NATIONAL CENTER ON
**DOMESTIC VIOLENCE, TRAUMA, AND MENTAL HEALTH**

TOOLS FOR TRANSFORMATION: BECOMING ACCESSIBLE, CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE, AND TRAUMA-INFORMED ORGANIZATIONS

*Implementation Support Guides for Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault Programs*

GUIDE 2

# SUPPORTING CHANGE LEADERSHIP

CATHY CAVE

# Table of Contents

# About the NATIONAL CENTER ON DOMESTIC VIOLENCE, TRAUMA, AND MENTAL HEALTH

The National Center on Domestic Violence, Trauma, and Mental Health (NCDVTMH) is one of four Special Issue Resource Centers funded by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Family Violence Prevention and Services Program. NCDVTMH promotes survivor-defined healing, liberation, and equity by transforming the systems that impact survivors of domestic and sexual violence and their families. NCDVTMH enhances agency- and system-level responses to survivors and their families through comprehensive training and technical assistance, research and evaluation, policy development, and public awareness. Emphasizing an accessible, culturally responsive, and trauma-informed (ACRTI) approach, NCDVTMH offers training and consultation to domestic violence and sexual assault advocates, programs, and coalitions; healthcare, mental health, and substance use treatment providers; legal and child welfare professionals; and local, state, and federal policymakers. For more information, see www.nationalcenterdvtraumamh.org.

## Preferred Citation

Cave, C. (2021). Tools for Transformation: Becoming Accessible, Culturally Responsive, and Trauma-Informed Organizations, Implementation Support Guide 2: Supporting Change Leadership. Chicago, IL: National Center on Domestic Violence, Trauma, and Mental Health.

## Editing, Layout, and Design

By Tamar Westphal
Communications Manager, National Center on Domestic Violence, Trauma, and Mental Health

# Acknowledgements

This ACRTI Implementation Support Guide series would not have been possible without the efforts of many. The National Center on Domestic Violence, Trauma, and Mental Health deeply appreciates the 2018-2020 Learning Collaborative Teams and all of the programs and coalitions that partnered with us on their journey to become more accessible, culturally responsive, and trauma informed.

**Alaska**
Alaska Network on Domestic Violence and Sexual Assault
Kodiak Women's Resource and Crisis Center
South Peninsula Haven House
Standing Together Against Rape

**Georgia**
Georgia Coalition Against Domestic Violence
Harmony House Georgia
Ruth's Cottage and The Patticake House

**Maryland**
Maryland Network Against Domestic Violence
HopeWorks of Howard County
Maryland Health Care Coalition Against Domestic Violence

**New Mexico**
New Mexico Coalition Against Domestic Violence
Enlace Comunitario
Esperanza Shelter
La Casa, Inc.

**North Dakota**
First Nations Women's Alliance
CAWS North Dakota
Domestic Violence Crisis Center, Inc.

**Pennsylvania**
Pennsylvania Coalition Against Domestic Violence
Victims' Intervention Program
Women's Services, Inc., Crawford County

**Washington, D.C.**
D.C. Coalition Against Domestic Violence
My Sister's Place

**Learning Collaborative Coordinator**
Karla Alegria, MS
Project Manager, National Center on Domestic Violence, Trauma, and Mental Health

Saman Aktar, MS, MBA, Maryland
Jasmin Brandow, MA, New York
Lorien Castelle, New York
Jes Cooper, New Mexico
Rachel Cox, LCSW, New Mexico
Sherry Frohman, LMSW, New York
Amber Guthrie, MA, Maryland
Brenda Hill, South Dakota
Michael Johnan, Tennessee
Karen "Thurna" Lucero, MA, LPCC, Isleta Pueblo, New Mexico
Elizabeth N McCourt, JD, Delaware
Claudia Medina, New Mexico
Gwendolyn Packard, Ihanktonwan Dakota, New Mexico
Darby Penney, New York
Jennifer Pollitt Hill, MSW, Maryland
Nancy Powell, New York
Julie Ann Rivers-Cochran, MSW, Michigan
Brandy Walega, Colorado
Jessa Winas, MSW, Pennsylvania

Community Against Violence, New Mexico
End Domestic Abuse Wisconsin, Wisconsin
Enlace Comunitario, New Mexico
Georgia Coalition Against Domestic Violence, Georgia
HopeWorks of Howard County, Maryland
National Indigenous Women's Resource Center
New Mexico Coalition Against Domestic Violence, New Mexico
Sexual Assault Response Center, YWCA, Delaware
Violence Free Colorado
Wellspring, New York

# Introduction

Successfully implementing accessible, culturally responsive, and trauma-informed (ACRTI) change processes is no small feat for leaders of domestic and sexual violence (DSV) organizations. DSV leaders face field-specific challenges that merit special consideration and discussion before any change processes begin.

Implementation Support Guide 2: *Supporting Change Leadership* was created for DSV leaders who are considering initiating, or are already in the process of implementing, organization-wide ACRTI change initiatives. In addressing the concerns of DSV leaders, this guide serves as a valuable reference point for those seeking a roadmap for how to manage change effectively, as well as a reflection and reorientation tool for leaders whose change processes have stalled. For additional background information on the role of ACRTI initiatives in DSV organizations, please see Implementation Support Guide 1: *The Social, Emotional, and Relational Climate and Organizational Trauma*.

When conducted with care from the outset, ACRTI initiatives foster growth and resilience among staff members, leaders, and program participants alike. The best ACRTI change processes create paths that lead to:

- The creation of sustainable, inclusive, and equitable programs that meet the true support needs of survivors and their children.
- The development of a shared language among leadership, staff members, and service participants.
- The ability to maintain a workplace culture in which staff members are proud of the work they do, poised to learn new skills, and feel valued, heard, and respected while conducting their day-to-day work.

The National Center on Domestic Violence, Trauma, and Mental Health (NCDVTMH) is committed to ensuring that this guide is accessible and rooted in real world experiences, which is why *Supporting Change Leadership* was made by and for DSV leaders from across the country. As such, all examples and scenarios referenced in this guide come directly from DSV leaders' experiences.

# Developing a Change Leadership Mindset

> "Leadership is not a person or a position. It is a complex moral relationship between people based on trust, obligation, commitment, emotion, and a shared vision of the good."
>
> — Joanne Ciulla

The first thing that any DSV leader who is preparing to manage a long-term ACRTI organizational change initiative must do is acknowledge the reality that long-term change planning is challenging.

Successful ACRTI change planning requires focused energy and dedicated time, both of which may be rare for any DSV leader to come by. Yet, the fact remains: focused energy and dedicated planning time are essential ingredients for success. Omitting either of these ingredients ultimately wastes the time and efforts of everyone across the organization.

When all is said and done, it is a change leader's top responsibility to ensure that ACRTI change plans come to fruition.

The best way to ensure this actually happens? Reading this guide in full is a great initial step. A solid next step is to be honest with yourself about change readiness, both personally and organizationally, before undertaking an ACRTI change process.

## Determining Organizational Readiness

Leaders should develop a practice of personal reflection before endeavoring to determine an organization's ACRTI change readiness level.

Before leading ACRTI-related readiness conversations with staff members, effective leaders will make time to engage in a period of personal reflection. During this reflection period, leaders should evaluate their own level of openness to change, as well as their willingness to sit in a state of uncomfortable transition while working toward change in partnership with other leaders, staff members, and service participants.

> "I learned to always take on things I'd never done before. Growth and comfort do not coexist."
>
> — Ginni Rometty

### Prompts for Personal Reflection

- What are the urgent issues that signal a need for change within my organization?
- To what degree am I willing to initiate a change process, and how am I willing to help sustain such a process within my organization?
- Are there limits to my willingness to engage in a change process? If so, what are those limits?
- What supports do I have in place for change leadership, both now and in the future? Would peer support, coaching, or mentoring be helpful to me?
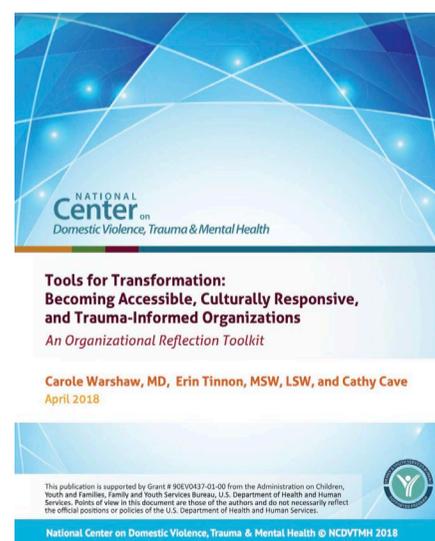
**QUICK TIPS**

For additional guidance on personal reflection practices, please see "Reflection Questions for Leaders" on page 22.

When the right time comes, reflective leaders create opportunities for others to identify what is best for them, determine how to use their time, name the resources that are necessary for change, and define shared goals.

With practice, leaders will hone their own change leadership mindsets. At the same time, exploring organizational readiness early on is critical to ensuring that staff are on the same page and have a shared language for discussing current conditions and future plans.

**QUICK TIPS**

For more details on how to lead readiness conversations, check out Tools for Transformation: Becoming Accessible, Culturally Responsive, and Trauma-Informed Organizations — An Organizational Reflection Toolkit (NCDVTMH, 2018). See "Before You Get Started" on page 12 of the Toolkit.

NATIONAL
**Center** on
*Domestic Violence, Trauma & Mental Health*

**Tools for Transformation:
Becoming Accessible, Culturally Responsive,
and Trauma-Informed Organizations**
*An Organizational Reflection Toolkit*

Carole Warshaw, MD, Erin Tinnon, MSW, LSW, and Cathy Cave
April 2018

This publication is supported by Grant # 90EV0437-01-00 from the Administration on Children, Youth and Families, Family and Youth Services Bureau, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. Points of view in this document are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the official positions or policies of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

National Center on Domestic Violence, Trauma & Mental Health © NCDVTMH 2018

*"There is no shame in recognizing a low level of willingness. It can be a key reflection in identifying best next steps. It can be good to reach out to connect with other programs that have been in similar states. We identified that our agency had grown and grown over the years to the point where people were overwhelmed by their current duties and that adding this change process to overwhelmed staff members' workloads was a big part of the whole agency's resistance. Our solution was to commit funds and time to a position whose role it was to sustain the change process, while supporting the Executive Director in implementation and using the supervisory process as a forum to set expectations and standards involving reflection and accountability."*

-Program Director

## Leading in Advocacy Organizations

Leadership in DSV advocacy organizations is especially challenging because it demands a deep understanding of power dynamics and the impact that abuses of power and violence have on survivors, staff members, programs, and communities. While leading non-DSV organizations typically involves balancing programmatic expectations with a leader's personal expectations and formal authority, leading DSV organizations also involves treating staff members with the high level of dignity, respect, and collaboration that is offered to survivors. Without collaboration, it is common for internal relationships to suffer and for overall organizational health to decline, so it becomes difficult to imagine solutions to challenges.

Effective leaders are aware of how their use of power and formal authority affect others within the organization. That is: successful leaders have developed an awareness and understanding of how organizational relationships *should* feel. For leaders, balancing power effectively and practicing change leadership means:

- Providing consistent and transparent communication to staff members and program participants.
- Holding oneself accountable for one's actions and holding others accountable as well.
- Remaining open to giving and receiving continual feedback.
- Committing to creating work settings in which learning and growing together is a priority.
- Choosing to embrace and lead, not just manage, the change process.

**QUICK TIPS**

For more information on what effective change leadership looks like, see "Ensuring ACRTI Success: 5 Critical Attributes of Effective Change Leadership" on page 10.

A leader's role is central to activities involving changes in policy or practice. Although many staff members may have the passion and skills to lead a change initiative, it is the leader's responsibility to consistently communicate their intentions for change and to ensure that initiatives fall within the organization's mission, policies, and scope of work. Early and close involvement with staff prevents the need to backtrack or undo decisions.

Example of a DSV Leader's Role in Organizing Internal Change:

*When a small group of program staff establishes an implementation team to guide a program's shift toward creating more accessible services, the director's role is to ensure that the group's decisions are in line with the Americans with Disabilities Act and that new policy ideas are not in conflict with efforts already in place to reduce rules and engage in survivor-driven planning.*

Throughout the early stages of ACRTI change planning, it is vital for leaders to provide guidance about the potential limitations of the process, while also ensuring that, when possible, ideas from all staff members are incorporated into the change planning process. Without close leadership participation, even well laid plans may not come to fruition, which can result in low morale and decreased staff buy-in about change initiatives. Change conversations need to move forward continually so that ideas transform into concrete and actionable plans.

# Ensuring ACRTI Success: 5 Critical Attributes of Effective Change Leadership

Fortunately, there is no such thing as a single, uniform ACRTI change process for all DSV organizations. Every DSV organization has its own needs, staff members at the table, resources to draw from, history to consider, and survivors to support, which means that each ACRTI change process will look different from the next.

In identifying a DSV organization's needs, it is common for leaders to encounter fears or concerns that can prevent them from initiating ACRTI change efforts. Such concerns may sound like:

- "No one else has these challenges."

- "I'm afraid to disclose our problems widely."

- "We've been doing it this way for so long—how can we change now?"

- "We have to reinvent the wheel."

These fears are shared by countless DSV leaders from organizations across the country. More importantly, these fears do not have to be roadblocks to successful ACRTI change efforts. Plenty of leaders have named these fears before finding their way forward! To help more organizations do the same, we have identified the following five fundamental attributes that, without a doubt, must be part of successful and sustainable ACRTI change processes.

> "Powerful and sustained change requires constant communication, not only throughout the rollout but after the major elements of the plan are in place. The more kinds of communication employed, the more effective they are."
>
> — DeAnne Aguirre

## Attribute 1: Mindful Preparation and Planning

While all effective leaders develop a vision of the changes they want to implement, the most successful leaders also identify the concrete steps that will help them get there. Identifying these steps takes courage and relies on the creation of a well defined vison. Examining policies, practices, and biases through an ACRTI lens is a critical step in creating a well defined organizational vision that is clear and accessible for all.

Successful ACRTI leaders are active participants in change processes. To be truly active, one must prepare to lead across all aspects of the process, from initial reflection and planning to ongoing implementation and evaluation. In addition, thoughtful leaders determine strategies for staying connected and informed, even when they are delegating.

### Indications of Mindful Preparation and Planning

- Leaders account for the resources and strategies needed to support both long-term change processes and day-to-day operations. Frequently, this requires navigating shifting and often competing priorities that arise due to the crisis-driven nature of DSV work, while still managing to keep ACRTI change processes on track.

- Leaders plan to engage others in discussions that highlight how proposed changes are in alignment with an organization's stated mission and values.

- Leaders reflect on what activities to start doing, stop doing, or continue doing, in preparation for organizational transformation. Sharing these reflections with others and inviting discussion can signal a leader's commitment to ACRTI change processes.
  - For example, leaders may initiate strategies to include all staff members in conversations about change, stop cancelling or postponing supervision meetings, and continue to expect staff to offer effective support for survivors and their children.

- Leaders consistently carve out time to share progress and communicate the status of ACRTI change efforts with everyone in the organization. Because this type of communication can be challenging when people work on different shifts, have varying roles, and work in multiple locations, determining the time and venue for progress updates is key. Ideas for successful communication include:
  - Creating a forum that allows for time to share updates with everyone, regardless of whether they work nights or in alternative locations.
  - Pressing pause to fully address anything unexpected with all staff members.
  - Engaging everyone in problem solving and celebrating successes together.

## Attribute 2: Transparent and Inclusive Communication

When organization-wide change is going to happen, leaders have a responsibility to communicate their commitment to the big picture moving forward, while simultaneously setting the tone for what comes next.

Transparent and inclusive communication is about more than frequency and access. The best communicators lead by example, lean into discomfort, and back up their words with actions.

### Indications of Transparent and Inclusive Communication

- Leaders model desirable ways to express thoughts and feelings. They also demonstrate how to navigate and work through feelings that arise within themselves or others — e.g., holding space for diverse ideas, curiosity, excitement, worry, or disappointment.

- Leaders clarify and amplify accountability expectations for everyone at the organization.

- Leaders initiate thorough readiness conversations to explore individual and programmatic capacity constraints before starting new projects and change efforts. Readiness conversations should include:

  - Notes on how the organization's mission, vision, and values align with the perspectives and principles of an ACRTI approach.

  - A discussion of how an ACRTI approach is (or is not) in alignment with what leaders and staff members believe about their work.

  - An acknowledgment that while change conversations may initially feel uncomfortable, they can result in a deeper understanding of the need for change in policy or practice.

## Attribute 3: Accountable Leadership Practices

Leaders recognize that engaging staff in the change process is not a substitute for oversight, implementation guidance, and change leadership. Clear decision making processes, timelines, and assignments are critical for success.

As such, leaders must ensure that staff members are engaged and equipped for success in their respective roles, while still defining and carrying out their own leadership responsibilities.

### Indications of Accountable Leadership Practices

- Leaders recognize the time and energy that staff members need to participate in change processes. They recognize all of the work that staff members are responsible for and check in on progress.

- Leaders accept full responsibility for addressing barriers — e.g., human resource practices, funding limitations, and scheduling blocks — that may arise while making changes in practice and policy.

- Leaders attempt to make change processes equitable and successful by discussing limitations as openly as possible, while acting in a timely manner to keep the implementation process moving forward.

## Attribute 4: Organizational Well-Being

Keeping one's fingers on the pulse of a DSV organization is no small task, yet it is something that effective ACRTI leaders find the time to facilitate and support. Through this process of facilitation, leaders center the wellness of the entire organization throughout all aspects of ACRTI change efforts. This often includes noticing the need for and providing resources to boost morale and resilience among staff members who grow weary in an ever-changing, crisis-centered environment.

**Indications of Organizational Well-Being**

- Leaders manage their own self-care needs by utilizing personal and professional resources that strengthen their resilience and capacity to lead effectively — e.g., mentoring, coaching, or peer support from other leaders.

- Leaders draw from a host of resources and supports to sustain long-term organizational change. Most commonly, support includes taking in information about emerging concerns, navigating disconnections within and among teams, repairing relationships after disconnections occur, adjusting or modifying plans when required, and continuing to lead through difficult periods.

- Leaders recognize that change agents tire and can become cynical about the organization being in a state of transition for long periods of time. This is particularly true when progress has stalled or stopped. Flexible leaders address challenges and take corrective action.

- Leaders contemplate strategies for how staff members can come together to strengthen connections, build camaraderie, and achieve a sense that everyone is working toward common goals.

- Leaders support staff in their self-care practices as much as possible in the workplace environment. Specifically, they highlight wellness strategies that address the impact of stress and trauma on advocates and advocacy work. Leaders also offer guidance to staff on how to recognize the impact of trauma, how to ground and center themselves, and how to "reset" before their next interaction with service participants or other staff.

Examples from Programs:

- *A program director who encourages staff to keep hiking boots around and supports them in taking a hike when they need to decompress during the workday.*

- *A program director who offers staff 30 minutes each day (in addition to mealtimes and breaks, which are required by labor laws) to engage in their wellness activity of choice onsite. In this program, staff members cannot come in late or leave early, but may take walks, use art supplies, or use the "sensory room" for calm and quiet.*

- *An executive director who leaves during lunchtime and encourages staff members use their mealtimes to eat, leave their desks, and engage in activities that feel restorative.*

- *A program director who builds a common space — in this case, a bulletin board — for staff members and service participants to share wellness tips and tools. Some directors pin their own resources for mindfulness, yoga, breathing exercises, healthy recipes, and body movement on the board.*

## Attribute 5: Growth and Learning

Change processes will naturally uncover concerns that staff members and leaders may not have noticed previously. Instead of fearing the inevitable unearthing of such concerns, confident leaders embrace this stage of the process, acknowledge concerns, and use the concerns that surface to foster growth and learning. Being transparent about one's desire to have staff members embrace a continual process of learning can help to create an enriching environment in which people support one another as they grow and learn new skills side by side.

Ultimately, leaders need to recognize that an organizational climate that feels open, focuses on learning, and supports the exploration of challenges — including unexpected change — will increase feelings of cohesion and improve conflict resolution among staff members.

### Indications of Growth and Learning

- Leaders take responsibility for implementing change and ask themselves, "As a leader, what don't I know yet?"

- Leaders openly acknowledge that a skill or approach is new for a team and attempt to alleviate the pressure of "expecting perfection" by setting expectations for everyone to learn together and share in honest conversation about what they are experiencing.

- Leaders model self-awareness, transparency, vulnerability, adaptability, openness to new ideas, willingness to try, and an ability to hold themselves and others to expectations.

- Leaders facilitate reflection when talking with staff members to encourage staff to be open and adopt a learner's mindset.

- Leaders are acutely aware of the interpersonal dynamics of their organization and navigate work relationships in a way that balances administrative responsibilities, staff development needs, and staff support.

- Leaders give and receive feedback, meet regularly with the individuals they supervise, and address issues of accountability in a timely fashion.

- Leaders anticipate navigating differing perspectives among and between staff members and fellow leaders. Leaders consider what resources and strategies can help all parties involved in a conversation move from a state of conflict or opposing interests toward exploring shared interests and cooperation.

# Navigating Feelings and Attitudes About Change

> "The key question for us was, why now? Many seasoned staff and even some newer staff perceived the impulse for change to be that people had been 'doing it wrong' and they took this personally, which was a resistance we had to work through."
>
> — Program Director

Responding to the emotional climate of an organization is something that leaders need to expect and prepare for when building ACRTI organizations and supports.

Ideally, staff members experience ACRTI change processes as hopeful, dynamic, and energizing. It is also common for staff to feel doubtful about the need for change or to lose faith that planned changes will occur. Positive and negative feelings arise for different people at different times. As a leader, being prepared with thoughtful responses for the disclosure of complicated feelings is critical to ensuring change plans stay on track.

In organizations where trust is strong and the idea of learning and growing together is already a part of the culture, leaders may find it easy enough to navigate feelings about change. On the other hand, leaders of organizations in which trust has been eroded or where relationships are strained are likely to find that change conversations can be exceptionally challenging. When staff feel heard, included, and respected in the planning process, they are more likely to be engaged in change efforts and take ownership of change processes.

When a foundation of shared understanding and effective communication is in place from the beginning, new concerns or challenges are less likely to stall or halt ACRTI change efforts.

## Tips for Navigating Feelings About Change

- Strive to create an organizational climate in which shared learning and growth is valued.

- Be patient with yourself and remind others that change takes time. In both individual supervision and group conversations, convey that the organization is a "work in progress." Remind all staff members that new practices need time to take root and can be adjusted if necessary. As staff adapt to change, acknowledge progress and remind individuals why the need for change became apparent in the first place.

- Create a timeline that makes room for regular check-ins on new practices and policies. As a part of the check-in timeline, consider assigning a timeframe for reviewing specific change practices. For example, "We will try this the new way for two months and then revisit. Let's check in on how it feels to work this way at our next staff meeting."

- Prepare to tend to the emotional and attitudinal climate of an organization from the very beginning of change efforts. Ensure that there is time and space for challenging conversations. Individual supervision and focused group conversations can be useful forums for people to feel heard and to get the direction and support they need to be engaged in change efforts. For leaders, the goals of these conversations are to listen to ideas, convey understanding, consider modifying plans, and clarify expectations.

- Recognize the potential philosophical disconnections among and between staff and leadership. Be open to discussion about these disconnections. Link conversations back to the overall mission, vision, and values of the organization.

- Do not take things personally.

- Be clear about your commitment to ACRTI change efforts. When leaders are unclear about their commitment, change processes may become less of a priority over time. This can create a sense of uncertainty or apathy among staff members that can spread throughout the organization. Sometimes the challenges that originally signaled the need for change resurface but involve new people or circumstances. The repetition of unaddressed themes can contribute to feelings of frustration, lack of unity, organizational trauma, staff burnout, and high turnover rates. Regular periods of deep individual reflection can help leaders decide whether to reconsider the timing of a change initiative.

- Offer consistent messaging about intentions and progress through regularly scheduled meetings, email updates, or briefings. Even if the news is not always pleasant, a flow of information creates a sense of belonging and can renew faith in change processes when people are feeling uncertain.

- Share non-confidential information equitably with all staff members and invite everyone to consider solutions when problem solving is needed. This may require additional effort to reach people working remotely or on night shifts.

- Reach out for your own support from peers, mentors, or coaches. Connect with people you trust who can offer clarity and perspective.

# Overcoming Common Challenges: Tips for Change Leaders

"Finding partners in the process and people who have been through it is so invaluable. I think sometimes we can be nervous to be transparent as leaders about where we are vulnerable, learning, or struggling. We have to find people we can trust to hold us in this process while we are holding our organizations."

— Rachel Cox

Because DSV work revolves around acknowledging the impact of trauma and violence, relationship challenges within programs are common and can take on a heightened sense of intensity. In successful ACRTI approaches, challenges are identified and addressed intentionally as part of the implementation process. Ultimately, many ACRTI change challenges look similar from one DSV organization to the next. In this section, we look at three common challenges and discuss possible paths for effective change leadership navigation.

## Challenge 1: Modeling New Skills

Simply put, leaders must lead by example. This means that when leaders ask staff members to practice a new skill or adjust a process to better align with ACRTI principles, they should consistently model the new skill or process as well.  In turn, the same must happen when the "ask" comes from staff members within the organization. In the DSV programs where crises abound, it is far too common for staff to participate in trainings and then find little or no support from their supervisors upon returning to their place of work and attempting to implement what they have learned.

*"In a program that had been going through a multi-year ACRTI process, the consultant was coming in to conduct a booster session more than a year after the initial ACRTI Core Curriculum training (NCDVTMH, 2014) and early implementation planning sessions. During that time leadership had let go of several staff who were unwilling to acclimate to or be a part of ACRTI organizational change. As often happens in times of transformation, staff turnover was expected. Without transparency, mechanisms for processing, providing language, and modeling, the remaining staff were left feeling that anyone could be let go at any time. They were afraid to speak up and fully engage in the processes and activities that were still left to do."*

— Lorien Castelle

Successful ACRTI change implementation requires leaders to signal their ongoing commitment to the implementation process, both verbally and non-verbally. This requires consistent self-awareness of one's own behavior and interactions with others, as well as acceptance that experiences of discomfort are common when learning new skills and being closely watched by others.

## Challenge 2: Balancing Power

ACRTI approaches require leaders to have a high level of awareness of the intersecting conditions that create and perpetuate abuse, violence, and discrimination in our lives, our communities, and our society. DSV leaders are well aware that working to eliminate the conditions that perpetuate abuse is central to DSV advocacy efforts. At the same time, many DSV leaders have to grapple with the fact that they lead and work within hierarchical organizations that uphold the very types of intersecting structures and conditions that their organizations' advocacy efforts are working to eliminate.

Leaders who are unable to acknowledge this inherent contradiction in their work will have more difficulty engaging advocacy staff, who — by the nature of their work — are keenly attuned to the types of behaviors and structures that perpetuate power imbalances. Naturally, these observations extend to the workplace as well.

Given these contradictions, workplace tensions are not uncommon in DSV organizations, especially in those focused on aligning with ACRTI values. Therefore, predictable workplace tensions need to be addressed before, during, and after they come to the surface. Planning to have conversations about power imbalances from the outset of ACRTI change initiatives — while ensuring that leadership responds thoughtfully to concerns as they arise — is critical to ACRTI change success. In preparing properly, leaders can help staff members feel engaged and see themselves as a part of change processes, rather than as passive participants or a leader's adversaries.

Because DSV work centers on navigating the impacts of trauma and violence, relationship challenges related to power imbalances within programs are common and can take on a heightened intensity.

Interpersonal disconnect stems from many sources that include, but are not limited to:

- Staff members' direct experiences with trauma and violence.
- Microaggressions that target staff and service participants.
- Historical and collective trauma.
- Limitations in organizational capacity.
- High rates of employee turnover.
- Secondary trauma
- Lack of transparency in communication.

The experiences listed above are examples of the types of experiences that affect how well people function in the workplace and the ways that they interact with one another. In ACRTI transformation processes, challenges should be recognized as part of what we encounter in our work. Leaders need approaches that allow them to respond effectively to the impact of people's experiences with trauma and violence. Holding complex emotional truths while continuing to navigate work relationships with empathy can be challenging. Because of these challenges, leaders must gauge their own willingness, comfort, and capacity to hold transparent conversations about organizational realities such as relationships, roles, and power sharing.

### Challenge 3: Staff Participation and Role Conflict

Given the nature of advocacy, many leaders have created highly participatory organizational cultures in which staff members routinely share in planning and decision making. This openness in an organizational climate can be incredibly helpful in creating buy-in for change initiatives. At the same time, this approach does not mean that leaders can abdicate their responsibilities for leading change processes. While in highly participatory organizational cultures an openness to discussing challenges and holding courageous conversations may already exist, it is worth noting that in times of change and transformation, some staff members may still perceive the existing level of openness to be insufficient.

In DSV advocacy organizations, leaders often expect staff to challenge the status quo regularly as part of their work with systems on behalf of survivors. Yet, when advocates turn their attention internally toward the organization, leaders can feel that their formal authority is being challenged. Disconnections may arise when leaders feel they are doing a good job of supporting and including staff in conversations, planning, and decision making, and then receive feedback indicating that staff disagree with the initial assessment. It is common for leaders to believe that staff are thriving, but later notice that, during times of transition, staff are struggling. These surprising realizations often indicate a need for additional support to navigate these challenges with transparency, empathy, and self-compassion. The support needed will vary from leader to leader, depending on leadership styles and preferences.

In many organizations, staff roles change and grow as organizational structures are modified or as funding changes. Roles shift so frequently in DSV programs that leaders can find themselves operating in crisis or survival mode without having the space to recognize the cumulative effect that operating under these conditions has on organizational well-being.

Organizational responses to unplanned changes in funding or structure typically involve reassigning tasks to existing staff members. At times, reallocating responsibilities can result in the unintentional creation of new supervisory roles. When new supervisors are appointed without the opportunity to develop necessary skills, a sense of overwhelm can prevail. At the same time, when new supervisors are supported in developing the skills they need to be successful in their new roles, this reallocation of responsibilities can become an opportunity for growth.

"In our program, I recognized the need to develop new leaders within our organization. We had staff that have been with us for many years and an investment in their growth became a top priority. We have a great many staff who are immigrants and most people we serve are immigrants. It was urgent to keep this talent in the field and in our organization. We were thoughtful about creating the new positions and sending all of the emerging leaders to Effective Supervisory Practice Training (NCDVTMH, 2016). As the Director, I prioritized leadership coaching as a proactive way to cultivate self-awareness and investing in their skill development. I also recognized I could not do this alone. Supervisors receive monthly coaching from an outside consultant."

— Claudia Medina

In many organizations, the change process is not as intentional or as focused on growth and learning as it is in the above example. When change processes are reactive, there can be unintended consequences. Skilled, committed, and compassionate people can become overwhelmed. This can lead to burnout, which contributes to high turnover and the loss of organizational history. In the example above, however, the intentional focus on supervisor development prepares everyone in the organization to manage change and leaves both the organization and individuals in a better position.

Another common result of reactive change processes is to have staff take on multiple functions that may present conflicts of interest.

Example:

*If a program does not have a human resources (HR) department, HR responsibilities may be assigned to someone in a supervisory or managerial role. When conflicts or grievances arise, staff have no access to an objective party. In the best case, the person responsible for HR functions tries to be understanding and objective, but this can be an impossible bind, as the responsible party is also invested in their own role and managerial responsibilities. This situation can be overwhelming, as the responsible party is holding care for staff while also being expected to resolve conflicts between staff and management. They may not have the support, guidance, or formal authority to address internal conflict. In the worst cases, the responsible party is in a position of formal authority and may, intentionally or unintentionally, use their power and position in harmful ways. Organizationally, this is usually a loss either way.*

Proactive planning — including the consideration of resources, staffing plans, and necessary short-term and long-term supports — helps sustain focus on the changes that program leaders want to make. Although proactive planning may take more time initially, it saves future time and energy, and ultimately leads to more sustainable ACRTI change.

"Our agency had attempted organizational change and implementing new methods multiple times throughout the years and any ground gained would disappear when the person who was most interested left or when staff's fears and resistance were more powerful than leadership's commitment to the change process. It wasn't until we really grew leadership's capacity, committed structured time, and created buy-in, that the process of truly implementing ACRTI services took shape."

— Program Director

# Reflection Questions for Leaders

"Seeing what it is wrong and how it could be made right propels us into action, but in that action we often leave other people behind and don't give ourselves enough time to be present, or to stop and reflect. Leaders have to get comfortable with pausing in that uncomfortable gap."

— Jessica Lawrence

| Reflection Questions for Leaders: Change Leadership | |
|---|---|
| Date Completed: | |
| What are the urgent issues that signal a need for change? | |
| What am I willing to begin and do to sustain the change process in my organization? | |
| Are there limits to my willingness to engage in a change process? If yes, what are those limits? | |
| What supports do I have for change leadership now and in the future? Would peer support, coaching, or mentoring be helpful? | |

## Reflection Questions for Leaders: Change Leadership

Date Completed:

| | |
|---|---|
| Do I have the resources I need? If not, what would be useful? | |
| How am I prepared to participate in conversations about the ways power dynamics affect my leadership? Am I open to change? | |
| How willing and able am I to examine how I share power as a leader? | |
| What do I need to prepare myself for holding this process and not taking things personally? | |
| How is information disseminated equitably? | |
| Who is aware of the need to change and what the change plan includes? Has anyone been excluded? | |
| Have all staff participated in conversations about the plan's alignment with our program's mission and values? | |
| Am I willing and prepared to create an organizational climate focused on learning and growing together? What would that take? | |
| How are all staff — including supervisors and managers — prepared for their roles and responsibilities in implementing change? | |
| What do I need to do to manage other organizational priorities and keep change implementation on track? What support do I need? | |
| What do I need to do to consistently sustain effective supervisory practice with staff while we are growing, learning, and in flux? | |
| What strategies for organizational well-being am I willing to consider and implement? | |

# References

Bangasser, R. (2014). Five Ways to Engage Employees in Change. Retrieved from https://www.shrm.org/hr-today/news/hr-magazine/pages/0314-tools.aspx

Bunker, K. A., & Wakefield, M. A. (2005). Leading With Authenticity in Times of Transition. Greensboro, NC: Center for Creative Leadership.

Grenough, M. (2012). Oasis in the Overwhelm: 60-second Strategies for Balance in a Busy World. Charlotte, NC: Beaver Hill Press.

Heathfield, S. M. (2016). Employee Involvement: Critical to the Success of Organizational Change. Retrieved from https://www.thebalancecareers.com/change-management-lessons-about-employee-involvement-1917806

Hiatt, J. (2006) ADKAR: A Model for Change in Business, Government, and Our Community. Colorado: Prosci.

Jones, J., Aguirre, D., & Calderone M. (2004). 10 Principles of Leading Change Management. Retrieved from https://www.strategy-business.com/article/00255?gko=9d35b

Kahn, W. A., Barton, M. A., & Fellows, S. (2013). Organizational Crises and the Disturbance of Relational systems. Academy of Management Review, 38, 377-396. doi: 10.5465/amr.2011.0363

Kotter, J. (1995, 2002) John Kotter's Guiding Principles for Leading Change. Retrieved from Organizations & People, https://www.strategies-for-managing-change.com/john-kotter.html; https://www.kotterinc.com/8-steps-process-for-leading-change/

Kouzes, J., & Posner, B. (2002) The Leadership Challenge. San Francisco, CA: John Wiley and Sons.

Laloux, F. (2014). Reinventing Organizations. Retrieved from http://www.reinventingorganizations.com/uploads/2/1/9/8/21988088/140305_laloux_reinventing_organizations.pdf

Middleton, J., Harvey, S., & Esaki, N. (2015). Transformational Leadership and Organizational Change: How Do Leaders Approach Trauma-Informed Organizational Change. Families in Society: The Journal of Contemporary Social Services, 96(3), 155-163.

National Center on Domestic Violence, Trauma, and Mental Health. (2018). Creating Trauma-Informed Services and Organizations: An Integrated Approach. Chicago, IL: National Center on Domestic Violence, Trauma, and Mental Health.

Quinn, R. W., & Quinn, R. E. (2016). Change Management and Leadership Development Have to Mesh. Retrieved from https://hbr.org/2016/01/change-management-and-leadership-development-have-to-mesh

Warshaw, C., Tinnon, E., & Cave, C. (2018). Tools for Transformation: Becoming Accessible, Culturally Responsive, and Trauma-Informed Organizations – An Organizational Reflection Toolkit. Chicago, IL: National Center on Domestic Violence, Trauma, and Mental Health.

# END