

Report-back from BTS Diversity and Inclusion Workshop 2017

From December 9-10, 2017, members of the Maritimes-Guatemala Breaking the Silence Network (BTS) met in Tatamagouche, Nova Scotia for a workshop on diversity and inclusion. The workshop was facilitated by Mohamed Yaffa and Paula Gallant.

Participants: Ann Manicom (personnel committee); Jessie McInnis (North Shore committee); Moira Peters (fundraising committee); Yvette Michaud (Halifax committee); Kathryn Anderson (finance committee); Rosalind Waters (PEI committee); Caren Weisbart (personnel committee); Lisa Rankin (staff); Stacey Gomez (new staff); Janette Fecteau (Antigonish committee); Jackie MacVicar (outgoing staff); and Wilf Bean (BTS member)

Key Concepts

Diversity: All the ways in which people differ, and all the different characteristics that make one individual or group different from another. It is all-inclusive and recognizes everyone and every group as part of the diversity that should be valued. A broad definition includes not only race, ethnicity, and gender — the groups that most often come to mind when the term "diversity" is used — but also age, national origin, religion, disability, sexual orientation, socioeconomic status, education, marital status, language, and physical appearance. It also involves different ideas, perspectives, and values (Source: UC Berkeley Center for Equity, Inclusion and Diversity)

Inclusion: Authentically bringing traditionally excluded individuals and/or groups into processes, activities, and decision/policy making in a way that shares power (Source: OpenSource Leadership Strategies)

Workshop Goal: To build a shared vision of how diversity and inclusion will be considered in our work as a network

Objectives:

- Explore a shared understanding of respect, diversity and inclusion
- Reflect on our level of awareness and acknowledgement of the forms of inequity and oppression in order to develop a deeper commitment to change
- To brainstorm ways to involve BTS members, local committees, working groups and partners in integrating these understandings into the life and work of BTS
- To discuss diversity and inclusion in the context of our membership and as a lens for our shared vision and future engagements

Workshop summary

1) BTS' culture

We spoke about BTS' culture, examining it as an iceberg with layers that are more visible (above the water) and less visible (below the water).

Top of iceberg (BTS at first glance):

- mostly white
- multigenerational/intergenerational

- mostly women
- mostly university educated
- Anglophone/English speaking or learned Spanish speaking
- non-profit
- solidarity network of people (not an NGO)
- continuity
- people with money - delegation
- not religious
- community based
- "something to do with Guatemala"
- crafts & coffee
- Tatamagouche Centre/United Church
- middle class
- social justice
- mining justice accompaniment
- interns
- refugees
- delegations
- charity
- "do gooders"
- solidarity & analysis
- Tatamagouche
- decentralized
- been to Guatemala
- Christian/secular
- committed
- non-charitable NGO

Below the water (what we know by asking or being involved):

- grassroots--Guatemalan partners & committees
- valuing other cultures
- adaptable & flexibility
- differences of ideology
- reflective
- consensus
- religious pluralism
- Kathryn holds things together
- non-hierarchical
- long-term relationships -- among each other and with partners
- Why? It's in us to complete ourselves, universe unfolding and trying to heal itself
- demanding of members - money, emotional, time, intense situations, privilege of resources, partners, hosting & accountability
- many ways and levels to get involved
- travel is challenging - limits who can go
- faith! we can and do make a difference - through experience and through privilege
- immense power differences - northerners can opt in and out
- unspoken rules - we have group norms
- flexibility - structure & areas of involvement
- family-like
- internal power dynamic
- not one leader/talk to consensus
- open to move/change
- influence long history & creation
- lack of clarity
- lack of decision-making
- lack of ongoing cohesive structure
- fluid participation
- decentralized (spread out)
- consensus-based/collective work
- independent/critical voice (not an NGO, not government-funded)
- changing, shifting levels of engagement/leadership
- precarity, reality of this work
- *privilege to take risks*
- citizenship/travel
- staff made many decisions
- disparate organization: hard to make decisions - small group of people making decisions because they make/have time to commit
- "messy"
- non-cohesive around policy & development

2) BTS in 2020

We collectively brainstormed what BTS will look like in 2020. These are the ideas shared by our members:

- Different ways of contributing are valued so that different communities feel welcome
- Different marginalized communities feel and are represented
- Representatives from high schools are present
- We have fun
- We court people in order to make the network accessible and interesting to others
- We have committed to and are learning to employ a decolonized stance
- We begin every meeting, gathering or space by reaffirming our commitment through a statement to diversity and greater inclusion
- We have the flexibility and capacity to be involved or support social justice struggles in the Maritimes
- Our members feel empowered to participate in ways they are able/want
- We are sometimes meeting in places other than Tatamagouche
- We have an ongoing fund to support people who want to go to Guatemala and for long-term involvement
- Since teleportation exists, there is representation of Guatemalan partner groups on our decision-making bodies
- We have a delegation of Black, Indigenous and People of Colour going to Guatemala
- There are more People of Colour in the room
- The network has meaningful relationships with other organizations
- We've renewed the *encuentros* (meetings between partners and BTS members)
- We begin every gathering with a clear outline of how decisions will be made

3) Issues we need to address

With the image of BTS 2020 in mind, we listed the problems/issues that will have to be overcome in order to achieve a diverse and inclusive network. We phrased them as questions, beginning with "How can we...?" This process produced 25 topics, which we then prioritized using dotmocracy. Each * represents 1 vote. These were the highest ranked ideas:

1. How can we hold partner *encuentros* again? ***
2. How can we provide more support for our staff? *
3. How can we reach out to racialized communities beyond personal relationships individual BTS members have? *
4. How can we create better access to a broader population/membership?*
5. How do we develop a strategy for understanding decolonization and how it can play out in BTS? ***
6. How can we clarify BTS's structure and decision-making so people feel on the same page/level playing field? *****
7. How can we access more grants? **
8. How can we develop more genuine solidarity relationships with organizations/ individuals from diverse groups (People of Colour, Black and Indigenous)? *****
9. How can we increase energy and engagement in local committees? *****

- 10. We need to articulate better our anti-oppression position**
- 11. We need to have a benchmark assessment of where we are now in terms of inclusion. *
- 12. How can we reduce demands on volunteers and staff so that time can be taken to develop new/diverse relationships? *
- 13. We need to understand better the barriers to participation in BTS for marginalized communities. *****
- 14. How can we involve people in different ways?*

4) Key priority areas moving forward

We first prioritized the 4 highest ranked issues (numbers 6, 8, 9 and 13). We then participated in an activity aimed at developing concrete recommendations for each of these areas in a collective manner.

1) How can we increase energy and engagement in local committees?	
<p>Solutions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Energizing activities or issues • Joint meetings by Skype • How do local committees want to be engaged? • Alternate meeting days • Advertise meeting date & agenda • More sharing of activities • Delve into questions of WHY a local committee should meet • Plan trainings/transformational activities locally • Carousel meetings for those who can (e.g. Members from Tatamagouche could go to PEI) • Engagement with other organizations 	<p>Barriers:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • People are busy • Internet connections • Meetings aren't energizing/inspiring • Event planning and "urgency" are the main focus of meetings
Creative ways to overcome barriers:	

- 'Fun' / participatory actions or seasonal events
- Having an energizing/inspiring part of the meeting
- Inviting people from other 'movements' to present at a meeting
- Meet in cafés or local hot spots
- More visits by Maritime staff/calls in with Guatemala staff

Recommendations:

#1: At least twice a year, invite guests from other community and organizations

#2: Do a participatory action every season (eg. urgent action, letter of support, or march) supported by staff and connected to network

2) How can we clarify BTS's structure and decision-making so people feel on the same page/level playing field?

Solutions:

- Find ways for local committees to vote on issues which are in front of the Community Council
- Clarify more on BTS website
- Create popular education document
- Send Community Council minutes to entire list
- Create a visual document that shows the structures and mandates AND lists people involved--a chart updated annually

Barriers:

- Lack of local committee engagement
- Requires larger time commitment
- Need to create a system people can actually engage in
- Website takes staff time
- Good to have other people involved, not just staff
- Danger of flooding the list

Creative ways to overcome barriers:

- Make document part of regular bulletin (within staff time commitments), one stop info which could include report backs on Community Council decisions and opportunities to give feedback on those decisions
- Make documents accessible by Internet link and hard copy by request

Recommendations:

#1: Revisit BTS structure. Honestly name how it works (eg. how decisions are made, what conflicts have come up that are structural at their core)

#2: Create visual document that shows structure, mandate and lists people involved – make document part of regular business. Clarify verbally at the beginning of each local committee meeting, AGM, etc. how decisions in that meeting are/will be made

#3: Annual BTS diversity and inclusion meeting

3) How can we develop more genuine solidarity relationships with organizations/ individuals from diverse groups (People of Colour, Black, Indigenous)

Solutions:

- Seek out and identify existing networks
- Plan a WELCOME
- Learn about their struggles
- Build on what already exists (e.g. Peace & Friendship)
- Staff attends events in solidarity

Barriers:

- Time & prioritization
- Understanding/taking into account our privilege (and how that can interfere with our willingness to learn about others)

Creative ways to overcome barriers:

- Include in staff work plan
- Encourage local committees to attend events either locally or car pool to communities.
- Take the time to invite members of diverse communities to BTS events
- Many BTS members also belong to other organizations working in solidarity in the Maritimes -- build on that cross pollination

Recommendations:

#1: Connect with the organizations we know to see how we can support each others' work. This becomes a visible/key priority of BTS Maritimes staff

#2: Publicize/share information on BTS website about other diverse communities, organizations holding protests, public events so that BTS members can create stronger connections with diverse communities

4) How can we understand barriers to participation of marginalized communities in BTS?

<p>Solutions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Academic research or studies from similar organizations • Conversations with people already engaged in BTS, including marginally • Appreciative Inquiry, focus group evaluation • Create relationships, develop understanding, attend community events in racialized communities • Need to do our own work first 	<p>Barriers:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Transportation • People who have felt marginalized by BTS may not trust process • Busy overcommitted communities • White folks' fear of entering the space of others • BTS run by white folks
<p><i>Creative ways to overcome barriers:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inviting people: letting people know they are wanted, needed and valued • Thoughtful facilitation: make an extra effort to create welcoming spaces that aren't necessarily easy to create. 	
<p><i>Recommendations:</i></p> <p>#1: "Research". Gather and analyze information (could be through pre-existing info, surveys, focus groups, interviews, etc.) – taking into account differing levels of engagement in BTS</p> <p>#2: Develop proposals for change</p>	