

# Slate Ballard

## Capacity Building Training Partner

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### What was your journey to this work?

My journey has two phases. If I was to name these two phases one would be called the learning phase and one would be called the opening phase. The learning phase started when I was attending Southern Connecticut State University (SCSU). I, for many years in my life within the charismatic evangelical church, had been a cultivator of group dynamics. I was interested in creating spaces where people felt welcome, could be vulnerable and could experience something both individually and collectively that created a feeling of connection. While taking a course in Organizational Behavior at SCSU I was introduced to the work of Edgar Schein on organizational culture. I became fascinated by the cultivation of culture within groups. I was particularly interested in how one might cultivate cultures that allowed creativity to thrive. I was also interested in how to encourage collaboration and co-creation, although I didn't know that word at the time. I began to ask myself the question - if I could cultivate a culture that modeled collaboration, creativity and co-creation in the city could it help transform the culture of the city? My co-founding of The Grove, a new kind of social space and coworking community was born out of this idea. I was cultivating a culture while experimenting with its potential impact on the larger culture of New Haven.

For phase 2 - the opening we need to fast forward about 6 years. My partner and I had recently adopted a black boy and my partner was going through a deep awakening around the impacts of structural racism and white supremacy culture and privilege.



For me, I did not experience a sudden light bulb moment but a slower opening and realization of the impact of structural racism and white supremacy culture on my own person. I began to notice how I had shifted my practice of community building towards capitalistic goals and had cut off my spirituality. These noticings helped draw me back to a truer sense of self. I attended CLP and BD101. I was a Creative Community Fellow with National Arts Strategy. These experiences challenged me, pushed me to be vulnerageous, helped me to heal and to access my whole self. I started to dream again of more equitable ways of building community and creating opportunities for folx to share their creative energy in new ways. I began to explore connections with my ancestors and to find a spiritual practice again. I am healing and finding my wholeness. This arc speaks to just some of my journey to this work.

### What fuels your work as a facilitator?

The knowing that my liberation and my children's liberation is wrapped up in the liberation of BIPOC and LGBTQ+ folx. I increasingly realize this to be true in every aspect of life from organizational work settings to family life.

### Who is a role model you look to in your work?

Currently, I am inspired by the work of Mia Birdsong and her exploration around rethinking community, family and social connectedness.

### Training History

B.S. in Liberal Studies with a concentration in Organizational Communication, Management and Organizational Psychology from Southern Connecticut State University. National Arts Strategy Creative Community Fellow 2019



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