



Building Movement Project

Activating Nonprofits | Fueling Change



SOLIDARITY IS

Constructing Solidarity Narratives in Challenging Times

*a resource from the
Building Movement Project and Solidarity Is*

**“We achieve a sense of unity
when we all call for collective liberation.
Where everyone fights the system as a whole --
connecting all our struggles together and
resisting in the ways we can.”**

*- a Palestinian feminist activist at a November 2023 teach-in
co-curated by Palestinian Feminist Collective, AWID Women’s Rights,
and the WHRDMENA Coalition*

“Solidarity is the political version of love.”

*- Melanie Kaye/Kantrowitz, Jewish American lesbian feminist,
author and activist (1945-2018)*



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Accompany this with the November 2023 *Solidarity Is This* podcast at www.solidarityis.org

In the midst of the crisis in Israel and Palestine, the war in Gaza, and growing anti-Semitism, anti-Palestinian racism, and Islamophobia in the United States, organizations around the country are developing statements and practices of solidarity. During this time, the SolidarityIs team has been supporting our partner organizations in identifying and uplifting solidarity narratives. In this resource, we offer direction and ideas for nonprofit and movement partners to consider, particularly during moments of crisis.

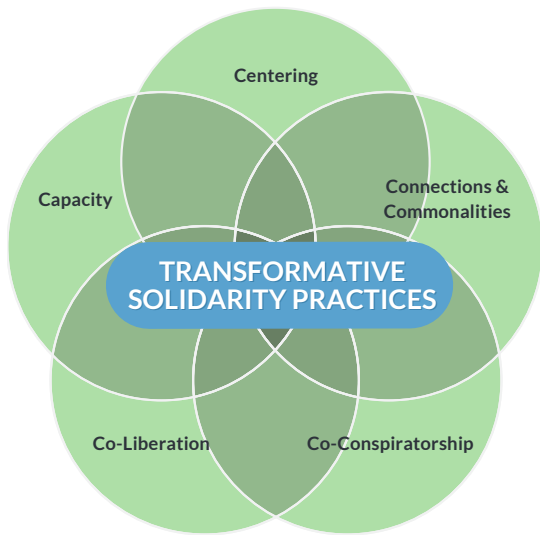
We suggest accompanying this resource with the [November 2023 Solidarity Is This podcast episode](#) featuring an interview with [Shanelle Matthews](#), CUNY Distinguished Lecturer and [Rad Comms](#) founder. In the podcast, Shanelle shares helpful frameworks and steps to construct solidarity narratives.

What is solidarity in the context of social change?

At BMP and SolidarityIs, we think of solidarity as a verb, as a set of actions that are practiced over and over again to show that we are aligned with a cause, a campaign, a call to action, and a community's demands. Solidarity can happen in many forms – via statements, direct actions, advocacy, healing circles, mutual aid – and more.

Solidarity is often contextual, in that it happens during a “movement moment” or in response to an event that catalyzes large numbers of people to take action. To move beyond a particular moment, solidarity requires us to become clear about our values, deepen relationships, take risks and be accountable, and manage conflict. Solidarity can lead to transformative change for people and communities (i.e. aligning with values), organizations (i.e. clarifying stances and positions), and systems and structures (i.e. changing policies and institutions and beyond).





At SolidarityIs, we have learned from the lineages of Black, Indigenous, labor, gender, and transnational movements that there are certain elements to solidarity practice that distinguish it as a vital strategy. These are laid out in the image here.

What are some questions emerging for groups in this moment?

As they reflect on their solidarity stances, organizations are pondering questions such as:

We feel that we need to take a position on foreign policy matters, which we don't typically do as an organization. How do we do that without drifting off-mission?

If we make a statement about human rights in Palestine, we may be criticized for being anti-Semitic. How do we move beyond that binary?

We have a lot of different opinions within our organization's leadership, staff, base, donors, and board members. How do we manage these internal conflicts?

The questions that organizations have at this moment are not surprising, given the binary frames being used to describe the current conflict in the Middle East and its consequences in the United States, as well as the harsh criticism targeting those who speak up for Palestinian rights. To learn more about how to avoid reductive narratives, [listen to Shanelle Matthews](#) break down divisive techniques at play right now, including: selective framing, divide and conquer, false equivalency, gaslighting, and scapegoating.

If your organization is navigating these questions and others, we offer the following ideas to guide your process.



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What considerations could organizations keep in mind as they develop a solidarity statement?

While this is not an exhaustive list, here are some ideas to consider. Accompany this list with our resource called [How To Write A Solidarity Statement](#) which offers a worksheet with reflection questions.

- **Clarify desired outcomes in developing and issuing a solidarity statement.** Examples of outcomes include: being clear publicly about our values and positions, educating our constituents, supporting our partners, disrupting dominant narratives, etc.
- **Ensure a clear understanding of the problem and solutions, as articulated by affected communities and grounded in historical context.** In moments of crisis, we can feel forced to have an immediate response. That is why it is vital to pause for a reasonable amount of time to educate ourselves, and have conversations with trusted partners.
- **Reflect on the risks of making a statement – and of not making one, including the risks we are willing to take because of the crisis moment.** Sometimes, organizations are concerned about “mission drift” if they weigh in on issues that are outside the scope of their purpose, geographic focus, or community. In these instances, it is important to reflect upon the significance of the moment and the overall arc of our organization’s mission. And in some cases, it becomes incumbent upon us to push past discomfort.



- **Consider what happens when there is not necessarily alignment across the organization.** These potentially challenging moments offer invaluable opportunities for growth and learning, even though they are often disquieting and uncomfortable. We might be forced to deal with underlying questions that our organization has avoided, or to make significant changes. These fissures often provide a unique opening for engaging in principled struggle and compassionate dialogue, and a way to model how divergent political views can find shared understanding and purpose. Some organizations have seized this moment to engage in collective political education to deepen shared analysis and skills and to open a dialogue that honors informed discussion rather than inadvertently creating a battleground for conflicting opinions. This approach can also help dispel misconceptions and assert why certain positions are held without negating the concerns of those who may disagree. If needed, you may wish to hire mediation and/or facilitation support to guide these conversations.
- **Plan a response to inevitable criticism.** Shanelle Matthews offers this advice: “Critique and pushback actually land differently on the nervous system if you are grounded in your politic and movement practice. If you're jumping on a bandwagon, if you're doing so because it's widely accepted or popular but you have not done the political study, values clarification, or personal work of distancing yourself from oppressive forces, it's going to be very hard for you to stand in your integrity in the face of critique.”



What elements might appear in solidarity statements?

- **Centering** the voices, needs, and demands of directly affected communities and organizations that represent them.
- **Connecting** the common roots of systemic injustice across movements and communities, while acknowledging that we hold similar yet distinct histories and experiences of dealing with oppression.
- **Articulating visions of co-liberation**, including mutual freedom and redistribution of power that recognizes that we can't all be free, equal, or whole if any community is being oppressed.
- **Providing calls to action for co-conspirators** to engage the issues at hand with respect, humility, and accountability.
- **Laying out next steps**, because solidarity is part of a sustainable, long-term, movement building strategy.

Additionally, we want to lift up elements that Shanelle Matthews suggests in the [Solidarity Is This podcast episode](#):

- What assumptions allow the dominant oppressive story to operate as truth in public discourses, and how can we undermine the basic legitimacy of those assumptions?
- How can we incorporate historical context to ground it in the social reality and material conditions of those targeted by oppression?



What are some examples of helpful solidarity statements that include the previous elements?

Solidarity statements are an opportunity to reflect an organization's core values, such as this excerpt from a statement by NDN Collective, which emphasizes valuing all our relations.

"In every Indigenous language in the world, there is a word meaning 'we are all related.' We are in a critical moment where we need to call upon our Indigenous knowledge and act upon that worldview, treating everyone as relatives. This moment requires us to act upon our values, so that a history of genocide does not continue to be repeated."

- NDN Collective

"As members of Asian diasporas whose families and ancestors have known the brutality of colonization and war, and as activists deeply committed to dismantling systems of racism, imperialism, patriarchy, and capitalism, we know no other option."

- Asian American Feminist Collective

Groups can also use solidarity statements as an opportunity to draw connections between communities, raising awareness about how our struggles - as well as our dreams for a more just and liberatory future - are linked, as seen in this excerpt from Asian American Feminist Collective.

Another example comes from Blacks for Palestine, which reaffirms a long-standing commitment rooted in lineage.

"We make this commitment in a long tradition of Black people standing with other peoples around the world in our shared struggle against oppression, racism, and colonialism."

- Blacks for Palestine

"The path towards a peaceful future for both Israelis and Palestinians will require a reckoning with the past. Reconciliation can only occur when there is space for truth-telling, justice and healing."

- International Sites of Conscience

Organizations can provide calls to action and recommendations based on their own history of work. For example, a statement from the International Sites of Conscience offers a perspective on healing generational trauma.



About Building Movement Project and Solidarity Is

The Building Movement Project supports and pushes the nonprofit sector to tackle the most significant social issues of our times by developing research, creating tools and training materials, providing guidance, and facilitating networks for social change.

An initiative of the Building Movement Project, Solidarity Is generates tools, trainings, and narratives to facilitate transformative solidarity practices for movement building organizations and activists who are invested in meaningful social change.

We offer workshops to organizations, coalitions, and networks that are committed to social change, solidarity, and movement building, and are looking for language, resources, tools, and frameworks to strengthen their practices.

We hope the considerations and resources in this document are a useful offering. If the SolidarityIs team can be of assistance with your organization's solidarity narratives and work, if you have questions about this document, or if you're interested in partnering with us for a workshop or training, please reach out to us at SolidarityIs@buildingmovement.org. You can also follow us at [@BuildingMovementProject](https://www.instagram.com/BuildingMovementProject) on Instagram for tips and ideas.

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For questions and/or support with this document, contact us at solidarityis@buildingmovement.org



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