

FORGING THROUGH THE FIRE

A Report With Recommendations From The Strengthening Organizing Project



July 2025

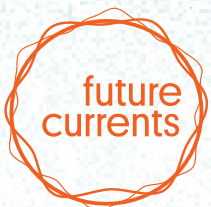
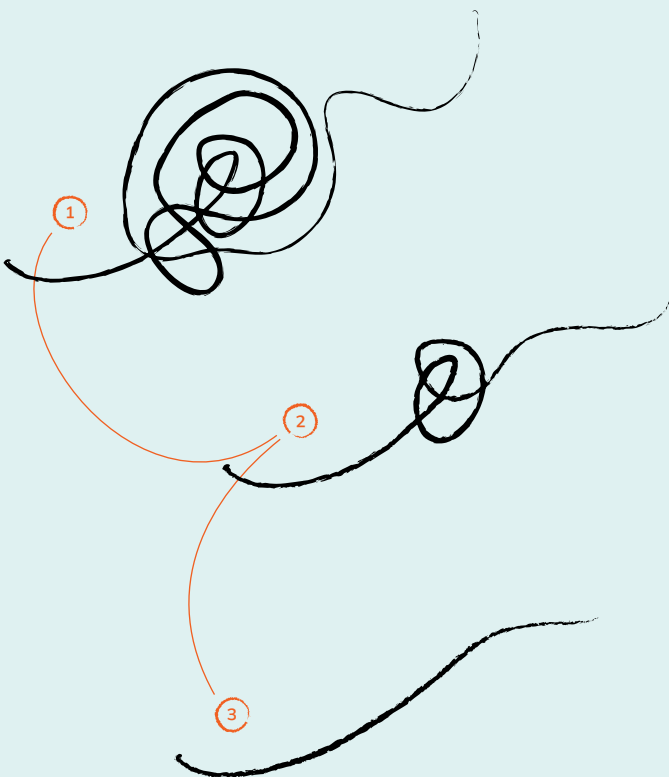


TABLE OF CONTENTS



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1 **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY** *page 4*

2 **WHERE WE ARE NOW** *page 6*

3 **FACING THE FIRE** *page 8*

4 **THE STORY OF THE STRENGTHENING ORGANIZING PROJECT** *page 10*

4.1 **Unpacking Our Terms** *page 11*

5 **SURVEYING THE FIELD: MAJOR THEMES** *page 12*

5.1 **A Hunger for Vision and Strategy** *page 12*

5.2 **Building the Bench We Need: Training and Leadership Development** *page 14*

5.3 **Maximizing the Power of Movement Upsurge Moments** *page 16*

6 **WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE?** *page 18*

6.1 **What Do We Mean by “Good Strategy”?** *page 19*

7 **ACTIONS TO STRENGTHEN ORGANIZING** *page 20*

7.1 **What Organizations Can Do to Strengthen Organizing** *page 20*

7.2 **Where the Field Can Innovate to Strengthen Organizing** *page 25*

7.3 **How Philanthropy Can Strengthen Organizing** *page 30*

7.4 **What We’ve Learned as Organizers Organizing Other Organizers** *page 33*

8 **CONCLUSION: FORGING OURSELVES THROUGH FIRE** *page 34*

9 **APPENDIX A: METHODOLOGY** *page 36*

10 **APPENDIX B: BUILDING ON THE EXISTING LITERATURE ABOUT STRENGTHENING ORGANIZING** *page 40*

11 **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS** *page 42*

12 **ABOUT THE AUTHORS** *page 42*

13 **ABOUT FUTURE CURRENTS** *page 44*

1 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

We are in an era of polycrisis, a period of interlocking political, economic, social, and ecological crises that has radically shifted the terrain on which we all organize. And yet, as our conditions have shifted dramatically, we — organizers and organizational leaders of the grassroots left, movement strategists and capacity-builders, and philanthropic allies — have not made an equal and corresponding shift.

Instead, we're largely disoriented, stuck in place, overwhelmed by the enormity of what we're up against. We reflexively do what's familiar even when we know it's insufficient. While there is exciting experimentation happening in the organizing field, many of us continue to rely on late-20th century organizing methods — issue-based lobbying and advocacy, electoral campaigns, and one-off protest actions — to solve 21st century problems that are new and complex.

Many of us also hunger for something different. There is broad agreement among organizers that our new reality requires new tools, new practices, and new habits to confront the threats we are facing, fight the blaze, and chart a path forward to the world we want. We *want* to harness the power of movement upsurges like the George Floyd uprising, but how? We *want* to get to our North Star, but what's the plan?

How do we break out of the loop we find ourselves in?

Several years ago, Future Currents kicked off the Strengthening Organizing Project to answer that question and to pinpoint the underlying dynamics that are holding us back. Led by a team of seasoned organizers — Cristina Jimenez, Nsé Ufot, Crystal Zermeño, Kandace Montgomery, LJ Amsterdam, Lissy Romanow, and Deb Axt — the Strengthening Organizing Project makes a broad, focused proposal for moving forward in rapidly changing conditions. Over a two-year period, the team held hundreds of in-depth conversations with organizers, both new and seasoned, and brought movement strategists together to honestly explore our collective shortcomings and tackle what needs to change.

Out of that process came a diagnosis of what ails us — and from that diagnosis came the seeds of solutions to the crisis facing the organizing field. This is a call to face our current reality with our best thinking and courage.

First, a diagnosis:

- We lack strategy that is equal to the conflagration before us: an analysis of the conditions, an assessment of our combined power, and a plan to win.
- We are missing some of the knowledge, skills, and attitude to devise and implement that strategy. In other words, we lack the leadership and seasoned organizers we need.
- Even if we want to get out of the loop, because we know it's not working, we are socially and materially incentivized to keep running in place.
- As a result, organizational leaders, organizers, and volunteer members are being burned by the fire of our time instead of forged by it.



What time is it on the clock of the world?

— Grace Lee Boggs



Photo Credit:
LJ Amsterdam

Fixing what ails us will require some transformation — inside our organizations, across the organizing field, and within philanthropy — all at once. Future Currents is by no means the first to suggest that fundamental changes are needed in those three arenas. But this report identifies priority areas for fresh ideas and adaptation, ones where organizers and funders have the agency to make the greatest impact.

Perhaps the most critical shift is in the realm of strategy: both its planning and execution. Organizations must reorient their work toward the creation of good strategy *in these conditions* and, crucially, the development of organizers to create that strategy. Fieldwide, as organizers, we must create the vehicles to develop collective strategy and nurture wise strategists; and funders must shift toward resourcing and rewarding that work.

This report outlines the various challenges that organizers are facing, how Future Currents sees the crux of those challenges, and a set of interventions for the progressive organizing field as a whole to forge ahead. You'll find more ideas for innovation and evolution within these pages. None of them are total solutions to the problems that we face. Rather, we hope to leave you with a clear sense of where the evolution required must *begin* — and we invite you to evolve with us.

2 WHERE WE ARE NOW

In April 2025, the Strengthening Organizing team hosted a conversation between two movement elders who had organized in the South through the labor and civil rights struggles of the last 70 years. When we asked them for their assessment of this moment, one elder said, “We’ve been here before”; the other said, “This is absolutely unprecedented.”

Organizers today are living in this question: Are we in a new era of history or an accelerated version of an old one?

For the last 100 years, we have been living — nominally — in a liberal democracy, a realm where elites govern our political institutions and systematically exclude some from participation. But those institutions function somewhat reliably, and the rule of law is enforced, albeit asymmetrically. Our current moment, however, is marked by a rapid restructuring of the state, steering us in undemocratic directions, without any pretense of inclusive egalitarianism and an explicit disregard for the rule of law. Elements of liberal democracy remain present, but its institutions and norms are increasingly hollow: Scheduled elections, court rulings, university graduations, and “free press” proceed largely on schedule, but power is more consolidated than ever among elites, many of whom propagate a ghoulish, racist apocalypticism. Today, these shells of former institutions are failing to mitigate or are actively accelerating a polycrisis — the combustion of political, economic, social, and ecological challenges that characterize our era.

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The world is shifting and it still feels a little like we are grasping at the old world. I am fearful that we are trying to solve yesterday's problem, and that we don't know what tomorrow's solution is.

– *Desmond Serrette*

“Polycrisis,” a term popularized by historian Adam Tooze¹ in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, describes the state in which disparate crises add up to far more than the sum of their parts. As Tooze explains, a polycrisis “is overwhelming and leaves us unable to cope, questioning our identity and finding it very difficult to decide what the ground is that we stand on because it's being destabilized from so many different directions at once.”

The common sense around how the U.S. will navigate polycrisis remains unsettled. That vacuum will be either filled by forces that further erode public institutions and goods, maximizing the interests and authority of elites, or it will be filled by *us*, the people who live in this country, produce its wealth, and remain intimately connected with those beyond our borders. Organizing ensures that those who experience polycrisis first and worst are central in determining and disseminating the new common sense.

What we are fighting for hasn't changed: We are still building a multiracial democracy where we live in integrity with each other and the land. But the conditions in which we are organizing *have* changed. We are living in a new world, where elements of the old still persist in hollow form.

¹ Complexity theorists Edgar Morin and Anne Brigitte Kern first used the term polycrisis in their 1999 book, [Homeland Earth](#), to argue that the world faces no single vital problem, but many vital problems. Sociologist Mark Swilling then adopted the term to capture “a nested set of globally interactive socio-economic, ecological and cultural-institutional crises that defy reduction to a single cause” (2013, p. 98). The term polycrisis entered mainstream discourse after the World Economic Forum in Davos in 2023. See this [New York Times Op-Ed](#) by Thomas Homer-Dixon and Johan Rockström to read more about the “perfect storm” of crises.

3 FACING THE FIRE



Do I really want to be integrated into a burning house?

– James Baldwin

Our job as organizers is to build a home — a society — that we can live in.

For decades, organizers have been navigating a tension in their work: a deep desire to radically redesign the foundation of the house all of us currently live in and a daily reality of tending to the unending repairs simply required to allow people to live safely and with dignity. Many wondered — years before this moment — when, or whether, our daily repairs and steady campaigns would overhaul the foundation.

But now that house is engulfed in flames, and the fire is accelerating at a rate that exponentially outpaces our ability to fight it.

Methods across the field — grassroots lobbying and advocacy, electoral campaigns, and targeted actions to persuade elites — were not designed to contend with an authoritarian government, let alone a polycrisis. And because the enormity of what we're up against requires us to respond — to everything, at all times, it seems — we are often reacting, relying either on a limited set of methods or casting them by the wayside altogether. Perfecting techniques like the one-on-one, or jettisoning those techniques altogether, will not answer the larger question of building and wielding power.

Organizers are stuck in a loop where we are overwhelmed and afraid to face both a complex polycrisis and the insufficiency of our organizing methods to address it. We lack strategy equal to the conflagration before us: an analysis of the conditions, an assessment of our combined power, and a plan to win. And we are missing some of the leadership — the knowledge, skills, and attitudes — to devise and implement that strategy. And even if we want to get out of the loop, we are socially and materially incentivized to keep running in place. As a result, the fire of our time is burning organizational leaders, organizers, and volunteer members instead of forging them.

The organizing field is currently in survival mode: fighting, fleeing, and freezing. Telling ourselves that we can win if we just try harder and if we just tweak our existing tools slightly only sets us up for confusion, exhaustion, and shame later.

But organizers *want* to make new moves. They agree that the political conditions have evolved and that our organizing methods must evolve as well. They know we are at an inflection point where we must make hard choices.



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Rae Breaux

Despite the blaze, we see bright spots of experimentation across the field. Movement organizations led powerful rapid-response efforts during the COVID-19 pandemic, won significant federal investment for a transition to green energy, waged unionization fights on new fronts, and forced a reckoning with the failures of police and prisons into mainstream discourse. The Palestine solidarity movement has attracted new activists and fostered a growing internationalism; the infrastructure for tenant organizing has boldly expanded to contend with an urgent national housing crisis; hotly contested municipal elections are garnering record numbers of volunteers and national media visibility; and new swathes of the population — including researchers and bureaucrats — are flexing the muscles of resistance for the first time. Organizers are more openly speaking to each other across disciplines, generations, and borders. They want to build a pluralistic movement ecosystem, where groups have specific functions, clear lanes, and a high level of trust with each other.

Even as democracy fails, some of our existing tools and approaches remain useful. Organizing is an elemental activity of being human. An ineffable spirit compels us to want to get free *together*. But in response to the growing speed and scale of the fire we face externally, some organizers have turned inward — toward intramural turf wars, elaborate internal organizational processes, or calls for rigor in older organizing methods — at the expense of seeing the larger political horizon.



4 THE STORY OF THE STRENGTHENING ORGANIZING PROJECT

“I can’t believe we’ve never sat down to talk about this before,” said Kandace Montgomery, formerly of Black Visions, a Minneapolis based organization at the center of the uprising in response to George Floyd’s murder in 2020. The Strengthening Organizing Project and Future Current’s Direct Action Incubation Lab convened a “movement upsurge” retreat in summer 2024 to surface lessons from some of the most defining political moments of the past decade, such as the protests in Minneapolis that evolved into a global upsurge. But we did not know until we sat down together that it would be the first time that Minnesota organizers from different organizations — each of them at the center of the uprising, each of them from a different organizing lineage — had been able to collectively process that momentous period of movement activity. It was also the first time that organizers outside of Minnesota had the opportunity to witness a conversation about an uprising that so profoundly affected their own work.

Over the course of the last two years, we have spoken with over 200 organizers through interviews, convenings, and online cohorts.² We’ve heard similar comments from organizers who hadn’t metabolized the big fights they’d won and lost. Leaders in our field are busier than ever, responding to crisis after crisis, and the urgency and pace of that work leaves little time for reflection. Many of us are hungry to have real and honest conversations about our movement, to learn from the past and each other, and to strategize together — but few of us find space for it.

Organizing is an activity within larger strategies for change. That begs the question: To what end do we organize? At Future Currents, we found that most organizers are working toward an implicit horizon of justice, outlined further below. The purpose of strengthening organizing is to move closer to this horizon of justice; no matter where we as organizers

² For more on our methodology, please see “Appendix A: Methodology” at the end of this report.



The past is the one thing we are not prisoners of. We can do with the past exactly what we wish. What we can’t do is to change its consequences.

– John Berger

live, whom we are organizing, or the issue we are working on, that is how we all intuitively measure our success.

While we aim to accurately diagnose our situation, our proposals — the treatment plan below — is not total. This is because the terrain itself is rapidly changing and our view is partial; it is also because the habitual ways we have been taught to see limit our view.

The central argument of this report is that we need to be sober about the forces we are up against and unrelenting in our commitment to doing the work better. And that commitment needs to be infrastructurally *supported* and courageously *incentivized*.

There are two ways in which the Strengthening Organizing Project aims to advance the ongoing conversation about the transformational changes that the field needs. First, it is crucial for grassroots organization leaders to identify what *is* within their sphere of influence at a time when so much falls outside that sphere. Second, we are focused on interventions that address the most persistent and pernicious problems and ones that therefore will have the greatest impact.

We offer this assessment in a spirit of agitation but also encouragement.

4.1 Unpacking Our Terms

What do we mean by *organizing*?

While there are many different ways of defining “organizing,” the many organizers we spoke with over the course of this project define organizing as a process of **facilitating people to take action in a collective struggle**. Most interviewees also included the following elements:

- Building a base of people who are directly impacted by conditions of oppression or injustice
- Taking collective action through an organized strategy with specific demands
- Developing leaders and leadership
- Shifting the balance of power while making material improvements in people’s lives

When we talk about “organizing” in this report, this is what we mean.

This definition leaves space for the wide variation in *how* we organize: For some, it means canvassing for an electoral candidate, lobbying decision-makers, and identifying potential leaders to recruit as new members. For others, it means staging a media-friendly direct action and absorbing and integrating hundreds or thousands of new people into an organization through petitions, mass calls, and mass trainings. For some, it means agitating workers to withhold their labor to secure better wages and working conditions. For still others, it means passing local or state legislation through a combination of grassroots lobbying and direct action targeting decision-makers. All of these tactics and approaches can be included within an organizing strategy.

What do we mean by *power*?

For the purposes of our discussions with organizers — many of whom are focused on the question of how to build “power” — we relied on the following schema that describes different types or modes of power:³

- **Economic power:** This is the control of money and resources, wealth, and assets, including the ability to control production (what gets made, how, where and when, by whom), labor (working conditions, wages), trade, and investment.
- **Political power:** This is the ability to decide the laws and policies that govern our lives, which includes who is elected or appointed to do the governing on our behalf. This includes all basic functions of government — legislative, judicial, administrative, and military — and determines which taxes are levied, how taxes are spent, and who is disciplined and punished.
- **Ideological power:** This is the ability to define and shape the “common sense” — what is considered normal and socially acceptable and what is not. Sometimes this is also called “cultural power” or “narrative power.”
- **Solidarity power:** This is the ability to work collectively, in large numbers, with strong cohesion. This is the power to consolidate diffuse sentiments into coherent action. Sometimes this is also called “associative power.”

Why does *organizing matter*?

“Organizing” is as old as domination itself. As civil rights leader Rev. James Lawson often said, there was resistance from the moment that the first slave set foot on American soil.⁴ Without organizing ourselves — transforming our individual needs into collective demands and real leverage — we have few means of shaping our environments or our destinies.

While other models of social change — including policy development, litigation, and legislative advocacy — play critical roles in addressing our conditions, organizing is the means through which the governed and the exploited assert our collective agency. By engaging large numbers of people in sustained campaigns and organizations, organizing efforts ensure that policy proposals meet the needs of the communities most vulnerable to crisis. Organizing a mass base also has important educative effects, developing everyday people’s collective capacities to interpret and analyze the conditions in their lives. Finally, building strong grassroots organizations can play a critical role in helping to rebuild the trust in institutions and collective action that neoliberal policies have steadily undermined. This *process* of learning to trust and stand with large groups of people is critical to rebuilding democratic structures in our image.

³ Note that this schema is adapted and revised from the one offered in Stephanie Luce and Deepak Bhargava’s book, *Practical Radicals: Seven Strategies to Change the World*, The New Press, 2023.

⁴ James Lawson Institute, 2017.

5 SURVEYING THE FIELD: MAJOR THEMES



Each generation must, out of relative obscurity, discover its mission, fulfill it, or betray it.

– Frantz Fanon

Future Currents began the Strengthening Organizing Project by conducting 100 in-depth interviews with organizers, organizational leaders, and capacity-builders based in the U.S.⁵ We asked them: What is the state of “organizing” in the U.S. today? What are the hurdles to building powerful movements, and how do we clear them? What is happening in our field today that is exciting?

Organizers are keenly aware that many of the challenges confronting us are outside of our control. We are subject to historical forces much larger than us and organize in a landscape carved by elites with capital, laws, police, and the military at their disposal. As one organizer put it: “We are up against a really powerful opposition. We can do everything right and still lose.”

But there is also widespread agreement that we control some of the forces and factors, including the dynamics and habits internal to the organizing field. These dynamics and habits interlock to form a knot that inhibits powerful organizing. Organizers *know* we have agency in how we relate to our economic and political conditions, how we spend our time, and how we build our organizations. This is the sphere where we can take wise action.

What are the strands of that knot? Several themes emerged from the project’s interviews, convenings, and working groups:⁶

- A hunger for vision and strategy
- Building the bench we need
- Maximizing the power of movement upsurge moments

5.1 A Hunger for Vision and Strategy

There is a widespread consensus among organizers and organizational leaders that we lack an honest analysis of our own power and accurate analyses of our opposition: institutions that we need to move, corporate agendas we need to disrupt, and ascendent authoritarianism we need to defeat in order to win. Without precision in power analysis, organizers develop strategies that are often rooted in the over- or underestimation of our power and vague assumptions about our leverage. One interviewee noted, “We don’t have a strong analysis of the opposition’s infrastructure, and therefore we don’t have a strategic understanding of the power and tactics that we need to contest.”

As the Strengthening Organizing Project dove deeper in our retreats with organizers, it became clear that there is, in fact, remarkable alignment on a broad vision for big wins. When we asked organizers what they wanted to win in their lifetimes, they repeatedly spoke of real democracy along both political and economic axes: There is no political democracy without a democratic economy and no democratic economy without the political means to enforce it. This includes a fundamental redistribution of wealth, universal healthcare, affordable and high-quality housing for all, and cancelling debt related to basic necessities. Justice also includes rights for the disenfranchised within our borders — the incarcerated,

⁵ These interviews reflected the breadth and depth of progressive grassroots organizing, spanning regions, issue areas, and sectors. While we spoke with newer organizers, we prioritized organizers with a decade of experience or more; 1 out of every 4 people we spoke with had been doing movement work for 35-plus years. For more on our methodology, please see Appendix A at the end of this report.

⁶ For more, see our [interim report “Fighting Shape: An Assessment of U.S. Organizing”](#) (2024).

detained, and undocumented — as well as the majority of people on earth who are subjected to the violent whims of U.S. foreign policy. Organizers want constitutional reform, decisive action on the climate crisis, and reconciliation and repair to Indigenous and Black communities.

But these big, transformational victories were often not what their organizations' campaigns focused on, and many organizations lack a clearly articulated hypothesis about how such victories might be won. As one organizer put it, "We do not have a strategy that adds up to what we want to win." There was widespread agreement that organizers have few frameworks for long-term strategy or collective strategy,⁷ lacking any model for collaborating across organizing lineages or concentrating our resources and demands on several major targets.⁸

Many of our models and tools were developed and codified against the backdrop of a liberal consensus defined by the New Deal and the Great Society programs, an expansion of protections for labor, of the welfare state, and of civil rights; others were against the backdrop of neoliberalism, a conservative period where social movements were largely absent and progressives accepted their marginality, preserving what they could of the U.S. welfare state through a pragmatic incrementalism.

Few organizers mentioned that the power analyses they use take into account the national and global political shifts of recent decades and, correspondingly, that they did not fully understand the role of economic and cultural power in relation to those shifts. We heard that while some good power analysis tools do exist,⁹ those tools are limited in scope because most power-building organizations only look at power in one way: building the size of their membership to win legislative and electoral campaigns through established political channels.

Our retreats revealed that movement upsurges expand the movement's ideological power (also called "narrative power" or "cultural power") — crystallizing new demands, changing public opinion, harnessing media attention, and interrupting elite discourse — but organizations are confused about how to interact with them. A miscalculation, or simply a missing theory of power, has serious consequences for what we do and what we win.

Leaders *want* to feed this hunger for vision and strategy but repeatedly underscored that they were chronically overwhelmed by their work, lacking support to get off of the hamster wheel. **Even though the political moment requires iteration and experimentation, there aren't social or material incentives to experiment, change, and do things differently.**

Top-Line Takeaways

- As organizers, we are more aligned than we think on our broader vision. But our organizations don't have a plan or strategy to win that vision, and our organizations' campaigns are not necessarily laying the groundwork to achieve those big victories.
- We don't have the tools for mid- or long-range planning, clearly articulated hypotheses to advance major structural reforms, or frameworks for cross-organizational collaboration outside campaign coalitions or national networks.
- This is both a power challenge and strategy challenge: in the absence of a shared power analysis, organizers and movement strategists develop strategies that are often rooted in the overestimation or underestimation of our power, and in return, these strategies don't lead us to build the power and achieve the change we need.
- We know something needs to change and that we are running in place — but we worry about what we will lose if we choose a new path. Organizers need support from each other and from philanthropy to be able to operate in a different way.

⁷ As one organizer put it, "How we align our fights is a key question for the leadership of our organizations. We can say, "This is your fight and I stand with you, we have the same common enemy." But our bases are fighting in their own corners on their own issues but not sharing strategies or ideas."

⁸ As one organizer put it, organizers lack an "assessment of where power lies and how to shift it through organizing and structural reforms over time."

⁹ Interviewees reported that the power mapping tools from SCOPE and Midwest Academy are the most helpful and widely used tools to assess power. Organizers named using these tools both for campaign planning and for popular education.

5.2 Building the Bench We Need: Training and Leadership Development

Because organizational leaders do not have the time and space to think and strategize — or train and coach others in power assessment, power building, and strategy development — we end up with strategies that are unfocused or incoherent. No organizer or organizational leader needs to have every skill. But how can we, as one organizer put it, “build a team that collectively has all the skills we need?”

A clear point of consensus in the field is that we lack developed talent at all levels of organizing but especially at the levels of lead organizer and organizing director, which are most responsible for strategy and require significant organizing skill and experience. We have, as one organizer put it, “a massive pipeline problem of organizing leaders, and the people who are the best organizers of our generation became executive directors.” They added, “The pipeline is just drying up.”

The lack of experienced organizers has meant that newer organizers don’t receive the mentorship and training they need, perpetuating the cycle. “There is not enough training — and what exists is sending people off to an experience, not being guided and supervised closely by someone who has lived through challenging campaigns,” one interviewee said.



Photo Credit:
LJ Amsterdam

Not only is there not enough training happening, but too often trainings are not integrated with the daily work of organizing and organization-building. When organizers are lucky enough to go to a training, they rarely have an opportunity to interpret and apply their learnings at home — let alone reflect on them with a mentor or be supported in thinking through how to put those new learnings into actual practice. Additionally, there are also sometimes analytical incongruencies between organizing and training curriculum.



We noted that the vast majority of learning and leadership development happens inside of organizations; yet too many organizations deprioritize training and development, and a culture of learning and assessment has grown weak. As one participant put it, “In many organizations, the idea of leadership development is seen as *supplemental* to people’s roles rather than something central or inherent to their roles.” We cannot address the organizer pipeline problem without rehabilitating the culture and structure of learning inside of organizations.

What, concretely, are the gaps in knowledge and skills that we need to fill? While organizers are working in different contexts, issues, and lineages, they largely agree on major gaps in the existing leadership ladder:

- Newcomers to the movement need to understand the difference between organizing and activism, why recruitment matters, and why instant gratification won’t be possible. They should be warmly welcomed to the movement, encouraged to ask questions and be curious, and quickly moved into action.
- Intermediate leaders (whether staff or volunteer) should know how to talk to someone who doesn’t agree with them and how to listen well, how to accurately identify leaders, and how to engage in principled struggle.
- Senior organizers should know how to design *and* implement strategy on shifting terrain. They should be able to draft strategic proposals and be able to move them, whether through their own organizations or through their broader issue area or landscape. They should know how to cut an issue, manage a project budget, and gracefully navigate their own and others’ trauma. They should be able to give direct feedback to leaders to uphold standards and expectations, and they should be accountable to the commitments they make.
- And organizational leaders need to embody a posture of learning, offering and inviting feedback regularly. They should be ruthlessly grounding decisions in the organization’s goals, competent at developing organizers (whether in a management capacity or otherwise), crafting organizational strategy with an eye to the conjuncture, and designing organizational structures that democratize strategy and leadership and allow for scale.

Organizers expressed that leaders at all levels need more appreciation for discipline, more fluency in talking about their organization’s theory of change and its role within a larger ecosystem, and a relentless orientation to power.

Organizers agree that the leadership pipeline has recurring gaps and that these are not merely gaps in *knowledge* and *skill* — they are also gaps in *attitude*. Organizing effectively is not just about what we know or how well we carry out certain tasks; it’s also about having a strong backbone; fire in the belly; and a spirit of daring, determination, and moxie.

To fill these gaps, leaders need access to more comprehensive and more politically relevant training and more consistent and more extensive mentorship and coaching.



Photo Credit:
LJ Amsterdam

Top-Line Takeaways

- The field won’t move closer to our goals unless we have a deep bench of talent at all levels of organizing experience.
- To get there, we need expanded training infrastructure, both inside and outside our organizations.
- We also need ongoing coaching and mentorship to integrate and reinforce training.
- To build the field’s bench of organizers, we must also rehabilitate a culture and structure of learning inside of organizations.
- There are recurring gaps in knowledge, skills, and attitude at all levels of leadership that we can only fill through expanded training, mentorship, and coaching.

5.3 Maximizing the Power of Movement Upsurge Moments

When we asked organizers to identify the moments that most shaped their work over the past 20 years, they unanimously named movement upsurge moments or trigger events: the murder of Trayvon Martin, the fight against S.B. 1070 or the “Show Your Papers” law, Occupy Wall Street, the COVID-19 pandemic, and the summer 2020 uprising after the police murder of George Floyd. These moments defined organizers’ political landscape and often their daily work, and yet they had no clearly defined place in their organizations’ theory of power, priorities, or campaigns. As one organizer put it, “Social movements and uprisings are now part of the landscape, but we aren’t sure how to relate to them.”¹⁰

In our gatherings, organizers agreed that we need to be better organized in responding to and maximizing movement moments to build power. Upsurges shift the terrain on which we organize: They function as a form of mass education, politicizing millions rapidly; shifting the common sense of what’s acceptable or urgent; and creating a sense of spiritual awakening, belonging, and connection. Consequently, new and often more radical demands emerge during upsurges along with new opportunities to advance those demands politically. Organizers agreed that some groups are better positioned than others to advance these demands in the public and the media, while others may be best positioned to translate that opening into new legislation at the state and local levels.

Photo Credit:
Rae Breaux



¹⁰ At the Movement Upsurge gathering (a joint retreat of the Future Currents Direct Action Incubation Lab and Strengthening Organizing Project), we discussed lessons from the 2020 uprising that began in Minneapolis after the killing of George Floyd and then spread nationwide. We also discussed the more recent upsurge for Palestinian liberation and the upsurge we hope will occur through the general strike planned for 2028.



Photo Credit:
Rae Breaux

But few organizers had a sense of the different roles that upsurges invite us to play — or how to play their own role well. And few organizers had plans existing in their organizations to anticipate the next upsurge or crisis. Too often, movement moments catch us by surprise, and the way we react is characterized by panic or paralysis rather than swift, decisive action.

How can we harness the energy of movement upsurges to build power? We need a theory of how to maximize upsurges' impact — translating new cultural energy into real political and economic power — and a matrix of different roles our organizations can play.

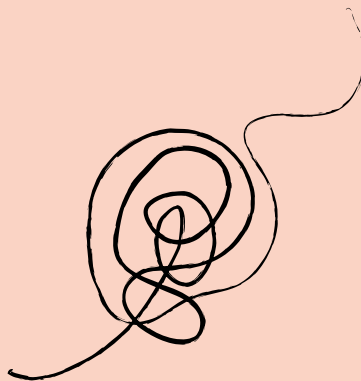
Top-Line Takeaways

- Upsurges define our political work — but currently, these moments catch us by surprise, and the way our organizations react is characterized by panic or paralysis.
- We are hungry to engage with movement upsurge moments, but we have yet to build the organizing methods and organizational infrastructure to springboard this energy into durable political and economic changes.
- There is a disconnect between our day-to-day organizing and campaigns and the upsurge moments that galvanize large swaths of the public.
- We intuitively know we have different roles to play in an upsurge — but we don't know what those roles are, how best to play those roles, and how to stay in coordination.

6 WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE?

The Strengthening Organizing Project has a proposal for how to move forward.

To put out the conflagration, both staff and volunteer leaders need to become good strategists. Good strategists are those able to reckon honestly with external conditions and our power to change them. They are driven by the imagination and focus to create, implement, and evaluate a plan to win. To become those strategists, leaders need support in the form of updated frameworks, spaces of learning, and material incentives for change – from their organizations, philanthropy, and each other. In other words, support must be intellectual, emotional, and material for us to get ourselves out of the loop and quell both the daily fires and the larger historical conflagration.



6.1 What Do We Mean by “Good Strategy”?



There is no good strategy without good strategists. The process starts with the people. A good strategist leads with honesty and creativity, rigor, and emotional awareness; a good strategist is willing to pick a big fight and make a plan to win, knowing it might not succeed.

And a good strategist follows through on that plan. While they must be willing to adapt in the face of changing conditions, they need to be focused enough to see a hypothesis all the way through to learn from the results. Good strategists maximize the resources they have instead of imagining that those resources are unlimited; they think beyond the moment they are in, and they think beyond themselves; they embrace study, ideological debate, and talking to people they disagree with.

And they are rooted in the communities they are organizing. They open up space for volunteers — instead of only staff — to do the work of strategizing because they recognize that there is no “good strategy” without the

lived knowledge and deep commitment of a base. As one organizer put it, “You can have a lot of good strategists without having an aligned strategy”; another organizer underscored that, noting that “the folks who are most impacted by our lack of strategy are not usually the folks who assign themselves the role of strategist.” Democratizing strategy development to ensure that the volunteer base is at the center of decisions about if and how and when to escalate would build a culture of deep ownership and deep learning. And it would be a sea change for many organizations.

Good strategists aren’t born — we must intentionally develop them through the process of learning how to organize people. We emphasize “strategists” here because we believe that getting out of the loop we are in will require leadership — people who take responsibility for creating processes within collective formations to devise ambitious plans and see them through — but individuals, on their own, cannot “do” good strategy.

Strategy is a muscle that we need to build through an expanded set of frameworks and robust processes. Good strategy is actualized through a virtuous cycle of execution and evaluation. As we run campaigns, rather than waiting until the end to do some hasty reflection, we should instead regularly assess our strategy, refining our analysis of the conditions and our power based on what we’re learning. All leadership, staff, and volunteer members should cultivate skills in both implementation and reflection.

Developing good strategy will also require us to expand and sharpen our strategic lexicon so that good strategists can more effectively communicate, collaborate, and accompany each other inside big plans to win.



Photo Credit:
Kandace Montgomery

7 ACTIONS TO STRENGTHEN ORGANIZING

To win transformational changes, organizing needs to evolve on several planes: on the organizational level, through fieldwide interventions, and in the philanthropic realm.

There are already capacity-building groups and power-building formations with expertise in training, strategy, and movement upsurges. What the project heard time and again, however, is that *more* infrastructure is needed to meet the field's needs. Our aim is not to create redundancies but rather to highlight how critical these existing efforts are and encourage an expansion.

For several years, organizers have been enumerating the tangle of challenges they face. But, as a complex system, the organizing field cannot be strengthened through one single intervention *or* a laundry list of unrelated efforts. Our aim here is to identify — and disentangle — the most important threads that can undo the larger knot. If we intervene in these three areas simultaneously and strategically, we will strengthen organizing far more effectively than if we tackle lots of disparate problems.

The following pilots are a series of interventions that organizers participating in this project initiated, and which our team has further developed, to address these three key areas of need.

7.1 What Organizations Can Do to Strengthen Organizing

We believe that ground zero for improving the craft of organizing is inside our individual organizations. Our organizations are the core units of the broader field, and transformative change begins there. No amount of external training or resources can overcome the challenges we face if our organizational habits don't change. But by committing to changing how we work inside our organizations, we unlock fieldwide changes that move us closer to winning.

We urge organizations to face the fire: Recognize the severity of what we're up against; take a good, hard look at their resources to fight it; and approach ourselves and each other with less shame and more honesty.



Photo Credit:
LJ Amsterdam

Recommendations:

1

Update our strategies for nondemocratic conditions.

While many of us have organized in the most undemocratic shadows of capital and particularly authoritarian parts of the country, none of us has organized in a national context of nondemocracy where the pretense of egalitarianism has been cast aside altogether. While organizers believe that far more people — including staff — need to be familiar with tools like cutting an issue or power mapping a target, they also believe that our existing tools *alone* are not enough. Some of those tools may now be incongruent with the conditions where we are using them.

With this in mind, organizations must approach strategy with a spirit of rigorous and disciplined experimentation. At the onset of a campaign, begin by explaining how it builds on or departs from the previous campaign's lessons. What hypotheses or assumptions are we testing in this next campaign? How do our methods correspond to our theory of power and the leverage we believe we need to win the campaign? What does “winning” mean and why?

We also encourage organizations to study strategies and methods that issue from undemocratic conditions. For example,

- In the early 20th century, workers engaged in strikes to take direct action against restrictions on their rights to organize and advocate for themselves.
- The civil rights movement in the Jim Crow South anticipated a “protracted struggle—organizing around non-violent assessment and focusing on a target—with maybe a decade or two of intense activity that does not depend upon Congressional legislation, but rather forces upon a city or nation the agenda of justice and truth.”¹¹
- The field of “civil resistance” advocates for a form of organizing that is less oriented to persuading elite decision-makers at the helm of institutions and more focused on organizing the people

within those institutions — workers, consumers, students, parents, etc. — to stop complying with that institution by withdrawing their participation.

These strategies depart from the premise that we need to engage a wide swath of the public and that we must consolidate public support in the form of methods that are coercive and popular rather than incrementalist or technocratic.

In our current political context, creativity is a necessity rather than a luxury, so we must relate to failure as a critical opportunity for learning rather than a discouragement from trying new things. In our organizations, disincentivizing innovation often comes from a place of fear, but we can courageously push against that instinct because we know what is at stake if we don't evolve the ways we work.

¹¹ According to Reverend James Lawson in an interview with Andrew Steltzer in [“What's Wrong with Our Social Justice Movements?”](#) Reimagine Magazine. Vol. 17, No. 2, Fall 2010.

Recommendations: (Continued)

2 *Prioritize the work that gets us to our goal and ruthlessly say "no" to work that doesn't advance that goal.*

We don't have unlimited time and resources. Too often, we scatter our energies away from the core work of organizing and then end up depleted, reinforcing a cycle of inadequacy that leads to burnout. We have to prioritize how and where we channel our resources to maximize our leverage.

We must ruthlessly say no to work that is not part of a coherent strategy that gets us to our goals — even if it upsets allies, sacrifices potential funding, or fails to satisfy the personal interests of individuals in the staff and base. There is simply no way to do good strategy and make everyone happy because good strategy is about achieving our goals in the world rather than appeasing individuals.

Our current political climate may require new forms of collaboration, but participation in coalitions, networks, and national formations can sometimes sap energy away from the work an organization is driving rather than turbocharging it. Being clear and committed about what lane of work your organization is holding down helps clarify when and why to join forces with bigger formations; helps you know your lane and cheer on others as they hold down theirs; and helps you know when to merge.

3 *Reshape organizational structures and redefine roles within organizations to prioritize the nuts and bolts of organizing.*

One of the most consistent refrains we heard from organizers, especially senior staff and directors, is that they would be more effective if they were able to offload the administrative work and fundraising that constitutes a lot of their time and focus on developing strategy, ensuring their organization implements it. Creating the conditions for good strategists to thrive requires rethinking our roles to free up the most experienced organizers to devote their energies to tracking a rapidly changing environment, drafting and implementing strategic plans,

developing junior organizers, and evaluating what is and isn't working. We need to remove some of the administrative and fundraising roadblocks in the paths of good strategists. How can staff job descriptions change to allow people to do less but better? What can members take on to increase their connection to the organization and develop their leadership? Making hard choices about priorities will increase our ability to focus, allowing us to hold each other to higher standards.

In addition to reshaping roles, our organizational structures need to evolve as well. We see increasing experimentation with legal structures beyond the 501(c)(3), with building diverse and stable streams of revenue (from member dues to earned income), and with building cross-organizational infrastructure to manage finances and operations. All of this has the potential to allow senior staff to focus more on organizing and leadership development. And it is all the more important in conditions where philanthropy is as under siege politically as many of our organizations.

Senior staff should understand management as leadership development. With this in mind, staff should be realistic about how many people they can manage *well*; for many, this is no more than three to four staff members. Organizations should also encourage junior staff to shadow senior staff, just as organizations encourage volunteer members to accompany organizers as part of their development. A great deal of learning happens through modeling; watching someone who has skills we are still cultivating, talking to them about how they do it, and getting feedback from them when we try.

4

Develop clear base-building and leadership development metrics that are in service of advancing organizational strategy.

The majority of interviewees also said base-building practices today lack standards and rigor. To increase our discipline in bread-and-butter organizing practices, we need clearer metrics of success, allowing us to assess whether we are building power or not, how, and why.

Organizations must fundamentally align metrics with our context, our plan to win, our core source of leverage, and our timeline. For instance, for an issue at the center of national attention, the kinds of changes we seek — and the timeline for those changes — will be different than for an issue that the mass media and general public chronically ignore. If our source of leverage is

electoral, we will need a certain number of leaders and members in key districts to deliver a margin of victory; if our source of leverage is economic, we will need both breadth of commitments to strike, boycott, or withhold rent within a given business or portfolio, but we will also need depth of commitment, particularly among those taking real risks. If our goal is to force a boss to raise wages in

contract negotiations, we should be able to guess the losses that a potential strike would have to incur to force the boss's hand. Organizations that lack these metrics or fail to consult them in regular assessments of progress are susceptible to distraction; focus and standards erode, producing busyness that does not meaningfully advance our goals.

5

Embed a culture of learning and leadership development — training, coaching, and feedback — inside our organizations.

For our organizations to thrive, we must embed a culture of learning — training, coaching, and organizational practices — inside our organizations. That culture must be alive and embodied in organizational practices, systems, and structures. Training is often treated as ornamental, but leadership development is not an add-on; it is integral to building and maintaining a team that can implement and execute a strategy.

Each of our organizations should have at least one — ideally multiple — people tasked with building a comprehensive, tiered approach to training and leadership development that aligns with the organization's overall strategy. In-house training directors should ensure that there are regular training opportunities on the calendar and that each role is matched with an appropriate coach whose suggestions will be in line with the organization's methodology and overall strategy. Without this, there isn't anyone within the organization who is tracking the skills and knowledge gaps in staff and the base, and there isn't anyone dedicated to plugging those holes.

Finally, feedback is a gift and a responsibility, and everyone in the organization should receive regular feedback on both large and small aspects of their roles, including the finer points of agenda design, facilitation, training, and agitation. Building in a consistent practice of feedback allows everyone to understand that it is a core part of a culture of learning rather than a warning. And when everyone has less to hold, they can receive more support and feel prouder of their contributions.

Recommendations: (Continued)

6

Prepare our organizations for movement upsurges.

Organizers agree that upsurges both interrupt and accelerate our work: They can open new political possibilities at the same time that they scatter our energies.

As a result, organizers often find themselves unsure of whether to rush headlong into rapid response at the risk of distracting the base or whether to stick to the existing plan at the risk of missing the moment. Upsurges often present us with two bad options: acting haphazardly or not acting at all.

We may not know when an upsurge *will* come, but we know they will come. So, our organizations can all prepare better for long-predicted storms.

We need to leave time for crisis response without abandoning our broader plan to win, building plans that account for the shifting political terrain and opportunities that upsurge moments create.

Given our recognition that we are in a time of polycrisis, we recommend designing staff work plans for 70% capacity because a “normal week” no longer exists. Having some wiggle room allows staff some flexibility for the things we need to get done but often doesn’t account for attending to local crises, preparing the organization for potential upsurges or legal attacks, and stepping into upsurges or what Momentum calls “moments of the whirlwind.”¹²

Preparing for a “crisi-tunity” requires organizations to ask: “Given our strategy and our source of leverage, how could an upsurge advance our goals?” For some organizations, upsurges are massive opportunities to make a long-ignored struggle visible or to absorb thousands of new members or volunteers; for others, upsurges may present the opportunity to translate new demands into new campaigns to change local policy or build solidarity with other constituencies.

If you decide to join the upsurge, be serious about what your organization can honestly and uniquely contribute and whether it can truly advance its strategic goals by jumping into the mix. By clarifying your functions in an upsurge, you build trust, maintain focus, and begin to live into a vibrant ecosystem where specialization and diversity of function maximizes your collective power.

¹² See Mark Engler and Paul Engler, *This Is An Uprising: How Nonviolent Revolt Is Shaping the 21st Century*, Nation Books, 2016, p.54.

7.2 Where the Field Can Innovate to Strengthen Organizing

Strengthening organizing requires organizers to not only change how we move and operate at the organizational level but also how we operate as a field. When Future Currents talks about the organizing field, we are referring to the constellation of groups, institutions, capacity-builders, coalitions, and networks that center organizing as their primary vehicle for building durable power. Our contention is that new infrastructure — new projects — are needed to fortify the existing field.

From over 200 conversations, we've heard organizers nearly unanimously identify four major infrastructural gaps:

1. Learning, training, and leadership development
2. Power analysis and strategy (from planning to implementation)
3. Maximizing the impact of “movement upsurges”
4. Introducing new tools and frameworks for 21st century organizing

We've put forward these prototypes to precisely address these four gaps, and we call upon the field to take them up for rigorous development, implementation, and iteration. As an initial blueprint, each pilot identifies the need, the broad contours of what an intervention could look like, and how this would elevate the field.

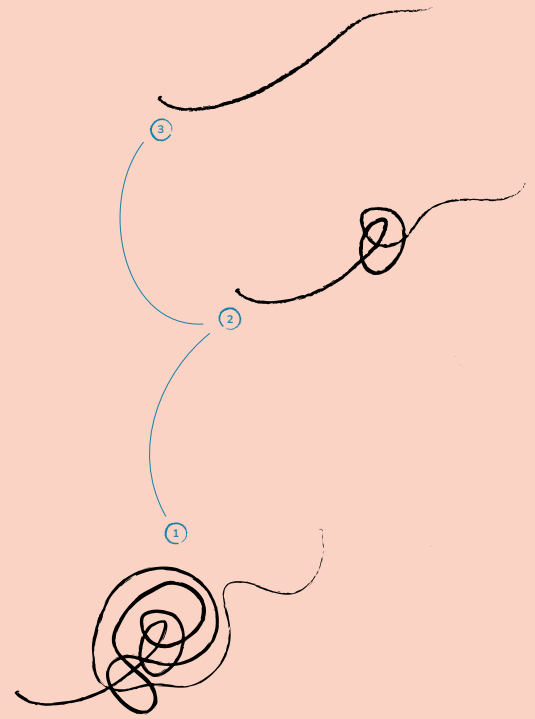


Photo Credit:
LJ Amsterdam

Pilot Projects:

1

The Seed Bank: *an initiative to expand and strengthen the talent pipeline*

The need:

To get out of the doom loop, we need sharp strategic leadership — people who can identify opportunities in crisis and apply our strengths to the opposition's weaknesses. As noted above, this kind of leadership is not born but forged through individual experience, organizational processes for learning, and an infrastructure for collaboration. Seeding the leadership that organizers need now requires first, recruiting and developing new leaders; second, reinvigorating our current fleet of organizers; and third, embedding a culture of learning inside organizations.

The intervention:

This will be a leadership development initiative called the Seed Bank that would massively expand and reconfigure the “talent pipeline” of the organizing field. One or several existing capacity-building organizations could lead this project, which could include both organizing the training and development sector of the field and filling the pressing gaps in knowledge and skills of leadership across the field. Future Currents will continue to research in and around this area of need, but we see other groups better positioned to initiate a project that would push the field to:

- **Set the bar higher for leaders and get them there:** As organizers, we need to get real about the types of leaders required to meet this moment, in the range of roles needed on the ground and in executive positions and also in the knowledge, skills, and attitude each role requires.
- **Align the current training infrastructure and build it out:** Align the existing training infrastructure to assess

what is covered, where there are crucial gaps, and what needs resourcing. We can open the aperture of this infrastructure beyond skills-based training to include organizing theories, histories, ideologies, and postures that leaders are hungry for.

- **Integrate coaching into the work:** Build an expansive coaching infrastructure to support organizers in applying what they learn at trainings to build new habits at home in their organizations. This would break the cycle of sending folks to one-off trainings without a plan to support the integration of their learnings.
- **Create cultures of learning within organizations:** In addition to coaching, groups need to embed ongoing learning (through modeling, feedback, and evaluation) within their organizational culture. Because shifting organizational culture is difficult, this project would create cohorts of base-building organizations dedicated to creating an internal culture of learning. Cohorts would allow groups to support and learn from each other, increasing the likelihood that these changes stick.

The impact:

This initiative would create a virtuous cycle of training, coaching, and learning within organizations — in concert with existing capacity-building groups — that will develop a much higher volume of leaders. This infrastructure will equip leaders at all levels with the skills, support, and strategic orientations they need, ensuring that they are set up to grow rather than plateau or burn out. Groups will know where to send their staff and volunteer members for supplemental training not offered inside of organizations themselves; they will have a database of trainers, coaches, and formations committed to fostering cultures of learning; and they will have a more promising pool of potential candidates to draw from in hiring processes. Organizers and organizational leaders themselves will be evolving, better prepared, and better supported to face the crises at hand instead of being left alone to figure it all out themselves or make it up as they go along.

2

The Enzyme: facilitated after-action reviews of past events that yield political analysis and strategy development for coming conditions

The need:

Too often, groups wrap up major movement moments or big campaigns with a quick round of pluses and deltas, recounting what happened rather than analyzing why. This is especially true for movement upsurges, those moments when millions of people are politicized, record-breaking numbers fill the streets, the media suddenly covers long-standing problems, and politicians are forced to respond to movement demands. Movement upsurges increasingly define the terrain of organizing, but organizers remain confused about how to relate to them, how to prepare for them, and how to learn from them. We need to level up how we reflect on our work by analyzing the shifts that did and didn't occur in the wake of movement upsurges and big campaigns, the kind of power that was or wasn't built, and the lessons we learned about our leverage. Without this kind of disciplined, collective reflection, it is impossible for organizing to evolve in a time of polycrisis.

The intervention:

This will be a multifaceted effort to digest weather-changing movement moments or major coordinated campaigns with historical and analytical precision and strategic reflection, with the goal of understanding how to maximize the political impact of upsurges. Future Currents is currently prototyping a version of the Enzyme with these components in mind:

- **A brain trust:** We need committed movement leaders who can study history, theories of power, political conditions, and international examples to contextualize upsurges.
- **Facilitated gatherings for boots-on-the-ground leaders:** We need to be in the same room together to analyze what actually happened and why and how decisions were made and restore trust where it has been broken. These moments can teach us about the roles and coordination needed across the field and help us build a healthy ecosystem capable of seizing the potential of coming upsurges.
- **Developing hypotheses that we can test in the future:** Given that many upsurges over the last

decade (Standing Rock, the racial justice uprising after the police murder of George Floyd, and the upsurge for Palestinian solidarity) have intersected with the dynamics of increased state repression, the Enzyme would yield especially important insights for strategies and tactics for slowing and stopping rising authoritarianism.

- **Theorizing how to turn an upsurge into a win:**

A key question we intend to tackle is: "How do we take the alley-ooop of a movement moment and then put the ball in the net, translating the potential of an uprising into concrete change?"

- **Getting serious about the millions of people who turn up to protest:**

By looking at upsurges, we can examine all of the ways in which we are — and are not — absorbing people into social movements. Given the leverage we need right now, we can't afford to turn people away. So, what do we need to reorient in our organizing — and organizational structures — to anticipate an influx of people without sacrificing our work's integrity and focus?

- **Documenting and sharing lessons, theories, and things to test:**

The Enzyme is working on behalf of the field, and will share the learnings and hypotheses widely, contributing to the growing toolkit of a 21st-century organizing methodology.

The impact:

By learning from the past and looking toward the future, the Enzyme will produce a blueprint for how to respond better to upsurges and big coordinated campaigns, laying out concretely how our organizing can be more impactful. When leaders know their role and organizations know their place, we can have a swift-footed and nimble upsurge ecosystem, allowing us to take the ball to the net. Together, we will learn more with each upsurge, building our collective understanding of how to translate protest into durable power.

Pilot Projects: (Continued)

3

The Collab: *a vehicle for driving shared, collective strategy*

The need:

Organizers across the U.S. are starved for strategies that are gripping, galvanizing, and effective. Our field's existing tools and frameworks for planning strategy typically center a single organization — its mission, vision, annual goals, and quarterly benchmarks — or cohere into a single campaign, uniting multiple organizations often already in relationship with one another. Both practices generally identify an incremental legislative or economic demand and target a decision-making institution or individual. In these contexts, the tools, coalitions and existing formations, and practices of developing the strategy we use have not kept pace with macro changes in social and political conditions. As a result, we stifle our political imagination and think too small or, conversely, try to shoot for the moon, without a plan to back it up. We need to feed our hunger to envision, develop, and execute an ambitious strategy to achieve high-level structural reforms and political and economic breakthroughs.

The intervention:

This would be an experiment in the process and outcome of strategy development. The Strengthening Organizing Project proposes an experiment in collective long-term strategy called the Collab, a series of convenings for organizers and organizational leaders to come together across issues and lineages for an extended period of research and planning. This is where we let go of the hundreds of Google docs that only a few people see and develop a few key features of a road map that thousands opt into. This project is a two-phase process. Phase 1 is convening people to do a deep dive into complex analysis and planning that is hard for leaders to do in their day-to-day work and then offering that plan back out to the movement. In Phase 2, leaders committed to that plan then fan out into the field to execute it, holding their lanes and coming back at regular intervals to evaluate progress and pivot. While the organizers leading the scope of Collabs will shaped is, Future Currents sees the foundation of these projects involving:

- **Commitment not consensus:** The Collab is not a new coalition or table; it is a collaborative alignment across sectors that provides a framework for a shared strategy that

spans different organizing traditions, allowing us to channel our energies toward the big wins we all want to see in our lifetimes.

- **Expanding our horizons of knowledge:** We would begin with a rigorous assessment of conditions with input from economists, historians, academics, researchers, cultural workers, and others to break out of the closed circuit loop of assessment that too often focuses on internal conditions of the field rather than the geopolitical forces that we're up against.

- **Prioritizing leverage:** The Collab would put forward power analysis that identifies crucial points of strategic leverage in light of the opposition's weaknesses and operates with a sober, clear-eyed assessment of our own capacities.

- **Going big:** Organizations and coalitions often work on atomized issues or incremental wins. The Collab is unafraid to put forward a big win that accounts for the range of political, economic, and narrative shifts that could occur — or must occur — to move us closer to a transformative win. The resulting plan would not be limited to passing legislation but could also include major shifts in the U.S. political system or distribution and ownership of economic resources.

- **Producing a road map:** The goal is a plan to win on a 10-year timeline that is undergirded by a clear theory of power and clear metrics of success along the way.

The impact:

Developing and implementing a robust and ruthless strategy is the largest tangle in the knot that our field faces. By committing to analyzing political conditions with a diverse set of actors, breaking out of our issue silos, and asking each other to work on behalf of advancing the field itself, we can iterate a process for winning a major structural reform at the heart of the crises we face today, learning to develop an ecosystemic plan with a medium-term goal, and developing sophisticated strategists willing to experiment with — and learn from — picking big fights.

4

The Toolkit: a project to expand our existing frameworks for organizing strategy

The need:

Organizers have indicated repeatedly that they have very few frameworks for long-term planning or grand strategy (meaning, strategy that is larger than a single campaign or organization). They have also indicated that they have few models of cross-movement or cross-lineage formations, bodies that are distinct from campaign coalitions united around a single issue or a single lineage of organizing. Most urgently, we as organizers need methods for addressing macro-level shifts in political, economic, and ecological context (for example, eroding democracies and rising artificial intelligence) as opposed to relatively smaller ones (such as the shift from a Democratic to a Republican administration or a single crisis event).

The intervention:

The Toolkit will draw on scholarly literature, training curricula, and organizing efforts to offer fresh — or refashioned — tools and frameworks for organizations and multiorganizational formations to develop strategy. Future Currents is planning to contribute to this expanded toolkit and hopes others will take up that task with us. The Toolkit would include:

- **A theory of how upsurges can build our power.** This would include a clearly defined standard for what it means to maximize an upsurge's potential versus missing the opportunities it presents as well as a timeline for assessing success or failure. Without this, it is impossible to evaluate how we relate to upsurges, leaving us instead with vague reflections that never quite amount to lessons. This will allow us to learn across upsurges as a whole field, leveling up our skills while forgiving ourselves for what was outside of our control.
- **A theory of ecosystemic roles for successful upsurges.** This will allow us to understand *who* needs to do *what* to maximize our power before, during, and after movement upsurges. What are the different types of organizations needed, what are the roles

they need to play, and what does it look like when we hold our roles well?.

- **Strategic frameworks from undemocratic contexts, both within the U.S. and outside of it.** Frameworks would include explicit hypotheses about the kinds of leverage people need to shift undemocratic conditions and tools for planning as evaluating changing conditions.
- **Strategic frameworks for assessing macro-conditions and achieving structural reforms over the long term.** These frameworks would be grounded in historical examples of movements that achieved structural reforms and clarify both the benefits and limits of long-term planning in turbulent times.
- **Metrics of success that are grounded in explicit theories of change.** Long-term planning requires clear benchmarks to measure whether we are on track. When the field does not have these benchmarks, we reflexively steer toward shorter-term plans where success is easier to measure and philanthropy steers toward the metrics that are superficial or transactional. To pick big fights — and to resource those big fights in the right way — the field will need to offer our own benchmarks or metrics of success for longer-term plans.

The impact:

As a result of this project, the field will have an updated toolkit for picking ambitious fights in clear-eyed ways. The frameworks within the toolkit will allow groups to hone their best roles in upsurges, hone their hypotheses about the approaches that do — or do not — lead to major structural reforms, and plan over the longer term beyond a single campaign or organization. Groups will have a shared language for ecosystemic planning so that they can collaborate with different *types* of organizations as well as metrics of success that they can use to measure progress and setbacks. These frameworks will be integrated into the field holistically through circuits of training, coaching, and organizational planning.

7.3 How Philanthropy Can Strengthen Organizing

Progressive philanthropy is under similar threats as our grassroots organizations in our current conditions. Strengthening organizing efforts in the U.S. will therefore require organizations to reexamine their revenue sources as well as how they relate to philanthropy.

This reexamination is long overdue. On the one hand, progressive organizational leaders are frank about the fact that there is a limit to how much funders and major donors will resource strategies that undermine their own influence. On the other hand, many grassroots organizations depend on funding from philanthropy now more than ever. Many organizers blame philanthropy for not funding long-term organizing and then sheepishly acknowledge that long-term organizing — without any further qualification or strategic innovation — does not, in and of itself, guarantee big wins. This ambivalence toward philanthropy has been a defining feature of American organizing for more than 30 years.

But there is an even longer history of mass organizations, including radical ones, supplementing membership dues with funding from external sources, including relatively elite ones. Grassroots organizations *should* require dues of members, but those dues are unlikely to cover all organizational costs. If progressives agree that strengthening organizing efforts in the U.S. is an urgent priority, philanthropy has a crucial role to play in cutting the knot that keeps us weak.

The ways the philanthropic sector funds organizing work is hampering our ability both to build power and expand our conception of it. To the field's detriment, people noted that philanthropy often dictates organizing priorities that are short term, transactional, and narrowly issue-focused. This kind of philanthropic practice, one interviewee noted, creates “a hamster wheel where organizers are forced to hustle to make the funding fit into a power-building strategy.”

If we want to strengthen organizing efforts in the U.S., philanthropy must incentivize organizations to pick big fights rigorously, try new approaches, and fail forward. The following are a series of actionable recommendations for philanthropy. Some of these recommendations are new; others are old and familiar. They are all recommendations that organizers mentioned time and again. At Future Currents, we believe that if organizations are capable of fresh ideas and new practices, so too is philanthropy.



Photo Credit:
Kandace Montgomery

Recommendations:

1

More philanthropic resources should go toward flexible, multiyear general operating support of power-building organizations

The vast majority of philanthropic grants for organizing efforts goes toward short-term mobilization and midterm issue campaigns rather than long-term efforts. Furthermore, funders tend to support familiar strategies — irrespective of their track record — rather than rigorously experimental ones that could expand our strategic repertoire and potentially supercharge our movements.

At Future Currents, we are advocating for longer-term, flexible funding in the form of multiyear grants for general operating support, with few strings attached and an invitation to embrace experimentation.

These general operating support grants would also resource the spadework of organizing that makes real wins possible:

recruiting and developing leaders; training and developing staff; ensuring that every level of the organization has an aligned and sophisticated understanding of power; planning, executing, and evaluating ambitious strategy; and dynamically responding to crisis and community needs.

2

There should be more funding earmarked for external, cross-movement infrastructure

Our field lacks essential infrastructure — this is why the Strengthening Organizing Project is proposing new pilots to fill gaps in training and coaching, strategy for major structural reforms, and learning from movement upsurges. Here, philanthropy can — and should — play a game-changing role in resourcing this new infrastructure.

Funders supporting the concentration of political and economic power have long recognized the need to fund the infrastructure needed to advance

their agenda, resourcing spaces to train the next generation of leadership, or think tanks to promote their ideology. Proponents of egalitarianism should not expect to win without a comparable infrastructure directed toward *our* goals.

The field is clamoring for a major investment in movementwide infrastructure for strategy development, training, coaching, and cross-organizational resource-sharing. Organizers repeatedly surfaced a wish for “operation hubs” that could

service multiple organizations with experts in finance and HR, saving money and time on work that organizations were doing in-house. Others talk about dreams for movementwide mentorship or widespread political education about backsliding democracy. By meaningfully funding capacity-building groups already doing great work — and seeding innovative capacity-building projects that fill the gaps in the current infrastructure — philanthropy can play a critical role in exponentially increasing the number of skilled progressive leaders in the U.S.

Recommendations: (Continued)

3 *Philanthropy should embrace new metrics for how to judge organizing work's success*

We believe philanthropy needs new metrics of success that will more holistically evaluate the impact of both organizing *and* philanthropy.

Development of new metrics should happen in tandem with a rigorous process of revisiting the field's strategic hypotheses about what does and does not lead to structural reforms — and the benchmarks organizations should expect to hit on the path to such reforms. Organizers advocate for moving away from

superficial, short-term measures (such as the number of people contacted in a given election cycle) toward more meaningful indices of power-building, such as the depth of leadership developed, the establishment of democratic organizational processes, the infrastructure for mass absorption, and the systematic evaluation of strategic plans. The development of these metrics should focus on utility to the field and filter to philanthropy from there rather than the reverse.

But philanthropy also needs a process to assess its impact. What are metrics of a foundation's success? Philanthropy pretending it understands what working-class communities need will not work; but neither will it work for philanthropy to outsource all of its thinking to the field.⁴³ Integrity — in all our work — requires a shared commitment to rigorous learning.

4 *The philanthropic sector should reward innovation*

Philanthropy should reward organizers and organizations when they do what it takes to strengthen organizing: choosing a focused, coherent strategy (over a series of unrelated initiatives); building a culture of learning (rather than a culture of action without reflection); experimenting

(rather than copying and pasting what's familiar); contributing to the impact of movement upsurges by holding the right role; and building organizational process to develop real strategic capacity at all levels.

This report makes a series of recommendations about how organizations themselves need to change to meet the moment. Those changes should be recognized and resourced, and result in more honest and generative relationships between organizations and funders.

⁴³ For more on this, see Nina Luo, "[Left Organizing Is In Crisis. Philanthropy Is A Major Reason Why.](#)" *The Nation*, January 16, 2025.

7.4 What We've Learned as Organizers Organizing Other Organizers



Over the course of this project, we have — at times — come up against the same limitations as the organizers we interviewed. We struggled to find shared language across issues, geography, generation, and organizing lineage. And we experienced the limits of facilitating and convening a field that is frustrated with its existing lexicon but cannot easily invent new terms in a three-day retreat. It is tempting to reflect back to the field endlessly what we are hearing rather than take a stand on what we believe must be done. Even with this project's mandate, we asked ourselves: "Who are we to tell the field what to do?"

When our team held a convening in April to share our findings with base-builders; capacity-builders; and organizers in labor, national networks, and philanthropy, we saw how organizers are grappling with practices that already weren't cutting it. While we see a decrease in turfiness and dogmatic insistence on a certain way being "the way," which is a tremendous opportunity for learning and collaboration, a prerequisite for working better in current conditions is a shared understanding of the history that got us to the point where nearly the entire field is aligned on the need to strengthen organizing.

Many of us organizers do not understand where our organizing methods come from and what problems those methods were meant to solve. We don't have a cohesive story about the fallout from the dismantling of the nonprofit ACORN, about our shrunken training infrastructure, or the rise in upsurges over the last 15 years. What happened that led to the loss of rigor that so many organizers lament? To what degree do our organizing methods reflect a historic compromise from the neoliberal period, an unspoken acceptance of our marginality? There are macro inflection points in the past that remain poorly understood in terms of how they influenced what we call "organizing" today — and whether organizers emerged stronger or weaker from the choices we made. Such an account is beyond the scope of this report, and it is only now — having gone through the process of asking the field what it needs for the future — that Future Currents sees the importance of understanding the past.

In addition to understanding history to situate ourselves as organizers and our work, the Strengthening Organizing Project also sees a need for new exercises that dislodge old muscle memory. For example, as organizers,

we turn down help regularly if people don't fit into our predetermined constituencies (or perhaps we just don't know what to ask them to do). Right now, we are not in a position to turn down help. It's on us — as organizers — to find the ways these individuals can engage and where to channel their anger and energy. We need to get serious about what taking action means and recognize that many of our "disruptions" last merely a few hours. We need to move toward disruptive actions sustained for weeks and months. That will require us engaging our people on different timelines and asking them to step into greater risks, which many of our members actually seem to want. Most of all, we need to recognize that, at this inflection point, hard choices will be necessary. We need decision-makers, implementers, executors, experts, and leaders. It's time for us to live into those roles.

8 CONCLUSION: FORGING OURSELVES THROUGH FIRE



Photo Credit:
Rae Breaux

The Strengthening Organizing Project has been honored to hear hundreds of organizers over the past year as they wrestle with what our era demands of us. Our work was to listen to the laundry lists of problems, synthesizing and analyzing these challenges into a theory of how and why these challenges are related, and how and where we can fix them. We hope that *Forging Through the Fire* cuts through some of the overwhelm and paralysis, shared by many in the field but not always voiced in public, to guide us toward where we have agency and where we should act first.

What you've just read the project offered back to and tested with the field in one-on-one conversations, working groups, and a convening in April 2025 before this report's release. We've invited our peers to kick the tires on these recommendations and proposals, and they've garnered overwhelming support

from organizers across the U.S. today. Philanthropy should take note of what is giving organizers hope and energy, what is working in organizers' existing approach to organizing, and what needs to adapt in light of life-altering conditions.

So, we offer our assessment in a spirit of agitation but also encouragement. We are up against massive forces, but history shows that in moments of crisis we are able to effect seismic change — if we can face our reality with focus and courage, sobriety about the scale of the challenge, and unrelenting commitment to doing what it takes to accomplish our goals.

In addition to listening to the lists of problems, we have heard the commitment behind the complaints. Organizers also see a return to the heart of what this work is all about: inviting people into something that is bigger than themselves. When

“

There ain't nothing to it
except to do it.

– Julian Bond



Photo Credit:
NDN Collective (L),
Rae Breaux (R)

a group of our respondents asked elder movement leader Edgar Fields what organizing advice he had for us now, he said: “Get out there and put your hands on people. Go to the barber shop, go to the club, go to where the people are. And find them.” The chorus of *mm-hmms* in the audience affirmed what all organizers know in our bellies and in our bones: Our people are first, last, and everything.

Late in the process, one organizer reminded us that while we typically see fire as a means of destruction, in many cultures fire actually bestows a cleansing effect. If the recommendations and pilots from this report are fully realized, we believe the field can move beyond fragmented efforts to reconfigure the terrain and command the political weather.

This moment requires leadership — encouraging each other to pick up the mic; courageously expanding our strategic vocabulary; and trying new things even when our bosses, peers, and funders are wary of the unfamiliar. To do that well, we will likely have to go beyond new permutations of the old. As Fields said, “Don’t wait for the torch to be passed to you.”

If you are interested in strengthening organizing or would like to collaborate around any of the recommendations identified in this report, we hope you’ll reach out to us at strengtheningorganizing@futurecurrents.org.

9 APPENDIX A: METHODOLOGY

The questions at the heart of this report are multidimensional, as are the concepts of “weakness” and “strength” that inform them. At a diagnostic level, our approach to these questions involved gathering detailed information about the state of organizing, the tangible actions organizers and organizational leaders have taken to address that state, and the structures within which they act. The Strengthening Organizing Project tried to synthesize organizers’ honest reflections about their work and their environments.

Our approach also sought to go beyond mere synthesis toward analysis. How and why have organizers come to think about their work this way? Which assessments were most accurate? Which recommendations would be most impactful? To go beyond listening toward understanding causes and prioritizing specific courses of action, we had to convene organizers to talk to each other. Relationships, both existing and formed throughout the process, were important here for allowing folks to show up as their fullest selves and distinguish the ideas with the most voltage from the ones that were simply the most familiar.

Effectively capturing all of these dimensions required a multimodal method of inquiry that we sought to make both expansive and mindful. Our team combined one-on-one and group interviews, group webinars, facilitated in-person convenings, and online working groups to ensure no question went unasked and no ideas went unconsidered. These methods brought important strengths to the project, giving us confidence in our diagnosis of the field’s weaknesses and in our proposals to amplify the field’s strengths.

The capacity and range of organizers we were able to reach provided great breadth and support for our conclusions. With over 200 total organizers involved in the project — ranging widely in demographic, geography, age, and organizing lineage — we were able to grasp the scale of agreement on various topics as well as degrees of (and reasons for) difference when consensus was not as clear. Our interactive formats also unearthed a depth and honesty of thought that was crucial for confronting the identified issues. Some organizers came to the table with candor; for others, their ideas emerged in later sessions once they had time to process. Our methodology made room for organizers of all stripes to cut through the disorganization and hazy language that many had been frustrated with in their own spaces. It also helped us be honest in turn about where and how organizers are best positioned to intervene. Meanwhile, the facilitated convenings gave us crucial data for the pilots proposed here: They showed us what kinds of questions generated energy and ideas and what kinds of questions led to overwhelm and silence.



Photo Credit:
Jon Cherry

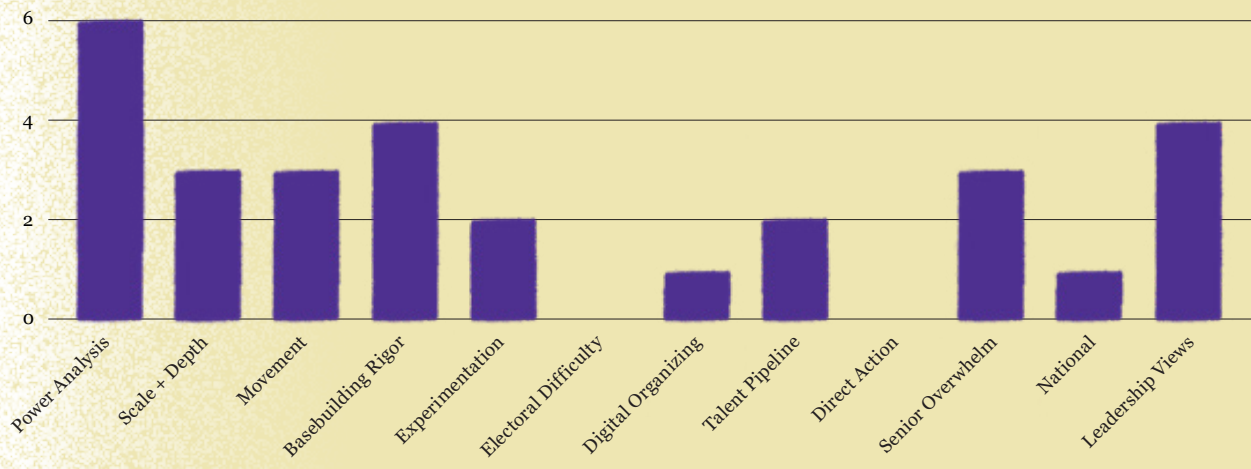
9.1 2023: Interviews

Between January and November 2023, the five members of the core team conducted over 100 interviews, predominantly via Zoom.

After a first round of interviews determined interviewees’ perceived areas of interest regarding the state of organizing, the team consolidated these topics into a flexible interview guide for a second round of more substantial inquiry.

As a whole, organizers with extensive experience — often in the role of executive director, organizing director, or lead organizer — are heavily represented in the group and ensured the report would capture perspectives honed from years of direct organizing experience. The interview pool was also limited to organizers who are based in the U.S. and focus predominantly on domestic issues. We also did not interview volunteer leaders in grassroots organizations.

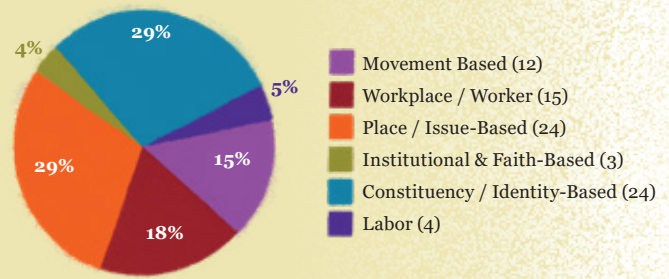
In the charts below, we have summarized the demographic characteristics of the interviewees, including short notes that explain the process through which particular aggregated totals were reached.



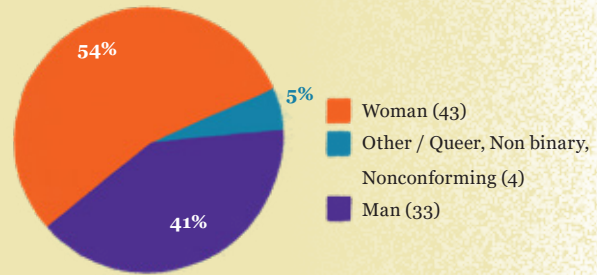
○ **Years in Organizing:** We maximized the numerical answer to whichever number was reported (e.g., “7-8 years” to 8; “over 30 years” to 30). The years in organizing range from 5 to 60, with an average of about 22 years.



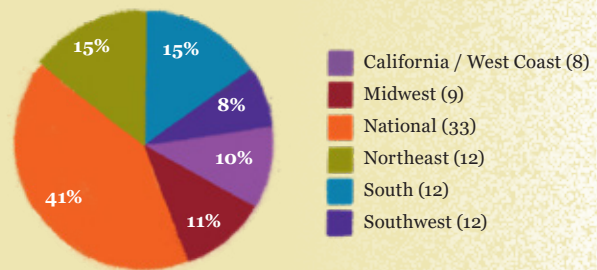
○ **Organizational Lineage:** We grouped organizational lineage into constituency- and identity-based (29%), institution- and faith-based (4%), labor-based (5%), movement-based (15%), place- and issue-based (29%), and workplace- and worker-based (18%). We grouped these categories from smaller reported categories (i.e., disability-based). Constituency/identity and place/issue combined comprise just over half of the sample (58%).



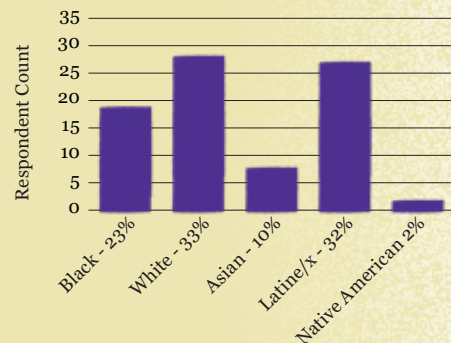
○ **Gender:** The reported answers for gender ranged in specificity from cis/trans male/female to man/woman, with a spectrum of queer identification. We placed any references to “male” in the man category (54%), any “female” references in woman (41%), and any “queer, nonbinary, or gender nonconforming” reference in “other” (5%).



○ **Region:** We grouped the reported answers for region on local, state, and national levels into five categories, with the following percentage per category: California/ West Coast (10%), Midwest (11%), Northeast (15%), South (15%), Southwest (8%), and National (41%).



○ **Race:** Respondents answered in varying levels of specificity and combination in ethnicity and nationality, including Jewish and Middle Eastern ethnic and religious identification. We grouped these into overlapping categories of Black (23%), White (33%), Asian (22%), Latine/x (32%), and Native American (2%). Latines had the highest rate of multiple identification (18.5%) also identifying with another race.



9.2 2024: Convenings + Cohorts

We launched the second half of the project in 2024, when we ran a series of retreats, working groups, and further interviews to get deeper into (and think more meaningfully about) the challenges facing the organizing field. These deeper methods included both returning interviewees and new people who were invited to offer insight on specific challenges. Together, they offered new levels of analysis that were crucial for helping us generate the proposals in this report.

We started with two retreats in Santa Fe (one in January 2024 and another in February 2024). In an attempt to create a “heat map,” we asked organizers at these retreats to weigh in on what we had heard in the interviews. What resonated the most? What resonated the least?

The insights from these retreats shaped more specific activities for the remainder of the year: a gathering of organizers from different issues and lineages to distill our lessons from movement upsurges; a working group dedicated to training, learning, and leadership development; and a working group dedicated to power and strategy. Between convenings and cohorts, we stopped to reevaluate how organizers spoke about their challenges and how those challenges might be linked.

Each convening thus offered new opportunities for movement toward solutions, building new relationships in the process. They included moderator-led conversations; exploratory assessments; group discussion; and active mapping, drafting, timelining, and planning. The more organizers got the chance to put their thoughts to action, the more they were also able to clarify what interventions were needed that could have enabled them to do it sooner.

We especially paid attention to whether organizers already knew of solutions in waiting or if they were at a loss for ideas in a period of overwhelm and exhaustion; we assumed that either answer would provide valuable information. We also sought to attend to whether and when consensus on what must be done in theory was matched with consensus on what can be done in practice. Last, we made a point to be mindful of differences in organizer lineage, which could shape their suggestions; this allowed us to be mindful of the habitual premises of those lineages as well as the accessibility — across lineage — of the language we used.



Photo Credit:
Kasey Ivan

APPENDIX B: BUILDING ON THE EXISTING LITERATURE ABOUT STRENGTHENING ORGANIZING

In a time of strategic reevaluation, a flurry of reports and assessments have been written to address challenges in the organizing field. These reports include: [Hopeful Monsters: Movement Upsurges, Mass Protest, and Solidarity in Flux](#) by LJ Amsterdam and Future Currents; [The Antidote to Authoritarianism: How an Organizing Revival Can Build a Multiracial Pluralistic Democracy in an Inclusive Economy](#) by People's Action; [Building Resilient Organizations](#) by Maurice Mitchell (Working Families Party); [Funding Movement Infrastructure Brief](#) by the Building Movement Project; [How Funders are Strengthening Nonprofit Capacity: Findings from a Field Scan](#) by the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation; [Power to Win: Report on Progressive Power and Organizing](#) by The Action Lab, Initiative for Community Power, and The Forge; [Rebalancing Power: Examining the Role of Advocacy and Organizing in Collective Impact](#) by Collective Impact Power and Frontline Solutions; and [Today's Challenges: Training and Capacity Building](#) by Sara el Amine and the Mobilisation Lab.

These reports have highlighted a range of problems, from the unsustainability of base-building work to difficulty meeting the post-2020 moment to senior organizer burnout to lack of training rigor. Some have also put forth recommendations, such as diversifying organizational leadership, supporting leadership development for mid- and upper-tier organizers, and providing support for dealing with conflict. Several reports have recommended specific grants for mental health support or training to deal with the mental health crises that continue to pervade organizational spaces. Other reports recommended new models of interaction between organizers and funders that would redistribute decision-making about grants more equitably.

There are key points of overlap between our report and others: Several have emphasized the need for more experimentation in base-building methods, for better networks and spaces of connection among organizers, for more mentorship, for a sharper power analysis, and for organizational structures and cultures of learning where success is rigorously evaluated. Our recommendations for more training and coaching infrastructure, new strategic frameworks and cross-organizational spaces for testing them, and multiyear general operating grants are among those that echo earlier calls. As organizers, we had to ask ourselves: Why weren't those calls sufficient? The Strengthening Organizing Project hopes to amplify widely felt hunches in the field while agitating those in a position to act to ensure organizers are discussing new problems in the next few years rather than the same ones that have surfaced before.



This report also adds to the existing literature in several crucial ways. First, we have prioritized questions about what organizers and organizational leaders can take responsibility for themselves. We think it is crucial for the leaders of grassroots organizations to identify what *is* within their agency to change at a time when so much falls outside that orbit. Second, we have sought to identify ways that specific weaknesses intensify each other in a complex system, a knot where certain threads are more important than others. We have specifically focused on the threads that we thought, if cut, would undo the knot overall, leading to major changes in the field. Myriad will be needed to strengthen organizing in the U.S. — but we have focused here on the ones that we believe are specifically poised to supercharge many others. We are also encouraged by interventions and opportunities that have emerged since our original analysis in reports such as Grassroots Solutions’ *Tilling the Soil* and others.

11 ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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12 ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Strengthening Organizing Core Team

Connie M. Razza is the executive director of Future Currents, a movement utility that provides progressive leaders space to plan along a longer time horizon that they otherwise are able to prepare to meet conditions beyond our control and practice responding to crisis and opportunity across organizational lines. Before joining Future Currents, Connie built the strategic research department and served as chief of campaigns at the Center for Popular Democracy. She also served as the vice president of policy and research at Demos, a senior policy analyst for health issues at the New York City Council, and a union organizer and strategic research campaigner.

Cristina Jiménez is an award-winning community organizer, bestselling author, and a leading voice in movements for social justice. She is Co-Founder and former Executive Director of [United We Dream](#) (UWD), the largest immigrant youth-led organization in the country, where she led national and local campaigns for immigrant justice. A distinguished lecturer at the City University of New York, she was awarded a MacArthur Fellowship and named one of Time 100's most influential people. Her USA Today bestselling debut memoir [Dreaming of Home](#) was published in May 2025.

Crystal Zermeño has worked for 24 years in labor, politics, and community organizing with expertise in strategic corporate campaigning and electoral base-building and organizing. Most recently she served in various capacities with the Texas Organizing Project, working for 10 years with

community leaders to build a progressive voting block and road map to change the Texas electorate. She has worked for the Service Employees International Union; PowerPAC.org; the Center for Popular Democracy; and various political campaigns, including Beto for Texas, several California races, and independent expenditure campaigns in the Southwest.

Lissy Romanow grew up in Massachusetts, where she served as a lead organizer with Neighbor to Neighbor. She became interested in social movements while working as a trainer with the Ayni Institute and helped launch Momentum, a training organization dedicated to building social movement organizations for the 21st century. After serving as its executive director for five years, she is now writing a book on the historical evolution of organizing methods in the U.S.

Nsé Ufot is the founder of Solidarity Analytics & Media, a global strategy and storytelling firm advancing democracy, data, and cultural power across movements and borders. As CEO of the New Georgia Project and founder of the New South Super PAC, she led efforts that registered over 700,000 voters and organized millions of high-quality, face-to-face conversations with Georgians each year which helped reshape the state's civic landscape. Today, Nsé builds on that legacy through domestic and international advocacy, media and policy work—bridging culture, organizing, and analytics to co-create a just and democratic global future.

LJ Amsterdam is a social movement organizer from New York City. Since Occupy Wall Street, LJ has trained close to 20,000 people to take action. A former DJ and a dancer, LJ was a co-director of the seminal grassroots direct action training organization The Ruckus Society for four years. Before that, she organized with homeowners fighting foreclosure, youth affected by substance abuse and incarceration, and Indigenous people on the front lines of climate change. She recently wrote a report for Future Currents — entitled [Hopeful Monsters](#) — on movement upsurges and solidarity, and is a member of Freedom Trainers, a group advancing strategies and tactics of mass noncooperation to fight rising authoritarianism.

Kandace Montgomery is an organizer, trainer, and movement strategist based in Minneapolis. Montgomery. Over the past 15 years, they have crafted strategies, led training initiatives, and spearheaded campaigns that prioritize the lives of working people of color across local, state, and national organizations. Kandace co-founded and served as co-executive director of Black Visions, where they guided the organization's strategic response following the 2020 uprisings sparked by the police murder of George Floyd. Kandace has been a committed trainer and member of Momentum, a movement incubator community. They are also a proud alum of BOLD (Black Organizers for Leadership and Dignity).

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Daniel Martinez HoSang is professor of American studies and political science at Yale University and the author, co-author, or co-editor of six books on racial justice, social movements, and racial politics, including most recently *A Wider Type of Freedom: How Struggles for Racial Justice Liberate Everyone*. A long-time community organizer and trainer, he is a steering committee member of the Anti-Racist Teaching & Learning Collective in Connecticut.

Travon Anderson has roots that are deeply grounded in the arts and racial justice. He is the project manager for the Strengthening Organizing Project at Future Currents, with over seven years of experience in project management, thought partnership, operations, and organizational development. He takes pride in being systems-oriented and being most adept at managing personal relationships with colleagues and key stakeholders. He is happy to have recently joined this team of brilliant minds and is excited to support team members in bringing their ideas to life.

Deborah Axt led the first year of the Strengthening Organizing Project before becoming the senior vice president of Community and Worker Power at the Freedom Together Foundation. After a previous life as a union organizer, Deb spent two decades helping to build the membership-based Make the Road New York, its sister 501(c)(4), and eventually second-generation Make the Road organizations across the country. Deb co-led Make the Road through the Trump era and the height of COVID-19 and co-led dozens of campaigns, like those that blocked Amazon from building its HQ2 in New York. And she led the campaign to establish a \$2.1 billion Excluded Workers Fund to support New Yorkers barred from unemployment and COVID-19 relief.

Sophia Lindner is a doctoral student in the sociology and African American Studies departments at Yale University. Her research focuses on relationships between race, cultural narrative, and national belonging, with attention to African diasporic populations and their navigation of these relationships.

Zoe Lee-Park provided research support for the first year of the Strengthening Organizing Project. She holds a Master of Environmental Science from the Yale School of the Environment and received a Bachelor of Arts in Legal Studies and a Bachelor of Science in society and environment from the University of California, Berkeley. She has led and supported environmental justice initiatives at the U.S. Department of Justice, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, and the NAACP.

13 ABOUT FUTURE CURRENTS

Future Currents creates the spaces for movement organizations to build resilient relationships, tackle pressing challenges, prepare for possible conditions, and map our way to the future we deserve. We focus on the knotty, chronic, systemic, and often scary obstacles in our daily lives, whether they are authoritarian threats to our democracy, the shifting economic paradigm, or the need within movements to retool and reshape our infrastructure to meet changing conditions.

Future Currents encourages movement leaders and organizations to operate outside the dominant modes of thinking that currently limit the scope of possibility. We use a mix of creative methods — including facilitated immersive group convenings, scenario planning exercises, and resources that build the muscles of preparation and imagination — to spark new understandings, analyses, and strategies that open up the potential for long-term change.

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