

CROSS-CULTURAL PROTOCOLS IN RITES OF PASSAGE: GUIDING PRINCIPLES, THEMES, AND INQUIRY

Youth Passageways has adopted these principles to guide its operations. It is our hope that this document may support affiliated organizations in creating their own working agreements, standards, and relations capable of addressing and caring for the needs that arise through their good work. This is a living document, which will be regularly updated. Please submit feedback, comments, and stories about how this document is being used to: info@youthpassageways.org.

Considerations

These protocols and approach outlined in this document can bring difficult dynamics to the surface, within individuals and communities. This document came into existence through a painful process, involving the blood, sweat, and tears of many. Navigating it may similarly require difficult soul-searching for you and your community/ organization. We are still learning how to best support others as they navigate this process. A couple of considerations we suggest: 1) assess investment/buy-in from members of your team, and their relative level of power and influence, before starting the work of unpacking this document. Don't go it alone! 2) consider the social positioning (both within the organization and in a broader societal context) of those leading the process. 3) Take stock of your resources (time, money, emotional energy, expertise) before diving into these protocols. Realistically consider if now is the right time, as exploring the document is likely to bring core issues into the light before it helps resolve them. Please contact info@youthpassageways.org if you'd like more support in this process.

Context

Rite of passage ceremonies are both old and new, and can be learned, inherited, gifted, created and experienced, in many contexts. It has been the experience of many in this network and beyond that there is a tremendous gift and beauty in this, and also that disputes can arise in the construction, use, and sharing of ritual practices and language.

Many of these disputes have their roots in the centuries of violence, genocide, and intentional cultural destruction. Continued inequities reinforce deep wounds within and between cultures. These dynamics occur between indigenous and settler cultures, and diasporic communities and "dominant" cultures. In unique ways, each of these groups has suffered from uprooting and historical trauma. The circumstances by which each of us have lost or been ripped from our indigeneity constitutes a specific history, and carries specific wounds and responsibilities. Because of the complex fabric of history we may play the roles of both colonizers and colonized, the under/over privileged, depending on the context. All of these factors influence what is possible and what is challenging in the delivery of rite of passage ceremonies and processes.

The contemporary rites of passage movement stands indebted to many cultural traditions which have in best-case scenarios gifted practices and in many cases suffered theft or appropriation. Particularly

important to acknowledge are indigenous societies for their centuries- and millennia-long cultural practices in human development. They have provided a formative influence on contemporary movements theoretically, aesthetically, and in terms of actual ritual practices. We also recognize that human beings, regardless of cultural background or connection to tradition, have painstakingly fought to reclaim lost cultural traditions, and by direct communion, inspiration, and intuition, have created new forms of initiation and other cultural rituals and ceremonies that have validity for their communities and beyond. The intersection of these truths needs particular care and attention, especially for a national youth rites of passage network. With discernment, we respect both established and emergent practices with all of the attendant complexities that this entails.

Our movement exists because the “THE HOUSE IS ON FIRE!”, and our young people are in a state of desperation on an international/global scale. Working through and learning from the inter-cultural conflicts in our movement and building toward reparations and restoration is an integral part of creating the ceremonial processes that allow communities to be renewed by the fires of transformation crossed by their youth. It is also an integral part of the world of justice, peace, purpose, mystery and abundance into which we seek to initiate our youth. Many well intentioned people do unintended harm when they mean to do good. Our hope is that through learning from one another and through practice, our intentions, actions, and effects as a movement can be aligned.

Our goal is not to offer an exhaustive document or settle issues once and for all, but to provide context, background, starting points for consideration, and a deepening and softening into the issues and questions. We recognize what we propose to do here is many lives’ work and we enter with humility and desire to learn. May these principles and questions draw on the wisdom of our ancestors and teachers, serve as a next unfolding and point of reference, and support future generations.

Assume Goodwill

We enter with a spirit of goodwill. We strive to trust that others are doing the same.

Historical Context, Healing & Reconciliation

We acknowledge historical context and historical relationships of peoples and place, recognizing that many cultures have been subjected, and continue to be subjected, to deep violations. This context affects access to power and justice and is embedded in relationships between peoples. We strive to educate ourselves and others about these dynamics, open ourselves to the pain, help sensitize others to it, and contribute to healing and reconciliation.

The Right to Earth and Spirit

We recognize the rights of all people to deep relationship with Earth and Spirit, and that we all have the right and innate ability to receive information from the more-than-human world.

Cultural Humility

We commit to a practice of cultural humility and cultural self-awareness. We strive to increase skillfulness communicating across cultures and deepen awareness of our own and other’s cultural norms. We take responsibility to deepen our understanding of our own cultural and ancestral practices and ritual forms, and those of others. When we share teachings/artifacts from cultures other than our own, we do so with

discernment, and provide context. We strive to become aware of and name the lenses through which we see the world, and recognize that others may see things differently. We ask rather than assume as much as possible.

Relationship to Place

Both in our home communities and when entering into a new place, we strive to educate ourselves about the land, the historical and contemporary and political context of the peoples of that land, build relationships with the people of that place, and follow local protocols as best we can. This includes seeking permission to conduct ceremony or other activities in that location.

Addressing and Growing through Conflict

We are committed to ongoing Cross-Cultural relationships, and strive to develop and support mechanisms and processes for working with conflict, reconciliation and forgiveness. We believe that justice and healing are central to each undertaking, rather than secondary benefits or distractions.

Sexuality & Gender

We recognize the essential nature of sexuality and gender in the work of rites of passage, and openly explore the dynamics of masculinity, femininity, and queerness (as archetypal energies, social dynamics, and deep cultural wounds) in our work together. We recognize that binary thinking is a product of patriarchy and colonization, and seek to bring balance by honoring and making space for all genders inside and outside of this binary. We strive to create inclusive spaces where LGBTQIA+ folks (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer or Questioning, Intersex, Asexual, plus) feel seen, heard, recognized, and honored, and to recognize and mitigate our own privilege in order to create safe spaces to center the voices of those often marginalized.

Different Perspectives/Perceptions of Time

We strive to become sensitized to different perceptions of time within and between different cultures. We recognize that ceremonial time differs from linear time and our work and schedules are designed with that awareness. We strive to set and keep to agreements of time and space, including agreements that at times, time will be fluid and processes will last as long as required. We commit to holding a long view of time, which holds in our awareness many generations of ancestors as well as future generations to come.

Legal Considerations and Free Prior and Informed Consent (FPIC)

We recognize that many aspects of culture, including dress, symbols, ritual and language, may be subject to intellectual property laws. Additionally, some indigenous peoples have their own norms, customs or legal systems associated with the use of their cultural ways. We strive to become aware and abide by these norms, customs and laws and practice Free Prior and Informed Consent.

Exchange of Money/Commodification of Rites of Passage

Many issues exist around the commodification of spiritual traditions and cultural symbols of indigenous and diasporic peoples. We strive to educate ourselves on these issues, and to act with consciousness

and transparency around the exchange of money in our work. We support practitioners having sustainable means as they assist communities and pursue right livelihood in these transition times. We strive to make initiatory work accessible and equitable for all that need it.

Legacy

We honor our teachers and seek blessing to operate alongside of our mentors, teachers and elders in the use of ceremonial and ritual processes. Our work is inherently inter-generational, therefore we seek out participation from all generations. We are accountable to future generations for what we model by what we teach and how we teach it - today.

Gratitude, Generosity, and Celebration

We celebrate, acknowledge, and give thanks for every step toward right relationship. It takes courage to face these conversations directly; even having them is cause for celebration. We water the good along the way.

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Submitted by Youth Passageways Cross-Cultural Protocols Working Group:

Ramon Parish, Darcy Ottey, Pat McCabe, Sharon Shay Sloan, Sobey Wing, Mark Robinson

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