

AESOP'S LEADERSHIP NETWORK

**ACTIVISTS ENGAGED IN SUSTAINING OUR
PURPOSE & POWER**

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JANUARY - MARCH 2026



Click [here](#) to register for our mailing list.
Learn more on [Prevention Institute's Website](#).

AESOP'S LEADERSHIP NETWORK

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Welcome to Year 4 of AESOP's Leadership Network!



Why AESOP's?

Aesop was a North African enslaved in Greece during the 6th century BC. He became renowned for his parables that helped explore complex truths in memorable ways. Aesop's fables became a way for harsh realities to be more easily understood, shared through oral tradition and part of cultural values.

AESOP's (Activists Engaged in Sustaining our Purpose and Power) Leadership Network seeks to do the same for those involved in social justice movements and community care. In addition to building a connection of resources for leaders and activists, AESOP's Leadership Network presents recognition of the healing, connecting and hopefulness found in owning our narratives and imagining common solutions.

Find out more about AESOP's Leadership Network [here](#).

Activists **Engaged** in **Sustaining Our Purpose & Power**

January Virtual Meeting: Restorative Principles

January Virtual Gathering

This quarter, our focus is on designing spaces, identifying practices, and centering rest and recovery for leaders during uncertain times.

In our first virtual meeting of the year, leaders convened to discuss three central practices New Seneca Village uses to sustain movements and center healing and restoration:

Prioritize Vision:

Nourish individual and collective visioning; support staff in dreaming of risky, long-term transformation

Restorative Principles for Leaders

Center Care:

Build trusting relationships by accounting for staff mental, physical, emotional, and spiritual health

Transform Funding:

Shift funding approaches towards committed, trust-based sources; build long-term relationships with funders

While all three principles are important for sustaining movements, our focus in AESOP's Leadership Network is to prioritize centering care, allowing organizations to sustain leaders and staff so that they can prioritize vision and transform funding practices.

You can view the slides from the January meeting [here](#).

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January Virtual Meeting: The Long Run (Poem)

In our virtual meeting, Rev. Vanessa Monroe shared a poem, The Long Run, and performed Lectio Divina to facilitate deep thinking and understanding around the poem's themes. This poem was used to illustrate the connection between rest and wellbeing through the metaphor of training for a race.

Read the poem below, then follow the steps to engage in Lectio Divina:

The Long Run (REST)

I learned the hard way
that the body keeps score.
That grit without pause
becomes injury.

The road does not care
how badly I want to finish.
It only responds
to rhythm.

Five days I train.
One day I stop.
One day I heal.

I am not weak for resting.
I am wise for returning.
This is how I stay
in the race.

Lectio Divina Practice

1. Read the poem out loud; what do you hear (what words stand out? what do they mean)?
2. Read the poem again; what do you see (what do you visualize when you hear the poem again)?
3. Read the poem once again; what do you feel (on a third reading, how does the poem make you feel)?

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February In-Person Gathering

February In-Person Gathering

In February, leaders, healers, and community advocates joined us at **Journey HTX** to reinforce the messages we heard in January about the importance of rest and recovery.



Our activities included:

- Grounding exercises led by U.S. Dream Academy Learning Center Director MyKayla Searles-Houston
- Re-reading of The Long Run poem by Rev. Vanessa Monroe
- Journaling activity with prompts around rest, recovery, and boundaries
- Networking and lunch catered by Flower Child

To close out the meeting, folks shared how they think about rest and recovery, along with important practical steps they want to take to protect their wellbeing, sharing examples of boundaries, practices, and messaging with each other.

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Key Themes and Reflections

Themes & Messages:

- Rest looks different for everyone, it doesn't always have to be sleeping.
- Suspend the expectation that you have to explain yourself when you need rest and recovery.
- Explore the 7 Types of Rest and the TED Talk by the creator of the framework to understand when you need different types of rest and recovery.

Message from a leader:

I'm deeply grateful to be part of this network and the intentional space it creates for reflection, connection, and growth. One moment that stayed with me was the most recent in-person gathering, where I had the opportunity to invite my mother. It meant a great deal to share that experience with her, and she expressed sincere appreciation for being included and for gaining a deeper understanding of the importance of rest and restoration in the work of serving others.

This experience reinforced a shift in my leadership practice: recognizing that rest is not separate from the work, but foundational to sustaining it. When leaders neglect rest, it can lead to stress and burnout, ultimately impacting how we show up for others. Being part of this Network has provided a sense of support and alignment that helps ease that burden. I am truly thankful for this community and make it a priority to ensure my schedule consistently allows for my participation and continued growth alongside other leaders.

Sifa Opot, U.S. Dream Academy

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February In-Person Gathering

Check out the resources and handouts we shared in our February Gathering below:

Resource: The Long Run Poem

Continue exploring the meaning behind the poem, including the imperative for scheduling both a rest and recovery day.

Reflection: Journal Prompts

Provides a set of questions and resources for leaders to establish boundaries and practices that center rest and recovery.

Tool: Rest and Recovery Plans

Jot down when you need a rest or recovery day, what types of activities work for your rest and recovery, and principles for scheduling rest and recovery days in advance before you need them



AESOP'S LEADERSHIP NETWORK

FEATURED RESOURCES

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Meditations, Readings, and Webinars



Community Trauma and Healing

What My Bones Know: A Memoir of Healing from Complex Trauma by Stephanie Foo

How We Show Up: Reclaiming Family, Friendship, and Community by Mia Birdsong

NEW Even Me: A Journey of Self-Discovery, Cultural Humility, and Commitment by Kenya Johnson

Kenya Johnson is a leading thought partner and co-founder of The RE Collective and Full Circle Strategies in Houston, TX!

Leadership Practices

Strengthening the Soul of your Leadership: Seeking God in the Crucible of Ministry by Ruth Haley Barton

The Purpose of Power: How We Come Together When We Fall Apart by Alicia Garza

Lead from the Outside: How to Build Your Future and Make Real Change by Stacey Abrams

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Resource Hub: Recommended Viewings

Recommended Viewings

Cultivating the Leader Within: Insights from the CLARE Program (Collective Impact Forum)

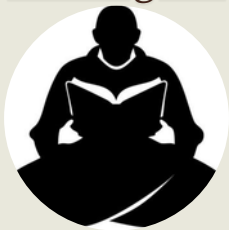
Healing through story: Unpacking Indigenous resiliency and hope - Annie Belcourt (TED Talk)

Why rest is a right, not a 'luxury' - Jotina Buck (TED Talk)

Guided Meditations led by Rev. Vanessa Monroe (Meditation)

**Click below to explore the full
AESOP's Resource Hub**

ALN Listening &
Reading List



Mental Health
Resources



Articles and
Blogposts



Music and
Meditations



**Do you have books, articles, or podcasts that help you manage burnout or stress?
Share them with Kalia at kalia@preventioninstitute.org**

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Upcoming Events and Opportunities

AESOP's Calendar (April-June)

April 16th 11-12:30 PM

AESOP's Virtual Meeting (Zoom)

Join us for our second virtual gathering of the year. This space is dedicated for leaders to take a break during the workday, hear powerful messages about wellness and leadership, and spend some time with others facing similar challenges and barriers in their work.

May 29th 10-2 PM (rescheduled!)

AESOP's In-Person Quarterly Meeting (*Journey HTX*)

We're excited to re-convene at Journey HTX for our second quarterly meeting of the year. Come as you are, stay as long as you need, and bring a friend!

Please email Kalia at kalia@preventioninstitute.org if you are interested in joining us in April and May!



Click [here](#) or scan to
join our mailing list!

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Upcoming Events and Opportunities

Other Upcoming Events

April 11th (TBD)

What Sula Teaches us about Public Health (Virtual Discussion Circle) - Led by AESOP's coordinator **La'Quana Williams**

April 11th 4-8 PM

2026 Liberation Rally | Celebrate 5 Years of the RECollective (Journey HTX)

April 25th 6-8 PM

Lualo Studios Exhibition: Altar of Care Opening Reception (The Collective, 4111 Fannin St.)

May 25th 9-12 AM

The Witness Series Part 2: Gardening for Liberation (Third Ward Garden @ Riverside Methodist Church)

May 30th (save-the-date)

Houston Assembled Partners Meeting with AESOP's and SHINE Houston

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join our mailing list!



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What should you expect when you join us?



Experience networking, healing, and connection through:

- Discussion circles and peer support
- Hands-on self care for leaders, advocates, and activists
- Rest and recovery in a safe space

Reach out to Kalia Pannell (kalia@preventioninstitute.org) to learn more and join the Network!

AESOP's Leadership Network

EXPERIENCE NETWORKING, HEALING, AND CONNECTION THROUGH:

- AESOP QUARTERLY MEETINGS: HALF-DAY EVENTS FOR LEADERS
- IN-PERSON EVENTS: NETWORK-LED ACTIVITIES AND SPECIAL EVENTS
- VIRTUAL MEETINGS: ZOOM GATHERINGS BETWEEN EVENTS

January <u>VIRTUAL MEETING</u> <u>JAN 15TH, 11-12:30PM</u>	February AESOP QUARTERLY MEETING FEB 20TH, 10-2PM	March QUARTERLY WRAP-UP NEWSLETTER
April <u>VIRTUAL MEETING</u> <u>APR 16TH, 11-12:30PM</u>	May RESCHEDULED! AESOP QUARTERLY MEETING MAY 29TH, 10-2PM	June QUARTERLY WRAP-UP NEWSLETTER
July <u>VIRTUAL MEETING</u> <u>JUL 16TH, 11-12:30PM</u>	August AESOP QUARTERLY MEETING AUG 21ST, 10-2PM	September QUARTERLY WRAP-UP NEWSLETTER
October <u>VIRTUAL MEETING</u> <u>OCT 14TH, 11-12:30PM</u>	November AESOP QUARTERLY MEETING NOV 20TH, 10-2PM	December QUARTERLY WRAP-UP NEWSLETTER

EMAIL KALIA PANELL AT [KALIA@PREVENTIONINSTITUTE.ORG](mailto:kalia@preventioninstitute.org) FOR MORE DETAILS!