

## ACTIVITY 5

# Rituals of Connection

### 🕒 TIMING

Rituals can be short moments of collective meditation or longer reflections. The “Whose shoulders am I standing on?” and “What Is My NLN Story” exercises take **about an hour** for a group of 15–20.

### ★ EXPERTISE

**None.** As long as the group has spent time establishing confidentiality and “community agreements,” this exercise is one that is created for and by the community.

## PURPOSE

To help a group mark significant moments together, to make visible the complexity of perspectives, and to create intention around who the leaders want to be, both individually and collectively.

## USE

Any time a group begins, ends, or solidifies something important. Co-creating a simple ritual will deepen reflection and memory.

## FACILITATION

Rituals are central to how NLN makes moments more significant by creating opportunities for the leaders to express themselves in different ways. These rituals can be as simple as standing together and expressing gratitude, or they can be more intensive.

### WHOSE SHOULDERS AM I STANDING ON?

This exercise is used at the opening of the first day to mark the beginning of the group’s journey. It’s a ritual of arrival that allows individuals to surface something important from their life and to immediately take risks and become more vulnerable.

**What’s needed:** Easy access to the outdoors. If that’s not possible, then ask participants to bring an object with them to the gathering. You will also need a small table or tray that can sit in the center of the room to hold the objects.

#### Instructions:

- 1 Introduce the purpose of the ritual as marking the start of the leaders’ journey together and becoming a collective. They will claim the space where the group will be together, and bring others into the room who have supported them.
- 2 Invite the participants to go outside and find an object that symbolizes an important person or people in their life. Pose these questions: *Who is central to why you are here today? Whose shoulders are you standing on?* They should spend no more than 10 minutes finding an object.

### Instructions (continued):

- 3 When they return, ask leaders to present their objects to the group and place them on a tray or table in the center of the room. As they do so, ask leaders to say their name, what the object is, and who it represents. Each person speaks for a maximum of 2 minutes.
- 4 In the closing, note the creation of an “altar to our stories” that can be referred to later in the group’s work together.

### WHAT IS MY NLN STORY?

This exercise is the closing ritual at NLN, done in the last few hours of the group’s time together. Its purpose is a public retelling of each leader’s personal journey through the NLN experience.

**What’s needed:** A quiet and private room with a circle of chairs.

#### Instructions:

- 1 Give the leaders a few minutes to recall three moments that represent the “before, during, and after” experience of the NLN.
- 2 Introduce the arc of each leader’s talk. For each talk (5-7 minutes):
  - Ask the speaker to select two others from the group to offer reflections on what they share.
  - Direct the leader to speak for 3 minutes and share key moments from their NLN journey and how they were impacted.
  - Ask the responders to offer feedback using the following prompt: “AND, what I ALSO saw you do is...” This allows colleagues a final opportunity to celebrate something about that person’s journey.
  - Ask that leader to select the next speaker.

### WHAT WE’RE LEARNING

- ✓ Rituals are powerful. They give individuals permission to express themselves more fully to the group, helping create vulnerability, deepen trust, and build connections. By witnessing others, participants build their empathy and capacity to see the world through others’ eyes.
- ✓ Rituals can also be disruptive. Participants are initially wary of being asked to step out of their comfort zones, so the facilitator must help overcome initial resistance. Over time, even the most resistant groups begin to revisit the rituals they have co-created.
- ✓ Rituals can build a collective capacity to talk about complicated issues and express less comfortable feelings. Often, what is expressed in ritual can become an invitation for further exploration.
- ✓ Rituals also solidify learning. Asking leaders to recount their experience in front of their fellow travelers helps cement learning and commitments.

WHO IS CENTRAL

TO WHY YOU ARE

HERE TODAY?