely, abuse situations can be belittled as being nothing more than a conflict. People within a community may also ignore or gloss over behaviour that is abusive (such as bullying, harassment or sexual misconduct), which leads to a space being physically or psychologically unsafe. Having discernment about how best to engage with a conflict takes practice.

## 3.2 Practices to address the different levels of conflict

| **We commit to the following tension and conflict practices and details:** | |
|---|---|
| Addressing tensions through feedback | More info |
| Processing conflict through restorative and transformative processes | More info |
| Mutual Understanding Conversations | More info |
| Making a change to the group's agreements | More info |
| Self-responsibility processes | More info |

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|---|---|
| Transforming the “enemy” image of someone you’re in conflict with | More info |

### 3.3 Attending to “toxic” conflict and harmful behaviours

When there are claims that a person is experiencing serious harm from someone, like physical, sexual, racial, harassment or bullying, rapid action is needed. In the first instance the CG will ask the accused person to temporarily step away pending a review[2]. In the absence of capacity to run a due process, a person from the convening group, supported by one other trusted person will try to establish facts and evidence and propose a decision to the CG. This is also the way to ask someone to leave the network.

## 4. Information sharing

Information is critical to making decisions and feeling part of a connected and purposeful community. Too much (especially irrelevant)  information can feel overwhelming, too little can feel and be disempowering.

Some information is filed in our GDrive - with responsibility on team members to access it as needed and to keep it updated. It is important for organisational memory. Some information is shared verbally in meetings, not all of it will be written down, it is important to check understanding. Wider relevant information is available through curated resources. As our networks grow our information flow processes need to scale and change to meet needs.

How information is shared, when and to whom all matter. Capacity limits need to be factored in, as do issues of power and privilege. People’s access to and processing of information is different - this can be affected by neurodiversity, language, education, confidence, hearing etc and if this isn’t tended / considered in how information is shared we will exacerbate marginalisation.

| **Lifehouse Network CG commits to sharing and moderating information in these ways[3]:** | |
|---|---|
| Moderating community online spaces according to guidelines | guidelines |
| Supporting new groups/ channels to be formed through an induction process, the handbook and a network of support where capacity and alignment allow | |
| Keeping our key documents together in a Handbook | handbook |
| Sharing agendas and requests for agenda items before CG meetings to co create agendas, keeping minutes of key decisions and action points | Minutes |
| Filing documents in our shared drive | Drive |
| Our work in progress / plans to be kept up to date for review | Table |
| Creating meetings in person and online to share information<br>(as well as connect and think together);<br>whole network zoom calls / webinars (at least three a year)<br>gathering in festivals<br>team away days | Community Zooms |

[2] Here in case of use is the XRUK harmful behaviour policy- (some of us think it was misused)
[3] Not all the links are publicly accessible, and can be where it is relevant and reasonable via Bob Bollen

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| Having smaller group and one to one meetings where there is space to process information and sensemake:<br>-A fortnightly meeting of the Convening group<br>-A monthly meeting to include all working group members<br>-One to one or few meetings for people undertaking specific work, for support and information sharing | |
| To review our online platform choice in 2027 | |
| Supporting the enquiry into how information flow can work across “Fabric” | |

# 5. Connection and Community

This section speaks to the relationships in our group, to how people are with each other, to who feels a sense of belonging and who doesn’t, and where the boundaries are. We want to ensure that our group is an inclusive one, where everyone feels their whole self belongs, and that they can contribute authentically.

## 5.1 Caring for Connection and Belonging

In every situation where humans meet, we experience connection with each other. We want to foster, care for and nourish that connection, and know that it’s a place where conflict and hurt can arise. Whilst some groups discourage sharing things about personal lives and showing emotions, in our group, that’s exactly that kind of life-connection we value. It’s not about turning into a therapy session, forcing people to be friends or disclose things that are private, but about valuing the level of connection between us, that helps to deliver our purpose in alignment with our values.

When we’re only, or mainly, operating online, it is too easy just to discuss tasks or plans – and the relational piece can fall to the wayside. When we know each other, when we have an understanding of each other, it often supports flow, and can pre-empt conflict and difficulties. People’s needs and hopes vary, so we need to be discerning. Someone might look for belonging and connection, whilst others may feel like they have little space and want to use time effectively.

We strive to create inclusive spaces where everyone can feel a sense of belonging and shared values, and can contribute authentically to our purpose and mission. We want colleagues to experience a sharedness, as well as being valued, appreciated, and welcomed.

In every group there’s a mainstream and a margin. The mainstream isn’t necessarily the majority – it’s the things that are centered in the group. Often we feel like we belong when people are similar to us, and we’re drawn to those spaces, which can make those who are different feel less welcome.

No matter how inclusive a group believes itself to be, when you look closely, there are always some characteristics that are less welcome / are marginalised / are pushed out of the centre. For example a group that loves to socialise might not notice the people on the margins who like to be quiet. Language, types of humour, particular activities - swearing, types of words - all create a sense of mainstream and margins. The people in the mainstream set the culture. They understand the rules about how things are done in the group and the communication style. Rank is also useful to understand.

We want all people to feel at home in the group, talk confidently and be listened to. We don’t want anyone to feel they have to leave a part of their identity 'at the door' in order to fit in. Everyone

should feel their work is valued, they are included and can express their honest views. We will work to understand what our group feels like to members and will work to create a “homebase” where people gather according to specific acute structural oppressions and other orientations as wanted, in a way that supports people to feel welcome. We will very explicitly make space for difference, invite it in, welcome it and celebrate it.

## 5.2 People joining, leaving and group wisdom

We have induction and leaving processes. With new joiners, we want to find a balance with integrating their wisdom whilst maintaining a focus on meeting purpose and forward movement. We will support newcomers, take time to hear from them and learn from their experiences. We have also set timelines to revise documents so there should be opportunities to update our work based on the growing intelligence of a more diverse group.

People leave groups for many reasons, for example conflict, their personal circumstances, or interests change. All too often people just disappear, leaving the group in a bit of disarray. It’s not just what happens to the roles or tasks they had taken on, but also the emotional processing of someone leaving. That can be a big thing and often needs some space.

## HEARTS

We try to work with Jessica Fern’s model HEART:

**Here** - being present with each other, listening with full attention, putting phones and distractions away during time together, and generally being in touch with what’s happening in the group. Active listening is not about responding, just hearing each other and letting something be said and received.
**Expressed Delight** - showing and sharing appreciation for each other, celebrating wins, finding ways to express and share how being part of the group is influencing the lives of its members and exploring how the members are shaping the group and helping it grow.
**Attunement** - being attuned to each other, creating the space to explore and share how we feel about what’s happening as well as problem solving.
**Rituals & Routines** means looking at what things your group regularly does. We will try to establish ours together and set these out so we all know what to expect.
**Turning towards after conflict** – we have set out in detail elsewhere how we will try to work with conflicts, including how people will be welcomed back into the group after conflict processing.

***To build connection and community, we will:***

- Include brief check-ins at the start and check-outs at the end of all gatherings,
- Meet in person at least twice a year, including some unstructured time
- Create space to listen, to get to know each other, to be with each other
- Take time to set out what we want our relationships to look like, so we are always working towards our vision of a healthy, well-nourished, connected community
- Tend grief and support grief tending
- Encourage the formation of "homebases" in our network and wider networking with other organisations - places where people can gather around specific identities and orientations - for example "young people", "people living with chronic illness" "people racialised as black / people of colour" etc.
  And for each formed homebase group we will seek to form an "accomplices of" group for people who have the capacity to "have the back" of people who most acutely face structural oppression.
- Undertake periodic group function review, where we engage with the diagnostic tool Mainstreams & Margins model by Amy and Arnold Mindell[4].

**When we come together in person we will:**

- Discuss proposals together and try to make arrangements that suit people's needs
- Ensure spaces are accessible and welcoming for all - listening to people's access needs and resourcing what we can with the capacity we have, being willing to learn and grow in the process
- Make sure people have the information they need to attend, feel comfortable, and engage
- Invite post meeting feedback about how it felt so we can evolve.

# 6. Wellbeing, care & support practices

Dealing with collapse is a profoundly difficult context in which to maintain good individual and group wellbeing. On top of the usual pressures intrinsic to the overall context - oppressive dynamics inherent to state capitalism coupled with activist work and community spaces, **collapse** means addressing wellbeing and support where there are likely to be mounting pressures. This may be due to multiple systems coming under strain or collapsing at the same time, as well as dealing with potential hostility from the state and fascists. In such a context, vital resources may run low or be cut off, people may start to panic and turn against one another, and the most marginalised people are likely to suffer disproportionately.

The Lifehouse network exists to do what we can to prepare our communities for such eventualities. As part of this preparation, integrating good wellbeing and support practices into our groups is essential. The key is 'practise, practise, practise' - good intentions are not enough; we need to work on embodiment by regular practice to become more grounded, centered and responsive to our own needs and the needs of the collective. This also takes experimentation. For any supportive practice, check if it is increasing the sense of support and choice you have of what to take on and what information to take in. It might be that some practices generally sound good, but in practice, don't accomplish it for you, for your team or for your context.

## 6.1 Regulating the nervous system under pressure

It's essential to bear in mind that even when working under pressurised and potentially traumatising circumstances, if good wellbeing practices and community support structures are in place, it's still

[4] https://tripodtraining.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/blog-mainstreams-and-margins-1024x604.png
https://www.trainingforchange.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/Mainstream-Margin-in-Groups.pdf

possible to come back to being centred and grounded. This means that we become able to work in a responsive way, where we can be attuned to the present situation and what action needs to be taken in it, rather than a reactive way, where our actions come from our nervous system triggers that are frequently rooted in trauma.

Of course, reactivity can be important; if a fire breaks out, our brains are wired to quickly mobilize us to get out of danger. There are many situations where our automatic reactions tell us that there is serious and imminent danger, and we go into a survival reaction of fight, flight, fawn, freeze or dissociate, depending on which survival mechanisms have helped keep us safe in the past. However, the way our brains work is often to overestimate the level of danger. This is particularly if we have experienced traumatic circumstances in the past and the state of trauma has not been resolved within us, leading us to be on high alert at all times. What is most useful at times where danger is not absolutely imminent is to have enough inner space and centredness to be able to take in what is going on around us and respond according to what we assess needs to happen, rather than go into our automatic reactions.

## 6.2 Finding our centre

An introduction to an important centering practice can be found via this link[5]. 'Somatics work,' takes the entirety of our experience - our bodily sensations, our emotions and our thoughts - to be a form of intelligence that can help us navigate the world if we allow ourselves to tune into it. Culturally, those of us who have grown up in the Western world have learnt to separate our thinking mind from our emotions and body, giving primacy to our thoughts over anything else. Somatics work means building awareness of the messages that our bodily sensations and emotions are giving us, as well as connecting us to the wisdom of the right brain hemisphere. This enables us to become more aware of what is driving us and allows us to create space within ourselves to change. We become more able to more consistently orientate our behaviour towards our values and what matters most to us, rather than allowing our subconscious drivers to take over.

| **Lifehouse Network CG commits to:** | |
|---|---|
| Maintaining a culture of support and choice, noticing and avoiding burnout culture and reminding each other what support is available | |
| Personal responsibility to find grounding exercises that work for you and avoiding burnout | more information |
| Working together in a fulfilling way, as wanted / needed through listening channels, peer coaching, finding joy and connection | more information |
| Maintaining a culture of celebration and appreciation:<br>People can't go long without seeing and hearing how their efforts enrich life. Celebrating what has been created or achieved and expressing gratitude for others' actions is immensely fueling, we do this by:<br>● A round of gratitude at each feedback meeting and as part of check outs.<br>● As any of us notice efforts and achievements, express gratitude and appreciation.<br>● Take time to celebrate together after reaching a milestone such as the achievement of a goal.<br>● When doing a check out round in a meeting, encourage people to express one thing they feel grateful about.<br>The type of gratitude we are mostly looking for is the type that will let people sigh in satisfaction that their actions have made something possible. | |

[5] a key component of the work of 'The Politics of Trauma' by Staci Haines

# 7. Resource flow practices

## 7.1 Money distribution

When money needs to be distributed between WGs or people, consider this process:

**a. Agree on "dialoguers, tuners and decision makers"**

You need to understand the makeup of three groups:

- Dialoguers: people who need to be in dialogue about the decision.
- Tuners: 2-3 volunteers who are going to synthesise the final proposal of money allocation.
- Decision makers: the ones who make the final decision. They can be the tuners themselves, or the entire group of dialoguers.

**b. Articulate criteria**

What are the criteria for applying and for deciding on distribution? e.g.

- The use of money will directly enable us to advance towards our WGs purpose, in a tangible way.
- Requests will be up to £1000.

**c. Publish process and boundaries**

Explain the process to all the stakeholders and explain any givens or boundaries of money available, max money per SG/WG/ person if it makes sense, time for the process, and time for the decision making phase. A request template might be useful. Here is a blank template.

**d. Collect requests**

Give the time for WGs / people to self assess according to the criteria and the boundaries and submit a request. A request template might be useful.

**e. Iterative dialogue**

If the total amount requested is at or below the amount available, there might not be a need for dialogue. If it's more than available, and you feel confident enough to hold a dialogue within the group of dialoguers, go into iterative dialogue between the "dialoguers". If not, go straight to the tuning stage. Money is a very sensitive subject, this is why our dialogue doesn't take the form of open discussion. It is time limited, facilitated & focused, turn-based, and without the need to converge. You can't stress that enough - they are not deciding, only producing wisdom and information that will then feed the tuners in making a proposal. Here are 3 examples:

**Selection Process**

Just like in the selection process, each person in the dialogue writes on a piece of paper / in a spreadsheet their proposed distribution. In a round, each person explains their reasoning according to the criteria. After everyone has been heard, there is a change round - where volunteers can change their selection.

**Money Pile**

In turns, each person can "move" money from the shared pot, to any of the requests on the table. We keep going in rounds until all the money is distributed, then members can choose in their turn to move money from one request to another. Any move is accompanied by the reason for the move. Nothing is final! We keep the rounds until no one wants to make any more moves, or that the time for the process has ended.

**Synthesise**
Pass the information to the small group of tuners. They are tasked with synthesising a final proposal. If the dialogue already produced an outcome people can go with, no change is needed.

**Consent by decision makers**
If the tuners are also the decision makers, you have a decision! If not, bring the proposal to the decision makers (e.g. The entire group) and invite objections (see: integrating objections). You can set a time limit to get consent, let the tuners decide or use a "willingness based vote" to choose between options. Another possibility is the Happy Money Story process.

## 7.2 Common-resource policy (e.g databases, social media accounts)

The CG or a WG might be responsible for a common resource, like a shared communication channel, where other WGs or members of the network might need to access it. The policy below will make it clear how others can request, access and engage with common resources if / when they come online. For now there are simply holding examples below.

- **Purpose** Start by stating the purpose of the common resource, e.g.
    - This newsletter is intended to keep a variety of members updated, connected and more engaged.
    - The money we have is intended to support this project to fulfil its purpose, in alignment with our principles & values.

- **Process -** explain the process the group / person needs to go through in order to engage with the resource. Be clear about who gives input, who decides, and by which criteria & constraints. Add the reasons and the needs you are attempting to serve by having this process the way it is.
    - e.g. In order to publish in the newsletter, contact [...]. It needs to fulfill all of these criteria [....]. Based on that, the newsletter team decides what gets in the newsletter.
    - e.g. To produce your financial request, consult the project coordinator and 2 other circle members, and follow these criteria [...]. If requesting money is hard for you, turn to [...] for assistance. Once a month we will have a space for financial requests and make the decision by the consent of the circle.

- **Feedback requests** - invite feedback, explain the extent of your ability to engage with it.
    - e.g. If you find yourself grateful for the newsletter and our work, let us know [here]. This is extremely demanding work and we find your encouragement nourishing.
    - If you find yourself upset about an engagement with us, or about something you wanted to get on the newsletter that didn't go through, you can let us know about the impact it had on you [here]. We read them but unfortunately we don't have capacity to respond. We hope you can trust that we are doing our best to serve the movement given our capacity, and that nothing is personal.
    - That being said, we welcome general feedback on this process, and will engage with it to the best of our ability, so the process can improve. In your feedback, please add any suggestions you have, that are still attending to the different reasons this process is currently the way it is.

# APPENDICES

## More on decision making

### More on Mapping roles / policies

Creating and delegating different roles is done so that as much work as possible can be done autonomously by entrusted and accountable WG members. Difficulties can arise when we try to effectively divide the work into roles and sometimes people neglect listening to others and take into account their needs when making decisions. If we find the same sorts of decisions or issues coming up and taking up the time of the CG or a WG, we will consider making a specific role or a policy. People in specific roles are then entrusted to make certain types of recurring decisions. Those types of decisions can be mapped using a simple table (example below). This mapping helps a WG increase clarity and autonomy in their decision making, it also shows gaps that need a role or a policy, and identifies blurry areas that need more clarity. (All underlined sections would link to bookmarks in the same document, containing the relevant policy or role description.)

| **Type of decisions** | **Who decides** | **Whose input** | **According to what criteria / policy + term date** | **Who gets notified** |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Adding new members | Anyone autonomously | By decider's judgement | Membership policy<br>*term date: ….* | WG members |
| Responding to messages | Messages response team | By decider's judgement | Messaging channel user policy & criteria<br>*term date: ….* | Available in this doc for everyone to see. |

When a WG is responsible for a common resource, like money or a shared communication channel, formulating a policy is useful so that there are clear guidelines on how the resource is to be accessed and used. Navigate to this document's common resource policy here: "common resource policy"

#### Capturing the noncontroversial essence of a proposal - convergent facilitation

When a consideration is controversial, you can try to capture the essence of it, on a deeper level that is no longer controversial. In order to get there, ask yourself, what am I / is this person trying to achieve with this? For example:

- How can we punish any wrongdoers? -> How can we make harmful behaviour less likely?
- How can we get money for leaders? -> How can we get the needed resources to lead our projects successfully?
- How can I get more money? -> How can we support our circle members with what they need in order to do their work? (making the consideration applying to all and not personal).

#### Advice process agreement

An advice process is a *governance agreement* that says anyone in the organisation can make a decision if the process below is followed. The process works well when people have close enough engagement with each other that they take their responsibility seriously, they care about the feedback of those around them, and they remember they would equally like to be heard and respected when taken advice from. The advice process is especially useful for making any

decisions not yet delegated to a role/sub-group, or for any decisions not governed by a policy and still it can be of use at any time- collective wisdom! Consider implementing the advice process within the group(s) you are part of, as the default for all of the decisions made within the group.

The advice process is as follows:

a. Someone notices a problem or opportunity and takes the initiative to take action. This person is the 'decision-maker.' They may also alert someone better placed to decide on a course of action..
b. Prior to a proposal, the decision-maker may seek input from others to sound out perspectives on what to do before proposing an action to take. The decision-maker does this by explaining that they are initiating an advice process.
c. The decision-maker initiates a proposal and seeks advice from:
    - Those meaningfully affected by the decision
    - Those with the relevant knowledge, experience or expertise. Consider different forms of expertise - some come from life experience, some from professional experience. Notice if you tend to favour one type over another - both have value. Also note that humans have cognitive weaknesses of favouring advice that suits their own position and thinking they "know" something when they may only have part of a picture.
    - Those who have needed resources for implementation, or could interfere with the effectiveness of implementation.
d. Taking this advice into account, the decision-maker decides on an action and informs those who have given advice. If you ask for advice and choose not to take it- think clearly about why not and share your thinking. This may help maintain trust when there is disagreement.

## Consent based (sociocracy) decision making, integrating objections and concerns

We are generally intending to work with enough shared purpose, relationship and shared understanding, and with practices to "ground" ourselves and let collective and wider (life) wisdom flow that consensus (everyone agrees) decision making is more likely to be the norm. At times though, consensus decision making can hold things back from being tried. 'Consent-based decision making' (from a school of practice known as sociocracy) means that participants are led through a process where a proposal is either rejected or deemed "safe enough to try" even if some people aren't sure the proposal is for the best. The consensus-driven "Is everyone ok with this?" is replaced with "Is there anyone who can't live with this? (and) What would you improve?" Proposals are accepted unless someone can articulate an objective reason why the proposal might cause harm. There is a radical focus on collective purpose and action, on the task at hand, rather than individual preferences. The process is outlined here and becomes easier as it is put into practice[6]. For consent decision making to work well, and be different than consensus, we need two things:

### A. A collective understanding of when we want to object.

[6] One of us has witnessed the weaponising of sociocracy to force people into accepting decisions in other spaces, by meeting to think about potential objections and tactics to find ways around them in advance, which smacks of power-over moves. We aim to keep alert to this and is one of the reasons for asking key decision makers to be in support and connection with the shared seeding transformation principles.

When the group doesn't have an understanding of when to object, they might lengthen the process over preferences or things that are not substantial to the shared purpose

It is recommended to repeat the meaning of an objection to an untrained group. e.g: "Does anyone see or sense a way in which this proposal will cause harm to our shared purpose?" "Even if this is not perfect and not your preference, does anyone see or sense a reason that this is not *good enough for now, and safe enough to try?"*

Furthermore, if group members are not skilled in calibrating within themselves what counts as an objection and what doesn't, it's helpful to add another "state" in the consent round, called a "concern". This way people are less torn between not speaking and objecting.

- Consent (can be indicated with a thumb up) = even if this is not my preference, it is not causing harm to our shared purpose. It's good enough for now and safe enough to try.
- Concern (can be indicated with a wobbly hand) = this is still consent, but I have a concern and I want to name it so it can be in our consciousness, and have it attended to depending on time and resources.
- Objection (can be indicated with a palm spread open, as presenting a gift) = I see a reason this can cause harm to our shared purpose, and it's not good enough for now or safe enough to try. I need us to integrate this wisdom to prevent the harm.

Before the process you make sure people understand that the concern option is still consent. Meaning, if we have no objections - we first celebrate making the decision! If time allows, by the facilitator's judgement, we can listen to the concerns and attend to them by support, small tweaks, or naming them as considerations while implementing and evaluation criteria. If they only want their concerns named but not addressed in the group time, naming them in the "quick reaction" round is enough.

### B. Being skilled at integrating objections

When the group hasn't yet developed the skills needed to integrate objections, they can be viewed similarly to blocks or vetos, and then people react to them with aversion. When that happens, pressure is exerted on objectors to align themselves, which tends to make them more tight and protective, thus making the entire process longer and more painful.

The best way to feel comfortable and relaxed about objections is to learn and practice how to integrate them well. After successful practice, people understand how objections are not a block, and how walking towards them adds value while being quicker than any other way. When decision making processes convey to participants that they matter and their needs are included and considered, it builds trust. When they don't, they decrease trust or limit its ability to grow.

Here are the steps for facilitators:

1. Relax. You are responsible for the process, not for the solution. It's not on you. Trust that the group will get there if pressure is not applied.
2. "Qualify" the objection:
    - This means to get to clarity *with the objector.* Thank them for speaking up.
    - Walk towards the objector with curiosity about what matters to them (what is the need or the "non controversial essence" of what they are bringing) and how it relates to the WGs purpose. Try to understand not their preference, but the thing

that they can't live with, the potential harm, and what is the crucial need that is not being met there.
    - You can check with the group: *"can you wave hands if you relate to this argument?"*.
    - If others don't see the reasoning as an objection, and neither do you, suggest that this might better fit as a concern.
3. If it holds as an objection:
    - Sometimes being heard and providing clarity about the proposal resolves the objection. Otherwise, invite amendment ideas from the objector, without it being their responsibility to come up with something (they are just more likely to know what will attend to their objection/concern).
    - If they don't know, take ideas from:
        - Those who made the proposal
        - Yourself as facilitator
        - Popcorn or round from the circle, e.g
          *"Any ideas of how to attend to this need … within our proposal?"*
4. Refrain from any discussions, convincing or applying pressure on the objector. That tends to result in more tightness. When the objector doesn't need to protect what matters to them, they relax and are much more open to different possibilities.
5. Amend proposal by:
    - Changing it's content
    - Shortening the term: e.g *"Is it safe enough to try for 2 months?"*
    - Making a measurement term: e.g *"Can we get a red flag email if at any point the visitor count at the website plummets below 80% of average?"*
6. Check for consent again. If there's no more time, delegate to two people, (for example: to the objector and the person bringing the proposal) to come back with an amended proposal for the next meeting that can work for everyone.
7. Remember: It is ok to drop a proposal, if we can establish a collective understanding that it is too costly for the group, or that the time isn't ripe yet.

## Selecting people for roles

Below is a process to help gather information in order to have a proposal that is good enough. (It is advisable to avoid the concept of "voting" as it leads people to get stuck in adversarial majority reasoning).

- **Consent to role description and considerations:**

Come up with a very clear role description, and a list of desired considerations and criteria for the role holder. They can usually be prepared in advance, but if needed can also be harvested through a round in a meeting.

- **Nomination round, and then a change round:**

CG/WG members write down nominations *without* needing to limit themselves to any pool of people who said they want to do it (otherwise, the process tends to filter out anyone who is introverted, or anyone that doesn't believe in themselves even though others do, or anyone not wanting to "compete" against others for a role). We don't want all of those people to be filtered out. This can be incredibly touching and fueling community building practice - because it's basically rounds of appreciations !

- **Make a proposal**

It doesn't have to be what the majority have selected, even though this is a good bet. Let the reasons you've heard be paramount. It's about trust, and just putting a good enough proposal out there.  The facilitator can make a proposal, or they might delegate it to another person, or two people that were given a few minutes to discuss only between themselves.

- **Invite objections in a consent round**

The person nominated is checked last for consent. This way they have a chance to see how much others believe in them before they decide. Even if they are unwilling, it's good to know the group wants you. This is not a waste of time for the group either, because now everyone has more information and a new proposal can be quickly presented. Because we are in a volunteer setting, it's advised to check with the person about their capacity and if they need any support.

Any objection, as usual, is not a block - it's information to work with: it might lead to sharing a role, or trying it for a shorter period of time with scheduled feedback, it might lead to an added accountability or constraining policy, and it might be about offering a certain type of support or training to the person filling the role. For example, we might ask How can we support you? Do you need to hear something from us? Can we take something off of you? Can we set you up with a coach or a training? Can we try it out for a month, and if you don't like it, we will switch to this person? Be creative :)

### Choosing between options

If at any point we need to choose between discrete options, we can:

A. **Use the above selection process.** Define the purpose of the selection and the considerations, then let everyone nominate an option and give the reasons for it, like you would do with people filling a role. Go ahead with the process as is. This is good for situations where a bit of deliberation and reason sharing is needed.

B. **Do a willingness-based-vote.** Instead of using a majority vote, where everyone raises their hands only for their most preferred option, do a vote based on willingness where everyone raises their hand for each option that is good enough for now. Or, of course, you can also ask people to raise their hands for each option that they see as not good enough for now and safe enough to try. This way you quickly focus on the option with the least resistance and the most willingness. Then, you can improve the decision by integrating the resistance. If this is not a governance decision that requires consent, then you can integrate resistance only to the point that time and resources allow.

## Separating from a member in the CG / WG / SG

Asking someone to leave a space is best framed not as a personal thing, but as **acknowledging the limits of capacity in the group** to find the ways to work with the person, and still fulfil the shared purpose and preserve wellbeing.

Before going for separation, try these practices:

- **Giving feedback:** If there are issues with a member, give them feedback. If feedback is not enough, consider:
- **Changing group agreements.**
- **Initiating a mutual understanding process.**

If conflict engagement isn't sufficient, and remaining together in the same circle is harmful to other people or the work, consider:

- **Requesting the person to leave:** Acknowledge the capacity limits in you, in the group and in the movement. Maybe with more capacity you would have found ways to collaborate while preserving well being and effectiveness, but unfortunately you don't have it. Remember that you are asking for the person's help in understanding and cooperating with you, even when it might be very painful for them.
- **Separation process:** as described below.

**Preparation for a separation process:**

- Ask for support before initiating the process. Take advice from people you are willing to engage with about this proposal to ask someone to leave.
- Make sure the process is initiated and facilitated with care for the person who is asked to leave. Refrain from any "wrongness" framing.
- Update the circle about what was tried: feedback, decision making, conflict processes.
- Explain the impact you see it has on you, on others and on the CG/WG. Explain that you see the cost as too high, and this is why you want to assess the cost as a group.

**A facilitated process:**

- a facilitator goes over possibilities:
    - The WG and the person asked to leave will separate
    - Find ways for the affected people to work apart, but in the same circle.
    - Try another conflict process with better support (if the person is willing).
    - (Other possibilities can be added by the group).
- WG/SG members are asked to gauge the cost to the group, from each of the possibilities, between 1-10. Consider, along with care for people, your purpose as a WG/SG.
- Sum up the costs for each of the possibilities.
- Go with the option with the least amount of cost.
- Ask, when going with this option, what can minimise the cost that you see?
    - Get support to anyone needing and decide on additional measures that minimise the cost.
    - (If there is more room to explore, this section can happen before the summation of the results. We understand that support that is needed in each possibility, and then we write down the numbers again, then we go with the least costly).
- Announce the decision. Check if anyone needs emotional support stepping out of the meeting and see if it's available from within the group. If not, give them a link to a person or group that is willing to listen- for example a group of elders.

## Saying goodbye to a member

When a WG/SG member is leaving, pay attention to the following things that might be overlooked:

1. **Celebrate their presence**: feedback to them ways in which they contributed to others and the work.
2. **Learn from their feedback:** If they are leaving because of frustrations with the L-CPC, don't miss the opportunity to collect the feedback from them about what was too difficult for them and what they needed that was not met. It is a loss if someone leaves because of hardship without the system learning from it.

3. **Support smooth handover:** of roles, knowledge and responsibilities the person carried. e.g. You might find months later you need editing access to documents only that person had access to, and the person is no longer reachable.

# More on Feedback

## Short Feedback Loops

Interpersonal tensions naturally arise in any group and can be a result of misunderstandings, a lack of awareness, preferences and issues related to “co liberation” (power and privilege related). Burnout can also result from a constant focus on the next action point, without time to pause and celebrate. Short feedback loops refers to the practice of giving and receiving feedback regularly, based on the idea that it is best to not let things fester. Short feedback loops include giving positive feedback. When we embrace the practice of sharing our gratitude, the person that gives the appreciation often benefits as well as the person who receives it. We get more skillful in sharing and receiving feedback that includes tensions the more we  practice it (more on this below).

## Creating Feedback processes with a commitment to ‘co liberation’

‘Co liberation’ is a term which helps us recognize a collective journey towards liberation, which fundamentally means working together to resist the harms of the current system and build the new. On this journey, we also work to understand how we individually and collectively contribute towards systemic injustices, bringing us to re-evaluate our beliefs and biases, so that we can actively work on making changes within ourselves while working in partnership with one another.

In committing to co liberation, we create regular spaces for processes of dialogue, reflection, accountability and action. This allows us to explore our differences and similarities so that we can create deeper connections with one another that are based on mutual respect and empathy.

Within any group, there will always be group members who have more power and influence in the group (the mainstream), and group members who are on the margins. Gender, ethnicity, sexual orientation, gender identity, class background, religion, ability/disability, language/ education level and psychological/cultural factors all influence who will tend to be in the mainstream or the margins. A group will only stay strong and cohesive if the mainstream continuously negotiates its relationship to its margins; otherwise those on the margins start to leave the group. It's important that we actively make it accessible for those with less power and privilege in the group to give feedback, for example by inviting rounds of reflection, rather than just leaving it to the most confident voices to speak.

In a co liberation space, we hear about the experiences of those who find they face marginalisation and/or implicit bias within the group or organisation. This might be feedback about behaviours, conditions, and ways of being, that make it hard for someone to feel like they belong, or that give signals that people should be a certain way. The ways that people may be deserving of a different amount of care, due to certain traits or identity (race, gender, religion, disability, etc), can also be highlighted here.

The purpose of feedback that attends to co liberation is to grow our capacity to care for everyone and be aware of all needs, actively implementing practices to make the group more accessible.

This in turn strengthens the group and the impact of its work. A tension that is brought up might bring to light a common experience of struggle of the entire team.

We also want to create a culture that cares for those who have taken on the responsibility of leadership in a certain area, as those in leading roles can be susceptible to projections and attacks. Although someone may be in a leadership role (and therefore have been given more power via a group mandate), they may end up feeling unable to give their own feedback and become sensitized and shut down as a result of feeling or being attacked, rather than given useful, supportive critique of their work.

## Approach to giving feedback with care

How can we give and receive feedback in a way that is most beneficial to the group and the impact it has?

- Consider if your feedback is in line with the group's guiding principles and purpose.
- If you have a lot of strong emotion about an issue, or if there is an issue that has been unresolved for some time, consider if it may be better to follow a process for addressing tension and conflict (see below).
- Consider if it's best to give the feedback to someone one-on-one or in a group.
- Attempt to use language that balances being clear and direct with being tactful and respectful, honouring the time and effort of those who have put in the work (nonviolent communication can be a helpful tool). Give encouragement by recognising the value of someone's contribution, even if you want to critique things about it.
- Make your feedback concise and specific - observations, identifying feelings and unmet needs, identifying the impacts of actions and inactions. This is a super helpful guide.

## Approach to receiving feedback

- It's normal to feel nervous or even defensive if you're not used to regular feedback practices, or if your experience has been of negative criticism rather than constructive criticism. This gets easier with practice. Bear in mind that critique is not intended to be a personal attack - it is to enable us to strengthen and grow individually and as a group so that our work is more impactful.
- Offer your own thoughts and feelings about what you've heard, and ask for any clarifications or follow up questions that you need to help you to understand and appreciate what is being said. If you feel ready to, then offer your thoughts on what you will do in response, and whether you need any help or support. It is fine to ask for some reflection time and arrange a follow up conversation to conclude.

## Periodic feedback and learning meetings

Having a lot to do in a short time frame means that automatic tendencies of a group will likely take precedence. A periodic space for overall reflection on how we really want to work and be together is therefore crucial, as it allows us to purposefully dedicate time to feedback, navigation and governance. By having a space to voice feedback about what works and doesn't work for us, we learn to establish a group atmosphere and agreements that truly serve us and our shared purpose. It provides a place to process tensions, thus preventing full blown conflicts. A space to pause,

reflect and deal with the relational aspect of our work frees the regular meetings to be more purposeful and increases the resilience of the team. Meeting in person enhances the benefits.

A periodic feedback & learning meeting may include:

- Celebrations and gratitudes
- Reflecting on what serves us and what doesn't in how we work together and do things.
- A review of the group's stated purpose, where we ask, 'Are we working in line with our purpose?' and 'Is our stated purpose still relevant to the context we're living in?'
- A review of accountability: Who is responsible for what? Are they able to take responsibility for what they said they would? Do people need to change roles? Think about the level of capacity group members currently have, to hold a shared picture and support those who are overworking themselves.
- Interpersonal tensions that require support to be dealt with regeneratively outside of the meeting.
- Experiences of marginalisation or unconscious practices that reproduce oppression.

We propose the Convening Group holds a periodic feedback & learning meeting a minimum of 4 times per year, aiming for 2 on zoom and 2 in person meet ups. In the start up phase of the project, it is likely that it will be useful to meet more often than this.

**Sustainability and capacity check-in**
During a Periodic Feedback & Learning meeting, explicitly invite people to consider the question: "Am I working sustainably right now? Can I keep going like this for the long run?"
This can also be indicated with a simple 1-5 fingers. Indications of unsustainability can raise these responses:

- A lot of resonance, making everyone feel less alone
- Understanding there is a systemic issue here that can be addressed together
- Supporting each other by taking tasks from each other, sharing tasks, rotating tasks, supporting prioritisation, supporting choice to let go of tasks by listening and reassuring that this is what would benefit the work.

It might be useful to have in a feedback meeting template a list of signs of overworking, and a list of remedies for it.

# More on tension shifting and conflict processes

## Addressing tensions through feedback

Try to address tensions as soon as possible after they come up, so that they don't fester into conflict (this is sometimes known as 'short feedback loops,' and it is a less formal process- see the section on feedback). If you sense a tension within yourself or within the group about the impacts of people's behaviour, consider the best process for addressing the tension. If you're holding tension around another person's behaviour, it may be best to address it one-on-one. You may also wish to ask another group member to be present to witness or mediate. Or if the tension is related to the workings of the group as a whole, you may feel the need to bring it to the whole group.

## Restorative or transformative practices

This section offers some foundational practices for addressing conflicts that have emerged. To

discern whether to engage with practices at this level of conflict, those involved need to have some desire and will to try to find a resolution. The suggested practices in this section are:

- Mutual Understanding Conversations
- Attending to conflict through a making a change to the group's agreements
- Self-responsibility processes
- Transforming the image of someone you're in conflict with as being 'the enemy'

(More in-depth recommendations for having an effective process, plus a detailed conversation script can be found via **this guide.**)

## Mutual Understanding Conversations

A Mutual Understanding Conversation gives the potential for those involved in the conflict to come to an understanding of one another. At this point, those involved can start to form agreements together on next steps - what they will do and how they will behave going forwards to try and ensure that the same conflict situation doesn't reoccur.

Process to build up to a 'Mutual Understanding Conversation.
If going to someone informally to resolve a tension hasn't worked, or a conflict situation has already emerged that requires more engagement, organizing a Mutual Understanding Conversation is the next step. The process can be used both for situations where people don't know each other very well and there isn't a lot of shared trust, as well as situations in which those involved in the conflict generally have a lot of trust for one another and want to sort out a disagreement.

In the run up to a Mutual Understanding Conversation, the following steps are useful to ensure that it works well:

a. **Rather than diving into addressing the conflict head on, look for support**
   Before those involved in the conflict come together, it is advisable to go to others for supportive listening. Doing this also gives an opportunity to identify areas of self-responsibility in how the conflict has emerged, and to work on 'transforming the image of someone you're in a conflict with as being the enemy'

   If you witness someone in conflict and tension with another, go to them and offer supportive listening as a first step.

b. **Invite the person/people to a Mutual Understanding Conversation:**

   If you want to address a conflict with someone: Explain briefly to them the area where you see disagreements or possible misunderstandings, and request that you make a time and place to have a Mutual Understanding Conversation.

   If you are witnessing the conflict: Suggest to those involved that they initiate a Mutual Understanding Conversation or offer to initiate one yourself. Unless serious harm has been caused, gently remind those involved how we tend to pay ten times over, even for years to come, over avoided conflicts that escalate.

c. **Ask for others to give support while the Mutual Understanding Conversation takes**

**place**
Do this if you've already tried to resolve a tension informally and it didn't work well, or if it's clear that for those involved in the conflict to meet by themselves it may lead to more problems.

a. Ask someone to be present in silence and facilitate only when they see it needed. This should be a person that everyone involved in the conflict trusts to a reasonable degree. This person is not there to judge who is right - it's about caring for all participants and helping them understand each other like they would like to be understood. A supporter can be 'multipartial,' meaning that they are rooting for everyone involved, rather than trying to be impartial. A supporter can prepare beforehand by contemplating, discussing or journaling on the following question: *"What ideas do I have, about me, others or the process, that might prevent me from seeing everyone's humanity?".* The supporter can then work on how they may best support everyone involved.
b. If one person isn't enough to support the process, get two. If relevant, you can ask the supporter to be aware of and help attend to power differences.
c. If all fails, or you need much more support, seek out a transformative conflict facilitator by writing to Navigate, OpenEdge, or similar (L-CPC may have our own conflict team over time)..

Tools to make the Mutual Understanding Conversation as effective as possible

- **Tool 1: Consider using writing to get clear to begin with**
  Either before the Mutual Understanding Conversation, or at the very beginning of it, each side of the conversation can get clear on what matters to them through some key questions, like:

  "What is the thing, that if the other person knew and understood, would relax you?"

  "What is important to you in this? What are your needs? What are you trying to serve?"

  "What do you fear? what is at risk for you?"

- **Tool 2: Agree on a way to pause**
  At the beginning of the conversation, establish a sign (e.g. raising your palm) that would signal taking a pause to breathe and ground in the body. It can be used when pain or a trigger is too sharp to continue in togetherness. Take the time to relax and realign to the purpose of the conversation, which is to find mutual understanding of each other.

- **Tool 3: Commit to taking turns speaking & listening**
  In a conflict, those involved can end up talking over on another to try and get their point across or win out over the other. For a Mutual Understanding Conversation to work, a commitment must be made by those involved: When person A speaks, the *only role* person B has in that time is to try as much as they can to understand person A and how they experience the world, even if they disagree. Then person B has a chance to express themselves, with person A requested to try the best they can to understand them. If one party is being much more vocal and the other is quiet and shut down, it's important for supporters to give encouragement to speak up, and to maintain boundaries to ensure that someone being especially vocal steps back and gives space to hear the other.

- **Tool 3: Use "understanding loops"**
  When we are in conflict, it becomes less likely that the message we understand from the

other is the message they intended to convey (they might choose words they don't mean, and we might interpret them in a very different way). We avoid that by making sure that everyone is understood *as they would like to be understood*:

- Person A speaks
- Person B checks if they've understood by reflecting back what they've heard: "What I understand is … Is that it?"
  There's no need to reflect everything back; a summary of what's at the core of the issue for the other person is what's important.
- Person A confirms if they feel heard, or corrects if something has been missed out, or is not understood as they intended. If there's a correction, person B again reflects back what person A has said to check if they've now understood correctly.
- When Person A says 'yes' to feeling understood, the roles are switched round. This process can go on several times. When it becomes clear that a good level of mutual understanding and connection has emerged, the following question becomes the next step in the process: "*What might be a way forward that would work for all / consider what is important to all*?"

## Attending to conflict by making a change to the group's agreements

Sometimes a conflict emerges due to different interpretations of the agreements that a group has made about how it plans to operate. This includes what the group plans to achieve and why (purpose and mission), how it will get there (strategy), how everyone agrees to work together (group processes), the roles that are responsible for particular tasks, etc.

The source of the conflict might stem from a lack of clarity about what the agreements actually are, specific processes may be missing or there may not have been a strong enough consent-based process in the first place. There may also be tension between newcomers to the group and those who founded the group, or between people from different backgrounds or political perspectives.

Some ways of tackling such a conflict are as follows:

- Look back over meeting minutes and any written up agreements, such as policies or a decision-mapping table. This may highlight where the source of the disagreement has emerged from.

- Prevent the conflict from escalating by using a consent-based decision making process to make changes to policies or the way that roles are defined. For example, a policy could be amended to change the remit of a particular role, so as  to guide and limit the level of authority someone is given when they take the role on.

- It may not be possible to fully resolve such a conflict, in which case, it's possible to work on managing the conflict rather than reaching resolution. It might be that some people need to work more apart, or work towards different directions in parallel. If we agree to that in coordination and collaboration, it can make a world of difference. Consider what can be clarified between those involved so working more apart can happen in collaboration, without harm to the group and its overall purpose. This will avoid creating further issues that tend to be caused by "working around each other",  "ignoring each other", or "pulling to opposite directions."

## Self-responsibility processes

Sometimes a conflict will keep going until someone is willing to make the first step towards the other, to open up and be vulnerable, to own up to what is their part in it. This is known as 'self-responsibility,' and it is a way to resolve conflicts and hostility.

Here's a possible way to move towards that direction:

a. Release any expectations that this process will make anything better. See if you can do it for yourself, your integrity, the care you have for the movement, and as a response to the call of our times to be "bigger" than we are.
b. If needed, get someone to support you through this process. It can be hard to do without empathy and support for yourself.
c. Write down anything you've done that contributed to the escalation or sense of separation in this conflict.
d. Write down anything you've done that had or might have had a challenging impact on the other.
e. Write down any honest sadness, mourning or regret you can find in yourself over any of your actions, the impacts they had, and the overall impact on the relationship and the work.
f. Write down any expressions of how you wished it could have been, and what kind of relationship you hope or could have hoped for instead.
g. Ask another person if you can share what you've written with them - ask them for feedback on what you have written. It might be helpful to use nonviolent communication approaches.
h. Acknowledge that you might be missing a lot of things and may not have realised what it is that has impacted them the most. If you have the openness, ask them what else you are missing. You can also ask how that was for them to hear.

## Transforming the image of someone you're in conflict with as being 'the enemy'

It's common to start seeing 'the other' in a conflict as some version of an enemy. By transforming this image into something different, it's possible to respond to conflict in an empowered way; one in which perceiving 'the other' no longer brings up strong reactive emotions.

Here are some suggestions for transforming an 'enemy image':

a. **Write your judgments** of the person with all of their bluntness.
   Noticing our judgemental side can bring feelings of shame. It is helpful to remember that these are just *some of your thoughts*, it isn't all of what you think or who you are.

b. **Explore your needs**
   The judgments you've expressed can give you clues about what it is you need.

   Look at each judgement and instead write it as a thing that you are needing. Ask yourself: Can I throw my judgements to the bin and **no information about my needs would be lost?** If not, keep looking for the needs underneath the judgments until you reach a sense of peace with what is written. For example a judgment might be "they always have to have things their way" and the underlying need might be "I need to know my thoughts and ideas will be listened to and taken into consideration before we act".

c. **Explore what needs the other is trying to serve by their actions**

Your goal is to reach something that you can connect to emotionally, so in some way it opens your heart. If it's hard for you to do, it might mean the judgments are still in the way. Use any resistance in you as a compass. For example, you might think the other person might be needing more ease, but then immediately you think "- but they always must have things their way." This is a clue of your needs that you have yet to extract or that you have yet to explore in their fullest. Go back to the previous stage to explore them. When you are ready, come back to exploring the other's needs. Continue until you experience some relief from empathic connection.

d. **Go back and read the judgements**
Are they still alive as before? Go over this process as much as you can and need.

# Well being and Support

## Coming back to being centred and grounded after a shock or knock

It's never going to be possible to remain calm and composed in every heightened or extreme situation that occurs. Often, if just one or two people manage to maintain their groundedness, this can be enough for the whole group to ground themselves. But in a situation where general panic has occurred or emotions have run high, the most important thing is to find grounding again as quickly as possible. Helping the group to regain a sense of safety and connection will help to regulate nervous systems. Grounding and centering exercises, shaking our bodies, crying together, hugging, creating sharing circles, singing together - all of these are ways of processing what has happened so that the experience does not become lodged in the body as trauma on an individual and collective level. The more a group can practise re-regulating the nervous systems of its members, the more resilient and adaptable the group will become, and able to better respond to shocks and knocks the next time round.

**Resources for grounding and centering**

There are many online resources that can be found by searching for 'grounding and centering exercises.' These won't address the root causes of anxiety or trauma, but instead they offer a way to prevent dissociation or becoming overwhelmed by anxiety or panic. Here is one useful link.

## Avoiding burnout

'Burnout' is a state of physical, emotional and mental exhaustion which can occur when someone continuously deals with more than they can carry and experiences a sense of constant pressure without let-up.

There are three main things to nurture in a team to avoid burnout:

- **Creating a culture of support**
The right support can increase a person's capacity to carry their load. Building a culture of support means asking for the support we need, practising receiving support, and noticing when others are struggling/checking in with them to see what they need.

- **Maintaining a culture of choice**

If we feel a sense of choice about the work we do rather than a sense of pressure, it's more likely that we'll be able to work in a sustainable way and experience ourselves as being on top of things, rather than being helplessly crushed under the weight of everything. It helps for the group to set an intention to strive to build a culture of choice, in which we do things out of true willingness, so we do not crash or accumulate grudges. We can practice being aware of our own and other's tendency to do things out of guilt, shame, fear or obligation - all of which come with a decreased sense of choice. We can practice being honest and compassionate about our capacity, taking on what we can reliably do, saying 'no', and supportively doubting a 'yes' when we see someone is overworked. If we realise that we have taken on too much, we can be open about this so that the issue can be resolved by the group, rather than dropping our responsibilities when things get too much, leading to a breakdown of work flow.

- **Maintaining good shared boundaries about work that needs to be prioritised and work that can be deprioritised**

  It's natural for groups to create visions of what they want to achieve that are not necessarily possible for people's capacities. Some people will have greater aspirations than others, which can create both pressure and resentment. It's great to start a project with 'blue sky thinking' and 'wild visioning,' but over time, the group needs to get clear on what looks to be achievable, and create a strategy that is in line with people's capacities. It can be helpful to have a two tier vision of what is essential work that needs doing for the project to happen, and what is desirable if the group should find itself with the time, energy and resources to do so.

**Create ways to remind people what support is available**
In your group, consider how you can highlight the resources available for support. Sometimes people might not know what support is available, and when under pressure it's also easy to forget that the group has put support structures in place. Consider making it a role for someone to make sure that group members get linked up with support when needed, or add links in places like the group description of an online communication tool.

## Working together in a fulfilling way

Here are basic things that can be implemented within any team for more support and choice:

**Create a 'Supportive listening channel' on your communication platform**
'Supportive listening' is where one person gives space for another to share their thoughts and feelings, which are received with concern and empathy. The listener gives the speaker their full attention, and may ask clarifying questions or reflect back to the speaker what has been understood.

A supportive listening channel exists only for the purpose of making a request for someone to give supportive listening when needed, eg. 'I just had the most stressful meeting. Is someone available to listen to me for 10 minutes?' You can also use the channel if you know that someone is in distress but you don't have the capacity to give support at that time, eg. 'I know that X just had the most stressful meeting. Is anyone available for them today for supportive listening?'

Agree and make sure together that you are inviting support that comes only from availability, capacity and willingness, and that it cannot be guaranteed. So, if you want a response or supportive listening, actively ask for it. and even if you do, there might be no availability to give it. Only if this is established people feel completely comfortable to make requests and receive them.

**Peer-to-peer coaching and support**
Nurturing a 'culture of coaching,' in which group members take turns to coach one another and receive coaching, enables us to better find ways of overcoming our challenges and allows for the growth of good leadership in the roles we have taken on. The role of a coach is to listen and ask questions to enable the person receiving coaching to uncover their own solutions and meet challenges with a greater place of awareness. Coaching helps maximise our creativity and flexibility, which can otherwise diminish in the face of overwhelm and other difficulties. The goal of coaching is to create/amend a plan for moving forward towards a goal.

Coaching can happen either in a one-to-one setting, where one person is the coach and the other the 'coachee,' or in a group setting, where there is a 'coachee' and several peers take on the role of coach.

To put coaching into practice, the group needs to come to a 'peer coaching agreement.' This is a way to make coaching support more systematically available and accessible to initiate. For example, a group may decide that:

- A core part of a coordinator's role is to maintain supportive one-to-one's with each group members once every few weeks
- Anyone can ask for a one-to-one coaching session with a coordinator or with a peer of their choice.
- Group coaching sessions should be held periodically.

**Coaching Resources**

- To learn about the process of one-to-one coaching, read pages 21 - 24 of this respected organizing handbook: "Coaching: Enabling others"

- To learn about the process of group coaching, read this 2 page outline from the Presencing Institute.

**Finding joy and connection**
No matter how challenging the circumstances, human beings have always found ways to be joyful, connected and fulfilled, even if just for short times every day. Mere survival is never enough, and the things that bring joy and connection are what make life worth living. It's easy to forget this when surrounded by mounting pressures and when we commit to taking our work seriously to care for each other and end oppression. However, if life is all work and no play, even if our work is fulfilling, it means that there is no space for releasing tension, reconnecting with each other as humans rather than colleagues, and enjoying the moment. This means that we don't recharge and leads us closer to burnout. It's so important to make time for any shared activity that is outside our usual work remit. This could be any shared activity - eating together, dancing, singing, artwork, chatting round the fire, rituals, games, walks in nature, collective gardening, or anything else that brings joy and connection, including spontaneous fun.

# Resource flow practices

## Money distribution from Lifehouse Stroud perspective

**Current Framework:**

- Rate: £20/hour for paid work. We acknowledge this is modest and may not cover all life costs (leave, sickness, savings). However, it offers resilience against potential economic instability.
- Recovery Time: For emotionally demanding tasks (e.g., conflict mediation, facilitating large events, addressing exclusion), we compensate for recovery time. Example: 1 hour of intense work may be paid as 4 hours.
- Voluntary Labor: In early phases, voluntary contribution is necessary. Those with financial security may choose to contribute voluntarily; we do not assume everyone can afford to work unpaid, nor do we exploit goodwill unsustainably.

**Distribution Decisions - regular meetings assess funding distribution based on:**

- Available funds.
- Required tasks and skills.
- Individual financial needs.
- History of unpaid contribution and long-term commitment.

**Resources:**

- The Happy Money Story: Consensus-based budget distribution ensuring all participants feel satisfied.
- Dark Matter Labs: *Re-Imagining Pay* – Tools for alternative pay structures.
- Co-Budgeting: Collaborative approaches to project funding.