

A PRIMER ON COMMUNITY POWER, PLACE, AND STRUCTURAL CHANGE

SEPTEMBER 2020

USC
Dornsife

*Equity Research
Institute*

Data and Analysis to Power Social Change

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USC Equity Research Institute Project Team:

Manuel Pastor, Director

Jennifer Ito, Research Director

Madeline Wander, Senior Data Analyst

Ashley K. Thomas, Data Analyst II

Cynthia Moreno, Data Analyst

Dalia Gonzalez, Data Analyst

Emma Yudelevitch, Project Assistant

Consultants:

Kirk Noden

Charlene Sinclair

USC
Dornsife

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INTRODUCTION

Social factors are becoming more widely recognized as having an impact on health.¹ There is growing evidence that social, economic, and environmental factors contribute significantly to disparities in health outcomes (Braveman et al 2011). As a result, those looking to close health disparities are increasingly looking at interventions that address **structural issues** that create an unfair and unequal distribution of social, economic, and environmental benefits and burdens (Iton et al 2010). At the root of these structural issues is **powerlessness** (Givens 2018).

This primer examines how health equity can be achieved through a community power-building approach to structural change. Given shifts in the public health field, what had been a matter of making an argument for equity is now more a matter of how to achieve equity. While there are best practices around policies and systems change, there is less known about the role, strategies, and impacts of community power-building organizations in achieving health equity.

New pathways and pioneering strategies to build power among those communities and populations that are most impacted by inequities are being forged every day. For over a decade, the University of Southern California Equity Research Institute (formerly the Program for Regional and Environmental Equity) has studied this work in the U.S. through the lens of contemporary social movements, community organizing, and community power building. The last decade has been a particularly fruitful period of experimentation as the field has matured. There has been enough time and experience to know what works as well as to test innovations and deploy new experiments.

While there is a diversity of theories and models, in general, community power building is about building and sustaining an organized base of people most impacted by structural inequities and engaging the base directly in processes to change policies, institutions, structures, and narratives. And in the process, not only are people transforming the social factors that shape health but they are transforming themselves into community civic leaders. A core principle of community power building is that impacted community members are best positioned to push for the deep structural changes that are needed and so should be active and direct participants in decision-making processes that shape their lives.

¹ See Commission to Build a Healthier America, <http://www.commissiononhealth.org/WhatDrivesHealth.aspx>.

While traditional service providers treat people as patients, clients, or consumers, the field of community power treats people as **agents of change**. Community power building is about building the ability of communities most impacted by structural oppression to set the agenda toward changing systems to create and sustain healthy communities—and the ability to achieve that agenda. **In short, a community power-building approach to health equity addresses structural issues and does so in ways that address powerlessness both in the process and as an end-goal.**

This primer is organized as follows: It begins with a definition of community power that is centered in organizing and base building and encompasses a broader ecosystem of organizations. It then highlights the key elements of structural reform from the perspective of community power-building organizations. To illustrate what this looks like in the field, there are examples of the pathways that community power-building organizations have taken in their efforts to achieve structural change. It concludes with a discussion on how community power is both an effective strategy and a desired outcome in dismantling structural barriers to a healthier and more equitable society.

COMMUNITY POWER: ORGANIZING AND BASE BUILDING AT THE CENTER OF AN ECOSYSTEM

“Community power is the ability of communities most impacted by structural inequity to develop, sustain, and grow an organized base of people who act together through democratic structures to set agendas, shift public discourse, influence who makes decisions, and cultivate ongoing relationships of mutual accountability with decision makers that change systems and advance health equity.”

LEAD LOCAL DEFINITION OF COMMUNITY POWER²

Community power-building organizations engage residents of communities most impacted by structural oppression in setting an agenda toward changing systems to create and sustain healthy communities—and build their leadership, skills, and expertise to achieve and oversee that agenda. A guiding principle of community power building is that community members are themselves experts in their own lived experiences and problems that their community faces. As such, community power-building organizations place members in the driver’s seat in the design and implementation of collective efforts to improve their day-to-day lives.

There are two important concepts in understanding community power: 1) community organizing as an approach that centers base building and 2) organizing at the center of a larger ecosystem of organizations working towards the long-term goal of justice and equity for all.

Organizing and Base Building

Organizing and base building are at the core of community power building. Author and racial justice leader Rinku Sen defines organizing as “essentially the process of creating politically active constituencies out of people with problems by focusing on their strengths and the solutions embedded in their experience” (Sen 2003). There are many theories and practices that have emerged from community organizing’s history in the United States with thousands of local community organizations and national organizing networks in existence today (Sen 2003).

² Lead Local was a collaborative project funded by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation that brought together community power-building organizations and a core set of partners, including USC Equity Research Institute, to answer the question: How does community power catalyze, create, and sustain conditions for healthy communities. For more, see www.lead-local.org.

COMMUNITY POWER: ORGANIZING AND BASE BUILDING AT THE CENTER OF AN ECOSYSTEM *continued*

Across the different schools of thought and practice of community organizing, there are a set of core fundamentals: building a base of members who are methodically engaged to identify the root causes of their problems and take actions; developing grassroots leaders from that base; forming an organization that represents this base; running campaigns that target decision-makers to win solutions identified by the base; and reframing a public narrative that shapes values and sets the vision and the terms of debate for creating change.

Organizing is often conflated with various methods of building collective voice, such as mobilization, advocacy, community engagement, community capacity building, communications campaigns, and civic participation. In an attempt to distinguish community organizing from other methods, we highlight the four fundamental elements of the field of organizing:

Fundamental #1: Building a base of members

At the heart of community organizing is the commitment to building a base of the people most affected by a particular problem. An organized base puts community members in relationship to one another and orients them around a common identity often shaped by similar experiences, values, and long-term goals. Importantly, it also builds a shared understanding of the root causes of their common problems and directs that understanding towards constructive solutions and strategies. That base can then be activated and mobilized towards civic action.

Community organizers employ a diverse range of tactics and strategies to bring residents of the most impacted communities together through recruiting individuals through door knocking, phonebanking, and other means and through recruiting institutions like schools, churches, and labor unions. At the core is bringing people together to help them make connections across their lived experiences and conditions and engaging them in efforts to improve their lives and their communities.

Fundamental #2: Developing grassroots leaders

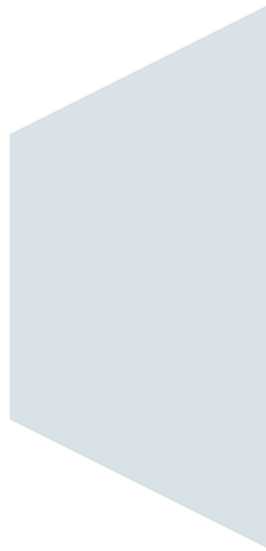
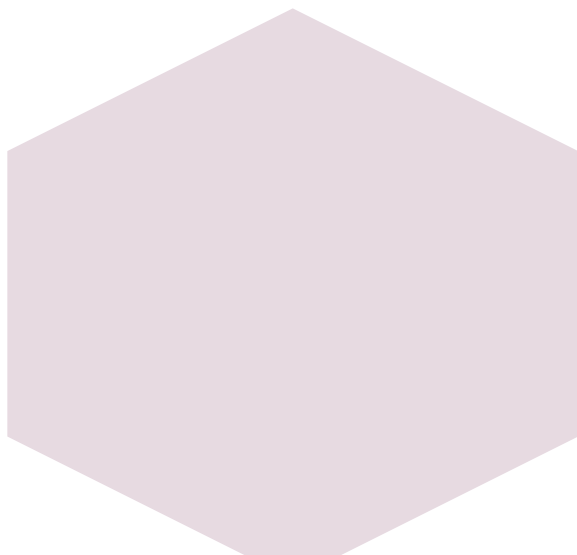
The personal and political transformation of people and their participation in collective action is what distinguishes community organizing from other methods of building collective voice (Han 2014). By being in relationship with others, people understand that their problems are not unique but that their problems are ones facing a larger segment of society. And by building an understanding of the root causes, they may begin to see that their problems are not necessarily due to any personal shortcomings or mistakes but that they have deeper systemic roots.

An individual's shift from private shame to public stance is a transformational change that is amplified when that person is part of a community power-building organization. Organizations' practices and systems for development leadership are varied. Some are focused on collective healing efforts to address personal and collective traumas in order to interrupt long-standing patterns of oppressive and destructive behaviors that can seep into organizations. Some have a well-defined leadership ladder and assessment tools that they use to measure and track leadership over time and to provide pathways, in some cases, up to elected office.

Fundamental #3: Forming an organization

A core goal of community organizing is to generate durable power through the formation of an organization driven by its community base thus allowing it to influence decision-makers on a range of issues over time (Staples 2004). Organizations are important vehicles for establishing lasting capacity and leadership within impacted communities that will sustain and grow beyond any particular collective action or campaign. Leadership development and membership recruitment, education, and mobilization are on-going activities in building an organized base of engaged, politically educated, and collectively-oriented community residents.

Equally important are the ways in which organizations make decisions about priorities, campaigns, and even structures that govern the organization. Every decision is an opportunity to build and exercise democratic leadership: deciding the direction of the next campaign, determining when a member is elevated to the roles and responsibilities of a leader, providing input on the composition and role of the board of directors. Organizations provide a laboratory for resolving issues that play out in society: addressing inter-personal conflicts, balancing multiple self-interests, and making difficult decisions about priorities.



Fundamental #4: Running campaigns and initiatives

Community power-building organizations test and build their power through campaigns. Demands for concrete changes in the policies and practices of institutions are put forth directly to those with the authority, influence, and power to meet their demands. Members put their leadership skills into action by making their case for change through public testimony and through in-person, direct confrontation with decision-makers. Members learn organizing skills by recruiting and turning out other affected members of the community to participate in the campaign. In an iterative process, campaigns are intended to expand the power and influence of organizations over time.

Campaigns are usually crafted to result in short-term wins. Why? Campaigns that result in changes in people's lives are key to keeping members and leaders motivated and engaged. Progress towards their long-term goals help them see the value of the arduous work of organizing and collective action. Furthermore, it increases their level of power and influence over decision-makers when they demonstrate that they can win their demands. Through the campaign process, organizations can become a powerful "outside" force against the status quo and gain the skills, relationships, and experience that prepares them for the on-going and long-term struggle for change as the particular issues, campaigns, and contexts for change shift.

Fundamental #5: Reframing the public narrative

Increasingly, community power-building organizations are focused on strategies to reframe the public narrative that shapes societal values and defines the parameters of public debate. Narrative change is about also shaping "people's understandings of the world, particularly in ways that prevent them from...seeing any possibilities for change" (Healey 2015). Part of this stems from an understanding that one of the root causes underlying the problems that the most impacted communities face are the cultural norms and the deeply entrenched, pervasive beliefs, biases, and forms of discrimination that produce widening disparities across race, class, gender, and place.

In their campaigns, community power-building organizations are developing counter-narratives to the dominant one that reinforces inequity by rendering marginalized people invisible, dehumanized, or vilified. Those dominant narratives build public support for—or indifference towards—policies, practices, and social norms that are harmful for particular populations and communities. For example, voter suppression efforts, police violence, and renter evictions are then accepted as justifiable thus making change efforts an uphill battle.

Power-Building Ecosystem

Community power-building organizations work within an ecosystem of other organization and civic actors whether or not it is an ecosystem that is explicitly or implicitly defined (Ito, Wander, and Pastor 2019). They partner with organizations that specialize in research and policy, provide legal support, focus on communications, messaging, and polling, and employ arts, culture shifting, and narrative change strategies. In an effort to make these ecosystems more visible and explicit, we have simplified it visually (see Figure 1). It is important to note that community power-building organizations have many of these specialized capacities in-house as well. For example, grassroots leadership development is a core strategy paired with organizing thus is carried out for staff or volunteers of an organization. Yet there are also independent leadership development programs and organizations that share the same values as, and commitment to, community power building. This distinction can be made across all parts of the ecosystem.

The purpose of visualizing the ecosystem this way is to challenge prevailing dynamics that sideline community power-building organizations. One such dynamic creates tensions between advocacy and organizing. When advocacy groups are seen at the center, the rest of the ecosystem follows their lead. In such cases, organizing groups are looked to as the mobilization force behind an agenda for which the demands and strategies have already been defined. Often there is an implicit bias stemming from an imbalance of resources and capacity within organizations in an ecosystem. Advocacy, legal, labor, and research institutions tend to be better resourced than community power-building organizations thus tend to dominate coalitions and collaborations. Or there may be cases in which foundations are seen at the center and the rest of the ecosystem is funded to carry out the priorities and programs of the foundation.

The specific categories of a power-building ecosystem will vary by place, population, and problem, which is defined by an organization’s primary motivator for change: Is the long-term goal to transform a particular place, such as Atlanta or a neighborhood in Denver? Is the long-term goal to improve lives of a particular population, such as undocumented immigrants or low-income renters? Or is the long-term goal to shift conditions around a particular issue, such

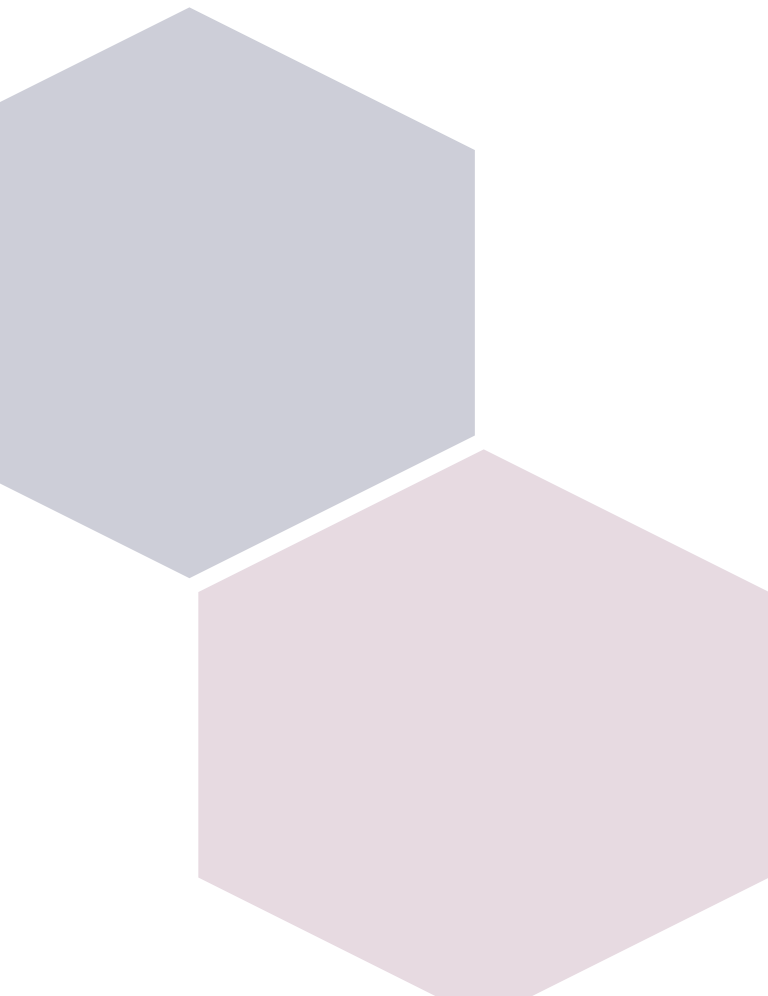


Figure 1. *Power-building Ecosystem*

COMMUNITY POWER: ORGANIZING AND BASE BUILDING AT THE CENTER OF AN ECOSYSTEM *continued*

as access to healthcare, quality jobs, and safe housing. So for tribal-serving organizations or organizations in rural regions, social service providers may be the seeds from which to nurture a power-building ecosystem. On specific issues, such as health access or criminal justice, community-based advocacy organizations or single-issue advocacy organizations may be at the core of the power-building ecosystem.

Finally, which groups are in the power-building ecosystem and which groups are not? To answer this, it is helpful to return to a core premise of the type of organizing that seeks to build power. They are if they align with approaches to change that see the importance of involving people in efforts to change their circumstances by altering the root causes that produce inequalities and health disparities—the underlying structures, decision-making processes, policies, and priorities. This is distinct from approaches (some services providers and government agencies) that seek to accommodate individuals to be more comfortable within their current circumstances (Christens and Speer 2015).

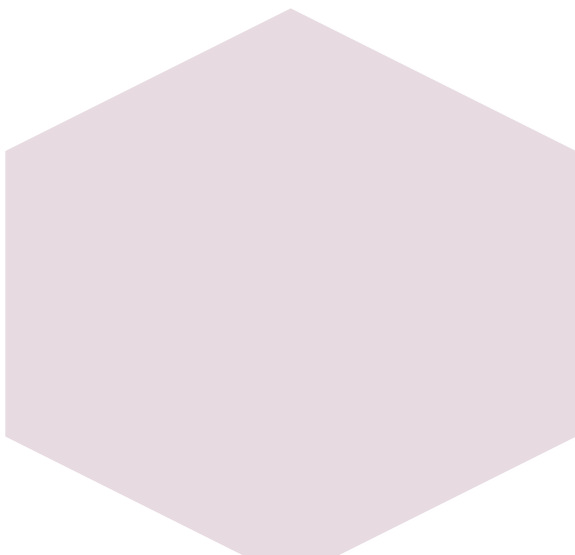


COMMUNITY POWER-BUILDING PATHWAYS TO STRUCTURAL CHANGE

What is the structural change that community power-building groups seek in different communities around the country?

While community power-building organizations take on initiatives and campaigns with near-term goals, they are doing so within a broader and longer arc for building power. While their long-term goals for structural change lie out of their reach given their level of power and influence, the stepping stone efforts along the pathway need to be on the power-building arc. Understanding the structural change that community power-building groups are building towards requires an understanding of this longer-term arc. This primer is intended to shine a light on the pathways that community power-building organizations take on their way to achieving long-term structural change.

In our work on social movements, we have found that this misunderstanding of the objectives of stepping stone campaigns creates tensions within the power-building ecosystem, particularly between community power-building organizations and their allied advocacy organizations and philanthropic supporters. When allied organizations see the stepping stone campaign as the end-goal, they navigate and make decisions through a more narrow and short-term lens. Without an understanding of the longer-term agenda of community power-building organizations, they may inadvertently take short-cuts that skip the steps required to integrate the organized base in key decisions about demands, strategies, and tactics, for instance, or negotiate down the demands of the campaign even before presenting them to the key decision-makers.



In this section, we attempt to highlight the common characteristics and elements of structural change and the long-term agenda that community power-building organizations seek and showcase three examples from the field that illustrate the diversity and complexity of the pathways they may take which are shaped by the particular conditions of a place and the capacities of the ecosystem to navigate change. While the examples given in this primer are all at the state level, it is important to note that there are also efforts at the local and national levels as well.

Structural Change: A Long-Term Agenda

Structural change is about fundamentally addressing inequities at their roots. It is about shifting the root causes that hold inequities in place: the systems, laws, institutional policies and practices that shape conditions in a community; how much, towards what, and how public and private resources are allocated; and the cultural norms that govern private and public attitudes, behaviors, and actions. It is about uprooting the inequities that result in unfair and unequal distribution of the social, economic, and environmental benefits and burdens—including the ways in which certain segments of society are rendered powerless in their ability to participate in decision-making that affects their lives.

While the specifics of a structural change agenda vary across the field, there are five core elements that we find in common: One commonality is a focus on large-scale change and redirection of resources that benefit those communities most affected by inequities. Secondly, there is a focus on fundamental changes in how decision-making happens to be more inclusive of those historically marginalized. Thirdly, there is an aspect of a structural change agenda that is about shifting societal values and narrative. A fourth component seeks to build lasting community power-building infrastructure. The fifth element is about sequencing, choice-making, and creating strategic openings for bolder demands.

Element #1: Redirects large-scale resources

Structural, or systemic, change is focused on fundamental changes to social, political, and economic systems in a place. For example, it seeks to change the rules, priorities, and structures of a tax system, healthcare, education or the economy as a whole. As a result, it improves the lived experiences and conditions of an entire place or population. So while community power-building organizations may be motivated by the problems facing a particular population, such as police violence against Black people, a structural change agenda will have the large-scale effect of improving the safety and well-being of all residents of the community. The scope and scale of change necessary requires working in alliance with others, a commitment to the long-term, and attention to building the capacity and influence of the power-building ecosystem over time.

Element #2: Changes fundamental structures of decision-making

One of the root causes of inequities is powerlessness and an imbalance of power between those with the authority to make decisions and those whose lives are impacted by those decisions. Community power-building organizations address an individual's sense of powerlessness through leadership development and through providing concrete avenues for building and exercising their individual sense of agency. At the societal scale, they address a community's ability to have power and influence in decision-making within an entire system. Therefore, structural changes that they seek include changing the "rules of the game" so that the community can directly participate in decision-making in legislative, electoral, administrative, judicial, or private corporate sector processes.

Element #3: Shifts societal norms and values

The ability to shift societal norms and values is one of the fundamentals of community power building as discussed in the previous section. Groups are fighting an uphill battle because their communities and constituencies are often cast as undeserving or not belonging. This is apparent in the way that undocumented Americans are often treated as not belonging in this country thus should not be eligible for public benefits and services. Or ways in which people who receive public benefits are portrayed as lazy and as a drain on public resources. Structural change not only requires dismantling of such discriminatory beliefs and biases but also resetting social values. For example, structural changes in healthcare are not only about ensuring access to quality services for all but also about shifting a core value of cost-cutting to one that places value on the health and well-being of all people.

Element #4: Strengthens community power infrastructure

A key element of a long-term structural change agenda is that it strengthens the community power infrastructure. Specifically, this means that it should help regenerate the power-building ecosystem rather than detract from it. This could mean that it expands the vision of what the ecosystem sees as possible or increases the pool of resources that the ecosystem can leverage for on-going work. It should build their experiences and expertise that they can carry over into the next campaign. It should strengthen the partnerships between community power-building organizations and elected officials, government agencies, business leaders, and other civic actors with power and influence. It could also result in clearly defined leadership pathways from the grassroots to the decision-making tables and entities that over a system and that allow for authentic democratic decision-making.

Element #5: Creates openings for the future

Increased community power shifts the possibilities for change. The demonstrated ability to make progress on the first four elements described above translates into an ability to push for bolder changes. Community power-building approaches to structural change are thereby iterative processes of continuously assessing the terrain and making decisions about the next move. The work is usually a series of incremental steps that are adapted to shifting conditions, keep the organized base and supporting organizations engaged, and move towards the long-term agenda.

Pathways to Structural Change: Examples from the Field

While we have attempted to lay out a clear set of elements of structural change, it is less clear how they show up in the field. Groups are navigating a complexity of dynamics in a place, a terrain that is ever-shifting and rarely predictable, and an imbalance of power and influence that limits their ability to engage in campaigns with demands at the scope and scale necessary to achieve the structural change they seek. Furthermore, the field is diverse in terms of the approaches, priorities, and choices they make along the pathways to structural change. However, they are all vision-oriented, strategic in their assessment of the landscape, and intentional in their decision-making.

In this section, we lift up the work of three organizations to demonstrate the diversity of pathways to structural change that groups are on in different communities across the country and how those pathways are determined: New Georgia Project, Take Action Minnesota, and Kentuckians for the Commonwealth.

New Georgia Project: Dismantling Structural Barriers to the Participation and Power of Black, Asian, and other Under-represented Populations

While the Georgia Legislative Black Caucus boasts being the largest state legislative Black caucus in the country, that political representation does not always translate into policies that improve conditions for poor and working-class Black families, other communities of color, and underrepresented groups. The New Georgia Project (NGP) seeks to close that gap so that all Georgians are living with clean air and clean water; parents are able to send their children to good schools, residents feel safe in their communities; and workers are fairly compensated for their labor.

The priority for NGP's first years were to identify the structural barriers to communities of color being able to shape decision making and policy development. Given its assessment of the landscape, it made a strategic decision to start with a goal of registering all eligible, unregistered citizens of color in Georgia by the end of the decade. While NGP is seen as a voter registration organization, voter registration and turnout is just the first step that it is taking on a longer road to achieving a multi-racial, multi-ethnic governing majority.

By being meticulous in its efforts and by working with strategic partners in the voting rights ecosystem, it has exposed “deficiencies” in Georgia’s electoral system and efforts at voter suppression at a scale that they had not imagined. In addition to precinct closures and dissemination of false elections information, it discovered an administrative rule set by the Secretary of State that those who do not vote in two consecutive federal elections get moved in a pending list slated for deletion from the voter rolls. It has brought about awareness of the importance and influence of county governments and, in this case, the varying competencies of the county boards of election.

In working under hostile conditions, NGP has had to be prepared with a litigation strategy either proactive or defensive. In its first year, NGP helped 86,419 Georgians register to vote but found that only 46,000 were on the voter rolls. When it approached the Secretary of State (who was running for reelection), the response was to subpoena NGP, its donor records, e-mails, voter registration forms, its scripts, literature, materials, campaign memos, and legal memos. And this was not an isolated incident: NGP’s close partner Asian American Legal Advocacy Center (AALAC) also faced a subpoena and an investigation by the Georgia Bureau of Investigation, which raided its offices, seized files, and shut down its campaign to register and turnout 10,000 Korean Americans in the northern suburbs of Atlanta.

In recent years, NGP has begun to engage in multi-issue policy campaigns. Like with its voter registration programs, it pairs on-the-ground organizing and leadership development with coalition building, strategic communications, social science research, and a litigation plan. It works to address shortcomings in the electoral system at the state and county levels. It also has joined campaigns with labor and economic justice organizations in the state to push for an increase in the state’s minimum wage as part of the Fight for \$15, a now-global workers’ rights movement to raise the minimum wage to \$15 or more per hour. It has an environmental justice agenda where it stepped in to address an infrastructure gap between NAACP and other racial justice organizations in the state that already have a lot on their agenda and environmental organizations such as the Sierra Club that lack a racial justice lens.

And from its on-going organizing and focus on leadership development, it is heading into the 2020 legislative session with a plan to make it a state law that every school board test its water source. This started with an effort by one of its leadership program cohorts

investigating whether or not there was lead in the drinking water in the Atlanta public schools. That questioning led to testing which found unacceptable levels of lead that then led to a remediation plan. The effort expanded to the Fulton County Schools and Dekalb County Schools—and now to the state.

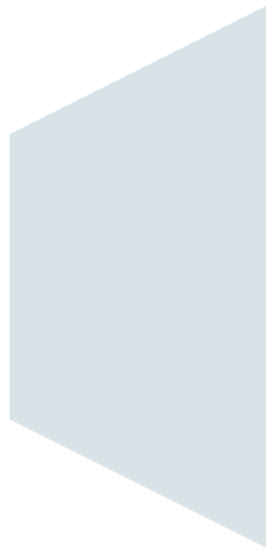
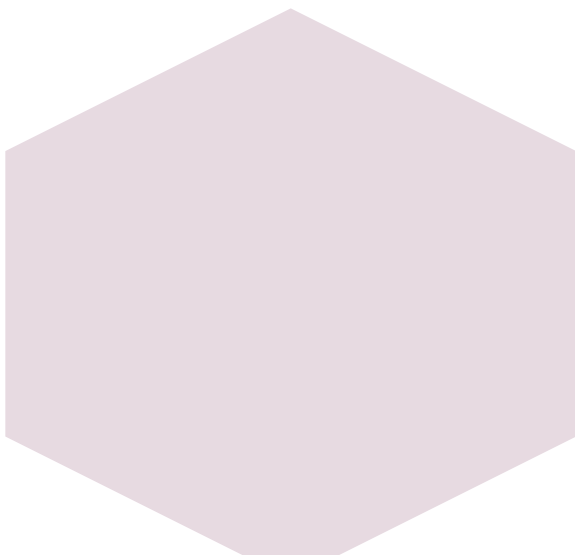
The New Georgia Project made a strategic decision to focus on large-scale voter registration as a way to start a conversation about power in underserved, underrepresented communities and as a way to identify their concerns and hopes for themselves, their families, and their communities. And it is just getting started...

TakeAction Minnesota: Building Power for People-Centered Governance and Structural Change

Founded in 2006 through a merger of two organizations, TakeAction Minnesota is an alliance that now includes over 20 organizations and 60,000 individual supporters committed to social, racial, and economic justice. It serves as a hub for the state's power-building ecosystem focused on building people-centered governance and structural changes that lead to a more just and inclusive society.

While its sights are on large-scale changes to dismantle structures built on racism, sexism, classism, and other forms of discrimination, it engages in short-term, issue-specific campaigns as way to train grassroots activists to become civically-engaged leaders and to gain concrete changes that hold corporations accountable to workers and communities, shift the public narrative, increase community participation in elections, and win policy changes at the local and state levels.

TakeAction Minnesota is explicit about its focus on gaining governing power and building the grassroots leadership with the skills, capacity, and clarity to run everything from the internal organizational governing infrastructure to cooperatives in the community to running public and private institutions towards people-centered democracy. Although Minnesota has a strong,

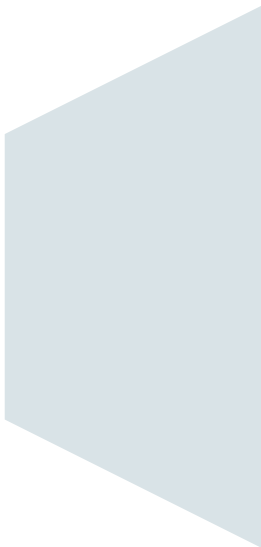
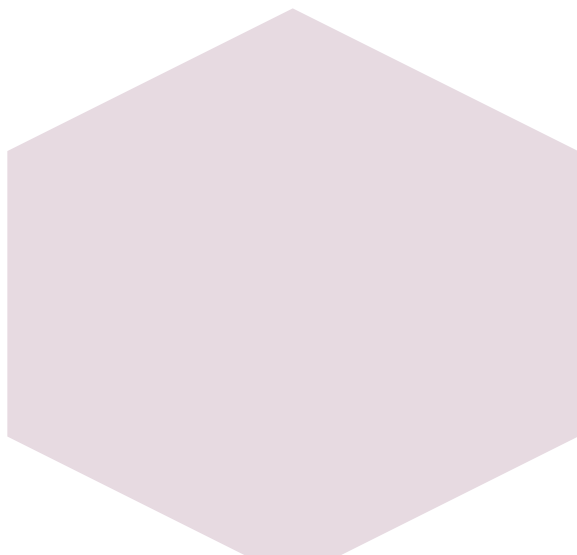


populist, progressive political history with Democratic political leadership and a robust labor movement, the work ahead requires a stronger racial justice orientation that will look different than past strategies and approaches and deeper alignment among the institutions and individuals that comprise the power-building ecosystem.

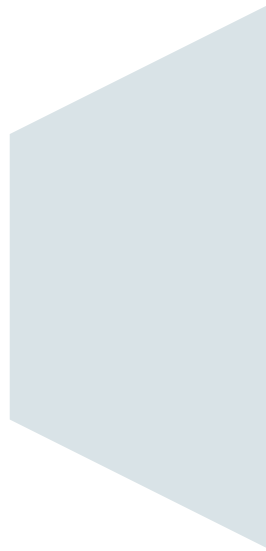
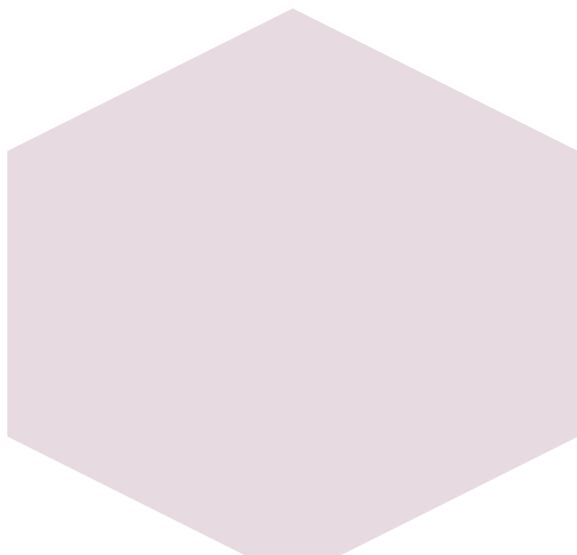
One of its earliest efforts at building deeper alignment was through a coalition Minnesota for a Fair Economy launched in 2010 to focus on a set of shared corporate targets and through the work come to a shared agreement around a common analysis and theory of change. The deeper fight was about challenging institutionalized racism, gender oppression, corporate greed and control, and replacing them with alternatives.

As organizations started developing their campaigns upon these core principles, Target emerged as a common “target.” TakeAction was organizing people with criminal records and was focused on a statewide campaign to “Ban the Box” to make it unlawful for employers to ask whether or not job candidates had ever been convicted of a felony. Centro de Trabajadores Unidos en La Lucha (CTUL) was organizing janitors in the retail sector. ISIAH and a local SEIU affiliate were doing work in Brooklyn where Target had plans to expand its corporate headquarters. Instead of approaching Target through independent campaigns, they saw the opportunity to move together intentionally and leverage their individual campaigns to help the other campaigns win more.

TakeAction had its early victories from that campaign. Several of its members had to check a box that they had a felony conviction and were denied jobs from Target. TakeAction filed several formal complaints to the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission which brought the company to the table. From that organizing, Target agreed not only to ban the box in Minnesota but nationally as well. But the work did not stop there.



TakeAction had been working on state level legislation to ban the box for several years and faced opposition from the state's business community. While TakeAction did not ask Target to publically support the statewide ban, they were able to leverage the relationship to neutralize organized business opposition thus paving the way for the legislature to pass the bill. That then created more relationships within the Target Corporation that created more space for CTUL's organizing of janitors. And at the municipal level, the relationship was helpful in the campaign to pass wage and hour standards in the City of Minneapolis.



Kentuckians For The Commonwealth: Building Grassroots Leadership, Power, and Vision of Structural Change

Founded over 38 years ago in the mountains of eastern Kentucky, Kentuckians For The Commonwealth (KFTC) started its organizing work holding coal companies accountable for the wealth, resources, and power it extracted from the people in the state. It has since expanded its geographic reach throughout the state and broadened its focus to include multiple issues ranging from economic justice, tax and fiscal reform, access to quality education, and environmental justice.

Reflecting a core commitment to leadership development and local organizing, KFTC is comprised of 14 local chapters defined by a county or multiple counties. While they choose their own local issues and strategies, they are governed through a statewide Steering Committee and through participation on issue-specific committees, such as Economic Justice and New Energy and Transition, and on governance committees, such as Finance and Leadership Development. And they strive to balance composition of the committee so that they are driven by people who are most impacted thus have the most to gain by the set of issues that the committee is focused on.

KFTC approaches its campaigns less as a set of policies and more as a long-term power-building strategy with four characteristics. First, their campaigns are vision-oriented, meaning that they have to be propositional not defensive. They are about a proactive agenda rather than being defined only by what they are trying to stop or protect. Second, they have to be inclusive, not only of isolated communities or constituencies but also inclusive of different interests and perspectives. Third, they have to be place-based and mindful of the impact on a place because that shapes what the power-building strategy needs to be. Lastly, it has to be generative. The campaign itself has to “generate more than it consumes.” This means that they should build momentum in ways that generate new political will or new political power by engaging communities and drawing more people into the conversation.

Because the local chapters are driven by local concerns, KFTC works on a multitude of issues—yet it sees all the work as intersectional and seeks to balance the value and structure of the local organizing and individual leadership development with state level and national campaigns. Because of the importance the organization places on leadership development, which they say is the work that makes all their other work possible, people join a local chapter because they have a specific concern such as a strip-mine in their backyard but they stay once they learn about the larger vision.

Through the local chapters and statewide committees, members are involved in all aspects of the campaign which is how they build their leadership, skills, and expertise. And their participation shapes the direction and strategic choices of a campaign coalition. In many cases, it is because of members' participation in meetings with advocacy and legislative allies and their push back on allies that a coalition chose to not settle for more incremental demands in a campaign.

For the past decade, KFTC has had a focus on economic structural change, specifically around new energy and the transition away from a coal-based economy. While such strategies are often reduced to an economic development strategy, for KFTC, it is more about comprehensive structural change. For one, it is fundamentally tied to the power that the industry holds over the state's political leadership so extracting the industry's stronghold in politics is critical. And it has to take into account the pride and identity of coalminers. For the workers who have toiled for generations in the coal mines, they have a strong identity of being a coal miner or Appalachian or eastern Kentuckian that they bring with them even after they move out of the region. So the challenge is how to talk about coal, new energy, and climate change in ways that respect that legacy and people's identity.

To underscore how KFTC takes a place-based approach, it is mindful of the different impacts that a just transition has on in the coalfield communities of eastern and western Kentucky. Its clean energy agenda takes this into account. Its recent victories include the successful opposition to the development of a new coal-fired power plant, development of an innovative community energy efficiency program, and a two-year process that engaged over a thousand Kentuckians in the development of a people's energy plan for the state called Empower Kentucky.

Yet equally important is the technical expertise that the membership and organization gained about the energy system as it exists today, tough negotiations among its allies around the inclusion of a small carbon tax for coal-fired electricity, reshaping of the conversation in the state and among national allies of a just transition, and an Empower Kentucky plan that they have yet to win but provides a goal for their next 38 years.

IMPLICATIONS FOR FUNDERS AND THE FIELD

What are the core lessons and takeaways for philanthropy and the field?

Understand the long-term arc of power building.

We see a tendency—among philanthropy and also practitioners—to focus on narrow investments in immediate *policy* victories or short-term initiatives, rather than on long-term *power*. This leads to organizations coming together around tactical opportunities and forming transactional relationships. At the end of the campaign, groups retreat back to their issue or constituency siloes and the momentum and opportunities are lost to focus on the implementation of the hard-fought policy or to pivot to new issues.

Nurture and not disrupt the existing ecosystem in a place.

A related problem is an emphasis on short-term *initiatives* rather than long-term *infrastructure*. While short-term campaigns are critical for community power-building organizations, what is too often missed is the lasting capacities—vision, leadership, inter-organizational relationships—that they are building through the campaigns with the intent of carrying over those capacities into the next campaign. Oftentimes, well-meaning organizations from the outside do not understand the dynamics and displace existing relationships, priorities, and programs with top-down structures, campaigns, and priorities that disrupt the existing ecosystem.

Build the tools and lessons learned to strengthen power-building ecosystems.

Lastly, there are many organizations in the community power-building field that have grown in their sophistication and experience, learning as much from mistakes and losses as from their wins. Sharing tools and lessons across the field can help accelerate progress by more emergent groups, consolidate wins for national level change, and expand capacity for the meticulous rigor and care that will be necessary as groups are able to more effectively challenge configurations of power that produce and reproduce inequalities in the U.S.

CONCLUSION

There is growing momentum among health equity advocates to center community power building and work towards structural change to address the systems, policies, and institutional practices that perpetuate inequities. This emerging focus is grounded in the assertion that deep and sustainable structural change is possible when we are centering our work among those most affected by a system's historical and current patterns of exclusion and marginalization. As this awareness takes root and spreads, we hope that health and health equity leaders and practitioners in government and civil society will pursue opportunities to partner with community power-building organizations to advance towards a healthier, more equitable society.

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