

A New Vision for


Empowering

Survivor

Leadership

The 2022  
Report of the  
NSN

NATIONAL  
SURVIVOR  
NETWORK

The logo for the National Survivor Network features the organization's name in a bold, sans-serif font. The word "NATIONAL" is on the top line, "SURVIVOR" is on the middle line, and "NETWORK" is on the bottom line. The letter "O" in "NATIONAL" and "O" in "NETWORK" are replaced by a stylized network icon consisting of three dark blue circles connected by thin white lines, forming a triangular shape.

# Introduction

The National Survivor Network (NSN) is a values-based, survivor-led professional membership network for survivors of human trafficking who are engaged in or preparing for leadership in the anti-trafficking movement using human rights, public health, and harm reduction approaches.

The NSN is a program of the Coalition to Abolish Slavery and Trafficking (Cast) that was founded in 2011 to foster connections between survivors of diverse forms of human trafficking and to build a national anti-trafficking movement in which survivors are at the forefront and recognized as leaders.

People with lived experience of human trafficking have continually and historically organized grassroots efforts to care for each other. They have quietly served in professional and leadership positions in other movements (such as the movements to address immigrant rights, end sexual violence, provide harm reduction, fight for labor rights, and care for folks struggling with substance use disorders), often without ever disclosing their lived experience of trafficking. And historically, in the anti-trafficking sector, their efforts to engage in meaningful leadership have been met with well-meaning confusion, unintentional tokenization, or outright resistance.

While some survivors desire the opportunity to fill roles typically thought of as "survivor leadership" (which often include personal storytelling, peer mentoring, or policy messaging), not all do, and for those who don't their options and support have been limited. Most decision-making power in our sector is still held by people who do not share in our survivorship.

In December of 2021, Cast welcomed me as its new Survivor Leadership Program Manager, a role that oversees the National Survivor Network. Since then, our program has been engaged in a strategic and operational restructuring process in order to allow it to roll out as a values-based membership network. This meant taking our prior values statement, building it out, and finalizing it so that our members will be clear about the values underpinning our work. It also meant restructuring the way decisions are made and re-envisioning what our work will look like and how it will happen to ensure we are modeling our values in our structures and activities.

These are not surface-level changes. Because these are big changes, we have been intentional and steady with the re-rollout of our activities. If we are to advocate for meaningful movement leadership by survivors (rather than just an increase in the number of "survivor leaders"), we must start with ourselves. We must model the change we hope to see in the movement.

I hope that as you learn what we've been up to for the past year you will be able to see the vision for where we are going. And if you feel aligned with our work, we would welcome you as partners and collaborators.

In solidarity,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Chris". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

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# WHO WAS THE RESTRUCTURE TEAM?

80%

identified as Black, Indigenous, Asian, or Latine

80%

identified as LGBTQIA+, with 40% identifying as transgender

60%

Have been involved with child welfare systems as a minor, as a parent, or as both.

70%

had been involved in juvenile justice or adult criminal legal systems

90%

indicated having a physical disability or chronic illness

## 1 Restructure & readying

### Action planning for the restructure

In December and January, an initial strategic action plan was developed to guide the restructure process. You can view the graphic for that process here: [LINK](#). Note that for each "bucket" of our work, indicators and timelines were assigned to guide the first year.

### Convening restructure team

In January and February, a diverse group of advocates with lived experience of trafficking met to clarify and expand on our values statement through a series of meaningful, challenging conversations. Some were "old-timers" in the anti-trafficking movement; others had never felt welcome in it. You can read the full restructure team demographics report here: [LINK](#).

### Infrastructure and logistics

Throughout the first half of 2022, infrastructure was developed to support our new direction and streamline processes. This included an overhaul of our website template and corrections of outdated information, a revamp of our social media and comms strategy, and the development of an integrated online application and application tracking process that gives members more control over updating their information ([LINK](#)).

## 2 Our Values

View our full values statement!  
Click or scan here



The NSN uses the operational, criminal definition of severe forms of trafficking found in the TRAFFICKING VICTIMS PROTECTION ACT – A person who is exploited through force, fraud, or coercion, or someone who was in the sex trades while a minor.

The NSN promotes a public health framework and human rights-based approach to anti-human trafficking efforts.

The NSN acknowledges that all human trafficking exploits an individual's body and mind, and that trafficking in the sex trades is not inherently more traumatic, grievous, or important to address than trafficking in other forms of labor, as different experiences of trauma cannot be compared or measured.

The NSN acknowledges that injustices experienced disproportionately by people of the global majority are rooted in systemic and historic oppression of these people and communities.

The NSN opposes the use of forced or exploited labor in prisons.

The NSN believes that social policy and norms (like immigration policy, anti-Black racism, and homelessness policy, for example), can either prevent or drive trafficking by decreasing or increasing vulnerability.

The NSN calls for an end to law enforcement ever having sexual contact with individuals in custody or potential victims, or ever having sexual contact while acting under the color of the law.

The NSN promotes harm reduction, sharing information and resources that help people in the sex trades to stay safer and healthier, and an end to stigma and criminalization for people in the sex trades.

The NSN opposes criminalizing survivors for their trafficking experiences and supports holistic and comprehensive vacatur expansion for all survivors of human trafficking.

The NSN supports meaningful survivor leadership in both the sector and the movement rather than tokenized contributions, the mitigation of power dynamics over when and how survivors choose to tell their stories, and a movement whose frameworks are big enough to accommodate and advocate for those survivors whose narratives have been ignored or invalidated.

The NSN believes in trauma-informed, nonviolent communication, and building survivor-centric cultures of care. We emphasize collective goals, shared facilitation, and active listening, and promote informed, inclusive, and equitable dialogue over debate.

The NSN seeks to end human trafficking without co-opting the language of slavery or abolition. While people are still enslaved in many parts of the world and all forms of slavery fit the definition of human trafficking, not all forms of human trafficking fit the definition of slavery.

The NSN acknowledges that human trafficking is horrific, and is an extension of rather than an exception to the range of exploitation inherent in capitalist systems of labor. Normalization of exploitative labor practices increases vulnerability to trafficking.

The NSN acknowledges that labor trafficking is underreported due to an increased emphasis on trafficking in the sex trades in awareness and prevention campaigns as well as media coverage and service provision.

The NSN opposes conflation of consensual and trafficked engagement in sex trades and acknowledges that not all adults in the sex trades are trafficked.

The NSN does not advocate for causing harm to end harm, and end demand practices (including models known as the “Nordic Model” or “Equality Model”) harm people in the sex trades, whether consensual or trafficked. The NSN opposes end demand and other anti-trafficking efforts that rely upon criminalization or shaming of consensual adult sexual behavior. **This is not at odds with systemic change to address racism, misogyny, and violence, but rather is an essential part of it, and this position is inextricably tied to our commitment to creating an inclusive space for survivors of human trafficking who have historically been excluded from the movement.**

The NSN supports the right to permanent resident status and equitable visa protections as well as a path to citizenship for noncitizen survivors of trafficking.

*Do members have to agree with every single value to join?*  
It is okay for members to join who are still learning about some of these concepts. However, this is the lens through which we will conduct all our work, and if potential applicants find any of our values problematic or offensive, they should not apply.

# Values in action:

## Organizational structure

### WHAT CHANGED?

Before the restructure, the NSN was overseen by a Program Coordinator who reported to Cast's Survivor Leadership Program Manager, and the NSN's work was primarily implemented by an Executive Committee.

Key changes that are in place now:

- The Survivor Leadership Program Manager (SLPM) now oversees the NSN and is responsible for accountability "upward" to Cast and our funders, and "outward" to NSN members and the broader survivor movement.
- The Program Coordinator position now oversees Cast's local survivor leadership group (Resilient Voices: [LINK](#)), which operates separately from the NSN and membership does not require alignment with the NSN's values.
- Instead of an Executive Committee in which one person is responsible for key pieces of our work, we have shifted to a more horizontal working group structure that allows for shared power among working group members.
- Our Restructure Team was one working group. We are currently developing and launching our Membership and Community Working Group and our Learning Working Group. We anticipate rolling out our Policy Working Group in early 2023.

“

*There is a lot of potential for harm in organizations working with vulnerable folks who have been marginalized & traumatized, but I believe that organizations that adopt & honor a values-based system not only help avoid that harm but actually help heal it for members who have experienced it elsewhere by other organizations or individuals.*

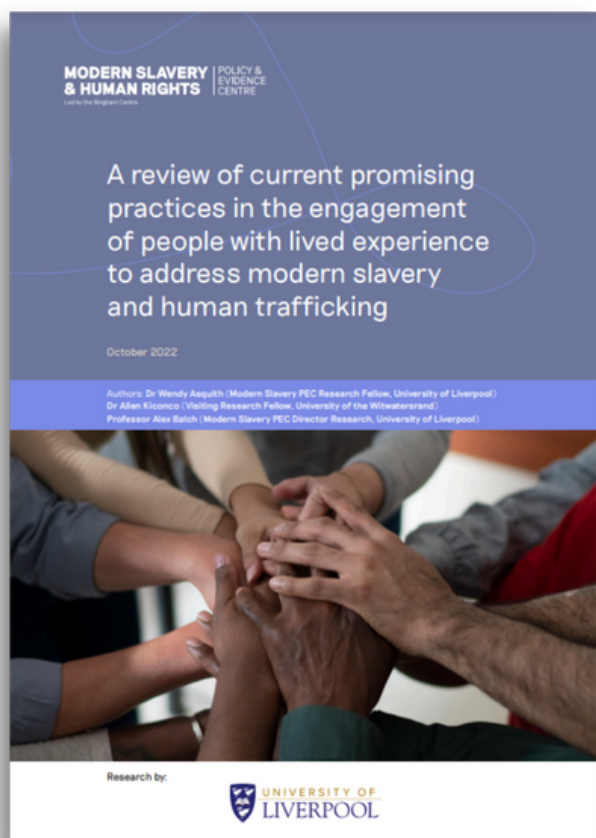
*- NSN Member* ”

### *Is the NSN its own organization?*

The NSN is a program of Cast that operates with a high degree of independence and autonomy. Our funding agreements ensure that our work is survivor-led. Therefore, our values statement, organizational practices, and decision-making processes are sometimes separate or different from Cast's as we prioritize shared power among our survivor members.

## 3 Gathering evidence

Often, when faced with a need for solutions or restructuring, there is an impulse to rush into responses or decisions. When we rush, we make mistakes. We take things for granted that are not the case. We take on common assumptions as truth without questioning whether those assumptions accurately reflect reality. Because this work is essential and because there is potential for both great opportunity and great harm, it was important to engage in collecting stories and evidence that could help shape the direction our program took.



Gathering evidence started with informal conversations. Over the first half of the year, we engaged in conversations with prior NSN members and leadership, survivors working in the movement, and other movement leaders to learn: What works, what keeps survivors out of leadership positions, what policies leave survivors feeling tokenized or othered, and what dreams do survivors have for what a movement would look like where survivors are seen as full humans, capable of learning, growing, offering meaningful insight, and leading our anti-trafficking work.

In March of 2022, our SLPM joined the Modern Slavery Policy and Evidence Centre (PEC) as a regional research consultant on a project researching global best practices in survivor engagement in anti-trafficking efforts. This involved semi-structured interviews with movement leaders (most with lived experience of trafficking), conducting thematic analysis to determine common themes, and authoring the regional report for North America.

This report, combined with a thorough desk review of existing literature and other regional reports, informed the development of a global report created by the University of Liverpool Centre for the Study of International Slavery for the Modern Slavery PEC. View the report: [LINK](#)

Throughout both these interviews and informal conversations with survivors engaged in movement leadership, all survivors named ways in which they had experienced harm as a result of their leadership engagement, much of it preventable and resulting from unquestioned sector norms. It became apparent that a previously untapped topic for evaluation would be assessing survivors' experiences of harm in movement leadership so that we could develop internal practices (and practice recommendations) to prevent and mitigate harm to survivors. During the first half of 2022, we conducted semi-structured interviews with survivor leaders who have experienced harm in the movement. In October of 2022, we presented at the annual conference of the Association for Applied and Clinical Sociology on the broad categories of harm survivors experience in sector leadership, with some minimal initial recommendations. We intend to build out publicly-available resources on this topic in 2023.

*I feel like they've taken a kind of sanitized caricature of myself and my experiences. [The organization I used to work with] cherry-picked the parts they wanted to use and just totally disregarded not only parts of my identity, but parts that were that are very important... They only seem to kind of care about our identity when they can exploit it to be like, “see, look, I'm being inclusive.” And I noticed the fact that I'm indigenous is almost never mentioned, because they try to say only cis privileged white women are advocating for sex worker rights. And I noticed they only really mentioned I'm indigenous when they were trying to pit me against white survivors or white sex workers. And it doesn't feel good to be used that way. And that's the only times they mentioned relevant parts of my identity, if ever, is when they were tokenizing me. - NSN Member*

## Categories of Harm:

Our interviews, review of the existing literature, and continued collaborations on this topic have indicated that survivors engaged in movement leadership regularly and consistently experience harm within the anti-trafficking sector, both from allies/organizations and from other survivor leaders. This list is preliminary and is not exhaustive. Additional details will be published in 2023.

- Exclusion of people with lived experience, particularly those with different perspectives or oppressed identities, from anti-trafficking decision-making spaces;
- Identity-based and oppression harm;
- Labor exploitation within the human trafficking sector;
- Fueling and engaging in lateral victimization;
- Conflicts around the sex trades;
- Exceptionalizing of survivor leaders;
- Conflicts around language, labeling, and frameworks;
- Enmeshment with carceral systems and carceral feminism;
- Frameworks that don't account for the diversity of survivors' experiences of the sex trades and survival;
- Funding restrictions and harms;
- Continued survivor feedback without action.

*If it was not for the NSN and the way that leadership and the work is modeled professionally and interpersonally - with compassion, justice, analysis, anti-oppression, explicit anti-criminalization of survivors, sex workers, BIPOC and LGBTQ [individuals], clarity and commitment to integrity, liberation, intersectionality - I honestly would have left the anti-human trafficking field long ago, and would have left feeling completely invisible, retraumatized, confused and silenced.*

- NSN Member



## 4 Building relationships

The NSN does not limit emergency, microgrant, or scholarship funds only to active members who support our values. Applicants do not need to support our specific values or strategies as a prerequisite for funding.

In the past year, we have paid out  
**\$71,595**

directly to survivor leaders in the form of scholarships, business startup microgrants, professional development registration fees, or emergency funds. These funds have been disbursed in alignment with our equity principles. For example, for our Dressemerber microgrant funds, 62.8% of recipients identified as Black, Indigenous, or other people of color, 28% as queer and trans people of color (QTPOC), over half indicated having a disability or chronic illness, and 47% have experienced unsheltered homelessness in the past five years. Our support helped them pursue their dreams and build stability.

## Partnerships and collaborations

Movement- Building  
Convening  
*May 2022*

Our SLPM and a small number of NSN members were honored to be invited to join representatives from Survivor Alliance, Polaris, Human Trafficking Legal Center, the McCain Institute, Humanity United, Global Fund to End Modern Slavery, United Way Worldwide, Freedom Fund, and many more organizations in San Francisco to discuss what it would take to build meaningful survivor engagement in the anti-trafficking sector so that it could genuinely follow the lived experience leadership of our movement.

Global Fund to End  
Modern Slavery  
*July 2022 - ongoing*

In July of 2022, the SLPM and a small number of NSN member-contractors began work with the Global Fund to End Modern Slavery on a collaboration to build out practices to advance and assess meaningful survivor engagement and leadership in the movement. Products are forthcoming in 2023.

Project Roadmap  
(ICF/OVC)  
*November 2022*

In November 2022, the SLPM was invited by ICF and the Office for Victims of Crime to participate in "Moving Beyond Words - Defining and Implementing Victim-Centered and Trauma Informed in the Anti-Trafficking Field" - a subject matter expert convening to determine practical recommendations for OVC-funded enhanced collaborative model human trafficking task forces.

# Building relationships through accountability and repair

*Powerful organizations use survivors as shields, basically to attack any other survivors they don't agree with, and I've had that done to me. I've had other survivors used to attack me... It's really hurtful to have another survivor, who has also been through trauma, used to attack you.*

- NSN Member

As part of our commitment to taking accountability for harm that has happened in survivor spaces, we have prioritized *how* we do our work *in community* with each other.

Our SLPM and another NSN member are currently attending Kai Cheng Thom's Loving Justice Conflict Resolution Facilitator Training through Education for Racial Equity. In October, we hosted Mia Mingus for a workshop on the four parts of accountability and how to give a good apology, with movement leaders from across the country present. We are part of an ongoing anti-trafficking survivor workgroup on harm and repair developing guidelines for anti-trafficking organizations to make repair, and we are presenting at the 2023 Freedom Network conference on this topic as well.

We recognize that creating a transformative movement requires us as survivors to learn to take accountability for harm we've caused each other, and requires our sector to take accountability for harm it has caused to survivors. We remain committed to learning and practicing genuine apology and accountability.

## FOUR PARTS OF ACCOUNTABILITY (FROM MIA MINGUS)

1) SELF-REFLECTION

2) A MEANINGFUL APOLOGY

3) REPAIR

4) CHANGED BEHAVIOR

*[Anti-trafficking organizations] do survivors dirty, too. She was working for an organization that knew she was a survivor. So instead of giving her a mix of cases, they gave her all the worst cases of kids that were sex trafficked when she was just a program advocate. They gave her all the most traumatic cases she was not prepared to handle. They were having her speak at all kind of fundraisers for free. They were just overloading her.*

- Survivor leader

## 5 Whose story?

Many of the findings from our conversations and research have centered around storytelling, power dynamics, and the role of survivors' stories.



Survivors are often expected to tell their trafficking stories when invited to "leadership."



Survivors are often not offered leadership opportunities other than storytelling.



Survivors are not typically offered professional development (PD) for a wide variety of skills.



Survivors are rarely offered **customized** PD specific to their interests.



Survivors often say "yes" to storytelling gigs they don't want to do out of financial need.



Survivors experience harm and trauma from repeatedly telling their trauma stories in detail.



When survivors tell their stories they may become dissociated and dysregulated.



When dissociated or dysregulated survivors may share things they had not planned to.



Excessive traumatic details in stories can impact learning and memory in your audience.

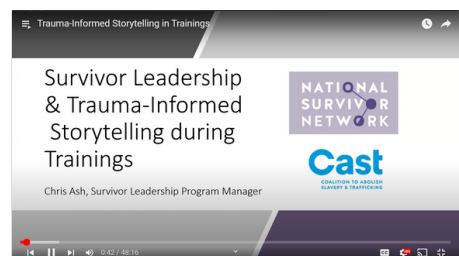
## Meaningful change:



We have implemented a group agreement for our shared spaces to minimize unnecessary storytelling so that we can have more sustainable working dynamics with less vicarious trauma and burnout.



We no longer pass along contract or consulting opportunities that require survivors to share any details of their trafficking experience.



We have conducted trainings with our membership (publicly available on our YouTube channel) on trauma-informed storytelling.

# Survivors feel "on display"

Another finding from our conversations and research is that survivors often feel "on display." As clients and survivor leaders, they're expected to have board members, staff from other programs, or funders and donors come through to observe the good work of the program.

## Meaningful change:



Survivor and survivor leader meeting spaces are members-only unless someone is there for a reason that supports the specific programming for that meeting. We love opportunities for social time, learning, and networking with colleagues, and those opportunities are scheduled separately from regular meetings to give survivors choice over attendance and agency over their spaces.

One NSN member said they had felt exposed and forced to be excessively visible in prior anti-trafficking organizations, and added

*"Now that I'm in the NSN I'm really looking forward to being able to do this work without sacrificing my privacy."*

**A CEO asks: But powerful storytelling shifts minds and hearts and motivates change! What can we do?**

Don't assume all survivors want to tell their trauma stories publicly. Offer professional development, mentorships, and opportunities based on the survivors' interests.

When offering public speaking leadership opportunities offer other paid work as well so that the choice will not be driven entirely by economic need.

**Remember: The survivors' stories are not the only powerful story you can tell for fundraising and media efforts. How can you tell the story of your organization in a way that shows learning, growth, and inspiring transformation?**

## 6 Membership

July 2022: All prior members were invited to renew their membership to continue in our new direction.

August 2022: Our new online membership application opened to new member applications.

**30** new members applied, interviewed, and were accepted from August to October.

October 2022: New member application period was closed to allow additional time for processing applications, orienting new members, and building community norms before re-opening applications.

### Contracts

Since re-organizing, the NSN has utilized many of the best ideas from Work Program models, in which members are contracted to provide services on projects in areas they would like to learn more about while learning and receiving mentoring.

### Referrals

Highly-qualified NSN contractors have been referred out to a variety of external contract opportunities, including to provide trainings, conduct research, support research, review documents and trainings, and inform the development of videos and educational materials.



Cast has contracted with evaluators from the University of California at San Francisco to conduct a needs assessment in 2022 and a program evaluation in 2023 to ensure we are basing our programming decisions on member feedback.

## 7 Mentoring & education

### Built-In Learning

Check out our new and improved "Learning" page on our website: [LINK](#)

- Since August, NSN members have had the opportunity to attend weekly skill-building sessions to explore common skills needed for movement and/or nonprofit work.
- These sessions, along with many more of our trainings, have been made freely available on our YouTube channel and organized into useful playlists that also feature other survivor leadership organizations.
- Most of our contracts with NSN members include a learning component, with learning contractors receiving \$60/hour for rotating internships that allow them to learn a variety of skills.
- For organizations that have contracted with the NSN to support a task, we have included additional hours for interns to support the lead contractors in order to support early-career survivor leaders in learning and professional networking.
- All contracts and paid internships include weekly or biweekly supervision and mentoring session.

- We have provided training and technical assistance on recommended practices for survivor leadership to the Alliance to End Slavery and Trafficking, Human Trafficking Legal Center, HEAL Trafficking, Cast's Program and Team Leads, and a variety of other organizations.
- We have provided training and technical assistance to over a dozen state sexual assault or domestic violence coalitions and coalition staff on how to provide appropriate services for survivors of human trafficking.

### External support

Check out the Event Host Guidelines we developed with HEAL Trafficking: [LINK](#)

### Contractor, paid internships, and professional development stipends.

*(The NSN offers PD stipends to support our contractors' attendance at events that build their capacity.)*

In the past year, we have paid over

# \$25,000

to NSN members for their work and time. The vast majority of these payments have been since the rollout of new member applications in August.

# Building knowledge, building connections

Freedom Network USA  
Annual Conference  
March 2022, Miami

Our SLPM presented two workshops at the 2022 Freedom Network USA annual conference in Miami, Florida: one on understanding demand reduction strategies in their historical and research context, and another on empowering survivor leadership in the workplace.

We have also presented a handful of web conferences for Freedom Network throughout the year.

HEAL Trafficking  
Training of Trainers  
October 2022

Our SLPM supported the HEAL Trafficking training of trainers as a team facilitator. More importantly, though, the NSN was honored to be able to send five members to attend this educational event to better prepare them to train healthcare system professionals!

We have also paid to send members to other trainings, including Freedom Network's BIPOC Advocate training, "Finding Joy in the Work," An Indigenous Approach to Mama Trauma, The Hibernating Bear of Childhood Trauma, and more.

“After suffering serious & ongoing burnout & harassment from doing very public-facing work in the movement..., it's been very good for me to be able to do impactful work in a way that doesn't require me to subject myself to that. I've learned so many different skills as well as learning from other survivors who have different life experiences than me, to try to find solutions to overlapping problems many of us face. The sense of a truly safe & supportive community has also been so deeply appreciated & has helped me to develop more confidence in growing my skills in a very nurturing environment, as well as having my existing lived experience expertise valued.

- NSN Member

## 8 Where we're going

Our priorities for the coming months include:

- Establishing working groups so that members can learn while participating in member-driven organizing (paid through internships);
- Continuing to establish group norms in small groups of members while bringing in new members 2-4 times each year;
- Continuing to develop members' capacity to engage meaningfully as our movement's and sector's practical and thought leaders;
- Continuing to develop innovative training and technical assistance products for both survivors working in the movement and our allies in the sector.
- Continuing to provide and grow a safer, braver, more emergent space for survivors to engage in movement leadership who have not previously felt welcomed, valued, or respected in our movement.

### Stay Tuned for More Exciting Projects in 2023!



**UNC**  
GILLINGS SCHOOL OF  
GLOBAL PUBLIC HEALTH

Capstone team of UNC Masters in Public Health students partner with the NSN to develop a training on human trafficking prevention!

#### Care, Safety, and Self-Determination

NSN to publish helpful booklet on a public health approach to trafficking prevention from an anti-oppression, human rights lens.

#### Spectrum of Survivor Engagement

NSN to publish toolkit to guide organizations through assessing their progress across the spectrum of survivor engagement.

National Survivor Network  
[nationalsurvivornetwork.org](http://nationalsurvivornetwork.org)  
[survivorleadership@castla.org](mailto:survivorleadership@castla.org)

NATIONAL  
SURVIVOR  
NETWORK

Donations made through [castla.org](http://castla.org) ([LINK](#)) can be designated on the second page to be specifically allocated for the National Survivor Network's work to empower survivor leaders.