

An illustration of three hikers walking away from the viewer on a path through a dense forest. The hiker on the left wears a red hat and a green backpack. The middle hiker wears a black hat and a brown backpack. The hiker on the right wears a blue hat and a yellow backpack. The forest is filled with tall, thin trees and large ferns in the foreground. The scene is lit with a soft, golden light, suggesting a misty or early morning atmosphere. The text is overlaid on the upper right portion of the image.

# **What Moves Movements?**

**An inquiry into the power of words and  
silence as we navigate uncertainty**

**What Moves Movements? An inquiry into the power of words and silence as we navigate uncertainty**  
2024

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Recrear is a community interested in social transformation from a place of emotional grounding, creativity, co-creation, and care. Working with civil society actors, grassroots organisations and social movements as well as INGOs, funders and academia, we design and organise programmes aimed at bringing people together to learn about their inner, collective and social realities. Together, we draw out learnings to accompany the healing and transformation of organisations, movements and systems.

Lankelly Chase is a charitable foundation striving for a world healed by justice, equity and inclusion. A world where all people can live with dignity and opportunity in supportive communities. Its mission is to challenge injustice and create the conditions for much healthier systems to emerge. It has a particular focus on those systems that result in the mental distress, violence and destitution experienced by people who are subject to marginalisation in the UK.



**Lankelly  
Chase**

# What Moves Movements?

An inquiry into the power of words and  
silence as we navigate uncertainty



# Swimming In Poisoned Water

**We are swimming in poisoned water.**

Some of us are pulling others out, some of us are carrying vital things through, some of us are trying to clean the poison from the water. We are swimming in poisoned water because someone with power, money, influence, saw the water is poisoned, and heard we had ideas, skills and experience to help.

And so the people with power gave us oxygen masks and tanks, so we can dive into the poisoned water, and move through it, safe, relatively safe, safe-ish. Some of us have been given six months of air, others 12, some of us—if the person with power has been incredibly generous—have been given 24 or even 36 months of tanks full of oxygen. This generosity is time-limited.

And we all know, while we swim, that however hard we try to say the work is not urgent—that we need to go slow, that we need to not burn out; while we are clapped for our bravery in the poisoned sea... we are rarely really asked—I mean really asked—(an ask that comes with help), if we are ok, I mean really ok.

A side story emerges of when those with a little oxygen look at those with a lot, and try not to think, but can't help but think 'but they aren't doing much with their air, if I had their air I could do so much more'. Or; 'we could do so much more, more fully, more completely, if they, the ones with the oxygen tanks, passed them all out. Not as gifts but as redistribution, as a duty of care, given as if they believed what they say they believe. There is enough. There was always enough. We can all breathe in if they give it all out.

***My breath is running out. I need to stop writing now, and come up for air.***

***Olly Armstrong -  
Freelance Community  
Organiser and Facilitator***



# Thank you

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Sara Hall from [Tax Justice](#), a campaigning and advocacy organisation committed to ensuring that everyone in the UK benefits from a sustainable, fair and effective tax system.

Liam Barrington-Bush from [RadHR](#), an emerging group that aims to be a wiki space and a platform for radical and progressive social change organisations to share the nuts and bolts—the policies, processes and structures—of how to organise themselves based on their values and challenge oppression within the social movement groups themselves.

Tatiana Garavito from [Tipping Point](#) UK, a small collaborative team that works on

building a grassroots movement with enough people power to win climate justice.

Sebastian Ordoñez from [War on Want](#), an organisation that works in the UK and with partners across the globe to fight poverty and defend human rights, as part of the worldwide movement for justice.

Jessica Kennedy from [Neon](#), an organisation that offers hands-on support and training for campaigners, organisers, communications and operations teams working across social movements.

Olly Amström and Sasha Josette were part of [Breathe](#), a group of activists coming together to build a new relational organising entity that will be focused on climate justice.

Penny Wangari-Jones from [Racial Justice Network](#) which brings together individuals, communities and organisations from across the West Yorkshire region to proactively

promote 'holistic economic, spiritual and cultural repairs to end racial injustice and address legacies of colonialism'.

Baljit Banga from [Imkaan](#), a UK-based, Black feminist organisation. They are the only national umbrella women's organisation dedicated to addressing violence against Black and minority women and girls.

We also want to acknowledge the participation of [Advocacy Academy](#) and [Healing Justice London](#) in the early stages of the inquiry, when we were contextualising the state of movement building in the UK.

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# Introduction

'Swimming In Poisoned Water', the opening piece, was written by one of the movement partners of 'What Moves Movements', a cooperative inquiry that offered a space to look at the relationship between social movements in the UK and their funders. The piece might read as a poetic, abstract reflection. But, if you are willing to see yourself in it, it touches upon key meridians of why philanthropy is in crisis. We invite you to consider:



**What emotions stir in you as you read the opening story? What thoughts surface? What's the poison? And what's the water? And who are you in all of that?**

This is a report about relationships within movement building and philanthropic spaces. It looks at philanthropy not as a word, not as a concept, but as the felt experience of engaging with a donor. This is a report about facing change and navigating uncertainty—it's an

invitation to ask ourselves who we are as we give and receive. It asks us to reflect on our responsibility as we engage in the ecosystem of movement building.

We first give a brief overview of how we learned what we learned. Then in Part 1, we discuss what we learned, outlining the critical reflections of the learning series with movement partners. In Part 2, we dive deeper into what we believe is the main insight of this report: the value of having uncomfortable conversations.

In this report we don't provide solutions. We don't provide answers because we don't have any. Instead, we offer a reminder that what is most unstable is also most prone to change. We hope we can host a conversation that brings different actors closer, and that can make us all feel more seen.

Thank you for being on the other side of this report reading, reflecting with us, and being touched.

The Recrear Team



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# Reflections on the Journey

Initially 'What Moves Movements' was envisioned as a five-month inquiry process to learn from movement partners about how to strengthen relationships, especially with donors in the UK. Over the course of six virtual sessions, we came together to question and share experiences around key themes shaping these relationships.

What no one could suspect at the beginning was that the inquiry would take place at the precise moment that LCF decided to close down.

As we write, LCF has made their decision public and are currently in the process of deciding how to redistribute their resources. They are figuring out how to release power, to stop holding on to funds which reproduce capitalist structures. As such the learnings that emerge from this report belong to a critical moment of navigating tension and uncertainty. Although the LCF transition was the catalyst for some of the conversations that surfaced during the inquiry, the core reflections of this report will resonate across the wider landscape of movement building in the UK.

If we take this inquiry as a microcosm of the UK movement building space, we notice that movement actors and funders alike are stretched thin in terms of their time, capacity, wellbeing, and

responsibilities. What's more, movement organisations are not comfortable leaning into conflict, especially when they fear that relationships and the sustainability of their organisations are at risk.

If we contrast this learning journey to those we have accompanied in other parts of the world (mostly across Latin America, Africa and Asia), we notice that we had to continually adapt the inquiry, not only to the unfolding situation at Lankelly, but also to the evolving circumstances of the movement partners. Our intention was to make the process as unburdensome as possible while remaining true to our commitment to a participatory and meaningful experience for everyone involved.

This is the story of how we learned what we learned. In these times of uncertainty and rapid social change, we need to learn to trust the validity of our experiences. We need to learn to have uncomfortable conversations. With this inquiry, an uncomfortable conversation between LCF and movement partners has begun. Where will it go next?



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# What We Learned



Matt James



In this section, we explore critical reflections that emerged from the 'What Moves Movements' inquiry. We present the main debates that are occurring amongst movement partners, followed by a series of actions that we invite funders and movement organisations to engage in.

## The Responsibility of Power

By holding and directing resources, funders inherently hold power over movement organisations. This might be obvious and widely acknowledged, and yet this power structure has remained intact and it creates **a problem of mutual accountability**. While it is normalised that partners need to report on how they spent their funds (bottom-up accountability), funders are not expected to be transparent with their partners (top-down accountability).<sup>1</sup> The partners interviewed in this inquiry highlighted that mutual accountability can only exist when there is open communication in both directions. Specifically, funders need to be clear about their strategic intentions and share both the decision-making process and the outcomes of all decisions that could impact partners.

Movement partners appreciate funders, like the Lankelly Chase Foundation, that provide core funding to their partners. This type

of flexible granting promotes a spirit of trust because partners feel respected and maintain their agency to spend resources as they deem most appropriate. They can therefore direct their own organisational growth<sup>2</sup>. Yet, movement partners described how they perceive that most funders do not trust movement organisations with money and decision-making<sup>3</sup>.

More precisely, we've understood that open communication is a necessary part of building trust between funders and partners beyond having participatory granting models in place. In fact, the findings of the inquiry were meant to inform LCF and other UK funders on how to better support social movements—so we can say that its very intention was to promote mutual accountability. Yet, as Liam's opening letter articulates, movement partners fear that if they 'say no' to a donor ask (i.e. the invitation to participate in the inquiry), even from funders as progressive as LCF, their funding could be at risk. Plus, when the news of the LCF transition surfaced through rumours, as opposed to a clear and direct communication from LCF to its partners, the original purpose of the inquiry felt to partners increasingly less relevant. In its absence, tensions and mistrust grew. Addressing this lack of trust is an essential part of healing and strengthening movement building work. Without it, the rest of the considerations and actions proposed here will seem meaningless.



## Actions to advise future funder-movement interactions:

**If you are a funder:** Be proactive about reflecting and owning where unequal power dynamics get re-enforced and how you are trying to redress them.

This can be done by having a simple practice in your gatherings with partners such as: At the mid-way point of the meeting, name the ways power is present in this conversation. In particular, you might want to observe:

- Am I allowing the person in front of me to speak with their full self?
- Am I allowing for uncertainty?
- Am I inviting vulnerability?
- Who else is going to be touched by this conversation? What would they say/feel/think?

These types of practices/conversations might not flow easily at first because they represent a significant shift in the way funders and movement partners typically speak to one another. So be patient and explore to discover a way that can work for you. Below, in Part 3, we also provide some guidance for having uncomfortable conversations for you to consider.

## Burning Out Within a System that is Burning Up

This inquiry also made visible the degree to which mental health, burnout, and the experience of juggling family, work, and activism can affect people's ability to participate. During the inquiry, we battled with issues of participation. We were surprised by the degree to which movement partners, as well as LCF staff, were over-extended and over-committed. For example, several partners who joined the inquiry had to drop out because of limited staff capacity. Movement partners specified that this burnout and overextension go far beyond this inquiry. They originate from **the dominant cultures of colonialism, capitalism and patriarchy that value hyper-productivity and the need to respond to the multiple crises** that are ultimately resulting from deep systemic failures<sup>4</sup>. To reference Olly's opening story, we are all swimming in poisoned water.

The multiple identities we hold also shape our ability to engage in movement building and funder-movement environments. The positionality we hold—in other words, how we experience our identities in relation to our societal context—is also reflected and even magnified in these spaces. So for example, blackness, or the lack of it,



in a space can impact how a person holding that identity feels and the degree to which they are able to comfortably move in those rooms. Thinking about our positionality vis-a-vis others in the room means being willing to look more deeply at how power impacts the ability of people to say yes/no, show up or choose not to, and ultimately to engage in the decisions that are made in these spaces. Integrating an intersectional lens into the design of movement/funder spaces is a necessary exercise.

We recognize how challenging it is to name these experiences when there is so much on the line in the day-to-day activism of movement partners. Not all movement partners felt comfortable speaking openly about the grief, anger, and existential fear behind their relationships with each other and with funders. In fact, the final session of our inquiry, when movement partners read their stories to LCF, offered a rare moment when those feelings could be shared and given space in the conversation. As one movement partner commented, it was a relief to finally have an opportunity to name those emotions.

In this context, partners are interested in being involved and consulted, but they have limited availability and capacity for engagement. Hence funders need to be very thoughtful about what for, when and how often they ask movement partners to engage.



## Actions to advise future funder-movement interactions:

**If you are a funder:** Prior to inviting partners into a process, gauge where they are at in terms of capacity to engage, and assure them that their funding relationship will be unaffected by their decision on whether or not to participate. Despite reassurances, power dynamics may still evoke fear among partners regarding potential funding implications. As funders and facilitators, it is essential to create a safe space for meaningful conversations about these issues. Be mindful of dedicating time to these dialogues in order to foster trust and understanding.

- E-mail communication alone may not suffice in addressing concerns. If timelines need adjustment, seek feedback from all partners. Make sure it is feasible!
- Be specific and thoughtful about when and how often you engage movement partners. As one person shared during the final session with LCF, 'give me three to five important decisions I can be involved in'.

**If you are a movement partner:** Take a moment to check-in with yourself (your individual capacity given your current work and life commitments) and then your wider team to see if it makes sense to say yes to a new invitation. Saying no can sometimes be the healthier, more aligned, and more spacious decision.

## Vulnerability has a sacred yet very fragile and deserted place in movement building

Through our one-on-one check-ins, we heard about a history of attempted exercises to address movement building tensions. These have often failed. As a result, movement organisations are now wary of engaging, let alone opening up, in these spaces. Throughout the inquiry we contended with real concerns around confidentiality and fears of information getting out to the wrong people or being shared at the wrong time. Being vulnerable in this environment was not an easy task.

Vulnerability—meaning a willingness to show emotion or to allow others to see you, including in your weakness—will be a vital quality for all partners to inhabit to do the necessary work of rebuilding movement partner-funder relationships.

For Lankelly Chase, speaking vulnerably would have meant talking about the internal chaos caused by the decision to transition, and owning the messiness, the confusion and the implications of that decision on their partners from the beginning. For movement part-

ners the vulnerability was in sharing their stories with LCF, and the implications this might have on their funding and relationships. As a third party, we had to carefully handle different pieces of confidential, and often partial, information while also doing our best to be transparent and trustworthy in our interactions.

We glimpsed these tensions as well as the possibility of a healthier way of communicating. If vulnerability had a safer place in the movement building environment, it could also create space for movement partners to speak about their own internal turmoil and the tensions between them<sup>5</sup>. For this to happen funders would need to understand the importance of this and enable a safe environment where conflicts, tensions and uncertainty are regarded as a natural part of organisational life cycles. Sara from Tax Justice, one of the movement partners, shared a story describing how interpersonal challenges caused fragmentation in their movement, which in turn made it difficult to advance their cause. From her storytelling process we can appreciate how the internal challenges of an organisation can feel risky to discuss, not only in the presence of funders but also in the presence of other movement organisations.

Funders can significantly contribute to a shift in power dynamics by being understanding towards the emergence of conflict, supporting the resolution of tensions, and encouraging learning from

mistakes. Modelling this type of healthy organisational vulnerability could be done by everyone, but is especially powerful when led by the donor given the level of power they hold. Over time we can hopefully drop the unhelpful and unrealistic expectation that movement organisations need to have everything under control internally while achieving significant wins for social justice.

The struggle around vulnerability that we witnessed and experienced in this inquiry was another reminder of **the interconnectedness between transparency, vulnerability and trust**. We cannot repair trust if we cannot also be vulnerable and honest with ourselves and others about what is going on in our organisational worlds. Without vulnerability, there is limited transparency. Without transparency, there is no trust. Without trust, we cannot take part in collective transformative change.

If funders are asking partners to be vulnerable (as they have in this inquiry), they also have to be prepared to be vulnerable themselves.



## Actions to advise future funder-movement interactions:

**If you are a funder:** If you are thinking about asking your movement partners to engage in a reflective exercise around their experiences—pause. Think about how you can also show up as an equal participant to share your own perspectives and experiences. For example, one ask that surfaced during the last session of our inquiry was for LCF to share its own story of how it experienced this initial period of the transition news.

- Model the healthy behaviours that can lead to deeper relationships. This can look like hosting reflective circles where you share about some of the failures you are learning from. You could even host a conversation on the ways you struggle to be vulnerable as a funder and what is behind this. For further ideas, look at Part 3 of this document.

**For both Funders and movements partners:** 'It's important to name that inviting vulnerability is also an invitation to sit with the unknown, in this case collectively. We need to, in our designs, make space for what happens when we invite the unknown' (Sebastian Ordoñez, from War on Want). How might we incorporate and accompany the unknown in an accountability process?



If you are an organisation that will act as an 'intermediary of sorts' like Recrear has:

- Think about advocating for a design that involves the funder more in the reflective practice<sup>6</sup>. Also consider how to design a process that can invite vulnerability and by doing so make space to sit with the unknown.
- Reflect about and name the existing relationships and expectations projected onto you as a bridging organisation.

## The question of responsible transition

As we listened and read the recently released announcement from LCF, we understood that a large part of the fund's decision to redistribute and close is located in their observation that LCF continues to be a part of the dysfunction of philanthropy as opposed to radically disrupting it. This inquiry was not initially set up to discuss the implications of progressive funds closing down, although the unfolding circumstances at LCF brought us to this conversation. By the time we were truly talking about the phenomena of Lankelly's

closure and the precedence it sets in the sector, it was late in the inquiry process. So while we can't possibly cover the merits and limitations of funders deciding to transition towards closure, we can highlight some of the important reflections that stirred among movement partners.

**Transition could be the 'right' thing to do; but 'how' you do it is just as important.** At the end of the day, the transition is not something that is only happening to the fund, it is also affecting movement partners and the wider philanthropic and funding sector. In the LCF case, their slow communication with movement partners around the transition decision caused movement partners to question the purpose behind LCF commissioning this inquiry, and shook their trust in LCF.

As we learned more about the complexity behind LCF's decision to transition, we also saw that it's important to distinguish staff from institutions in the midst of chaos. For example, not all the staff at LCF knew the full details of what was happening. Throughout the inquiry it felt like LCF staff overseeing the project only ever had partial information. The strategy of how to even announce the decision was being planned as we were doing the inquiry. It became clear over time that there was an institutional failure playing out, within which there was little known about who had the power to

provide clarity and help us move through the chaos.

**Closing a progressive fund within the broader ever-changing philanthropic landscape.** Knowing that there are already so few progressive funders, what is the implication of a funder like LCF closing? Movement partners expressed their worry as LCF's departure leaves the philanthropic space to the conservative donors, many funded by billionaires who are upholding and perpetuating toxic dominant cultures. From this reading, at least in the near future, movement partners will be exposed to an increasingly hostile environment with few lifelines around them<sup>7</sup>. This will be particularly concerning for movements that already struggle with being underfunded and rely on flexible and more progressive funders for support<sup>8</sup>.



## Actions to advise future funder-movement interactions:

**Actions if you are a funder:** If this transition and closure is the best move, how can this be done in alignment with your ethos? For example, you might opt for processes that are intentional, slowed-down and participatory so that movement partners can be equipped to sustain themselves and thrive after the fund's departure. As Sebastian Ordoñez, from War on Want shared: 'Transitions never happen in isolation; grantees are not passive observers, they are active subjects who will both shape and be shaped by the transition.'

Involve and consult your movement partners early-on about the fund's thinking. Ask them how they would like to be involved, and to what degree, in this transition process. Communicate with your partners about the decisions that have been made and the gaps that still exist in order to manage expectations. Ask yourself:

- What would it look like to carry out a transition (from start to end) that is in alignment with the values and principles we want to practise with our movement partners?

Make use of formal and informal communities where movement organisations and funders interact to actively engage in the debate

about transition. Ask yourself:

- How can you embody key learnings of these debates in your day to day, and incorporate them into the process of the transition?


Engage in exercises of foresight<sup>9</sup> to more critically assess the impact of a decision to redistribute assets and transition towards closure.

Ask yourself:

- What conversations are you having with other funders about the evolving landscape of philanthropy and what is your role in shaping its future?

In the following section, we provide reflections and tools that you can use to facilitate uncomfortable yet essential conversations within your organisation, as well as with partners and stakeholders.





# 3

## How to Have Uncomfortable Conversations

# What Are Uncomfortable Conversations And Why Bother Having Them?

*"I long for more people to experience the satisfaction of the processes I have been in and held—not perfection, but satisfaction. People getting to name what caused hurt, where the conflict is, what is needed, people receiving an authentic apology, people getting to commit to paths of unlearning harmful belief systems and behaviours."*

adrienne marie brown, We will not cancel us (2020)

**What is the elephant in the room that nobody is speaking of?  
What theme are you avoiding because it feels so uncomfortable?**

This section shares tools to place the spotlight on those conversations that we might normally skip over. By 'uncomfortable conversations' we mean those conversations that seek to pay attention, dive into and attend to what is hurting in our relationships. Having uncomfortable conversations takes courage and conviction because we feel that their outcome is unpredictable. They challenge us to

surrender control over what we might hear and say, or how these exchanges will impact us emotionally. Yet, within these uncomfortable spaces lies the potential for genuine understanding, empathy, and change.

Within the context of the 'What Moves Movements' inquiry, we discovered the pressing need for uncomfortable conversations about the oppressive systems that permeate both relationships between movement partners and funders, and the internal dynamics within our movements. Specifically, we grappled with the role of funders within the uncertainties of LCFs transition in the backdrop.

We present uncomfortable conversations as a practice and as a process, rather than a specific moment. When we name what is uncomfortable within our family, organisation or community, which are just fractals of our society, we are creating change that is big and small at once. Sharing discomfort can be a pivoting point—a juncture where healing, repair, connection, and growth can take place.

# Before You Have The Conversation

*"(...) half of what's about to occur is unknown, both inside you and outside you. John O'Donohue (...) used to say that one of the necessary tasks is this radical letting alone of yourself and the world—letting the world speak in its own voice and letting this deeper sense of yourself speak out."*

David Whyte, on On Being Podcast

You might find yourself in a conflict with a movement organisation, funder, or other actor. The tension is spilling over and affecting the important work you want to do together and ignoring the problem only makes the relationship more strained. Before diving into an uncomfortable conversation to address a situation like this, you'll want to listen deeply, look inward, and reflect on your own. Once you are ready to have the conversation, consider assessing people's readiness and willingness to share their perspectives and to listen to others'.

We compiled a list of questions based on our learnings about having uncomfortable conversations. Here are some that you might want to reflect on in order to determine if the right conditions are in place for this conversation.

- Who is present, and what **forms of power** do they hold?
- Do race, gender, (dis)ability, and/or economic factors impact how individuals are perceived, listened to, and treated during the conversation?
- What pre-existing relationships exist within the group? Are there concurrent side conversations? Who has access to this information?
- What are the consequences of challenging those in power? What risks are associated with not doing so?
- How far can the conversation progress in the given place and moment? Is there a risk of losing momentum if certain issues remain unaddressed? How do we handle discomfort in the moment?
- What is required to make everyone feel safe (enough) to be vulnerable and trust each other in a space marked with power dynamics?



# How To Have Uncomfortable Conversations

## Opening and Setting up the Space for Uncomfortable Conversations

You have decided it is worth having an uncomfortable conversation. Now, at the precipice of your conversation, it's a good moment **to share the intention** of the session with everyone present. Others might also want to share what their intention is going into this space. After each person has spoken, one of the participants can take stock of the key words and share them back for the group.

Then it would be a good idea to **check in** with how each person genuinely feels at the beginning of this conversation, making everyone aware of how they are coming into the room, and particularly observing what thoughts or emotions are present.

A technique that might be helpful to embed while opening the space is **modeling**. This is a facilitation technique used to show rather than tell people what kind of space you intend to host. If you

are the one facilitating or initiating the conversation, you can see this as setting the tone in the space.

- You might also want to set **group agreements** to create a safe and brave container based on collective understanding of needs, expectations and boundaries. These agreements are a way to build consent as an ongoing practice during an uncomfortable conversation. You can arrive with pre-made agreements to discuss and approve (e.g. [Chatham House Rules](#); reading a poem like [Invitation to Brave Space<sup>10</sup>](#) or [other methods to create community norms](#)), or generate agreements organically from the group. This can be done by asking a question like: What do you need in order to feel comfortable, safe and able to fully participate in this conversation?

In the next pages we present three methods that can be used to have uncomfortable conversations. This is by no means an exhaustive list, so if you feel inspired but not entirely committed to any one proposal here, explore some of the resources we share for inspiration.

## Three Methods for Having Uncomfortable Conversations

From the inquiry we were able to gather three methods that we want to present: Talking Circle, Ritual Readings, and hosting a conversation from a Restorative Justice approach.



### Talking Circle

A talking circle is a practice of actively and deeply listening to others, offering an opportunity for everyone and anyone to equally share while sitting in a circle. This practice originates in various Indigenous communities around the world and provides an opportunity for people to witness one another and harmonise their collective understanding. This practice has also been respectfully adopted by non-indigenous communities in order to share, listen and exchange in a grounded and attentive way.

In the 'What Moves Movements' inquiry we hosted a talking circle in the data gathering phase. We saw this as a practice that could hold the vulnerability of the emergent moment we shared. We met virtually and everyone present brought an object that represented our relationships to movement partners and/or to funders. For example, one person brought the toy corn of their child; another one brought a postcard representing everything they've learned as well as the tensions they've felt while being in a movement. The intention of the circle was to set a safe enough space where the important topics, especially the elephants in the room, could surface. And they did, as well as the emotions that accompany those experiences.

This practice prioritises listening deeply and wholeheartedly to others and to oneself. It can be a good way to express the emotions that are present. However, it is not necessarily a strategic decision-making space, so you might want to set up a follow-up conversation to consolidate needs and actions.

### Tips

This practice does not require clear facilitators, and yet it is helpful for someone to open, set ground rules, and close the circle. Some

of the guiding principles that are common include:

- **Speaking from the heart:** This means not planning what you will say but allowing yourself to simply speak when you feel you are ready.
- **Listening from the heart:** Beyond agreeing or disagreeing, there is an invitation here to suspend your assumptions, to notice and allow others' words to reach you.
- **Allowing each person to speak without interruption or feedback:** We are often used to responding to what others share but in this practice we simply allow others to speak uninterrupted. There is also no need to validate their words.
- **Speaking succinctly:** Although there is no fixed time per person, we would encourage each person to speak succinctly. This means saying only what is necessary and being as concise as possible with your words (i.e. saying what is important). We also encourage you to underline this point when you are a large group, since the listening time for the collective inevitably lengthens when there are more people in the circle.
- **Taking a deep breath after each person has spoken:** Taking a collective breath helps mark the moment in between one person finishing and opening the space for someone else to share. Because emotions can be present, this practice helps ground the group and respectfully acknowledge the person who has just spoken.

Here are two resources that share the step-by-step process of setting up a talking circle:

Talking Circles<sup>11</sup>: [More than a Technique](#) by Global Learning Partners

[Council Circle](#) shared by Recipes for Wellbeing

If you are still having a hard time imagining what a Talking Circle could look and feel like, we invite you to read the story written by one of the movement partners, Sebastian Ordoñez from War on Want:

## Through the Cracks, We Fall

*As the fire ancestor 'Inti' crackled and danced, the four elders Reishi, David, Xue and Sayani settled into their talking circle. Their hearts weighed heavily with the struggles their village faced, but they knew that this space could open the door to grief—to find the light needed for collective healing.*

*Reishi, the mushroom elder, who thrived by absorbing and*



*preserving the memories of fallen tree kin, spoke first with a gentle, earthy voice: "We must remember, dear friends, that cracks are where the light enters. Embracing pain and loss is an essential part of love. As we confront the challenges our village faces, we must allow our hearts to break open, not apart."*

*David, a condor elder, singer, and poet, leaned forward. His voice carried the melody and depth of a distant song and responded: "Vulnerability is not a weakness, but the essence of our nature. When we run from vulnerability, we close off our understanding of the grief of other beings."*

*Pausing for a moment, letting the weight of his words settle, he then posed a beautiful question: "What are the stories we need to let go of as we imagine other futures?"*

*Xue, a dancer and river being, moved her hands gracefully, responding with a soothing voice: "We must let go of stories of ownership, domination, and control that prevent us from making sense of the world. I want us to sink into thinking and feeling; embracing the encounter with difference."*

*Sayani, the youngest of the elders, with a firm yet soft voice, asked: "What other languages can we communicate with, and what are other ways of seeing each other?" She looked around the circle and continued, "This circle we have created here with our bodies, let it nurture healthy boundaries—where love for the community does not overshadow love for ourselves"*

*There was a pause, filled with the sounds of Inti's gentle hissing and the rustling of needle-like leaves atop the mighty Alerce Tree.*

*After a few moments, Sayani spoke again, "Let us create intentional spaces for silence, listening, and hesitation, knowing when not to speak. In these moments of stillness, we can truly hear the wisdom that lies within and around us."*

*Reishi, her voice a whisper, drew the circle to a close, "Through this ancient practice, we've rekindled empathy with ourselves, the land, and all our kin. In the heart of this circle, we've rediscovered our ancient language of care, and with it, the seeds of healing and balance for our village."*

*They embraced and stepped into the night. Into the cracks.*



## Ritual Readings

**'Ritual Readings'** (a translation from Spanish 'Lecturas Rituales') is a methodology created by the Truth Commission as part of the peace agreement between the Colombian State and the guerrilla group FARC. The practice of ritual readings was imagined as a pedagogical, healing, and restorative space to read out loud the curated testimonies of victims of the armed conflict. All harm-doers (e.g. the State, ex-FARC soldiers, and military soldiers, among others), survivors, and common citizens can be present in the readings. Following the testimonies reading, participants can share individual and collective reflections of what they heard and felt. The principles are similar to those of the talking circle, yet the element of the readings guides the reflections.

We used a similar concept to facilitate the final meeting of this inquiry. Movement partners read their stories, setting the stage for the conversation to take place. The stories provided clarity on

the challenges they experienced, allowed for walls to crumble, and enabled an environment for more stories to be shared in the space. For example, this practice opened a door for movement partners to hear about how the LCF Board of Directors came to the decision of transitioning, and what makes this board of directors unique. In other words, it allowed for further moments of witnessing. During this session, LCF's staff apologised to movement partners, and their apologies were well received. A good first step to repairing the tensions.

## Steps

- 1. Write and collect stories** with a chosen topic. If you can, have an editor review them. This will ensure that the stories will be impactful for the reading.
- 2. Prepare the space:**
  - Ideally people will read their own stories. Tell them in advance to practise reading out loud.
  - If you organise the reading in person, prepare the space by putting chairs in a circle.
- 3. How to guide the space**
  - **Welcome people** and ask people to **sit silently**
  - **Give a very short explanation** of what will happen and ask

participants to tune into the silence and be present during the whole process.

- **Open the space** with a short meditation or any other type of grounding exercise.
- **Start the reading**, inviting participants to read their own stories one at a time.
- After reading all the stories, open a **reflective space**, similar to a Talking Circle. Prompt Question: What uncomfortable conversations do we need to be having? What moved you?
- **Close the space** by checking out.

To learn more about Ritual Readings see the video [“Ritual Readings, a new way of narrating conflict”](#) (in Spanish with CC subtitles in English). [Read this recount](#) (2022) of a Ritual Reading taking place in the Arhuacos territory in Colombia. Finally read the Systematization of the [Truth Commission’s working methods](#) (2022) including the values of rituals.



## Uncomfortable Conversations from a Restorative Justice Approach

*“Accountability processes have to be rooted in growth and a willingness of the harmer to learn. But how do we inculcate vulnerability, openness (and) safety to learn and grow?”*

Reflection shared by movement participant during a ‘What Moves Movements’ inquiry session

Uncomfortable conversations are avoided out of fear of the consequences of having them. Throughout the inquiry, movement participants shared their reflections about how to move away from punitive behaviour in favour of more liberating practices. Restorative Justice principles can guide these practices and lessen the fear of punishment when deciding to have uncomfortable conversations.

In this context, **restorative justice** can be a way to recognize and address any mistakes made or harm done by finding ways collectively to repair and heal our individual and collective traumas.



We see restorative justice as a long-term process that requires commitment, time, and consistent practice, as well as other resources. The framework can provide core principles and/or strategies that you can apply/integrate to the tool(s) you decide to use for the uncomfortable conversation (i.e. talking circle, ritual readings, etc.).

### How to start practising Restorative Justice?

For adrienne marie brown, the main principles to restorative justice practices include: naming what was harmful, making intentions visible, breaking patterns, satisfying the need for apologies, creating new agreements and boundaries, and providing lifelong healing resources for all involved (We Will Not Cancel Us, 2020).

We also see a deeper exercise with the Sara Lamble article "[Practising Everyday Abolition](#)" and their four suggested strategies:

1. Identify and challenge punitive logics in everyday contexts
2. Shift our everyday responses to harm to stop responding to harm from a logic of punishment and isolation, and instead offer support, safety, healing and connection—even when it's hard.

3. Build our collective skills and capacity to prevent harm and to foster everyday accountability and reparation.
4. Connect the everyday to the big picture.

### Steps

Here are some of the main steps involved when recognizing that the uncomfortable conversation involves addressing some form of harm that has been done:

1. Stop the harm
2. Understand (collectively and individually) the harm done
3. Identify the needs to repair and heal
4. Make the repairs and commit to ongoing accountability
5. Move towards your desired community by practising everyday

Although harm might refer to specific incidents, it can also refer to systemic failures that have endured over time. Some of these were named in Part 1 of this report, pertaining to a lack of mutual accountability and the effects of power imbalance, but we know there are many more. For LCF and other organisations that are going through a similar process, we invite you to ask yourself: How

could a restorative justice approach be implemented in a transition plan? And how can you mobilise this approach to foster everyday accountability during a transition and more broadly?

You can find more inspiration about Restorative Justice here: [Culture of Care and Accountability by Level Up](#) in RadHR Policy Library  
[Creative Interventions Toolkit](#) - A Practical Guide to Stop Interpersonal Violence, created by Creative Interventions 2012

## Closing the conversation

After an uncomfortable conversation, it is important you close the space appropriately. If you agreed on follow-up actions, we would recommend consolidating them as **next steps**. Say them out loud and agree on an accountability process to ensure they will have proper follow-up (clarity on responsibilities and timeline).

We also recommend having time for **checking out** of the space, to witness how everyone is stepping out of the conversation. Some easy prompts could be: **What are you taking away? How are you currently feeling? What do you need?**

## Follow-up to the Conversation

After at least a couple weeks have passed, we encourage you to schedule a follow-up conversation or send an email to check in. There are two important steps worth highlighting:

- **Check-in:** As emotions and perspectives may have moved and shifted, a debrief takes in how people are doing. Ideally, it would be good to check in with everyone and identify if any additional support is needed.
- **Follow up of actions and agreements:** What is the progress with the actions, agreements and asks settled during conversation? What is stuck? What else is needed?

In some cases no follow-up will be necessary and just a message thanking everyone for their time and effort in the conversations will be enough.

## A Closing Note on Having Uncomfortable Conversations

Uncomfortable conversations provide us with an opportunity to commit further to the process of mutual accountability. More than a meeting or a gathering that we schedule for certain times of the year to talk through any underlying tensions, we'd like to imagine that we can learn to practise and normalise navigating discomfort as a way to transform the habits, dynamics and systems that no longer serve us. So that over time, sharing and listening to emerging conflicts becomes easier and becomes a healthy way to transform and sustain our relationships within movement building and philanthropic ecosystems. The horizon we are walking towards is one where these relationships can be based on trust, transparency, and care.

## Conclusion

In this report, we have weaved together insights and stories from Recrear and movement partners. We took a step back to reflect on some of the learnings that came out of the 'What Moves Movements' inquiry and suggested possible ways forward for both movement partners and funders. We concluded by sharing tools that may be helpful to navigate uncomfortable conversations.

On the surface, the 'What Moves Movements' report tells a story about a chaotic moment in time between movement organisations and a funder. On a deeper level, we see a fractal of debates, tensions and desires present within broader movement building and philanthropic spaces. One of the movement partners articulates the significance of this instance:

*The 'What Moves Movements' report offers a courageous, fresh, and candid portrayal of the journey that LankellyChase's partners embarked upon over the last year. It captures both the rhythm and the deep tensions that surfaced during the process. The report seeks to confront the deep-seated challenges and uncertainties that both LCF and the broader community are grappling with in this moment of transition. Serving as an offering for the current*



*phase, it invites readers to embrace the discomfort, to be guided critically by it. Packed with actions, resources, and practices, the insights and reflections demand attention and humility. I hope the dedication and effort, especially from Recrear, that went into this process are matched by the way in which the offerings and opportunities made in the report are embraced.*

*Sebastian Ordoñez from War on Want*

Wrapping up this process, we are left with the awareness of how important and challenging it is to tend to the relationships that sustain social change. As we saw throughout this process, we are moving towards spaces of trust, transparency and vulnerability. We are learning to lean into uncomfortable conversations. We are building profound relationships where power dynamics can be named and addressed. Yet we still have other hikes to embark on.

Our intention with this report is to move this conversation forward by calling people in to reflect and participate. We hope this report leaves you with echoes of resonance. As you reach the end of this reading, we would like to ask:



**What moved you as you witnessed this story?  
What uncomfortable conversation is awaiting  
you? How will you move this conversation  
forward?**

# Notes

1 [Promoting Mutual Accountability for Trust based Grant Making](#) (2022) by Peris Kariuki retrieved from Voice

2 Read Jim Coe and Rhonda Schlangen report '[Pulling up the floorboards - Reshaping accountability and evolution in an era of core costs grantmaking](#)' (2022) for an analysis of the benefits of core cost funding.

3 We recognize that funders, although they share features in terms of being holders and granters of money, are not a homogenous group. At many moments in the inquiry we would hear some of the nuances that seem to differentiate 'progressive funders' from 'the majority of funders'.

4 Some resources you can consult: (1) [Recognizing the characteristics of white supremacy](#) created and revised by Tema Okun (2023) (2) The Intercept Podcast: [Tema Okun On Her Mythical Paper On White Supremacy](#) (2023) (3) [Suspending Damage: A Letter to Communities](#) (2009) by Eve Tuck (4) [Continuum on Becoming an Anti-Racist Multicultural Organization](#), model adapted from original concept by Bailey Jackson and Rita Hardiman (2006), and further developed by Andrea Avazian and Ronice Branding; further adapted by Melia LaCour.

5 The inter-organisational tensions weren't explored as much within the inquiry for several reasons. First because there have been challenging and unsuccessful experiences of resolving inter-movement tensions in the past, second because of misgivings about these conversations happening in funder-hosted spaces, third because it seemed like there were bigger 'elephants in the room'. Within the limited time we had together movement partners felt it was more necessary to talk about their relationship to funders.

6 If you are responding to a ToR that doesn't integrate funder participation. Advocate for this during your application phase.

7 (1) [As More Foundations Choose to Spend Down, Charities Worry About Future Funding](#)

(2009) retrieved from Candid (2) [Breaking Up is Hard to Do](#) (2017) by Barbara Kibbe, J.D., S. D. Bechtel, Jr. Foundation

8 This was particularly emphasised in Tax Justice's story since this movement is underfunded and often overlooked by donors.

9 Foresight involves exercises of scenario building in order to prepare for different possible futures.

10 Written by Micky ScottBey Jones based on Beth Strano's original work.

11 Recrear also references talking circles as a practice for conversations in [Resourcing Youth-Led Groups And Movements](#) (2020).



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*we observe & we recreate*

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