

Southerners On New Ground

SONG Leaders Core Agreements and Code of Conduct For Our Work Together

As leaders of SONG, we agree to the following core agreements and code of conduct. We know that leadership is a gift and a privilege; we acknowledge we come from communities where we have endured great harm, and have harmed each other, through broken agreements. We agree to do our best to keep our agreements as one way to take on the work of healing in our communities. We understand that having and keeping agreements is a core way we build trust and secure the wellness of SONG; therefore, we understand that to violate any of these agreements or protocols could seriously jeopardize our leadership positions within SONG.

GUIDING AGREEMENTS

Honesty and Transparency

All SONG leaders agree to be honest with all SONG members and all other leaders about all matters that pertain to collective work. We believe honesty, even when it's hard, is at the core of building radical and loving community. We agree to creating an organizational culture where honesty in and of itself is honored even if it results in the need for SONG to deal with difficult truths. We commit to making organizational bodies, decisions, and work as transparent as we can, to as many people as we can, without compromising any needed confidentiality.

Patience and Kindness with SONG members

We commit to an organizational culture of constant leadership development and teaching. All SONG leaders agree to be patient with other members, especially new members; constantly keeping in mind that if we are still doing this work ourselves then, at some point, someone was patient with us. We agree to do our best to be kind, and if we are feeling unable to be, to step back and/or let someone else take over our work at that moment.

Active Listening

As leaders of SONG, we agree that one of our core responsibilities is to be good listeners. We agree to always do our best to listen to other members without our own agendas as much as we can. We agree to listen in order to understand first, before making our own judgments.

Thinking Collectively

As leaders of SONG, we agree to take on the responsibility to put the organization's needs and priorities at the center of our attention when we are doing SONG work. Of course, we must take care of ourselves as well; however, we agree that a central and driving force behind our leadership in SONG is our desire to support and build our communities, and never put ourselves first at the expense of the collective. We are not leaders in SONG to serve our own egos; we are leaders to be whole and help build whole communities; we agree to always keep this in mind in our decision-making.

Working Broad-based with a Strong Power Analysis to Challenge and Interrupt Oppression

As leaders, we do broad-based work with a strong power analysis of oppression: looking to challenge, interrupt and transform racism, homophobia, transphobia, classism, ableism, sexism, xenophobia, and all forms of oppression whenever we can. We understand that this requires constant self-reflection, collective reflection, and active creative work as challengers and transformers of culture. We commit to constantly be working to figure out how to do this work. We do cross-race, cross-class, cross-gender, cross-ability, cross-immigration status work, and cross-oppression work and we always find the most strategic ways to put people most affected at the center of the work.

Not Engaging in Abusive Power Dynamics

As leaders of SONG, we see all kinds of abusive power dynamics play out around us and in our communities. We agree to not initiate or perpetuate these kinds of power dynamics. Specifically, we agree to not use our privilege around age, race, culture, language, gender, immigrant status, or ability to intentionally hurt or disadvantage any other members. In contrast, we agree to use our privileges whenever possible to support SONG's work and membership. We will not use our access to resources of any kind (money, information, etc.) to disadvantage or injure any SONG members.

Being Supportive to People of All Ages

As leaders of SONG, we agree to be welcoming and open to people of all ages; and we agree to be sensitive and open to how to create spaces that feel safe and comfortable to people of all ages.

Access for All

Creating access across ability is central to moving SONG's work forward. We believe that the connections between disability, class, race, gender, and sexuality are layered and impact our communities and organizing work. We agree to listen, learn and build more accessible space whenever we can.

Valuing Multiplicity

We value different approaches, skills, leadership styles and we understand and value that we often have different needs in our various communities. We do not believe in social, political, or religious fundamentalism; the idea that there is "only one" needed or transformative skill or approach. We are always creatively looking for ways to incorporate many ideologies, approaches and skills in service of community liberation.

Communication and Clarity

In our work together, we work to create an environment where we can ask clarifying questions openly, and adapt situations around needs. We agree to always doing our best to communicate from a place of curiosity and openness; assuming best intent from others.

Discipline

We see ourselves as part of a chain of ancestors and elders who have passed on, not knowing, but hoping, that we would do our best with what has been passed down to us. We are their legacy. We agree to do our best, bring our best, work hard, and take care of ourselves—consistently in honor of ourselves, our ancestors, our elders, and our peoples.

Accountability and Support

We do what we said we were going to do. If we cannot do what we said we were going to do, we take responsibility to tell other leaders while there is still time to pick up the slack. We are willing, at all times, to give an account of all of our actions as leaders of SONG; and to hold our actions up to the standard of SONG's agreements and code of conduct. We agree to provide caring feedback that supports mutual accountability and responsibility; and to hold a space that furthers the collective vision and allows us to bring our best selves to the work. We commit to using tools (like group evaluations and self-reflections) which we know help build more transparency and accountability in groups.

Hope Before Fear

We put hope, desire, and longing at the center of our thinking and work, instead of and before working out of fear. This means, when in doubt, we are on the side of trusting each other (as leaders) and the other people we work with.

Working without Trade marking Ideas

This is a movement, not a business. We don't need to trademark or own ideas. We ask SONG work to be acknowledged for the sake of the recognition of work of our members; but we never put recognition of the organization before the importance of movement-building work.

Committed to Timely Conflict Resolution

We commit to timely and direct communication as (not if!) conflict arises and to not undermine each other's leadership. We see conflict as a necessary and inevitable part of any group or collective process: conflict creates possibility for tremendous growth and/or tremendous destruction. We choose to approach it as an opportunity for growth. We are open to our own disagreements among leadership; but we agree to participate in SONG conflict resolution processes as needed.

Wellness

We are mindful and intentional about how we take care of ourselves and each other; and seek to do so whenever we can. We do not see wellness as "self-care," we see it as "community care" that extends to each of us individually.

Stretching and Self-Reflection

We see constant growth and self-reflection as key components of every leader. We ask ourselves regularly, "Am I willing to be transformed in the service of this work? If so, how?" Every day is another chance to open our answer to this question up a little more. We agree to be open to being transformed for the good of liberation work and ourselves. We are open to push ourselves, each other, and who we work with as needed—valuing stretch and expansive ways to dream, vision, and practice. We agree to take responsibility for evaluating and reflecting on our own leadership first and foremost, before others do so. We agree to reflecting on our strengths and challenges regularly, coming to know ourselves better, and communicating our needs to others based on this self-reflection.

CODE OF CONDUCT (CONCRETE AND MEASURABLE ACTION AGREEMENTS)

This code relates to specific actions (or non-actions) that we agree to in service of protecting our organization politically and legally. We understand that as a Southern liberation-based, multi-racial, multi-gendered, LGBTQ organization—we are particularly vulnerable to scrutiny by the state and conservative political forces; we honor the following with that in mind.

Not Encouraging or Allowing Minors to use Illegal Drugs or Alcohol Around Us

As the largest grassroots queer organization in the South, we cannot afford to have our work interrupted or hurt by the legal ramifications of youth using illegal drugs or alcohol at SONG events. We agree to discourage this and interrupt this if we see it happening, for the sake of protecting SONG.

Not Engaging in Sexual Relations with Minors

As leaders of SONG, we understand that every sex positive organization (such as SONG) needs to also have a strong understanding of power dynamics between minors and adults. Politically, we understand that in an organization it is a blatant violation of boundaries and negative use of power for adult leaders to engage in any sexual conduct with minors. As leaders (those leaders who are not minors), we agree to refrain from any and all sexual conduct with minors. We also agree that if we know about a sexual relationship or encounter between an adult SONG leader and a SONG minor we will find a way for that issue to be addressed by SONG.

Being Allies to Survivors of All Forms of Violence

As leaders of SONG, we understand that intimate, communal, and state violence are present all around and inside our communities. We commit to doing everything we can to create SONG spaces that support all survivors, encourage a culture of disclosure, and create processes where survivors can be supported actively. We also agree to help connect survivors to resources they need whenever we can. As SONG leaders, we agree to finding a way to report or resource young people who confide in us about suicidal thoughts or actions; sexual violence; or physical violence. This means that we must share our mandate to disclose these three things with young people before they confide in us. (For example, any time a young person asks for a ‘private chat’ on SONG time, we will tell them that if it is about any of those three things we can’t promise them confidentiality, and that we want to help in whatever way we can.)

Financial Transparency and Accountability

SONG’s funds are always either directly from our communities, or taken in the name of our communities. Therefore, we commit to a high standard of ethics in how we raise and use funds. We agree to be transparent in raising funds: we will use money we raise for what we said we would use it for. We will be honest and transparent in how we use SONG funds, and not use SONG funds for individual gain. We will utilize the best of a “working class ethic” in how we use funds: matching our standards for “needs” to those of our working class members (i.e. not eating at expensive restaurants on SONG time while our members are eating bag lunches).

Not Physically Harming Other SONG Members

As SONG leaders, we agree to not physically harm other SONG members in anyway. We all come from many different communities, and many different walks of life—we do our best to not judge each other’s histories with violence. However, we always agree to disengage from conversations or processes if we feel that we may be close to breaking this agreement.

Honoring Confidentiality

For some SONG members, confidentiality is a life and death issue. If we are asked for confidentiality, we will honor it. If we feel we cannot, we will go back to whoever asked us for confidentiality and try to re-negotiate the agreement. If we are not sure if a conversation was confidential or not we will ask the person who we were in discussion with.

I agree to honor the above. If I cannot, I will talk these issues through with a SONG staff person.

SONG Leader, Leadership Role

Date