

## Collective Visioning

### Exercise 2

The goal of this exercise is to identify, acknowledge, and honor our differences for deeper understanding of each other and building trust and community. I use this exercise early on in a gathering.

#### **Stepping into the Circle: Celebrating Our Differences**

With all participants standing in a circle, start by calling out specific ethnic, race, class, and cultural identities. Ask participants to voluntarily step into the circle if they believe they fit the identity called out. The group celebrates the people in the center. This can be done silently, by just looking each other in the eyes, or more dynamically by having people say, "We honor you." The first and very important rule of this exercise is to let everyone know that people don't have to self-identify unless they want to. Everyone has the option not to step into the circle.

Say things like "Step into the circle if

- You grew up poor."
- You are over sixty-five."
- You are under twenty."
- You are gay/lesbian/bisexual/transgender/queer."
- Your family came to this country against their will" (for example, as slaves or refugees).
- You are of African descent" (and Asian descent, European descent, and so on).
- You are an immigrant or a member of your family's first generation in this country."
- You are disabled."

Name identities you want people to notice, For example, say, "Step into the circle if you are Native American," and point out if no one steps in. This is an important way to honor those voices not present, especially if they are part of your community and should be there.

After naming a few of these identities, ask for suggestions from the group. People often name identities they have in common or one you might have missed. For instance, they may ask people to step into the circle if they are a parent or grandparent, love dogs, love to dance, and so on. I personally like to add, "Step into the circle if you don't have a college education," and am very often the only one, or one of two, in the room when it's a group of activists. It's important for me to do that because I tend to feel bad about myself when people assume that everyone in the room has a college degree. This way I take power in who I am, rather than secretly harboring shame. It also supports others who might have the same feelings, especially when the leader steps in with them,

End the exercise with a debriefing and a chance for people to express any feelings that come up. Ask, "How did that feel for you?" You can ask people to do this in pairs or, if time permits, in larger groups. It's important to ask the question because it can bring up heavy feelings for some people. I have used this exercise in many gatherings and feel it is a powerful way for people to be acknowledged in both their differences and commonalities. But most of all, it is another way to build trust and community.

This exercise can take a half hour to one hour, depending on how large your group is, how much people contribute, and how much time you need for debriefing. You can keep the debriefing short, and say you're taking one more suggestion if you need to end by a certain time.