



## Community Workbook

# Exploring Community Experiences Around Abortion Stigma

[www.makeinroads.org](http://www.makeinroads.org)

With the support of **rfsu** 

# Introduction to the Workbook

This community workbook was created by The International Network for the Reduction of Abortion Discrimination and Stigma (inroads) with the support of the Swedish Association for Sexuality Education (RFSU), as part of a shared commitment to dismantling abortion stigma and amplifying reproductive justice around the globe.

What began as a research project exploring the cultural norms and values which shape how communities experience and challenge abortion stigma expanded into this – a resource for abortion advocates and community researchers to hold their own participatory workshops, wherever they are situated, guided by storytelling, reflective dialogue, and values exploration through a multilevel model of stigma.

This resource is for those who seek to explore how abortion stigma manifests within their own contexts on multiple levels beyond the individual, and how it might be collectively challenged and transformed.



# Introduction to the Workbook

**Through this community workbook, we hope that users will be able to:**

- Explore the values and experiences which shape how your community understands, challenges, and resists abortion stigma.
- Spark conversation on the role of stigma across the levels of the individual, community, institutional, legal, and media and culture.
- Unpack examples and ideas of stigma-busting solidarity, resistance, and work already being done around the globe to challenge reproductive oppression.

**Guidance note:** This resource is intended for those who are already engaged in the work of abortion stigma-busting and reproductive justice. It is not a VCAT training or an introduction to these topics, but rather a group facilitation guide for deepening understandings of abortion stigma and its manifestations through a participatory workshop format.

# How to Use This Workbook

This participatory format can help groups to share how stigma is felt, seen, and challenged within their own contexts and experiences, to build a participatory base of collective wisdom and research, to further understand and challenge abortion stigma.

## **At inroads, we always recommend:**

- Obtaining verbal and written consent before carrying out any recorded research, with clear explanations of the planned activities and discussions.
- Anonymizing identifying details during group discussions, to preserve privacy and identities.
- Offering translations and interpretation where possible, as well as other accessibility accommodations such as sensory breaks.

*We share some examples of this further below!*



# Who is this workbook for?

Individuals and collectives who wish to open up conversations about abortions and stigma within their communities through storytelling and group reflection.

Researchers seeking participatory, narrative-driven methods grounded in reproductive justice themes to explore how stigma might be experienced at different levels.

Anyone holding space for learning and dialogue, for a collective understanding around abortion stigma within their own contexts and experiences.

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# Before starting

This workbook was designed as a supplementary tool to the inroads Reproductive Justice and Intersectionality to Dismantle Abortion Stigma online course ([click here!](#)).

We highly recommend taking the course, created as a primer for understanding abortion stigma through the frameworks of reproductive justice and intersectionality, before using this workbook.



# What You Will Need

- 1 facilitator with familiarity around abortion stigma and reproductive justice (Psst – check out [our online course](#) on this!)
- A secure physical or digital space for group reflection and engagement

## Materials

- Flipcharts
- Sticky notes and markers
- Suggested for virtual meetings: A Miro board or similar tool

## Suggested Duration:

We recommend taking a minimum of 30 to 45 minutes per level, depending on the group size. This may mean taking 1 full day or having multiple sessions to get through all 5 levels. We recommend making sure to regroup each time you meet again as a wider group.



# What You Will Need (Cont.)

## Facilitation tools that we recommend

- Consent forms for informed participation and any documentation
- Community agreements to enable safe & brave group boundaries
- Pre- and post-workshop surveys to briefly evaluate and measure impact, if desired
- Grounding tools – This can look like a calming music playlist, space for regular movement or to reground, and breathing & meditation exercises

## Linked resources

- [Link to participant consent form sample](#)
- [Link to an example of community agreements](#)
- [Link to pre- and post-workshop survey form samples](#)

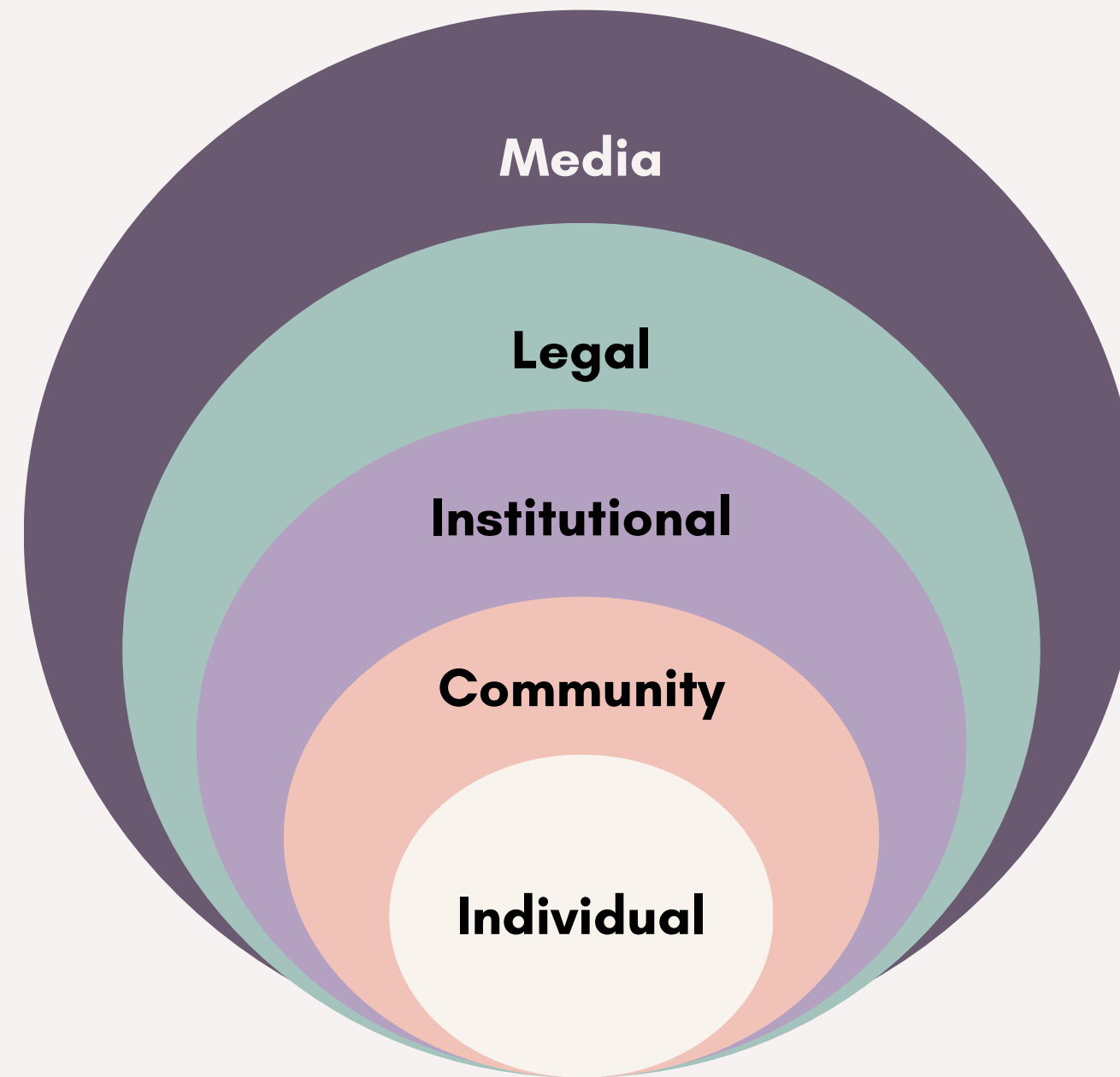
## Related resources:

- [Values clarification and attitude transformation \(VCAT\)\\_training toolkit from Ipas](#)
- [Stigma measurement tools workbook from inroads](#)
- [Abortion stigma tools and resources from IPPF](#)





# The Multilevel Model of Stigma

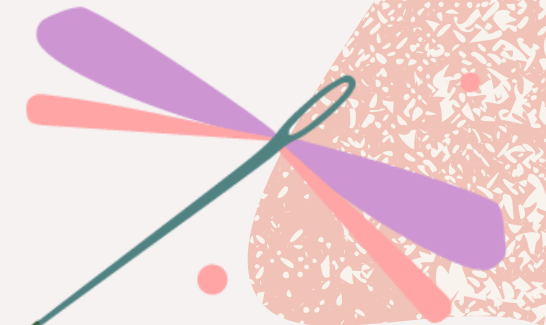


**This model depicts the multiple levels of stigma which can exist.** It is commonly used in social research to better understand stigma as a structural process, beyond an individual phenomena.

At inroads, we have used this model in our online course offering and continue to use it here as a grounding entrypoint to **understanding and examining abortion stigma and its manifestations.**

Are you ready?

**Here we go!**



# Level 1: The Individual



***How Does Stigma Live in the Body and Self?***

**We start at the Individual level, where everything begins.**

Although so much begins with the self, too often when we discuss stigma, we risk *over* emphasizing the individual level of stigma.

This risks ignoring wider, structural causes of stigma, such as the law and media, which deeply penetrate the systems and structures we are embedded within.

Nonetheless, it is important to first recognize and reckon with stigma within the self, understanding that stigma-busting can be a constantly evolving and deeply personal journey.





# Discussion Point



- What were you first taught to believe about abortion?
- How did you learn this?
- How might that have changed since then, if at all?
- Do you have experiences surrounding abortions and abortion stigma that have shaped your perception and understanding today?



# Activities

## *How Does Stigma Live in the Body and Self?*

- **Inner Maps**

Draw an outline of a body shape. **How does abortion stigma feel in your body?** Encourage participants to write on sticky notes and paste them to the corresponding body part, before sharing back what it signifies.

- **First Messages**

On a whiteboard or flipchart, write down: **“What were the first things you heard about abortion?”** Encourage participants to share their thoughts on sticky notes, which can be pasted and discussed once all of them are gathered.

**Facilitation tip:** Prioritize and emphasize emotional safety particularly in this section – feel free to return to the community agreements that were made at the start. Gently affirm participants that no one should be required to share anything which they do not wish to share, and identifying details should be anonymized as much as possible.

# Real Life Example

## ***Brazil - Feminist Accompaniment***

**Feminist accompaniment groups, such as Milhas Pela Vida das Mulheres in Brazil, use WhatsApp and Signal to accompany abortion-seekers in real time.**

From the first interaction, they affirm the care-seeker that *“there is nothing wrong with your decision.”* This clear, values-based approach actively challenges internalized stigma and builds emotional resilience within individuals seeking support and understanding.

Groups also often create collective chat groups, enabling abortion-seekers to connect with others going through the same process, fostering community, reducing isolation, and creating shared knowledge grounded in compassion, understanding, and affirming bodily autonomy.



# Level 2: Community


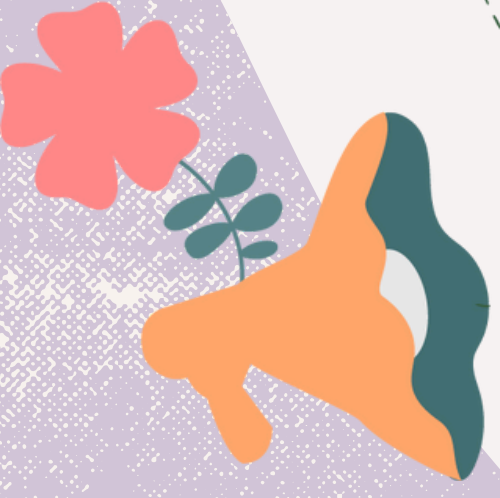

*What Does Our Community Say (And Not Say) About Abortion?*

**Communities are the interpersonal webs we live in, woven by various facets of life and each other.**

Communities can look like family members, friendships, religious groups, neighborhoods, clubs, and more. They can have a large impact on attitudes and experiences around abortions, and what may be spoken or unspoken.

We rely on each other in our communities to survive, thrive, and learn about how to exist together.

# Discussion Point

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- What happens when someone has an abortion in this community?
  - What are the types of reactions (including support, actions, conversations) that can surround abortions?
  - Who are significant figures in this community who might have an impact on abortion seekers?
  - Who holds power when it comes to abortions, and who *should* hold power?
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# Real Life Example

## ***Thailand - Reframing Narratives***

In Thailand, community stigma around abortion is often deeply tied to religious and cultural beliefs that paint abortion as immoral or sinful.

People who seek abortions are often seen as acting against Buddhist values. This stigma permeates not just family and social life, but also public conversations and community-level leadership.

### ***What needed to be done?***

- A strategic narrative shift that placed responsibility on systems and decision-makers, rather than individuals seeking abortions.
- Deep engagement with religious leaders to challenge stigma from within cultural frameworks.
- **Reframing abortion as a public health and social justice issue, rather than a moral or religious one.**



**Tamtang**, a Thai feminist collective and inroads member, successfully reframed the dominant narrative from “*people who have abortions are sinful*” to “*people who allow unsafe abortions to happen are sinful.*”

Their work targeted health ministers and abortion service providers – that is, those holding power to influence abortion access – rather than focusing blame on those seeking care.

A key part of their approach was also engaging Buddhist monks who were already supportive of reproductive rights. **By amplifying the voices of these respected religious figures in the Thai community, Tamtang positively shifted community-level attitudes, helping to reduce stigma and promote collective responsibility for abortion access.**

[Read more about their incredible work here.](#)



# Activities

## *What Does Our Community Say (And Not Say) About Abortion?*

### **Activity 1 - Stigma Soundtrack**

- Ask participants to recall common phrases, warnings, or stories they've heard about abortion in their community (Eg. From elders, peers, neighbors).
- Write each one on a card or sticky note and read them out loud, one at a time, to create a community "soundtrack" of stigma.
- Pause after the readings to reflect: Who usually says this? What does it imply about abortions? How do you feel hearing it?

**Discuss:** What messages should we be hearing in our communities? Invite the group to rewrite a brand new community soundtrack together.

# Activities

## *What Does Our Community Say (And Not Say) About Abortion?*

### **Activity 2 - Neighborhood Walk**

- Ask participants to take a “walk” through their community, physically (if possible) or through a guided visualization.
- Where would someone go for information about abortion? Where might they encounter judgment? Who would they avoid or trust?
- On a flipchart, map out spaces of stigma, support, and silence, such as clinics, religious centers, and community centers.

**Discuss:** What does this reveal about our community values? What would a stigma-free, supportive neighborhood map look like?

# Level 3: Institutional

*How Do Institutions Reinforce or Resist Abortion Stigma?*

**Institutions are part of the systems and structures that shape our daily lives – such as schools, clinics, and workplaces.**

They can deeply influence how we access care, information, and support, and often mirror the stigma and biases present in society.

When institutions create space for care, respect, and inclusion, they can shift from reinforcing stigma to actively supporting reproductive justice, care, and the right to abortion.



# Discussion Point



- How do institutions that you interact on a regular basis with respond to abortion in their policies or syllabus? Do they address it openly, indirectly, or not at all?
- Are there policies, practices, or leadership decisions which may stigmatize people who have abortions? Alternatively, are there ones which support decision-making around reproductive choices?
- Who within these institutions has power and who is silent or silenced when it comes to abortions?





# Real Life Example

## ***Nepal - Institutional Reform for Service Provision***

Despite the legalization of abortion in 2002 in Nepal, many service providers and healthcare facilities may still deny or obstruct care based on personal beliefs, lack of training, or institutional culture.

In response, Ipas Nepal implemented values clarification and attitude transformation (VCAT) trainings for providers and health facility staff, as well as establishing referral networks and working with government systems to revise policy guidelines and build provider capacity.

Over time, facilities began to adopt stigma-sensitive approaches, leading to improved privacy and confidentiality, clearer referral systems, and greater recognition that provider attitudes affect access and quality of care.

# Activities

## *How Do Institutions Reinforce or Resist Abortion Stigma?*

- **Policy Role Play**

Act out a scenario where a person seeks support for an abortion from a local institution (eg. a school, hospital, place of worship). How might the institution respond? What could be put in place to offer better support?

- **Stigma Audit**

Choose one institutional example brought up within the group discussion and explore the scenario together. What might it look like if this space were completely stigma-free? What could be shifted to make it so?

**Facilitation tip:** Encourage participants to name experiences that range from the negative to positive. This is to recognize and challenge how institutions can be powerful spaces of care and change, especially when led and reinforced by the voices of people who seek and have abortions.

# Level 4: Legal

*How Do Laws and Policies Create or Reinforce Stigma?*


**The law can be a significant place from which abortion stigma and access is reinforced or dismantled.**

Power through the level of legal systems can feel all-encompassing and oftentimes immovable, but are also part of systemic changes which history has repeatedly shown can be altered, shifted, and even **completely rewritten in the name of wider access and justice.**

Legal systems can either protect people's rights and dignity or reinforce fear, shame, and punishment around abortion. When legal frameworks are rooted in justice, they open space for safer, more equitable lives for everyone.



# Discussion Point

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- Discuss the legal policies surrounding abortion in your context.
  - Do people know what the law says and means for abortion seekers in your context?
  - Does the law apply in real life situations? How does it make people feel, in terms of seeking and providing abortions?
  - Consider healthcare access, criminalization, stigmatization, and attitudes surrounding abortions as a result of these legal policies.



# Real Life Example

## ***Malawi - Court Upholds Abortion Rights***

In 2025, the High Court of Malawi ruled that denying abortion services and care to a girl who became pregnant through rape violated her rights under the Gender Equality Act (GEA).

This landmark decision recognized access to abortion as a matter of justice, health, and dignity - not just morality or exception. It also ordered the Ministry of Health to update its national standards to ensure that survivors of sexual violence can access abortion services.

This ruling, the first of its kind in Malawi, shows how legal reform can affirm abortion as a right and help shift the burden of stigma from the individual to the system.

# Activity

## *How Do Laws and Policies Create or Reinforce Stigma?*

### **Access Trails to Care**

In small groups, retrace the abortion journey of how a person in your context would seek abortion care.

On small cards, write down each potential step to gain access to an abortion, including potential blocks along the way, taking note of the legal policies of your context(s), to build an access trail.

Possible scenarios are suggested below (feel free to add more relevant detail!).

- a. Seeking surgical abortion access in a clinical setting for a 13 week pregnancy.
- b. Seeking medical abortion access and accompaniment for a 7 week pregnancy, with little to no funds.

# Level 5: Media and Culture



*How Are Abortions Represented in the Media and Culture?*

**Portrayals of abortion in the media cast a wide cultural net over how abortions might be stigmatized or not.**


Recognizing the ways in which we hear about abortions through media sources (eg. TV shows, movies, podcasts, and more) and their wider cultural impact allows us to recognize sources of implicit and explicit stigma and bias.

In the same light, positive experiences of abortions in media and culture can allow us to understand abortions through different viewpoints and perspectives.





# Discussion Point

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- What are portrayals of abortions that you have seen on the TV, news, or social media posts that come to mind? How did they make you feel?
  - In cases where abortion seekers are portrayed in the media, how have they been judged and/or supported?
  - Do these experiences feel true to what you might know about abortion access and care?



# Activities

- **Flip the script**

Show participants headlines, movie clips, or social media posts about abortion (choose locally relevant examples or describe them if showing is unsafe). Analyze how abortions are framed in it and what cultural messages are reinforced. Ask participants to rewrite the same story/post using abortion-affirming and justice-based framing.

- **Make Your Own Media**

Invite participants to imagine an abortion-positive piece of media they wish existed: A comic strip, podcast, Instagram post, advertisement, TV scene, or theatre skit.

Give participants 20 to 30 minutes of small group time, then come together to share with the wider group what was brainstormed and created. Who knows what might be sparked!

# Real Life Examples

## ***Bolivia - Media and Journalism Training***

Stigma around abortion is often deeply embedded in how the media reports on reproductive rights, often using sensationalist language, misinformation, or moral judgment. Journalists, editors, and media outlets often lack formal training in rights-based approaches and have contributed to shaping a hostile public discourse around abortion.

**In response**, Católicas por el Derecho a Decidir (CDD) Bolivia launched *“Periodismo que Transforma”* (*“Journalism that Transforms”*), a program designed to equip journalists with the tools to report ethically and accurately on sexual and reproductive rights, including abortion.

The initiative included capacity building training sessions for media professionals, story contests that rewarded responsible reporting, and the formation of *Red Activa* – a collaborative network of journalists committed to putting abortion rights and related issues on the public agenda.

**By focusing on institutional change within media systems,** CDD Bolivia was able to concretely shift how abortion was represented in mainstream discourse and challenge stigma at the level of information production.

This effort led to sustained impact and increased normalization of rights-based narratives in local media.

[Read more about their powerful work here!](#)



Also...



Feminist collectives in Latin America and the Caribbean, like Soccaristas en Red, sparked the powerful Green Wave (*Marea Verde*) movement, taking to the streets and organizing with joyful, colorful, and empowering abortion imagery.

**Community murals, social media illustrations, and digital zines featuring slogans such as “Aborto es Libertad” were widely shared on social media to center safe, supported, and celebratory abortion experiences and shift public discourse.**



# Putting It All Together – Closing Circle

***What do we want abortion to feel like in our own spaces?***

- Divide the workshop into 5 small groups, representing each of the stigma levels that have been explored.
- Each group should reflect on themes and collective learnings from the workshop at their assigned stigma level – in particular, how stigma can be shifted, resisted, or reduced through collective action steps.
- In the big group, one representative from each group should share back their main discussion findings and ONE feasible, concrete idea for stigma-busting at their respective level (eg. individual, community, media, etc.).



# Closing Circle (Cont.)

***What do we want abortion to feel like in our own spaces?***

- Document each stigma-busting idea from the various groups on the flipchart or whiteboard, to make five in total.
- Using sticky notes or stickers, ask each participant to place a vote for the idea which the group is most willing and excited to develop and commit to in their everyday efforts.
- Ask the group for agreement in committing to the idea with the highest number of votes, as an ongoing takeaway from the workshop.

*From here – the possibilities for collective action, creativity, and commitment to reproductive justice and freedom can be endless!*



# Summary

**Abortion stigma operates across multiple levels** – from individual experiences of shame to systemic barriers in the law, media, and institutions.



**Feminist accompaniment and community care** provide impactful forms of destigmatization, creating safe spaces where people can affirm and have the abortion experiences that they desire.

**Change requires collective action.** Community education, cultural storytelling, media advocacy, and legal reform all play powerful roles in dismantling stigma.

**Real life movements continue to show us the way.** From the powerful actions of the Green Wave in Argentina to feminist accompaniment and resistance across the globe, communities build stigma-free futures when they come together and resist!







**Check out the 2025 RFSU research report [here](#) on cultural norms and values around abortion stigma in regional areas, and how fearless advocates are responding in incredible ways according to their contexts.**

- Share your own findings and thoughts with us!



**Questions?** Contact us at [services@makeinroads.org](mailto:services@makeinroads.org).

**To learn more** about our network offerings for stigma-busting and reproductive justice work, go to [makeinroads.org](https://makeinroads.org).

**inroads** is a global feminist hub for over 2000+ abortion stigma-busters in over 130 countries. **To join us** as a member, go to [makeinroads.org/get-involved/join-inroads](https://makeinroads.org/get-involved/join-inroads).