

CO-LEADERS' GUIDE

Best Practices for Chapter Co-Leaders

Co-leaders have responsibilities in three general areas: communications, logistics, and process.

Communications

- 1. Stay in touch with your Sisters.** Send out an annual or semi-annual calendar of meetings, so that sisters can set aside the time well in advance, as well as reminders before each meeting.
- 2. Develop a system for ongoing communication with chapter members.** Find out from each sister if she prefers to receive reminders and notices via text, email, or a private Facebook or WhatsApp group. Send us an email if you'd like help setting up one a Facebook or WhatsApp group. While this may take a little extra time initially, it will make your outreach MUCH easier each month. Some chapter co-leaders enjoy outreach and take it on as one of their unique responsibilities, while others rotate communicating with sisters. Decide with your co-leader(s) what works best for you, and feel free to change your system if it doesn't seem to be working.
- 3. Reach out to women who don't regularly attend meetings.** During the first six months, it's normal for membership to fluctuate. Remember that personal relationships form the heart of the Sisterhood. They take time to develop, and it's more challenging to establish trust if women drop in and out of the group. If a sister misses a meeting, or doesn't RSVP, text, call, or email her. Reaching out lets her know that her presence matters to you and to all your sisters. If she misses a couple of meetings, reach out and check in with her. Ask how she's doing. Find out if work or family responsibilities make it difficult for her to attend. If she is committed to the group, but the regular meeting time is difficult for her, talk as a group about possible accommodations. Perhaps you can alternate days (e.g. Sunday afternoons and week nights) or come up with another solution. If she feels she can't make a regular commitment to chapter meetings, ask if she would like to be invited to larger special events and celebrations. That way, she can maintain a positive connection to your chapter. Eventually, your membership will stabilize and reminder emails or texts prior to meetings or special events, should suffice. As a common courtesy, if a sister emails or calls you, we ask that one of the co-leaders gets back to her within 48 hours whenever possible.
- 4. Stay in touch with the central office.** The central office is the hub that connects all the local chapters and exists to support each individual chapter. Please send your chapter membership list to Samantha at the central office (samantha@sosspeace.org) within one month of your first meeting. Once a year, we will ask you to update your membership list and invite you to share your best practices and challenges. We'll share selected best practices each month in an email newsletter, which also includes updates about upcoming trainings, conferences, and events.

5. **Utilize regional coordinators.** In 2019, we introduced the concept of regional coordinators, individuals who serve a select group of regions across the country and are available to assist with challenges, activities, and programming for chapters within each region. Once your chapter is up and running, in addition to the central office, you can refer to your regional coordinator for support. Samantha (samantha@sosspeace.org) can put you in touch with the Regional Coordinator(s) serving your area.

Logistics

As a co-leader, you aren't responsible for DOING everything. You just need to make sure that things get DONE. Here are some important logistics to consider:

1. **Group size** A stable group promotes bonding and intimacy. Consistency in membership is very important. We do not recommend people dropping in and out and suggest, once the chapter has reached a stable, core membership, closing to new members.
2. **Location** We strongly encourage you to meet in women's homes, because this setting encourages intimacy in an informal atmosphere. Make sure the host knows how many people to expect so she can prepare the space. On occasion, chapters visit a religious house of worship for a specific educational experience.
3. **Meeting times** Finding a time to meet that works for everyone can be very challenging! Many chapters have found that Sunday afternoons work well. Other chapters meet on a weeknight. With input from your chapter members, decide upon a day and time of the week that works for everyone. If there's no one time, consider alternating meeting times and days. Just remember, in the spirit of inter-religious dialogue, please don't schedule a meeting on the Jewish sabbath (Friday evening, or anytime Saturday before sundown), during Muslim Jummah prayer (Friday afternoon), or during other holidays, unless that meeting is celebrating a specific religious observance.
4. **Meeting themes** There are three common ways to decide upon the theme for each meeting.
 - a. The host of the meeting decides.
 - b. The chapter decides together at the end of the previous meeting.
 - c. The co-leaders decide.

Regardless of which method you choose, it's a good idea to balance time for socializing, learning, and personal sharing. Share your meeting theme with sisters at the beginning of your meeting so everyone knows what to expect. We find that the most successful chapters have a mix of themes that range from members-suggested topics, to discussions chosen from the guide, to holiday or ritual based celebrations, social action/service-oriented meetings, social activities, field trips, and more.

5. **Meeting facilitation** Best practices for meeting facilitation are available in the Running Successful Dialogue and Effective Meetings section. It is important to note that co-

leaders are not responsible for leading the dialogue portion of each meeting, only for ensuring that someone has volunteered to facilitate the chosen discussion.

6. **Committees** Some chapters like to have small committees- a fundraising committee, for example, a Good and Welfare group, which ensures chapter members have support in the event of illness, or a death in the family, or a new baby, or a social action or social (extracurricular get-togethers) committee. Does your chapter have women with a passion for one of these, or another, subgroups? Maybe someone who has a passion for art or dance programs, or trying new restaurants, or checking in with members needing extra support. Maybe you have someone who loves putting together a simple, quarterly newsletter or birthday announcements. If so, consider adding committees of a few women who would like to spearhead specific initiatives within the group.
7. **Information Management** Each chapter decides how it wants to manage members' information and what information is collected, but at a minimum, we ask that co-leaders update the central office with a membership spreadsheet annually and whenever there are additions or losses of members. Some co-leaders prefer Excel spreadsheets or shared Google spreadsheets, but however you manage this information, You should have each woman's name, address, email address, religion, phone number, and other information as needed. Each co-leader should have access to this information, and the chapter should decide together how much information they want to share with one another- phone numbers and email addresses? Birthdays?
8. **National Initiatives** The Sisterhood has several national initiatives, including Tzedakah/Sadaqa Day projects, voter registration drive, and Rise and Respond, a step-by-step guide to responding to Islamophobia and anti-Semitism. Co-leaders don't have to lead the charge on national initiatives but we strongly encourage chapters to participate in them. These types of outreach can be great opportunities for other members to take on leadership roles and share their own ideas and skills with the group. Often, you'll be the first to know of upcoming national initiatives, projects, and news. Please monitor your inbox for emails from the central office and share these announcements with your chapter.
9. **National Leadership Opportunities** As a co-leader, you will be invited to participate in monthly Zoom calls for co-leaders. They range in topic from resolving challenges to presentations on upcoming initiatives, to sharing best practices, and panels with guest speakers. The meeting schedule is sent out several months in advance by Janet Penn. Please do your best to attend these meetings by conference call or webinar. You can reach Janet at janet@sosspeace.org.
10. **Co-Leader Facebook Group** There is a co-leader networking and support Facebook group. If you are a new co-leader, please email Samantha at samantha@sosspeace.org for an invitation to join this group. It is a great forum for discussion, troubleshooting, sharing meeting ideas, asking questions, and more.

Finally, as a co-leader, you'll often be the first to know of upcoming Sisterhood-wide initiatives, projects, and news. Please monitor your inbox for emails from the central office and pass news and announcements to your chapter. Thank you!

Process

Your final area of responsibility may just be the most important part of your leadership. Thoughtful process will enhance everyone's experience in the Sisterhood. Here are some guidelines that will help you create an atmosphere of trust and respect:

- **Share leadership equally.** Commit to leading the chapter as an equal with your partner co-leader. Shared leadership models trust and respect in your chapter. Pair a sister from each faith to lead discussions. Alternate homes when and if possible.
- **Make decisions democratically.** Seek input from chapter members about programming and logistics. Remember, each sister has an equal voice and vote.
- **Balance personal sharing and learning.** Successful meetings strike a balance between sharing personal experiences, socializing, experiential programs, and discussing intellectual topics. Examples of experiential programs include: Ramadan Iftars; Sukkot dinners; community building/social action projects; attending a museum exhibit; and, screening a movie.
- **Follow guidelines.** Co-leaders agree to promote and support the Guiding Principles of the Sisterhood within their chapter.
- **Represent a positive face to the media.** You are the voice and face of the Sisterhood in your local community. When participating in media interviews, present the strengths of the Sisterhood. Internal challenges or concerns are best shared with the central office, not with the press.
- **Be thoughtful about approaching challenging conversations.** Because it can be such a divisive issue, we ask that you refrain from talking about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and having other, similarly challenging conversations until your chapter has been meeting for at least a year, has developed strong bonds, and has facilitators who have the skills to maintain a safe space. This guide contains two suggestions for structuring this conversation, *Sharing Personal Narratives* (p. 48), and *Conducting a Successful Dialogue* (p. 41). The Sisterhood has created brief videos and written guides, *Engaging in Difficult Conversations*: <https://sosspeace.org/series1/>. Feel free to contact the Central Office for additional support.

Planning for Co-Leader Transitions

We understand that for most co-leaders, there comes a time when they'd like to pass the reins to another set of women to take on chapter leadership. Leadership comes with a set of responsibilities toward the chapter and toward your co-leader(s), but it can also be rewarding, creative, and a wonderful outlet to develop a new skillset and to meet new women locally and throughout the United States and Canada!

As you transition leadership roles from one set of women to the next, please consider your personal best practices as a co-leader, as well as the specifics of your chapter and what details new co-leaders will need to know. How do you manage communication and membership information, what committees and leadership roles are part of your chapter, and how are meeting times, locations and themes chosen?

Please know that we at the central office are here for you whenever you need support. Whether that's updating us with chapter membership lists, troubleshooting a challenge, or sharing an exciting development, we want to know. You can reach Samantha at samantha@sosspeace.org for updates, challenges, general questions or membership changes, and Sheryl at Sheryl@sosspeace.org for Sisterhood-wide questions.

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Timing of Leadership Change

Most chapters have a transitional period that occurs over several months. Sometimes, one or more co-leaders need to step down for personal reason—a move, a new job, a new baby—and other times, co-leaders are simply ready for someone else to take on the commitment. We suggest planning the leadership transition ahead of time so chapter members are aware of the change and so that new co-leaders have a chance to make sure they feel comfortable in their new role. Changes in leadership often bring a new and exciting perspective to a chapter and can usher in new ideas or a new focus.

When co-leaders decide they'd like to transition out of co-leadership in order to become regular members of the chapter, sometimes, new women will step forward, eager to fill the role. Other times, chapter members need encouragement to take on the responsibilities, or other times, a chapter will nominate women and decide as a group who the new co-leaders will be. However you make the transition, make sure everyone feels comfortable with the changes and understands the process. Every chapter must have at least one Jewish and one Muslim co-leader, but for various reasons, chapters often have other configurations- two women of one faith, two co-leaders and an assistant, two co-leaders of each faith, etc. Your chapter will find the model that works best for you. If you're having trouble with finding new women to lead or the right fit for your group, please be in touch. We're happy to help.