FRIDA'S STRATEGIC MEL FRAMEWORK
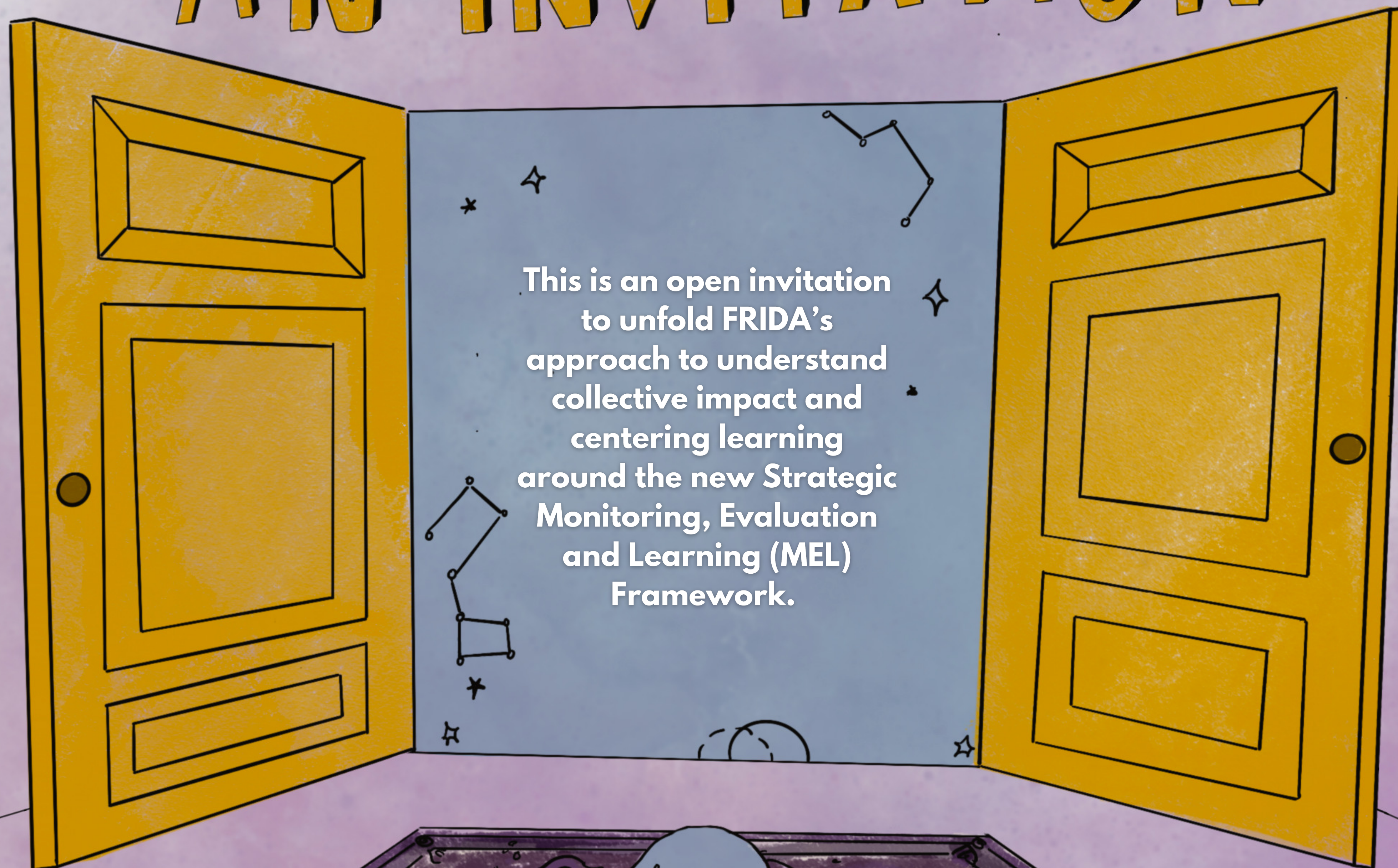
WAYS OF UNDERSTANDING IMPACT AND CENTERING LEARNING

TABLE OF CONTENTS ♄

AN INVITATION

This is an open invitation to unfold FRIDA's approach to understand collective impact and centering learning around the new Strategic Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning (MEL) Framework.

FRIDA wanted to create a feminist and inclusive approach to measuring impact and to think about it in a more accessible, participatory way. And so, **FRIDA's Strategic Plan (2020-2025) was created**, which outlines FRIDA's five-year organizational commitments. The MEL framework in this document unpacks how FRIDA will honor the commitments depicted in the Strategic Plan.

Through this framework, FRIDA also aims to **reclaim the tools, the language and the principles of MEL-as-usual** for both our community and for the young feminist movements we serve. We believe that language is political and that in order to start thinking about MEL differently it is necessary to queer (challenge + change) the verbiage around data, outcomes, outputs, inputs, goals and indicator.

Finally, while FRIDA is seeding its vision for a new Strategic MEL Framework here for the first time, it will undoubtedly expand in the years going forward. But we believe that **how we measure, track, and are able to assess both individual and collective contribution to change is powerful and magical: how we conceptualise MEL is deeply political** and this framework aims to lay the foundation for our MEL commitments.

FRIDA is a young feminist-led fund dedicated to backing young feminist movements. Thus, we are dedicated to societal transformation both locally and globally. We invite you to take this journey with us as we systematically deconstruct traditional approaches to monitoring + evaluation and **share how FRIDA approaches impact and change.**

"When you work for women's interests, it's two steps forward – if you're really smart and very lucky! – and at least one step back. In fact, it's often two or three steps back! And those steps back are, ironically, often evidence of your effectiveness; because they represent the threat you have posed to the power structure and its attempt to push you back. Sometimes, even your 'success stories' are nothing more than ways the power structure is trying to accommodate and contain the threat of more fundamental change by making small concessions."

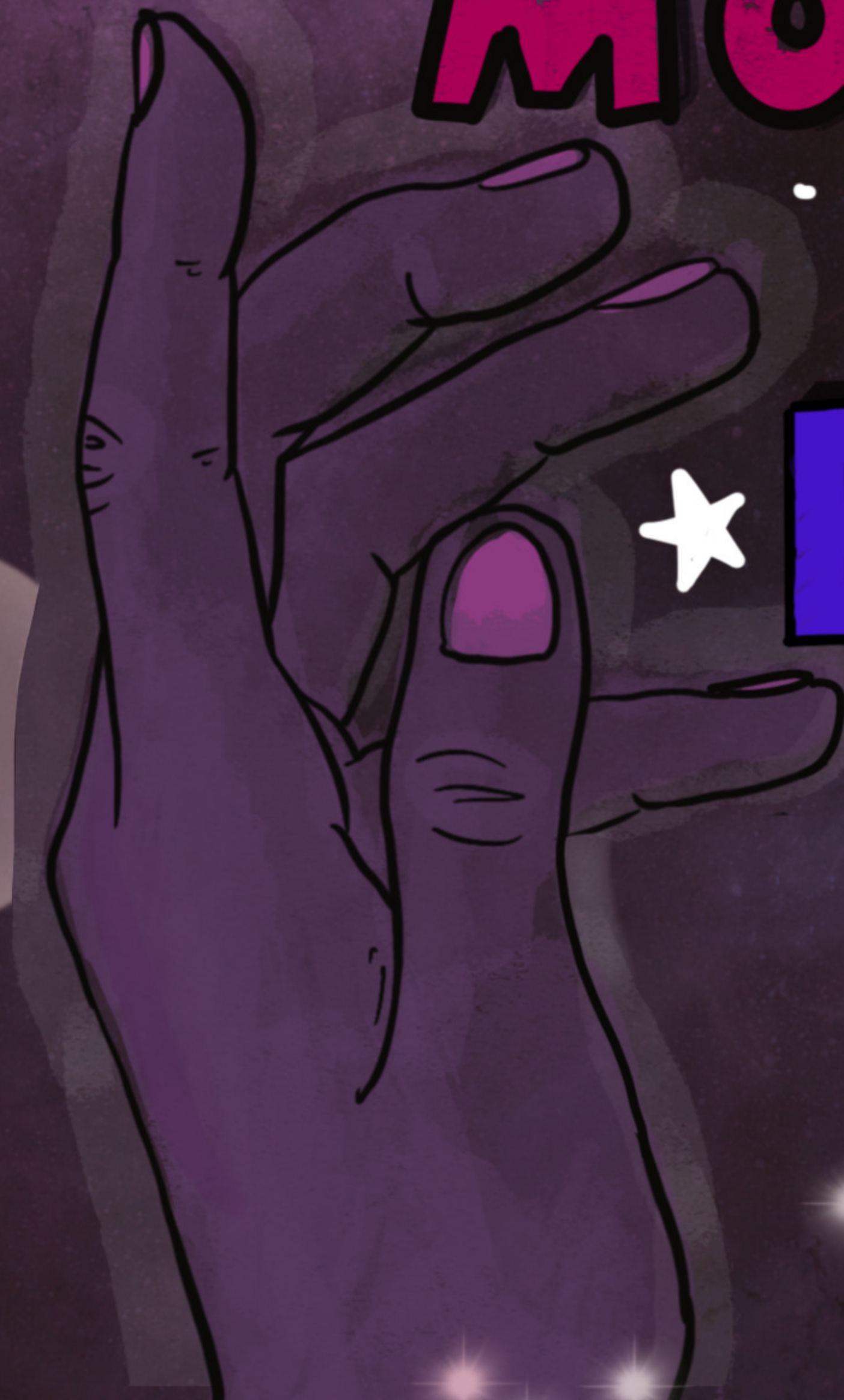-Srilatha Batliwala and Alex Pittman

5

Reclaiming
the POWER and MAGIC
of
MONITORING
EVALUATION
&
LEARNING

OUR CONSIDERATIONS

1

MEL as an area is often associated with technical expertise, and this can leave activists or organizers excluded from it.

↓

As a result, the lack of agency around shaping monitoring, learning and evaluation processes can default to a donor-driven agenda because there has not been an opportunity to truly interrogate and ground the organization's **vision of change** and how to go about evaluating its contribution to it.

2

MEL thinking and tools can perpetuate a linear vision of change, with simple causality links that do not necessarily take into account shifting contexts.

↓
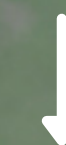
As a result, tools like log frames and indicators take over, and there is a risk of simplifying or caricaturing what is really happening on the ground. FRIDA acknowledges that this type of linear thinking is rooted in Western, colonized traditions. This does not necessarily account for other ways of conceptualizing and navigating the complexity of change.

3

Traditional approaches to MEL require 'proving' one's contribution to change and continually providing tangible evidence.

↓

This in turn places a burden on both staff and our community. As a funder, we have a duty to refrain from taking activists away from their core activities, remain sensitive to what is asked of them, and considering how they can co-own these MEL processes and narratives.

4

Some MEL processes can make us miss what's most important.

↓

As a result, the feminist movement's resources leveraged by FRIDA may not be used in the best possible way. This means young feminist organizations are hindered from taking calculated risks, experimenting with innovative practices, as well as building and learning in the service of the global community.

BACKGROUND

The development of FRIDA's Strategic MEL Framework did not occur in a silos. It builds upon **FRIDA's Theory of Change** (2018) and the **Strategic Plan 2020-2025**. This is the next step in the wider development of how FRIDA navigates and thinks about change.

FRIDA'S STRATEGIC MEL FRAMEWORK

WHAT IS FRIDA'S STRATEGIC MEL FRAMEWORK?

Simply put, FRIDA's Strategic MEL Framework is our attempt to 'queer' (challenge + change) the language, structures, and tools normally used to think about monitoring and evaluating programming, development outcomes and resource accountability. Our decision to 'queer' traditional approaches to MEL is a political stance. FRIDA believes that transforming the practice of MEL will make understanding goals, outcomes, and indicators more accessible, approachable and user-friendly for the collective FRIDA community.
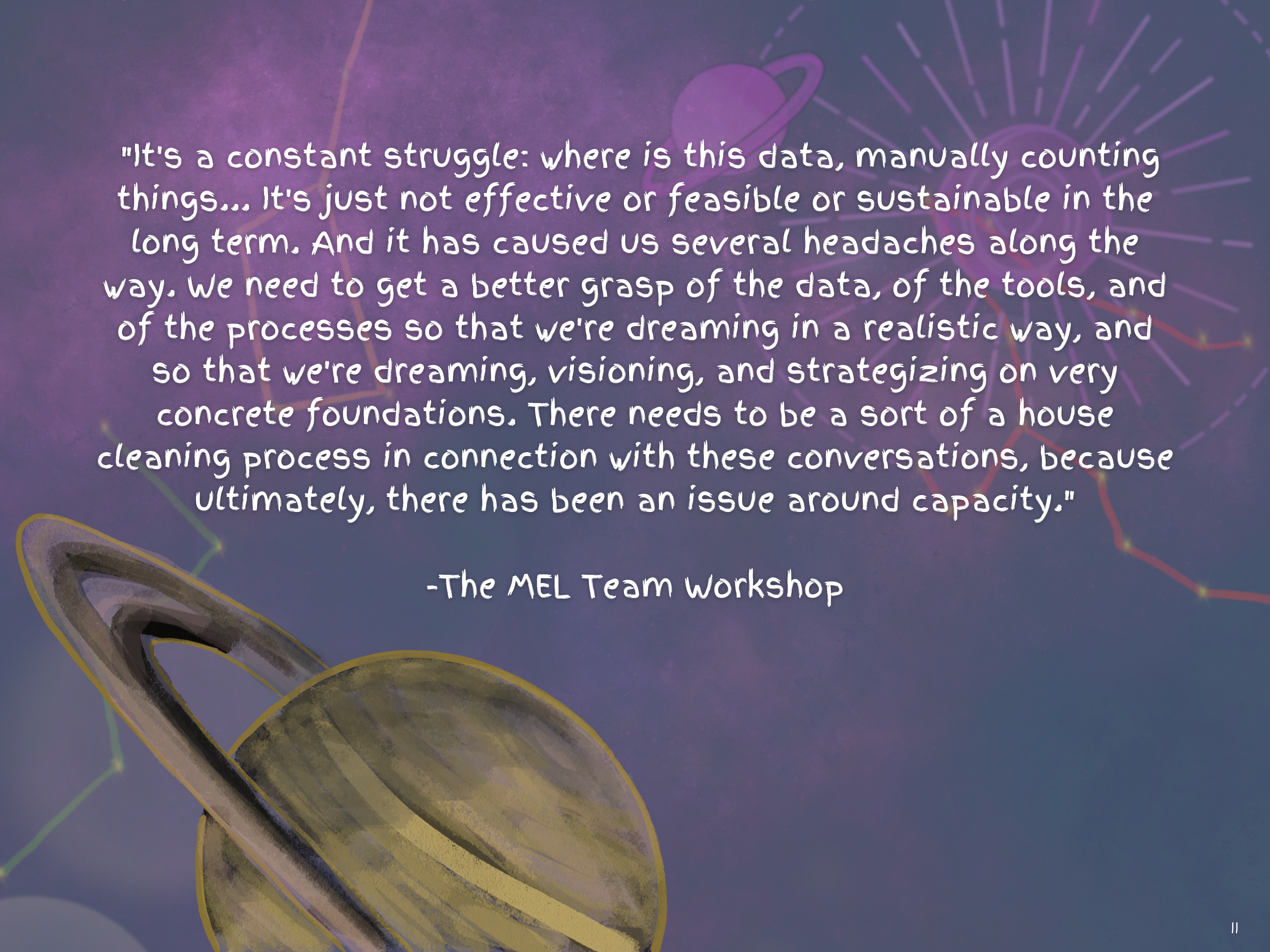
Why DID FRIDA CREATE a Strategic LEARNING AND IMPACT Framework?

There are **three reasons** that FRIDA created a new approach to the traditional MEL framework:

1. To **challenge** conventional thinking about monitoring, evaluation and learning

2. To **focus** the narrative on young feminist organizers

3. To make it more **accessible**, **participatory** and **focused** on change

"It's a constant struggle: where is this data, manually counting things... It's just not effective or feasible or sustainable in the long term. And it has caused us several headaches along the way. We need to get a better grasp of the data, of the tools, and of the processes so that we're dreaming in a realistic way, and so that we're dreaming, visioning, and strategizing on very concrete foundations. There needs to be a sort of a house cleaning process in connection with these conversations, because ultimately, there has been an issue around capacity."

-The MEL Team Workshop

HOW DID FRIDA create THE STRATEGIC MEL FRAMEWORK?

In creating our framework and designing our methodology, FRIDA was guided by **three core organizational values** :

Participatory Collaboration

FRIDA held online workshops to **encourage wide participation** of the FRIDAverse, including grantee partners, advisors & staff. Participation was based on a voluntary basis so as not to overwhelm the team and partners, in line with **FRIDA's mandate on care.**

Accessible Language & Understanding

FRIDA organized a MEL refresher session to ensure a level understanding of traditional MEL language across the teams, so they could **all feel comfortable** contributing. We also held **grantee-partner and advisor sessions** in English, French, Spanish.

Collective Feedback

FRIDA held two interim download sessions where all FRIDA staff were invited to help draft the new framework's content, integrate **community feedback**, and understand how the feedback would be included. Teams could contribute to ALL areas of the MEL framework to **avoid team silos**.

FRIDA's PARTICIPATORY PLANNING PROCESS

Literature & Document Review

Team Workshops

Mini Online Trials

Write-up

1. LEARN
2. explore
3. TRIAL
4. CONSOLIDATE

Establish an in-depth understanding of the fund, its approach, objectives and constraints in terms of MEL

Gather inputs from the various teams and collect key feedback for the next phase

Collect feedback from key partners on feasibility, appeal and potential in order to improve indicators & tools

Share key insights by writing a final report on FRIDA's MEL plan and a shorter paper on learnings to be shared with allies and partners

HOW *is* FRIDA DOING MONITORING *Learning* AND EVALUATION DIFFERENTLY?

FRIDA's framework is:

Flexible

Innovative

FRIDA values-driven

Accountable

Learning focused

User-friendly

ADOPTING A NEW LANGUAGE

Liberation

Bottom-Up

"All that you touch You Change.
All that you Change Changes you.
The only lasting truth Is Change.
God Is Change."

-Octavia Butler

Interdependence

Adaptive

Ecosystem

Interconnected

Reframing the LANGUAGE of MEL

To transform the practice of MEL and make it more in line with FRIDA's values, we decided to take a look at the language of MEL itself because language is political. We 'queered' the words traditionally associated with MEL. FRIDA believes this bold renaming will result in a much needed reframing of the ways that we usually think about monitoring, evaluation, and learning.

QUEERING

We acknowledge that we don't want to appropriate struggles. This term emerged out of our planning process and reflects what FRIDA wants to do: emphasize diversity and challenge norms.

CONSTELLATIONS

Our core commitments are what we call our constellations and speak to the broad vision we have in the horizon.

COMMITMENTS

DREAMS

Dreams are what goals are made of. They are our compass for change, and what we are projecting towards.

GOALS

PLANETS

Planets, formerly outcomes, are the desired results of the many work streams at FRIDA. We need our planets in order to turn our goals (dreams) into a reality.

OUTCOMES

SIGNS OF CHANGE

Signs of change, formerly indicators, are change trackers. They allow us to explore whether our strategies actually lead to the results expected.
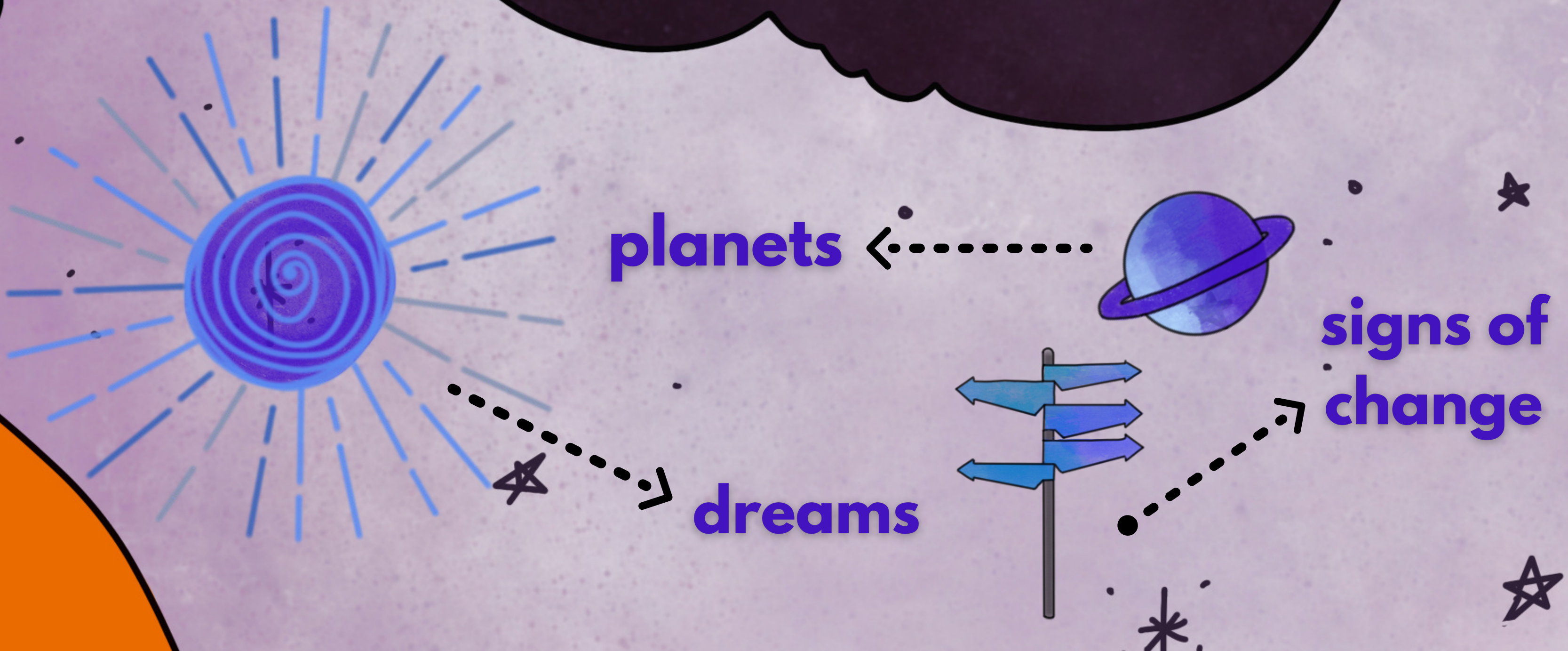
INDICATORS

FRIDA's MEL framework is anchored by five commitments, which we call our rising constellations. The next page illustrates our framework and depicts dreams, planets, and signs of change with icons.

planets

signs of change

dreams

A FLEXIBLE, INTERCONNÉCTED APPROACH

FRIDA's Strategic MEL framework encourages each team's autonomy and flexibility to connect to different monitoring and evaluation processes. While FRIDA encourages interconnectivity, each team has agency and ownership over tracking specific signs of change.
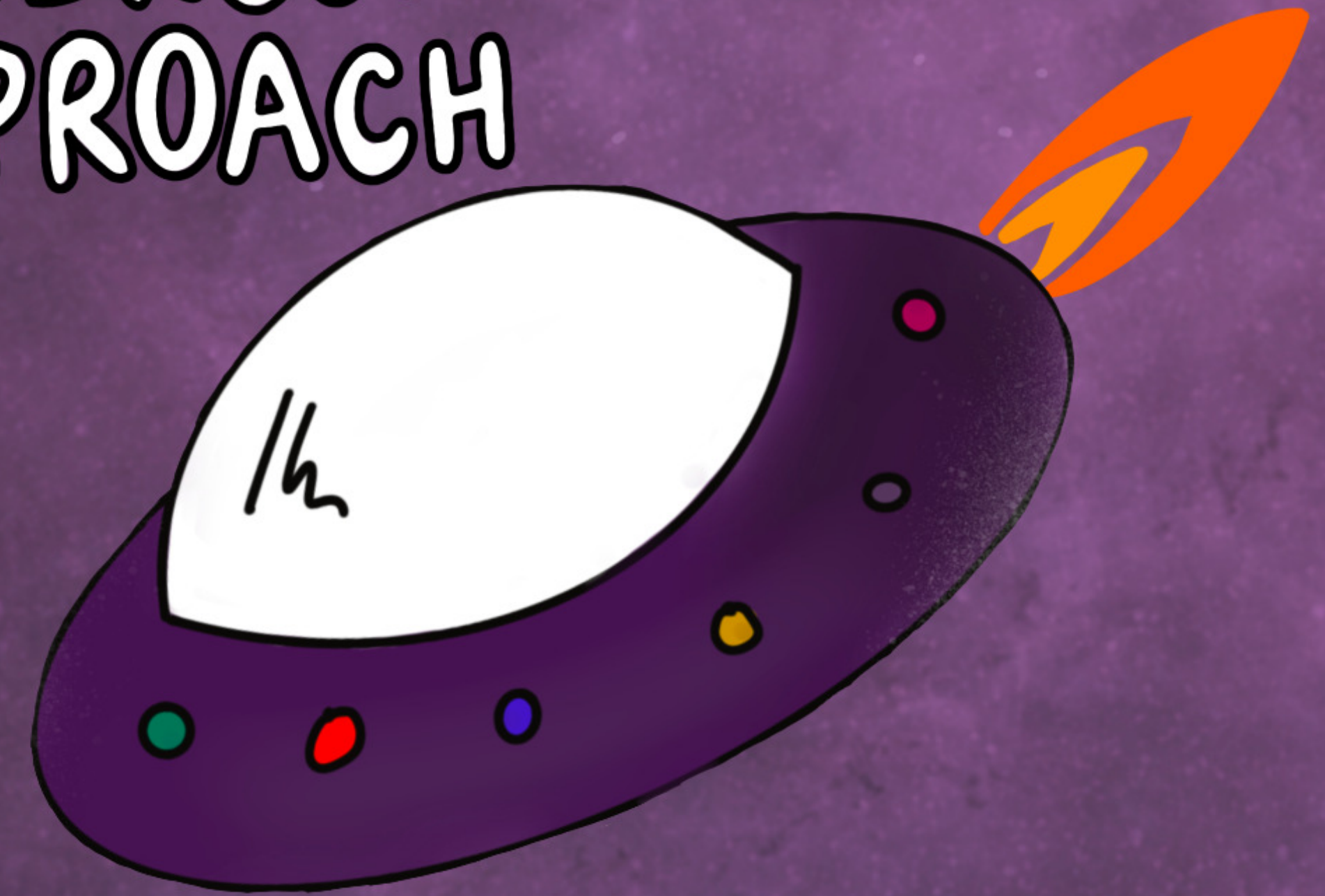
FRIDA'S STRATEGIC MEL FRAMEWORK

BRIDGING
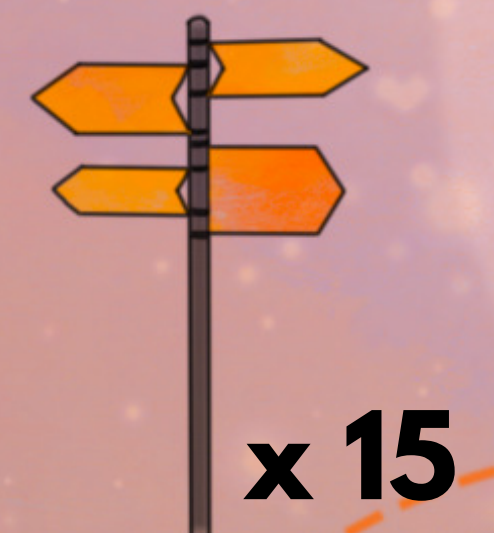connections, co-accountability and accessibility

x 12

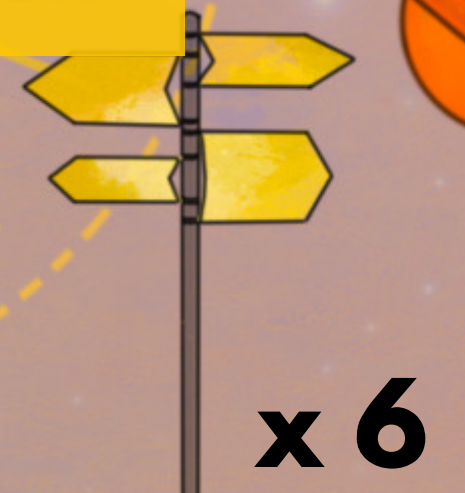## QUEERING
creative disruption and strengthening diverse feminist movements

x 9

x 15

FLOURISHING
radical care and planetary wellbeing

co-creating
culture of collaboration

x 6

moving
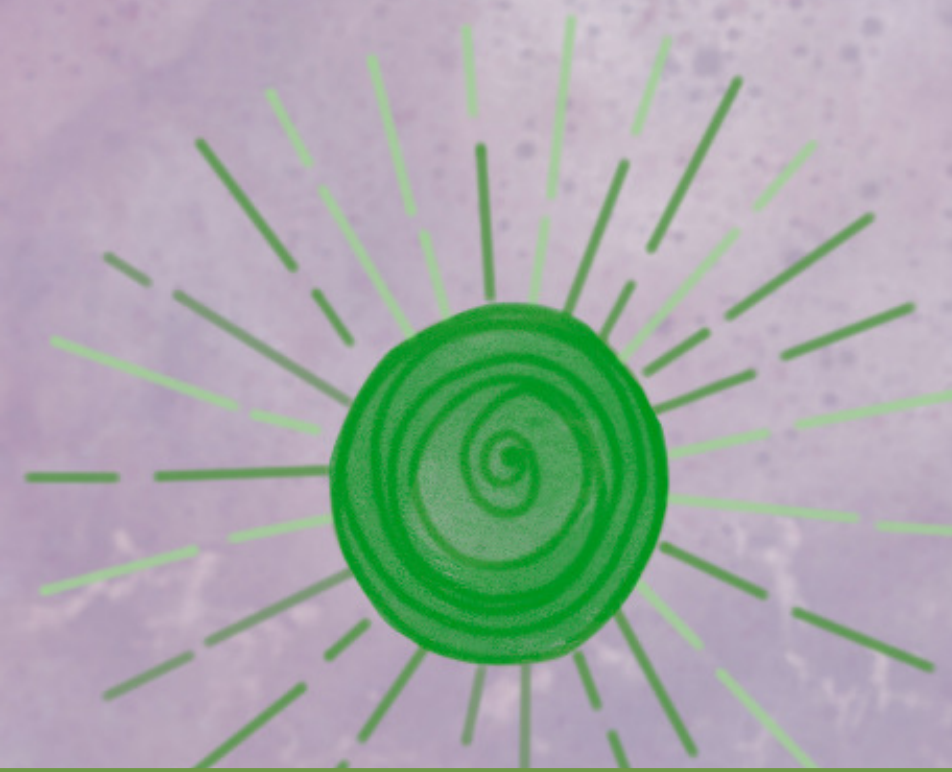agility, flexibility and adaptability

x 10
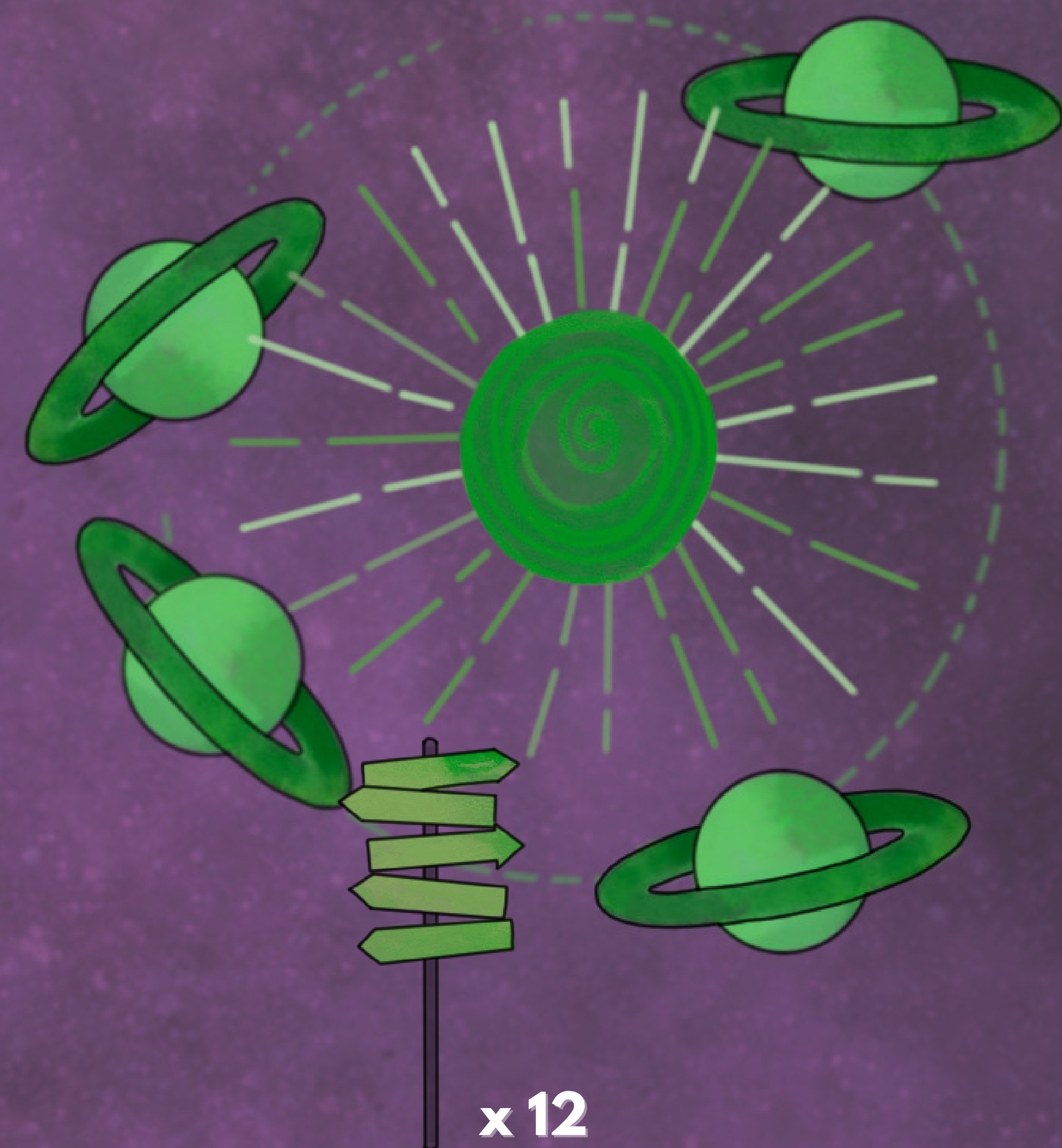
The

BRIDGING

Constellation

x 12

1 Dream, 4 Planets, and 12 Signs of Change Facilitating Connections, Co-accountability, and Accessibility

Dream #1

FRIDA funnels more and better resources to young feminist organizers, strengthening their activism in a sustainable and safer way and building participatory systems that respond to the needs of their communities.

Planet #1

Planet #2

Planet #3

Planet #4

Young feminist organizers are more resourced and better connected, their leadership is collectively, strategically and successfully promoted.

Support to grantee partners is amplified and deepened to create meaningful resources to build their capacity for feminist organising.

Support to advisors is magnified towards a meaningful engagement, so they strive with their capacity strengthened, with their time and effort compensated and their voices and views centered.

Promotion of young feminist organizers' autonomy, embracing multilingualism, and bettering our work across local and regional contexts in FRIDA's strategies and collective practices.

The FLOURISHING Constellation

3 Dreams, 5 Planets, and 15 Signs of Change Focusing on Radical Care and Planetary Wellbeing

x 15

FRIDA encompasses happiness, wellbeing, mindful technology, and data usage through radical care and security strategies.

Planet #5

Planet #6

Happiness principles, policies, and practices related to wellness and care are vibrant in everyday work. Shared pauses are purposefully instigated to acknowledge and celebrate milestones.

Streamlined tech, data policies, and practices prioritize holistic security, co-accountability and accesibility to strengthen "the FRIDA experience" in every day work.

Dream #3

FRIDA's work blossoms and deepens, allowing the organization to conduct its work and fulfil its mission in a more strategic and sustainable way.

Planet #7

Planet #8

Feminist governance, organizational strengthening and community consultations in decision-making processes deepen, ground and create cohesion and balance with work plans .

FRIDA is adequately resourced to allow for creativity, care and innovation while ensuring institutional sustainability and resilience.

Dream #4

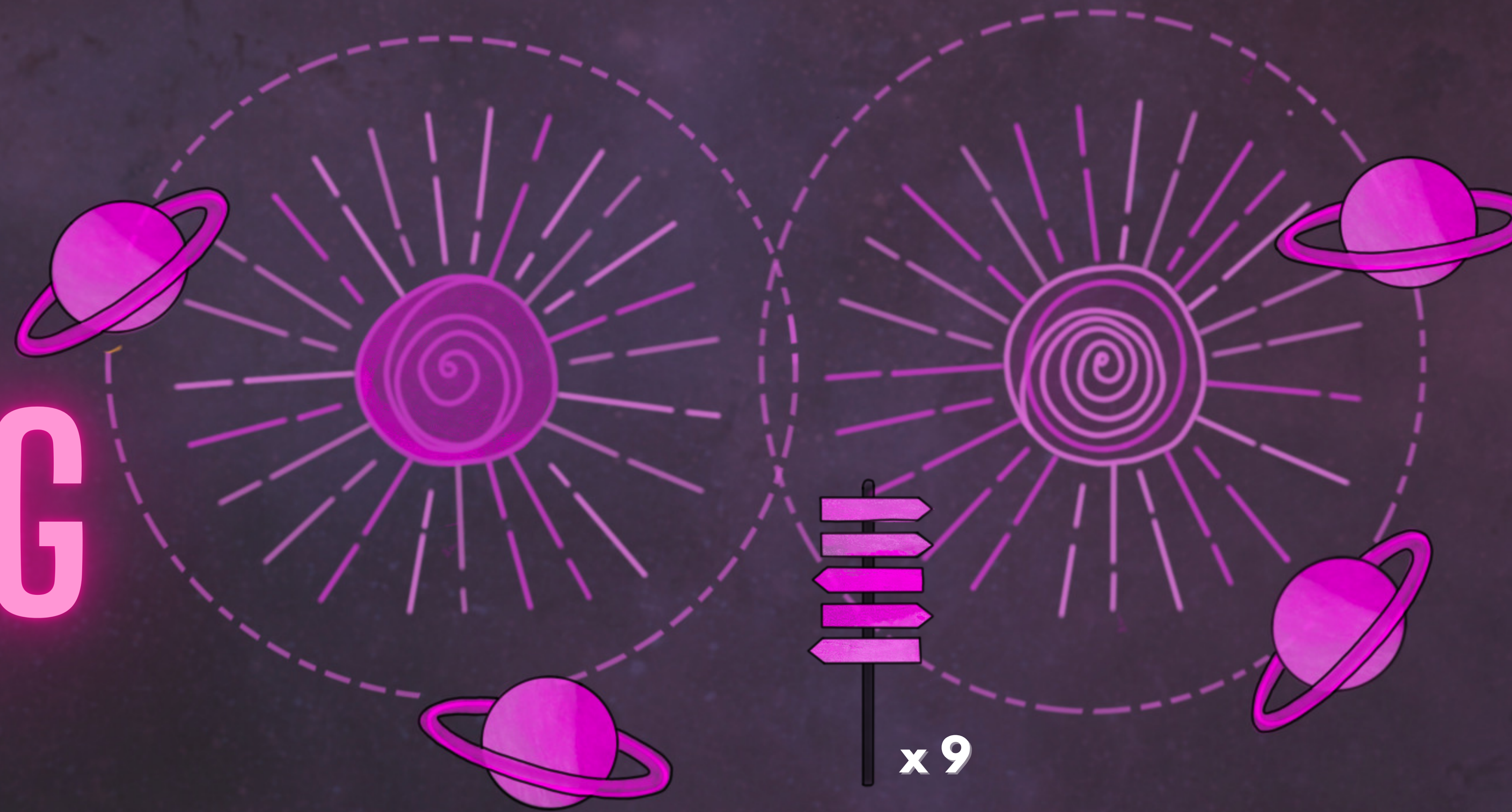**FRIDA embodies planetary wellbeing** for young feminist organizers, activists, and staff.

Planet #9

Environmental stewardship policy is in place, with FRIDA's practices environmentally sustainable.

The
QUEERING
Constellation

x 9

2 Dreams, 4 Planets, and 9 Signs of Change to Foster Creative Disruption and Strengthen Diverse Feminist Movements

FRIDA exemplifies and celebrates diversity and inclusivity for young feminist organizers and its organization.

Planet #10

Planet #11

A feminist organizational culture blossoms with feminist HR and the full diversity of the FRIDA community is centered and celebrated.

Tailored, participatory strategies to better support trans youth, indigenous youth, adolescent girls, migrant youth and outreach to sex workers.

Dream #6

FRIDA advocates for more safe spaces for creative disruption and meaningful community-centered engagement for young feminist organizers.

Planet #12

Planet #13

Philantropic advocacy to shift mainstream discourses and conventional practices for young feminist organizers' engagement.

Support of meaningful and intentional engagement of young feminists organizers in advocacy spaces and investment of resources.

The
co-creating
Constellation

2 Dreams, 4 Planets, and 6 Signs of Change Nurturing a Culture of Collaboration
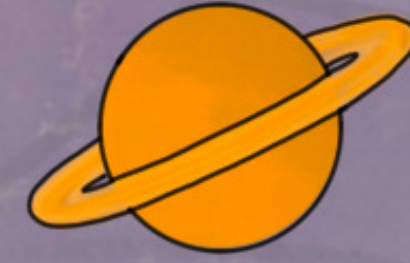
x 6

Dream #7

FRIDA embraces a feminist ethos sustained by cross-community solidarity and bonds of trust to reinforce a participatory ecosystem.

Planet #14

Planet #15

Planet #16

Active collaborations and connections across the FRIDA community, centering solidarity, building collective leadership and co-conspiring for change.

Spaces and moments of cross-team work are celebrated with roles and responsibilities clarified for each shared work stream and clear decision making processes.

Participatory culture based on accountability and clear decision making ensures constant learning and ability to move swiftly through processes.

Dream #8

FRIDA surrounds itself with purposeful alliances and a broader ecosystem of peer organizations.

Planet #17

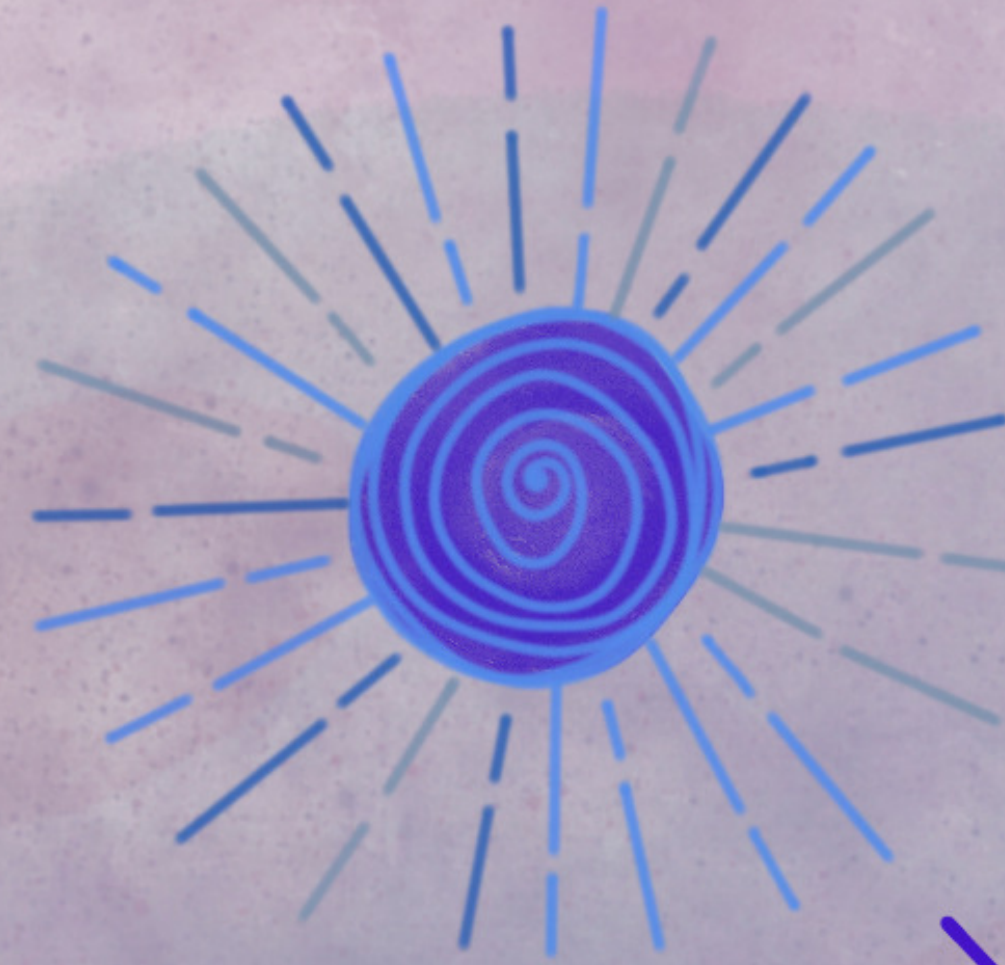**Broader, stronger partnerships across sectors with allies that align with FRIDA's mission and values.**

The *moving* Constellation

2 Dreams, 3 Planets, and 10 Signs of Change Cultivating Agility, Flexibility, and Adaptability

x 10

Dream #9

FRIDA fosters both organizational learning and an open, accountability-centered community.
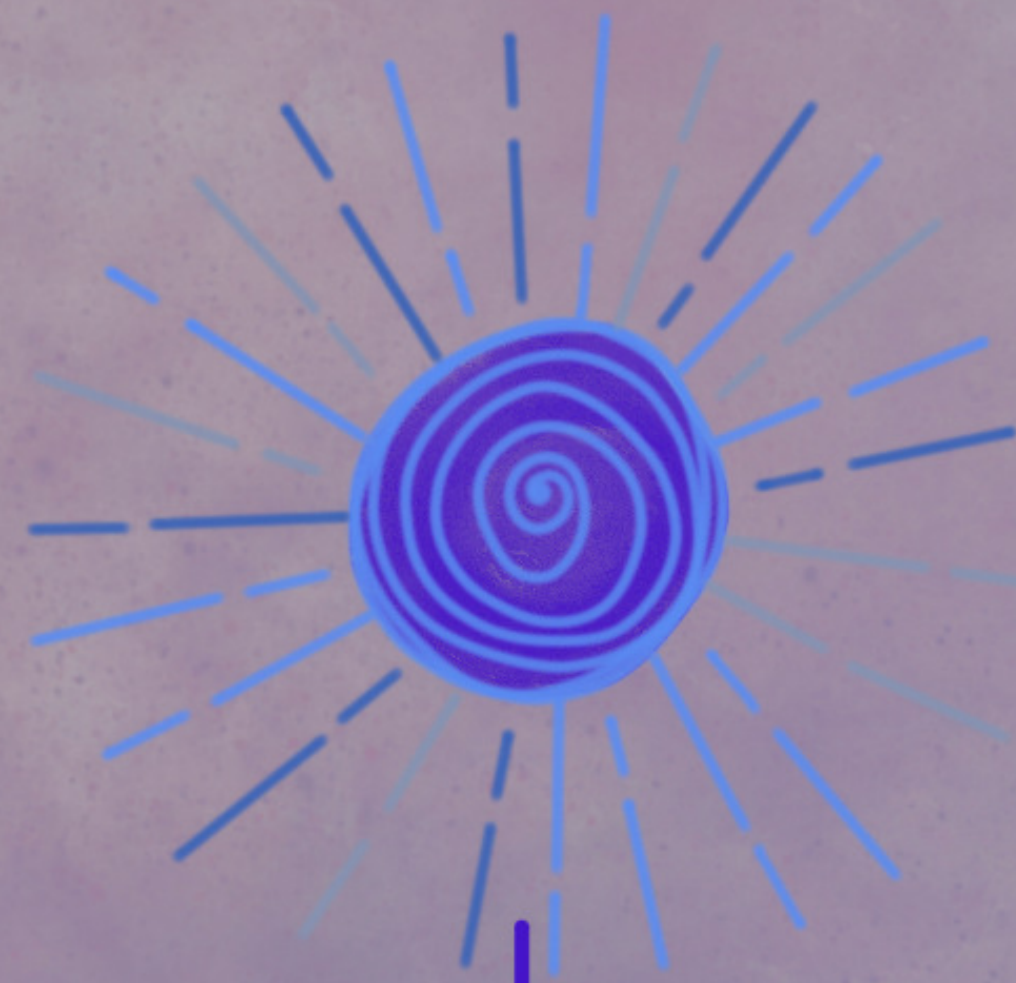
Planet #18

Planet #19

An organizational culture of learning is nourished through collective commitments and agile systems that make smarter data regularly available and facilitate the seamless flow of knowledge across the FRIDA community.

The most significant changes, learnings and challenges of both young feminist activism and FRIDA's participatory strategy are shared and made visible to illuminate and continue countering patriarchal violence.
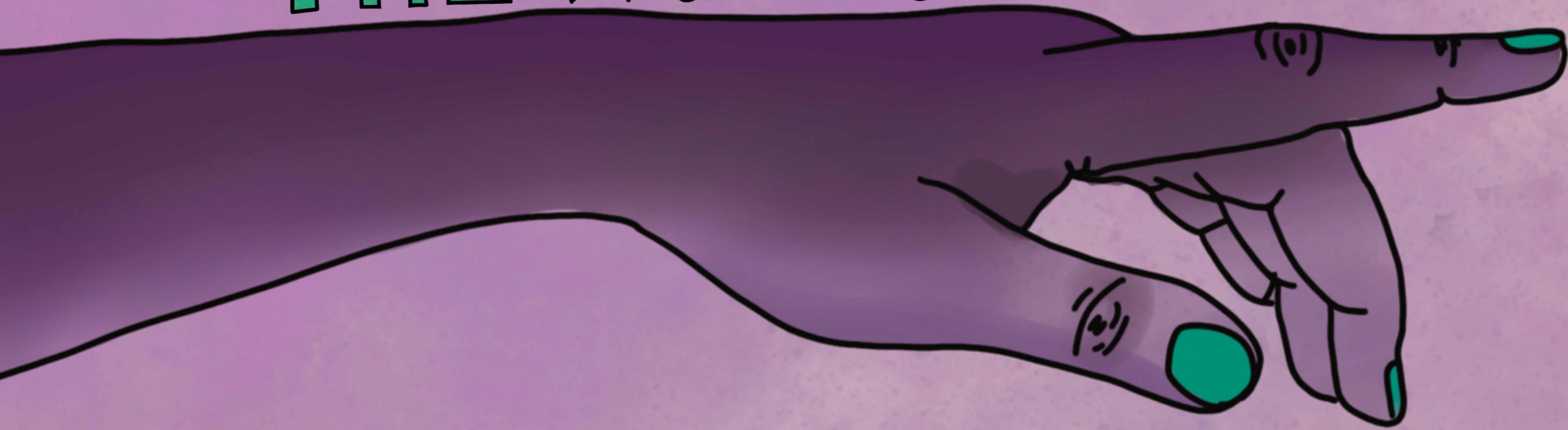
Dream #10

FRIDA responds to crises and restrictive, volatile contexts in a timely and empathetic manner.

Planet #20

Empathetic responses and resilience processes are included in FRIDA's Emergency Assistance and Solidarity Strategy for better support in times of crisis and restrictive environments.

THE WAY FORWARD

Our next steps with the Strategic MEL Framework involve **evolving, learning, operationalizing,** and **being open to change.** FRIDA's internal work is being adjusted to adhere to this framework. FRIDA also looks forward to **discussing** and **sharing** this new approach with other feminist peers and young feminist organizers.
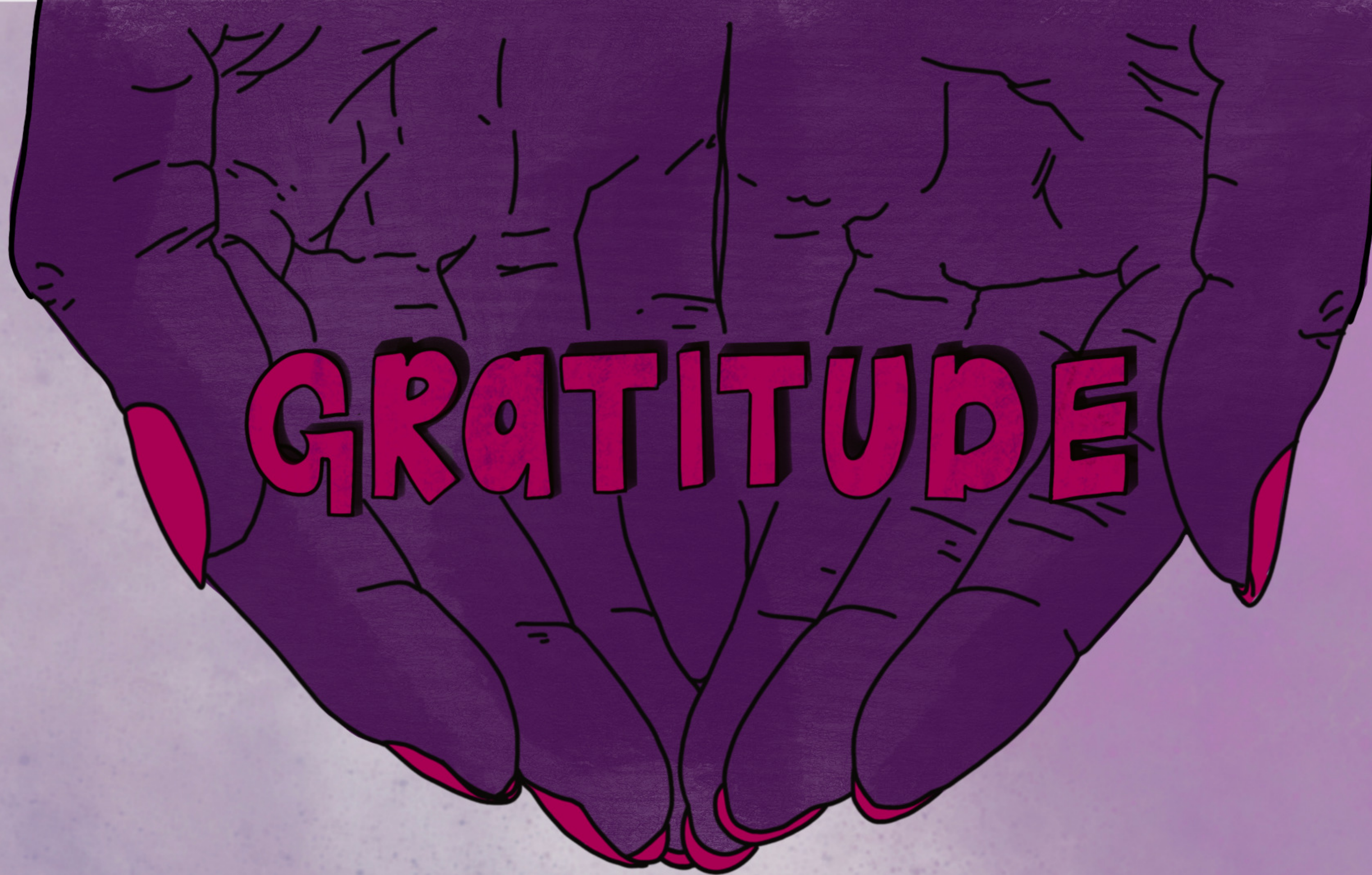
FRIDA holds deep love, gratitude, solidarity and feminist sisterhood for everyone that contributed to the creation of FRIDA's Strategic MEL Framework. We appreciate the entire FRIDA community tremendously - including FRIDA's Grantee Partners, Staff, Consultants, Advisors, Board Members, and contributors to this document. Lastly, we are very grateful for our donors and allies, who always support our vision of change.

Special thanks goes out to:

1 **The FRIDA Change Team** that embarked on a multi-year journey to identify a strategy that could meet FRIDA's most pressing needs in the near future.

Boikanyo Modungwa, FRIDA's first MEL officer and close adviser through all the years of both FRIDA's and the MEL team's growth. **2**

3 **Clara Desalvo** and **Zazi Dlamini**, current MEL magic-makers at FRIDA, for their vision and work to rethink traditional MEL approaches and their key role in developing this MEL framework.

Eva Didier, FRIDA's external consultant who co-led the MEL framework development alongside the MEL team. Eva's commitment and openness to an honest, collective process made this possible. **4**

5 **Ré Phillips**, FRIDA's external consultant that supported the MEL team to give birth to this document.

All of the **grantee partners, advisors & allies** who participated in the workshops to co-create FRIDA's Strategic MEL framework. **6**
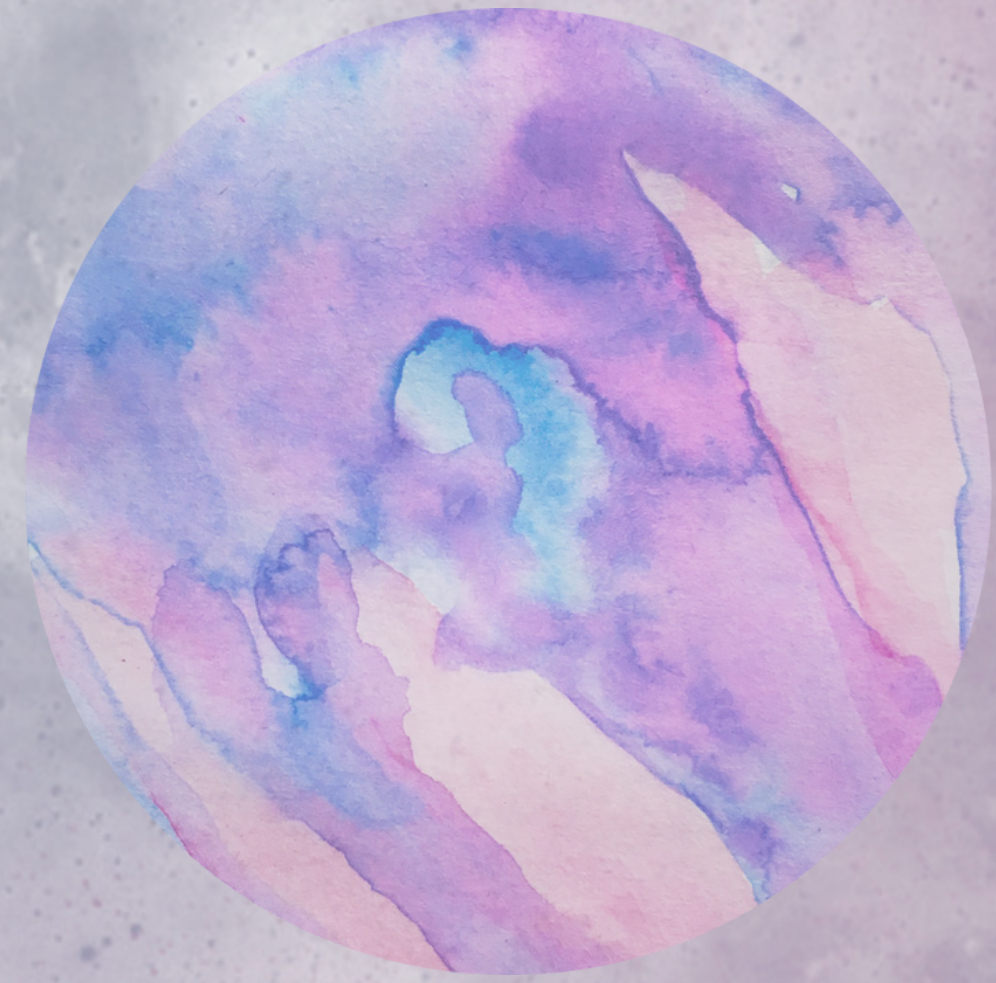
ANNEX

MINI ONLINE TRIALS WITH GPS & ADVISORS

List of Participants

Workshop 1 (ENG) - Mix GPs & Advisors

Rachael Mwikali (GP) | Aminah Abedelhack | Razan Othman | Maimuna Jeng
Niki Roosta | Zulaikha Shihab

Workshop 2 (ENG) - Advisors Only

Sally AlHaq | Myra Elmir | Yasmin Che | Selamawit Tezera Chaka | Ololade Faniyi

Workshop 3 (FR) - GPs

Lami Tchedre (LADIES' VOICE - TOGO) | Peggy Ngague & Emma Celeste (ELLES CAMEROUN)

Workshop 4 (SP) - GPs, Advisors and Peer Fund

Camila Corvalán (A) | Brigada migrante, Irene (GP) | Luciérnagas Sobre Ruedas (GP)| Belén Leguizamón Servián (A) | Colectivo Morivivi, Sharon y Raiza (GP) | Marilin Cabezas (GP) | Chola Contravisual (GP) | Anaid Alcázar (PF)