

Chapter Toolkit Overview



The Effervescent Power of Sisterhood!



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Out of One, Many

By Velveta Golightly-Howell

As time exists and rivers flow, a lone, beautiful spark appears in the sky. Growing into embers, the spark multiplies and erupts into glowing flames, birthing a single roaring fire. As dancing sparks increase, the fire's embers grow hotter and boundlessly spread across the horizon to ignite more. Together, these fires comfort those journeying through life in search of hope and purpose.

Along a mountainside, a weary Elder and child, who have lost their way, move upward through the blackness of night. Blinded by darkness, fear envelops them. And, invasive cold dampens the air, shortening their breath. Nearing hopelessness and despair, the travelers cry out for help. Suddenly, they reach the mountaintop and look over. From there seen are clusters of fires burning across the land, creating an abundance of light, heat, and warmth.

Unveiling piercing majestic rays of light fueled by fires offer revelation. Now, the Elder and youth view all before hidden by darkness. Their bodies warm, and their spirits' soar. As warmth envelops them, the child asks the Elder, "Father, who lit the spark that ignited the embers, turning them into flames?" Turning to the child, the wise Elder proclaims, "Child, it does not matter who lit the first spark, all that matters is that the fires are burning! Now, we must use the burning fires gifted to us by the Creator, to ignite more!"

May you be the change you want to see in the world! Mahatma Gandhi

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INTRODUCTION

Although few may admit this, it is not uncommon for Black women, particularly those with busy careers and caregiving responsibilities, to live in a state of ‘aloneness.’ Often, we “Sisters (“Dadas”)¹ strive to emulate the strong female role models who raised and groomed us for adulthood. While strength is needed to endure our state of being, true also is that self-care holds equal import. Some of us Dadas choose aloneness or simply limit access to ourselves because we are introverted (i.e., “shy”); hesitate to allow other Sisters into our space, as one has abused our trust; or just believe that no one else can truly relate to our experiences and struggles. Respectfully, some may loudly insist that these observations are not valid as we share time with members of our family and, occasionally, friends. In what state of living are we placed when they pass on or frictions arise, severing our relationships? And, if truth be told, our relatives and friends are often not ones to whom us Dadas “bear our hearts.” Before March 2020 when the global onslaught of COVID-19 communing with our family and/or friends was common.

As we shelter in place even those of us with family close by, creating treasured memories is infrequent. Also, depending on the nature of our familial and friendship relationships, connection may not be optimal. Life is short. We Dadas spend ours mostly working and caring for someone else. Our space is constantly invaded by colleagues or technology or social media platforms where we, at times, communicate with total strangers.

¹ “Dada” is Swahili for “sister.”

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Whether a caregiver, stay-at-home mother, student, career professional, business owner, job seeker, retiree, or any combination, thereof, Sisters frequently find themselves surrounded by individuals of differing ancestry, who do not understand [and often, do not wish to understand] how our lived experiences impact the way we view and present in the world or who we are at our core. The unspoken truth is that constantly interacting with those who view us as “the other” and of little, if any, consequence, squashes our spirits, self-confidence, and strength. Negative environments threaten our well-being. And, if our well-being is threatened, so is our families.’ For, innately, we need validation and spirit uplifting.

Irrespective of socioeconomic status, professional networks, political connections, service on prestigious boards, commissions, and committees, or level of education, we Sisters cannot escape one universal and indelible commonality, by which we are viewed and judged. Our Blackness forever connects us. We of African ancestry exist in a world of structural and systemic racism, crippling racial prejudice, constant denigration, and moment-by-moment microaggressions, all while carrying inside racist stereotypes, deeply embedded for over four hundred years. Although not often spoken [or addressed], we live with inner turmoil, equating to anxiety, fear, and depression. Our innate needs for “safe spaces” cannot be fulfilled in “pretentious” environments where authenticity is unwelcomed, or signals negates a sense of belonging. Our quality of life and well-being require continual replenishment of our minds, bodies, and spirits. As psychologists and health wellness professionals agree, Sister Circles benefit our lives and loved ones.

Finding holistic nourishment in the company of genuine, warmhearted. and caring Dadas with shared ancestral roots in the Motherland has long eluded us. We need look no farther. ***Sister-to-Sister: International Network of Professional African American (Black) Women, Inc.***TM (“***Sister-to-Sister International, Inc.***” or “National”) exists to satisfy this hunger. As an incorporated, tax-exempt nonprofit organization, ***Sister-to-Sister International, Inc.*** is specifically designed to promote the well-being of Onyx women through created safe communal spaces, which require only genuine kind hearts and a willingness to spread authentic Sisterhood.

Sister-to-Sister, Inc. International, Inc. is chartering “local chapters,” from which our nonprofit anticipates, will blossom over time. Chartered chapters -- in and outside the United States (“U.S.”) -- will model and advance the authenticity of Sisterhood, centered on National’s vision, mission, purpose, and core values. Our nonprofit welcomes Dadas with a diversity of lived experiences, who willingly embrace the essence of ***Sister-to-Sister International, Inc.*** Our “welcome” doormat is always open. No “status symbols,” are allowed, though. For Sisters (“Convenors”) interested in chartering a chapter, National

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offers a resource-filled Charter Chapter Toolkit (“Toolkit”), including this overview.² The Toolkit includes guidance and fillable template adaptable form documents to use in constructing local [and regional] chapters, promoting chapters’ growth, and broadening capacity to better members’ quality of life. Consultative assistance is also available, upon request. Convenors my contact National at info-sister-to-sister.org. or 1.303.536.1203.



² Toolkit appendices are accessible at this site by members, only.

*What drives, guides, and serves as the foundational core?
of Sister-to-Sister International, Inc.?*

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|  <p>VISION</p> | <p><i>Standing together</i>, building communities of Sisterhood, and realizing endless potential!</p> |
|  <p>MISSION</p> | <p><i>To create “safe haven” communities</i>, which offer Ebony Sisters social connectivity, encouragement, emotional support, shared knowledge, and the opportunity to network, and showcase their creativity in a global environment.</p> |
|  <p>VALUES</p> | <p><i>We create and foster</i> haven communities for open communication between Sisters’ to build and maintain strong relationships.</p> <p><i>We work together</i> in the spirit of global Sisterhood, to support Sisters’ personal and professional growth.</p> <p><i>We lead</i> in advancing Sisters’ stature.</p> <p><i>We nurture Sisters</i> to leverage their strengths, leadership, and influence, to achieve shared goals while developing their individual gifts and talents.</p> <p><i>We promote Sisters’ successful entrepreneurialism</i>, and actively seek to promote expansion and creation of new entrepreneurial opportunities for economic empowerment.</p> <p><i>We believe in and value lifelong learning</i>, and we are dedicated to supporting the educational development of Sisters.</p> <p><i>We uphold the highest standards</i> of honesty, integrity, and accountability in all our endeavors.</p> |
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SYNOPSIS: HOW TO START A CHAPTER

As extensions of *Sister-to-Sister International, Inc.*, local, and regional chapters' roles and functions should align with National's vision, mission, and purpose. Chapters have autonomy in determining their own roles, function, and culture. National will manage and promote the formation of chapters; supply a national communications platform, to heighten chapters' visibility within and outside chapters' local communities; and offer chapters knowledge and other resources to sustain and grow their reach, to the extent desired. National will provide resources, consultation, model standards, and a Toolkit for chapter implementation.

Procedures. National has established charter applications procedures. Included are guidelines for aspirant chapter Convenors. Convenors must review and follow the outlined procedures.

Annual Reporting. Complete and submit an annual report by August 31 of each year. The report will summarize such information as membership numbers; dates of informal meetings; formal meeting dates, their subject, and any pertinent outcomes/decisions; hosted special events, notable activities; formed alliances; keepsake memories created within the Sister Circle; and ideas that may enhance members' lives, for discussion with and consideration by National's Board of Directors.

Chapter Boundaries. National defers to local chapters to establish their own boundaries. Chapter boundaries must be reflected, in writing, within submitted charter applications for National's review. As part of recordkeeping, local and regional chapters are to maintain related documents. If a chapter wishes to expand its boundaries, the chapter must submit a related request to *Sister-to-Sister International, Inc.*, provide a rationale for expansion, and obtain clearance before expanding.

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Regional Chapters. Local chapters within a fifty (50) mile radius of each other will collaborate to establish regional chapters. Regional chapters are to select regional representatives to serve as liaisons to *Sister-to-Sister International, Inc.* Additionally, regional chapters are asked to select alternate regional liaisons, who will act in the absence of their principal representatives. Regional [and as needed, alternate] representatives will participate in *Sister-to-Sister International, Inc.* quarterly virtual business meetings and perform other duties as identified. See, *Sister-to-Sister International, Inc. Regional Representatives' Roles and Responsibilities* in the Charter Chapter Toolkit Appendices.

Outreach and Recruitment.³ *Sister-to-Sister International, Inc.* is fully inclusive and non-hierarchical. In other words, no one has charge of anyone else. Rather, the hallmarks of our organization are respect and shared responsibilities. Interested Dada Convenors are not expected to hold a particular position of employment, professional title, or income status. Chartered chapters will be guided by, and filled with, those who desire and convey a sense of belonging that welcomes Sisters, both adult and youth, into their Sister Circles. Membership is open to those who model the core values, vision, mission, and purpose of *Sister-to-Sister International, Inc.* Interested Sisters may be found in and outside communities (e.g., places of work, grocery stores, churches, social group settings, in schools, restaurants and elsewhere.).

National strongly encourages local chapter Convenors to identify prospective members by leveraging their and existing members' personal networks and outreaching to nearby military installations and other institutions where Black women are employed. Faith-based organizations, gyms, department stores all represent viable places for member recruitment. So do local Historically Black Colleges and Universities ("HBCU") and educational institutions that have Black student organizations, alumni associations, and sororities. Local chapters may create a chapter Facebook page or use other social media platforms to stay to members and potentially recruit new Sisters. Chapter outreach and recruitment are intended to attract and retain nurturing Sister Circles and, thus, help advance member engagement and Sisterhood.

³ *Sister-to-Sister International, Inc.* seeks to build up Sisters and attract members of good character (e.g., women who are comforting, engaging, supportive, and unpretentious to maintain harmony. It is critically important that chapters avoid prospects who are combative, demeaning, or off-putting. Consider inviting to Sister Circles prospects who are either personally known and trusted Dadas and those with whom members are connected by family members, friends, and close acquaintances.

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Member Engagement. As with connectivity, member engagement is a vitally important component of true Sisterhood. An ability to feel, touch, and chat face-to-face are critical to creating and nurturing genuine Sisterhood. Recognizing this and to commune and foster Sisterly engagement, chartered *Sister-to-Sister International, Inc.* chapters must convene a minimum of eight (8) regularly scheduled yearly in-person gatherings once COVID-19-related safety concerns are adequately addressed and dissipate. Gathering, together, with some food, drinks, fun and/or a learning opportunity built in, allow Dadas to relax and enjoy each other's company. These gatherings also allow for some crucial "real world talk" on issues affecting Black lives. In essence, they strengthen *Sisterly* bonding.

While awaiting opportunities to safely gather in person, virtual gathering will provide Dadas enrichment. When and whether to gather in-person or virtually, of course, depends on surrounding circumstances and conditions, such as weather and members' proximity to each other. Chapter business meetings must convene twice, yearly. National encourages chartered chapters to incorporate food and merriment into them.

Programming. Local and regional chapters possess flexibility to determine the type of programming with the goal of advancing "realness" among Sisters. To acquire, keep, and engage members, chartered chapters may consider including in their programming, newsletters; occasional open gatherings where members bring non-member Dadas; family potluck events; guest speakers on selected topics of interest; monthly or more frequent in-home and outside informal member gatherings; fun activities; exploration of in-kind or free services to benefit members. Additionally, training/education represent vehicles for member engagement and recruitment. National encourages chapters to consider affiliating with similarly purposed service organizations if interested in hosting or co-hosting conferences, seminars, or other events requiring greater capacity. Chapters may also wish to first look to internal resources to meet event-planning needs, e.g., event planners, keynote/featured speakers, workshop presenters, catering, etc.

National Resources. *Sister-to-Sister International, Inc.* is available to offer Convenors guidance to support chapter formation, upon request. Although National cannot provide monetary resources to support costs associated with charter chapters' start-up (e.g., paid staff, etc.), National will offer a proportionate share of proceeds generated from membership dues, as explained in the *Charter Chapter Toolkit Appendices*. National will pursue grants and invite donations to support scholarships for ebony females. Local and regional chapters may wish to do so, as well, and/or partner with other organizations to advance educational support for Sisters residing within their geographic areas. Chapters may choose to apply for tax-exempt status, separate from *Sister-to-Sister International,*

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Inc., for purposes of fund scholarships. Those interested are advised to conduct thorough research before seeking separate status, as they will be subject to federal and state laws, if granted tax-exempt status. National requests that any chapters choosing to pursue separate corporate status notify ***Sister-to-Sister International, Inc.***, in writing, of such plan and provide copies of application materials and once received, a copy of the U.S. Internal Revenue Service's decisional communication.

Dadas possess a wealth of knowledge, skills, and experience, and ***Sister-to-Sister International, Inc.*** is committed to supporting their entrepreneurialism. Given this commitment, National offers Sisters opportunities to market their services and goods through the *Onyx Dada Marketplace*. A directory of participating Sister entrepreneurs and links to their enterprises' websites will exist on National's website.



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U.S. CHAPTERS



Sister-to-Sister International, Inc. affords local and regional chapters autonomous latitude. While National is providing guidance and resources for chartering chapters aligned with our nonprofit organization’s vision, mission, and purpose, National recognizes that there is no “one size fits all” template. Every chapter and region are different. Recognizing this. National offers helpful template documents, suitable for adaptation relative to chapter structure, programming, recruitment, and member engagement.

Each chapter should create its own culture and determine its governance structure, leader-guides through appointment, term limits, roles, and programming. While creating a community culture that is fun, supportive, and constructed of love, it is important that a chapter ensures its charter is both effective and enforceable should the need arise. National will serve as a resource for conflict resolution (though none is expected based on *Sister-to-Sister International, Inc.’s* experience).



INTERNATIONAL CHAPTERS

International chapters may use the same tips, as those outlined above for U.S. chapters. National recommends that, before applying for an international chapter charter, Sisters residing abroad arrange an International chapter may use the same tips, as those outlined above for U.S. chapters. National recommends that, before applying for an international chapter charter, Sisters residing abroad arrange a consultation with a *Sister-to-Sister International, Inc.* representative to discuss plans, get their questions answered, and receive guidance. Technology will be used for the consultation(s). Laws, policies, culture, and process may differ from region to region in foreign countries. When forming a chartered *Sister-to-Sister International* Chapter, National recommends that convenors consider the following:

- ❖ Cultural and language barriers, when intersecting members from different countries come together.

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- ❖ Establishing a local entity in a target country can help empower the residents to be invested in the work of the organization and could help tap domestic sources of funding.
- ❖ Creating a foreign entity governed by local citizens may be necessary to operate in some countries. Meaning, it is likely you will not be able to function under National's 501(c)(3) tax-exempt status. Note that international chapters, like those in the U.S., do not have to formalize operations. Chapters may choose to operate as informal groups. If this choice is made, there is no requirement to seek and obtain government clearance to operate.
- ❖ National advises Convenors, interested in acquiring corporate, tax-exempt status, separate from *Sister-to-Sister International, Inc.* consider potential tax and legal implications. Related information is included in the Charter Chapter Toolkit, accessible to members. See, section 501(c)(3) of the U.S. Internal Revenue Service ("IRS") Code. A chapter may organize and operate exclusively for purposes allowed by IRS. Such chapters may not attempt to influence legislation as a substantial part of its activities or participate in any campaign activity for or against political candidates. Whether a chapter seeks and receives status as separate corporate tax-exempt entity, they remain under the auspices of *Sister-to-Sister International, Inc.*, pursuant to their charter.
- ❖ International chapters may benefit from collaborating with other existing non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in countries where they reside that have similar missions and goals and are willing to serve as a fiscal sponsor for *Sister-to-Sister International, Inc.* events, programs, and activities. Collaborating with NGOs would help:
 - ❖ reduce the learning curve, and
 - ❖ reduce cost of operating in new location.
 - ❖ Grants may also be a good source of funding.

***Note:** Members residing outside the U.S. and its territories may choose to affiliate with a chartered local U.S.-based chapter of their choice. Non-resident members will be members of *Sister-to-Sister International, Inc.* and their chosen chapter.

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See Chapter Charter Toolkit Appendices for a detailed chapter formation checklist.

