Steering Diverse Partners Toward Cohesive Action

Session 3 | May 06, 2020
Section 1

WELCOME
We’re so happy to see you!

Thank you for joining us.
Talking Today

Panthea Lee
Founder & Executive Director

Alyssa Kropp
Senior Program Associate
Hi! We’re Reboot.

Who We Are: We were founded to **tackle structural inequity and injustice.** We primarily work in the global development, good governance, and civic & media innovation spaces.

How We Work: We advance our mission in over 40 countries in collaboration with partners — social movements, community groups, civil society, media, companies, governments, and international agencies — **to drive transformative collaborations for courageous change.**

Our Perspective: Our thinking and methods are informed by our backgrounds as ethnographers, organizers, facilitators, and designers.
Why We’re Here

The Need: Tackling systemic challenges require systemic approaches.

The Challenge: Radical collaboration is hard. There’s mistrust, there’s fear, there’s cultural differences, and there’s good ol’ logistics.

But advancing structural systems change is more important than ever.
A window of profound peril?
Historically, pandemics have forced humans to break with the past and imagine their world anew. This one is no different. It is a portal, a gateway between one world and the next. We can choose to walk through it, dragging the carcasses of our prejudice and hatred, our avarice, our data banks and dead ideas. Or we can walk through lightly, with little luggage, ready to imagine another world and ready to fight for it.

— Arundhati Roy
A window of profound opportunity
We must rebuild together.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Role, as commonly understood</th>
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<td>... and as it must evolve.</td>
<td>and <strong>advocate</strong> for these new realities.</td>
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<td>We need ALL these superpowers</td>
<td>Radical Imaginations</td>
<td>Moral Clarity &amp; Courage</td>
<td>Intellectual Rigour</td>
<td>Generosity, Agility, Creativity</td>
<td>Power to Compel Action</td>
<td>Production Distribution Capacity</td>
<td>Resources, Scale &amp; Durability</td>
<td>Ability to Shape Public Agendas</td>
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We need ALL these superpowers.
Our 3-Part Series

Session 1: Why & Who
Designing Collaborations for Urgent, Courageous Change
How to:
- Create a compelling rallying cry
- Bring together unlikely partners
- Overcome mistrust & establish a strong foundation for success

Session 2: How, Pt 1.
Aligning on Priorities
When Everything is Important
How to:
- Identify and set priorities for our collaborative efforts
- Reach decision points together
- Navigate disagreement
- Synthesize discussions

Session 3: How, Pt 2.
Steering Diverse Partners
Toward Cohesive Action
How to:
- Guide your progress through the ups and downs of collaboration
- Troubleshoot and respond to the inevitable challenges and tensions that will arise
For an A+ Experience

Be:
- Present
- Constructive

Online Etiquette:
- Mics will be muted!
  See anything inappropriate? Please chat Kisha.

Collaborative:
- Ask us questions in Q&A function.
- Share your reflections in chat. Make sure to send to all!
Quick Recap

Building a Coalition & The Arc of Alignment

Recording & Slides at reboot.org
Engage the right humans.

- Start with people that share the same worldview, values, and motivations. This is priceless and critical at the outset.
- Don’t reach for status: the biggest name organizations, the highest titles, the most prominent thinkers. (Those can often be more trouble!)
- Start with trusted relationships, develop a core, and work “up and out”.
- Appeal to personal incentives.
Diverse perspectives are key.

Pay attention to often overlooked profiles and perspectives that are critical to creating, executing, sustaining, and adapting collaborative efforts.

Take an expansive view of "expertise".

- **Technical Experts**: Less is more
- **Living Experts**: More than you think, but maybe differently
- **Decision Makers**: Early, avoid weeds
- **Implementers**: Far more than you think—always
- **Allies**: Early, at strategic points
Give partners a compelling reason to show up.

- **Be as precise as you can** about your interests and concerns. Avoid jargon like “innovation”, “empowerment”, “revolutionize”.

- **Avoid pointing fingers.** Blame is the fastest way to turn potential partners into likely adversaries.

- **Craft an invitation that sparks imagination - think “what if?” not “what about...”**. Invite partners to think with you. Don’t state the solution - it gives them an excuse to say “why not” or “not for me”.
COME TO THE DARK SIDE
WE HAVE GANTT CHARTS
The Arc of Alignment

- Do the Work before "The Work"
- Meet the Humans & Elephants
- Ground through Commonalities
- Brainstorm, with Bumpers
- Turn Mayhem to Magic

Community & Momentum

Time
The Building Blocks of Cohesive Action

Principles & Practices
Your Toolbox for Action

1. Think in Systems
2. Convince the Cheerleaders
3. Navigate Conflict
4. Organize through the “Physics of Transformation”
5. Create Space for Courageous Change
Part I:

Think in Systems
Show strength in systems

Guide partners to move beyond scarcity mindsets, aka “If we do that idea, there will be less space for my idea. I must advocate for my idea.”

A successful coalition sees how all the pieces fit together, and the strength in diversity. This doesn’t mean everything happens at once, at the same intensity, with the same level of investment.

Visual frameworks & portfolio approaches are key. They show how different initiatives connect, and where each actor / activity fits.
Map the Portfolio

- **Craft frameworks that help collaborators:**
  - Separate goals, strategies, methods, activities
  - Articulate the relationship between / sequence of different ideas
  - Understand dependencies & synergies

- **Define the portfolio across which the group will collaborate.** Show the logic and coherence of connected activities, and define the “core vs experimental”, “now vs later”, and % allocations across them.

- **Articulate connections, relationships, and coherence** between elements, and show that every activity / collaborator has its place. Taken in sum, the portfolio shows we are stronger together.
Example: Reboot’s Portfolio

Tensions --> Assets:

- Inside vs outside?
- % investment in advocacy / radical generosity?
- Global vs Africa?

Propose
Develop Bold Proposals for Equity & Justice
Pioneer new spaces to enable impacted communities, civil society, and responsible institutions to co-create bold proposals to tackle structural inequity and injustice.

Influence
Build Broad Momentum for Courageous Change
Call out powerful institutions when the fall short of their stated values (aka engage in hypocrisy)—and offer them paths to do better.

Design
Lead Transformative Co-Design Processes
Support major multi-stakeholder efforts to co-design strategies, initiatives, and programs to tackle systemic challenges.

Coach Partners in Effective Design
Support partners to implement effective design through our “Design With” course, hands-on support, and learn-by-doing engagements. Offer sliding-scale rates for civil society partners.

Implement
Support Partners to Deliver Impact
Help partners run programs that are innovative and agile, where decisions i) are grounded in community needs, ii) build on institutional capabilities, and iii) respond to lesson and results from implementation.
Iterate the Portfolio

- Portfolio serves multiple purposes
  - Strategic planning tool
  - Communications framework
  - Progress tracking framework
  - Learning framework
  - Tool for role definition

- Define points to revisit and iterate. Don’t get too precious about it.
  Setting expectations as hypothesis and learning framework are key.
## Help Each Partner Find & Own Their Role (& Stretch)

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Start with what should we do...

**Wikipedia Movement Strategy: New Voices (Track D) Research**

**Opportunities to Grow Impact**

This framework maps opportunities for Wikipedia surfaced through New Voices research in Indonesia and Brazil—and, to a lesser extent, New Readers work in Nigeria and India—against Movement Strategy themes. Opportunities to advance Theme A have been left blank, as they will come from other tracks.

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**METHOD**

Advancing with technology, leveraging innovations that enable greater creativity and productivity

**THEME A**

**OPPORTUNITY**

Help people find what they need on Wikipedia through more precise search and topic guides/curation.

**OBJECTIVE**

Ensure Wikipedia remains a relevant and respected source of knowledge

**THEME B**

**OPPORTUNITY**

Meet user expectations and preferences for online content by getting more visual, real-time, and social.

**METHOD**

Engaging the knowledge ecosystem, through partnership with diverse allies in free knowledge

**THEME C**

**OPPORTUNITY**

Build a community passionate about helping people learn, by working with niche content experts, curators, and ambassadors.

**KEY OPPORTUNITY**

Wikipedia in 2030: A Source of (not a Destination for) Knowledge

Wikipedia movement can empower and enable learning, wherever and however people learn. It can do this by making content more modular, portable, and by partnering with diverse actors. In doing so, its content will be a source of and an engine for learning, in all the diverse and dynamic ways humans consume information.

**OPPORTUNITY**

Where internet and mobile data are expensive, improve accessibility by reducing bandwidth requirements and optimizing the mobile browsing experience.

**THEME D**

**OPPORTUNITY**

Become a source of otherwise hard-to-get local history and culture, through work with local partners and targeted local content drives.

**OPPORTUNITY**

Advance information access for marginalized and hard-to-reach populations, through partnerships to expand digital access and literacy.

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*Draft for Discussion | Updated June 27, 2017*
...then who should do what?
Part II:

Convincing The Cheerleaders
From locker room to field.

Once you have turned your great idea into a solid concept, it is tempting to dive right in and start laying out the details that will make your vision a reality. But before you get too far, you must gather wider support.
You’re an exclusive club that needs more members.

You have the momentum and buy-in from the allies you convened, but you don’t have that same investment from those outside of this group.

Our goal? To convince them that this is something worth getting involved in (whether that’s time, resources, personnel, a signature, or otherwise!) We want more people in this club, because the stronger your support system, the better chance you have for implementing bold change.
Take a note from advocates:

1. Identify who needs to be engaged, and how.
2. Have key messaging to support your ask.
3. Make it easy for targets to say yes.
4. Build relationships, not transactions.
Things we tend to forget when getting others on board:

- **Speaking their language.** Look at what people do, to understand what they care about. Be precise and avoid jargon.

- **Each audience has its own needs.** Often you need both official approval and informal buy-in. What will resonate for one might not for another!

- **Aligning your work** with supporting policies, initiatives, and/or political priorities. Think about both high level and on the ground plans, and the various calendars involved.
### Example:
**Cross team buy-in for bold government change.***

We partnered with a coalition made up of those working in government accountability, public spending, and transparency to help them lead their teams to impact.

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<td>Teams <strong>came to the first workshop with assumptions</strong> of who needed to be there. → Went back to their teams and realized that not having members of other teams left their work incomplete and unable to implement. → <strong>Returned with a wider collaboration to increase buy in</strong></td>
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<td>A team <strong>came prepared with plans that were only tangentially related to wider work</strong> → They brought their workplan back to the city and had trouble getting uptake from leadership → They <strong>realigned to match the Mayor’s mandate more explicitly</strong> to ensure small businesses were highlighted in their work, <strong>and were able to secure people and funding</strong></td>
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“If you want to build a ship, don’t drum up people to collect wood and don’t assign them tasks and work, but rather teach them to long for the endless immensity of the sea.”

- Antoine de Saint-Exupery
Part III:

Navigating Conflicts
Stop! Collaborate & Listen

Embarking on radical collaboration means accepting that conflicts and tensions will inevitably arise. Anticipating and preparing for them enables you to address them well.

As always, approach them from a listening posture and probe for the core issues, not the manifestation.
Leaning into tension

- **Conflicts can be healthy.** Debates help us to examine assumptions, tensions, and challenges that can strengthen our work. If it exists in the group, it will exist outside the group, too.

- **Unaddressed, they will manifest in dysfunction.** Show it is normal and expected to talk about difficult issues. Getting out ahead of them means preventing them from surfacing in unexpected ways (e.g. factions, outside the group, etc)

- **Navigating conflict well can strengthen coalitions and initiatives.** The long tail of implementation is plagued with difficult decisions; build your muscle for resolving / depersonalizing tensions now.
Ways to manage conflict

1. Let form follow function
2. Ground in data & principles
3. Find the right forum
4. Throw controversy (literally) into the space
Let form follow function

- **Discussions should always start with concrete problems.** From there, understand how the capabilities, interests, and roles of different partners will play in. Do this before conversations on governance / structure.

- **Governance / structure discussions should be grounded in concrete scenarios and issues.** Examine multiple scenarios and anticipated challenges, discuss how they should be addressed THEN synthesize themes, define roles.

- **As the activities / functions evolve, so too should governance / form.** Set this expectation early on, and define points for revisiting.
Ground in data & principles

- **Research and data are your friends.** Opinions and feelings are useful, but tricky. Introduce research and data to inform discussions about possible paths forward, with an emphasis on primary research and user experience.

- **Return to the success criteria defined by the group.** Always keep your success criteria / design principles close at hand. Remind the group what it aligned on.

- **Develop visual frameworks to present data and principles, to help locate individual scenarios / conflicts within them.** This can also mitigate future tension.
Example: Sweet Spot of Political Interest
Find the right forum

- **Find the right format for each tension.** Consider what is most conducive for each human / group dynamic. General guidelines:
  - **Plenary:** “Big ticket items” e.g. success criteria, roles — but as synthesis, after details worked through; requires skilled facilitation
  - **Breakout:** Specific issues / granular details that merit deeper discussion, with a smaller set of actors; requires guidelines for “feeding back in”.
  - **Private:** Individual tensions or challenges; requires individualized attention / support.

- **Give extreme disruptors a separate task.** Allow them the space to work out their ideas to bring back, but under common framework.
Throw controversy in

- Find ways for everyone to speak to the contentious issues. Loud voices and opinions tend to dominate, find ways for everyone to participate.
- Build the confidence of “the silent majority”, so they can be more vocal in future. These tend to be “living experts” and implementers whose expertise is not traditionally celebrated, but absolutely essential.
- Surface the underlying tension between different ideas, and throw it to the room. Don’t debate the principles / values —- translate them into approaches, and debate the trade-offs.
Example: New Media Collaborative

**DON’T ASK:** What should we do?

such as:
- Tackle structural challenges
- Be innovative
- Be bold
- Be experimental
- “Change moves at the speed of trust”
- Diversity, equity, inclusion

**ASK:** What are the tradeoffs?

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<th>Focus</th>
<th>Tackle historical, structural challenges</th>
<th>Seize new, exciting opportunities</th>
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<td>Approach</td>
<td>Make a few big bets</td>
<td>Try many things, see what “sticks”</td>
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<td>Community</td>
<td>Strengthen the core</td>
<td>Expand the circle</td>
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Part IV:
The Physics of Transformation
Physics and Cohesive Action?

"Hey, Sisyphus, when you’ve got a minute I’d like to discuss this progress report with you."

Kanin
The moment you realize transformation is less about the idea and more about how you do it...
Add Transparency to Structure.

A collaboration has the pillars in place ahead of time -- a successful one is clear about how they do so. Sharing process and being open across stakeholders allows for an underlying support system that creates the foundation for which the inherent messiness of the work can build from.

We do this because transparency is the practice and behavior that we want to instill across the work.
Allow for human nature.

Defining and understanding roles in advance can prevent headaches. Clarity in roles & responsibilities can help your work move forward without tension between coalitions.

Roles and responsibilities may evolve over time. Sometimes you don’t realize the “superpower” of someone (or group) until you’re neck deep in the work. Your projects can become better when you allow them to do what they do best.
Be artful in the pivot.

Being flexible and easy to adapt will be crucial during new, bold projects. Even the smallest broken or forgotten protocol can drain time and energy from your colleagues. Knowing when and how to change process is a key skill.

This might look like: adapting the roles of team members to better suit their strengths; reconfiguring the final deliverable; adding something new based on testing.
We document to understand and to share, not to make more work. That said, often our methods of documentation aren’t aligned with what we are intentionally trying to capture.

What should a radical collaborator do?

Be creative in our approach.
Organization is the process that leads to bold change.

- Clarity in the process allows for alignment, endorsement, and structure
- Practical steps lead you one step closer to change
- The “steering towards cohesive action” relies on people being invested. PMing can get them there.
Part V:

Creating Spaces for Courageous Change
Where do we do this?

- **There are insufficient spaces for transformative collaboration.** Most are created by institutions, where the “acceptable solution set” is therefore defined by them.

- **Promising examples** where this is happening:
  - Coalitions / collaborations supported by multi-donor funds
  - Co-creation of global public goods
  - Progressive / innovative institutions with convening power
  - Others?
We must create the spaces we yearn for

- **Power likes to hold onto power.** Don’t wait for institutionally created spaces to tackle structural injustice. The change there will always be more incremental, narrow, slow.

- **Institutional allies crave sophisticated outside pressure.** It helps them do the work they want to do, but struggle to push from the inside.

- **Build the spaces we deserve.** Don’t wait to be invited. Claim our seats at the table. Get powerful interests to join on our terms.
REPORT TO THE CITY

II

CRAVING REPRESENTATION
Recap

Building Blocks of Cohesive Action
Key Takeaways

This is a toolbox of blocks for you to choose from. The tips and ideas from today may not work for each collaboration or coalition you work towards, but those you choose can help you move from idea to action.

- Think in systems to build strength through diversity
- Strong buy-in will help your project reach impact faster, but be prepared to navigate conflict in diverse ways
- Be radical, empathetic, and creative in your organizing and planning
- Find spaces for change, or be courageous enough to create them.
Looking Forward

#RadicalCollab for Social Transformation
Rethink roles.

Embrace radical collaboration.

Create a future that centers equity & justice.
We want your thoughts. Please answer these 5 quick questions:

Q&A

Questions? Ideas? Get in touch:

urgentnow@reboot.org
@theReboot @PantheaLee #RadicalCollab

Please take our survey!

Thank you!

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