



ETHICAL ENGAGEMENT WITH SURVIVOR LEADERS

written in collaboration with the NCJFCJ Child Sex Trafficking Survivor Leader Board



It is vital that any efforts to address child sex trafficking in our communities must include not only survivor input but also provide opportunities for survivors to lead this work. Survivor leaders are people who hold leadership positions within their field and/or provide guidance to other survivors.¹ Organizations and individuals must be thoughtful about why, when, and how they engage survivor leaders in the work. The following guidance is based on the feedback of the Office for Victims of Crime-funded Field Generated Strategies to Address the Criminalization of Minor Victims of Trafficking project's Survivor Leader Board.

CONSIDERATIONS WHEN ENGAGING SURVIVOR LEADERS

Compensation

Organizations must first consider how they will compensate survivor leaders. Survivor leaders have unique expertise, knowledge, and guidance, and they should be compensated accordingly. They should be compensated

in a manner that is consistent with other consultants. Once the organization determines how much they will pay survivor leaders for their time and expertise, it must carefully consider the why, when, and how of engaging survivor leaders.

Why Engage Survivor Leaders in the Work?

Survivor leaders' expertise and knowledge are critical to informing successful responses to child sex trafficking. However, organizations must dig into why they are engaging a survivor leader in the work. By asking *why* multiple times, the root reason for seeking guidance from a survivor leader will be clear. With a clear picture of the purpose for their involvement, an organization can then transparently invite survivor leaders who might be interested in participating. This clarity will allow a survivor leader to determine if working toward the organization's purpose and goals is something they are interested in doing.

In considering the purpose and goals of survivor leader

1. <https://freedomnetworkusa.org/app/uploads/2019/01/SurvivorWhitePaperDigitalFinalJan2019-1.pdf>.

involvement, it is important to note that the organization should not only engage survivor leaders to promote the importance of the work by sharing their personal narratives. Ethical engagement of survivor leaders requires organizations to consider their roles beyond sharing their stories. Survivor leaders should be included as key thought partners in the work. Having a survivor leader on call or listed as an advisory member, but never really involving them, underutilizes their skills and experience. Some survivor leaders may be interested in or willing to share their stories, but not all survivor leaders will be. If sharing their personal experiences is a requisite part of their involvement, be clear about that expectation up front. Survivor leaders should never be put on the spot to tell deeply intimate stories from the past.

Understanding why the organization will benefit from the knowledge and guidance of survivor leaders can also help determine other perspectives that can benefit the organization. Organizations should seek to connect and get advice from a diverse group of survivors. There are many different experiences, and some survivors who often get overlooked are those who experienced familial trafficking and those who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, and two-spirit (LGBTQ2S+) and/or male.

Once clear on the why and the how, the organization will be able to engage authentically and transparently with survivor leaders as experts.

When To Engage Survivor Leaders in the Work

In an ideal world, survivor leaders would be invited to co-design and co-create an organization's efforts to address child sex trafficking from the beginning. If that is not possible, survivor leaders should be invited to design and create their roles, the projects they will support and lead, and how they will be invited into the work in the future.

At the conclusion of the contract or work, provide feedback to the survivor leader about their work. Follow-up should include positive and constructive feedback and acknowledge the success of their contributions. Be sure

to connect them to other resources or organizations that they could work with in the future. Ethical engagement of survivor leaders includes collaboration from the beginning to the very end of the proposed work.



How to Engage Survivor Leaders in the Work

There are three stages to working with and engaging survivor leaders: inviting them to the table, preparing staff and stakeholders, and collaborating authentically. Ethical engagement entails intentionality at each stage.

Inviting Survivor Leaders to the Table: After considering how and when to engage survivor leaders, it is time to invite them to the table. From the outset, clearly communicate the expectations for the work, including whether they will be asked to share details of their stories, how much and when they will be paid, the contract length, and the work setting. Be specific and detailed in sharing information about what to expect from the conversations and environment, including what they should expect to discuss, the level of formality, and how to contact staff if there are any questions.

Be consistent — if there are any changes to the plan let the survivor leaders know ahead of time. Be genuine, take some time specifically to get to know the survivor leaders, and build trust. During this time, learn more about their language preferences, their preferred names and pronouns, whether they want to be introduced as a survivor leader or by their professional title, if there is a term other than survivor that they would prefer to use, such as overcomer



or expert consultant, and if there are any accommodations they may need. Do not use language, names, or terms that will make the survivor leader uncomfortable or evoke past trauma. Clarify early and often that survivor leaders do not have to share anything that they choose not to share.

Preparing Staff and Stakeholders: All staff and stakeholders who will be working with survivor leaders should be given specific and explicit training on working with survivor leaders. Training should include respecting space and boundaries and how to communicate respectfully. Respecting physical space and personal boundaries, including physical touch, is key to building a safe working environment for all people, and particularly so for survivors of trafficking. Staff and stakeholders should be trained to respect personal space and boundaries.

It is critical to ensure that all people working with survivor leaders are trained to communicate respectfully. Respectful communication includes not asking invasive personal

questions during or following meetings. To ensure that guests and other people who do not regularly interact with survivor leaders do not overstep, it may be necessary to include a disclaimer that survivor leaders are there to share their experiences but not to answer participants' questions about their experiences. Respectful communication also includes ensuring that people avoid inappropriate empathy by apologizing for survivor leaders' experiences or imposing religious beliefs (such as verbalizing that they will pray for survivor leaders). Many survivor leaders have been, or are, on a personal healing journey. An individual apologizing for experiences they do not know about or praying on behalf of a survivor leader can be disrespectful to that journey and may be uncomfortable for survivor leaders, even if they too are spiritual. It is important not to make assumptions about their feelings about their experiences or the conversations being held. Respectful communication inherently allows all people to have unique emotional reactions. Creating safe spaces for all manner of feelings is paramount.

Collaborating Authentically: Survivor leaders should be included in all aspects of the work as any other colleague would be. Ensure they are included in all relevant correspondence, planning, or team building, including email chains or team lunches. Ethical engagement with survivor leaders means consistent collaboration from beginning to end, including sending agendas with clear structures, welcoming them and walking them into a space, and following up after meetings to process and discuss the conversations that were held. If a survivor leader isn't participating in a meeting, invite them into the conversation directly or check in during a break to see how they would like to be invited to participate. Ask if survivor leaders would like you to document their participation in a specific manner. Many survivors do not have a person to document their professional engagements and may appreciate photos, videos, or other documentation for marketing purposes. Authentic collaboration requires everyone to feel safe and of equal value in a space, which requires intentional thought and consistency.

Authentic collaboration should also involve building relationships with survivor leaders. Staff should get to know who survivor leaders are as whole humans, beyond their past experiences and the labels ascribed to them. They should be a part of the team, and their whole selves should be recognized and welcomed into the work. Through building genuine relationships with the survivor leaders, staff will also interrupt transactional work cultures that can be retraumatizing.

Conclusion

At the core, the ethical engagement of survivor leaders is centered on not reproducing transactional and oppressive or trauma-invoking forms of communication. Organizations and individuals must value the whole set of skills and perspectives that survivor leaders bring to the table beyond their stories. It is important that survivor leaders are paid in a manner consistent with how any other consultant is paid, and they need to be paid in a timely manner. Most of all, the organizations and individuals working with survivor leaders must demonstrate a commitment to the work, be authentic, and be consistent.

EXAMPLE

Invite a survivor leader to participate in a strategy meeting. Determine ahead of the meeting that you can pay the survivor leader the same hourly rate as your consultant on the project. Share the level of compensation with the survivor leader and walk through the required paperwork. Prior to the meeting, tell the survivor leader when, where, and how long the meeting will be. Send the survivor leader an agenda with all of the information and include them on any relevant email chains. Let the survivor leader know the level of formality, share your contact information, and make a plan to meet prior to the meeting to walk through the building and become acquainted.

Take some time ahead of the meeting to talk through expectations and share a little about your motivations. At the meeting, welcome the survivor leader to the space and make sure they feel comfortable. Take a moment in private to check in with them to see how they are feeling. At the conclusion of the meeting, walk them out and let them know when you will be following up. If there is a team lunch or dinner, invite them to join. Within the next several days, follow up with the next steps from the meeting. Give them any specific feedback relevant to their contributions. If the survivor leader met any professional contacts for the first time, broker a connection to foster further collaboration. Reach out to your finance team and ensure that all paperwork was completed satisfactorily and that the survivor leader was compensated within a reasonable timeframe for the full amount promised.

Ethical Engagement With Survivor Leaders is a publication of the National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges (NCJFCJ). This material is made possible through funding from the Office for Victims of Crime, Office of Justice Programs, U.S. Department of Justice under 15POVC-22-GK-03683-HT. Points of view or opinions are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent the official position or policies of the Office for Victims of Crime, Office of Justice Programs, U.S. Department of Justice.

