

# Creating a Covenant for Your Group

## The Big Picture

- Your goal is to create a statement that reflects how your group members desire to interact with each other during your meetings or other activities.
- You may write your covenant in a single gathering, or over several. Please view your initial statement as a draft that you will review again, especially if you write your covenant in one session. Living covenants are works-in-progress!

## Three Strategies for Drafting an Initial Covenant

### #1 Quick & Easy

- Talk about what covenants are (and aren't!). For example, they are guides to how we want to be together. They are not rules with penalties.
- Give each person a piece of paper and pen. Ask participants to write down three statements that they'd like to have as part of the groups' covenant. Give them a few minutes to do this.
- Go around the room, each person reading one statement that hasn't yet been spoken, until you run out. Write these on an easel where everyone can see them. Combine statements that are similar, but make sure that those who proposed the statements agree.
- Ask if anyone has questions or concerns about anything that's been written. If so, discuss them. If not, ask if everyone is comfortable with what's been written and ask them to sign the covenant as a sign of their willingness to abide by it.

### #2 Building on existing covenants

- Distribute copies of the handouts we've provided to give your group members a sense of what a covenant looks like. See if one of the covenants feels like a good starting place. Remember that no two groups are alike, and different covenants will serve different needs (e.g. the Board covenant is going to look different than the Numinous Circle covenant!)
- If you choose to start with an existing covenant, first take a few minutes to speak about the items that resonate with you. Then ask if there are items that don't seem relevant and need to be deleted or revised. Then ask if there are omissions, items that you'd like to add that weren't part of the original covenant.
- Alternately, you might start with a blank sheet of paper and select statements from a number of covenants in order to craft your own.

### #3 Reflective & Thoughtful

- Begin by talking about the values you hope to live by in your relationships with each other. Generate a list by brain-storming or brain-writing (brain-storming individually on paper).
- Take some time to listen to each other as you talk about what these values mean to you. Focus on what excites you, rather than criticizing or dwelling on what does not work for you. It may help to encourage people to tell a short story of a time when they experienced the value in action.

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- Hone down the list. Are some values similar enough to combine? Then ask people to pick their top three or five. You can use dot voting, putting a check mark on a list, or any other clear way for people to indicate their choices. It is important to limit people's choices to three or five so that you can end up with a manageable list.
- Sit with the list. Have a silent time among you to just take it in.
- Ask people to write down behaviors that exhibit each of these values. Ask for behaviors that are in context to what your group does. Make a list of those behaviors.
- Ask people to talk about why the behaviors are important to them. Encourage talking in the positive.
- Again, see if any can be combined. Then, hone down the list in a way similar to what you did before. This is the basis of your covenant statement.
- Avoid the temptation to word-smith your statement as a group. Ask if statements don't ring true for people. If so, ask for general principles for how they could be improved. Then give your draft to one to three people at most to word smith and bring back to the group.

## **Using Your Covenant: Ways to Keep it Alive and Vibrant**

Covenants will not do their job if you write one and then file it away. They need to be kept alive. Here are some strategies that we've found helpful. You may choose to do one or more of these, at different times:

- Give everyone in your group a copy of the covenant
- Read your covenant aloud at the beginning of every meeting. Rather than asking one person to read, go around the circle and ask each person to read a line.
- Post your covenant on a chart where everyone can see it. Do this at every meeting.
- Take a few minutes at the end of your meeting to reflect on whether or not you personally have upheld the covenant. Then think about whether the group has upheld the covenant. Don't accuse. Speak your truth with love. Remember that a covenant is an ideal. We, being human, will make mistakes. Our goal is to work together to live our covenant as best we can.
- On a regular basis, make some time on your agenda to reflect on whether your covenant still reflects your desires and concerns. If it doesn't, revise it.
- When a new member joins the group, give them copies of the covenant and invite them to ask questions and propose changes. Be open to changes – people are much more likely to honor a covenant if they've played some role in creating it. This is also an opportunity for you to reflect on your covenant to see whether it still matches your beliefs and practices.

## **Help from the Covenanting Project Team:**

We would love to help you with the covenanting process! We are available for consultation and/or facilitation. We'd be happy to consult with you as you develop a specific plan to help your group write a covenant. We're also willing to come lead the covenanting process. For more information, contact Marion Thompson, at (510) 841-7817.

If you are interested in reading more about the concepts and history of covenants, check out the Minns Lectures on our website at: [www.uucb.org/about/minnslectures/](http://www.uucb.org/about/minnslectures/)