



Leading Circles Booklet

a Free Resource
created by Emma Dines
for The Branches

Questions to ask yourself before initiating a Circle

Vibe/Content/Identity

Is your circle for a particular affinity or identity group? What kind of content do you want to discuss? What kind of vibe do you want it to have?

Format

What kind of circle format are you going to choose? What suits the purpose of the group? How long will each circle be, and how strict will you be with that length?

Rhythm

How often are you proposing the circle will meet? Monthly, twice monthly, every other month?

Closed or Open

Is it a set group that will meet for the circle, or are others free to come and go? Might depend on the topic/group, but generally I recommend a closed circle.

Length of commitment

Are you inviting people to try out a circle format for 6 months, a year? The length of commitment could also relate to new members joining, or existing members leaving the circle. For example, after the year's commitment, the circle can decide if it makes sense for someone to join, or someone can decide if they are ready to move on from the circle.

Level of commitment

What kind of priority would you like members to place on the circle? Is it "Come if you feel like it" or "Make this a priority as we are building something together and your presence matters".

Rotating Facilitation & Location

Once people are familiar with the circle format that you've agreed upon, each member of the group can participate in facilitating different circles. Rotating this is important for everyone to feel ownership and share responsibility for the circle.

Building Your Circle's Culture and Arriving at a Shared Purpose

Spend the first few circles discussing what you each want to get out of the circle, and what the purpose of the circle is. What kinds of topics do you want to discuss? What do you want to experience or grow together as a group? Is this group more about intellectual exploration and sharing ideas, is it more about sharing about your life and getting to know one another? Is it about spiritual pursuits or practices? Have a few people take notes on what is said and write some "Culture notes" or (wo)manifestos up and share these with the group. You might also come up with a list of prompts or questions to choose from for future circles.

Choosing/Refining your format

Spend the next few circles trying out a format, and tweak/adjust as needed. This might include the length of your circle (can people pay attention for 2 hours, is there appetite for longer or desire for it to be shorter?).

Resources

Books

- The Millionth Circle by Jean Shinoda-Bolen
- The Art of Gathering by Priya Parker
- Calling the Circle by Christina Baldwin

More on Forms (Circle/Meeting/Gathering Structures)

- liberatingstructures.com
- conversationcafe.org

Podcasts

The Belonging Podcast with Becca Piastrelli

- The Women's Circle with Anoushka Florence
- Redefining the Aesthetic of Circle with Gemma Brady
- From Lonely in a Crowd to Truly Met with Ginny Muir