

# Helping to Empower Through Advocacy and Leadership (HEAL) National Training Institute

Adult Facilitator Guide

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# Background

The Center for Justice Innovation (Center), in collaboration with Rights4Girls, Courtney's House, and CATCH Court, launched Project HEAL: Helping to Empower through Advocacy and Leadership, an OVC-funded survivor leadership and peer support initiative for human trafficking survivors.

As part of this initiative, an advisory council comprised of national experts and a diverse group of survivors was established to guide the development of the HEAL National Training Institute, a leadership development training program for survivors. To further inform the development of this institute, a national needs assessment was conducted to promote equity and hear from as many practitioners and survivors as possible. This needs assessment focused on how to better understand the leadership and professional development needs of survivors, identify training topics and resources, consider best practices, and offer recommendations for engaging survivors in leadership training.

The HEAL National Training Institute and accompanying Facilitator Guide are a synthesis of these collaborative efforts to create a national leadership training program centered on the unique needs and diverse experiences of survivors. The facilitator guide that follows is meant to accompany and supplement the content found within the HEAL National Training Institute. Facilitators can look to this guide for helpful tips and considerations when determining how best to deliver an institute that is tailored to the needs of their participants.

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# Guiding Principles

Input from survivors, national experts, and practitioners underscored key guiding principles for the development and delivery of this institute. Facets of these guiding principles are discussed in further detail in the pages that follow.

## Flexibility

“Consider a program they create, not one they have to go through. We are walking alongside them, they are directing.”

The institute was designed with built-in adaptability and flexibility to meet the individual needs and maximize the individual strengths of each participant and group. Facilitators, together with participant input, are encouraged to tailor the overall composition of their institute to their participants, including the order and selection of the topics covered as well as the length and modality of individual sessions and/or the institute itself. The institute was also designed with tips to accommodate an in-person, virtual, or a hybrid approach to facilitation. The institute prioritizes responsiveness to participant needs over a rigid programming structure.

## Engaging Survivors

Engaging survivor-participants in the institute’s direction and facilitation are critical to its success. This includes providing the opportunity for participant feedback on the content and modality of sessions throughout the institute, and being prepared to pivot to meet their dynamic and changing needs. Facilitators can also invite participants to co-create and meaningfully contribute to the development of the program (e.g., review materials, create materials, leading or co-leading trainings). Ensure survivors receive fair and equitable compensation for their expertise when contributing to the work of the organization/program, including program development.

## Survivor-Informed Approach

The institute was developed following a survivor-informed approach, meaning “[a] program, policy, intervention, or product that is designed, implemented, and evaluated with intentional leadership, expertise, and input from a diverse community of survivors to ensure that the program, policy, intervention, or product accurately represents their needs, interests, and perceptions.”<sup>1</sup>

## Building Community

Opportunities to build community within and beyond the participant cohort are an important tenet of this training program. Space is created throughout the institute to build authentic, trust-based relationships amongst participants. In addition, facilitators are encouraged to reach out to and incorporate community resources and expertise into their programming in order to foster a broad support network and to connect participants to networking opportunities. Facilitators can also consider adding elements of mentorship and ongoing support to the institute as an additional path to connecting participants to long-term support.

## Creating A Safe, Inclusive and Empowering Space

The institute is designed to create a safer space, both physically and emotionally, and to empower participants to value their experiences and show up as their authentic selves. Participants’ voice and choice are incorporated into the design and content of the institute alongside a recognition and leveraging of their strong, resilient, and capable nature. The institute takes a trauma-informed approach,<sup>2</sup> recognizing the role and impact of trauma in participant’s past and present experiences in order to better equip them with the tools they

need to deal with trauma triggers and continue to thrive beyond their trauma. The institute also aims to be culturally responsive<sup>3</sup> by recognizing and responding to the unique and diverse experiences, cultures, and needs of survivors. Participants will be presented with a wide range of tools they need to continue to be successful and thrive, an understanding of why the tools are needed, and opportunities for them to practice these newly learned skills.

# Delivery Considerations

## Facilitators and Facilitator Training

There is not an absolute requirement that facilitators should have lived trafficking experience in order to facilitate the institute, but a background in anti-trafficking work and experience working alongside survivors is recommended. Youths surveyed for the development of this institute felt strongly that facilitators should have lived experience unless a training topic is strictly skills based, while adults were open to survivor and non-survivor facilitators. It is suggested that a survivor be present to help co-facilitate sessions led by professionals without lived experience. There is a consensus that anyone without lived experience should receive very specific training on the dynamics of human trafficking, and that all facilitators should receive training on human trafficking, trauma, trauma reactions, effective de-escalation, grounding principles, and implicit bias. Finally, consider whether facilitators have had training in or can otherwise demonstrate cultural humility and anti-oppressive practice in working with the population(s) of their group (e.g., do facilitators speak the language of participants? Are they familiar with the neighborhood/area? Do they have familiarity with culture(s) of the group?)

When considering survivor facilitators, be mindful of fast tracking survivors into facilitation roles. Institute leaders can discuss and determine eligibility requirements for facilitators, if any, and are encouraged to keep in mind principles of flexibility and equitability. Specific guidance on what kind of facilitator might be best suited to facilitate a particular session or module are located through the curriculum.

## Participant Facilitation

After an initial session on facilitation skills, participants are invited to co-create and meaningfully contribute to the development of the program by reviewing or creating materials and leading/co-leading trainings. Providing opportunities for participants to teach one another enables them to practice the skills they are learning, take ownership over the material, and to empower and motivate them as leaders.

## Group Format: Open or Closed?

Some adults surveyed in the development of this institute believe that closed cohorts are best for cultivating a sense of community, while others felt that open cohorts offer opportunities for motivation and mentorship by observing others' progress. Youth expressed a preference for closed cohorts to help build trust and community. To foster important relationship and trust building from the beginning, institute leaders might consider a closed format for at least the core sessions (see Sample Institute Curricula in the Curriculum Outline) so that everyone enters the space with the same foundation and understanding of group expectations (see Community Agreements below). When considering whether to have an open or closed group format, also consider that much of the material builds on itself within and across modules. While many of the sessions beyond the core sessions can stand alone, consider inviting someone new to enter the group at a thematic (e.g., beginning of a new module) break.

Where institute leaders determine that an open group format best fits the needs of their participants, consider how the group can help new participants enter the community. At a minimum, create space for introductions between new and existing participants, and encourage new participants to talk about what they hope to learn from the institute.

Existing participants might review any community agreements created by the group, and ask new participants if they agree with and/or would like to add those agreements. Facilitators might also encourage existing participants to volunteer to provide peer support to a new participant while they adjust to their new community.

## Time and Length

Together with participants, institute facilitators can determine how often and for how long participants will meet (e.g., weekly or bi-weekly meetings for a certain length of time, ongoing programming for an indefinite period, etc.).

## Community Agreements

Community agreements are boundaries and understandings created and honored by each participant. While not mandatory, these agreements can help participants create a shared vision for the institute and further trust and community building. Agreements can address issues of confidentiality, punctuality, respectful communication, and other expectations and responsibilities of participants. The first module of the institute proposes an activity around creating a community agreement. When drafting community agreements, consider the consequences for participants who do not follow the agreements or who do not agree with them.

## Virtual Adaptations

In some instances, holding all or part of the institute virtually may be necessary or help increase access. A virtual format can allow for more robust programming and access to more volunteers, mentors, and industry experts outside their communities. Participants can benefit from the accessibility of virtual programs if they are facing transportation or childcare issues, for example. There are notes throughout the institute about how to adapt certain activities or sessions to be held virtually.

When considering whether to create virtual components of the institute, consider the impact on community building. Some survivors, particularly youth, prefer to meet in person to get to know each other and share their struggles and victories together. While it is possible to build community virtually, it can be challenging. It is recommended that virtual sessions be held in small groups to help foster relationships. We also recommend taking more frequent breaks—e.g., a 5–10 minute screen break every 30 minutes.

### Digital Literacy

If training is virtual, you will want to ensure that you are meeting the needs of participants with limited tech experience or access to technology.

To start, ensure that everyone has access to a computer and strong internet connection, and that technology training is provided as needed. Consider exploring funding for devices and internet for participants in need.

For those with little tech experience or experience with your online platform: offer a demo/video tutorial, introduce different strategies slowly, ask for feedback, set clear expectations for participation, explain why you are using a virtual platform and the benefits, and do not make assumptions regarding their level of understanding and ability.

### Creating a Trauma-Informed Virtual Environment

Many tips on creating an in-person trauma-informed program also apply to a virtual model. Below are some helpful resources to think about making a virtual program more trauma-informed:

- <https://traumainformedoregon.org/creating-a-trauma-informed-space-in-online-platforms>
- A website with a link to many helpful resources can be found here: <https://www.pacesconnection.com/blog/resources-on-hosting-trauma-informed-virtual-meetings>



## Program Readiness

The success of a survivor's participation in this program and in their long-term professional development is furthered by addressing their healing needs. However, this is not a therapeutic program. This program is intended to be offered in addition to prior and/or ongoing healing and therapy work done outside this program. Institute facilitators might consider creating an assessment to gauge participant readiness or eligibility for the program. This can help to identify whether their basic needs are being met and whether their healing process would not be rushed by embarking on advocacy and leadership training.

## Individualized Approach

Since individuals are in different stages of their journey, the institute strives to meet survivors where they are in their journey and to help them identify their individual needs and goals. Creating an individualized approach to learning can begin prior to participant enrollment in the institute. For instance, institute leaders may consider creating an initial assessment to identify participants' specific leadership and advocacy skills and future goals. Once desired skills are identified, the training can be tailored to hone the skills they want to learn and practice.

## Feedback and Adaptability

Throughout the institute, participants are offered space to provide ongoing feedback about the training and what they want to learn. A constant feedback loop between participants and facilitators is essential to creating an institute that is responsive to the participants' dynamic needs. Eliciting participant feedback throughout the institute can maximize the helpfulness and relevance of the content while also elevating their voice and choice. Be mindful, however, of the need to balance individual and group needs. For example, balancing group dynamics can present a challenge when some participants seek a more therapeutic support-style

group whereas others want to move past support (or receive support in other settings) and want to “get to work” and focus on training and skill building.

Each session begins with a check-in and ends with a check-out, which are great times to engage with participants about the material—how they're feeling, what they found helpful, what they would change, what they would like to learn next, etc. Also feel free to elicit feedback more casually throughout activities. Additional and more in-depth debriefs may also be needed throughout the institute to process and reflect on material. Some institutes may even opt to alternate one session of content with one session devoted entirely to a debrief. See Additional Participant Resources for debrief suggestion questions to guide such sessions.

Consider offering additional opportunities to participants to provide anonymous feedback through, for example, surveys or comment boxes (virtual or physical) at the end of each session or module.

## Program Milestones and Incentives

Some participants may prefer striving for certain milestones so long as there is intentionality behind those milestones that goes beyond certificates. Any program milestones should balance recognizing and celebrating individual accomplishments with broader program goals of recovery, leadership, and advocacy.

You may also consider creating a pre- and post-assessment for participants to evaluate their growth (hard and soft skills) over the course of the institute.

## Mentorship

Mentorship and other forms of peer or professional support can be offered in addition to institute programming. Mentors (or “collaboration coach,” “job coach,” or “life mentor,” depending on preference and role) can walk with survivors to help them navigate challenges and their professional path throughout and beyond the institute.

Careful creation of mentorship guidelines and eligibility can be critical to a successful mentorship program. Mentors can be peers or professionals, though youth expressed a strong preference that life mentors should themselves be trafficking survivors. Regardless, all mentors should receive adequate training on the dynamics of trafficking and trauma, and be careful to not overstep their role as mentors by acting like social workers, counselors, or case managers. Successful mentors are kind and gentle, but also willing to push. They are also consistently available.

Keep in mind that effective and healthy mentorship is often organic rather than the result of a formal structure. It is therefore recommended that mentors be vetted, and that survivors have a choice when selecting their mentor as opposed to being assigned one. Consider making the pairing process interactive and fun by, for example, asking prospective mentors to create videos that introduce themselves to potential mentees. Pairing is critical and needs to be the right fit.

Mentors should also be given feedback throughout the process, including why survivors may choose to leave mentorship. Personality conflicts are normal, and flexibility should be provided for participants to change mentors.

Mentorship can also be created and fostered between participants themselves. For example, institute leaders can provide opportunities for participants to take the lead in supporting one another, such as taking turns leading weekly support calls, “empower hours,” or providing other similar opportunities throughout the institute. In an open group format, existing members can provide critical support to new members.

Consider offering ongoing support and long-term engagement as opposed to a finite period of support tied to the institute. An alumni group, for example, offers a path to connect and network with other survivor leaders post-institute. Regarding mentors, they can also work with participants to create a plan for after the program, such as planning next steps, creating connections to opportunities like internships or jobs, and referring to other trainings. Consistent, long-term mentorship is very important.

Additional resources for guidance on creating a mentorship component to your institute (these

guides were designed for youth but offer guidance helpful to adult mentoring as well):

- Culturally Responsive Mentoring for Youth of Color: <https://www.youthcollaboratory.org/resource/culturally-responsive-mentoring-youth-color>
- Mentoring Models: <https://www.youthcollaboratory.org/resource/mentoring-models>
- Mentoring Basics: <https://www.youthcollaboratory.org/resource/mentoring-basics>
- Strength-Based Mentoring: <https://www.youthcollaboratory.org/toolkit/strength-based-mentoring>
- Critical Elements of Mentoring: <https://www.youthcollaboratory.org/resource/critical-elements-mentoring-0>
- Trauma-Informed Mentoring: <https://www.youthcollaboratory.org/resource/trauma-informed-mentoring>

## Accessibility

Be it online or in person, you will want to ensure that you are meeting the learning needs of all participants. This includes accommodating different learning styles, language abilities, literacy, physical abilities, etc.

We’ve provided some resources on how to make your institute more accessible:

- Vera Institute of Justice offers several guides for designing accessible resources: <https://www.vera.org/publications/designing-accessible-resources-for-people-with-disabilities-and-deaf-individuals>
- Additional resources on creating accessible programs: <https://www.missouristate.edu/Accessibility/advancing-accessibility.htm>
- Some tips on making your material more digitally accessible: [https://www.washington.edu/doit/sites/default/files/atoms/files/20\\_Tips\\_Designing\\_Courses\\_5\\_7\\_20.pdf](https://www.washington.edu/doit/sites/default/files/atoms/files/20_Tips_Designing_Courses_5_7_20.pdf)

## Engaging Community Resources

Facilitators are encouraged throughout the institute to engage and leverage community-based partners and resources to provide additional expertise through guest speakers, increase participant access to networking opportunities, and connect them to industries in which they are interested in working. This is done to create meaningful opportunities outside of survivor leadership and to expand community networks, resources, and support beyond the institute.

## Self-Care

Throughout the curriculum, we discuss the importance of self-care for participants, but these reminders and tips also apply to facilitators. Ensure you take the time you need to engage in self-care activities during and in between sessions, and we encourage you to also make space to regularly debrief amongst facilitators.

# Additional Facilitator Tips

The survivors and experts who informed the development of the institute suggested some additional tips for facilitators to consider.

- Practice and promote inclusion.
  - *Ensure that programming is culturally responsive to participants, and seek input and engagement from diverse community-based resources to get multiple perspectives. This may include services that account for the unique needs of, for example, immigrants; lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer (or sometimes questioning), and others (LGBTQ+); and Black, Indigenous and people of color (BIPOC).*
  - *Recognize and acknowledge that everyone has a unique story and comes from a different background and experience. We speak about oppression and marginalization throughout the institute to recognize the impact of this on individual experiences.*
- Create a trauma-informed space. Facilitators must learn to redirect trauma reactions, de-escalate situations, hold uncomfortable space, avoid being reactive, and withhold judgment and “shoulds.” Recognize that anyone can be triggered at any time, thus it is critical to offer on-call support staff to respond to trauma reactions and increase access to mental health services. Make support staff available after the training and check-in with participants to gauge needs. Keep in your role as an educator (versus a case worker) when responding to participant needs, and do not hesitate to refer out to external resources.
- Be intentional with language.
  - *Use language participants relate to, and be honest and explicit. Avoid using trendy language that loses meaning, or proxy language that obscures the reality. Do not be afraid to use uncomfortable language relating to “the life.”*
  - *Redefine language to ensure it is inclusive. Language and framework can limit an individual, so facilitators and participants should avoid trying to name experiences because they are so vastly different.*
  - *Inform survivors how language may show up in spaces, how they can prepare for it, and how they can shift harmful narratives or create positive ones.*
  - *Finally, be mindful of body language. Survivors can be hypervigilant and non-survivors may be unaware of offensive body language. Avoid dumbing down language and be mindful of any anxious body language that might make young people uncomfortable.*
- Be mindful not to unintentionally embarrass or shame. Remember people have different backgrounds and levels of ability. For example, education may have been disrupted and literacy may be a challenge.
- Be flexible and provide choice.
- Be transparent about expectations.
- Create a safe, brave space.
  - *Avoid asking participants to give consent to be filmed and recorded. Or, if they would like to record the sessions, make sure it is clearly stated in and agreed upon in the community agreements.*
  - *Create community agreements (see above).*
  - *Help participants feel brave about sharing and recognize that being uncomfortable can lead to growth and self-actualization. But keep in mind that they need not feel obligated to share their story.*
  - *Acknowledge the reality of survivors’ experiences and invite them to share.*
  - *Empower participants to value their experience, show up as their authentic selves, and understand the systems in which they are working.*
  - *Sometimes, hearing about trauma even in a general way can be uncomfortable. Remind participants to take care of themselves and feel free to leave the room, if needed.*

- Cultivate community.
  - *Community offers a space where they feel like they belong and are genuinely cared for.*
  - *Recognize the importance of authentic, trust-based relationships.*
  - *Foster healthy and positive relationship that do not reiterate power and control dynamics.*
  - *Give permission for participants to engage and share.*
  - *Welcome and integrate new participants.*

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# Footnotes

1. This definition was adapted from the Department of Justice, Office for Victims of Crime Model Standards for Serving Victims and Survivors of Crime, available at <https://ovc.ojp.gov/sites/g/files/xyckuh226/files/model-standards/6/glossary.html>.
2. “A trauma-informed approach recognizes signs of trauma in individuals and the professionals who help them and responds by integrating knowledge about trauma into policies, procedures, practices, and settings. This approach includes an understanding of the vulnerabilities and experiences of trauma survivors, including the prevalence and physical, social, and emotional impact of trauma. A trauma-informed approach places priority on restoring the survivor’s feelings of safety, choice, and control. Programs, services, agencies, and communities can be trauma-informed.” Definition from the Department of Justice, Office for Victims of Crime Model Standards for Serving Victims and Survivors of Crime, available at <https://ovc.ojp.gov/sites/g/files/xyckuh226/files/model-standards/6/glossary.html>.
3. “The ability of an individual or organization to interact effectively with people of different cultures. This includes drawing on knowledge of culturally based values, traditions, customs, language, and behavior to plan, implement, and evaluate service activities.” Definition from the Department of Justice, Office for Victims of Crime Model Standards for Serving Victims and Survivors of Crime, available at <https://ovc.ojp.gov/sites/g/files/xyckuh226/files/model-standards/6/glossary.html>.



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