

## The Art of Participatory Leadership and Equity and Inclusion

Because the Art of Participatory Leadership (AoPL) seeks to bring forth the best thinking and collaborative action among and across groups of people, it is a natural fit for convening groups around issues of equity and access. Using simple, but powerful, methodologies and practices, people who participate in hosted conversations are invited to both come together into deeper relationship as well as collectively do good work around issues that are important to them.

### Overlapping Principles and Aspiration

There are four key areas of overlapping principles between the Art of Participatory Leadership (AoPL) and work geared toward addressing issues of historical oppression, diversity, and inclusion. The principles:

- Wisdom - all people have knowledge to share with the whole
- Dignity - all people deserve to be treated with respect and with appreciation for their unique gifts and to use those gifts in all areas of their lives (personal and professional)
- Voice - all people deserve to have a say in what happens to them and their communities
- Action - working together on issues that are important to us is the way to make change in our own lives, organizations, systems, and communities

AoPL and equity work both hold the above core principles with the accompanying aspiration that together, we can make systemic change where the wisdom, dignity, and voice of every person impacts our action. While AoPL was not developed specifically to address issues of historical issues of access, equity, and inclusion, it is being used to bring diverse groups of people around the world together to take action around our toughest issues.

### How does AoPL amplify equity work?

One of the core philosophies of AoPL is that *we're smarter together*. This fits nicely with traditional notions of inclusion, which stress the need for folks from marginalized groups to have an equal access and representation in a system. AoPL asks us to move a bit deeper into this inclusion conversation by shifting our typical parameters about who is invited in to our work - who are those folks who could be strange allies, surprising partners, or unexpected co-creators? What if the key to systemic change is being wildly inclusive? What might be possible if we shifted our own thinking about who “we” are?

AoPL has been viewed as “deeper than engagement” or other ways of getting others to come to the table. The notion that we need to invite others to the table is valid - especially when we are walking in the halls of power- and AoPL builds on that understanding by working to create a collective sense of “we” that moves us beyond engaging others to seeing ourselves as a whole system with valuable insights,

questions, and contributions from every other person in the system. What does work from the place of *there is no one we don't need* look like?

AoPL, which is based in living systems theory, holds diversity as the “smart” way of working. The complexity of diversity is seen as both a gift and as a given. There is an assumption that every person is needed for us to develop new solutions together.

AoPL provides practitioners with new ways of thinking about being smarter together, engaging others, and working from our strengths. It is inherently complimentary to work seeking equity and access.

#### How does AoPL differ from traditional work around diversity and inclusion?

AoPL is deeply rooted in the practice of inquiry. We know that there are answers to be had, but even more important are the questions we ask to arrive at those answers.

AoPL does not engage in a pre-designed set of exercises around current or historical realities, but rather asks questions to help us create a new future together.

Typically, AoPL workshops do not have a lot of teaching that has participants agreeing on a specific set of facts or analysis, but poses powerful questions to participants that allows them to move toward shared work and action together. AoPL practice is inherently emergent. There is a strong container of principles (some shared above) and specific methodologies/tools, which allow groups to discover, name, and plan for what they would like to create together. Emergence entails not having a predetermined answer for addressing issues, but rather allows the group to come to their own best conclusions and action planning.

AoPL works to deepen ongoing efforts to address historically hierarchies and oppressions.

#### What's possible?

What's possible is a new conversation around issues of diversity, inclusion, and equity. A conversation that invites us to our next level of thinking about these complex topics that we have been doing really good work around for many years. A conversation that does not invite easy answers, but rather invites us into the tough questions in a new way: based in relationships and the shared power of those relationships. A conversation that stands firmly upon what we do know and what is yet to be discovered about smart ways of working together across difference.