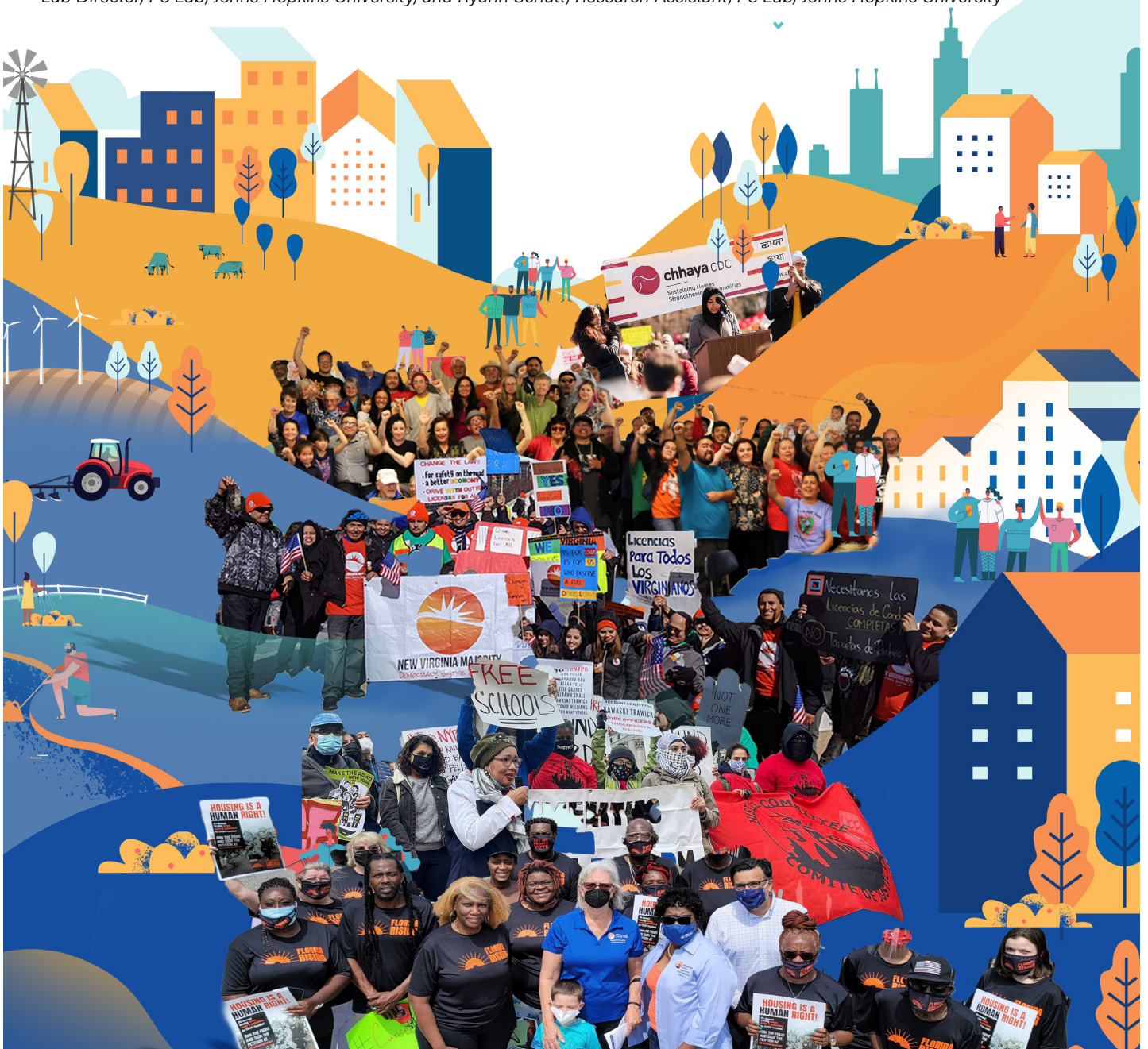The P³ Lab
at Johns Hopkins University

Social Homes as Sources of Power for Health Equity

Authors: Sonia Sarkar, DrPH, MPH, Director of Social Homes and Health Equity, P3 Lab, Johns Hopkins University, Jane Booth-Tobin, Lab Director, P3 Lab, Johns Hopkins University, and Ryann Schutt, Research Assistant, P3 Lab, Johns Hopkins University

Table of Contents

Executive Summary

The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation (RWJF), in partnership with the P3 Lab at Johns Hopkins University, established the Social Homes and Civic Engagement project in 2020 to reveal how organizations develop their constituents' collective capabilities to achieve power and change societal conditions for health equity. This project opened up these organizations' black boxes to surface the specific mechanisms — i.e. how they built community and structures — that helped create transformative experiences for their members, as well as how those choices related to power outcomes.

Project Goals and Questions

In particular, this project sought to uncover the ways a set of 13 movement organizations across the United States built spaces for their constituencies that cultivated their capacity to engage in civic action — forming, what we have termed here, a "social home." With support from RWJF, we launched a research and peer-learning initiative to establish high-level, preliminary insights on the creative, multitudinous, and specific ways in which these organizations are working with their members to build social homes.

We explore whether organizations strengthening this internal fabric makes them better equipped to wield long-term power that contributes to — but is not dependent on — the next voter turnout effort or campaign win. In partnership with the organizations in this cohort and RWJF, we identified the following research questions:

1. **How do movement organizations design and operationalize the collective capabilities that comprise their social homes?**

2. **How do these design choices relate to organizational efforts to build the power necessary to change conditions for health equity?**

3. **How can movement organizations learn from one another's work on social homes — and what should a future learning and practice agenda be for the field?**

We engaged in an iterative, participatory research process with the cohort of organizations to identify what questions and learning edges were most interesting to them. Following that initial identification, we utilized a mixed methods approach that incorporated interviews, primary and secondary data review, and quantitative data analysis to craft ten shorter profiles and three deep-dive case studies (a sample of them are attached to this report).

Each of the case studies and profiles represents the nuance and variability of what we found. Some highlight a pivotal moment that presented several pathways for the organization to take in terms of its social home approach — underscoring that this work is not automatic or organic with fixed outcomes, but rather requires deep strategic analysis and internal discussion.

The organizations, along with P3 and RWJF, also expressed interest in building a network of organizations who would exchange learning on these research questions and generate insights for the field. To that end, we hosted three peer-learning sessions and a final sense-making session for participants to engage with emerging findings and dialogue regarding their experiences.

Project Findings

This report does not purport to prescribe exactly what a social home is or should be; these organizations are also not a representative sample of organizing entities across the country. Indeed, over the course of the project we identified several tensions regarding what a social home could be. Should an organization meet members' needs holistically or focus more narrowly on taking action? How do spaces for social and political identities intersect? What distinguishes a social home within power-building organizations from other organizations with social or community-building elements? Accordingly, our definition of "social home" — an umbrella phrase that we used to refer to collective capabilities but wasn't necessarily used by the participating organizations themselves — evolved with the project.

In this context, **three core findings emerged:**

1. **Each social home is unique, but organizations frequently invest in four common elements that they believe will support individual and collective member political transformation as well as enhance recruitment and retention:**
 	
   a. **addressing whole-person needs via culture, community-building, and care;**
   b. **internal accountability and decision-making;**
   c. **political education; and**
   d. **enabling smaller "sub-homes" within the home.**
	2. **Organizations believe they can successfully convert the collective member transformation occurring within their social homes into potential and exercised power over the conditions and policies that create health inequities;**	3. **Movement organizations are hungry for spaces where they can be in direct dialogue with one another regarding the operationalization and measurement of this work.**

This period has had tremendous impact on both the organizations that we worked with as well as the field in general. The need to change the conditions for health equity — by tackling the social, political, and economic factors that enable health (from environmental policies to fair wages to immigrant rights) — has never been more visible or more prescient.

The 13 organizations whose insights appear here are working to build the robust social homes that they report are necessary to wield power for transformational change. Our hope is that other organizations, as well as the funders who support them, might be able to utilize this report to further understand what a social home is and how it works, and to consider its role in building power to realize healthier, more democratic futures for their communities.

Project Overview

Since early 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic and ongoing reckonings with persistent structural racism have further exposed the United States' long-standing inequities in health, dignity, and community conditions. This study sought to examine the way a set of organizations tackling these challenges are engaging their constituencies in civic engagement in ways that center their needs and expertise, transform their commitments, connections, and capacities, and build their power.

From pushing for an essential workers' fund that provides support for people on the frontlines of the pandemic, to fighting displacement and upholding tenants' rights, to organizing communities of color in elections not only for voter turnout but also to build co-governing relationships with elected officials, these organizations continue to fight for the services, policies, and conditions that will enable their communities to achieve health equity.

Traditionally, research on the impact of social movement organizations on advancing health equity only considers the conventional "outputs" of those movements, such as policies passed, candidates elected, and community institutions built. That perspective, however, ignores the role that movement organizations play in nurturing communities of leadership, belonging, and, potentially, power amongst the constituencies with whom they work.

The Social Homes and Civic Engagement project thus built upon Lead Local, an RWJF-funded collaborative research project that brought together experts in the fields of community organizing, advocacy, and research (including the P3 Lab). Lead Local sought to answer the question of how collective power catalyzes, creates, and sustains conditions for healthy communities. Building on existing literature and practice, the collaboration identified that power is multi-dimensional and not just a way to achieve outcomes or win an agenda; it is also deeply rooted in internal practice and action. Social home organizations not only help pass policies that promote health equity, they also nurture constituencies equipped to become architects of their own future. Cultivating people as architects helps ensure that any policy wins or changed conditions for thriving and well-being can be protected over time.

To understand how movement organizations act as crucibles for leadership and power-building, we must reframe the questions we ask in assessing the impact of social movement organizations on health equity. Instead of looking only at movement outputs, we need to better understand internal organizational practice, namely the structures, processes and practices that make such outputs possible.

This project thus focused on understanding those internal practices as potential vehicles for changing conditions around health equity.

To examine internal practice, this project also built on prior work by the P3 Lab. In particular, in Prisms of the People (2021), Hahrie Han, Elizabeth McKenna, and Michelle Oyakawa argue that successful movement organizations serve as prisms, taking inputs such as individual people

through a prism of transformational design choices known as collective capabilities. These design choices then result in the public exercise of power that can extend beyond the sum total of the inputs themselves, as visualized in **Figure 1** below. For the purposes of this project, we are referring to the inside of the prism as "social homes."

Transforming People Into Power Through Collective Capabilities

People   Collective Capabilities   Power

Participating Organizations

We worked with 13 diverse movement organizations on this project. All engaged in some form of civic engagement, in which individuals and/or groups use a wide array of strategies and tactics to address issues of public concern. Recognizing that not all forms of civic engagement are the same, however, this research project intended to make visible the ways in which these organizations create transformational individual and collective experiences for their members to engage civically as a core part of their power-building strategies.

California Calls:
- *Location*: California (founded in 2003)
- *Constituency*: Communities of color across California
- *Revenue*: $9,755,142 (2019)
- *Mission*: Engage, educate, motivate new and infrequent voters among young people, from communities of color, and from poor and working class neighborhoods to make California's electorate reflect our state's diverse population.

Chhaya Community Development:
- *Location*: New York City, New York (founded in 2000)
- *Constituency*: South Asian and Indo-Caribbean immigrants in Queens
- *Revenue*: $1,793,531 (2019)
- *Mission*: Advocate for and build economically stable, sustainable, and thriving communities for New Yorkers of South Asian origin.

Color of Change:
- *Location*: Oakland, California (founded in 2005)
- *Constituency*: Black Americans
- *Revenue*: $15,358,904 (2019)
- *Mission*: Empower Black Americans and allies to make decision makers more responsive to the concerns of Black Americans and to bring about positive social change for everyone.

Florida Rising:
- *Location*: Florida (founded in 2021, previously New Florida Majority and Organize Florida)
- *Constituency*: Working class communities of color in FL.
- *Revenue*: $6,372,829 (NFM's 990/Revenue in 2019)
- *Mission*: Win elections, change laws, and create a state where everyone can be safe, happy, healthy, and whole. They are a people-powered organization made up of members advancing economic and racial justice across FL.

ISAIAH:
- *Location*: Minnesota (founded in 2000)
- *Constituency*: Multi-racial, faith-based coalition of Minnesotans
- *Revenue*: $7,306,892 (2019)
- *Mission*: Faith-based, nonpartisan coalition of clergy, congregations and people of faith acting collectively and powerfully for racial and economic justice.

Kentuckians for the Commonwealth (KFTC):
- *Location:* Kentucky (focused on Appalachia, founded in 1981)
- *Constituency:* Working-class Kentuckians
- *Revenue:* $4,767,589 (2019)
- *Mission:* To support grassroots organizing, leadership development and public education around important public policy that promotes active citizen participation in the democratic process.

Make the Road New York (MRNY):
- *Location*: New York City, New York (founded in 1998)
- *Constituency*: Immigrant and working class communities
- *Revenue*: $25,054,864 (2019)
- *Mission*: Build the power of Latino and working class communities to achieve dignity and justice through organizing, policy innovation, transformative education, and survival services.

New Virginia Majority (NVM):
- *Location*: Richmond, Virginia (founded in 2007)
- *Constituency*: working-class people of color
- *Revenue*: $5,755,222 (2019)
- *Mission*: Empower low income people and people of color in local communities through leadership development, trainings and workshops, issue education and advocacy, and voter education and mobilization.

Organization for Black Struggle (OBS):
- *Location:* St. Louis, Missouri (founded in 1980)
- *Constituency:* Black working-class
- *Revenue:* $483,020 (2018)
- *Mission:* To build a movement that fights for political empowerment, economic justice and the cultural dignity of the African-American community.

People's Action:
- *Location*: National network of 40 organizations in 30 states (founded in 2016)
- *Constituency*: Poor and working-class people
- *Revenue*: $7,549,903 (2019)
- *Mission*: Advance a long-term agenda for racial, economic and gender justice.

Southerners on New Ground (SONG):
- *Location*: Atlanta, Georgia (with satellite locations in other Southern states, founded in 1993)
- *Constituency*: LGBTQ people, poor and working class, immigrant, people of color, rural
- *Revenue*: $3,757,740 (2019)
- *Mission*: Build, sustain, and connect a southern regional base of LBGTQ people in order to transform the region through strategic projects and campaigns developed in response to rural isolation, Right-wing Christian infrastructure, racism, environmental degradation, and economic oppression.

Southwest Organizing Project (SWOP):
- *Location*: Albuquerque, New Mexico (founded in 1980)
- *Constituency*: Multi-racial membership organization, primarily working in low-income communities of color
- *Revenue*: $1,307,030 (2020)
- *Mission*: Empower disenfranchised communities in the Southwest United States to realize racial and gender equality and social and economic justice.

Texas Organizing Project (TOP):
- *Location*: Texas (founded in 2009)
- *Constituency*: Black and Latino communities
- *Revenue*: $7,832,130 (2019)
- *Mission*: Unite Black and Latino families in Texas to build power and fight for real change in our committees through community organizing and civic engagement.

Research Questions

We identified three research questions in partnership with the 13 organizations in the cohort and RWJF:

1. **How do movement organizations design and operationalize the collective capabilities that comprise their social homes?**

2. **How do these design choices relate to organizational efforts to build the power necessary to change conditions for health equity?**

3. **How can movement organizations learn from one another's work on social homes — and what should a future learning and practice agenda be for the field?**

In particular, the project was intended to capture both individual experiences within the social home — for example, member entry points, transformation, and retention — as well as the collective experiences that surround those member interactions, such as organizational strategy, culture/values/rituals, and internal decision-making structures.

FIGURE 3:
Project Timeline - A Co-Created Research Project

The project consisted of five phases, as identified in the process timeline in **Figure 3** below:
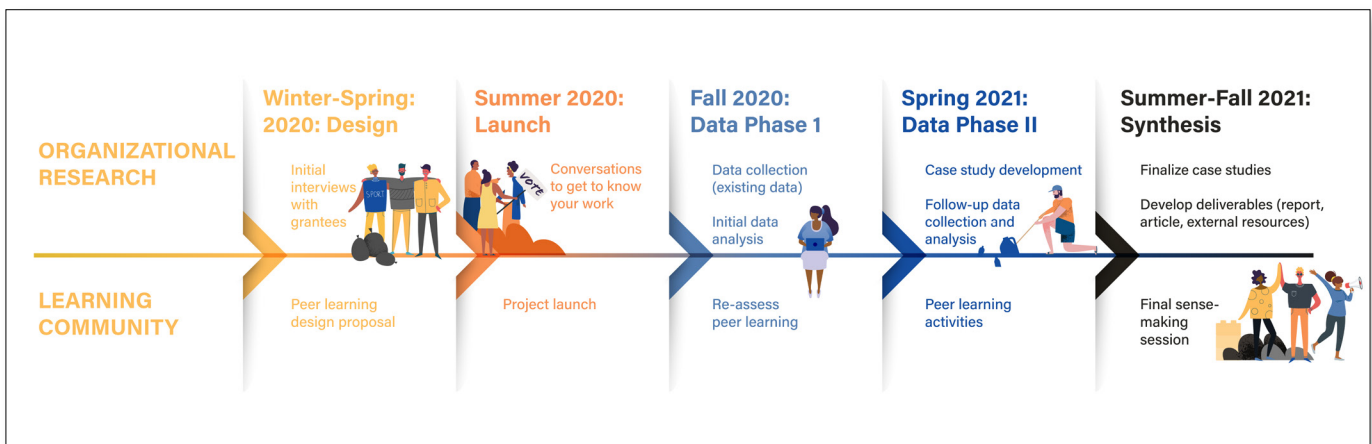
Research within movement spaces comes with several considerations. Historically, traditional research practices have extracted data and knowledge from marginalized communities while failing to align with the needs or strategies of organizations working within these spaces. At the P3 Lab, we believe that research partnerships are the richest when they are strongly grounded in the core strategic questions that field leaders are currently wrestling with.

Consequently, we kicked off the project in January 2020 by interviewing the 13 executive directors, as well as eight program staff, from the participating organizations to identify their aspirations for the research partnership, as well as preferences for a peer learning space. These conversations surfaced a deep interest in a dynamic and customized learning experience, including an initial peer learning structure designed to give grantees more freedom: Each organization would receive flexible funding (in the form of subgrants) to conduct on-site, in-person site visits with each other.

The onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, of course, deeply impacted the grantee organizations, who were frequently on the front lines of responding to impacted members and communities. The pandemic had implications for each organization's strategies as they were required to pivot from in-person, face-to-face interactions to other methodologies and action formats. From a project standpoint, the ensuing lockdown and travel restrictions also required rethinking launch, data collection, and peer learning efforts.

In June 2020, we hosted a project kickoff to share the learning questions that emerged from the interviews that had taken place earlier in the year. Recognizing ongoing challenges related to the pandemic as well as racial justice reckonings across the country, the kickoff was also designed to serve as an initial community-building space for grantees to get to know one another.

Following the kickoff, the project was organized along three distinct workstreams aligned with each of the three research questions. Additional information regarding research design and methods can be found in **Appendix C**.

I. How Organizations Design Their Collective Capabilities

"Social home" is not a defined term, nor is it a common term amongst organizations that use community organizing strategies. As a result, when embarking on this project we sought to look across the data we were collecting to identify potential elements of a social home, i.e. organizational collective capabilities.

All 13 organizations we spoke to had incredibly varied constituencies, governance structures, geographic scope, member size, and strategic priorities. We found that, despite these differences, organizations were wrestling with design choices across four high-level shared themes (see **Figure 4**). As they made these decisions, organizations chose to prioritize and invest in some of these themes more than others — ultimately developing unique structures that they believe best supported their specific community or the type of change they were seeking.

FIGURE 4:
Social Home Shared Themes
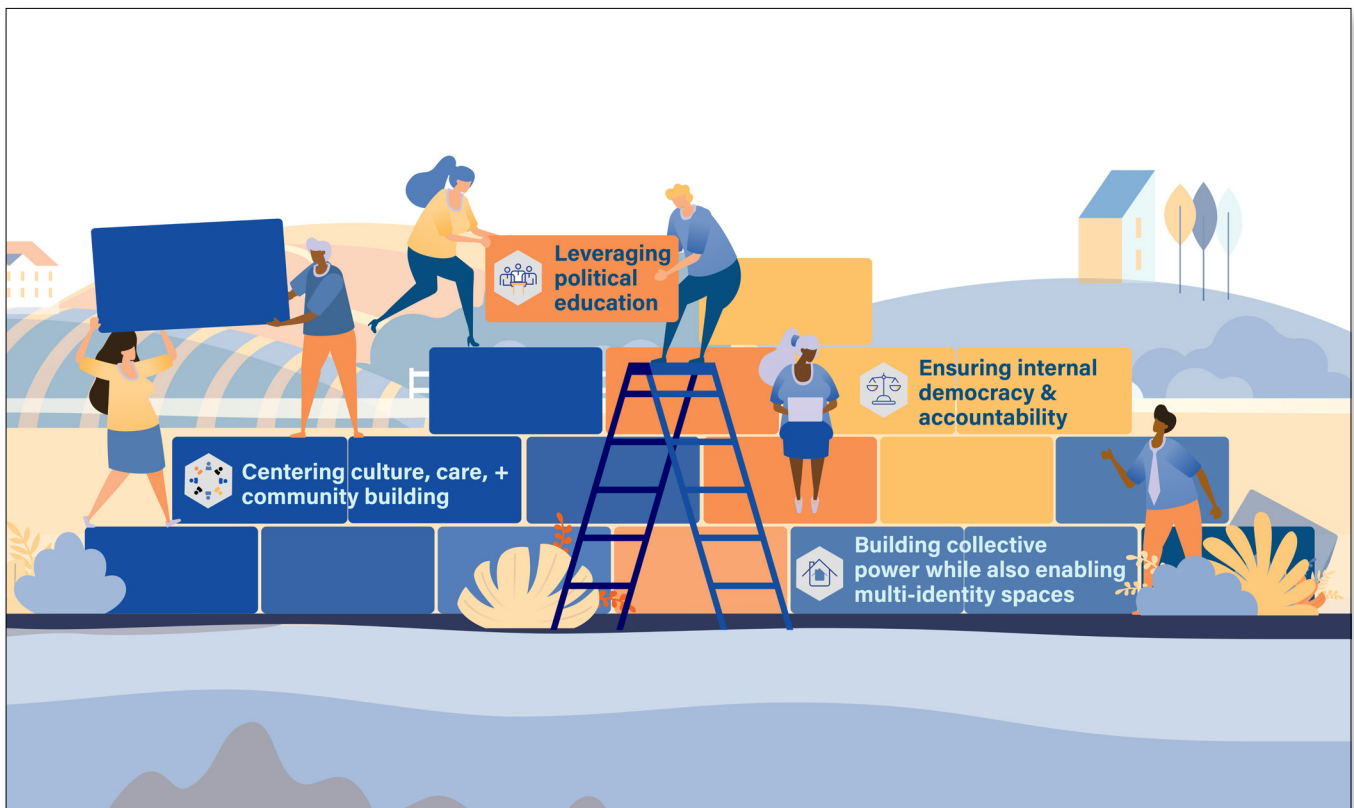
Theme #1: Centering Whole-Person Culture, Care, And Community Building

Organizations building social homes seek to holistically address the individual and collective needs of their members, through things like direct services, mutual aid, food, ritual, art, gatherings, and more.

Organizations across the cohort expressed the importance of prioritizing whole-person care, community-building, and rituals to bring members together and support their participation — emphasizing that the collective work is not only about mobilizing into action but also about the people who engage in the work together. Several organizations cited practices ranging from eating together (pre-pandemic), to holding regular events for members to gather and celebrate, to exercising shared values. Additionally, far from viewing this as a "nice-to-have" benefit, organizations considered it a crucial and intentional part of their strategy to cultivate and dedicate resources towards.

Three sub-themes arose here in our conversations. First, some organizations, seeking to meet members where they are and ensure their capacity for participation, intentionally built organizational structures for direct service and mutual aid programs — for example, ESL classes, financial literacy, connections to health insurance, and more. This was especially true during the pandemic, as organizations grappled with whether or how much to lean into rapid response and recovery programs for their constituencies, and what implications that might have for organizing work.

Make the Road New York (MRNY), a statewide organization that builds power to holistically address the needs of immigrant families in New York through direct services and community organizing, views their direct-service programming as a stepping stone to new members staying with the organization, as well as giving them a pathway to organizing work. Eighty percent of organizing participants had also accessed either a legal or health service or completed a class offered by MRNY. By pairing services with organizer interactions, MRNY is taking an intentional approach to transforming individual members' ability to take action.

Second, organizations cited the importance of creating collective community by tending to members' humanity — breaking bread together, specific celebration rituals and events, and providing care in the form of food or childcare. These actions were seen as a manifestation of individual and institutional values, as well as an effective way to support participation and build collective identity across members.

Southerners on New Ground (SONG), for example, calls this their "Alchemy" practice, an approach to setting space that evolved collectively from SONG members that enables the organization to be more than just the "sum of their parts." Alchemy includes elements such as cultivating physical space and establishing altars, providing nourishing food and childcare, ensuring accessibility across language and disability issues, centering intentional facilitation with breaks and check-ins, utilizing poetry, visual arts, and music, and prioritizing clarity and mindfulness.

Other organizations incorporated similar elements into their organizing events — SouthWest Organizing Project (SWOP)'s annual Chile Harvest Fiesta, for example, brings members and partner communities together to celebrate and honor the indigenous and Latinx cultures, practices, and traditions of the Southwest — as well as energize the base for the work ahead. Not only do these events center a core value of celebration, they also align with SWOP's perspective on how their members can exercise agency in the world. Events such as the Chile Harvest Fiesta enable deeper connections, a place for members to share in their experiences, and then the opportunity to raise potential projects or campaigns that members want to take on.

> *"We just want to have fun and build relationships and celebrate art and culture, which I think often gets lost in the mix, but for us it's super important especially in a state like New Mexico that so much is built on that. And we talk about resilience of people in our state and it's based on their connection to the land and the culture, art and music really keeping their spirits up."*

Left Image: SWOP Members

Particularly for organizations whose constituents have been historically oppressed and who require social homes that recognize them as full human beings with needs — rather than as means to an end — this element of the social home was frequently seen as non-negotiable. Care and ritual are crucial to combating exhaustion and in turn ensuring that there is the collective capability to survive while engaging in the work of building power. It is difficult, for example, to engage if you are struggling to get personal protective equipment or are facing an eviction or food insecurity. Organizations were interested in understanding how the community-building elements of their work might be a part of — or foundational to — cultivating a collective member identity and experience.

> *"There is a real identity. People in our membership, they wear their [organization] t-shirt with pride. It means something when they walk into a room. They understand that it means something when they show up at city hall. They understand it means something in front of a candidate. The undocumented member who is on a zoom call with the city council rep that represents her district, she's not a voter. But she's on a phone call with a couple of people who are voters in the district and who have backup from the organization to say, 'this is my family's situation. This is what we need you to do.'"*

Lastly, organizations surfaced that while they saw the importance of braiding whole-person needs into their organizational strategies, they also experienced significant tension negotiating

how extensively to center it. Several of the organizations said they saw their work as generally distinct from that of civic organizations — where social activities are not necessarily tied to a broader power-building agenda. This sense of accountability to the organization's core goals presented them with a series of strategic decisions to make. For example, provide rapid assistance during the pandemic to ensure that members have their basic needs met and can therefore engage in other organizational work, or risk intensive resource investment into meeting short-term needs potentially at the expense of long-term power shifts? While some organizations saw this not as a tradeoff but rather as a mutually reinforcing strategy, other organizations expressed that they sometimes found it challenging to take both approaches simultaneously.

Theme #2: Ensuring Internal Democracy and Accountability

Organizations building social homes seek to develop internal decision-making structures and strategies that cultivate relationships of accountability to their membership base.

Constituency-based organizations in the United States have become more professionalized and top-down in their management structures since the 20th century (Skocpol, 2003). Fewer 21st-century organizations are truly led by their base, thus limiting opportunities for members to come together and engage in collective decision-making. Many people do not have the experience of shared governance; thus, organizations working to develop practices of internal democracy and shared governance can face an uphill battle, and many struggle to develop democratic decision-making within their own structures.

Participants in this cohort shared several different views of member-led decision-making, as well as the governance structures they have implemented to enable that decision-making. New Virginia Majority (NVM), for example, regularly faces challenges around engaging with elected officials and other power structures with historically exclusionary decision-making processes while continuing to ground in what their base actually wants. NVM pointed to its day-to-day actualization of including constituents in policy decisions:

Bottom Image: NVM Members and Community

> " *"For us and for the members, we kept them informed every step of the way. Even with me as the inside negotiator working with the governor's office and with bill patrons … I would go back to [a set of member-leaders] and say, 'Here's what's on the table. Tell me what you want me to do. If you want me to kill the bill, I can kill the bill. If you want me to move forward, we can move forward' … that demonstrates to our members that they are actually in the driver's seat with this decision."*

Organizations manifest their commitment to internal accountability via a variety of structures and practices, ranging from a People's Assembly model (in which members come together to vote directly

on organizational issues), to a chapter structure, to local affiliates of a national organization. Processes for internal accountability range from membership-wide voting to intensive consensus-building work sessions. These processes — and those of other organizations we spoke to — are not straightforward.

Across the board, organizations shared that there are various challenges and tradeoffs that come with cultivating democratic governance. For example, what is the role of a vocal minority within an organization when it comes to consensus-building? At what point is there deep enough trust for a leader or staff person to act on members' behalf? How do members access the information they need to approve a shift in strategy with respect to policymakers or power structures with limited visibility? These structures are constantly in flux as both the external environment and the experience of members shift as well.

Despite these challenges, many organizations expressed determination to continue holding internal democracy as part of their core values and day-to-day operations, and to continue testing different structures and practices for effectively facilitating that dynamic. Several pointed out that this was a core collective capability to build power — ensuring that populations within their social homes who have been historically excluded from traditional power structures are an authentic part of decision-making and strategy-setting for the organization.

> *"We should be having a real conversation around what does it mean to have community-led governance. Period. That includes assemblies. But it takes a lot of ego-losing … it requires us to go deep on what power means when we share it. How do we really engage in that collective leadership? That will redefine a lot of things."*

> *"The leaders also wanted to make sure members had the power in the organization. It was decided that the organization's work would be guided by a platform developed and approved by members. Internal decision-making would be open and democratic. And it would be the members, not the staff, who would speak publicly for the organization. The chapter structure recognized the work being done by a number of local organizations while providing a structure for these local groups to work together across county lines on shared concerns and issues."*

> *"An organization should be led by its members. We struggle with that and engage with that … it would be a lot easier for us to have a board that's made up of special people as opposed to members. But we've really been leaning into it."*

Theme #3: Leveraging Political Education

Many organizations building social homes work with members to design and administer political education that enables individual and collective member transformation and develops member leadership and knowledge.

Political education within the social home serves as a way to support members in understanding the political, social, and economic power structures that their individual experiences connect to, as well as an opportunity to build collective purpose and vision. Make the Road New York's

Youth Power program, for example, includes an intensive summer program during which youth who were referred by their schools, peers, or MRNY organizers are taught to unlearn systems of oppression related to sexism, racism, and transphobia. Paired with MRNY organizers, participants in the program are tasked with translating that knowledge into collective action by executing campaigns and contributing to the organization's committees. MRNY reports that its political education program, which contains several levels and is shaped directly by member interest and feedback, enables the organization to build its collective capacity across the organization.

Organizations also utilize political education to deepen and mirror culture and values. SouthWest Organizing Project and Organization for Black Struggle, for example, both work to center their constituents' unique and specific traditions of intellectual thought. SWOP collaborates with global movement organizers to administer its Universidad Sin Fronteras program, which recognizes that traditional aspects of knowledge development and transfer can themselves be uncoupled from mainstream (white/western) methodologies. Members of SWOP identified that they wanted their political education to include both traditional organizing tactics such as power-mapping, as well as topics like decolonizing creativity and engaging in oral storytelling.

Bottom Image: OBS Community Members

OBS, with a 40-year history of civil rights organizing in St. Louis, Missouri, specifically uses political education to ensure that new and younger members are aware of the long history of Black political power-building — for example, lessons from the 1972 Gary Convention on the National Black Political Agenda, in which thousands of African Americans came together in Gary, Indiana, to develop a shared social and economic agenda. This history is passed down via customized political education sessions during which OBS elders share firsthand reflections and accounts of the discussions that took place — and what implications they could have on OBS' strategic approach.

The organizations in this cohort often described their approach to political education as an intentional space for members to step into leadership roles and design curricula that aligned with their own visions for the organization. These organizations noted the opportunity for individual transformation when members (rather than staff) are designing and administering political education.

Ongoing political education helps members understand their own struggles as part of a collective challenge in a way that is tied to broader theories of knowledge. The process of developing political education is also an opportunity for members inside the social home to share their own knowledge.

> *"There [was] a want for political education that is not always seen in the mainstream. And ours, more often than not, took a local tact. Members identified that they wanted to participate in sessions that included both traditional organizing tactics (i.e. Power-mapping decision-makers in New Mexico) as well as less-frequented topics including decolonizing creativity and storytelling. All curriculum design and decisions were run through the member-led board, and members also had the opportunity to design and bring forward their own content."*

Theme #4: Building Collective Power While Also Enabling Multi-Identity Spaces

Some organizations building social homes developed interdependent spaces for shared identity groups (i.e. by race, nationality, geography) within their constituency to form their own group identity, while also connecting to collective power across the full organization.

While the thought of a unified "home" for members might imply that all members must engage with one another in the same space, organizations across the cohort have identified that in order to build solidarity across identities, geographies, etc., spaces for people with similar identities and experiences to be in community and build power together play a valuable role.

Although this may seem counterproductive, multiple organizations reported that this was necessary to build a more collective whole. There are several reasons for this "homes within a home" approach, including feasibility (i.e. local affiliate members of a national organization are more likely to gather in-person at the local level) and culture and shared experiences (members are interested in engaging with others that they feel comfortable/safe with).

Chhaya, for example, is a New York City-based organization whose constituency includes a broad diversity of communities that fall under the Indo-Caribbean and South Asian bucket, each with specific needs, cultures, and ways of building community. The organization balances both a focus on collective power as well as space for individual identity-based groups (i.e. by nationality) to build their own power. For example, in early 2019, Chhaya launched the Bangladeshi Tenant Union to fight for the rights of tenants. The organization originally wanted to develop a South Asian Tenant Union, but members felt it would be stronger as a specifically Bangladeshi-identified group. Executive Director Annetta Seecharran shared, "both can exist — it is indicative of an evolution, and a growing social capital."

Left Image: Chhaya Community Development Member speaking to crowd.

> *"To your brand new immigrant who comes from Bangladesh, or who doesn't have particularly fond memories of Pakistan, or fond memories of a Pan-South-Asian identity — or Indian folks who don't necessarily see Indo-Caribbeans as one and the same with them — we still have to break down those barriers somehow ... we shouldn't expect them to be where other folks are, but we have to figure out how we get there collectively."*

Similarly, the ability to organize and build power across racial lines emerged as a significant learning edge for participating organizations. What we found throughout the cohort was that, in multi-racial organizations, communities reported needing specific, closed spaces to gather. These spaces involved their own form of culture, community-building, and organizing strategies within the broader social home. Acknowledging that members' diverse identities result in distinct experiences internally, many organizations felt that this practice had the potential to strengthen internal work rather than create silos.

Recently, Texas Organizing Project, an organization formed from a merger between Latinx and Black organizing bases, decided to build out BlackTOP, a space within the organization for Black members to be in community with one another while also engaging in conversations about multi-racial solidarity. This initiative is new, but both leadership and members believe it is worth investing in this type of strategy to see if it can strengthen the collective whole across the organization.

> *"We want black members to understand the mission of TOP, that the big picture is solidarity, and then move people into the campaigns at large. We want them to know that as they go into a criminal justice campaign or into a housing campaign, they have a firm understanding that their blackness matters. And at the same time, they're going to be allied with our Latino and brown and other people of color, as well as poor white people."*


Left Image: TOP Organizers at a Rally

By building these spaces within the social home, organizations saw opportunities to create greater solidarity across constituencies, as well as the potential for greater retention among communities facing particular systemic oppressions. By prioritizing flexibility and the specific requests of their members rather than holding to the idea that the social home must operate as a single environment, organizations were testing the theory to ensure that members of these communities have the processing space and security to continue taking part in the broader collective work.

Cross-Theme: Member Entry Points & Retention

A through line across all four themes was the way that these design choices brought members into an organization and supported not only their retention, but their deepening engagement. As they considered these design choices, organizations sought to identify and test theories regarding why members were coming to their organizations in the first place (see **Figure 5** below) — and then what was causing them to stay once they had joined.
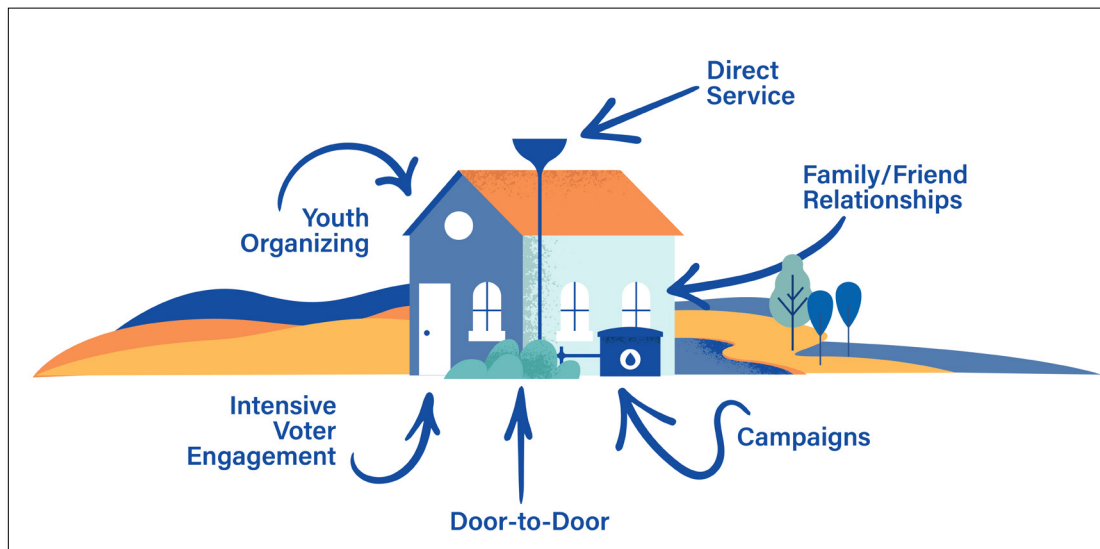
Entry Points into the Social Home

Florida Rising described examining data via a "lab" within its membership department that is tasked with brainstorming and researching effective tactics for boosting recruitment numbers and then providing feedback to the organizing department on what seems to be resonating (or not) with potential members. Whether providing direct services as described in **Theme 1** (page 12), or enabling spaces for constituents of a particular identity as described in **Theme 4** (page 17), organizations frequently dedicated staff and data collection resources in order to understand whether these entry point tactics were indeed having an impact on member recruitment.

Once members are in, the question arises of what causes them to stay with the organization over time while continuing to deepen their commitment. Here, too, organizations varied widely in their hypotheses of what might result in high retention. The choices they made related to each theme reflect these hypotheses. Several organizations shared that they were beginning to look more specifically at event types within these themes in order to understand the relationship between events where members are involved in building collective capability — i.e. engaging in political education or active decision-making on a specific campaign — and "stickiness" within the organization.

If the core purpose of building a social home is to enable individual and collective member transformation that builds power, then understanding pathways and practices for member engagement, as well as the effectiveness of those pathways, is crucial — and an area for continued capacity-building and research.

II. The Connection Between Social Homes And Power Outcomes

Through our work with three organizations in the project cohort — ISAIAH, Kentuckians for the Commonwealth (KFTC), and Color Of Change (COC) — we explored the relationship between the design choices within their social homes and the power outcomes they were trying to create. Each case study presented a different example of how organizations reported their inputs coming together inside a social home in order to impact power structures, as depicted in **Table 1**:

TABLE 1:

RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN SOCIAL HOME DESIGN AND POWER OUTCOMES

Organization	People	Collective Capabilities	Reported Power Outcomes
ISAIAH	Multi-faith, multi-racial coalition in Minnesota	Building out "rooms of the house" — supporting specific constituencies (i.e. Muslim Coalition; Black Barbershops and Congregations Cooperative) in building their own power while enabling collective power	Exercised ongoing power relationship with a local elected official
KFTC	Progressive, state-wide base in Kentucky	Leaning on a democratic governance structure rooted in intensive dialogue, values, and community to navigate tension among members and deepen commitment	Potential power with governor's office built on strong election turnout
COC	Black members engaging digitally and in-person across the country	Centering Black joy to achieve both scale and depth during a pivot from online to offline organizing by bringing culture, care, and ritual to relationship-building and organizing events	Deepening power outcomes by building a base that is committed to long-term engagement

ISAIAH'S "Rooms Of The House"

For ISAIAH, building a collective home requires placing trust in decentralization. Executive Director Doran Schrantz describes their coalition as a house with multiple rooms — as the organization has grown and added new leaders and constituencies, more rooms have needed to be tacked onto the house:

> *"It's a ramshackle, sprawling thing, but everybody's got their own room. And we share the plumbing, we share the electricity, we maybe share a kitchen, but you build your own room, you decorate it, you run it, and then we have common spaces where we come together and go like, 'what are we going to do? How are we going to move x, y or z forward? Or learn together about something, you know?' So it really is increasingly like these hubs, and those hubs have their own power in the context of the organization, and then a lot of the organizational challenge becomes, how does that [all] get aligned into a common strategy that then meets everybody's interests?"*

In this case, as different people — from Latinx organizations, Black barbershops and congregations, Catholic churches, childcare centers, Islamic centers, and immigrant sanctuary organizations — have entered into ISAIAH, the coalition has decided to structure its social home in a way that doesn't force everyone to fit into one "room." Instead, the organization acknowledges that affinity spaces can foster safety and processing, and it pairs this approach with overarching trust-building and dialogue across the organization as a whole. Furthermore, these separate strategies allow for tailored organizing strategies that meet each group where they are. In 2020, for example, ISAIAH's white Christian base conducted voter turnout virtually via Zoom, while the Muslim Coalition and Black Barbershops and Congregations organizers attended community events and local businesses and knocked on doors.

As outlined in the attached case study, this approach was tested in 2017 as the city of Saint Paul held a referendum on the shift from a private trash collection system to a publicly managed consortium. ISAIAH's organizers saw the opportunity to engage in the trash referendum as a way to develop a power relationship with the newly elected mayor's office. However, there was no guarantee that such a diverse coalition with different priorities would agree to this strategic pivot. For example, Muslim organizers faced questions from their communities about why the focus was on trash in light of issues such as Islamophobia. Navigating this tension would require committing to the idea of supporting individual bases to develop unique strategies — resulting, in this case, in ISAIAH leveraging its influence to broker a conversation between the mayor and Muslim community leaders.

Ultimately, ISAIAH felt that this re-energizing of the base contributed to an overall win on the trash referendum. But it also crucially shifted ISAIAH into a co-governing relationship with the mayor's office, which it saw as an important long-term power outcome in order to push on other local priorities including housing policy, police accountability, and more.

KFTC Democratic Governance

KFTC takes pride in its democratic governance structure, rooted in a 40-year commitment to deep and intentional leadership by members, starting with a small group coming together to fight harmful coal company practices and growing to become a statewide organization. For example, each year, prior to the organization's annual membership meeting, steering committee members — representing every KFTC chapter — review organizational platform recommendations and edits that each chapter puts forth. The full committee then discusses these suggestions and accepts, revises, or declines each recommendation. Then, at the annual meeting, all of the recommendations are explained, and members can make additional recommendations. Members vote on each recommendation, and at the end there is a vote to accept the entire platform as proposed or to amend it. Importantly, all KFTC members across the organization are eligible to vote in this agenda-setting process. This is not a widely adopted practice, even amongst movement organizations that value democratic governance, given that enabling all standing members to engage at this level of detail is often time-consuming and labor-intensive.

Furthermore, this commitment to internal accountability does not necessarily guarantee unanimity. In fact, it can create tensions around how to move forward with a decision when a small but vocal minority might oppose it. This dynamic arose as KFTC shifted direction following the 2015 gubernatorial election and the 2016 general election, choosing to dedicate additional resources and capacity to electoral strategy. As the organization moved forward with a decision to engage in the 2019 gubernatorial election, and in particular encourage turnout with the hopes that Democratic candidate Andy Beshear would win, not all members were convinced that a pivot towards electoral strategy was the right decision for the organization.

Members worried that leaning into this new direction would mean sacrificing other priorities. One member shared:

> *"I was initially kind of personally doubtful about [electoral work] because it's not systemic change, it's not revolution. On the other hand, when the republicans have a supermajority, a lot of our lobbying is ... reactive."*

Despite this skepticism, the member described participating in KFTC's internal democracy procedure, in what would come to be known as the "Berea meeting," as a basement full of KFTC members focused on building consensus around this decision:

> *"It became real clear in this summit that there was more interest than there'd ever been on electoral work. I think we all just felt kind of backed into it from the sense of, what choice do we have? Trump is the president, Bevin is the governor. We just can't push issues if we don't do something about the people that are making decisions on those issues. I remember that because it was one of those real, for me, KFTC moments when everyone is together dealing with the really tough issues, but also drawing on the warmth of the community."*

Ultimately, KFTC adopted this strategy and built a base of voters it sought to turn out in the 2019 gubernatorial election, which Beshear won. Now, with an increased base of members and a continued grounding in democratic decision-making, the organization has built a potential power relationship with the governor's office that it could exercise to advance its agenda.

Bottom Image: COC's Social Media Post Sample

Color Of Change: Black Joy And Engagement

As the largest online civil rights organization in the United States, Color Of Change, has a long track record of achieving campaign wins related to hate speech in media, police reform, and more by mobilizing their large base of Black members. Following the 2016 general election, however, Color Of Change decided to expand from its online organizing strategy to also prioritize in-person organizing, seeing this as a key aspect of building long-term, sustainable power at both the local and national levels.

At a time, however, when those outside of COC pushed for traditional approaches to Black voter turnout — focusing on short-term mobilization over long-term engagement and relationship-building — the question for COC was how to build out a program that achieved both scale and depth.
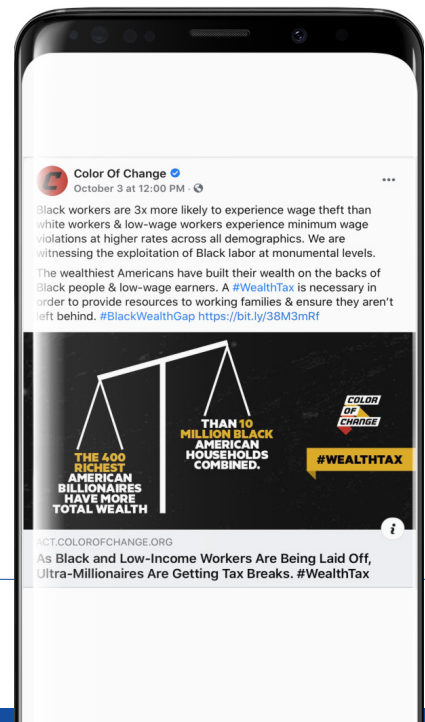
One of the ways that COC has navigated this perceived dichotomy is by scaffolding a new offline and electoral strategy that prioritizes community-building, care, and ritual, including a PAC as well as local squads that engage with local programming such as Black Women's Brunch and "Black joy" events. In doing so, the organization has sought to build a uniquely Black social and political space that provides an overarching umbrella for the many different Black members seeking a space to be unabashedly themselves:

> *"[In] creating black women's brunch, I was drawing on traditions of different things that I'd been a part of since i was a little kid. The black church for one. My mom's black women's bible study ... or cookouts. These are the things that are ... intrinsic to Black American culture and easily replicable."*

As COC builds out these activities, it has chosen to center Black joy as a central principle, identifying it as an internal power dimension in and of itself. In the context of Black people's holistic experience — including countering the forces of structural racism and trauma in day-to-day life — COC creates a sense of belonging and purpose that can then translate into political power-building:

> *"People across the country were showing up to brunches and thinking about the ways that they were engaging politically. And it wasn't about, 'oh, I'm coming to this political event because I want to do something.' It was, 'oh, I feel a sense of belonging here. I feel like I could see me.' And they saw themselves reflected in the room."*

Color Of Change is currently conducting analysis on the relationship between Black joy experiences and member engagement and retention.

III. Developing Shared Learning Spaces And Areas For Future Learning

In facilitating shared learning among participants, we learned that organizations were eager to connect with one another on the topic of the social home specifically. Cohort participants were diverse in size and scope, and many had not had the chance to build learning relationships with other groups previously.

While we had to pivot from our original plan of funding in-person site visits for the cohort due to the pandemic, we instead hosted a series of 90-minute peer learning sessions between March and July 2021. These sessions were designed to serve as interactive experiences for organizations to get to know one another's work and share questions and stories. Following each peer learning session, participants had an opportunity to provide feedback on how they would like to continue learning from each other.

The peer learning sessions touched on three topics: achieving scale and depth in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic; understanding how data can facilitate social home design and

evaluation; and assessing the most effective entry points and on-ramps for member retention. During the peer learning sessions, project participants raised several overarching reflections related to the project, including:

■ Wish for additional time and space to hear directly from other organizations conducting this type of work (including those in this cohort);

■ Resonance that the type of work described in this project is often seen as a "nice-to-have" benefit but is in fact core to strategy, in particular building the collective capabilities to transform individual members into a form of power;

■ Challenges related to measuring, assessing, and analyzing elements of the social home (i.e. understanding how culture-building is contributing to retention) — several organizations were still pivoting to prioritizing this type of data within their evaluation concerns and also shared questions about identifying what kind of data can capture these complex phenomena;

■ Agreement that this work is not traditionally well understood or acknowledged by funders or external partners who may be more focused on traditional metrics such as election turnout;

■ The toll that the pandemic and ongoing work fighting for economic and racial justice has taken on organizations and their members at a physical, mental, and social level.

For each peer learning session, we partnered with a graphic recorder to capture key findings and stories from the participants (see **Figures 6-8** below).
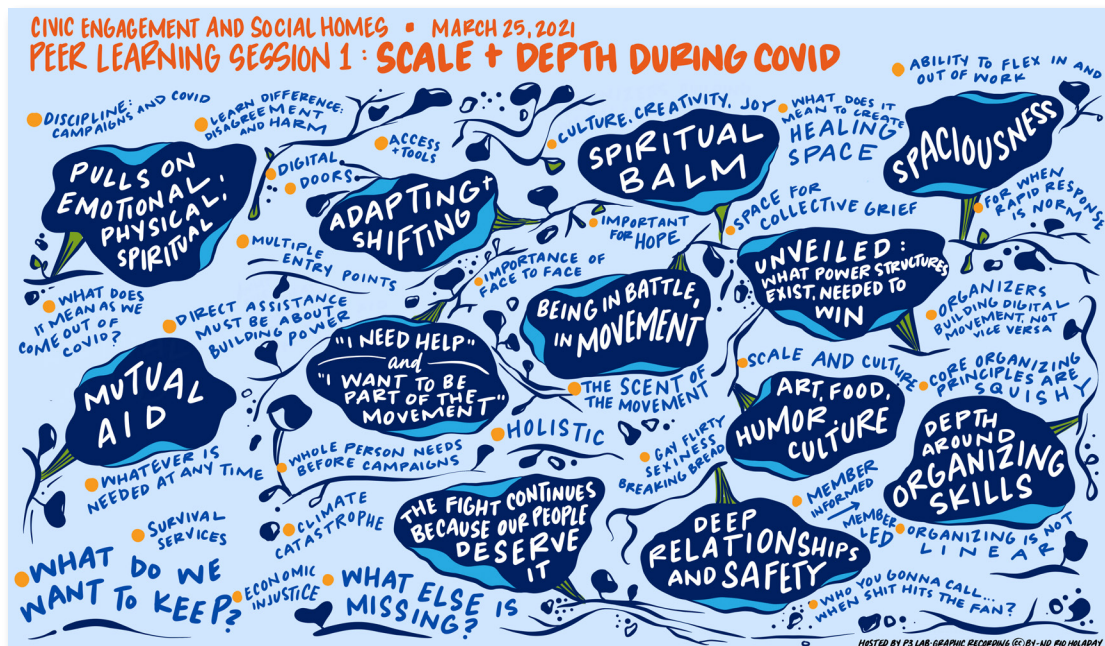
FIGURE 6:

Session 1: Exploring How To Achieve Scale And Depth During Covid-19: Lessons From 2020 And Looking Ahead In 2022.
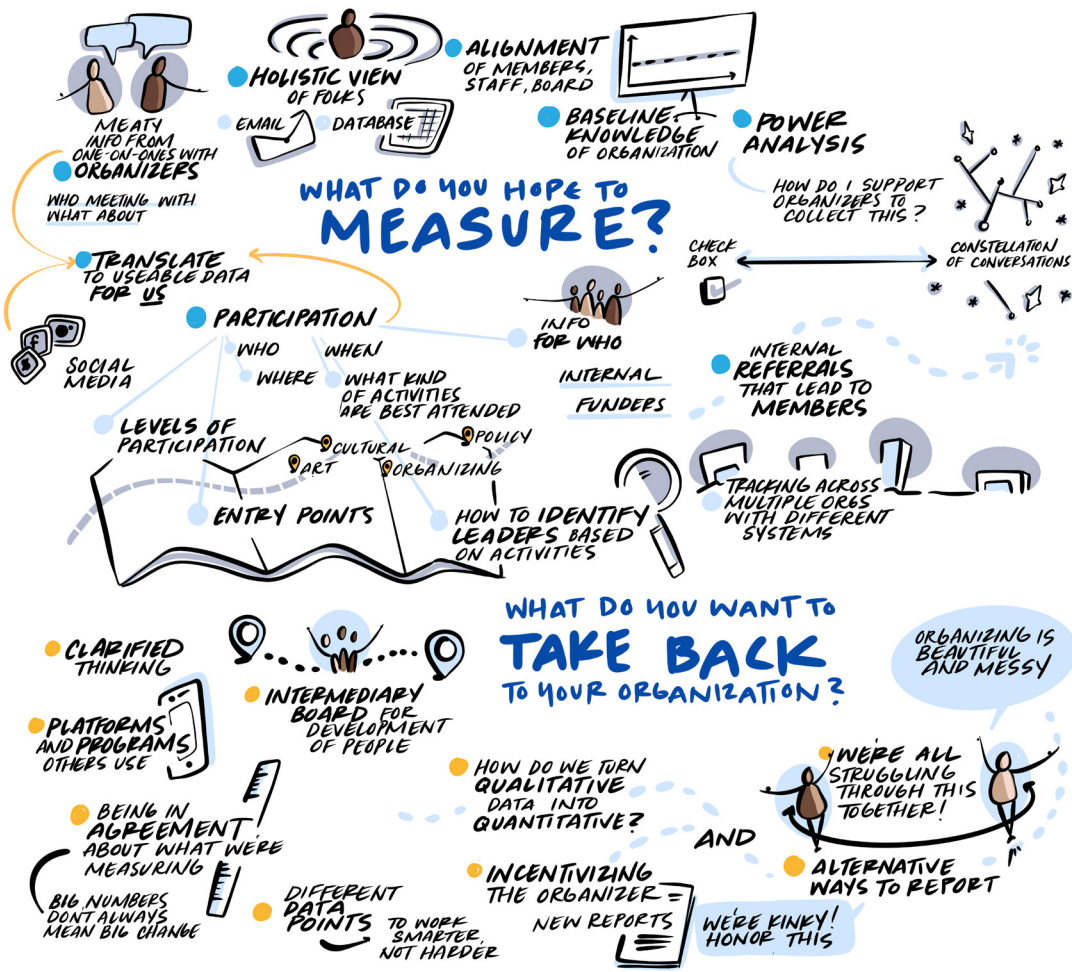
FIGURE 7:

Session 1: Understanding How Data Can Facilitate Social Home Design And Evaluation

Throughout these conversations, organizations resonated with the idea that the work of building social homes was a shared priority and a topic of learning for the field. Individual organizations frequently stated the idea that "who we are" is connected to "what we do" as a clear priority and theory for building power. Hearing that this was also the case for peer organizations created a shared sense of collective experience across the cohort. Organizations then raised the importance of bringing this vital strategy and knowledge to funders, partners, and other field organizations.

Limitations And Future Research

Through our research and the peer learning sessions, we surfaced future directions for a research agenda that builds upon this project's findings and that could address some of its limitations:

- First, this research was limited in that our findings were specific to this particular group of 13 organizations, who were pre-selected for their well-established community organizing focus. As a result, we view this report as illustrative of the themes that resonated with this group, but we also recognize that there may be other collective capabilities that are missing. Additional research, particularly with power-building organizations that fit other constituent, geographic, or governance profiles, would help to deepen understanding of the full landscape of how organizations design their social homes.

- This project illuminated a handful of the design choices that organizations are making with respect to social homes, but we did not set out to comprehensively catalog the ways in which organizations are working across the four design choice themes, nor did we identify the specific types of civic action that members of these organizations engaged in. Future research might delve further into specific pathways for members into these organizations, and then the specific engagement journeys that they then followed.

- While we conducted some preliminary analysis in the three deep-dive case studies to see how organizations are leveraging their social homes in order to achieve specific power outcomes, the research is descriptive, and not causal. More research is needed to understand the relationship between the collective and individual experiences they are creating and the impact on both 1) measures of collective capability, such as member recruitment and retention rates; and 2) the power outcomes that they seek to shift (i.e. elections, campaigns).

- This research primarily focused on conversations with organizational staff and a small number of organizer leaders and members. As a result, much of our data came from individuals who were already deeply familiar with and had been part of shaping their organization's work, which could result in response bias. An individual's experience of a social home likely varies dramatically depending on who they are: a new member, an event attendee who is not yet a member, etc. Further research could focus on the experiences of members and non-members themselves, and how they relate to the social home, what draws them in, etc.

- Another question that came up in this research is what distinguishes the idea of a "social home" from other concepts that organizations might use to describe the spaces they have created — for example, referring to a "political home." Additional research to identify frameworks for the relationship between these concepts — for example, what bridges the social to the political — could help to provide movement organizations with a more accurate way of describing their internal work.

- This project did not seek to compare these organizations' approach to social homes with that of other organizations that seek to build power via strategies outside of community organizing. Future research could examine this phenomenon across a broader cross-section of institutions (i.e. traditional political parties).

- Organizations also raised the question of what constitutes a "power outcome" — for example, is increasing joy, affinity, and a sense of organizational identity amongst people who have been historically oppressed a power outcome in and of itself? How might we define that through participatory research?

Concluding Thoughts

As movement organizations continue to fight for the conditions that enable their constituencies to achieve health equity and thrive, it is important to deepen our understanding of how those organizations are internally building collective capabilities for civic engagement and increasing their ability to wield power.

We found that these organizations are regularly making intentional design choices with respect to their social homes, exploring diverse and creative mechanisms for engaging members as whole people, ensuring internal accountability, leveraging political education, and creating spaces within the home for members with shared identities and experiences. These structures and practices are seen as essential to the organizations, rather than as "nice-to-haves."

We also found that by engaging with these choices, some organizations reported converting individual and collective member transformation into potential and exercised power, from co-governing relationships with policymakers to campaign wins.

Finally, we heard that movement organizations are eager for spaces to engage with one another on these themes, as well as to engage with future research that examines whether organizations' hypotheses about particular design choices do result in a stronger social home — and greater power as well.

There is still much to explore with respect to social homes. As these organizations continue to test different mechanisms to build collective capabilities for power, we anticipate identification of further themes and a clearer understanding of how individual and collective transformations lead to more resilient power.

As that exploration takes place, movement organizations will require ongoing support to build out their social homes. Despite the value of this work in actualizing organizational power-building strategies, it has been historically underfunded, overlooked instead for shorter-term, mobilization-focused wins. In particular, participants highlighted the essential nature of general operating support in enabling them to invest in the design choices described here — and in doing so, build crucial investment in the long-term movement infrastructure necessary to ensure organizations can continue creating transformative experiences for their members.

Our previous research on Lead Local shows us that building community power is not just a way to achieve outcomes but is an outcome in and of itself. To ensure healthy, thriving communities in the face of longstanding economic, social, and political inequities — further exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic — we must invest in and understand the relationship between the transformation that happens "inside" the house and its refractions into various dimensions of power.

Organizations who participated in this project, as well as other organizations in the field, continue to build their social homes, seeking to make design choices that shape their ability to achieve the power outcomes they desire. As they do so, we see great opportunity for further support and learning to ensure that they, and the communities and constituents they are building with, are able to shift the conditions necessary for equitable health and well-being.