

Learning activity

The practical challenges of working across difference

TIME: 90 mins

LEARNING AIMS:

- Understand practical challenges in building alliances across diverse movements and communities.
- Assess personal and collective knowledge about potential allies.
- Identify existing initiatives aiding in bridging gaps between movements.
- Explore strategies for improving cross-movement collaboration.

NUMBER OF PARTICIPANTS: 5-30

PREPARATION AND MATERIALS: Write text

FRAMING:

This is a three-step activity; it is fine just to do one or two steps, or just read it through and think about it in your own context. It can usefully be done with other people from your group or movement, or on your own. In either case it will probably be more effective if you write your thinking down or draw it out on paper.

FACILITATION:

Step 1. Identifying concrete challenges

As we've seen in other MLC modules of this chapter, there are interpersonal, psychological etc. issues that get in the way of working across different movement issues, different political cultures, different communities in struggle. But what about the practical ones? What actually trips us up when there is a concrete possibility of building an alliance? E.g.

- Distinctive rhetoric / language that is hard to bridge
- Particular audiences that we are each trying to hold on to
- Established alliances that might be put at risk by making this one
- Different kinds of political action that don't easily connect
- Different timescales that we have to work to
- Competing for resources / media attention / political access etc.
- Different leadership groups threatened by alliances
- Demands we place on each other before we're willing to work together

See if you can name which of these have been / often are problems in practice in your own context, and how.

Step 2. How much do we know about each other?

What do we actually know about the movements, organisations, communities we might want / need to make alliances with?

- Do we have any experience of being inside their spaces, physically or politically?
- How did that happen?
- How many other people in our own organisation have that experience?
- How many people in the “other” movement / community know what our spaces are like?
- When do we feel we have had a genuinely useful conversation across our different spaces, on any level?
- What could we do to get a better sense of the “movement reality” of someone else’s space?

Again see what you can concretely write down or note (even draw as an image!)

Step 3. What wider initiatives help?

So far we’ve been thinking about two-way relationships, mostly “us” reaching out to “them” in one way or another. But do we have any shared spaces / wider initiatives that are trying to bridge these gaps?

- Any movement / radical media that actively engage people from different movements and communities in struggle?
- Short-term coalitions, speaker panels at demos, other brief encounters? • Any long-term solidarity relationships connecting movements and communities? • Are there explicit “social movement parties” that try to join up different struggles?
- Any “movement infrastructure” (e.g. trainings, gatherings, events) that bring people together across movements and communities in struggle?
- Any big movement waves that mean many of us have been part of the same struggles in the wider society?

This could usefully be drawn onto a sheet of paper to try and make these things visual.

Conclusion and takeaways

Gather participants key takeaways and insights from the exercise. Conclude by saying that this kind of exercise obviously isn’t going to solve the difficulties – but if it is at all enlightening it might be worth doing collectively, with more people from your organisation or other parts of your movement. Or even as a joint exercise with people from different movements – the MLC should be a safe space to try this kind of thing out!

SOURCE: Laurence Cox