

Purpose, Vision, Strategy:

Insights from the July Transitions Lab



July 2015 Transitions Lab
Hosted by Movement Strategy Center
Oakland, California

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction:

MSC Transitions Lab..... p.2

Day One: Connecting & Grounding in Practice & Purpose

Love, Purpose, & Connection..... p.4

Questions People Carried..... p.5

Purpose and Practice..... p.7

Day Two: Seeing the Whole & Exploring Navigation

Vision & Courageous Commitment..... p.11

Transitions Landscape..... p.15

Day Three: Commitments, Questions, Next Steps

Navigating from Purpose..... p.17

Practice & Commitments..... p.19

Navigating the Unknown Into the Future..... p.21

Appendices:

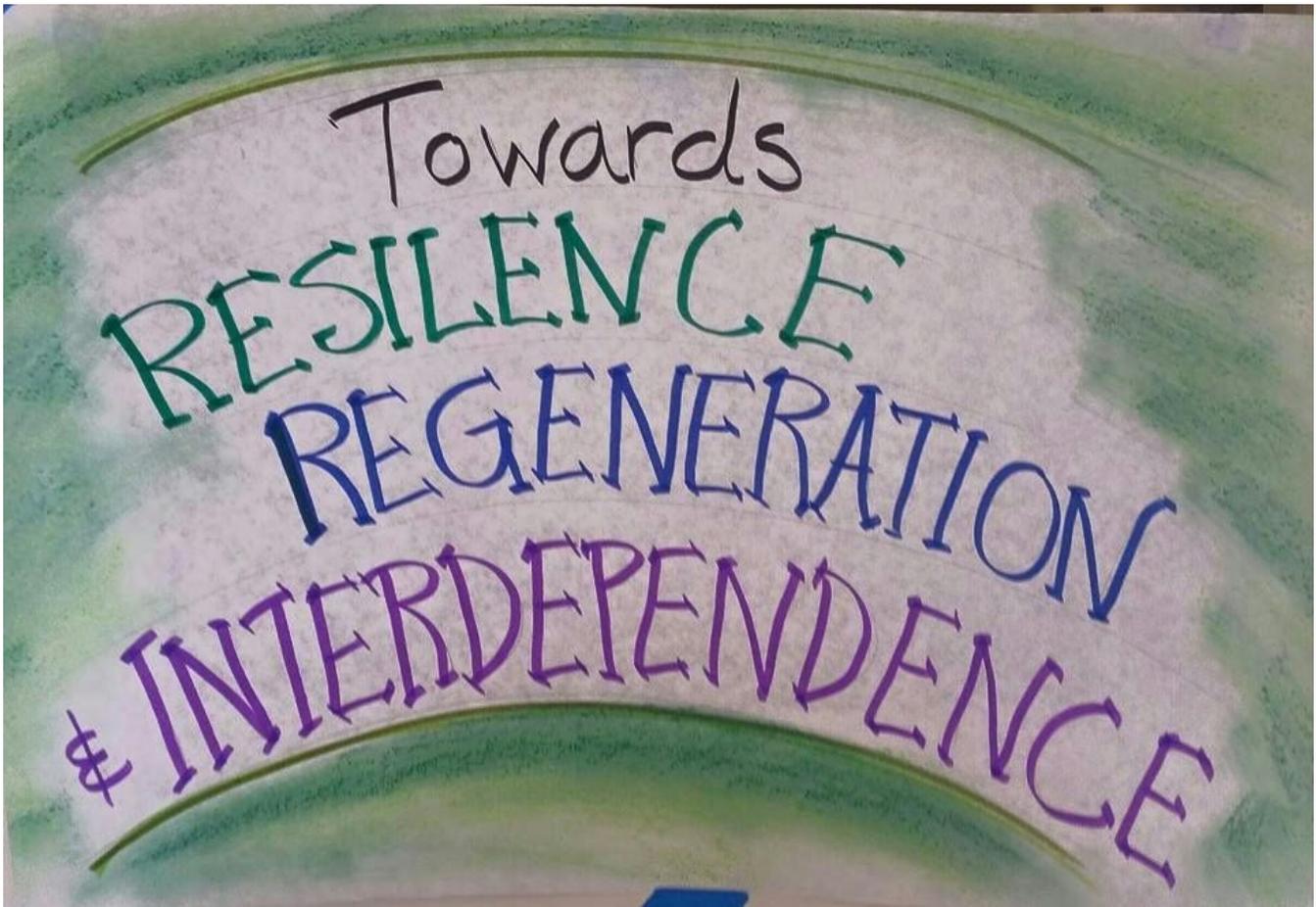
Transitions Leaders..... p.22

The MSC Transitions Lab

From July 7th to 9th, 2015, 32 people gathered in Oakland for the first of two three-day gatherings bringing leaders together from across regions and areas of work -- racial justice, ecological justice, economic justice, migrant justice, education justice, and more -- to practice wholeness and nurture beloved community to do bold and impossible things.

This gathering was one of Movement Strategy Center's **Transitions Labs**, gatherings which form the core offering of the **MSC Transitions Initiative**:

The Transitions Initiative catalyzes transition from a world of domination and extraction to a world of regeneration, resilience, and interdependence.



The **Transitions Labs** ground people in their personal purpose, inspire them to believe in their vision, and offer them space to practice navigating toward an achievable horizon of transformation.

The **Transitions Labs** shake up our tired, linear notions of how change happens and bring forth a speed of action that is possible only through radical depth. They engage individual movement leaders to build depth for exponential action, to nurture connection for unprecedented collaboration, and to transform insight into innovation we are only beginning to imagine. The Transitions Labs invite and support movements and movement leaders to step into who we need to be -- in order to create what doesn't yet exist.

In the **Transitions Labs**, movement leaders practice:

- **Transitions Vision & Commitment** -- What is our vision for the future -- and how do we deepen our courageous commitment to it? How can we set our sights on a near-term horizon that moves us toward our vision? How do we create new stories that we can step into with hope?
- **Individual & Collective Embodiment** -- Who do we need to be to bring forth the vision we seek? What is the *way of being* that makes another future possible?
- **Synergistic Relationships and Radical Connection** -- How do we love with depth and power that grows powerful relationships? How do we put relationships at the center of our strategic wisdom?
- **Strategic Navigation** -- How are we guided by purpose as we move toward the horizon? How do we combine vision, embodiment, and relationships together for extraordinary strategic agility, speed, and impact?

In these pages we offer a glimpse of the July 2015 Transitions Lab; what we experienced, explored, shared, learned, and questioned, moving toward the second Lab in this two-part series, which will be held in November 2015.

People then met in pairs and small groups to share stories of moments when they have experienced a sense of clear & compelling purpose as well as their hopes and insight about the Transitions needed in the world.

Beginning with building beloved community, we had the opportunity to know and care for one another as human beings and to build the trust needed to successfully leap into the unknown together - to dare, to imagine, to disagree, to risk.

“One of the most valuable parts of the lab was meeting others who are working at a level that is so soulful and deep.” - Holly Bartling

“It was wonderful seeing beautiful practices in developing beloved community.”
- Yeshica Weerasekera

Questions People Carried



In our opening circle people shared questions they were bringing into the lab. Questions like:

How do we hold the experience of living with the world where there's so much harm?

What is liberation? How can I in my personal life orient towards that?

What does our understanding of white supremacy ask of me as a person with white skin?

How is caregiving part of social change?

How do we grow new things that have their own life – not fight what is hurting us?

How do we make the process of reconciliation real as we are creating beloved community?

How do we reconcile peace and forgiveness with self care, self healing, and justice?

How do we protect ourselves and build beloved communities, not focus on power structures which can easily make us militaristic?

How do we end oppressive practices of our organizations?

How do we let go of the ego satisfaction of having a big to-do list?

How do we create systems that are not about domination, while we are living in systems that are about domination?



What will it take for human evolution to occur? Can we do it faster than human destruction?

How do you heal with people who are not willing to admit they have caused harm?

How do I transition from me – a predator of things like a job and a wife? How do we shed that muscle memory of the extractive economy?

What's up with the either/or thinking that this culture has – how do we transcend this either/or thinking?

How do we have deep stillness and incredible activity? Infinite joy and deep grieving? Anger and peaceful nonviolence?

How do our movements bring in people who are curious, open, willing to shift?

How do we hold a window open for people to do whatever healing is needed so they can come in?

How do I have space for rage and anger even though I believe in forgiveness and reconciliation?

How do we not calibrate our work to the most fearful person in the room?

How do we support people who choose to engage in the electoral arena -- or do we take it over and make it ours?

How do we embrace and strengthen the role of cultural work in restoring spirit and wholeness in a place like a prison that is built to break your spirit?

How do we re-energize our souls?

Purpose and Practice



The afternoon was led by Norma Wong, a longtime MSC mentor and Institute of Zen Studies teacher who developed the practice of "60/40 Stance", a mind-body approach to explore how movements and leaders need to transform to create powerful change. Norma invited us to explore purpose and practice, and how our unconscious habits can sabotage us, limiting our capacity as movement builders and as movements. Norma helped us see that individuals have individual habits and groups and movements have collective habits.

What Is a Habit?

A habit is any unconscious repetitive act.

"If you think of something as a good habit that doesn't mean it will serve you because it is unconscious. Even something that is a "good habit" cannot serve us if it is unconscious."

"A habit of the body is connected to a habit of the mind. We just may not know what it is."
-- Norma Wong

Because habits are unconscious, we are not able to fully access the power of the action. We also do not have the choice to turn them on or off. Because they are unconscious, habits, instead of choices, can dictate our actions.

In movement building, habits can hold us back from creating the impact we want to have. Habits limit and constrain us, and create vulnerabilities in our strategy. Shifting our collective movement habits can shift us out of old patterns and unleash energy, insight, and impact beyond what we've had the capacity to imagine.

What Is Practice?

Practice is a conscious and repetitive action that cultivates specific qualities and capacities.

Practice allows us to take small, immediate steps to nurture shifts that are larger than we might imagine in the present. A pianist runs through the scales daily, developing capacity that makes an entire sonata possible. A runner puts in daily miles, developing muscle strength, endurance, and memory that can be called on in a marathon.

Conscious practice can be applied in other areas of life, allowing us to cultivate new qualities and capacities -- and interrupt ingrained habits -- even when we are unsure or unclear about our future. For example, writing down one gratitude each day increases capacity to recognize and emphasize positive aspects of any situation, while meditating for 15 minutes a day increases overall awareness and mental agility.



Quotes from Norma:

"If you don't repeat it, you can't say it's a practice."

"From a strategy standpoint it's important to know others' habits – my opposition, my allies, my organization, my self. Their habits tell me a lot about my ability to implement something."

"Our unconscious habits don't serve us. They are weakness, parts of who we are that can be taken advantage of."

"Every habit could be justified by something we are trying to protect. We build a scab around what we're trying to protect. That scab is that habit, instead of building something strong that can carry power."

"There is power in becoming aware of habit and interrupting it."

What Movement Habits Do We See Around Us?

People in the lab identified movement habits, including:

Glorification of overwork – colonizing mindset.

Hanging on to identity of trauma.

Defaulting, as we develop strategy, to a split between mind, body, spirit, and emotion -- with overemphasis on the mind.

Overemphasizing things you don't think are important to move forward.

Always critiquing.

Believe there is only one way forward – central & right, regardless of context.

Undermining, avoiding, fearing our own power.

Day Two: See the Whole & Explore Navigation

Vision & Courageous Commitment

Bringing a new world into being requires vision and courageous commitment: a vision of what we long for, of what calls us with love, a commitment that fills our souls with courage and infuses us with strength we did not know we had.

The second day began spontaneously with a creative offering from Yalini's words and movements in her poem *Next to the Divine*¹. "If the world was absent of violence and war," she wondered in her poem, "perhaps we'd think of fear as a delicious thing that tickles the breast bones from within."



¹ *Salted Wounds, a chapbook*, YaliniDream, undated.

After physical practice to ground us in our bodies, we called forth our vision and courageous commitment by reading aloud a piece of visionary fiction by Alexis Pauline Gumbs²:

Ancestor Alexis:

I've heard about you. I've even read some of your writing. Everyone says I have an old soul, and I'm really interested in what it was like back when you lived. It seems like people were afraid a lot. Maybe every day? It's hard to imagine, but it seems that way from the writing. I have to remember that no one knew that things would get better, and that even people who were working to make it happen had to live with oppression every day. I read your writing and the writing of your other comrades from that time and I feel grateful. It seems like maybe you knew about us. It feels like you loved us already. Thank you for being brave.

Following the reading, we closed our eyes in guided visioning of the world five generations from now -- and what our present generation did that made that future possible.

After our visioning, we wrote our own letters, to ourselves, from our future ancestor, a child five generations -- 100 years -- from now. We read our letters out loud, all of us listening in a silently powerful circle.

Here are excerpts from some of those letters.

Where do I begin? Thank you. Thank you for the freedom songs you sang. Thank you for your daily fight for beloved community.

It was the great turning inward that helped you all find the strength, courage, and creativity to fully blossom.

²“Evidence” in *Octavia's Brood: Science Fiction Stories from Social Justice Movements*, edited by Walidah Imarisha and adrienne maree brown, © 2015 AK Press and the Institute for Anarchist Studies. *Octavia's Brood* reflects a growing cultural movement of “visionary fiction.” adrienne maree brown explains that visionary fiction “intentionally disrupts the status quo, examines change as a collective, bottom up process, centers marginalized communities” and generates “stories, visions and futures that are hard and realistic and hopeful.”

I thank you for getting rid of machinery, electricity is not needed or digging and digging as I can feel mother's pain if one cuts her skin and she is too loving to mistreat her. We now practice relational modes of love. Wow!! The cosmos are light years of immediate presence.

There are neighborhood hubs that gather people for community governance, we tell stories and sing songs, and consider together the questions of how to face life's challenges.

We learn by: spending a certain amount of time each day connecting with a knowledge guide who helps us explore ideas in which we're interested or suggests strands of knowledge we might not have thought about.

*we've learned the ways
to care for and hold
the wounds that have
been created
collective responsibility
for healing finding
the rhythm of breath
we share with the
grass the wind the mountains
we're leaning into
the deliciousness
of fear*

You did not tremble. You rode the huge, crashing waves like a sea turtle, and swam upstream and downstream like a salmon.

You made a lot of mistakes. You tripped up on your ego. You forgot to laugh. You overworked. You put too much faith in the wrong things. But your example of your effort, your learning to allow yourself and others to be -- humans being. Your vulnerability, your love -- it came through.

We do like other families and share space with open homes. It's my turn to pick the dates and get the rooftop fruit. Did you grow food on roof gardens?

We won a transnational public rail system across the Americas and Canada. In your time it became free and free transnational public education and health care followed.

*The path is
waste nothing
use as little as possible
do only things that you enjoy and benefits others*

*be wonderful
explore
nourish and cultivate your mind, body, and spirit*

We held young people with love. We did not cast them away to be forgotten. And away with prisons. Focused on healing and reparation. Children indoctrinated in love.

What you did back in 2015-2030 was reshape decisionmaking to be based around these neighborhood units. The common threads of these neighborhoods were community gardens, affordable housing, locally run businesses, grocers, etc. What made this all possible was a few strategic takeovers of land

I know you were not a farmer but you taught your boys how to grow and to hunt and fish and build by learning alongside them. You taught them how to read the sky and to listen to the leaves and the wind. Now we cull energy from inside the earth.

Five Pillars to Uphold this World:

- *All learning at all ages comes from nature, history, books, music, art, and dance.*
 - *Science and technology are for regeneration.*
 - *We have strong intergenerational communities.*
 - *Our governance leads with people.*
 - *We are creating economies based on sustenance.*

What did you do?

You did not let fear organize your life. Kept on your practice to be love even in beautiful times.

Eliminated plastics & got off all oil.

The shock of the truth of what you had become & done to the earth became rallying point for positive change rather than time for giving up.

It means so much to the elders to know there were people of your time speaking truth.

Transitions Landscape



Holding on to our vision, sense of purpose, and courageous commitment, we needed to feel and understand the ground we're standing on, to examine the seeds germinating in the soil or even sprouting up above it. We needed to see paths rather than search for them, to create new paths with our steps.

In the afternoon of the second day we explored the landscape of our transitions, seeking to understand our own areas of focus and learn about the work and perspectives of others in the room.

First we reflected individually:

- What transitions insights and possibilities are emerging in the world, that you see & experience, are excited about, think are important for others to know about?
- Who (groups, networks, people) are on the leading edge of these insights, possibilities? What are they leading?
- What big questions is your movement/ work grappling with in how to lead and navigate these transitions?

Then we gathered in groups to explore three areas that are crucial in our transition to a world of resilience and regeneration.

- How is our present **climate** crisis a catalyst for transitions? What systems are perpetuating crisis and what are emerging possibilities for the future?
- How do we define the qualities of our **next economy** and our steps toward it? What systems are perpetuating an economy of domination/exploitation and what are emerging possibilities for the future?

- What is needed to shift from a **culture of violence to a culture of interdependence**? What systems are perpetuating a culture of violence and what are emerging possibilities for the future?

Each group created a map of old and new systems with the lens of their focus area, and shared these with the full group. The maps on the wall became a first glimpse of a whole, cross-sector Transitions Landscape.

After the Lab the MSC team reviewed the Transitions Landscape maps, finding common themes emerging across the groups. Based on these common themes, we identified four core areas that seem ripe for innovation: areas where the infusion of Transitions Vision & Commitment, Individual & Collective Evolution, and Synergistic Relationships could unleash Strategic Navigation that expands and accelerates what is possible.

In interviews with Transitions Leaders we shared four transitions areas and a question for each:

- **Policing & Justice**: If you could re-envision and remake policing and justice systems as caring for beloved community, supporting community stability and safety, where would you start?
- **Education**: If you could re-envision and remake public education around supporting human development prioritizing living well in community and thriving through transitions, where would you start?
- **Land**: If you could transfer and restore community management of land use toward beloved community and sustainability, where would you start?
- **Economy**: If you could strengthen cooperative local economic efforts and connect cooperative local economic efforts together, where would you start?

In the interviews many people expressed a deep longing to explore and define the theme in an integrated, synergistic way.

"What's most interesting for me is how we start linking those four questions together," said one person.

"What are the different ways that people are talking about linking them together. Are those the right ways? What would a holistic approach look like?"

Or, in the words from another interview,

"The integration of the themes speaks most to me!"

Day Three: Commitments, Questions, & Next Steps

We began Day Three with Kathy Sanchez's gift of beautiful herb bundles she brought from the Tewa Community in New Mexico, followed by David Cournoyer's funny and animated story about learning to be bold and playful.

Navigating from Purpose

Kristen shared the story of her mother's passing away and how this personal transition created the opportunity for her to pivot toward a future that felt unknown, to imagine a new role and purpose for herself with her family, and to unexpectedly deepen new relationships.

Aparna told the story of her organization, Mobilize the Immigrant Vote (MIV), making a pivot into the unknown as they bring together a multiracial base united against both incarceration and detention, and able to address and transcend anti-black racism. To do this MIV is developing a new strategy with cultural work at the center, taking a leap of faith in trying a radically new approach to electoral and civic engagement.

Kristen's and Aparna's stories lifted up a key lesson:

How we navigate toward the future depends on who we are, on the "north star" of our own unique purpose that guides us. While we are on our own distinct paths toward the future we can share a collective long-term vision and near-term horizon.

To illustrate our individual paths toward a shared horizon, we placed a piece of paper on the wall. Three of us began walking from wherever we were, toward the paper on the wall. As this simple exercise made clear, how people walked, the perspective they began with, and the route they chose was all their own. Yet, it was possible for these three people to arrive together at the same visionary destination.



To explore our own purpose and path, each of us wrote a reflection on three questions:

1. Based on the last few days, what is a pivot or a cluster of pivots that you can make to move in the direction of our vision and emerging horizon?
2. What difference would that pivot make, to you and your work?
3. What is clearer now about your own purpose?

We then identified habits that could get in the way of moving in this direction, as well as practices that can support us. We then paired up with our love note buddies to share new insights about our individual purpose or a pivot we want to make, and one habit and one practice we want to focus on.

Practice & Commitments



As we move toward the future, we are strengthened by a commitment to conscious practice. Through practice we can interrupt habits that do not serve us, and turn habits into conscious, deliberate, and strategic action. Coming together as a full circle, we each shared out loud our insights about purpose and one simple commitment we were making toward conscious practice. Below is some of what we shared:

Insight

deepening personal connection
connecting daughter with family
choosing to be happy
embodying place based relationship
spaciousness
my purpose may shift
doing things with all my might &
building reserve at same time
beauty in new way of seeing &
organizing things
attitude is more important than
what I do
playful, happy life
I am enough for what I need to do
responsibility of relationship
what I fight for outside must
be embodied in home
cultivate a dialogue with seen &
unseen allies
big picture vision
purpose is building the next

Commitment

having lunch with someone once a week
specific word count in writing practice
align work with happiness
movement practice
pray five times daily
cooking as practice
meditation practice
new cluster and design
cultivate attitude
time for play
de-clutter
remember names
cultivate son's liberation
regular cleansing of body
grow a plant
smile, connect

Navigating the Unknown Into the Future



Great transitions need great navigators. In order to journey into the unknown and towards a future rooted in interdependence, resilience and regeneration we need navigators who can chart the course. We are those navigators. And, we are not the only ones.

On the third day we closed the Lab by watching a short video about the the worldwide voyage of the Hokulea -- a worldwide voyage for a sustainable future.

*Our Polynesian voyaging canoes, Hōkūle‘a and Hikianalia, are **traveling over 50,000 nautical miles around the earth**, bringing people around the world together to set a course for a sustainable future. **We are sailing like our ancestors have for a thousand years—using wayfinding**. On board, there is no compass, sextant, or cell phone, watch, or GPS for direction. In wayfinding, the sun, moon, and stars are a map that surrounds the navigators. When clouds and storms make it impossible to see that map, wave patterns, currents, and animal behavior give a navigator directional clues to find tiny islands in the vast ocean.*

The story of the Hokulea inspires us to see how other people - other wayfinders - are learning this art of navigation. In the words of the Hokulea:

Everyone can be the navigator our earth needs. Every person on earth can help navigate us to a healthy future where our Island Earth is safe and thriving again. Stories of hope and local solutions that blend indigenous wisdom with other best practices can be found all over the world. If we find and share those stories with each other, we can help chart a positive course for our planet.

In closing we asked ourselves: **What do we see of ourselves in the Great Navigators?**

Appendix: Transitions Leaders

Transitions Leaders

Ibrahim Abdul-Matin - *New York City Department of Environmental Protection*
Nwamaka Agbo - *formerly EcoDistricts, now Our Next Economy Team, Movement Strategy Center*
Holly Bartling - *General Service Foundation*
Mia Birdsong - *formerly Family Independence Initiative, now Family Story*
David Cournoyer - *Vision Maker Media*
Yalini Dream - *YaliniDream Poetry, Dance, Theater and Song*
Tomás Garduño - *Alliance for a Greater New York (ALIGN)*
Beth Glenn - *Education Justice Network*
Rosa González - *Facilitating Power and Climate Team, Movement Strategy Center*
Trina Greene - *Move to End Violence*
Rachel Humphrey - *Leadership Design*
Carmen Iñiguez - *Youth Organizing Team, Movement Strategy Center*
Tammy Johnson - *TMJ Abundance & Raks Africa*
Navina Khanna - *HEAL Food Alliance*
Nicole Lee - *Urban Peace Movement*
Beckie Masaki - *Asian Pacific Institute on Gender Based Violence & Move to End Violence*
Scott Nine - *Institute for Democratic Education in America*
Jacqueline Patterson - *Environment & Climate Justice Program, NAACP*
Sheryl Petty - *Transformational Educational Systems Alliance & Management Assistance Group*
Byron Ramos Gudiel - *Communities for a Better Environment*
Kathy Sanchez - *Tewa Women United*
Aparna Shah - *Mobilize the Immigrant Vote*
Yeshica Weerasekera - *International Development Exchange*
Calvin Williams - *Youth Organizing Team, Movement Strategy Center*

Movement Strategy Center July 2015 Transitions Lab Team

Lily Hayes-Wong
Mimi Ho
Taj James
Shiva Patel
Julie Quiroz
Jovida Ross
Norma Wong
Kristen Zimmerman