

## **Statement on Power, Access, and Inclusion at the East Coast Nonviolent Global Liberation retreat, Oct 30 - Nov 5, 2019 at Stony Point, NY (USA)**

This statement is meant to clarify key assumptions, intentions, and expectations around power, access, and inclusion as they relate to the 2019 US East Coast NGL retreat. We want prospective participants to have enough information and context to make an informed choice about attending, and we want to be clear about what we can offer and what we can't.

Nonviolent Global Liberation (NGL) is a community that formed to develop, refine, and practice a framework of ideas and skills that create new global systems that work for all. NGL shares critiques of current systems of domination with many other contemporary social justice activists, organizations, and movements. It couples this critique with a vision of a future that is rooted in a detailed, specific, and unwavering commitment to care for all. We believe that the challenges in this time of human history are immense and urgent, and call for strong collaboration even among people who do not share the same analysis and strategies. This, in of itself, can take significant capacity, time, and resources.

The NGL community aims to move from critique towards strategies that are deeply grounded in nonviolence and based on understanding and addressing the structural, institutional, and historical conditions giving rise to such crises as poverty, police violence, mass incarceration, war, environmental collapse, massive refugee migration, and climate change. We also seek to engender conversations and activities about such conditions that allow people to form bonds of trust across societal lines of division.

Foundational to this is identifying and transforming systems that are based on implicit or explicit coercion. This requires understanding and challenging the dynamics of racism, patriarchy, colonialism, and other forms of domination – even as they show up in our community. We strive to cultivate greater awareness and self-reflection among NGL members about dynamics of power and privilege, whatever their social location, through agreements/commitments, special sessions, resource materials, and peer support related to power and privilege. Locally and globally, we seek to fundamentally re-create new systems of shared power, resource flow based on needs, and care for all rather than simply rearranging who occupies dominant and nondominant positions within the same or renewed systems of oppression.

We recognize that centering the voice, perspectives, and experiences of those in currently nondominant positions is crucial to engaging in social change work that is effective and does not reinforce systems of oppression. We invite and include both those who are currently in dominant and nondominant positions based on a commitment to collective liberation. We recognize that those whom the system privileges most often resist change because facing privilege invariably entails pain. This, then, necessitates a synergy of dialogue and nonviolent action to understand and eventually embrace collective liberation. We seek to use as little force as possible with as much love and conscious choice as possible to avoid replicating cycles of violence and oppression. No oppression has been transformed by passing trauma from one group to another.

At every NGL retreat so far, we have engaged deeply with these issues. We are continually asking questions and experimenting with what ways of inviting greater inclusivity work given capacity and resources. Despite our best intentions and analysis, we acknowledge that the NGL community does not currently have significant numbers of Black and Brown, indigenous, LGBTQI+, and working-class members. Retreats are open to the public and so the current composition of the NGL community flows from the particular history and networks that gave rise to NGL, as well as the accessibility of NGL in terms of organizational culture, time, resources, and location.

NGL retreats have attracted participants who come with low awareness of or interest in issues of power and privilege as well as those who come with high awareness and a tendency to frame and confront these issues through blame and shame. A unique contribution that NGL offers is its attempt to work out in specific detail what it means to “call in” rather than “calling out;” how to affirm the power and necessity of naming impacts, care for impacts, raise awareness, and grow our collective liberation with care.

For the 2019 US East Coast NGL retreat, we continue to experiment with greater inclusion. The facilitation team represents a mix of national, racial, religious, gender, and ethnic social locations. We are also seeking to recruit participants who more fully represent nondominant groups and centering their voices, perspectives, and experiences. We are aware that it takes concerted effort, courage, patience, and humility to create a meaningful multicultural community. We ask all interested participants to keep in mind that this is a work in progress and that how we (including you) go about it – given all our collective, individual, and neurobiological constraints – is as important as its outcomes.

To the best of our ability, according to the resources we have now, we have engaged in the following strategies at retreats:

- Attending to emotional accessibility by supporting affinity groups;
- Attending to financial accessibility by implementing a needs-based gift economy format re: program expenses;
- Responding to impacts (including micro-aggressions) in multiple ways specifically informed by a deeply nonviolent approach, both at the individual and systemic levels;
- Continually seeking feedback around our efforts in inclusion, reviewing it, reflecting, and incorporating what we learn in the design and realigning of our operational systems.

These are additional strategies that we are inspired to develop or further implement:

- Building meaningful personal relationships with leaders and activists from nondominant groups and inviting them into membership, leadership, co-creation, and joint decision making in ways that benefit all;
- Using targeted media, networks, and technologies to reach out to a more representative audience;
- Proactively and responsibly committing to physical, sensory, language, and further financial accessibility;
- Offering tracks related to healing and reconciliation around collective and transgenerational harms; and
- Proactively and robustly acknowledging/celebrating diverse identities and histories.