

On Shared Equity Leadership Series

# What Is Shared Equity Leadership?

## A Primer



**ACE**® American  
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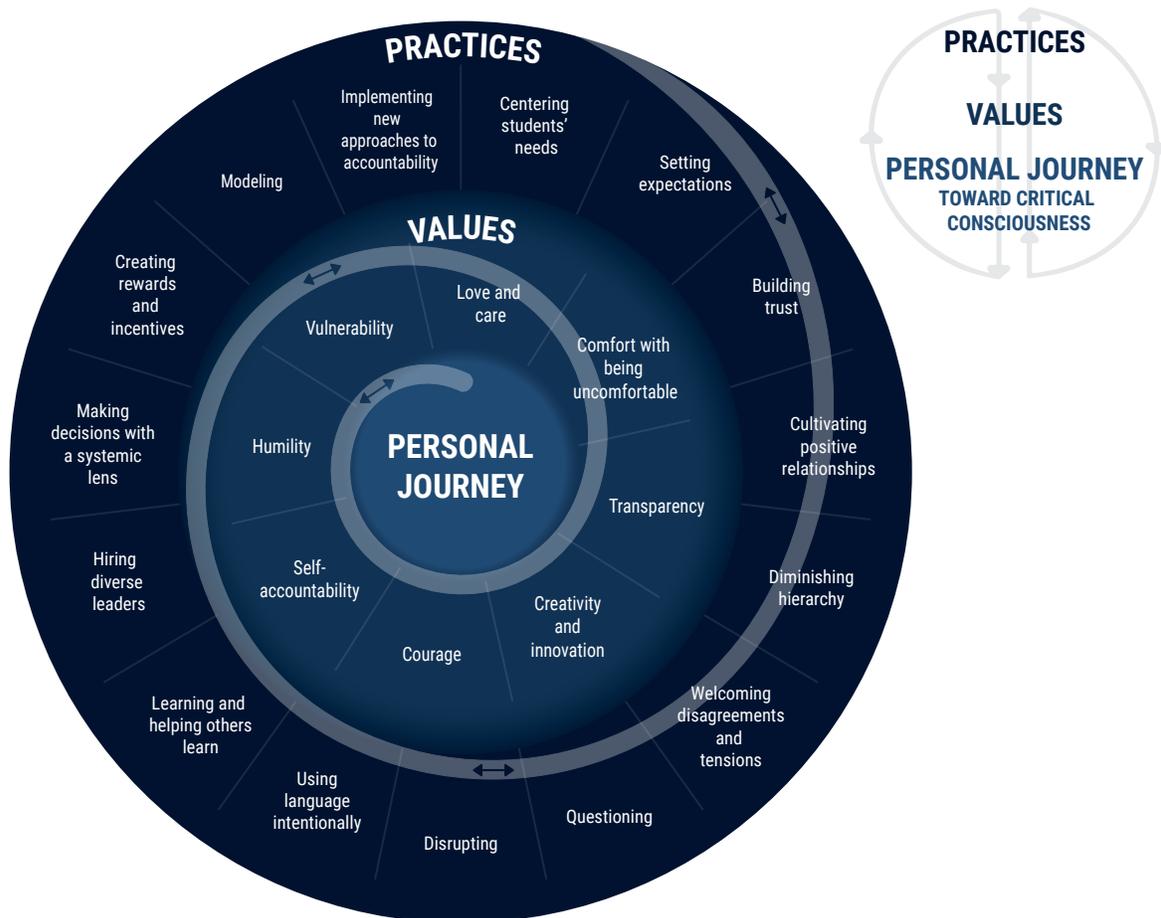
# What Is Shared Equity Leadership?

How can higher education institutions transform to more effectively address systemic racism and persistent inequities on campus? Shared equity leadership (SEL) is a collective process by which equity becomes everyone's work, rather than being relegated or siloed in one office or one leader's portfolio. SEL includes multiple people in the work of leadership to accomplish an institution's equity goals—work is shared or distributed among this group rather than falling solely on the shoulders of a single individual. Leadership in this model becomes widespread and institutional rather than narrowly localized.

We describe the shared equity leadership model in more detail in our report *Shared Equity Leadership: Making Equity Everyone's Work*. The strategies outlined in this report were developed and supported by extensive research interviews with more than 60 expert campus leaders currently practicing shared leadership.

This primer shares an overview of the three main components of the shared equity leadership model—a *personal journey toward a critical consciousness* for those engaged in the work of shared equity leadership, as well as a set of *values* that undergird the work, and *practices* that are enacted by the participants.

## SHARED EQUITY LEADERSHIP



## Personal Journey Toward Critical Consciousness

At the heart of SEL is the notion of *personal journey toward critical consciousness*—before we can partner with others to begin the work of institutional transformation, we must first turn inward and do the work to transform ourselves. Personal journeys require leaders to develop a critical consciousness by unpacking their own identities, understanding the systemic nature of inequities, and cementing their own personal commitment to equity work.

Through our research, we found that the entry points to this personal journey toward critical consciousness differed based on leaders' experiences and identities. These experiences of learning from personal history and from others catalyzed an interest in equity and a commitment to the introspection and growth necessary to become an effective equity leader.

## Values of Shared Equity Leadership

A common set of *values* animate the work of SEL. Values are the beliefs and ideals that matter to individuals or groups. The values of shared equity leadership are developed through leaders' personal experiences and commitment to equity, and cultivated and nurtured in their collaborative work with other leaders on their team. While some of these values may be more traditionally or typically associated with leadership in our society (e.g., courage, creativity and innovation), many of them are not (e.g., vulnerability, love and care, humility).

For example, shared equity leaders enact a value like *vulnerability* by opening up about difficult personal experiences, even if they don't know exactly how they will be received. Often these vulnerable experiences regarded race or other aspects of identity, and were painful for leaders to share. Many participants mentioned experiences of either allowing themselves to be vulnerable or being with others who made themselves vulnerable, and how powerful that was in terms of building connection and trust.

### Shared Equity Leadership Values

- Love and care
- Vulnerability
- Humility
- Courage
- Transparency
- Comfort with being uncomfortable
- Self-accountability
- Creativity and innovation

## Practices of Shared Equity Leadership

Certain *practices* that leaders enact both individually and collectively embody shared equity leadership in action. Some of these practices are simpler and more concrete, while others are broader and more institutionally focused. Additionally, some of the practices are best enacted by leaders in a particular role—for example, presidents or other formal leaders are better suited to work on *diminishing hierarchy* and minimizing power differentials so that all voices can be heard in groups with members of different ranks or levels of power. Other practices, such as *centering students' needs*, *building trust*, and *cultivating positive relationships*, can be effectively enacted by any member of the shared leadership group.

### Shared Equity Leadership Practices

- Centering students' needs
- Setting expectations for the long term
- Building trust
- Cultivating positive relationships
- Diminishing hierarchy
- Welcoming disagreements and tensions and unpacking them respectfully
- Questioning
- Disrupting
- Using language intentionally and communicating openly
- Learning and helping others learn
- Making decisions with a systemic lens
- Hiring diverse leaders
- Creating rewards and incentives
- Implementing new approaches to accountability
- Modeling

We recognize that eight values and 15 practices can seem overwhelming, and we want to emphasize that this is not a checklist of competencies intended for a single leader to achieve. In fact, we struggled to identify any individual who could effectively embody all of these values and enact all of these practices on his or her own. That is the beauty of shared equity leadership—the values and practices are meant to be enacted *collectively* rather than by a single leader. Individual leaders can each leverage their strengths while also benefiting from the complementary strengths of their fellow leaders.

The report features examples of what shared equity leadership looks like in practice, as well as recommendations for leaders interested in exploring this form of leadership on their own campuses. We hope that shared equity leadership provides institutions with a bold approach to leading that can transform institutions, improve equity outcomes, and withstand ever-changing social and political challenges.

On [ACE's website](#), you can read *Shared Equity Leadership: Making Equity Everyone's Work* for more information about the shared equity leadership model, sign up to receive an invitation to participate in a shared equity leadership learning circle, and get information about future reports in the On Shared Equity Leadership series.

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