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WHAT IS A JAM?

YES! co-organizes and co-facilitates unique gatherings called Jams, which are the primary spaces in which we utilize the activities in this book.

When musicians come together to “Jam” they bring their own unique instruments, skills and styles, and together create a collective sound that is unprecedented. YES! Jams are jams of ideas, creativity, passion and commitment. They are a place where diverse social change-makers combine their talents, inspirations and skills to create something greater than the sum of their individual parts. The synergy that takes place at YES! Jams give participants perspectives, insights and support that can change the nature and quality of the life they live and the work they do. YES! Jams are a place for strengthening the roots that underlie who we are and what we do, and for linking up with others to create a movement that will grow stronger with the passing of time.

To understand a Jam, maybe it’s important first to know what it’s not. A Jam is not a week of intellectual rhetoric and debate. It is not a meeting, conference or seminar, or a time to be spoken at through panels and plenary sessions. It’s not really about information (though that may be present) or about being primarily in the mind/head space (though, that can be there too). It’s definitely not a franchise to be spread around the world (no McJams!), and not THE heart of the global youth movement (we hope that there are many hearts, heads and hands). Nor is it about abstract, internet-based networking. For the folks organizing and facilitating Jams, it’s also not about making money, advancing careers, or traveling around the world as ‘youth ambassadors’.

A Jam is a chance for young change-makers to share their experiences, ideas, questions, hopes and struggles; to learn and unlearn from each other; and to build relationships that matter to them. It looks different in different contexts, but there are few common aspects.

First, a Jam seeks out and tries to manifest vibrant diversity, both in terms of participants and facilitators, and in terms of processes and issues explored. Moreover, a Jam attempts to build bridges across diversity. It offers glimpses into a world which can include everyone, wherever they are at in their journeys. The emphasis is on what and who is present, rather than on a pre-set agenda. In other words, the people in the room are the focus of the Jam. All efforts are geared towards dialogue, friendship and understanding, rather than towards being right or winning arguments. Process comes first, only then can there be authentic outcomes.

The personal and interpersonal elements are given ample space and time. All of this means that processes are often ‘slowed up’, that people are invited to speak from their hearts, and that they are invited to listen for understanding (not necessarily agreement or disagreement) and to be present to the space and energy of the community. Those who participate in a Jam usually come hoping to find their next growing edge.

To put it simply, a Jam embodies two core principles: uncompromised truth and unconditional love. A Jam is, above all, a place to be real, to take off masks, to speak one’s truth, and to be fully oneself. Simultaneously, a Jam is a highly appreciative space, where compliments and love are given freely and received with dignity and gratitude, and where the intention is towards healing, learning and growing honest, healthy relationships.

Some key ingredients of a JAM

1. Safe, supportive and beautiful physical environment.
2. Solid logistics (for food, accommodation, transportation, etc.).
3. Carefully selected participants, on the grounds of their commitment to internal, interpersonal and systemic change, and whatever other criteria the organizers/facilitators have set.
4. Capable facilitators (more on this in "Qualities of Jam Facilitators").
5. A trusting relationship and good teamwork/ team balance among the facilitators.
6. Relevant and provocative content and processes.
7. A few carefully selected guest presenters/elders based on the criteria the organizers and facilitators have set.

It is also very important to notice that Jams are highly specific kinds of events. We do not suggest that they are the only or best kind of work to happen in the world of social change. A Jam is simply a process, with its own particular idiosyncrasies that have been developed and chosen. It is important to name these specifics.


For example, we have decided that 30 people (inclusive of organizers, facilitators and participants) is the ideal number to have at a Jam. We focus particularly on people who:

- are engaged in their own work in their own community;
- are accountable to a place and/or people and rooted in something real and concrete (not abstract ideas or theories or networks);
- are willing and eager to have their perspectives, worldviews and practices challenged;
- are aligned with the above-mentioned Jam principles and values.

There are also certain conventions which further limit who comes to a Jam. For example, language capacities, access to computers/technology, in order to find out about the Jam, sometimes passport/ visa capacities and a somewhat secure financial capacity to travel (especially outside of the country). And usually, participants will have had to somehow come into contact with current or former Jam facilitators or participants and receive recommendations for participation.

While Jam alumni have been organizing more local and regional Jams these days, and are finding ways to integrate the Jam experience into their organizations, families, communities, friends' circles and more, we are still aware that the Jams are still selective and have not included everyone who has ever applied to participate in a Jam. It is our intention to recognize that Jam participants are not inherently better or worse, more accomplished or less, than anyone else. They are just a particular mix of people that helps this particular program to work. Everyone, of every age, region, ethnicity, area of focus, background, relationship to privilege, and depth of activism experience, has unique gifts to give to this world. Everyone deserves a loving, safe and supportive environment to help them grow and thrive. Jams focus on a small and intentional cross-section of people, in the hopes that this work can be of service to the creation of more wholeness, health, transformation and support for all people everywhere.

Appendix 1 is an organizing compendium and includes information on key stages in creating a Jam – everything from dreaming up the idea, to assembling a team, to planning and logistics. Please check it out for more details.



Our deepest fear is not that we are inadequate.
Our deepest fear is that we are powerful beyond measure.
It is our light, not our darkness that most frightens us.

We ask ourselves:
Who am I to be brilliant, gorgeous, talented, fabulous?
Actually, who are you not to be?
You are a child of God.

Your playing small does not serve the world.
There's nothing enlightened about shrinking
so that other people won't feel insecure around you.
We were born to manifest the glory of God
that is within us.

It's not just in some of us; it's in everyone.
And, as we let our own light shine,
we unconsciously give other people
permission to do the same.
As we are liberated from our fear,
our presence automatically liberates others.

— Marianne Williamson,
as quoted by Nelson Mandela in his inaugural speech

