



Cultivating Inclusive Leadership

A Proposal for the New York State Independent Living Council

Margo Hittleman, Ph.D.

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Request

The New York State Independent Living Council (NYSILC) is seeking education, training and action planning to:

- Understand how to respond to and eliminate exclusionary cultures (including but not limited to, addressing increased awareness of systemic racism in our society);
- Take meaningful, significant and sustainable steps toward improving the diversity within its organization, staff and leaders; and
- Address “intersectionality” to ensure its framework and actions incorporate the intersection of different modes of discrimination and privilege (for example, the intersections of disability, race and class).
- Build an inclusive organizational culture that can harness the richness of diverse ideas, backgrounds, talents and perspectives; create an organizational environment in which all people feel valued, respected, connected and engaged; and are provided equitable access and opportunities.

Response

To help the NYSILC attain its goals for diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) awareness and strategic planning, I recommend beginning with a customized version of the ***Cultivating Inclusive Leadership*** educational series to enable staff and Council members to:

- (a) Develop the foundation of a shared language and perspectives on how to move forward as an organization on issues such as diversity, equity, inclusion, intersectionality, etc.;
- (b) Strengthen existing skills and learn new tools to better foster a culture of inclusion within the NYSILC



- (c) Engage in skillfully facilitated, reflective dialogue about how the NYSILC could best apply diversity/equity/inclusion (DEI) perspectives, skills and tools to its work
- (d) Begin to identify concrete action steps – what the NYSILC could “do more of, less of, or differently” – to better move from “good intentions” to “intended impact.”

The educational programs will be scheduled on a timeline and in a format that is feasible for NYSILC’s members. The full series runs 12-hours, typically offered as three 4-hour workshops. However, in an online environment, many prefer to schedule six 2-hour sessions. This series can be effectively scheduled over 3-4 months. It is also possible to schedule sessions them more frequently if participants desire, or to conduct an intensive weekend series.

Further, if time or budget constraints preclude incorporating the entire series, I will work with the NYSILC’s leadership to customize a shorter version addressing the highest priority learning objectives.

I would meet with the NYSILC staff and Council representatives prior to the first session to learn more about the organization and its successes, challenges, and goals in order to customize the series’ content and learning environment to NYSILC’s needs.

Given the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, these sessions and meetings will take place on Zoom. Rest assured: the online sessions will be highly interactive and engaging. As recent participants in the series wrote:

“Zoom worked. It was inclusive. We all heard each other. It was a ton of fun. I thought I was going to be all upset about sitting in a chair for hours. But the content kept me engaged, and the time flew by... I didn’t want it to end because I was craving more.”

“I was pleased that the class was engaging the entire time. I’ve sat through a lot of Zoom presentations, and my mind starts to wander quickly. But we were engaged and active the entire time.”

Linking Learning to Action: Since the most effective, most sustainable change comes from intersecting processes of learning (“developing awareness”) and application (“action planning”), each session includes both important DEI perspectives **and** substantial time for participants to reflect on how they can apply the concepts learned to identify new opportunities and generate concrete targeted action steps related to the NYSILC’s work.

Thus, key elements of NYSILC’s DEI action plan will be generated throughout the educational component. Following the educational sessions, I will assist a NYSILC staff-Board team to further develop these ideas and opportunities into a **coordinated action plan**.

More information about the consultant, series and a recommended scope, timeline and budget follow.



About the *Cultivating Inclusive Leadership Series*

The research is clear: Diverse engagement is a pragmatic “good,” as well as a moral “should.” Bringing together diverse groups of people -- with a variety of backgrounds and experiences – provides a measurable advantage for innovation, problem-solving, decision-making and impact.

But that advantage is realized only in the presence of the skills, behaviors, norms and leadership that effectively fosters equity, inclusion and belonging. Without those, organizations face a chasm between their “good intentions” and their “intended impact.”

The highly interactive ***Cultivating Inclusive Leadership*** series brings together practical tools, research-based content, strategic discussions and small-group activities -- within a supportive and affirming learning environment – to help participants strengthen the Inclusive Leadership awareness, skills and behaviors that help build diverse trusting relationships, generate inclusive engagement, unleash collective capacity and leadership, and increase desired impacts.

The 12-hour ***Cultivating Inclusive Leadership*** educational series consists of:

(1) The Art and Skill of Building Diverse Relationships

Building strong, ongoing relationships – with people from many different backgrounds – is a key step for building an inclusive organization. But it’s a step that stops many people in their tracks. This opening workshop creates a supportive environment for participants to explore the attitudes, skills, behaviors, and organizational norms that can help (or hinder) in building respectful relationships across “difference,” understanding “intersectionality” and becoming effective allies. They will generate action steps that change typical but ineffective approaches to “outreach” and “recruiting” into a more productive habits of long-term relationship-building.

(2) Leveraging the Power of Diverse Teams

While people strive to bring together diverse teams, they often work in ways that fail to reap the benefits of that diversity. The second workshop looks within the organization, to help Council members build more inclusive norms, practices and behaviors for its work. This part of the series offers both a framework and practical tools for leveraging the power of diverse teams, optimizing innovation, and strengthening organizational decision-making. Participants will generate specific action steps to become intentional and strategic in creating inclusive norms, practices and habits of behavior that generate innovation and impact.

(3) Cultivating the Leadership in Our Midst

In the search for diverse leadership, people often overlook one of their organization’s greatest untapped assets: the large pool of informal, emerging and potential leaders that already exists all around them. The third workshop enables participants to recognize and tap the diverse leadership already in your organization, network and community; and to identify practical action steps that systematically build diverse engagement and leadership.



Overall Outcomes – Participants will:

- Clarify personal and organizational purposes in seeking diversity, equity and inclusion; understand the framework of diverse “isms,” intersectionality, and where they fit within it; and explore the power of diversity for creativity and innovation
- Assess how they and their organization currently build relationships, and learn why shifting from “outreach” to cultivating strong, ongoing relationships offers a better path to success
- Explore the attitudes, behaviors and norms that support building respectful relationships across “difference”
- Strengthen their Inclusive Leadership skills, practices and behaviors to create working environments that better foster collective participation, wider inclusion, and diverse leadership
- Gain tools to promote an inclusive group process that invites and supports the sharing of diverse and divergent perspectives, experiences and ideas
- Better recognize, support and develop the large, diverse pool of “natural leaders” – the greatest untapped asset in any community – and start to build a diverse “pipeline” for NYSILC’s work
- Expand their comfort zone, and build the confidence needed to reach beyond limiting social divides and develop, strengthen, and sustain diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) within the NYSILC’s work
- Reflect on the meaning of new ideas for NYSILC’s work, and collectively identify concrete action steps to help NYSILC more consistently and strategically move from “good intentions” to “intended results”
- Become more engaged in and stronger, more effective advocates for NYSILC’s DEI processes.

Scope, Timeline and Budget

Please note: Face-to-face meetings drawing participants from multiple communities across the state is unlikely to be wise before late summer or fall. Thus, the following costs reflect work conducted virtually on Zoom. The cost will be adjusted to reflect travel time if in-person sessions are added later in the year.

Part 1: Developing Awareness & Initial Action Planning: \$6,000

- Meet with the NYSILC staff and selected Council representatives (Executive Committee and/or Diversity Committee) to learn more about the organization and its successes, challenges, and goals in order to customize the series’ content and learning environment to NYSILC’s needs. (up to 3 meetings)
- Customize and facilitate the 12-hour *Cultivating Inclusive Leadership* series specifically for the needs, goals and context of the NYSILC.
- Since the most effective change comes from intersecting processes of learning (“developing awareness”) and application (“action planning, the *Cultivating Inclusive Leadership* workshop



series includes substantial time in each session engaging participants in generating concrete targeted action steps.

I highly recommend completing the full series, if possible. Each component is designed to build on prior work. However, I also recognize that organizational budgets and volunteer time do not always allow this. In those cases, I will work with clients to understand what is feasible within their allocated budget and to select some portion of the educational content described above.

Part 2: Coordinated Action Planning: Up to \$5,000 (depending on the level of assistance desired)

- Assist a staff-Council DEI Committee to assess, prioritize and flesh out the action ideas generated during the *Cultivating Inclusive Leadership* series, turning them into a concrete, targeted action plan, with clear timelines, responsibilities and measurable outcomes.
- If desired, I will help structure and facilitate meetings to ensure productive discussions and a concrete, timely, actionable plan.
- This work will be bounded at 15 hours of face-to-face meeting time, plus the related preparation, agenda planning, email communications, etc. If less help is needed, the price will be reduced accordingly.

About Margo Hittleman, Ph.D.

Margo's passion for helping people and organizations strengthen their capacities to collectively build strong, inclusive, sustainable organizations and communities has guided her work with community, educational and business organizations for over thirty-five years.

She began co-leading anti-oppression retreats at Cornell University in the early 1980s, helping people learn about the dynamics of intersecting "isms," along with the skills of cross-group dialogue, effective allyship, transformative action. Understanding that the "personal is political," she also embarked on a life-long journey of healing from both the oppression directed at her "target" identities and the confusions acquired as a result of her "privileged" ones. In the ensuing decades, she has continued to delve deeply as both "learner" and "teacher." As a white, Jewish woman with a hearing-impaired, raised-rural life partner, Margo lives "intersectionality" in her own life.

Both independently and in multi-racial teams, Margo has designed and led numerous highly acclaimed educational and professional development workshops and curricula on inclusive leadership; diversity, equity and inclusion; staff and organizational development; human rights; social and organizational change; alliance-building, participatory action research; and evaluation. She has also taught at Cornell University, where she was the recipient of three teaching awards, as well as at Ithaca College.

In 2007, Margo co-founded the Natural Leaders Initiative, in Ithaca, N.Y., infusing the work of Inclusive Leadership and diverse grassroots leadership development more deeply into approaches to civic engagement. She is also a former Cornell Civic Leaders Fellow and currently co-founder and Senior Fellow with the Dorothy Cotton Institute, whose work focuses on civic engagement related to fostering and protecting human rights. She has written several professional development books and publications, including *Winning Decisions: Getting It Right the First Time* (Doubleday, 2002), and *Counting Caring: Attending to the Human in an Age of Public Management* (Cornell Cooperative Extensions, 2007).



Margo holds a Ph.D. in Adult and Extension Education from Cornell University. She lives in Lansing, N.Y., where she and her partner have built a home-scale permaculture garden-farm and dance in the living room.

Her consulting business, **Margo Hittleman Consulting**, through which she will be doing this work, is a sole proprietorship, woman-owned business. She will be applying for NYS MWBE certification in early 2021.

From Past Participants:

“This work is absolutely groundbreaking. It is thoughtfully designed to support transformation and concrete action on both personal and organizational levels.” -- Joanna Green, former executive director, Groundswell Center.

“If you are looking for leverage points in our system – places where small shifts in one thing can produce big changes in everything – I think you have found one in this program!” – Lauren Golden, co-founder, Healing Our World.

“This workshop taught me that inclusion isn’t about being nice. It’s about being effective in a changing world” -- anonymous.

“I would love to have access to NLI's thinking and mentality on an ongoing basis. ... I want more of my Board to attend this!” -- anonymous

References:

- **Lisa Marshall**, Executive Director, HeatSmartNY; formerly Regional Lead Organizer, Mothers Out Front. Lisa@HeatSmartTompkins.org. 850-291-5259.
- **Stacy Dimas**, Vice-Chair, Tompkins County Democratic Committee. stacedimas@gmail.com, 607-220-6635.
- **Marcia Fort**, Former Executive Director (retired), Greater Ithaca Activities Center, City of Ithaca. fortmarcia@yahoo.com. 607-592-0093.
- **Erin Martea**, President, Executive Exchange (a network of non-profit Executive Directors in Tompkins County, New York) and Executive Director, Ithaca Children’s Garden. erin@ithacachildrengarden.org. 607-227-2982.
- **Scott Graves**, Vice President of Business Development and Growth, Cerebral Palsy Alliance Research Foundation. scott.graves@cparf.org or scott.graves@mac.com. 917-697-0807.