

Access in the Making (AIM) Lab
Apology, Call In's/Call Out's Protocol

Acknowledgement¹

As we write our Apology, Call In's/Call Out's Protocol, we want to acknowledge in bold letters that it was the methodological work of **the Civic Laboratory for Environmental Action Research (CLEAR)** that has inspired and guided us throughout the process.² We are extremely grateful to CLEAR Lab for the incredible amount of work that they have done in how to run a feminist and anti-colonial lab,³ and their generosity in sharing this know-how with others. **We cannot cite you and thank you enough.**

Citation

Inspired by CLEAR Lab's work, AIM Lab has worked on this document over almost a process of ten months (and we are still and will be working on it). This document is the result of *labour*, including doing research, collective conversations, and editing. This

¹ Please note that in our *Manifesto* and *Protocols*, we make the deliberate decision to use, not endnotes, *but footnotes*. In order to subvert the design hierarchy scripted into footnotes (which automatically decreases their font size vis-a-vis the font size of main text) we choose to use the same font size for both footnotes and the main body of the text, with the same line spacing. These design choices reflect our commitments to feminist ethics of citation. Through these choices, we seek to emphasize the shoulders we stand upon, and the various intellectual genealogies, activist, and artistic traditions that we draw from. Thank you, Annemarie Mol, Sara Ahmed, and Max Liboiron for teaching us about the importance of citations and the politics of footnotes (Mol, *The Body Multiple*; Ahmed, "Making Feminist Points,"; Liboiron, *Pollution is Colonialism*).

² CLEAR, *CLEAR Lab Book: A living manual of our values, guidelines, and protocols*.

³ For methodological projects of the CLEAR Lab, see:

<https://civiclaboratory.nl/methodological-projects/>

document is a research output. This document is a *publication*. If you quote, use, or in any way benefit from this document, cite it.

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As a lab committed to disability justice and feminist citational practices, we are especially concerned that the intellectual labour of marginalized folks (including BIPOC, disabled artists, activists, scholars) and those occupying precarious positions in the academia (graduate students, adjuncts, emerging scholars) are not properly (sometimes, never) recognized. Our own citational practices seek to dismantle that ignorance and erasure, and we hope that you, the reader, will do the same.

Apology, Call In's/Call Out's publication co-authorship

This publication emerged out of a series of numerous conversations within AIM as well as from a litany of members' own experiences in various academic and community spaces as well as activist and social movements. The writing of this manifesto was by and large produced by Dresda Emma Méndez de la Brena and Jessie Stainton in consultation with AIM's Steering Committee.

Apology Protocol

We approach apology not as a noun but as a verb; not as a thing but as a process. We consider apologizing not the end but the beginning of something new. Apologizing is a power we have to create new beginnings. It is through an apology that we demonstrate humility and agency.

Honouring Genealogies

We have developed much of our apology protocol by taking our inspiration from and in line with Mia Mingus's [How To Give A Genuine Apology Part 2: The Apology – The What and The How](#), available at <https://leavingevidence.wordpress.com/> as well as the *CLEAR Lab Book: A living manual of our values, guidelines, and protocols*, V.03. We are deeply grateful for these brilliant resources for a deeper understanding of accountability and apologizing that has guided us through this work.

We have also developed much of our apology protocol in the recollection of our own stories of apologies, misunderstandings, and self-reflections. In writing this protocol, we did not want to provide a single, and perhaps simplistic narrative of what an apology should look like, because this would mean simplifying the complexity of what an apology is. We wanted to hear the voices and experiences of our AIM members to weave the fabric of our own apologizing protocol. So, at one of our weekly meetings, we asked AIM members: what does an apology mean to them?

Quoting an idiom, Nick shared that “the greatest apology is changed behaviour.” Amy and Sabrina reminded us that apologies should not include the word “but” because “buts” are more about justifications (of why you acted in this or that way, or why you

said this or that thing) rather than accepting, reflecting on and taking accountability for why you acted. This resonates with Yolanda’s perspective, which describes apologies as “taking accountability for your own actions”. Returning to our key values, Prakash mentioned that apologies are “grounded in relationality.” Apologizing can render oneself vulnerable. While they can be uncomfortable; they are necessary because mistakes are inevitable, and a good apology requires practice.

We hope this protocol leads to a path of reparation, not only for harm done in the present but for rectifying possible harm to be done in the future.

Goals of Apologizing

- We believe that apologies are not magic words. They should be combined with material forms of reparation.
- Apologizing needs to break patterns of repetition. Apologizing needs to work towards knowledge, acknowledgement and accountability of our actions.
- Apologies without commitment to repair are empty statements. Apologizing describes actions. Meaning, what has been *learned* and what needs to be *done* to minimize recurrent harm, whether intentional or unintentional.
- Apologizing starts with the self-reflective “I” – we should address our actions rather than naming or deflecting blame on others. There should be intentional and meaningful focus on *our* behavior(s).
- Apologizing does not need to point out “who started it” – rather an apology should look for the generosity of moving beyond simply balancing the books.

Concrete Steps

Mia Mingus details five steps to an apology and reminds us that “[t]he goal of these steps is not to be over-accountable, but to be thorough and to tend to those who were harmed, hurt or impacted by your actions”⁴

1. Say “I’m sorry.”
 - Speak, sign, type, or write the words “I’m sorry”
2. Name the harm/hurt
 - Be direct and specific
3. Name the impact
 - Name the consequences of your actions (regardless of intention)
4. Take Responsibility
 - Own the consequences of your actions
5. Commit to not doing the harm again
 - This is key!

Apologizing within AIM Lab

When discussing this protocol with our AIM members, the need emerged to define how we apologize AIM member to AIM member. We devoted one of our regular meetings to reflecting on the spirit behind an apology and how should it be carried out in practice. We concluded that at AIM, apologies should happen organically as they are part of our self-reflective process. Nick reminded us that being an AIM lab member means constantly “reflecting and doing anti-oppressive work. It should be up to the person when and how to apologize, because part of the self-reflecting spirit is not to force an apology. The person should have the space to apologize if they feel it necessary. Leaving the space open reinforces self-reflecting work”. We trust in our members’

⁴ Mia Mingus, “How To Give A Genuine Apology .”

restorative and generous spirits to apologize when needed. We do not police each other.

We also agreed that more than a recipe, apologies should work in a case-by-case basis. We want to leave space open for personal creativity and inner strength. However, we want to share an example on how an apology could be done, in case it helps with our creative apologising process. We appreciate one of our members for their generosity in sharing and letting us share this example.

- **Scenario:** In a virtual meeting, a person commented something in the chat that could be perceived as aggressive and that took space and time from the meeting facilitator. In this scenario, the person opted for a dual apology strategy. First, to make sure that individual relations are repaired (unless the parties harmed wish to remain anonymous) and then a public version (via email or in group meeting) so that everyone is aware that the issue is at least acknowledged if not resolved.

- *Dear members,*

For those who were in attendance of today's meeting, I would like to sincerely apologize for my textual outburst. I am quite embarrassed by the multitude of my actions both in the distraction it caused as well as the aggression of the words chosen that were devoid of context.

I would like to also extend specific apologies to W, to X and Y, and to Z. To W, I'm sorry for introducing harm and disruption into the space you were facilitating and had kindly invited me into as a guest. To X and Y, I'm

sorry for having taken attention away from the matter at hand, which was the article in which you two as well as [redacted] have placed much time, labour, care, and attention. And to Z, our remaining minutes together were meant to be for your goodbyes, and I'm sorry that my actions were involved in taking time away from that.

I am especially apologetic if my words caused anyone harm. If there is anything I can do to repair this harm, through conversation, context, etc. please do let me know and I will be happy to hold that space for you. I will be sure not to misuse our time together in the future.

Moving Forward/ Reparative Actions

Apologizing is contextualized by power relations that span race, gender, age, class, and social position. Be mindful of how these dynamics are embedded in the situation. An apology should not make the person who has been hurt do more emotional labor (e.g., “I feel bad...”; using an apology/emotion as a weapon to silence another person’s feelings).

An apology should be reflected through a variety of actions. This is an opportunity to foster a better understanding of something you might not have understood and integrating new knowledge into your system of values.

While it is important to not centre ourselves in the aftermath of an apology, make sure to take care of yourself and self-reflect. Are there any actions that I need to take in my commitment to not doing the harm again? Do I have the resources I need?

When an apology isn't ready to be accepted

Not all apologies are forgiven or accepted. We cannot force someone to accept our apology. Forgiving is a generous act but sometimes it needs time to flourish. If this is the case, we need to find another way to heal and find sustainable peace and reconciliation without burdening the wounded.

Language, Place-based and Cultural Specificities

AIM Lab is enriched by the diverse contexts, histories, backgrounds, languages, and knowledges of our members. We recognise and embrace our multicultural specificities and we are aware how it can play a significant role in possible misunderstandings. In the context of our lab, we aim for a generous reading of others' words and comments so we can interpret them either as intentional or just a language/context difference. We want to never assume harm done intentionally but part of the complex textures of our cultural backgrounds. In situations in which cultural or linguistic differences create situations of unclarity or instances of accidental ableism, we opt to use our common communication tool kits we have developed to rectify the situation in a non-confrontational and generous manner.

Call-Ins/Call Outs Protocol

This section of the protocol was inspired by Loretta J. Ross's Ted Talk: [Don't call people out -- call them in](#) and CLEAR's *Lab Book*.

Call-out commonly refers to the practice of denouncing in an accusatory, public and personal way an expression (or a behaviour of) of machismo, racism, homophobia, transphobia, xenophobia, classism, ableism, or any other rhetorical scenario that could reinforce any system of oppression. Usually practiced in conversations, assemblies, conferences, and other public scenarios, calling out culture is used as a rhetoric strategy to publicly address and simultaneously cancel the harm being done to a person, group, or community. However, when used excessively and thoughtless, calling out could sharp-cut any possible dialogue and reparation, provoking the alienation of the recipient, and causing exhaustion and anxiety to all the parties involved.⁵

Several feminist scholars and activists have built against this practice to move beyond cancel culture to a more compassionate and contextual learning and personal growth moment. *Calling in* as opposed to calling out is a strategy to help challenge wrongdoing while still creating space for growth, forgiveness.⁶ Calling in is another way that we maintain our core values and relationships of mutual trust and respect with one

⁵ For a more in-depth discussion of calling out, see Ross, *What if Instead of Calling People Out, We Called Them In?* and Ross, *I'm a Black Feminist. I Think Call-out Culture is Toxic*.

⁶ (Loretta J. Ross, 2021)

another. The goal of a call in is to successfully and compassionately communicate to someone that a behavior of theirs is problematic or harmful in a specific way.

Why we prefer the practice of calling in as opposed to calling out:

- “We are focusing on people you love or care about and with whom you want to be in a relationship. We are focusing on conflict, hurt, misunderstandings, small breaks in trust, and low-level harm”.⁷
- Calling the action of taking care of the other opens the door for personal growth. Calling in avoids judgmental attitudes towards the other which maintain hierarchies and power relations.
- Calling in is not the responsibility of the person being harmed. They do not have the responsibility of “educating” anyone. If they choose to, it will be an “extra” gesture and a gift that the recipients must value and cherish.
- Being called in invites us to humbly accept that we do not know everything but that we need to be accountable for that which we don’t know and causes harm. Calling in is a moment of personal growth and demands consistent analysis and discovery of what we still need to know and to learn.
- We recognize that we will face moments when “calling someone out” would explicitly be necessary. Calling out is a powerful and appropriate practice to address and stop oppressive actions, behaviors or/and words that are actively hurting someone (e.g., wrong use of privileges, racism, misogyny, ableism, etc.).

1. Call in’s

1.1. Use of a mediator

⁷ (Mia Mingus, 2019).

Sometimes it can be difficult to address an issue as it arises, especially in the context of Zoom where an issue might not go unnoticed but goes unaddressed. For situations like this, or for when you might not feel comfortable addressing a person directly, we have a conflict resolution mediator. This is a term-based role and each of our core members takes turns in the role. The mediator's role is not to solve the conflict, but to ensure that there is space for the issues to be addressed among all parties.

1.2. Before you call in:

- Lead with love and care, not anger and resentment.
- Do a Self-Assessment – What are your motives? Are you emotionally available to accommodate someone else's feelings that may result from the call in? If not, maybe you're not ready to do the calling in. You can always “call on,” instead or for the time being, which is asking someone to explain themselves. Sometimes simply asking: “What do you mean by that?” can act as a bridge to a teachable moment.
- Choosing the right setting can also help the call in. Call in's should be done as privately as possible, however, sometimes they may require you to interrupt a public or semi-private conversation if the harm is being perpetuated at the moment.

1.3. How to call in

- Announce / ask for a call-in conversation: both people should know that they are arriving at this conversation
- Begin the conversation with a “vibe check” to let each other know how you are both coming to the conversation

- This is about behavior, not people and about relations. Try the phrase: “when you _____, I feel _____.”⁸
- A call in is a two-way conversation that engages in a continuous dialogue. It is a deeper discussion and understanding of the problem.
- Call in is an act of love – at the end of your call-in we invite you to leave space for personal contact (ask if a hug, smile, or a hand touch is okay).

1.4. If you have been called in

- Take a moment to self-reflect on the action. Remember that this is not a personal attack on your character, but rather a gift to self-reflect and grow. We all need to be called in at some time or another.
- Thank the person who called you in – they were generous with their emotional energy
- Plan: What reparative actions are necessary to move forward?
- Do you owe someone an apology? See apology protocol.

⁸ For more examples we invite you to check out the work of CLEAR Lab, they have an entire page of possible ways to begin the conversation (2021, 56)

References

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