



NATIONAL CALL TO ACTION GUIDANCE TO ASPIRING ALLIES

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The origination and context of the term *aspiring ally* has its roots in the Women of Color Network's National Call to Action (NCTA) *National Ally Statement*¹ in its application in the movement to end domestic and sexual violence.

You do not speak for me. As an aspiring ally, you are there to amplify my voice. –
Nicole Gray, WOCN National Call to Action conference, St. Paul, Minn., July 2012.²

WHAT IS AN ASPIRING ALLY?

An ***ally*** is someone from a dominant or mainstream group who acknowledges certain unearned privileges they hold, who recognizes that their unearned privilege puts them in a position of power and shares their privilege responsibly to support access, understanding and opportunity alongside underrepresented groups. An ***aspiring ally*** is someone who recognizes and acknowledges that they must strive to work at being an ally to women of color and other underrepresented people on a daily basis; that becoming an ally is not a finite process but rather a life-long journey.

To be an aspiring ally in the movement to end domestic and sexual violence is to strive toward social justice and end oppression against all survivors – as well as colleagues and community partners from underrepresented communities in this movement. An aspiring ally in this movement strives to operate with accountability to amplify the

¹ Women of Color Network. *National Ally Statement, Call To Action Statement 2008 by Those Aspiring To Be Allies To Women Of Color Advocates and Activists*, Edited and Distributed by the Women of Color Network. July 2008.

² A WOCN friend and consultant, the late Nicole Gray identified as Blackfeet, Chippewa-Cree and Irish, and dedicated her life's work to her family and anti-oppression and anti-violence work since 1978. Her message captures the essence of what it truly means to be an aspiring ally; we include it here in dedication to her life and work.

voices of those who are underrepresented or under-acknowledged, such as: white women and men supporting the leadership of women of color advocates and advocates; men in the violence against women movement seeking to challenge traditional male attitudes and behaviors; and the hearing who actively work to create more access to resources for deaf survivors and amplify the voice of deaf advocates and leaders.

We believe that:

- Aspiring allies are aware of where they hold certain privileges that bring unearned power.
- Aspiring allies work to stand up and point out injustice to open the way for underrepresented groups.
- Aspiring allies seek opportunities to step back and let go of power to amplify other voices.
- Aspiring allies recognize that they must work consciously to acknowledge where they have privilege and develop new habits to work accountably with underrepresented groups.
- Aspiring allies understand that historical oppression manifests in our personal lives and institutionally, including within organizations created to end violence against women.
- Aspiring allies understand that they must recommit to their work daily.
- Aspiring allies take responsibility to hold themselves and each other accountable.

ASPIRING ALLY ACCOUNTABILITY:

What do we mean when we talk about accountability for aspiring allies – when we discuss holding each other and ourselves accountable? Often times, the term accountability can have negative connotations, bringing up feelings of being monitored, stirring fears of making mistakes and creating unintended but additional barriers for the people we are committed to join as allies. At its worst, under the guise of “accountability,” aspiring allies can be used as a weapon; a bullying tactic among and between aspiring allies.

At its best, accountability serves as a guiding light for aspiring allies. We remember that the work of an aspiring ally is to amplify the voices of those whom we seek to ally. There is no room for shaming, blaming and attacking other aspiring allies, or ourselves as we work together to counter historical and structural oppression. As we deepen our understanding and analysis, we continue to learn that aspiring allies work is a circular process; internally driven momentum that benefits others and ourselves.

At its heart, accountability happens because aspiring allies consistently strive to amplify the voices of those whom we seek to be an ally. Accountable aspiring allies practice showing up, engagement and risk assessment before taking action.

Accountable aspiring allies also remember that even when all of these process steps happen in the best of circumstances, unintended consequences can and do happen. We must always be willing to assess our roles in taking too much action, the wrong kind of action, action at the wrong time or no action, when we were needed to do something different.

In its truest spirit, accountability requires us to accept the impact of our action, regardless of intent, and make amends for any harm while continuing to learn and move ahead.

ELEMENTS GUIDING THE ACTION OF ASPIRING ALLIES:

Showing Up:

Consistent exploration of the emotions that arise when “accountability” is mentioned, such as fear, guilt, anger, shame, confusion, and continuing to show up anyway. Aspiring allies understand that, while perfection is not required, doing no harm is a guiding principle. Engage with other aspiring allies for accountability and support is critical, rather than turning to those whom we seek to be an aspiring ally.

Engagement:

Begins with other aspiring allies and doing research on the history and realities of the underrepresented community to whom one seeks to be an ally. We learn how the group has been marginalized, colonized, eliminated, silenced and affected by sexual and domestic violence as well as a community’s accomplishments, leaders, communal values, areas of shared experience and expertise, assets, places of preferred engagement, organizations and culture.

Working with Others:

Identify other aspiring allies who should be included, especially across lines of difference and others from similar privilege. Who has begun to do work around a particular issue or has respected relationships with the community? Who can bring other resources?

Risk Assessment:

What are the risks involved in taking a particular action, even as harmless as a certain action may seem? Who might be most hurt and/or endangered? Who else needs to be included?

Action:

Whether an internal or external action, aspiring allies keep the issue at the center to amplify the voices of those whom we seek to ally.

Mistakes:

Mistakes, unintended consequences, can and do happen. Aspiring allies are willing to accept and assess our role in making missteps.

Reparations:

Aspiring allies take action to accept the impact of our actions, regardless of our intent. We make amends and continue to move ahead without guilt and fear.