

Tips for Anti-Trafficking Professionals When Working with Survivor Leaders

Written by: Catie Hart, Celia Roberts, Genèvieve T. Tiangco, Kae Kae Baybie, Monica Anderson, Ummra Hang, alix lutnick, Minh Dang



- **Survivor leaders want to collaborate with you.**
We will explore with you whether it is a good fit. If we say we can't collaborate, please do not take it personally and don't stop asking survivor leaders to collaborate.
- **Check-in with the survivor leader about their boundaries and needs for the working relationship.**
Before an event, confirm whether they want to tell their story and discuss their boundaries for the working relationship. Ask if the consultant wants to work closely with another survivor professional on your team. If this is not available, make it clear and find other ways to support the leader.
- **Be mindful of your body language and non-verbal communications.**
Pay attention to how you might be communicating judgment. If you feel judgments come up, take a breath or step outside. Be aware that when your shock or discomfort is noticeable to the survivor leader, they may feel responsible for tending to your feelings.
- **Provide a stipend.**
This includes monetary payment, room and board, and travel expenses.
- **Check-in with the survivor leader in private before you share any personal information about them.** Ask them, "How would you like me to introduce you?"
- **Try not to focus on the individual-level details of sex and trauma.**
It is helpful for people to understand brainwashing and coercion aspects of human trafficking, as opposed to focusing on the details. You may be curious about someone's experience but do not assume you can ask about it.
- **Be mindful of the diversity of experiences.**
Survivors may be in different stages of change and how people make sense of their experiences will vary and change over time. For some people their reflections will change positively and negatively. Some may even have felt empowered by some of the things that occurred during their trafficking experience. Others, not so much. Remember that many survivors feel there is no end date to healing.
- **Survivors are the experts about their experience.**
Survivor consultants are your peers and professional equals. Please be mindful of trying to define or analyze their experience for them.
- **When someone shares personal information, do not respond with "I'm so sorry."**
Say "Thank you so much for sharing" or something more positive and uplifting such as, "You have shown a lot of strength and courage."
- **Survivors are human and do not have all the answers.**
- **Know the intention of your question and do not move too quickly.**
Avoid asking questions that are irrelevant to your collaboration. Pay attention to the pace of the questions, so that it does not feel like an interrogation. Give people enough time to think and answer your questions.
- **We all have things to teach each other.**
Collaborate with organizations that have expertise in areas you do not. Remember that your academic background and our lived experiences makes working together more effective.
- **Respect confidentiality.**
Inform survivor leaders if there are additional people who will have access to their personal information. Discuss what you will do with their information and their work, after your collaboration is over. Make sure to let the leader know about data protection guidelines, media presence, and potential use of photos.